

To: Drs. Youngblood, Whittemore & Welhausen

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Re: Reflection on Seminar Paper

Keywords: Interconnectedness, ecocritical, post-colonial, social justice

Introduction

As part of the ENG 7180: 19th-Century Studies class with Dr. Keirstead, I developed a seminar paper titled “*Environmental and Ecocritical Perspectives on Heart of Darkness*” by Joseph Conrad. In it, I explored the novel's environmental and postcolonial themes, focusing on the intersection of ecological degradation and colonial exploitation. I also prepared a class presentation communicating key insights in a clear and accessible narrative.

In this reflection memo, I explain my research process, discuss how I applied interdisciplinary theories, and highlight the rhetorical strategies that guided the project. I also reflect on how this experience strengthened my analytical, research, and presentation skills, enhancing my academic and professional growth.

Project Overview

In this project, I analyzed *Heart of Darkness* through the dual lenses of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. I highlighted themes of environmental devastation, cultural exploitation, and imperial greed. As this seminar paper was part of the Blue Victorians course, I focused on water imagery in the novel, examining its symbolic role in shaping the narrative and connecting it to broader themes of power, resistance, and transformation.

For the accompanying presentation, I simplified complex themes into a straightforward narrative. I used visuals to emphasize Conrad's critique of imperialism and the limitations of his cultural and historical context. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, I demonstrated the interconnectedness of literature, environment, and social justice.

Process and Methodology

The research process for this seminar paper required a strategic approach to identifying and evaluating credible scholarly sources. I focused on journals specializing in ecocriticism, Victorian studies, and postcolonial literature, such as *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* and *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. These journals provided a theoretical foundation for analyzing *Heart of Darkness*, offering perspectives contextualizing Conrad's narrative within broader environmental and socio-political frameworks.

I prioritized interdisciplinary articles that bridged literature with environmental ethics and colonial history to deepen my analysis. Cheryll Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) provided foundational perspectives on how literature engages with ecological concerns. Within this collection, specific works on ecocriticism helped me analyze the

ways *Heart of Darkness* portrays the natural world not merely as a setting but as an active force intertwined with colonial dominance and resource depletion. At the same time, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) offered a critical framework for examining the Eurocentric biases in Conrad's narrative. By annotating these sources, I traced recurring themes such as environmental degradation and cultural subjugation, ensuring my arguments were grounded in established scholarship and aligned with contemporary academic discussions. The writing process emphasized clarity and coherence, synthesizing complex theoretical insights into a structured argument. I divided the analysis into thematic sections, such as ecological collapse, cultural exploitation, and the symbolic role of water imagery. This structure allowed me to address Conrad's nuanced critique of imperialism while maintaining a clear narrative flow.

For the accompanying presentation, I adapted detailed academic content into an accessible format, using visual aids inspired by Cairo's *The Functional Art*. Cairo emphasizes the importance of data visualization in enhancing comprehension, which guided my decision to incorporate a thematic map. Specifically, I used a visual representation of the Congo River to highlight the Congo's geographical presence in the novel and its symbolic function as a symbol of imperial exploitation.

Finally, Dr. Keirstead's feedback provided valuable insights that helped refine my argument and presentation. This iterative process improved the quality of my work and reinforced the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives in academic writing.

Challenges and Solutions

One significant challenge lies in addressing the ambiguities in Conrad's portrayal of imperialism. While *Heart of Darkness* critiques the brutality of European colonial practices, it often does so from a Eurocentric perspective that limits the scope of its critique. To reconcile these ambiguities, I adopted a postcolonial ecocritical lens, which enabled me to frame the novella as a product of its time and a critical commentary on European imperial arrogance. This approach highlighted how Conrad critiques imperialism while remaining constrained by the cultural and historical context of his writing.

Work Cited

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