Epistemology, Modernity, and Masculinity: Heart of Darkness

¶1 Roberts provides a summary of critical discourses surrounding epistemological uncertainty in modernist writing. Roberts also makes clear his thesis: knowledge and certainty are unevenly distributed between his male and female characters, and the control of knowledge perpetuates the reinforcement and modification of gender differences.

¶2 Conrad uses male archetypes to perpetuate his perceptions of modernity. Female perceptions of modernity are not greatly accounted for. Roberts states that Conrad employs the flaneur archetype as an example of a social situation from which women are excluded. This results in an overtly male outlook on modernity in HOD.

¶3 Roberts uses explanations of Nietzsche and Foucault to highlight the perceived functional benefit of depriving women of knowledge.

¶4 Roberts asserts that Conrad’s work can be explicated in terms of the structures of male power and desire. The discourses of male power and desire attribute to women specific secret forms of knowledge while still depriving them of engaging as a “knowing subject”

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¶12 Because these characters cannot describe “the life sensation” and the meaning behind their experiences, they use empty signifiers to share knowledge and cross boundaries.

¶13 Ideologies structure “Heart of Darkness” in a familiar pattern similar to discourses of colonialism and homophobia. The text constructs itself as symbolizing personal and metaphysical ideas, but its ideologically-inflected narrative delivery offers footholds for a political reading.

¶14 Conrad suppresses the Intended by not giving her a name, and Marlow suppresses her by denying her knowledge. While Marlow has rational reasons for lying, he is more worried about the implications of having a woman so close to knowledge.

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Because the horror is not cannibalism, human sacrifice, or witchcraft, it must be homosexuality, specifically Marlow’s love for Kurtz. Marlow’s interest in the darkness of Africa is a mask for his love of Kurtz.

Having three male characters attempt to psychoanalyze the story of Marlow is the connection to *Billy Budd* that Roberts is trying to make. The psychoanalysis is the reason Marlow tries to conceal the imperialism and male desire from them.

Roberts retells *Heart of Darkness* at the most basic level with a homosexual interpretation.