

(Post)colonial Encounters: Power Relations in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and
Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*

Reading about colonization I used to search for two totally different opponent groups, an inferior and a superior one, especially when the conflict was between blacks and whites. However, this approach is not surprising, because colonial narratives have been traditionally read as the case studies of a superior and an inferior group's violent conflict. As Homi Bhabha argues it in his book, *The Location of Culture*, the justification for these violent conflicts was exactly the fact that the colonized was considered to be inferior: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction," says Homi Bhabha in his book, (Bhabha 70). Handling the other race or the other sex as inferior has been a naturalized practice for centuries. Although Robert J. C. Young argues in his book, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, that colonization was a complex process which cannot be reduced to a single definition, he mentions "the tendency of colonial administrations to regionalize, split up, divide and rule" which suggests that people usually rely on generalizations like this in their minds when they hear the word colonization (Young 18). In this way no wonder that the readers are accustomed to colonial novels, where the stronger, more civilized one conquers the weak and ignorant group. In Rita Felski's essay, *Modernity and Feminism*, it is suggested that in the discourses of colonialism "the historical distinction between the modern present and the primitive past was mapped onto the special relations between Western and non-Western societies" and that during colonial invasions "the traditions and customs of indigenous peoples were forced to give way to the inexorable path of historical progress" (Felski 14).

As Bényei Tamás interprets Graham Huggan's comment in his book, *Traumatikus találkozások*, the colonial system has the aim to reproduce the colonizer itself – including its values and principles – in the natives and its society and culture in the colony (Bényei 160). These conquests, however, always have another side, too, which consists of more latent discourses, so it is sometimes hard to recognize. As Bényei Tamás argues, both the conquered and the conqueror needs to experience an identity crisis in a colonial situation. He evokes Robert Young's thoughts which explain that one of the shared points of the postcolonial and the postmodern is the fading of these clear binary oppositions and borders, and the reconsideration of the opposites in this new, highly influenced environment (Bényei 10). At this point one can ask the question what this new environment is like. It is clear that in order

to break the strict boundaries in a system one needs to reconsider the system itself. In human history every period has had its own interpretative system of discourses, which gives the basis of thinking and acting in that particular period. In Felski's essay the concept of the modern is defined by the possibility of questioning the old structures and traditions and replacing them with the critical mind of the human beings as interpretative tools (Felski 14). So in this new environment the border-lines can fade away and there is a chance for the so far clearly separated parts to blend. During the interpretation of human interactions concerning colonial and racial issues, whiteness, blackness and gender relations in Lloyd Jones' recently published and lesser known *Mister Pip*, and Joseph Conrad's classic modernist novel, *Heart of Darkness* it becomes clear that although people often think about colonization, civil wars and gender interactions as the conquest of the superior over the inferior one, these novels help us to see that in human interactions both sides are influenced, both sides need to fight their own battles and even the stronger one needs to reconsider its principles and ideas about its own identity.

Before offering an in-depth analysis of these seemingly incompatible books, Joseph Conrad's high modernist fiction and Lloyd Jones contemporary novel about the Civil War on the Bougainville Island in the 1990s, my initial aim is to contextualize the books themselves and to establish the theoretical and conceptual basis of my analysis. Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip* was first published in 2006 in New Zealand and one year later it was already shortlisted for the 2007 Man Booker Prize. The book got a wide range of positive feedbacks, for example Olivia Laing writes in her review of *Mister Pip* the following: "There is a fittingly dreamy, lyrical quality to Jones's writing, along with an acute ear for the earthy harmonies of village speech" (Laing). The book was also the runner-up for Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year 2008. Although Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was first published as a book in 1902, as Bényei Tamás emphasizes it in *Traumatikus találkozások*, Conrad's novelette became contested field of postcolonial interpretations as revealing example for texts which can be interpreted out of their contexts (Bényei 17).

The conceptual and theoretical background of my essay is principally based on Felski's above mentioned essay on the modern subject and Bhabha's notion of the Other. The modern and the postmodern are naturally not interchangeable terms here but it is also a potentially false approach when one wants reduce them into two extreme poles of a binary opposition. Rita Felski's above mentioned essay clearly states:

Hence I am skeptical of those writings which equate the entire modern period with a particular and narrowly defined tradition of intellectual thought stretching from Kant to Marx (as if several centuries of history could be reduced to the writings of a handful of philosophers!) in order to celebrate the emergence of postmodern ambiguity and difference against modern homogeneity and rationality. (Felski 15)

Based on this essay I will consider the modern as a “constantly shifting set of temporal coordinates” which is not the opposite but rather a basis for the postmodern, and as Felski points it out, there are many texts from the 19th century which actually foreshadow the main concepts of the postmodern, what is more, the postmodern “repeats the gesture of overcoming and futurity that is fundamental to the modern”, which can prove that Joseph Conrad’s 19th century novel can contain fundamental referential points which foreshadow the possibility of change in the strict concepts of the century (Felski 23-27).

As Bhabha argues in the chapter entitled “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*, Western people had strong, unshakable stereotypes about the “Other” (regardless whether it means blackness or femininity), and these stereotypes did not allow anyone who was a member of a minority to be more than a specimen of one of this stigmatized group. Bhabha considers it as a main failure of the colonial subject; its inability to recognize the difference between the individuals of the group and to support this argument he recites Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*: “Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro” (Bhabha 75). Although it took a long time to recognize the differences, near the end of the 19th century – along with various conservative thoughts of the day – the clear-cut boundaries between races and genders gradually started to be questioned:

Thus on the one hand [...] the nineteenth century saw the establishment of increasing rigid boundaries between private and public selves [...] On the one hand, however, a close consideration of nineteenth-century texts suggests that the divisions between public and private, masculine and feminine, modern and antimodern were not as fixed as they may have appeared. (Felski 19)

With the questioning of this fixed position the point is reached on the basis of which the two novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *Mister Pip* can be connected. Simone de Beauvoir supports this argument in her essay as well when she mentions that the “unchangeably fixed entities” are no longer valid when a new concept appears which means that “given characteristics, such

as those ascribed to woman, the Jew, or the Negro” seemed to fade away. (Beauvoir 13-14). On the basis of Bhaba’s notion of otherness, Bényei’s argument about the identity crisis of the colonizer and the colonized and Felski’s concept of modernism my essay consists of three chapters, considering colour symbolism, gender roles, and the significance of literary works blended with cultural symbolism within the books.

First of all, I would like to introduce a motif which can be observed in both novels and which helps to dismantle the border-lines and stereotypes the Western subject had in mind in the previous centuries during the observation of the other race, the other gender and so on. This motif can be connected with the phenomenon when someone gets stuck at one point in his or her life, whether in time or space, and cannot move on. When this happens, the person who falls in the trap of time, place or both at the same time becomes unable to see the world from any other perspective than through the limited view of the geographical, cultural or temporal point he or she has got stuck in. In Lloyd Jones’ *Mister Pip*, there are many characters who are struggling with this problem. *Mister Pip*, as I already mentioned, is a novel about the Civil War in the Bougainville Island in the 1990s, narrated by a 14 year old black girl, Matilda, who is taught by the only white person on the island, Mr Watts, from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, which as an intertextual element shapes the whole plot together with its own characters and conflicts. It is also important to highlight that Matilda’s father has to leave the isolated island where they have lived with his family, because the mines are closed and he has to work somewhere else to earn money, so he flies to work in Australia in the hope that his family would follow him in a short time. Unfortunately, a civil war breaks out on the island so his family cannot follow him for years. Anyway, he is typically one of these above mentioned figures who got stuck in time or space, because this separation makes him unable to think of his wife and daughter other than the persons he left on the island years before, so when he sends sneakers to her daughter, Matilda, it is two sizes too small for her. Although this is just one tiny detail, it suggests that when Matilda and her father finally meet at the end of the book, the father can treat his daughter only as a child. Another example in this book is Grace, the black wife of Mr Watts who is the only white person on the island. Grace is considered to be mad, because she does not speak with the other black characters and she is acting like an unreachable ice queen. She used to be the smartest girl among the other black girls as a child so she had the opportunity to travel to Australia with a scholarship and when she comes back, she had already changed. At the end of the novel Matilda finds out the reason for this mysterious behaviour. Grace took part in theatrical performances together with

Mr Watts, and once when she was playing the Queen of Sheba she refused to step out of the role. She was unable to go back to her original identity. She returns to the island as the Queen of Sheba with a white husband so it is in a way understandable that she does not feel able to interact with her race the way she used to before her departure.

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz's Intended gets stuck at the point of time where her fiancé died. When the narrator of the story, Marlow arrives at the house of Kurtz and the Intended at the end of the novel he finds the girl draped in black, although Kurtz died more than a year before: "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. For her he had died only yesterday" (Conrad 107). Her refusal to move on can be explained by the fact that she has such a deeply rooted contact with the illusion who Kurtz was that he seems to be part of her, and so letting him go would probably result in her death, too. Their conversation with Marlow suggests that the memory of Kurtz is the only thing that keeps her alive: "'To the very end,' I said shakily. 'I heard his very last words...' I stopped in a fright. 'Repeat them,' she murmured in a heart-broken tone. 'I want – I want – something – something – to – to live with'" (Conrad 110). In Lloyd Jones' novel there is a similar intertextual link connected to a character from Charles Dickens' novel, *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham, for whom the clock also stopped ticking on the day of her planned wedding, which then influenced not just her whole life but that of all the characters living in her direct environment as well.

All these above mentioned characters seem to wear special glasses, which limit their perspectives of the world. They are not open for new perspectives, new schemes to interpret the world around them which keeps them far from seeing the world together with its colourful complexity. With these examples my aim was just to see in a microcosm what is really happening in the macrocosm of the world's history, so the "glasses" of the different periods and cultures are limited by many concepts and stereotypes which are considered to be unquestionable and are the results of the old historical failure to interpret texts in the historical, cultural and temporal context of the interpreter instead of the context of the interpreted. This failure of the past is unravelled in Bényei Tamás' *Traumatikus találkozások*, where he mentions that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is the best example of the interpretative strategy of colonial texts, because this strategy suggests that people tend to take colonial texts out of their own historical context and interpret them from their own point of view and try to conceive them as something similar or equal with their own results that they

learn about themselves rather than reaching new ones (Bényei 16-17). In the case of many books about the Victorian era this problem has already been recognized: the problem of interpreting literary texts or historical events taken out of their own context, forcing them to fit into their contemporary culture. One of these books is *Sweet Thames*, a neo-Victorian novel on the 1854 London cholera outbreak by a British author, Matthew Kneale formulates this phenomenon the following:

Readers, guard yourselves, I urge you against the toxic slumber of unanimity. Seek instead that most dazzling of prizes; to see through the delusions of your own time. Every generation has its vanity, its scorn of preceding eras, and its determination to be the first – or last – example of humanity of real distinction. Each era and place has its own maddened assumptions, no more evident to their populations than distortions of colour are detectable to a fellow who has from birth seen the world through yellow-painted spectacles. You will not fully escape the influence of your own time [...] but if you trouble always to find your own thoughts, you may just rise above the fog of its more ludicrous imaginings. (Kneale 311)

This quotation by Kneale includes all the above mentioned troubles and difficulties of the generations and individuals to interpret a text in its own historical and cultural context. In Lloyd Jones novel *Matilda* unwittingly gives a really good example for the wrong approach of whites to the black's issues. She tells about the experience when she saw white people for the first time in a film with her black classmates and she says that they "all laughed [...] at the whites trying to sit on the ground as they would in a chair" (Jones 5). I think that this is the main problem of humanity, that "people sit on the ground as they would in chair" unable to see that there is no chair to sit on (Jones 5).

To be able to dissolve the stereotypes let me take into consideration the protagonists of the two novels, and how they are related to "the other colour" and how this relation changes throughout the two novels. In Lloyd Jones' novel, the narrator is the fourteen-year-old black girl, Matilda, who could be considered in many ways as a subordinated character, because she is not just a black, but also a woman and a child. However, at the end of the novel she becomes an academic, a Dickens scholar, which is enough to persuade the reader about the level of her intelligence. She defines the colour white with many associations and compares it to ice-cream, ribbons, aspirin, the moon and the stars, which all mean something significant to

her. It is observable that when she talks about white people she somehow always emphasizes their whiteness. For example when she describes the white people's behaviour she has seen in a film she mentions that they were all wearing "moustaches and *white* trousers" and one of them has asked for "the *white* cloth which he used to wipe his mouth" (Jones 5). Fascinated with the colour white she says that her father has also seen films before leaving their island to prepare for the world of whites and in one of these films he had seen "a demonstration of a pedestrian crossing" where "kids in *white* coats had the power to control traffic with their stop signs" (Jones 7). This suggests that she as a child has already understood that whites have the power to control others but she does not speak about this fact as something truly bad. When the rebellion breaks out on their island she also says that they wish "the fighting would go away, and for the white man to come back and re-open the mine" (Jones 43). She also connects the colour white with magical happenings, for example once when one of their relatives in the class speaks about the colour blue which has "magical power" to release the colour white when it "crashes onto a reef"(Jones 51) and later when she mentions a TV programme where "a magician produce a *white* rabbit" (Jones 111). Knowledge as such is also connected to whiteness which Matilda mentions for example when they start to clean the school building from the "flowering vine" which they "hauled [...] away from the building to a clearing where we burned it in a thick *white* smoke" (Jones 15). This "flowering vine" burning with white smoke can indicate here that nature must be injured to give place for culture.

The first real and for a long time the only white person in Matilda's life is Mr Thomas Watts, her mysterious teacher, who has a great role in her life. With the observation of her relationship with Mr Watts one can see how Matilda succeeded in unravelling the real personality of Mr Watts from the stereotypes she and her environment had about whites and how she later realizes the similarities between the two races. This is gradually peeling off layers of stereotypes in the framework of (post)colonial encounters. For the first time she speaks about Mr Watts as a "source of mystery" and what is more important, as the "confirmation of something else we held to be true" (Jones 4). The emphasis is here on the part "we held to be true" which suggest that they saw him firstly as a type, a white man, as Other, rather than an individual and they clad him with all the assumptions they had about the white race. Furthermore, Matilda also falls in the trap of seeing white people from her own cultural context which manifests itself when she asks about Mr Watts' "white tribe", because the existence of the tribes in the 20th century is usually typical only for black people (Jones

112). When Matilda tells about the anger of her mother towards Mr Watts it turns out that her mother was not able to see beyond his skin colour:

She thought she had Mr Watts summed up. She could not see what us kids had come to see: a kind man. She only saw a white man. And white man had stolen her husband and my father. White men were to blame for the mine, and the blockade. A white man had given us the name of our island. White man had given me my name. (Jones 41)

Although Matilda is able to see these misconceptions after a while, she also has her own battles to fight until she reaches this point. In the first part of the novel for instance when she speaks about Mr Watts' gestures she feels the necessity to emphasize his skin colour: "His white hands relaxed at his sides" (Jones 13) or "He brought up a delicate white hand to touch the knot" (Jones 14). She keeps doing this because she might want to call everyone's attention to the fact how different Mr Watts is. Although she is afraid of Mr Watts' otherness, she also respects his status as a white man: "This was the first time I had spoken to Mr Watts alone and I was very aware of his status as a grown-up and as a white" (Jones 60), or "this was one of those moments that reminded us of Mr Watts' status as the last white man on the island" (Jones 73). (In parenthesis I would add that Mr Watts is not the only person whose whiteness is alien for her, because after leaving the island at the end of the book, she starts to add the word *white* to the gestures of the white characters again: "The doctor sat back in his chair. He pushed away from his desk so that his *white* knees rose above it" [Jones 189].). The first surprise comes for her when during the rebellion Mr Watts stays on the island in spite of the fact that he was allowed to leave. When Mr Watts starts to teach in their school and goes to the beach together with the children, Matilda experiences for the first time how similar they actually are: "To see him on the beach in his baggy old shorts with a plastic bucket was to wonder what had happened to Mr Watts of the classroom. You saw how terribly thin he had become or he really was [...] On the beach, though, he was like the rest of us" (Jones 59). Maybe the most telling part of this recognition is when Matilda says "how terribly thin he had become or he really was". This reveals that there is a chance that Mr Watts was always like that but their stereotypes and misconceptions did not allow them to see him clearly, for what he really is. After many classes with him one student feels brave enough to ask the question: "What it is like to be white?" and his answer is that on this particular island he feels like the last mammoth on the earth. What is more interesting for the children is his question: "What it is like to be black?" and a child's response is that it is "Normal" (Jones 81). At that point one

can ask the question: what does it mean to feel that something is “normal”? To this question Matilda finds the answer when many days later Mr Watts tells his life story to the blacks gathered in the forest to hear him. He says that “white is a feeling” which one can only feel “around black people” and a black boy, Daniel, is really happy to hear that and he says they feel the same around white people (Jones 156). At this point they all recognize how identical the races are and how false their “theory” was about Mr Watts as a white person (Jones 141). He wins the whole black audience over with his notion about the whitest white, which he thinks is like “the inside of a toilet bowl” (Jones 155). His irony towards whiteness indicates to the blacks that Mr Watts is able to see the imperfections of the white race as well. The negative experiences with whiteness come later in Matilda’s life, when she experiences what it is really like to be the only black in a white class in Australia and what kind of influence the white’s world has on black people. Firstly she cannot see this changing effect of the white world, only her mother does: “And if I had been older at that time then I would have noticed, as my mum did, that whenever our men returned from the white world they came back changed in some way” (Jones 85). Later, at the burial of Mrs Watts, Matilda’s mum is again the person who tells a story about Grace, the smartest black girl in the class who was sent to New Zealand to learn at a white dental school, (which is ironical, because the teeth must be also white) but he highlights that “when she came back, she was a different person [...] We did not know any more if she was black or white” (Jones 124-25). Nevertheless, the main transformation can be observed in Matilda’s father. (I will elaborate on this transformation more in the next paragraph about the role of intentions in changing human behaviour.)

On the other hand, in Conrad’s novel the protagonist, Marlow, who is a white colonist in the heart of the African continent, sees the blacks firstly as special creatures very close to nature. At the beginning of his journey to the inner station he sees black people who are paddling a boat and Marlow thinks that their movements are “as natural and true as the surf along the coast” (Conrad 20). Another example for the similarity of blacks to nature can be seen when Marlow orders his helmsman to be quiet but thinks that “I might just as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind” (Conrad 64). Finally this closeness of blacks to nature can be observed when Marlow is thinking about why the cannibals are restraining themselves from eating the whites on the board: “these chaps, too, had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield” (Conrad 60). So in Marlow’s imagination the blacks are definitely not people who are able to control their basic instincts or make moral decisions.

That is the reason why he becomes so terrified when he realizes the human nature of blacks together with their similarities to whites:

No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. The howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. (Conrad 51)

This part of the novel shows us the fact that Marlow recognized the humanity of the seemingly inhuman black savages, whose behaviour in this way can become the symbol of the repressed white self. Bényei Tamás mentions in *Traumatikus találkozások*, that colonial texts often project the suppressed problems of the Western Culture on the “natives”. What is more, the colonial society makes visible what the mother country already considered to be a thing of the past: aggression, cruelty, racism and other issues, which belonged to the taboo topics we are not really talking about. So in colonial texts one can often see phenomena which are considered to be forgotten in Europe (Bényei 10-11). So it simply can mean that the aggressive and barbarian behaviour of the natives is in no way inferior to the cruelty of the white colonists. Another realization for Marlow about the humanity of blacks comes when his helmsman dies and he misses their partnership. He finds his regret strange because he knows that this man was just a “savage” and “was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara” but he was considered to be a really helpful “instrument” (Conrad 73). These strange feelings in Marlow already indicate the dawn of questioning the strongly believed categories in people’s minds about the nature of blacks.

Analysing the role of intention in changing human behaviour in the stories, from the two groups the black is the one which is more willing to assimilate to the other group until the white tries to preserve its traditions and identity among extraordinary circumstances as well. Homi Bhaba’s concept about colonial mimicry is a crucial notion to mention here. In *Traumatikus találkozások*, Bényei Tamás also elaborates on Ranjana Khanna’s explanation about a process during which the blacks lost the real model of their mimesis – their ancients’ moral code – and replaced it with a kind of empty and superficial mimesis of the white colonists (Bényei 160). As Bényei also highlights it, Homi Bhabha defines in his work, *The Location of Culture*, the colonial mimesis as “flawed,” because “mimicry repeats rather than re-presents” (Bhabha 87). It means that without a real model and real representation, blacks

can only become empty copies of the whites. In other words, the blacks are expected to copy the whites and assimilate into their society, but on the other hand the whites see blacks as totally different creatures, unable to reach their level of perfection (Bényei 167). A great example for mimicry is Matilda's father in Lloyd Jones novel, because he is living among white people, using their gestures, wearing their clothes and living their lifestyle. This is the main reason why the character of the father stays alien for Matilda throughout the book. When she arrives at Australia, she describes her father this way: "His transformation into a white man was near complete. He wore shorts, and boots that rose no higher than his ankles. A white shirt did little to hide his bulging stomach" (Jones 192). To Matilda this behaviour is really strange and she highlights that not just his clothes but even his smile was "a white man's smile" which can suggest that the transformation is happening not only outside, but inside as well (Jones 128). (It is similar to the transformation inside which the doctor mentions to Marlow before his journey to Africa: "the changes take place inside, you know" [Conrad].).

In the *Heart of Darkness* the situation is similar but not the same. There are black characters who are more civilized than the others but they are forced to transform instead of choosing it deliberately. For example his way to the Company Station Marlow meets savages who are escorted by a black guardian who – as Marlow says – was "the product of the new forces at work" and who had a "large, *white*, rascally grin" on his face (Conrad 23). Another thought provoking scene is the one when Marlow and his crew – in which for example the fireman is a former savage – are sailing to the inner station and on the river bank they see blacks dancing and howling with animalistic movements. What comes to Marlow's mind is that his fireman, who "ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the river bank" is an "improved specimen" busy with his work, which might be "a thrall to witchcraft, full of improving knowledge" (Conrad 53). These examples also show the fact that black people who want to be or are forced to be like whites are just products of a colonizing process, unable to identify fully with their new roles.

In contrast with the blacks' attempts to assimilate into white society, white characters are more insistent on their white identities in spite of the extraordinary circumstances. In the *Heart of Darkness* this person is the Company's chief accountant who is like a vision at the Company's station because of his elegance: "I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand" (Conrad 25). Most of the

attributives – “white”, “light”, “snowy”, “clear”, “varnished” – refer to his refusal to become dirty and thus similar to the inhabitants, which indicates his dread of going native, but it turns out that it is a black woman who cleans all his clothes, so ironically behind his efforts to stay white the accountant needs a black woman’s labour. Such as the Company’s Chief Accountant, Mr Kurtz cannot keep his initial intention to control black people as a godlike leader without being influenced by the dark continent. Marlow talks about the wilderness as if it were a devastating lover who “had taken him [Mr Kurtz], loved him, embrace him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation” (Conrad 69). So in this way, Kurtz is conquered by the mysteries of the feminized forest and its wilderness, which restrains his soul like an unbreakable curse: “I tried to break the spell” says Marlow “the heavy mute spell of the wilderness – that seemed to its pitiless breast by the awaking of forgotten and brutal instincts” (Conrad 94). In spite of Kurtz’ intention to possess everything; “my ivory, my station, my river” etc. he was taken into possession by wilderness: “Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own” (Conrad 70). It also suggests Kurtz’ transformation, that Marlow calls him “the original Kurtz” when he tells about his entrance into the profession and it is also an important fact that “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” completed finally by the African continent (Conrad 71). Like the Company’s Chief Accountant, in *Mister Pip* the only white person on the island, Mr Watts is wearing a “white linen suit”. He is not as indivertible as the chief accountant, but he also preserves his habits and principles on the island, even though he is ridiculed for them. For example he preserves with her wife the shared memory of *Queen of Sheba*, wearing the red noise and pulling a trolley in front of the black community and he teaches from a book written by a white man, which is discouraged by Christian black mothers in the community. Like the Company’s Chief Accountant, Mr Watts is also accompanied by a black woman, but his wife has a very different status here not only as black, but also as a woman.

It is also significant how white and black characters reflect on themselves, on their own knowledge in reference to the other race. From this aspect there are greater differences regarding the self-reflection of the whites in the two analysed books, but with the black characters this reflection is almost the same. The feeling of superiority is much stronger in Conrad’s colonial novel, where Kurtz’s aim is to eliminate the barbaric lifestyle of the blacks and to be a divine model for them. This aim is documented in his pamphlet supported by the

“International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs” and it is also telling, that he notes on the last page of his work: “Exterminate all the brutes!” (Conrad 71-72). In *Mister Pip*, however, the only white character on Bougainville Island, Mr Watts is aware of his own ignorance in several fields of life and he makes no bones about it: “I will be honest with you” – says Mr Watts in the school for the children – “I have no wisdom, none at all. The truest thing I can tell you is that whatever we have been between us is all we’ve got” (Jones 16) and later during this class he says: “I welcome questions. I won’t always be able to answer them. Remember that” (Jones 19). Admitting one’s lack of knowledge is one of the hardest things for a human being regardless of his/her skin colour. On another occasion Matilda is the one who remarks Mr Watts’ lack of knowledge, but it is important to highlight that considering this she is all but malevolent: “There were large gaps in Mr Watts’ knowledge. Large gaps as it turned out, for which he apologized” (Jones 24), but Mr Watts tried to compensate his lack with inviting other adults to his class to share their own experiences and knowledge about the world.

As opposed to the white figures, blacks are much more critical with themselves in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Mr Pip*. In *Mister Pip*, Matilda enjoys the situation when after attending Mr Watts’ classes she possesses a piece of the world which her mother does not know about and she tenderly provokes her mother to ask more and more about the Victorian London of Mr Dickens’ novel. However, after a while her mother becomes angry and frustrated about her ignorance so she stops asking questions about the book, which is full of unknown expressions for her: “She didn’t care what a rimy morning was. Or else she didn’t want to appear dumb or backward” (Jones 30). Matilda’s grandfather also had a story about the first white person on their island. This white man was shipwrecked and asked for a compass and a map but the grandfather did not understand what he wanted so he was just smiling and answering irrelevant things for “he wouldn’t want to appear dumb” (Jones 4). The fear from appearing dumb is also a power that keeps some parent away from attending Mr Watts’ classes and telling the students something they know. Matilda says here: “We didn’t want them [the parents] scared to come to class. But also saw how shame and fear of looking stupid was never far from the surface, and this is what kept some at a distance” (Jones 55-56). On the other hand the black characters also enjoy the situation when they have the chance to appear smarter than the whites or the redskin soldiers, who invaded their Island to beat the rebels of the civil war. For example when Mr Watts’ wife, Grace, as a child is sent to England “to show the white world how smart a black kid could be” or when the redskin soldiers ask

for all the names in the village and the inhabitants are happy to help them in the correct spelling (Jones 124). The redskin soldiers, however, are not happy about appearing dumb when they are asked whether they know Mr Dickens' *Great Expectations* or not and this selfish pride of all human kind will lead to tragedies in the story: "The officer looked angry. [...] He would have to ask what character, which book, and thereby reveal his ignorance. I could see those questions brewing in his face" (Jones 86-87). Apart from the importance of self-esteem, in the process of self-reflection it is significant to mention that Matilda feels the necessity of defining herself against other creatures of nature as a black human being. For instance when the soldiers attack their village they flee to the forest while the roosters stay in the village and she notes that "Seeing them made you feel human, because they didn't know anything. They didn't know about guns and the redskins from Moresby. They didn't know about the mine or about the politics or of our fears. The roosters only knew how to be roosters" (Jones 31). Although Matilda can identify with the similarity of human beings and animals – once she sees a dog, called Black, killed by the soldiers, whose insides hang out and she thinks it is like a human body – she also feels the capability of humans to be much more than an animal ever could be. In Conrad's novel the situation is very similar when somebody examines the importance of self-esteem. Marlow's helmsman is a strong man with an athletic body and he also likes to appear to be a talented person, but Marlow can see his fear behind his mask: "He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute" (Conrad 63). Based on these examples one can see that all human hearts need some acknowledgement to have a balanced self-esteem and when this balance gets hurt, it has serious consequences.

The next part of my essay is about female characters in the two novels, since beside colour, gender is another crucial form of otherness in the novel. Talking about gender roles, there are examples in both novels for the humiliation of feminine characters by a seemingly superior male figure. As a novel from the late Victorian era, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* contains various unquestionable-looking binary oppositions, where women are identified with passivity and the private sphere, while men are the representatives of the public sphere as active participants so the superiority of men over women is implied. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in her book, *The Second Sex*: "Man can think of himself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is incidental, the inessential as opposed

to the essential” (Beauvoir 16). Nevertheless, as it was suggested in the introductory part of my essay, modernist novels foreshadow the developmental forces of the era which will emphasize the power of femininity and as Beauvoir continues in her essay, “there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are emancipating today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes to ‘keep them in their place’ – that is the place chosen for them” (Beauvoir 23). This process, the slow leaving of a chosen place has already started in the modern period, but it is crucial to emphasize that it did not happen in a flash. The *Heart of Darkness*, however, is still dominated by the perfect, “angel in the house” type Victorian women, just like Marlow’s aunt, who is ignorant and nice with an irreprehensible house and a cup of tea in her drawing room or Mr Kurtz’ fiancée who is wearing her mourning-dress more than a year after Kurtz’ death unable to have an own life apart from the mourning of the dead man. It is crucial to mention, however, that the contemporary society made these women ignorant by identifying them with the private sphere and exclude them from the public life.

On the other hand, however, there is a hint that women are always there, even if they are acting behind the scenes which suggests how powerless men could be without their help. Firstly, the character of an unknown black woman is mentioned by the Company’s Chief Accountant in Conrad’s novel, who was – as I mentioned it in the chapter about colour symbolism – forced to clean the Accountant’s clothes to make him able to stay white among blacks. Considering this it seems to be ironical that without this black woman the white man could not keep his identity, his whiteness – both literally and symbolically. Moreover, Marlow’s aunt is the one who has the power to arrange the journey for Marlow to the African continent. Speaking of the African continent, other more ancient feminine symbols can be also mentioned in *Heart of Darkness* which have power over masculine characters. Such characters are the two women knitting black cotton wool in the outer room of the Company office building. Their description is really telling regarding the entity they symbolize:

Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. [...] Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Ave! Old knitter of black wool. *Morituri te salutant.* (Conrad 15-16)

The whole description is like an illusion because of the muteness of these women and their mysterious behaviour. As it is suggested in Marinovich Sarolta's essay, entitled "A sötétség mélyén" the knitting refers to the Greek mythology's Moirai, whose task is to cut the life's thread of people, who are near to die (Marinovich 152). In this interpretation, these feminine figures get a transcendental power which gives the device of control a passive, silent character. However, the most crucial feminine entity of Conrad's novel is the African continent. Although it may seem to be the most passive feminine being in the story, it is the most active essence, which is personified in many ways and which has many different faces. Marlow gives a lot of descriptions about the nature of the continent: "I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as menace. [...] Could we handle the dumb thing, or would it handle us?" (Conrad 56) or "A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station" (Conrad 60). The word "virgin" can refer here to a dominant metaphor of colonization and the whole process of cognition.

As Kalmár György suggests in his book – *A női test igazságai* – the process of cognition has been represented symbolically as a kind of sexual intercourse for centuries in the West (Kalmár 11), which is present in a way in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Mister Pip*. In Conrad's novel, sexual abuse is symbolical, because here the colonists penetrate deeper and deeper into the "virgin forest", destroying and taking everything they want. "To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" says Marlow about the members of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition (Conrad 44). This idea shows that colonization itself was the symbolic process of the violation of a feminized entity. The destruction of the continent and the liquidation of the natives are all abuse against an innocent, naïve creature. The description of the continent is complex, because it does not only have a transcendental power, but it also resembles an innocent girl and Marlow calls it a "conquered monster", which is "monstrous" and "free" at the same time (Conrad 69). One can ask the question: how can something simultaneously be a conquered object and a monster? This paradox implies both the geographical and the feminine features of the African continent. However, as I suggested above, in every interaction both sides are influenced and shaped, even the superior one. In this book throughout the colonisation process on the symbolically feminine African continent many white men die in various diseases and many of them lose their minds during the expeditions. In this way they are also conquered by a huge, silent feminine entity, which

suggest here a change in the power relations. In *Mister Pip*, there is a real rape scene, where Matilda's mother is abused by a redskin soldier just to be punished for her "sin". However, just like in the *Heart of Darkness*, the soldiers are shattered by the adversity of the dark jungle: "the redskin soldiers filed out of the dark jungle. Their uniforms were torn, and many of them wore bandages. Their faces looked drained" (Jones 171). It means that as a piece of nature, the jungle can be also a feminine symbol, which eventually weakened the superior male soldiers.

Apart from feminized nature, the female figures of Lloyd Jones *Mister Pip* are much more active than that of *Heart of Darkness*. Although there are still hints in the text that the men feel superior to women and they objectify them (when for example the rambos come back after three years in the village and their message is that: "They want girls" to satisfy their needs) both Matilda and her mother can be considered as revolutionary women characters who represent the emancipation of women. As Rita Felski states it in her essay the modern has already started to question the old concepts and it became possible for suppressed minorities to reinterpret their status:

Appeals to the modern and the new could, however, also be appropriated and articulated anew by dissident or disenfranchised groups to formulate their own resistance to the status quo. Thus in the early twentieth century the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of emancipation [...] In rather different ways modernist and avant-garde movements sought to disrupt taken for granted assumptions [...] refashioning the idea of the modern to signify ambiguity, uncertainty and crisis. (Felski 14)

As Felski suggests, the "taken for granted assumptions" have already started to fade away in the modern and Patricia Waugh supports this argument in her essay, "Postmodernism and Feminism: Where have all the women gone?" when she says that the postmodern continued what the modern has started: the "disruption of the boundaries" and the blending of what was separated for centuries (Waugh 4). What Matilda's mother does is exactly the transgression of the border-lines, because she questions openly the teaching of the white man, she is brave enough to use her voice and finally she proves that she is able to reconsider her own assumptions towards the white man and she is ready to defend Mr Watts' honour against the red skin soldiers. Just like her mother, Matilda is also ready for the reinterpretation of the world around her, but she needs to pass through a crisis resulted by the disruption of the

stereotypes to be able to move on. This crisis of Matilda will be discussed in the conclusion of my essay.

The last chapter of my essay is about the role of literature, books and the power of human voice in the two novels. As regards Lloyd Jones' book, the main literary piece is Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, which as an intertextual element offers a parallel world to the readers – and Matilda. Mr Watts is the person who introduces this novel to Matilda, which has a great influence on her throughout her life. Mr Watts is the one who shows to the black children how they can play with identities and slip under the skin of somebody else. *Great Expectations* gives them another world where they can flee, when they do not find their places in the real world, so reading gives “an interesting insight into the parallel world the reader develops from the words on the page” and anyone is able to do it regardless of his/her skin colour (Jones 110). So just like Matilda, Mr Watts also needed a place to flee: “I feel equally sure he was more comfortable in the world of Mr Dickens than he was in our black-faced world of superstition and mythic flying fish. In *Great Expectations* he was back among white people” (Jones 58). In this sense books help people regardless of their skin colour, age and sex to survive the seemingly hopeless days. The surviving function of literature is the clearest in the scene, when Matilda nearly drowns in the flood, but she finds a log in the water that she imagines being Mr Jaggers from Dickens' novel which helps her to stay alive. So *Great Expectations* together with its white characters is a kind of shelter for Matilda, what is more, Pip's character becomes a friend of hers, because after reading the book she feels that she actually knows him. She mentions her relationship with Mr Pip as if she were a character in Charles Dickens' book as well: “The money would be used to turn Pip into a gentleman. So he was about to change *into* something. When I first heard that I fretted to the end of the chapter. I needed to see what he would change into before I could be sure we would remain friends” which means that Matilda believes entirely in the realness of this relationship (Jones 45). Matilda also admits that Mrs Havisham, Joe Gregory and Pip are actually closer to her than the memory of her own dead relatives, whose names are considered by her mother to be really important for her to know. As an adult, Matilda becomes an expert reader and a writer and she wins the senior English Prize in Townsville so her life is built on the foundation which she got from Mr Watts. Likewise in *Heart of Darkness*, narratives and texts have a great role in the life of the two main white characters: Marlow and Kurtz. During his traveling to Kurtz, Marlow finds a book titled *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*, which he starts reading and considers it as a real treasure:

Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages [...] luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor [...] made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in the delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. (Conrad 54)

This part of the novel seems totally comparable to the experience Matilda had with *Great Expectations*, because these imaginary worlds were for both of them the place to escape from the traumas of the real world. As Mr Pip was a friend of Matilda's, Marlow also felt to have a close relationship with the book: "I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship" (Conrad 55). In both novels there are literary texts which are written by one character on the basis of his/her experiences. To Mr Kurtz his own writings and investigations meant almost everything, and it is important to highlight that the source of his work was the African continent with its inhabitants, so the essence of his work came from a kind of black source, which is a nice contrast with the book of Matilda, who as a black girl gained her knowledge about the world from a white source. These examples point us the fact that the races need each other as a source to be able to develop.

Another crucial factor in both novels is the power of the human voice or more precisely; human voice as power. The human voice, the ability to speak, to form thoughts with the help of words is one of the most important abilities that differentiates human beings from animals or any other creatures in nature. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* this voice is identified mainly with Kurtz. "The man presented himself as a voice" says Marlow (Conrad 67). After hearing of Mr Kurtz ability to speak and his power to bewitch not only the blacks, but also the whites around him, Marlow's main fear is that Kurtz will die and he will not hear him to speak. On the other hand, there are minor characters in the book who are considered to be inferior, but here can be observed the dual nature of the modern, which was mentioned in the introduction of my essay, because although the woman and the negro characters are identified with passivity, it is foreshadowed that they can have a voice which was unheard before. (This is the case in *Mister Pip* as well, because Matilda as a female black child narrates the text.) For example Marlow describes his helmsman before his death in this way: "We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an

understandable language” (Conrad 66-67). Although the helmsman died before saying a word to them, there is a chance that he had something to say which is the most important here. The other passive character who finally breaks out and starts to speak is Kurtz’s fiancée, or “Intended” as Kurtz used to call her. She needs to speak out all the things she has in her soul to be able to recover from her misery. She says to Marlow: “I feel I can speak to you – and oh! I must speak. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink” which suggests that speaking has also a kind of healing power, which is available for women as well (Conrad 108).

In Lloyd Jones’ novel, however, the voice is already a device for everyone regardless of his/her skin colour to speak out. Mr Watts, the white man is the one who calls the attention of the black children to the power of using their voice:

‘Close your eyes’ [...] ‘and in a voice only you can hear, say your name. Say it to yourself only’ [...] The sound of my name took me to a place deep inside my head. I already knew that words could take you into a new world, but I didn’t know that on the strength of one word spoken for my ears only I would find myself in a room that no one else knew about. [...] ‘Another thing’, Mr Watts said. ‘No one in the history of your short lives has used the same voice as you with which to say your name. This is yours. Your special gift that no one can ever take from you. (Jones 107)

This special gift, as Mr Watts calls it, is not gender or race specific as I already mentioned. The power of one’s voice can be examined when the reader observes it in the case of a particular person and what changes it can result when he/she uses or is afraid to use his/her voice in a particular situation. For instance Matilda’s mother, who steals Mr Watts’ copy of *Great Expectations*, would have the power to avert the burning of their belongings if instead of remaining silent she would reveal her sin and save the others, but in this case she is too proud to do it. On the other hand, later in the story, after the redskin soldiers have killed Mr Watts, Matilda’s mother is the one who dares to say that she saw that the white man was killed: “‘Sir I saw your man chop up the white man. He was good man. I am here as God’s witness’” (Jones 175). Matilda’s mother as a black woman feels the necessity to declare that yes, she has seen the cruelty against the white man, even if she knows that she will be punished for it. She does not want to stay dumb any more, or to be looked down and behave as a coward. She is ready to hear her own voice and she is also ready to die for it. What is

more important, however, that before her death – after being raped, shot in the leg and humiliated – she is able to find out that instead of raping her daughter, Matilda, the red skin officer accepts her life, so she simply offers herself in exchange for Matilda's protection. With other words, her voice had the power to protect her daughter against the red skin soldiers. The death of her mother, however, is such a trauma to Matilda that she will be unable to speak about it for many years. It stays deeply repressed in her mind. Nevertheless, many years later after her depression (the significance of that will be explained later in the essay) she is able to write her pain out, just like Kurtz's Intended could speak out her miseries: "One morning I woke and threw back the covers. [...] I took the top sheet of paper from 'Dickens' Orphans', turned it over, and wrote, 'Everyone called him Pop Eye.' I wrote that sentence six months ago. Everything that follows I wrote over the intervening months" (Jones 217). After so many years she is also able to speak about her mother's death and tell it to her father. In this case the healing power of speaking can be seen again. The last example for the power of the human voice is the scene, where Mr Watts tells his life story (as if he were Pip from *Great Expectations*) in the forest to the rebels, which is risky, because the rebels are boys from the village, but after three years in the forest had a bad influence on them. As Matilda puts it "living the way they did had changed them. [...] They had turned into creatures of the forest" so nobody really knows how these "wild" boys would react to Mr Watts talk (Jones 137). Every member of Matilda's village is there for hearing the story of the white man and Mr Watts' voice has a kind of magical effect on the whole audience: "The rambos had not heard a storytelling voice for years. The boys sat there with their mouth and ears open to catch every word, their weapons resting on the ground in front of their bare feet like useless relics" (Jones 142). In this case the human voice has literally speaking a disarming power which saves Mr Watts from the cruelty of the rambos. Considering all the above mentioned possibilities, human voice, critical thinking and creating narratives is a special gift, which regardless of somebody's skin colour, sex or age is there for everyone to protect, heal or change the people who are using it.

Observing the whole process of identity reconsideration, one can say that there is a long way for anyone to be able to see the Other free from assumptions and stereotypes, regardless of who is considered to be the Other to that particular person. As Simone de Beauvoir highlights it in the introduction of her book, *The Second Sex*:

the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential as opposed to the other, the inessential [...] But the other

consciousness [...] sets up a reciprocal claim. The native travelling abroad is shocked to find himself in turn regarded as 'stranger' by the natives of neighbouring countries. As a matter of fact, wars, festivals, trading, treaties and contests among tribes, nations and classes tend to deprive the concept *Other* of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity [...] individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations. (Beauvoir 17)

To realize this relativity is maybe the hardest challenge to take, but as my essay has aimed to argue, all women and men, blacks and whites, adults and children have to experience it in order to see the world as an always changing entity. When reflecting on their own stereotypes, people can experience instability, since without fixed categories and a strict system of values it is hard to place yourself in the world. This crisis happened with Matilda and Marlow as well. Matilda as a black teenager girl goes through a long process of transformation till she is able to see Mr Watts as a fellow human being to the blacks, but after leaving Bougainville Island she meets with the former white wife of Mr Watts and she tells things about him which are confusing to Matilda and bad to hear. What is more, the adored novel by Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, turns out to be manipulated by Mr Watts, who tried to simplify the story for the black children to make it more digestible. (At this point it becomes clear, that just like Matilda, Mr Watts was also an unreliable narrator.) Moreover, reading about Mr Dickens himself Matilda finds out that he was not the person she thought him to be and the Victorian London described by him has also changed during the years. These disappointments force Matilda to reconsider the world she started to believe in again, which brings her near to madness. Although, she describes a kind of "heaviness, which set deep inside" and which makes her depressed for six days unwilling to wake up from her bed she says that she saw a "pinprick of light" which grows and finally "one day the cave appears to slip behind and just like that you find yourself in daylight and free" (Jones 216). In contrast to Matilda, Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* experiences a very similar identity crisis. He starts his journey without the suspension that the black savages of Africa are similar to the human race of whites and at the beginning he is also ignorant of the continent's influence on the conquerors' soul. When he mentions Mr Kurtz's last words "The horror! The horror!" he suspects that it can be the expression of "the appalling face of a glimpsed truth" and he feels to be lucky that he as opposed to Kurtz was able to step back from the border of going mad. He also suggests that "perhaps all the wisdom, all the truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible" (Conrad

101). What kind of knowledge is that Kurtz expresses as horror? Is that knowledge so surprising that he who thought himself to be a godlike figure is also unable to deal with it? Does he go mad, because he realizes that the darkness has also power over him like he has power over the savages? I think that in both novels the threat of madness emerges when the characters experience something surprising which does not fit in their assumptions about the world. They all had a concept in their mind, a theory on which they wanted to build their world but after a crucial experience this illusion collapsed and their identities needed to be reconsidered. I think that the point is that people always have to take it into account that everything is relative. The whole world is an ever changing entity which can be observed from thousands of perspectives and everybody has to learn to accept changes, or more precisely to be ready for changes without blindly holding onto a theory, a concept or anything which is evanescent.

To conclude my essay I would like to point out that in colonial texts there is no clear boundary between whites and blacks, and it is also not true that throughout a conquering process only the weaker group needs to be changed. In human interactions both sides are influenced, both sides need to fight their own battles and even the stronger one needs to reconsider its principles and ideas about its own identity. From this approach the three chapters of my essay are supporting the argument, that just like black and female characters, whites and men are also struggling when encountering Otherness, and although they tend to conceal it, they have their fears and questions as well. This way Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip* represents the identity crisis of a black woman under the influence of whites while Joseph Conrad's novel reveals the identity reconsideration of a white man among blacks.

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