

Imperializing Femininity: Falsehood Production and Consumption in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has received a torrent of painstaking research as an intricate literary work which portrays the horrifying details of Marlow's physical and philosophical quest. However, within this framework does lurk a matrix of male chauvinism which relegates the female characters in the novella to irreversibly inferior positions and silent bodies. This necessitates a reading of Conrad's text that goes beyond the context of sexist innuendos in order to attain a deeper comprehension of the novella; that is, a contextualized reading which directs attention towards the variable of colonization and imperialism in the novella and its imperialist exploitation of femininity which makes women embrace specific roles and identities assigned to them while being deceived into thinking that they are ardent keepers of noble dreams. This paper argues that the female figures in the novella are imperialized by men in ways that make them consume the falsehood men produce about "the noble cause" and "the white man's burden". It also attempts to identify the reasons which make women accept such a subservient role by elaborating on the idea of human mimicry as discussed by Rene Girard in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Girard claims that the person's desire for a certain object is not provoked by the object itself, but by another person who possesses the same object. This implies that the attraction of Conrad's women to the noble cause and to the wealth of the Congo extorted along with it has made them unquestionably accept the ancillary roles assigned to them by men, the possessors of the object. As more and more white people consider Africa a source of wealth, they became rivals, and since rivalry in Girard's theory leads to violence; a scapegoat is needed to prevent the disintegration of the colonizers. So, in *Heart of Darkness*, all the violence is directed against the black natives who are held responsible for violence to the extent that they fit in Girard's theory as the "scapegoat."

Key Words: Conrad, Gender in *Heart of Darkness*, Post Colonial novel

Introduction

The devotion of the female characters in *Heart of Darkness* to "the noble cause" and their attraction to the wealth that comes along with it made them willingly accept the inferior roles that men, the possessors of the object, assign to them. Since the white imperialists consider the Congo a source of wealth, rivalry was generated among them. This eventually leads to violence which was mostly vented by assaulting the black natives. Therefore, they fit into Girard's theory as the victimized scapegoats. To conclude, this new way of reading the novel accounts for the violence that is inflicted on the black natives.

This suggests that the women inhabiting the world *Heart of Darkness* provide the text with a subtle background for a cultural and psychological discussion of gender issues. They show characteristics specific to the Victorian appropriations of anti-feminist Christian and medieval stereotypes. The atmosphere of the novella articulates the silence befitting the conventionally approved archetypal virgo. It is then followed by a sequence of female images which are truthfully decorous, and no attempts at candor seem necessary to communicate what they feel or think because they just say what they ought to say.

Although women are important pillars of the novella, they are demoted to subsidiary roles of being appendages to men whom they love and look up to the extent that they annihilate their own identities and voices as women. This is attributed to the fact that the women seek oneness with the imperialists who carry the white man's burden and work for the so-called "noble cause". This type of depiction calls into memory the saintly persona inherent in the Victorian literary canon. For instance, the tears and the naïve devotion of The Intended, a female character in Conrad's text, to the memory of Kurtz, the male protagonist inscribe her character with the marks of laudable virgo femininity. This type of dignified devotion to a man that Marlow knows to have betrayed her with his African Mistress enormously awes him simply because he belongs to a culture in which the virago was regarded with apprehension and disdain while the virgo was regarded with love and reverence.

One of the thematic challenges fraught with connotations of sexism is Marlow's awareness of the evils of European imperialism while oblivious to gender prejudice or what might be called female otherness and subalternity. It might be argued that the novelist seems to have been interested in images of women in terms of their otherness from men, and, specifically, in their ambiguous or complex status as simultaneously essential members of the imperialist framework and second-class citizens in imperialist states, excluded from full participation in decision-making. This is why it is important to examine the complex or contradictory presence of women in the text, as this paper attempts to do through establishing a connection between Girard's mimetic theory and the motives behind the female characters' adherence to the traditional patriarchal code of female silence.

An example of the ideologically complacent role women in the novella subscribe to and unquestionably embrace is the silence of the African Mistress. Her imposed silence reinstates her position as the loveable intriguing female who is similar to the African continent in its darkness and bewitchingly attractive magic. Another striking example is the naivety of the Intended and her decision to silently love Kurtz and live on his memory for the rest of her life because she believes that true love defies the capacity of language to communicate it fully. Psychologically,

Kurtz is not only her fiancé but also an ideological model worthy of her emulation and devotion. This relates to the idea of the contagious human mimicry which is deeply rooted in the human nature.

The springboard for Girard's mimetic theory is "acquisitive mimesis" (Girard, 1979, p. 9). Girard suggests that much of human behavior is based on "mimesis" or imitation. What Girard describes is a situation where two individuals desire the same object, and since they both attempt to obtain this object, their behavior becomes "conflictual," because there is only one object and two people. This results in "Violence" which "is generated by this process; or rather, violence is the process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means" (Girard, 1979, p. 9). In this way, Girard "takes issue with the dominant conflict models" that concentrate on aggression or scarcity as the basic sources of conflict. These models maintain that most of our problems directly result from the concentration of wealth and power as well as from colonialism and exploitation (Farley, 1987, p. 17-18).

In light of the aforementioned arguments, this paper examines gender identity in Conrad's novella in order to provide answers for the following questions: Why is it throughout *Heart of Darkness* that the female characters are muted and silenced? What is the writer's motive behind his insistence on the argument that female voicelessness epitomizes the most desirable feminine attributes? To what extent can women in *Heart of Darkness* be analyzed with reference to Girard's mimetic desire - triangle theory? The paper also makes connections between the novella, the theory and the passivity of its female figures as accounted for within the stable slots of the theory. This is to fill some of the gaps that may exist in Girard's triangle by the addition of two extra slots to the Girardian shape, namely the slot of violence and the slot of the reader's response.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to probe into interpretations of gender identity in Conrad's novella and to provide answers for the following questions: Why is it throughout *Heart of Darkness* that the female characters are muted and silenced? What is the writer's motive behind his insistence on the argument that female voicelessness epitomizes the most desirable feminine attributes? To what extent can women in *Heart of Darkness* be analyzed with reference to Girard's mimetic desire - triangle theory? The study also examines the connection between the novella and the theory and the passivity of its female figures as accounted for within the stable slots of the theory. This is to fill some of the gaps that may exist in Girard's triangle by the addition of two extra slots to the Girardian shape, namely the slot of violence and the slot of the reader's response.

Methodology

The paper adopts an analytical framework for the study of the female figures in Conrad's text. It attempts to account for their passivity and naivety by placing them in the subject slot of Girard's triangle with its angles labeled each by its distinctive title, and then to stick Kurtz in the model slot while Africa in that of the object. This is to argue that the impression the researcher has got about the women of the novella and its events needs to be modified in order to show that femininity is the victim of a special kind of imperialism. Therefore, Girard's triadic shape, for

the purpose of this paper, is the main variable, according to which any mimetic relationship could be expanded into three dimensions, and then configured, in a triangular shape. That being said, Girard's model provides a convenient framework that adequately accounts for the acceptance of the female characters in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to the traditional roles ascribed to them on two stages. The first stage is when Marlow and the women are the subject while Africa is the "object" and "Kurtz" is the "mediator" or the model and the second stage is when the shift takes place and things are inverted. However, this subtle understanding of the human psyche does not mean that Girard has not missed other corners that would be useful if added to his model. Hence, this paper elaborates on the psychological triangle and expands it a little in order to incorporate both the slot of "influence" which is basically violence as an end product of the violent mimicry and the slot of the "reader's position" who takes a certain position from the narrative events.

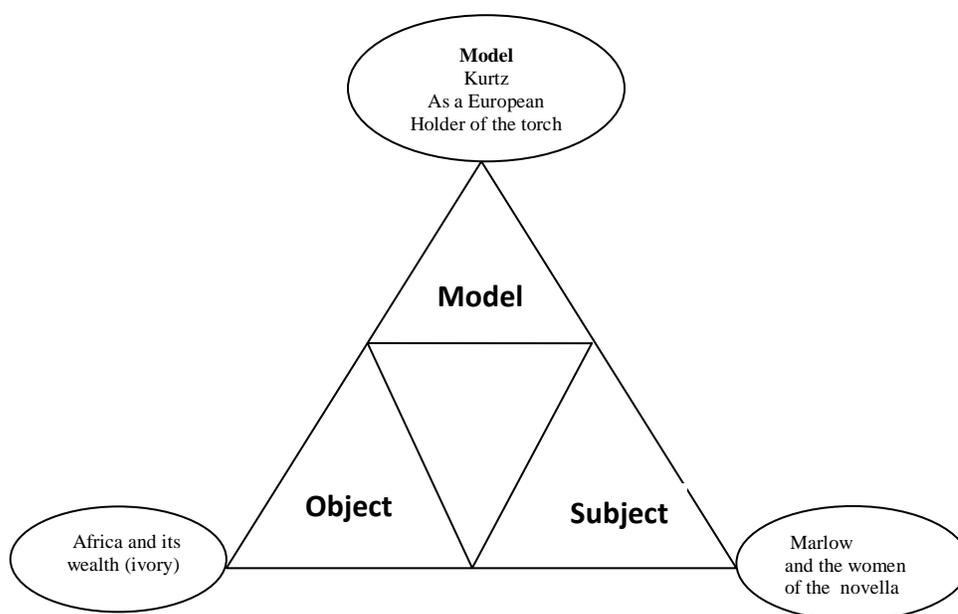


Figure.1. The positions of Conrad's characters in Girard's model prior to Marlow's journey into the 'heart of darkness'

Girard's theory

In his first book *Deceit, desire and the Novel* published in 1961, Girard promotes his mimetic-desire triangular theory, arguing that the person's desire for a certain object is not provoked by the object itself but by another person who possesses the same object. In other words, individuals' relation to the desirable object they wish to possess is indirect since there is always another thing in between the object and the "desirer" of that object which is the slot of the object-possessor or the "mediator". Consequently, what is seen as a direct relationship turns out to be an utterly triangular one consisting of three autonomous slots. The first one is the "subject" slot that is the person who desires to possess something. The second one is the "model" slot or the object possessor who is highly dignified and valued in the eye of the subject. And the last angle of Girard's triangle is the "object" corner which exceeds its being a mere physical or materialistic object to include other psychological desires.

According to Girard's theory, we, the subject of the system, are not directly attracted to the object we desire to have. Rather we are first attracted to the model, and then perceive the model in a highly desirable or perfect situation. Thus, we persistently attempt to attain such a high position, and be as perfect as the model itself by possessing the object, the thing that ascribes the sense of perfection to the model at least in the eye of the subject. Girard concludes that the desire for the subject is quenched, and that s/he's satisfied when s/he becomes in a parallel corner to that perfect one in which the model stands. This, therefore, makes the "satisfied" subject a model in the eye of many other subjects. Moreover, Girard emphasizes that we borrow our desires from others. In doing so, we realize that we are not autonomous; rather, we are intricately engaged in a sophisticated system in which our desires for a certain object are provoked by the desire of another person for the same object (1961, p. 138).

To conclude, the basis of Girard's mimetic theory is the principle that human beings are mimetic creatures because they imitate what they see in other people. In other words, our desires are copied from others and not largely our own. The more we imitate each other, the more similar we become. Consequently, "[d]istinctions between individuals are blurred as they mirror each other," and the boundaries between individuals which keep order start to disintegrate. This rivalry creates violence, and the blurred boundaries pose a serious threat which destabilizes the social fabric" (Skylar, 2012, p. 1).

According to Girard's theory, the primitive man found the scapegoat as a solution to this threat by placing responsibility for his distress and hatred on one individual or group of individuals. To phrase it differently, a community's violence becomes polarized against the ones being blamed for the violence, so they become the scapegoats for the bad happenings in the community. Order and peace can only be restored by expelling or killing the scapegoat. This "single act of sanctioned violence becomes like a vaccination against the disease of chaotic, out of control violence" (Skylar, 2012, p. 2). The above-mentioned aspect of Girard's theory is useful in the discussion which places the black natives and the female figures in the same slot in the same vicious machine which sustains imperialism, as will be argued later.

Analysis of the female characters in the light of Girard's theory

According to Hayder Ali, the female figures in the novella are relegated to "a one dimensional state" because Conrad "promotes" sexism by depicting them as feeble, ignorant and grieving persons who are completely dependent on men. (Ali, 2008, p. 1).

Marlow "submits to the prejudices" of his period with regard to things which are important to the dignity of women. (Ali, 2008, p. 1). In attempting to interpret this prejudice in light of Girard's theory, one finds that Mark I. Wallace lists several common victims who are fit to be scapegoats in the world of men: one group is women along with the poor, old people, those with physical abnormalities, members of racial or ethnic minorities, and "those whose natural endowments (beauty, intelligence, charm) or status (wealth, position) mark them as exceptional" (1994, p. 253). Depending on this view, Marlow and Kurtz seem to manipulate women in the novella in order to attain their goals, not to be at one with their social norms. This makes the female characters one dimensional especially as the males in the novella decide not to tell them about the Congo experience because women would never accept to remain in the subject slot and would never look up to men as models.

Marlow's and Conrad's sexism emerges from "the entirely patriarchal European world of which both author and character were products" (Roberts, 2006, p. 458). Men, unlike women, are the only ones who are ascribed the roles of power in this culture. In order to keep this patriarchal system of control, they treat women as "sexual scapegoats" (Roberts, 2006, p. 458). Being a scapegoat is a second important step in Girard's theory: "bringing into existence a scapegoat, which is necessary due to the increasing cycle of violence that occurs between the doubles. Their anger and hostility must be vigorously dispersed or vented, as opposed to being a process open to transformation by introspection or meditation (i.e. something like a psychoanalytic or spiritual approach)" (Townesley, 2003, p. 5).

Obviously, Andrew Roberts views women in the novella as sexual objects whose femininity is subjected to scapegoating on the altar of colonialism. Kurtz's African Mistress is as violated betrayed and as Africa itself, and his fiancé's long tantalization during his stay in the Congo and her perpetual morbid attachment to his memory after death are tantamount to the subjection of the black natives, if not much more agonizing. Here, it is possible to draw a parallel between, Townesley's argument and the women of *Heart of Darkness* in the sense that men use women as scapegoats physically or psychologically in order to release their anger. Above all, women seem to blindly subscribe to the role of the scapegoat, thinking that they are serving and guarding glorious ideas and noble dreams. Thus, possessing the body of the black native woman by Kurtz is a way of subduing Africa. By the same token, imperializing the mind of the Intended is Kurtz's only way of marketing his colonialism in Europe.

In addition, Jeremy Hawthorn contests that Conrad denies the women of *Heart of Darkness* the right of possessing human dimensions such as self-expression and participation in decision-making. By juxtaposition Kurtz's Intended to the African mistress, Conrad makes women one dimensional. The Intended is extremely devoted and exceptionally chaste while the other is "sensual and sexual flesh" (Hawthorn, 2006, p. 409). This juxtaposition is crucial to the argument about imperializing women and exploiting them to be tools for Imperialism, as will be shown in this paper. On the one hand, the Intended is mentally colonized as to serve in the subject slot in Girard's theory. As a Christian virgo, she believes that her fiancé is devoted to a noble cause and that the least she could do for him is to show devotion and to identify with the ideal world he, according to her, represents. On the other hand, the African mistress is physically colonized by those who colonize and rob the land and hence are entitled to possess its women. The sexual union of Kurtz and the African mistress is marred by the violence of the imperialist against the imperialized; that is, if the African mistress were a man, Kurtz would kill her and hang her head on a post as he did to the rebels of her people. This is part of the violence that results from rivalry between the black natives and the colonizers for the same object; i.e. Africa.

Relevant to this argument is Amanda Conklin's analysis of the role of women in *Heart of Darkness* where states that Conrad treats his female characters in a traditional way although his critique of imperialism is essentially progressive (2014, p. 1). In his attempt to highlight the belittlement of women in a male-dominated society, Conrad leaves his female characters unnamed while their speech is reduced to the minimum in ways that make it unheard. Conrad's treatment of women reinforces the chasm between the realms of men and women, where the latter are portrayed as "unnatural entities, voiceless and agentless, to their male counterparts" (Conklin, 2014, p. 1). They either hold "ignorant" conceptions like Kurtz's mistress or seem to

be alien to the material found in men's world; therefore, calamity befalls the men who have the courage to breach the boundary between the two separate realms (Conklin, 2014, p. 1).

This decision to keep the female figures ignorant of the Congo experience implies that women are kept away from the world of men for a good reason. If a woman is granted the right to cross the boundaries, she may denounce her own beliefs, and this justifies why Conrad's women glorify false ideals and embrace naïve illusions made by men to get their support. It thus seems that women's bodies and minds are an indispensable provision in the world of imperialism.

Accordingly, for the female figures in *Heart of Darkness* to remain provisional tools of imperialism they should remain invisible and silent. Gabrielle McIntire sums up female invisibility in two instances. The first instance is when Marlow's insistence on inviting the readers to believe that women are outside the world of the Congo experience by "figuring [them] as palimpsestic, ghost-like, half-presences" (McIntire 2002, p. 258). The second one is further bolstered by the unwillingness of some critics like Murfin and Ross to look into their roles per se but rather their ancillary position to Marlow's adventure and their relevance to the details of his quest in the Congo which is indeed an excessively feminized and passive position (McIntire 2002, p. 258). It is probably deemed plausible for Marlow to approve of the marginal roles that the female characters in his narrative have in order to be at one with the stereotypes of his time because the opposite would be endowing them with an inappropriately masculine voice. Hence, women are needed to thoughtlessly support men rather than to step into men's world as equals.

Oh, she is out of it – completely. They – the women I mean – are out of it.
We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest our world
gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it (Conrad, 1996, p. 29).

Obviously, this protected sexist separation can be accounted for by applying Girard's mimetic theory. In other words, for imperialism to achieve its purposes, women should remain in the subject slot in Girard's triadic theory where they willingly, or unwillingly, serve men either in the colony such as the African woman who does the laundry and Kurtz's mistress or in the metropole such as Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended who are devoted to the glorious idea of civilizing and Christianizing the African people they think their role models represent.

This poses a critical question here regarding the reasons why men refrain from explaining the Congo experience to the women of the novella. Amanda Conklin maintains if the male experience of the Congo is explained to the women, the boundary separating women from the truth will be blurred. Only one woman is able to see that men who are removed from civilization are substantially transformed. Kurtz's mistress is equipped with more forceful language than any other female character in the novella. Even though she is voiceless, she has a force of her own. However, Kurtz's attachment to her proves to be eventually "fatal". By having a mistress, Kurtz seems to have crossed the boundary between the world of men and that of women and, therefore, he loses "the stability of brotherhood bonds," which brings about his horrid death (2014, p. 2). This implies that the model of Girard's theory loses its glamour when it gets closer to the subject.

Consequently, the separation of the sphere of women from that of men is the bond that links Marlow to Kurtz even after the latter's death, given that it maintains the brotherhood of

males in *Heart of Darkness*. This accounts for Marlow's lie to the Intended since it serves to position women in a world of falsehood manipulated by men who keep women ignorant of the truth (Bloom, 2008, p. 30). As Nina Strauss contests, "[h]eroic maleness is defined precisely in adverse relation to delusional femininity" and this elucidates a vaguely expressed idea that haunts the text regarding the patriarchal orientation and the Victorian stereotypes of the epoch in which the novella was written (2004, p. 207). It is possible to say that women's ideals of heroism can only be achieved through their men, and that women should accept naively the falsehood that men present to them. This relates to Girard's theory. Men are the ones who possess the 'object' _ Africa_ which they want to get hold of in order to civilize and Christianize the native brutes living there. This, on the one hand, unmasks the propaganda that men spread among women in their virtual world. It, on the other, shows that women willingly embrace the role of the 'subject' who imitates the mediator, or the role model, in order to reach his status of fullness by possessing the same 'object' which, in this case, is the noble cause and its resultant wealth that women benefit from as a reward for being the sole keepers of the naïve illusions that men force them to protect.

Thus women in Conrad's novella live in a dependent inferior world. Conklin is justified in saying that women are "unnatural parts of a man's world because, unlike men, they have no voice and/or agency" (2009, p. 3). This is what stimulates Harold Bloom to conclude that what Marlow fears the feeling that strong females would "threaten to devour his masculine identity" (101). In other words, *Heart of Darkness* clutches to the older ideology of separate gendered spheres in an attempt to "resolve the contradictions of Marlow's position vis-à-vis Kurtz" (Smith, 1996, p. 176).

This shows that Conrad silences or objectifies women in his text by depriving them of their voice in order to keep them outside the sphere of men which they would never understand (Hinkle, 2007, p. 3). This means that women are kept in the dark to emphasize the need for two separate worlds without a grey area in the middle (Conklin, 2014, p.3). This ideology of separate spheres emphasizes how "the masculine production of feminine identity works in the interests of the dominant identity (Murfin, 1996, p.30). Hence, women find themselves forced to depend on men's version of the truth in order to have clear notions of what happens outside their households.

'You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy of his hire,' she said brightly
It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it and never can be. It's too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation [until something] would start up and knock the whole thing over
(Conrad, 1996, p. 27).

Subsequently, the aim of Conrad's narrative is to "colonize" and "pacify" both women and savage darkness. Like the black natives, women are not only denied the right to oppose the will of the white men, but they are also expected to facilitate the task of the white imperialists. Even Marlow's speech is expressed in a way which enables him to produce his own masculine version "to keep the darkness at bay" (Smith, 1996, p. 169). He manages to do so by symbolizing

Kurtz's mistress and the company women as well as by silencing the native laundress; eventually he reconstructs his experience of the darkness they stand for (Smith, 1996, p. 169). On the other hand, Dmitri Kaminiar states that Conrad criticizes the way the English society treats women and scorns their treatment of native Africans. It seems that Conrad views the white man as the culprit who relegates women to an inferior position and treats them the way he treats the people of another race as both are assigned submissive roles (2007, p. 4). It seems that both the Africans and women are required to play the roles assigned to them by the white men, and that both will be punished if they deviate from boundaries set to them. Still, women will benefit from imperializing Africa unlike the black natives who get nothing but victimization and violence.

An in-depth reading of the novella can reveal the gap between imperial oppression and masculine oppression. The former is clearly visible to Marlow when the natives are sent to the grove of death, while the latter is intentionally invisible to him because he believes that it is natural for a native woman to do a white man's laundry. In a sense, Marlow's power as a masculine narrator is indicated through the laundress's silence power that conceals her story and the stories of other silent women in *Heart of Darkness* (Smith, 1996, p. 173). This suggests that the novella reiterates the ambivalence of both the characters and their author regarding their efficacy and propriety of speech for the principal female figures. Thus, it is possible to find a connection between speech as opposed to silence and otherness as opposed to silence: to be excluded from a powerful manner of speaking confirms one's place outside an established community. If Marlow's remarks are related to the status of women as "Other" in *Heart of Darkness* and to the popular perception dominant in the time of writing the novella, one finds that women's speech or lack of speech, confirms their positions with respect to an institutionally circumscribed environment—which, according to this logic, justifies their being ostracized as "Other."

As Marlow distances women from his memory as he embarks on his journey to the Congo, the memory of the old woman imposes itself on him again as she intrudes in the shape of "the knitting old woman with the cat (Smith, 1996, p. 176)." This reappearance suggests that Marlow attempts to separate the "realm of domesticity" from the "colonial adventure," and, therefore, the separation of the feminine from the masculine (Smith, 1996, p. 176). Indeed if these realms are to meet, colonialism will lose its sustaining discourse of deception. Hence, women should never come to realize that their femininity is a special form of imperialistic victimization.

... What [men] have said so far, for the most part, stems from the opposition activity/passivity, from the power of relation between a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize, and the consequential phantasm of woman as a dark continent to penetrate and to pacify (Cixous, 1976, p. 877).

The complex undertones of Hélène Cixous' notion obviously question the validity of the stereotype of the silent passive woman: a virginal, enclosed, uncorrupted woman, privileged as having attained a status closer to the traditional ideal than that of her loquacious female counterparts simply because women are treated not only as objects but also as tools of imperialism penetrated and colonized exactly like the dark continent.

The final aspect to elaborate on in relation to Girard's theory is Kurtz's self-destruction at the end of the narrative. "Kurtz's tragedy could not be a simple revolt of the inhabitants of the area. It had to symbolize the destruction of the white man through his very inspirations which led him, tainted by the greed for profit, too close to the primitive and barbarous which released the same suppressed instinct in himself" (Sherry, 1970, p. 118). Following Girard's theory of the scapegoat, it is possible to say that Kurtz's violence against the black men emerges as a revengeful attempt to restore his "stolen" mode of being the prestigious "model" of Girard's triangle. Thus, Kurtz does not measure his victory upon his victims by the mere fact that he succeeds in urging them to worship him and to allow him to rob the wealth of the Congo. On the contrary, he does so by the real level of their devastation. As a result, Kurtz's revengeful behavior emphasizes Kenneth Buker's argument that "it is not enough for the person to succeed in his endeavors to accomplish what he wants;" rather the person who competes with him "must also fail or even be crushed out" (1975, p. 177). On top of that, the endeavor is more serious because law and order are completely missing in the Congo experience, so the darkness in Man's heart and his propensity for violence go unchecked. The following sections analyze the female figures in light of the aforementioned arguments. The first female figure is Marlow's aunt who is enthusiastic about getting Marlow appointed skipper of a river steamboat thinking that in doing so she serving a noble cause and promoting a glorious idea; yet, she is ignorant of the horrible atrocities of the white men in the Congo. Demonstrating ignorance similar to that of the aunt, Kurtz's Intended turns a deaf ear to anything that distorts Kurtz's image, and prefers to live in her own false shell. In contrast to the idealized presentation of the Intended, the African mistress is a second-rate sensual figure incarnating the usurped African continent. In short, even though Conrad's female figures are disproportionately deprived of power positions and attaining full humanity, the black mistress suffers a two-folded type of prejudice, and is put to a more inferior position than that of the two white women.

The Aunt

Conrad's presentation of Marlow's aunt reveals sexism. The aunt is anxious about helping Marlow; still, he is ashamed of having asked her for help (Ali, 2008, p. 1-2). This suggests that it is degrading for a man to gain access to work through asking women's help:

... I tried the woman. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work to get a job. Heavens! (Conrad, 1974, p. 8).

The idea that a man's access to work by means of women's help might be an embarrassing thing that Marlow repulsively rejects. This tells why Marlow's use of the word "women" in plural form makes this attitude amount to the level of a fixed rule. Here one may say that Marlow is aware of the "otherness" of women and of the importance of keeping them away from the sphere of men even before he gets involved in the Congo experience. This means that male chauvinism is deeply rooted or inscribed in his mentality and behavior to the extent that he realizes that women are relegated to the back seats just to clap for the white imperialists.

Moreover, the portrayal of the aunt shows that she is a woman "out of touch with the truth because she has no idea of what life in Africa is really like. According to her, Marlow is on a mission of some sort while he tries unsuccessfully to convince her that the aim of her company is first and foremost to make profits. The aunt, the doctor and the women who keep knitting in

the company show indifference and ignorance of the realities of colonialism (Jeffares, 1994, p. xviii). Actually, the aunt is not specifically ignorant; rather, she has her own falsified attitudes towards imperialism, as is evident in her tendency to legitimize robbing the colonized natives as a reward that the white deserve for the alleged services of civilizing and Christianizing them oblivious of the claim that this mission is the noble cause that the white claim they voluntarily serve.

Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended, the two European women in the novella are not silenced. Nevertheless, Marlow mocks their lack of imperial experience, and offers his manly experience to them as he considers himself essentially aware of the truth. Both women merely echo Kurtz's beliefs about imperialism; thus, Marlow's portrayal of these women represents his relentless effort to combine an ideology of imperialism with that ideology of separate sexiest spheres (Smith, 1996, p. 177). Part of this ideology states that women should perceive imperialism as a service which the white men perform to the black natives (Christianizing and civilizing Africa) and-in turn this service deserves provision (the wealth of Africa). This is to keep women blind from and unaware of the real intentions or motives of imperialism. Otherwise, it will reveal the underlying level of a hideous reality marred by rivalry and violence which goes a step further when Kurtz is about to kill his Russian friend for a piece of ivory.

Therefore, both the aunt and the Intended are kept away from the reality of their world, for the two characters, despite their differences, are women who merely accompany the imperialistic manly men of Europe (Kaminari, 2007, p. 1) as ardent believers in their illusions. Both white men and white women have families, friends and social relationships and it is normal that they will support them or argue on their behalf if they get hurt. Yet, this does not apply to the black people if they are victimized by the white people. Hence, they all unite against the natives in a way identical to the Girardian concept of scapegoating those people whose death will not lead to reprisals.

In short, Marlow's aunt fits in the subject slot of Rene Girard's model because she looks up to the white imperialists and legitimizes their possession of the object of her mimetic desire, Africa. A keeper of imperialist claims to the wealth of Africa, the aunt's moral support compensates her inability as a female to go to the heart of darkness in order to colonize the Congo. She seems to idolize the white imperialists who make her believe their chivalric lie.

Kurtz's Mistress

Kurtz's African mistress represents "an allegory of Africa" who has a future that imperialist Europe may never have (Kaminari, 2007, p. 3). A black native woman, she represents the untamed wilderness and, hence, serves to "fracture Kurtz's self-control." (Simons, 2007, p. 102). She worked to break Kurtz's bonds with his society and promoted his loss in the freedom of the jungle (Simons, 2007, p. 102). Having associated himself with the African mistress, Kurtz crosses the boundaries between the subject and the model of Girard's theory thereby resulting in the devastation of the model.

Despite having a black skin color, Kurtz's mistress is described as lavishly decorated with all sorts of flashy decorations, beads and charms as well as with tattoos of various colors. The way she is described in the novella corresponds with her role as "an avatar" of the Dark

Continent in the sense that both are full of life; yet, this life is mysteriously dark and dangerous (Kaminiar, 2007, p. 2). According to Edward Said, Conrad realizes that “darkness” could be either colonized or illuminated, and this implies that colonialism in one way or another is nothing but dominance and land-grabbing. However, what is missing in Conrad’s argument here is the fact that imperialism has to come to an end, and that the native Africans should be freed from European domination. “As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them” (1994, p. 30). This is represented in the character of Marlow who is closer to the subject slot; that is, because it is impossible for him to be in the slot of the black natives. Thus, colonialism and violence go hand-in-hand because the object of imperialism has its legitimate possessors who will give their lives to defend it.

On the other hand, Padmini Mongia maintains that the “savage” woman who appears when Marlow is carried onto Marlow’s ship stands for “the nexus where the discourses of imperialism and patriarchy coincide” because her physical union with Kurtz brought two opposite poles together (1993, p. 146-7). The black mistress’s love for Kurtz denotes both colonialism and betrayal. That is her body is colonized exactly like Africa ;however, her soul betrays her nation when she surrenders to the colonist.

The white colonists consider her an African plunder. Marlow, for example describes the savage woman’s adornments in details and then concludes that “she must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her” (Murfin HOD, 1996, p. 77). Here the woman’s body is commodified; it becomes a commodity on which value is placed. This entails that she is associated with the wealth of Africa which nurtures the greed of the white man.

However, Kurtz’s mistress with her “animal vitality” stands in sharp contrast to his European fiancée who dedicates her entire life to his memory or rather to the lie she wants to believe, making her home and life similar to a cemetery (Cox, 1974, p. xviii). Therefore, the Intended’s position in the subject slot, according to Girard’s theory, is secure unlike the African mistress who can be placed in both the subject slot and the object slot.

Commenting on the differences between the European fiancée and the African mistress Chinua Achebe contests that:

The most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the rudimentary souls of Africa. In place of speech they made a violent babble of uncouth sounds. They exchanged short grunting phrases even among themselves. But most of the time they were too busy with their frenzy. There are two occasions in the book, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech, even English speech, on the savages. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them (1977, p. 4)

Achebe’s criticism is better understood in light of the early responses to *Heart of Darkness*, they mainly focused on the aesthetic aspects of the text. They show that the narrative language is “atmospheric and beautiful” while the “race” aspect is completely missing. This is

not unexpected if one takes into consideration that “racism was not even a word and race thinking was seen as something so natural, that they were completely blind to it.” (Svensson, 2010, p. 17)

To sum up, the African Mistress is the only female figure in the novella who transcends the barrier between the subject and the object slots. She occupies both the subject slot through her love and admiration of Kurtz and the object slot when she allows a white man to possess and commodify her the way he possesses her own country. However, she is not perceived as a suitable soulmate to Kurtz. Unlike the Intended, she is likely to go over Kurtz’s death.

The Intended

A keen reading of Conrad’s portrayal of the Intended reveals that Kurtz is the very reason of her desire to live. Her disparate need for Kurtz explains why his death shatters her and deprives her of the wish to survive. Having comprehended her plight, Marlow lies to her “not only to escape the darkness that enveloped Kurtz but also to perpetuate a world in which women are dependent upon men, no matter how falsely virtuous they might perceive the men to be” (Ali, 2008, p. 3). Conversely, Marlow suggests that he has actually sacrificed Kurtz’s a bereaved Intended to her own “saving lie”. This validates the pain that Marlow has inflicted on her as she asks him to repeat Kurtz’s last words with unspeakably wild ecstasy (Smith, 1996, p. 181). Kurtz must have felt extremely guilty for having fabricated this lie as he feels that the sky is about to fall on his head. Broken-hearted, she beseeches Marlow to say them again:

Repeat them, ‘she murmured in a heart-broken tone. ‘I want- I want – something- something to live with’ ” (Jeffares HOD, 1994, p. 117)

On the other hand, Marlow could have had a hidden desire to possess Kurtz entirely, so he must “shield” his only competitor—the Intended—from the truth about Kurtz and keep his awful legacy “safe and unsullied by feminine hands” (Walker, 2006, p. 43). As Nina Strauss emphasizes Marlow constructs his own version of the truth in order to guard his secret knowledge from the woman who is capable of “deconstruct[ing] and demystify[ing]” it, should she attain access to the masculine sphere (2004, p. 214). In doing so, Marlow’s position in the subject slot in Girard’s triangle is more fixed than that of the women of the novella. This suggests it is necessary for him to eliminate any grounds for women’s departure from the subject slot, that is why he covers Kurtz’s back and protects his position in the model slot.

In addition, the dedication and fidelity of Kurtz’s Intended along with her morbid grief stimulates Marlow to utter a lie. He prefers to lie than to shatter her world of love and her belief world of make-believe for that matter (Conklin, 2009, p. 2). In doing so, Marlow fails his test of devotion to the truth; still he succeeds in keeping the Intended away from the reality of his world as a man. Hence, she will never know the transformation that befalls Kurtz in the jungle and she will always clutch to a false image of the man. It seems that there is a bond linking Marlow to Kurtz even after the latter’s death (Simmons, 2007, p. 102).

Furthermore, Kurtz’s Intended is “a perfect spiritual counterpart to Kurtz” whose “tomb-like dwelling floating walk and black clothes” seem to be melding with Kurtz. Her deep

mourning after one year of Kurtz's departure symbolizes not only her role as a bride but also her role as the metaphor for the imperialistic Europe which only considers the white man's side of the story and fails to give the least attention to the devastation of those who possess the object they are after (Kaminari, 2007, p. 2- 3). Accordingly, being conceived with the admiration of the colonizer of Africa who also colonizes her heart and her existence, she seems to cherish her sorrow and delight in her mourning:

She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, I-I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves. But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time (Jeffares HOD, p. 113).

Although Kurtz's fiancée is essentially an idealistic person capable of belief, fidelity and suffering, she manipulates life to be what she wants to be. When Marlow lies to her in order to keep her ideal of Kurtz the way it is, she does not try to find the truth for herself. Obviously, she can be regarded as a symbol of European idealism or rather of Europe's purposeful production of falsehood pertaining to the motives of imperialism (Jeffares, 1994: xviii):

“I have been very happy –very fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for-for life” (Jeffares HOD, 1994, p. 116).

The way Marlow treats the Intended epitomizes “the good Victorian imperialist and patriarch” in ways similar to Kurtz who stands for “the enlightened Victorian missionary” who has gone corrupt in his relations with the native Africans within the story told by Marlow (Walker, 2006, p. 43-44). A question arises at this point: does Kurtz's Intended need to be protected by lying? As Walker suggests, she does not need this type of rescue because she is capable of securing her authorship, of “an alternative narrative or 'lie' which performs the work of a feminist critique on Marlow's narrative that precedes it, and exposes the many 'delusions' at play” (Walker, 2006, p. 48). Different from other female figures, she steps in and imposes her co-authorship on the narrative and in doing so she disrupts Marlow's narrative and forces him to tell a different version of the truth. In contrast to Marlow's scheme, the Intended imposes her own authorship on both “the story that will govern her life, and of the Modern age that imagines it can leave her behind” (Walker, 2006, p. 48). To wrap things up, the Intended is irreversibly dedicated to her subject of idolatry and a lie is not needed to keep her in the subject slot of Kurtz's fans. In addition, a thorough analysis of her discourse with Marlow reveals that she goes as far as putting words which embody her wishful thinking into his mouth.

However, if one seeks to account for the Intended's sickly attachment to Kurtz even after his death, one finds she fits into something similar in Girard's theory which Forsyth describes as “Deindividuation”. In other words, individuals can get deeply submerged in the group to the extent that they no longer need to stand out as individuals. This feeling could result in a “reduction of inner restraints and, in the extreme, atypical actions” (1990, p. 442). As such, the Intended is typically a white woman who fully identifies herself with the so-called white man's burden and “the noble cause” which as a collective European principle that she reduces in the

character of her fiancé. Consequently, her radical dedication to model leads to her total submersion in Kurtz whom she sees as all Europe.

The Painting

When analyzing the role of women in *Heart of Darkness*, one should not overlook two important points. Firstly, the reason why Marlow “exerted an effort to keep them mostly out of his narrative in an attempt to keep them out of his own world” although he knows that his world would go into pieces without them (Starrett, 2012, p. 1). Secondly, the symbolic value of the painting of the woman who is “draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch” (Conrad, 1947, p. 523). It is possible to argue that Conrad wants to say that women are the ones who carry the torch to light the way for men. However, one needs to interpret why the woman in the painting is blindfolded, unlike all women in the novella who are ascribed indispensable roles in directing the helm of Marlow’s quest despite being unaware of their self-esteem and the inspiration they unknowingly provide. In light of Girard’s theory, Marlow is a model who is looked up to, thus all women are blindly ready to give him help without questioning his motives. As such, men produce the falsehood about the noble cause of Christianizing and civilizing the brutes while women consume it with great devotion. Men mask their real intentions and women fail to unmask them as their desired deluded femininity is cautiously sheltered.

Imperializing women and Girard’s model

As argued in the previous sections, the white male characters in *Heart of Darkness* do not only imperialize Africa and its natives; rather, they succeeded in imperializing femininity in order to achieve their ulterior motives. Women are portrayed in ways similar to the pieces of chess in the sense that they are assigned certain roles and identities and are then checkmated when the player decides to do so. Ostensibly, each woman in the narrative plays the role assigned to her without realizing that she is not allowed to transcend the margin or the space that confines her, literally and metaphorically.

As far as Girard’s theory is concerned, one finds that women are not only subjects who aspire to the model but are also objects exactly as is Africa and its natives who are victimized in order to satisfy the salient desire of the white men for (the ivory of the Congo). This means that rivalry does not only exist between the white men and the black natives; rather, it exists among the whites themselves. The black natives are ignorantly attached to Kurtz and worship him as do the women of the novella who not only embrace the marginal roles assigned to them but also believe in them as the only ones they can have.

Women are indeed similar to the scapegoats of Girard’s theory, where Jeramy Townsley argues that “the victim often does not disagree with the charges laid against him/her, and the scapegoaters themselves believe the charges. Part of the nature of the scapegoating mechanism is that, not only do the scapegoaters not know that they are scapegoating, but often the scapegoat believes the charges to be true”(2003, p. 12).

Since change dominates all stages of Marlow’s quest, things change and need to be viewed through a different scope after Marlow filters the Congo experience through his own consciousness and offers a modified mild view of imperialism. Roles are altered; consequently, all that we have to do is simply to interchange the Girardian constant labels and the novella

characters; that is, to put Marlow in the “model” corner and the people of the Congo in the “subject” angle of the triangle. At the beginning, Kurtz is admired and unrivalled; yet, at the end of the story Marlow seems to be closer, at least for the white readers, to the slot of the model because he neither approves of the atrocities of the white colonizers, nor utterly denounces the legitimacy of their presence in the Dark Continent. The idolatry of Kurtz by the black people secures his movement to the object slot because they want to possess Kurtz and keep him for themselves. The resulting modified shape appears as follows:

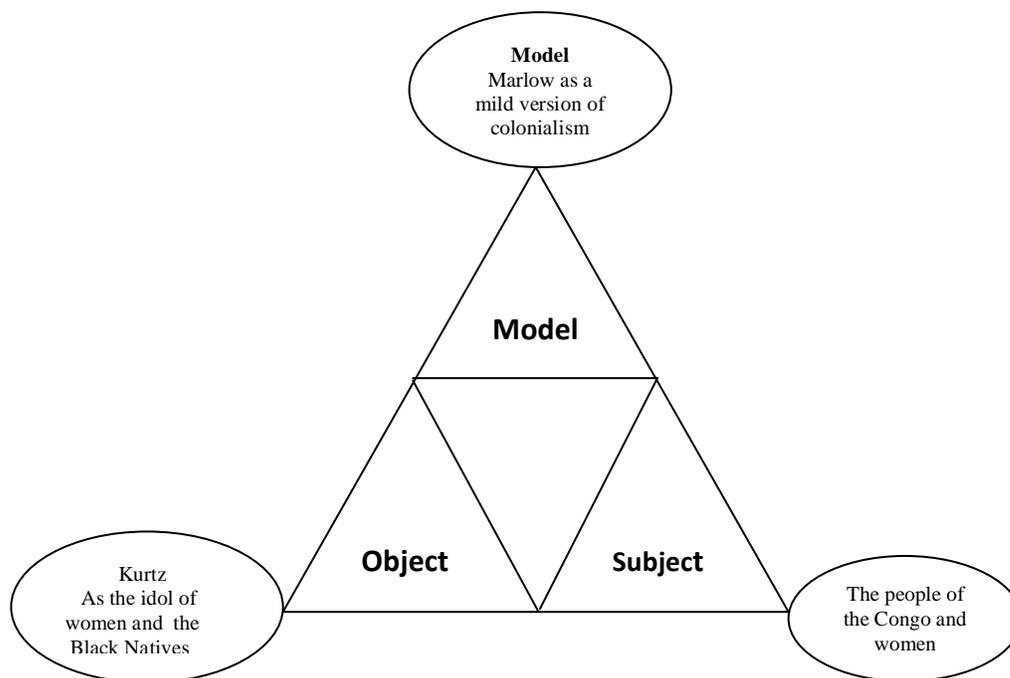


Figure 2. The positions of Conrad's characters in Girard's model after Marlow's journey into the heart of darkness

Since the reader's response is one of the major factors in reading a literary work, one should always take the reader's position into consideration. In most cases the reader identifies with a specific narrative characters; yet, his/her position changes as the events of the story change. Hence, the view of the reader changes through the progression of the narrative. This shows that Kurtz does not keep the role of the powerful model admired by readers; consequently, the reader's obsession with Kurtz, the previous model, is directed toward Marlow.

All in all, it might be concluded that the reader is not actually attracted to the changing characters themselves as s/he seems to be; instead s/he is attracted to the stable or fixed “model” slot of the triangle or more precisely to the “model” slot of the quinary circle. Irrespective of the character occupying this slot, the reader can be still obsessed with the same model slot, and that whoever stands in that corner, becomes undoubtedly the reader's model. In other words, the reader is neither drawn to Kurtz nor attracted to the one who receives his legacy, Marlow. More or less; he is rather attracted to the model, the slot whose characters are not stable.

Accordingly, the reader's perspective to things remains an outsider one since the reader is obviously still to some extent a detached observer standing away from the novella and the theory

because s/he is not one of its characters , and so his view has been treated with some caution to distinguish it from the one held between the characters themselves towards each other. Hence, another question at this stage is: Is the reader's attitude towards the model in reality different from that towards the same model s/he reads about in a work of fiction such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*?

The answer to this question directs attention towards another important dimension namely the "violence" dimension, as argued previously. Firstly, the reader's desire to imitate fictional characters seen as role models, is similar to that desire of any "subject" character to imitate the model and to reach a parallel situation. Yet, the reader-model relationship is not accompanied with the tendency of violence or revenge towards the model as it is the case when it comes to the character-character relationship. Therefore, the reader's desire remains merely a desire not replaced by the idea of revenge. Nonetheless, violence stands in the heart of the matter when it comes to real situations in which the reader is not a reader, but a real slot holder deeply involved in Girard's imitation process.

This leads to the stage when two necessary extra slots are added into Girard's triadic system: the "scapegoat" slot and the "readership" slot. By that, Girard's triangle becomes a circular shape that is more comprehensive than the triadic previous one ,at least in this paper which applies the theory to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The modified shape appears as follows:

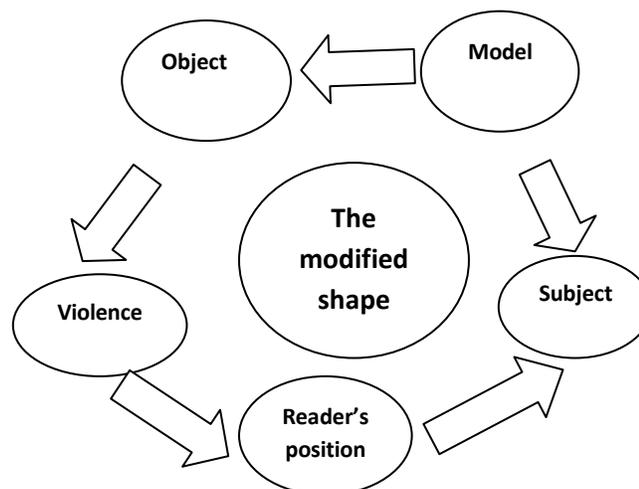


Figure 3. The modified shape of Girard's model after adding violence and reader's position

Conclusion

The female figures in *Heart of Darkness* are as colonized and violated as Africa and its natives. The portrayal of women in the novella demonstrates sexism and deprivation of any power position. Ostensibly, each woman in the narrative plays the role assigned to her ignorant of the fact that she is a special victim of imperialism and not a keeper of noble dreams.

However, attaining deep understanding of the novella requires the reader to go beyond the sexist innuendos and to steer the helm towards colonist exploitation and victimization of femininity to show how women came to embrace the role assigned to them without realizing

that they are naive keepers of illusions. Eventually, women in the novella are colonized by their males to consume all the falsehood they produce about “the noble cause” and “the white man’s burden”. Once the mission is achieved, both the white and the black female figures are checkmated.

There is a perfect match between the novella and Girard’s theory, and, therefore, the passivity of the female figures in the novella is accounted for within the stable slots of his theory. Women obviously accept the ancillary roles assigned to them because they are humans, but human beings are mimetic creatures who borrow their desires from whom they look up to as models possessing the object of their desire. Men colonize Africa (the object of desire), which is the source of wealth and provision. In addition, women (the subject of desire) are seen as essential benefactors, who approve of imperialism partially because they are deceived into thinking that the white colonizers (the model) are Christianizing and civilizing the “brutes.” This can be attributed to the fact that the Congo experience is never explained to them and in doing so they become the naïve consumers of male falsehood.

In attempting to interpret this prejudice against women in light of Girard’s theory, it becomes clear that women are among the common victims who are fit to be the scapegoats in the world of men. Marlow and Kurtz manipulate women in the novella in order to attain their goals, not because they want to conform to the stereotyped views of gender roles. This makes the female characters in the novella one dimensional because the males decide not to tell them about the Congo experience, for, if they did, women would never accept to remain in the subject slot and would never look up to men as models.

In short, colonization can be seen as an act of violence and hostility which must be vigorously dispersed or vented, as opposed to being a process open to transformation by introspection or meditation. Much of this violence is released by assaulting the black natives; however, women have their own share of this violence. They are treated not only as objects but also as tools of imperialism undergoing suffering and oppression because they are physically and mentally penetrated and colonized as is the Dark Continent. As far as Girard’s theory is concerned, one finds that women are not only subjects who aspire to the model but also objects as is Africa and its natives who are victimized in order to satisfy the salient desire of the white men for the ivory of the Congo.

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