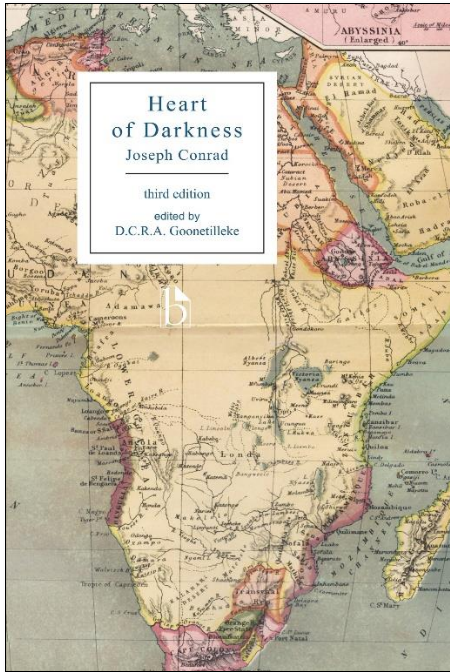

Comments for Instructors

on possible ways of teaching the text so as to connect it with the contextual materials provided in this edition

Disasi Makulo

One objective of this edition is, as Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy of the University of Utah notes in his comments on the edition (included on the website associated with the volume), "to bring forward the Congo's own history to tell that nation's story as more than a backdrop to Conrad's tale of European longing. In that sense, this edition reads *Heart of Darkness* as a story of colliding cultures; not as Europe acting on the passive object Africa." Pages 16–18 of the Introduction are here of particular relevance—as is the inclusion of a substantial excerpt from the autobiography of Disaso Makulo, "a Congolese villager who was captured as a slave a few years before Conrad was in central Africa. Here at last is a voice from Africa itself to set alongside those of Marlow and Kurtz," as William Atkinson puts it in his comments about the edition.

For a fuller discussion of the importance of Makulo's account to our knowledge of Congo history, it is very much worth consulting David Van Reybrouck's *Congo: The Epic History of a People*, pages 33–49. Van Reybrouck is particularly good at setting in context such things as Makulo's conversion to Christianity by missionaries. "When it came to impressing people," Van Reybrouck writes, "the early missionaries had their own bag of tricks. He quotes the comments on missionaries provided by a local chieftain from the Mbanza-Kongo region who was not persuaded:

> Ah! So they [missionaries George Grenfell and Thomas Comber] haven't come to buy ivory! Well then, what do they want? To teach us about God! About dying, more likely. We already have more than enough of that: the deaths in my area go on and on. They must not come here. If we allow the white man in, that will be the end of us. It's bad enough that they are on the coast. The ivory traders already take far too many spirits away in the tusks, and they sell them; we are dying too quickly. It would have been better if the whites had not come to cast a spell over me. (Van Reybrouck 47, quoting an unnamed chieftain quoted in W.H. Bentley, *Pioneering the Congo* [1900] 81.)

In connecting the Makulo material to Conrad's novella, it is worth asking students to comment on some of the ironies here: the one contemporaneous Congolese voice we now have from the area in which *Heart of Darkness* takes place is someone who was persuaded to adopt the sorts of Christian, Western ideals that Kurtz (and to a lesser extent Marlow) came to reject—and that real-life imperialists of the time tended at most to pay mere lip service to.

It is worth noticing the way in which Makulo describes the attacks of Tippu Tip and his armed force. He provides us through direct speech with the point of view of those experiencing the attack—and seeing rifles for the first time:

> Those who had been the first to see them carrying their weapons ran to alert the rest of the population by crying: "We have seen people going back and forth: they carry a sort of hollow stick,[1] when they hit it, a noise is heard—PAM PAM!—and then it sends out shots that wound and kill men. It's terrible!" (page 203)

Makulo is recounting all this to his children ca. 1940—in other words, something like 60 years after the fact. Given that he had received an extensive Western education, we might have expected him to recount these incidents using the vocabulary he would have become entirely familiar with—describing in his own words an attack with rifles rather than recreating through imaginative memory the attack in the words of those experiencing it—seeing these "hollow sticks" for the first time. What does that say about Makulo?

> [One possible answer: His powers of imagination (or imaginative memory) are considerable. Another possible answer: Whether consciously or unconsciously, Makulo wants to present the native Congolese in a way that emphasizes the extent to which they have lived apart from Western "civilization."]

One interesting assignment might be to ask students to compare the ways in which attacks on the river are described by Conrad (pages 122–25); by Stanley (pages 254–61); by E.J. Glave (pages 227–28); and by Makulo (pages 203ff.).

Worth noticing is that Makulo says nothing of any attacks by Stanley on Congolese natives—though it seems reasonable to presume that he must have heard of these. Why would he include in his

[1] In the original French, "une espèce de bâton cruex."

account reports of the attacks by Tippu Tip but not those of Stanley? [The obvious answer here would be that his subsequent history leads him to want to show Stanley in a highly positive light.]

What does the episode that concludes the excerpt presented here (in which Stanley refuses to return Makulo and the other children to their native villages—page 209) say about Stanley? About the attitudes of imperialist explorers more generally? About Makulo?

One other interesting point of comparison with the connection between Stanley and Makulo—the connection between Stanley and Kalulu (see pages 318–19).

One thing that often surprises students about history (and history as depicted in literature) is the extent to which some numbers of oppressed groups may buy into their own oppression—and act in ways that perpetuate the oppression of the group to which they belong. Examples include the many 18th, 19th, and 20th century women who opposed voting rights for women (or indeed any extension of rights for women); and African Americans such as Clarence Thomas who have resolutely opposed measures that would help to alleviate the oppression of other members of their group. To what extent should a voice such as that of Disasi Makulo be included in that list? (That may be a good question to raise with students.)

"exterminate all the brutes"

A very interesting point of comparison with Conrad's novella is R.B. Cunninghame Graham's biting satire "Bloody Niggers" (pages 284–87), which Conrad read a couple of years before he wrote *Heart of Darkness*. The most obvious point of comparison is the use of the word "exterminate" (Cunninghame Graham speaks of whites being put "to the trouble of exterminating whole tribes," whereas Kurtz famously writes, "Exterminate all the brutes" at the end of his report (pages 129–130). In a discussion of different possible tones in which writers may approach these sorts of horrors, it might be useful to compare Conrad's "straight" narrative with two different sorts of satirical approach—that of Cunninghame Graham, and also that of Mark Twain in his "Defense" of Leopold II's rule (pages 249–53). How can we tell that Cunninghame Graham and Twain are writing in a satirical vein?

It may be worth noting here that, while this edition does not expunge the "n-word," nor does it allow it to pass without comment; see in particular the Introduction (page 34) and the footnote at the beginning of Conrad's text (page 71).

"what makes mankind tragic"

An interesting irony is that, while Marlow shields Kurtz's Intended—the only white woman to figure significantly in the book—from the horror that Kurtz has glimpsed (and that he exemplifies), Conrad himself reported that it was the writing of a woman that helped him to understand "what makes mankind tragic"; see the excerpts from Gabriela Cunninghame Graham's *Saint Theresa* (pages 281–82), and also Conrad's letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham (pages 191–92).

Conrad and Nietzsche

The connections between the ideas expressed in *Heart of Darkness* and those expressed in Nietzsche's writings are discussed briefly on pages 44–46 of the Introduction. A *Blackwood's* article (which Conrad would likely have read) summarizing Nietzsche's philosophy and life appears on pages 291–296. An interesting topic for discussion might be to ask students to focus on one strand of Nietzsche's thought, and point to connections between that strand of thought and the ideas expressed by Kurtz—or by Marlow—in *Heart of Darkness*.

George Washington Williams—an African American voice

It is sometimes suggested that Leopold's atrocities were still almost entirely ignored at the time Conrad traveled up the Congo; George Washington Williams's pamphlet is proof that such was not the case. Williams had interviewed Leopold II in 1889 and been impressed by the king's assertions of good intentions when it came to improving the lot of the Congolese; Williams's disillusionment was complete when he saw later in the year what was actually happening in the Congo Free State.

It bears mentioning, perhaps, that among some students the notion persists that various characteristics can inhere among all people who share a certain skin coloring. Reading the well-crafted prose of the highly educated Williams may be for some a useful reminder of a truth one wishes were obvious to all; skin color has nothing to do with culture. Culturally, Williams is clearly at as great a remove from the Congolese natives of the late nineteenth century (whether as described by Joseph Conrad, or by Disasi Makulo) as is Mark Twain.

Imperialism and Globalization

It may be suggestive to begin any discussion of globalization and *Heart of Darkness* with maps of the sort reproduced on the cover of the Broadview edition (and also on page 339)—and connect them with Conrad's personal history as he recounts it in the passage quoted on the first page of the Introduction, describing himself as a boy "looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent." (The passage appears in the context in which it was first published, on page 195 of the appendices, in "Geography and Some Explorers.")

Imperialism and globalization are also touched on in the Introduction on pages 15–20, 36–37, and 53–54.

One possible assignment: Compare the attitudes towards native Africans that are expressed by Kurtz with those expressed by historical figures in the appendices. Which are more horrific?

In a more detailed way, students might be asked what connections they can find between the attitudes expressed by the Belgian imperialists (both in *Heart of Darkness* itself—by Kurtz and

others—and in the appendices, by Leopold, Houdret, etc.) and those expressed by British imperialists such as Stairs (pages 210–18), Glave (pages 227–28, 297–306), Stanley (pages 254–67), Carlyle (pages 268–69), Ruskin (pages 272–73), Chamberlain (275–76), Kingsley (276–77), and Rhodes (pages 279–80).

When connecting the strands of Belgian and British imperialism, it may also be helpful to ask students to point to connections in the text between the central narrative in the Congo and the framing narrative, in which London is described as also having been among "the dark places of the earth." To what extent is London—at that time the center of the "civilized" world and certainly the largest center of global trade—central to the heart of darkness, as Conrad presents it?

Broadview now publishes two editions of *Heart of Darkness*: this one, which takes an expansive view of the connections between the novella and imperialism and globalization; and that edited by John G. Peters, which takes a more closely focused view of the connections between Conrad and the Congo at the time that he traveled there. One interesting question for discussion with students: to what extent are events of the later 1890s and early twentieth century relevant to a discussion of *Heart of Darkness*? Is it anachronistic to consider the horrors of the Congolese rubber-trade in the late 1890s and early 1900s? Or is it fair to see those developments as natural extensions of the ivory trade and the economic exploitation described in *Heart of Darkness*?

Numerous other passages in the contextual materials can also be tied in with themes of imperialism and globalization. One aspect that has received less attention than it deserves is the role played by Tippu Tip and other traders from places such as Zanzibar in creating the Congolese trade both in enslaved people and in ivory. Makulo's autobiography has a good deal on Tippu Tip, as do the Stanley selections, and the E.J. Glave selections touch on this too. Here is a telling comment by Glave, revealing the extent to which Europeans (and, we may take it, traders such as Tippu Tip) regarded anything that had no *monetary* value as having no value of any sort:

> Before the arrival of the Arabs ivory had no value; the natives often did not store it. Having killed an elephant, they took only the meat; and when the Arabs came and, pointing to the ivory, wished to buy, the natives hunted about in the woods for ivory of elephants dead a long time, and big points were sold for a handful of beads, or a copper or brass ornament.... (page 299)

Ranging more broadly, instructors may wish to ask students what connections they see between the sorts of globalization depicted in *Heart of Darkness* and the sorts of globalization that are occurring in the twenty-first century.

Sources for *Heart of Darkness*/what Conrad did with his sources

Those interested in making connections between Conrad's experience (and Conrad's thinking) and the text will find plenty of raw material here—including not only the *Congo Diary* (pages 180–187) and the other materials in Appendix B, but also many of the materials in Appendix C, and all those

included in Appendix F. Of particular interest may be the reports in Appendix F6 (page 300) and F7 (pages 306–07) of Captain Rom displaying the heads of natives. The reports of course bring to mind the skulls that Kurtz displays in *Heart of Darkness*. But the comparison may be used to draw students' attention to more than simply the existence of source material for Conrad to draw on; at least as interesting is what he did with that source material. In this case it's an excellent example of the technique that Ian Watt famously termed "delayed decoding." We first see what appear to be "round curved balls" through Marlow's eyes on page 133; it is not until pages 139–40 that Marlow (and readers) understand that these are heads.

There are several mentions in Glave's reports of skulls on display (see page 43, footnote 2), by Congolese natives as well as by Captain Rom, and it is impossible to be sure which (if any) of these descriptions registered most strongly for Conrad—though it is hard to imagine that he did not read any of them. All, however, are briefer—and far less rich descriptively—than Conrad's description.

The pages in Glave in which he mentions the skulls are worth drawing attention to not least of all because they illustrate the multiplicity of uses to which the contextual materials may often be put; Glave's mention of the skulls occurs in an extended passage on pages 299–300 ("The state conducts its pacification … he ought to") that could be a useful reference point in class from quite another angle—in a discussion of the economics of and the cruelties of Leopold's Congo and, more generally, of imperialism and globalization. It is very much as Dierdre Coleman of the University of Melbourne has put it (in a comment that is included on the website associated with the book):

> Controversial classics like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* demand editions as revelatory as this one. Following his thought-provoking Introduction, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke provides us with an abundance of contextual materials, many of which introduce new voices and new perspectives on the book's writing, publication, and reception. The "blank space" of Conrad's boyhood apprehension of Africa is filled up with excerpts from the adult novelist's travel and reading during the peak of European imperialism at the end of the 19th century. Alongside racist propaganda keen to excuse the atrocities committed in the vile scramble for African loot, we hear the voices of a former slave and an African-American eye-witness whose open letter to Leopold II denounced Belgium's unjust and cruel wars in the Congo. In this edition the figure of the British explorer Henry Stanley hovers around the figure of Kurtz while the human mind itself evolves as the "lightless region of subtle horrors."

Leopold II in his own words

Though no selection by Leopold II is listed in the table of contents, two selections include substantial passages of letters by the Belgian king: an 1898 letter is included in the excerpts from the Guy Burrows volume (see pages 233–34), and a 1909 letter is excerpted as part of the selection from the E.D. Morel volume (pages 248–49). Also of interest for those wishing to show students statements representative of the official positions of Leopold's regime is the 1897 correspondence

from *The Times* involving Jules Houdret, Consul-General in London for the Congo Free State (Appendices F3, F4).

Virginia Woolf

A small thing that is relevant for teaching only if one is teaching a Modernism course that includes Woolf as well as Conrad on the curriculum, but that is nevertheless of interest is the way in which she ends her 1917 review of a reissue of *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories*:

> "There was a completeness in it." Perhaps it is that quality which satisfies us so enormously in these stories. When the burning ship sinks, when Marlow adventures into the Heart of Darkness, and, most of all, when old Captain Walley, betrayed by nature and by man, fills his pockets with iron and drops into the sea we feel a rare sense of adequacy, of satisfaction, as if conqueror and conquered had been well matched and there is here "nothing to wail." (page 179)

Note to Instructors

If you would like to make suggestions regarding using the contextual materials in this edition in ways that enrich the experience of students, please don't hesitate to pass them along to us: broadview@broadviewpress.com.

www.broadviewpress.com