

The Creative Use of Moral Megametaphors in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

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Abstract—This study explores the overlooked area of moral megametaphors and the innovative use of conventional moral metaphors in literary discourse, focusing on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Using the cognitive linguistic approach, specifically The Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research investigates how the conventional moral metaphors create novelty and enhance the thematic coherence of the novel. The findings reveal that Conrad vividly portrays the hypocrisy and cruelty of colonial imperialism through the megametaphors IMMORAL IS DARK and IMMORAL IS BLACK, employing elaborating and combining techniques. By questioning the traditional metaphors of MORAL IS LIGHT and MORAL IS WHITE, Conrad exposes the deceitful nature of colonialism, depicting immorality through blinding light and deceptive whiteness. Additionally, by extending the megametaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY, Conrad effectively illustrates the contrasting paths of the characters: Marlow's journey towards moral enlightenment and Kurtz's descent into moral corruption. This research highlights the role of moral megametaphors in uncovering the underlying immorality of colonialism and encourages a reevaluation of conventional moral metaphors.

Index Terms—conceptual metaphor, megametaphor, morality, *Heart of Darkness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Morality is a social phenomenon closely linked to human activities and community life. Moral principles such as empathy, honesty, loyalty, and responsibility aim to promote social cooperation, ensuring mutual benefit and contributing to human survival and development (Gert & Gert, 2002; Haidt, 2008; Johnson, 1993; Lakoff, 1996, 2016; Luco, 2014). These principles provide a framework for evaluating human behavior and guiding social interactions, thus playing a crucial role in maintaining societal order and fostering collective well-being. Understanding morality is therefore essential for comprehending human nature and enhancing societal well-being. Given its foundational role, exploring how morality is conceptualized and communicated becomes imperative in both everyday and literary contexts.

Metaphors related to morality have long captivated cognitive linguists (e.g., Johnson, 1993, 1996; Lakoff, 1996, 2016; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Yu, 2022). These studies have offered detailed analyses of moral concepts and their underlying logic across various languages, compiling comprehensive lists of different conceptual metaphors of morality in conventional thought and language. However, while much attention has been given to conventional metaphors of morality, their creative use in literary discourse remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill this research gap by examining the creative use of overarching, “undercurrent” metaphors—termed “megametaphors”—of morality in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (*HoD*). In literary texts like *HoD*, metaphors are often employed in innovative ways to convey complex moral landscapes and critique societal norms. Through a cognitive approach, this research aims to uncover how Conrad's novel utilizes and transforms these megametaphors to depict the moral ambiguities and hypocrisies of colonialism.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) was selected for analysis because of its rich metaphorical language, recurrent moral metaphors, and narrative complexity. While the novel has garnered significant attention from scholars examining it through cultural and literary perspectives (e.g., Harris, 1981; Paris, 2005; Said, 2008), there has been relatively little focus on its linguistic analysis, particularly from a cognitive linguistic viewpoint. Notably, Kimmel (2005) is one of the few who has briefly explored various source domains in the novel, such as DARKNESS, and provided an in-depth analysis of the megametaphor SELF-DISCOVERY IS A JOURNEY. However, most previous studies have neglected to examine moral megametaphors and the innovative use of conventional moral metaphors within the novel. This research gap underscores the importance of a cognitive linguistic approach to explore how these moral megametaphors generate novelty and contribute to the thematic coherence and depth of *HoD*.

Given this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research question: How are moral megametaphors reworked to create novelty and contribute to the themes of *HoD*?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the study and guides the data collection and analysis processes.

A. *Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)*

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) was initially proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their pioneering book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). This theory has fundamentally challenged the traditional perspective on metaphors by stating that: (i) metaphors are a part of the conceptual system, not merely a lexical phenomenon; (ii) the primary function of metaphors is to facilitate the understanding of abstract concepts, rather than solely serving artistic or aesthetic purposes; (iii) metaphors are not primarily based on (pre-existing) similarity; (iv) metaphors are ubiquitously used in everyday language by ordinary people, not just by geniuses, literary writers or orators; and (v) metaphors are not just ornamental language devices, but an essential mechanism in human cognition and reasoning processes (Evans, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Turner, 1987). In essence, CMT asserts that metaphorical structures, as integral components of the human conceptual system, shape not only language but also thoughts and actions.

The central idea of CMT is conceptual metaphor, which is defined as “understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)” (Kövecses, 2020, p. 1) or “a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203). This mapping is partial, unidirectional, and tightly structured; this means that the source domain, usually more concrete and more directly grounded in perceptual and bodily experiences, provides a framework for grasping the abstract target domain (Kövecses, 2010; Turner, 1987). The correspondences between the source and target domains are systematic, involving specific roles and elements from the source domain projected onto the target domain. For example, in the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, the abstract concept of LOVE is structured through the concrete experiences associated with JOURNEY: travellers are projected as lovers, the vehicle is understood as the love relationship, the journey represents the events in the relationship, and the obstacles encountered are difficulties experienced, etc.

B. *Metaphor in Literature From Cognitive Linguistic Perspectives*

(a). *Creating Novel Metaphors From Conventional Metaphors*

Conventional metaphors, also known as ordinary metaphors, “structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 139). These metaphors are so frequently employed that native speakers often do not recognize them as metaphors. The term “conventional” can apply to both conceptual and linguistic metaphors (Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Kövecses, 2010), which are established or institutionalized within a language community (Philip, 2017, p. 222).

In contrast, novel metaphors, also known as literary or poetic metaphors, introduce a new way of thinking about an object and are often created by writers and poets (Kövecses, 2010). Unlike conventional metaphors, which are used unconsciously, novel metaphors result from deliberate choices and showcase creativity and talent. They often transform conventional metaphors into new forms or blend concepts in unique ways. Novel metaphors are identified by their “similar-but-different” nature, requiring more cognitive effort to understand (Philip, 2017, p. 224). Additionally, novelty is not a clear and stable category in all cases but varies along a continuum from completely familiar and easily predictable to so novel that it is unimaginable.

To create novelty from conventional metaphors, poets and writers often employ four main techniques: extending, elaborating, questioning, and combining (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). These techniques allow them to reshape and reinterpret familiar metaphors creatively, enhancing their expressive power and depth. In **extending**, poets add new, unconventional elements to an existing metaphor, introducing aspects not typically associated with the source domain. **Elaborating**, on the other hand, provides more detailed descriptions of the existing elements within the metaphor, creating novelty through vivid and intricate details. **Questioning** the appropriateness of conventional metaphors invites readers to rethink established concepts by challenging the validity of widely accepted metaphors. Finally, **combining** merges multiple conventional metaphors, creating a more complex and layered meaning by utilizing elements from several source domains simultaneously. These techniques illustrate how poets and writers creatively manipulate language and thought, pushing the boundaries of conventional metaphors to convey deeper meanings and more impactful messages.

(b). *Megametaphor and Narrative Macrostructure*

According to Werth (1994), literary metaphors often function at the discourse level, creating an “undercurrent” that permeates the entire text by linking numerous single metaphors. This highlights the need for researchers to move beyond sentence-level or surface metaphors and delve into these deeper, discourse-level structures. Known as megametaphors (or extended/sustained metaphors), these macro-level metaphors underpin and organize the text, providing a framework for smaller micrometaphors. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, megametaphors are rooted in conventional conceptual metaphors but perform a distinct role by shaping narratives at the discourse level (Kövecses, 2010). Megametaphors can be conventional or novel, with novel megametaphors often building on established mappings to achieve originality.

The consistent use of megametaphors in literary works is a common technique employed by writers, as noted by Crisp et al. (2002) and Werth (1994). Valenzuela and Soriano (2007) show that this consistency helps readers process and understand literary works more effectively and deeply. Megametaphors also create coherence within a work, reinforce and highlight the main ideas and messages the author wishes to convey (Werth, 1994; Kövecses, 2010). Thus, megametaphors are not just ornamental devices but essential tools for structuring and enhancing literary texts.

According to van Dijk (1985), macrostructure is a holistic semantic structure that represents “global coherence” (p. 115). Without this coherence, even sentences that are locally connected cannot form a complete unit to convey a central theme. Childs and Fowler (2006) further explain that the theme of a work is indirectly expressed through the repeated occurrence of certain events, images, or symbols, serving as the “a line or thread running through a work, linking features which are un- or otherwise related” (p. 239). Megametaphors, which operate at the macro level, support smaller, micro-level metaphors, thereby creating consistency in content and imagery throughout the work. These megametaphors are closely tied to the theme, reflecting the macrostructure. Therefore, analyzing the system of metaphors and their structure at the macro level is crucial for understanding the macrostructure and theme of the work.

This literature review provides a theoretical framework for understanding metaphors in literary texts through a cognitive linguistic lens, focusing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), novel metaphor creation, and the role of megametaphors in narrative structure, setting the stage for analyzing metaphors in Joseph Conrad’s *HoD*.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study explores the creative use of moral megametaphors in Joseph Conrad’s *HoD* through a cognitive linguistic approach. The research involved a comprehensive reading of the novella, identifying metaphorical expressions related to morality, recording their contexts, categorizing them by source domains, and analyzing their narrative roles. Conceptual metaphors were formulated from these expressions, and those repeatedly used throughout the text were identified as megametaphors, reflecting their overarching influence on the narrative structure.

It should be noted that all quotes presented in this article are from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness and the Complete Congo Diary* (2015) published by Alma Classics, as this edition served as the primary source for data collection. Due to the unavailability of the original 1899 version, this edition was selected as a reliable reference.

To ensure systematic identification of metaphors, this study employed the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIPVU) developed by Steen et al. (2010). This method compares the basic meanings of words with their contextual uses to determine metaphorical status. Both metaphorical expressions and similes were included in the analysis, as similes are regarded as ‘direct expressions of metaphor’ (Steen et al., 2010, p. 93). While differing in linguistic form, similes evoke similar mental imagery to metaphorical expressions, reflecting the same underlying conceptual metaphors that structure thought and meaning (Sullivan, 2013).

To reduce subjectivity, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted. Two trained researchers, including the author, independently applied the MIPVU to the novella. The process yielded a Cohen’s Kappa score of 0.619 ($p < 0.001$), reflecting borderline substantial agreement according to Landis and Koch (1977). Of the 52 initially identified expressions, 15 were flagged for further review due to differing interpretations. Through collaborative discussion, consensus was reached on 8 cases, while 7 remained unresolved. The final dataset of 44 metaphorical expressions included only those instances where both coders agreed, ensuring methodological rigor while addressing the inherent subjectivity of metaphor analysis.

Following metaphor identification, initial coding categorized the expressions by their source domains, with morality as the target domain. Conceptual metaphors were constructed using Steen’s (2011) five-step procedure. Recurrent conceptual metaphors, or megametaphors, were recorded and analysed in terms of their function in the text. While frequency counts were used as a descriptive aid to examine the relative prominence of these megametaphors, the analysis prioritized qualitative interpretation. Techniques such as extending, elaborating, questioning, and combining were analyzed to demonstrate how Conrad creatively transformed conventional megametaphors to convey complex moral themes at the cognitive level.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While *HoD* features various megametaphors, such as WILDERNESS IS A FORCE, DANGER IS DARKNESS, and DEATH IS DARKNESS, this study focuses exclusively on moral megametaphors. Among the identified moral metaphors, the three most prominent—MORALITY IS LIGHT, MORALITY IS A COLOUR, and MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY—were selected for analysis due to their recurring use and thematic significance. Although other moral metaphors, such as MORALITY IS STRENGTH, are present, they occur less frequently and are thus not included in the scope of this study. Table 1 presents the frequency counts for the three most prominent moral megametaphors in *HoD*.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE THREE MOST PROMINENT MORAL MEGAMETAPHORS IN *HoD*

Moral Megametaphor	Frequency	Percentage
MORALITY IS LIGHT	26	59.1%
MORALITY IS A COLOUR	7	15.9%
MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY	11	25.0%
Total	44	100.0%

MORALITY IS LIGHT is the most frequent moral megametaphor in *HoD*, with 26 linguistic instances, reflecting its thematic centrality to the novella's critique of colonialism and moral hypocrisy. This centrality is emphasized by the novella's title, "Heart of Darkness," which challenges the imperialist narrative of "bringing light to darkness," a key justification for colonial exploitation. MORALITY IS A COLOUR, with 7 metaphorical expressions, focuses on symbolic contrasts of purity and corruption. While significant, its narrower scope and frequent alignment with MORALITY-AS-LIGHT metaphor—both of which use visual imagery to convey moral contrasts—explain its lower frequency. Meanwhile, MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY, with 11 instances, closely aligns with the narrative structure by connecting the physical journey into the "heart of darkness" with moral exploration and degradation. Its expressions appear at key moments in the plot, and its role as a narrative scaffold for Marlow's and Kurtz's moral trajectories, rather than a recurring conceptual frame, accounts for its moderate frequency compared to the more dominant MORALITY-AS-LIGHT metaphor.

For clarity in this article, metaphorical expressions in the quotes are shown in italics; however, these words or phrases are not formatted this way in the original novella.

A. MORALITY IS LIGHT and MORALITY IS A COLOUR Megametaphors

It should be noted that the imagery of darkness, linked to the domains of DARK and BLACK, has various connotations in the work, including night, death, backwardness, danger, fear, madness, and moral decay (Watts, 2002). However, this article focuses on conceptual metaphors of morality, so it analyzes only those relevant to this theme.

(a). MORAL IS LIGHT and IMMORAL IS DARK Megametaphors

In the novel, Marlow embarks on a journey up the Congo River with the objective of finding and assisting Mr. Kurtz, the station chief of the Inner Station of the Company in the land of ivory. Kurtz represents European civilization ("All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," Conrad, 2015, p. 54) and was sent to the Congo (a Belgian colony) on a mission to "save" and civilize the so-called savage tribes of Africa. Kurtz is admired and revered as "the universal genius" (Conrad, 2015, p. 30) and as "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (Conrad, 2015, p. 27). In fact, Europeans who ventured into such remote lands, like Kurtz or Marlow, were celebrated by the Western press and society at that time as:

- (1) "Something like an emissary of *light*, something like a lower sort of apostle. [...] weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways." (Conrad, 2015, p. 13)

Kurtz himself believed that:

- (2) "Each station [of the European Company for trade] should be *like a beacon* on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." (Conrad, 2015, p. 35)

The source domain of LIGHT in examples (1) and (2) symbolizes both moral qualities and European knowledge and civilization. Morality and civilization are closely linked, as morality is seen as a foundational pillar of human civilization (Tambunan, 2023). Just as light is essential for the growth and development of living beings, the British Empire in the late 19th century framed its civilizing policies as a source of moral and intellectual enlightenment, claiming to help so-called 'inferior' races in Africa emerge from ignorance and barbarism. Conrad employs the MORAL IS LIGHT metaphor with an **elaborating** technique to specify the agents and processes of this enlightenment. For instance, when describing the emissary as "something like an emissary of *light*, something like a lower sort of apostle" (p. 13), Conrad elaborates on the metaphor by specifying the emissary as a moral guide, akin to a religious figure tasked with spreading moral and spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, the portrayal of trading stations as "*beacons* on the road towards better things" (Conrad, 2015, p. 35) elaborates the metaphor by using the literal meaning of a beacon – a light placed to guide or warn – to symbolize these stations as centers of trade and moral improvement to guide the natives towards "better things".

Before embarking on his journey, Marlow, like most Britons, believed in the noble ideals of imperialism and, later, colonialism. However, as he traveled up the Congo River and witnessed the tragic lives of the black slaves, he began to see the harsh realities of colonialism, leading to his disillusionment with Kurtz's once-esteemed image. The Congo, a land where white men exploited and slaughtered the indigenous people to satisfy their greed, revealed Kurtz as an ivory trader profiting from the suffering of natives and slaves. Kurtz's true nature is often depicted through the domain of DARKNESS:

- (3) "Of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently [...] was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, [...], the most exalted and the most contemptible, *the pulsating stream of light*, or the deceitful flow from *the heart of an impenetrable darkness*." (Conrad, 2015, p. 51)

- (4) “I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is *lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines.*” (Conrad, 2015, p. 75)
- (5) “[...] he lived as much as he had ever lived - [...] *a shadow darker than the shadow of the night*, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 80)
- (6) “It [Kurtz’s voice] survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the *barren darkness* of his heart.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 74)

By **elaborating** the IMMORAL IS DARK metaphor, the author portrays Kurtz’s brutality and greed through profound darkness: a darkness devoid of light (4), darker than night (5), and so impenetrable that nothing can be seen (3). The **combination** of IMMORAL IS DARK and IMMORAL IS LOW metaphors in (4) further emphasizes Kurtz’s degradation, depicting him as having reached an irredeemable state, akin to the bottom of a sunless abyss. In example (6), the author combines the metaphors IMMORAL IS DARK, MORALITY IS A LANDSCAPE, and the metonymy THE HEART STANDS FOR PERSONALITY to illustrate Kurtz’s evil nature and the absence of virtue through the imagery of darkness and barren land. Additionally, “the barren darkness of his heart” contrasts sharply with “the magnificent folds of eloquence,” highlighting the gap between Kurtz’s promises and actions. The repeated phrase “folds of eloquence,” described with adjectives like “gorgeous” (5) and “magnificent” (6), illustrates the metaphor LANGUAGE IS CLOTHING. Just as clothing can conceal flaws and enhance appearance, eloquent language can hide sinister intentions and improve one’s image. The “folds” elaborate on the LANGUAGE IS CLOTHING metaphor, reflecting the complexity of language, which can obscure the truth. Kurtz’s eloquence is also depicted as “exalted” and as a “pulsating stream of light,” with such continuous movement, vitality, integrity, and the ability to influence and change, all of which are in sharp contrast with his profound and unrelenting inner malevolence (“the heart of an impenetrable darkness”) (3). Kurtz’s eloquence is emphasized in this novel, for he represents Western civilization in its mission to civilize (Conrad, 2015, p. 54). The adjective “impenetrable” is used with “darkness” three times in the novel: once to describe the night, and the other two times to characterize Kurtz’s nature. The literal darkness of the African landscape, fraught with dangers, therefore, appears to be overshadowed by the figurative darkness of a malevolent heart, concealed by beautiful and compassionate words¹.

In addition to the DARKNESS domain, the work vividly and creatively employs the LIGHT domain to underscore the hypocrisy of Kurtz specifically, and of imperial colonialism more broadly. Through his eloquence and other talents, Kurtz is revered and feared by the natives and black slaves in the Congo, almost as a deity, because:

- (7) “he came to them with thunder and *lightning*, you know—and they had never seen anything like it—and very terrible.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 61)

Although Kurtz is seen as a great man and worshipped by the natives and slaves, the light associated with him is not the nurturing warmth of the sun but the cold, terrifying lightning of a storm which causes fear and destruction. The imagery of lightning appears three times in the work: once in relation to the Roman Empire’s territorial expansion and twice in connection with Kurtz, who represents European civilization’s mission to “civilize” the colonized peoples of Africa (7, 8):

- (8) “at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it [the note at the foot of the last page] *blazed* at you, *luminous* and terrifying, *like a flash of lightning in a serene sky*: ‘Exterminate all the brutes!’” (Conrad, 2015, pp. 54-55)

In example (8), after making an impassioned appeal to help the backward tribes in the Congo, Kurtz inadvertently reveals his true intention in a hastily written note, which is to exterminate these tribes. Unlike examples (3-6), Kurtz’s immorality in (7-8) is not depicted through the source domain of DARK, but rather through the LIGHT domain. The **questioning** technique is evident in both examples (7) and (8) as the metaphor of light, which usually signifies morality, is used to portray Kurtz’s terrifying and destructive nature. While light in the metaphor MORAL IS LIGHT generally evokes comfort, warmth, and utility (such as providing warmth or guidance), the light in these examples is discomforting due to its “blazing” intensity and potential danger. This light is like a fierce flame (“blazed”) or “lightning”, which, with its extreme electrical discharge, can be lethal or cause fires. Moreover, the consistent details related to light throughout the work further support the notion that the author uses the LIGHT domain in an unconventional way to highlight the hypocrisy of colonialism. For instance, sunlight or the sky in the African landscape is often described with adjectives like “blinding” (used twice) and “blazing” (used twice), indicating an overwhelming brightness that dazzles the observer. This blinding brightness seems to obscure the dark reality occurring on the continent.

(b). *MORAL IS WHITE and IMMORAL IS BLACK Megametaphors*

¹ At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Africa was often referred to as the “Dark Continent” or simply “black Africa” in British and Western media, highlighting inferiority, and backwardness of non-white populations (Bassil, 2011; Saunders, 2019). In contrast, the superiority of Britain was stated as follows: “England, the great chief of the commercial world, possesses a power that enforces a grave responsibility. She has the force to civilize. She is the natural colonizer of the world. [...] a triumphant proof of England’s power to rescue wild land from barrenness; to wrest from utter savagedom those mighty tracts of the earth’s surface wasted from the creation of the world, –a darkness to be enlightened by English colonization. Before the advancing steps of civilization the savage inhabitants of dreary wastes retreated: regions hitherto lain hidden, and counting as nothing in the world’s great total, have risen to take the lead in the world’s great future” (Baker, 1867, p. xxii).

Similarly to the DARK domain, the domain of BLACK is also used to denote evil and immorality. Some examples of this domain in the work include:

- (9) “Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage [Marlow’s late helmsman] who was no more account than a grain of sand in a *black* Sahara.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 55)
- (10) “I don’t know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar *blackness* of that experience.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 70)

In example (9), the author not only describes the insignificance of the black helmsman (comparing him to “a grain of sand” in the desert) but also **combines** the DARK domain with the imagery of the Sahara Desert (despite the story’s setting in the tropical rainforest and the Congo River) to reflect the death, cruelty, and inhumanity of the colonial regime. The barrenness and darkness of the desert in (9) can be related to the barren darkness residing in Kurtz’s heart (“the *barren darkness* of his heart,” Conrad, 2015, p. 74) as mentioned in example (6).

In example (10), Marlow’s experience during his journey deep into the Congo to bring Kurtz back to England is described as “black” and “peculiar.” This description reflects Marlow’s realization of the true nature of colonial imperialism, as well as the nature of humanity and the potential for human degradation when wielding power, living in isolation, succumbing to instinct, and being driven by greed. The capacity for corruption and the extreme degree of corruption in human character are exemplified through the row of real human heads decorating Kurtz’s fence (Conrad, 2015, p. 62), which may be used to intimidate the local people, forcing them into submission.

Like the instantiations of MORAL IS LIGHT, in the following examples (11a, 11b, and 11c), Conrad employs the technique of **questioning** to challenge the conventional metaphor MORAL IS WHITE, portraying morality not as genuine goodness, but as a deceptive facade:

- (11a) “In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a *whited sepulchre*.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 10)

The city referred to in the story is Brussels, the capital of Belgium (Brady, 1962). The phrase “whited sepulchre” originates from the Bible: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27, New International Version). Thus, “whited sepulchre” refers to individuals who appear virtuous and noble on the outside but harbor wicked and harmful thoughts within. Therefore, immorality can still be understood through the domain of WHITE, but it is an artificial, exterior whiteness, not inherent or natural. The image of the city as a “whited sepulchre” is repeated twice more in the work, but rewritten as “sepulchral city”:

- (11b) “He alluded constantly to Europe, [...]—putting leading questions as to my acquaintances in the *sepulchral city*, and so on.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 26)
- (11c) “I found myself back in the *sepulchral city* resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, [...]” (Conrad, 2015, p. 77)

The whitewash of the sepulchral city, much like Kurtz’s splendid exterior (5, 6), symbolizes the artificial facade created to mask the dark inner nature. The whitewash makes the tombs appear grand and clean; however, beneath the surface lie decaying corpses. Similarly, the truth behind the civilizing missions carried out by the so-called emissaries of light and devout apostles are hidden schemes, profit-driven actions that disregard the lives of the colonized people. The deaths of those brought to Congo, as well as the indigenous people, are partly due to disease and the treacherous environment, but fundamentally, they stem from the greed and cruelty of colonial imperialism, those who come from so-called civilized cities and consider themselves “emissary of light” (p. 13), “of pity, science, and progress” (p. 27).

In summary, the metaphors MORAL IS DARK and MORAL IS BLACK are **elaborated** to emphasize the cruelty of colonial imperialism, while the **combining** technique enriches metaphorical meanings by integrating diverse images and concepts such as LANGUAGE IS CLOTHING, COMMUNICATION IS A CONDUIT, and IDEAS ARE LIQUID into the moral metaphors. By **questioning** traditional notions of morality represented by MORAL IS LIGHT and MORAL IS WHITE, the author uniquely exposes the hypocrisy of colonialism, using blinding light to symbolize immorality and a deceptive outer layer for white to contrast an outward appearance of morality with an inner core of immorality. These approaches effectively underscore the malevolent nature and hypocrisy of British colonial imperialism.

B. MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY Megametaphor

The novel follows Captain Marlow’s journey into the depths of the Congo. Through Marlow’s experiences, the story critiques the hypocrisy of European colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While claiming to bring civilization to Africa, the colonizers were actually plundering natural resources and exploiting and killing the indigenous population (Said, 2008; Watts, 2012). In the story, Marlow and Kurtz’s journeys into the heart of the jungle symbolize their exploration of moral ambiguity and the darker aspects of human nature (Bloom, 2009, p. 18). In fact, Marlow and Kurtz are described as “doubles,” who mirror each other, for they embark on parallel journeys and have similar experiences, though their destinations differ (Ellis, 1976, p. 110). This section will examine the contribution of the megametaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY to the entire narrative of *HoD*, delving into the moral development and deterioration of Marlow and Kurtz, through the lens of cognitive linguistics.

By employing the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, the mapping model for the conceptual metaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY can be outlined as follows:

TABLE 2
 ONTOLOGICAL MAPPING OF MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY IN RELATION TO SOURCE-PATH-GOAL SCHEMA

Motion in space	Source domain: JOURNEY	Target domain: MORAL TRANSFORMATION
Moving object	→ Traveller	→ Moral agent
Initial conditions	→ Enabling conditions	→ Moral foundations
Starting point	→ Point of departure	→ Initial moral state
Movement	→ Movement	→ Moral progress or decline
Obstacles	→ Difficulties	→ Moral challenges
Interacting forces	→ Conflict	→ Moral conflict
Endpoint	→ Destination	→ Final moral state

(developed based on the discussion of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema in Johnson, 1993, pp. 168-169)

The metaphor MORALITY TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY, rooted in the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, profoundly shapes the narrative and thematic development of *HoD*. By mapping the characters' physical journeys onto their moral explorations, the novel effectively intertwines external adventure with internal moral development. Kurtz and Marlow are the main characters of the story, both of whom embark on journeys deep into the Congo River basin. Their physical journeys into the Congo parallel their internal voyages into the depths of their own morality and humanity as moral agents. Both characters start with certain enabling conditions: Marlow embarks on his journey with a sense of curiosity and a moral compass shaped by European ideals, while Kurtz begins with grand ambitions and ideals of civilization. The starting point for both is Europe, representing a civilized world. Their initial conditions are the moral foundations shaped by contemporary European society. This moral value system serves as the metaphorical baggage they carry on their journey:

(12) "I [Marlow] was curious to see whether this man [Kurtz], who had come out *equipped* with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all [...]." (Conrad, 2015, p. 33)

Though sharing the common European belief in the superiority of Western civilization and the mission to civilize the indigenous people of the colonies, Kurtz and Marlow each has personal motivations driving them to the Congo. Kurtz is driven by his ambitions for fame and wealth, while Marlow seeks to satisfy his passion for adventure and exploration of unknown territories. This difference in purpose leads to different choices and ultimately different fates for the two men. Despite both journeying along the Congo River and facing similar hardships (i.e., hunger, disease, solitude, existential doubts, and the awakening of primal instincts in the wilderness) and encountering the same groups of people (i.e., colonial subjects, natives, and Company representatives), they each follow distinct paths, which lead to Kurtz's tragic downfall and Marlow's sobering enlightenment.

Throughout their journey on the Congo River and its basin, Kurtz and Marlow encountered numerous obstacles from both nature and the local people. Morally, these obstacles are understood as ethical challenges, forcing the moral agents to choose between yielding to instinctual urges or adhering to ethical standards. Marlow pointed out that this choice is easier when living in a civilized society, but in the heart of the wilderness, such morals seem inadequate for survival, especially when plagued by hunger (p. 45). Additionally, the isolation provides a temptation, free from societal judgment or legal consequences:

(13) "How can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's *untrammelled feet* may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion?" (Conrad, 2015, p. 53)

Free from the constraints of public opinion and moral barriers, a person living in complete solitude can act without restraint, even beyond the limits of ethical norms. This idea is captured by the metaphor of walking anywhere with "untrammelled feet." In such circumstances, one must rely entirely on their inner strength or moral fortitude to stay on the right path and live honorably, unless:

(14) "you may be too much of a fool to *go wrong* [...]." (Conrad, 2015, p. 53)
 or "too noble to be aware of anything but heavenly sights and sounds," and thus unaffected by earthly temptations (Conrad, 2015, p. 53). However, "most of us do not fall into either category" (Conrad, 2015, p. 53), making us more susceptible to temptation. Kurtz, with his pre-existing ambitions, was no exception and crossed the line:

(15) "this [the spell of the wilderness] alone had beguiled his [Kurtz's] unlawful soul *beyond the bounds* of permitted aspirations." (Conrad, 2015, p. 72)

Life in the wilderness awakened in Kurtz primal instincts from ancient times, such as resolving problems through violence and killing, which is regarded as brutal and savage by the civilized world (Conrad, 2015). Marlow also faced moments of hesitation when confronted with temptation and was curious about how a person's true nature would reveal itself in the wild and how deeply one could descend into evil in such a harsh but unrestricted environment:

(16) "Since I had *peeped over the edge* myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, [...]." (Conrad, 2015, p. 77)

However, unlike Kurtz, Marlow did not embark on his journey with ambitions for wealth and fame. Kurtz, in contrast, was driven by his own ambitions and the powerful influences of the wilderness—a place without laws, moral constraints, or consequences for wrongdoing. The internal and external pressures on Kurtz interacted, and for someone "hollow at the core" (p. 63), he succumbed to his darker impulses and moral failings:

(17) "he [Kurtz] had *made that last stride*, he had *stepped over the edge*, while I had been permitted to *draw back my hesitating foot*." (Conrad, 2015, p. 77)

By **extending** the conventional conceptual mapping, the new concept of straying from the path and ending in a deep abyss has been added to the mapping system of the megametaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY. Thus, there are two paths in this metaphor: (1) the first path represents positive moral development, characterized by maintaining and enhancing moral values, and (2) the second path represents negative moral change. Kurtz became so corrupt that:

- (18) “There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had *kicked himself loose of the earth*. Confound the man! He had *kicked the very earth to pieces*.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 72).

Typically, being on a journey implies progression and movement. In example (18), Conrad **extends** the conventional metaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY by adding the actions of “kicking loose” and “kicking to pieces,” extended to show a complete detachment from the journey’s path, representing a rejection of moral guidance or progression. Moreover, by **combining** both MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY and MORALITY IS STABILITY, the author creatively illustrates Kurtz’s complete rejection and destruction of both moral guidance (the journey) and moral foundation (stability). Since the ground supports the traveller’s steps, when the traveler destroys the ground beneath them, they cannot walk steadily and inevitably fall down. Similarly, if a person not only fails to uphold moral standards to build a better society but also actively undermines it for personal gain, they lose their humanity and can no longer live harmoniously with any community. The price for choosing the wrong path and destroying it is to become irretrievably lost, unable to return to the original path:

- (19) “‘You [Kurtz] will be *lost*,’ I said—‘utterly *lost*.’ [...] he could not have been more irretrievably *lost* than he was at this very moment, [...]” (Conrad, 2015, p. 71)

Kurtz could not reintegrate into civilized European society, as evidenced by his refusal to return to Europe and his decision to remain in the African wilderness, living a solitary life as a ruler. His descent into greed and brutality led to the loss of his human values and humanity, causing him to gradually lose his sense of self. He is repeatedly described as a “shadow” (five times) or “ghost” (three times), no longer the complete person he once was.

For Kurtz, the farthest point of his journey was his ultimate corruption and death in the Congo, where he gained a profound, albeit horrifying, insight into human nature—specifically, his own greed and brutality—culminating in his final words, “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad, 2015, p. 76). For Marlow:

- (20) “to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the *farthest point of navigation* and the *culminating point* of my experience.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 7)

Marlow considered the place where he first met Kurtz to be “the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of his experience” because it was there that he encountered the ultimate truth about the darkness within humanity and the devastating impact of imperialism. This realization marked the climax of his moral and psychological journey. Understanding Kurtz gave Marlow deeper insights into human nature, the extreme evil one can reach when living without moral constraints, and the hypocrisy of colonialism. From this, he realized:

- (21) “Those heads drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz’s windows were merely a savage sight, while I felt as though I had been *transported* into a lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that obviously had a right to exist—in the sunshine.” (Conrad, 2015, p. 63)

The image of heads on stakes, though frightening and violent, is not as terrifying as the horror within the human heart. This inner horror is harder to see and predict, making it more dangerous and destructive. Similarly, the black tribesmen, who are often seen as savage cannibals by the white people, did not attack or eat the white men on the boat, even though they were starving and vastly outnumbered them. Despite hunger driving people to the brink of losing their humanity, one of these black men, though naive and easily influenced, accompanied Marlow until his death on their arduous journey. Meanwhile, the white men, who consider themselves a superior race, brought death and destruction to this land. It is the white men who reach the ultimate level of cruelty, and this cruelty is disguised by benevolence, making it even more frightening than visible violence. This new moral awareness is described as a leap that takes Marlow far along the path of understanding, but the endpoint of this leap is darkness—not darkness due to ignorance or lack of knowledge on Marlow’s part by the end of the journey, but because this knowledge itself is too dark. It reveals the extreme cruelty of human nature and the brutality and deceit of imperial colonial rule. By the end of the story, neither Kurtz nor Marlow follows the intended path or reaches the anticipated destination. In other words, neither fulfills the mission of civilizing in its true sense. While one realizes the ultimate degradation of humanity and succumbs to it, losing his life, the other, upon gaining enlightenment about human nature and colonialism, finds it difficult to reintegrate into civilized society due to its inherent deceitfulness.

Generally, the **extending** technique is used to enrich the megametaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY. Instead of focusing on a single path leading to moral enlightenment, as seen in Marlow’s case, the novel introduces the idea of another path that leads to moral corruption, embodied by Kurtz. This new idea of a divergent path adds complexity to the conventional metaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY. While Marlow’s journey suggests a quest for understanding and moral insight, Kurtz’s path represents a descent into moral darkness and depravity. This extension of the metaphor emphasizes that journeys can lead to vastly different moral outcomes, reflecting the duality of human nature and the consequences of one’s choices in the face of moral ambiguity.

Figure 1 illustrates the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, providing a detailed understanding of Marlow’s moral enlightenment and Kurtz’s moral degradation.

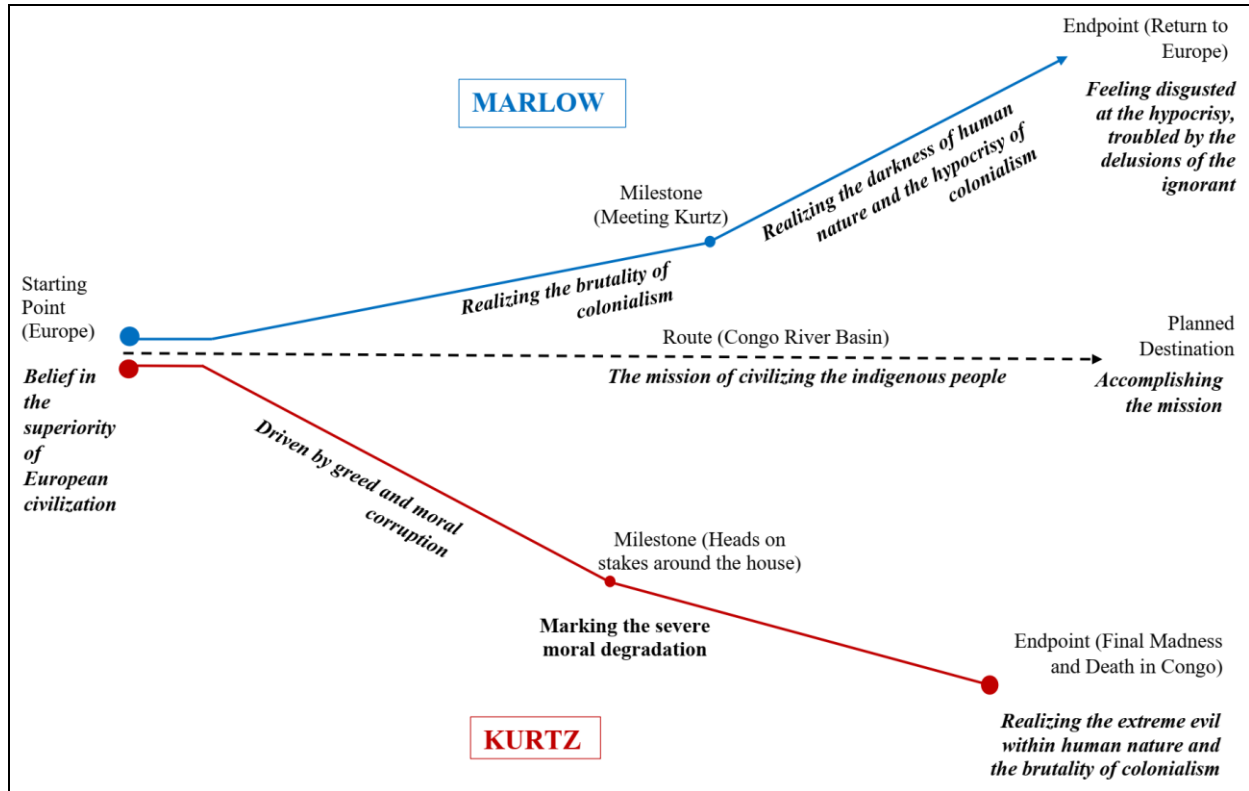


Figure 1. The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL Schema in the Cases of Marlow and Kurtz

Table 2 summarizes the content related to the mapping system from the JOURNEY source domain to the target domain of MORAL TRANSFORMATION in the case of Marlow and MORAL DEGRADATION in the case of Kurtz.

TABLE 3
THE MAPPING SYSTEM OF THE MEGAMETAPHOR MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY

Target Domain: KURTZ’S MORAL DEGRADATION	Source Domain: JOURNEY THROUGH THE CONGO RIVER BASIN	Target Domain: MARLOW’S MORAL TRANSFORMATION
• Kurtz	← Traveller	→ • Marlow
• European civilization	← Initial conditions	→ • European civilization
• Belief in European superiority and morality	← Departure point	→ • Belief in European superiority and morality
• Civilizing mission	← Planned route	→ • Civilizing mission
• Moral corruption through indulgence and power	← Actual path	→ • Self-restraint to maintain integrity
• Moral challenges: isolation, fear, greed, lawlessness, primal instincts, ultimate cruelty and evil within	← Difficulties: disease, starvation, attacks, harsh weather, damaged transport	→ • Moral challenges: isolation, fear, greed, lawlessness, primal instincts, ultimate cruelty of civilization representatives
• Influences: European prejudice, Kurtz’s greed and vanity	← Encounters with others	→ • Influences: passion for discovery, skepticism of colonial morals, reflection on humanity and Kurtz
• Completing civilizing mission	← Planned destination	→ • Completing civilizing mission
• Realizing the extreme evil within human nature and the brutality of colonialism	← Actual destination	→ • Gaining moral enlightenment, feeling disgusted towards colonial hypocrisy and troubled by the delusions of the ignorant

The findings of this study align with prior literary critiques, such as those by Ellis (1976), Paris (2008), Said (2008), Bloom (2009), and Watts (2012), which examine *HoD* as a critique of colonialism, imperialist ideologies, and the moral degradation associated with imperialist endeavors. While sharing these insights, this study offers a unique contribution by uncovering the cognitive structures behind these themes. Through the analysis of moral megametaphors, it demonstrates how metaphorical frameworks provide thematic coherence and foster creative transformation. This cognitive linguistic approach complements traditional literary perspectives by revealing how recurring metaphors shape the novella’s critique of colonialism and morality.

V. CONCLUSION

In the novella, Conrad uses conceptual metaphors to portray the hypocrisy and cruelty of colonial imperialism. The megametaphors IMMORAL IS DARK and IMMORAL IS BLACK, developed through elaborating and combining techniques, emphasize the malevolent aspects of colonialism. The novel challenges traditional moral metaphors, such as MORAL IS LIGHT and MORAL IS WHITE, by subverting these through questioning to expose the deceit of colonialism. Instead of representing morality, LIGHT and WHITE depict immorality, with LIGHT obscuring truth and WHITE contrasting a moral facade with an immoral core, which highlights the moral corruption of imperialism.

The characters Kurtz and Marlow illustrate the complexities of moral transformation. Kurtz embodies moral decay and the brutality of imperialism, with his journey into the Congo symbolizing his moral decline. Conversely, Marlow's journey represents moral enlightenment, as he becomes disillusioned with the imperial mission. Conrad extends the metaphor MORAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY to depict the contrasting moral outcomes of these characters by showing that the same journey can lead to either moral enlightenment or corruption, depending on individual choices.

Ultimately, Conrad's novel invites readers to critically examine the true nature of morality within the context of colonialism, challenging conventional moral dichotomies and emphasizing the critical role of individual choices in shaping one's ethical trajectory. Future research could broaden the scope of this study by exploring how these conceptual metaphors interact with other literary devices in Conrad's work and by comparing them with those in contemporary novels to gain a more comprehensive understanding of colonial literature from the Victorian to the Modernist literary periods.

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