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## The sins of the fathers: The missionary in some modern English novels about the Congo

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This essay offers a discussion of some novels written in English in which the (Belgian) Congo forms the historical background to the fictional world, and that were published after that country became independent. Works by internationally well-known authors like Graham Greene (*A Burnt-out Case*, 1961) Barbara Kingsolver (*The Poisonwood Bible*, 1998), Robert Edric (*The Book of the Heathen*, 2000) and John le Carré (*The Mission Song*, 2006), fall under the spotlight, though references are also made to other and earlier relevant works. The texts represent different eras in a history of just more than a hundred years and all of these narratives relate, in a direct or implied manner, the nature and impact of a Christian missionary presence. Whilst genre, story line and narrative tone differ considerably in the individual books, the reader is exposed to a remarkable analogous range of subject matter and theme: amongst others the disappointments of the missionary ideal, the corruptive power of authority and the subservient part played by the female devotees. The plight of the Congo is narrated from a postcolonial point of view, though the story lines indicate that this vast country has always been, and still is, at the mercy of colonial exploitation, in which the missionary set-up played a crucial part. The novels also display a remarkable intertextual relationship through recurring motifs, titles, images and names and thus contribute to that body of work forming a tradition of (English language) Congo literature.

**Key words:** Congo literature, English Congo novels, missionaries, postcolonialism.

### Introduction

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), that archetypal novel on the presence of Europeans in the Congo, makes no mention of any general or specifically Christian religious activity. However, Portuguese missionaries had been present in this region since 1492; by 1853 Livingstone was envisaging a rivalry between Protestant missionaries and Catholic priests, and in 1888 the first Belgian missionaries directly linked to King Leopold's entrepreneurial plans arrived in what was then becoming known as the Congo Free State.<sup>1</sup> Although Conrad never mentions the Belgian monarchy and government or its capital city, Brussels, by name, his main character and narrator, Marlow, implies that this is where he had received his assignment. This "continental" city reminds him of "a whited sepulchre" (Conrad 2003: 54). The reader is also struck by the sustained references to "pilgrims." Marlow uses only this name for the numerous small time traders and administrative staff attached to the concessionary compa-

nies he encounters during his stay there, although one of these traders is once described as a “paper-maché Mephistopheles” (Conrad 2003: 76). Coupled to Marlow’s image of his first trip down the Congo river as “a weary pilgrimage amongst hints of nightmares,” and of the station where he arrives as “some circle of an Inferno” (Conrad 2003: 60, 63), these references form a pattern of negative allusions in which the atrocities committed by the Belgian and other traders are described through religious and missionary metaphors.

*Heart of Darkness* is now generally acknowledged as the point of reference to which almost all subsequent (English language) Congo narratives have paid homage. I will return to that finding. But in discussing the novels of famous and prize winning modern authors such as Graham Greene, Barbara Kingsolver, Robert Edric and John le Carré, I focus on their explicit portrayal of missionary zeal and how it reflects the images introduced in Conrad’s work. *A Burnt-out Case* (Greene 1961), *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) and *The Mission Song* (Le Carré 2006) are all written with a post-independence Congo as the background, while Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* was written in 2000 but is set in the same period as Conrad’s work. All four novels refer explicitly through their titles and/or in their main plot to the activities of missionaries working at mission stations funded by different Christian denominations. And in every instance, the missionary ideal is entwined with the ruthless endeavour of transferring the Congo’s riches to imperialist interests – be they Arab, European, British or American.

### **Narrating the Congo**

When Graham Greene published *A Burnt-out Case* in 1961, his reputation as a “Catholic” writer, and one who also used West-Africa as the scene for his moral explorations, had been firmly established.<sup>2</sup> In this novel, set in the Congo in the period during and just after being granted independence, the main character is Query, a famous European, probably Belgian church architect who has led a life of great personal and sexual indulgence. After the suicide of one of his lovers, and experiencing a complete breakdown of interest in his successful career, he leaves his old life and journeys to the Congo. There he boards a boat, which ferries provisions from the provincial capital Luc to an inland Belgian missionary station where he disembarks, but only because that is the terminal point. Query’s nihilism is slowly tempered by a growing involvement with the activities at the station – which is also a leper colony – and through his contacts with the crippled black convert Deo Gratias, the atheist doctor Colin and the charitable Mission Superior. But this road to redemption is blocked by Query’s unwilling and innocent entanglement in the affairs of the obsessive Belgian Rycker – manager of a palm oil factory – and his intimidated young wife, and because of the religious fanaticism and fancies of the junior priest Father Tho-

mas. By this time the uncertainties of the new state of independence have started to affect the daily lives of traders and missionaries; the Superior is recalled and Father Thomas is put in charge. In this intransigent atmosphere Querry is shot dead by an inflamed Rycker, and though the Superior returns, the future of the mission station and the hospital remains uncertain.

More than thirty years later *The Poisonwood Bible* was published, an almost instant blockbuster that brought international fame to an author who, up till then, was mainly known in the United States as an ecological activist (see Roos 2000). The story unfolds between 1959 and 1996 and is told by the American Orleanna Price and her four daughters Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. In successive monologues they tell of being dragged by their husband and father, the pig-headed Reverend Nathan Price, to a derelict mission station where they live in poverty and growing domestic conflict while Nathan never reaches any understanding of or compromise with his surroundings. Although they bow to Nathan's will and after independence remain in the Congo amidst increasing hardship, the death of the youngest daughter finally splits the family. Orleanna and the crippled Adah return to the States, Rachel marries a South African mercenary, Leah – stricken with malaria – stays behind with black friends and a half crazy Nathan eventually dies a ghastly and lonely death somewhere in the interior. It is specifically in Leah's tale that the destructive influence of the American presence in the Congo – on the political situation, in the exploitation of mineral and agricultural riches and in its efforts to impose western ways on the Congolese – is unveiled.

*The Mission Song* is one of the famous spy novelist John le Carré's most recent books. The events take place at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the setting is outside of Africa: the streets and offices of bureaucratic London and an unnamed island in the North Sea where a secessionist *coup d'état* against the current Congolese government is being planned. The narrator is Bruno, a very capable professional interpreter – son of an Irish priest and the daughter of a Congolese chief – who was born and brought up at Catholic mission stations in the Congo where he learnt to speak most of the Eastern Congo's numerous languages and dialects. He however regards himself as British, having arrived in the UK as an orphaned ten year old after which he had no further contact with the country of his birth. But, while his marriage to a snobbish white journalist is breaking up and he unexpectedly becomes involved in an affair with an activist Congolese nurse working in London, Bruno is recruited by the British Secret Service to do instant interpreting of the discussions amongst the group of Western and East Congolese conspirators. More specifically, he is to inform his British masters on what is said off the record by members of the Congolese factions. He slowly comes to realize that, despite his admiration for and loyalty to all things British, he has never been regarded by them as "one of us" (Le Carré 2006: 327). When the whole plot implodes, the English schemers get off scot free and Bruno's silence is ensured by "repatriating" first Nurse Hannah and then him.

*The Book of the Heathen* was published in 2000, but narrates events at a British trading station in the Congo Free State as they are taking place sometime during May 1897. The narrator is the reticent James Frasier, a well-educated member of a very-well-to do and well-connected old English family. He joins a merchant company with interests in the Congo and strikes up a close friendship with another – much less privileged – new employee: the dashing and adventurous Nicholas Frere. In the Congo it is Frere who always takes the initiative, dragging Frasier along on his explorations and getting him to draw meticulous maps of the unknown areas they invade; journeys undertaken much against the advice of the other managers at the Station. After one such journey, but one which Frasier did not join, Frere only reappears after many weeks' absence – the prisoner of the Belgian authorities, and accused of killing a young black girl. During Frasier's awkward conversations with the imprisoned Frere, it is revealed that Frere watched this child being sold to cannibals, mauled and thrown into their cooking fire and that he then shot her to save her more pain. As the events unfold, it becomes clear that Frere is set up as the scapegoat for motivating the destruction of the British trading post and establishing the authority of a local Arab slave trader Hammad who is conspiring with the Belgians to take over all power in the region. In the mean time, the depraved Belgian priest Klein, deeply involved in the evil human trade, whips up emotions against Frere amongst his awestruck congregation. While waiting for the company boat that must transport Frere to a show trial in Stanleyville, Klein assaults the captive Frere and is himself then killed by one of the Company men during the ensuing brawl. The entire station is in uproar, but Hammad's imperialistic plans remain on course.

### **Onward Christian soldiers<sup>3</sup>**

#### *Portrait of a priest*

Although not any one of the books discussed here portrays a priest or preacher as the main character or narrator, or in the case of *The Mission Song* not even as an obvious antagonist, in every text there is a detailed – and central to the development of the storyline – characterization of the various missionaries.

In both Greene's *A Burnt-out Case* and Le Carré's *The Mission Song* a group or several groups of missionaries populate the diverse settings, although the spotlight falls only on one or some specific members of the group. In Greene's novel the main setting is an inland missionary station attached to a leper colony; there is a full contingent of brothers who farm and build, nuns who cook and nurse, and priests teaching, preaching, baptizing and burying. There is also a passing reference to a Salvation Army leader who had swindled people out of their blankets and spare money and in the process warned them against body snatching priests and Protestant missionaries. Two of the mission's priests are singled out: the easygoing, forbearing Father Superi-

or, who accepts not only the atheist doctor running the state hospital but also Query's unexplained presence there, and in contrast to him the rigid, at times almost demented Father Thomas. Query's decision to leave his former life is treated in quite different ways by these two: the Superior reflects but asks no questions; Father Thomas assumes and undertakes a deluded quest to portray Query as a man of "profound faith." Their personal habits and little quirks, the way they furnish their rooms, their looks and even their language are diametrically opposed. The Superior absent-mindedly chews cheroots and hands out sweets to the Congolese youngsters; Thomas is always anxious, often fasting, "with eyes sunk like stones in pale clay" (Greene 2004: 17). The violent end of the "case" is also dealt with in totally different ways; the Superior hopes that Query "had begun to find his faith again"; Father Thomas is enraged by what he sees as a betrayal of his grandiose visions and the possibility of a public scandal. Greene depicts the mission station as an example of everyday life: the missionaries represent different aspects of human behaviour and a variety of attitudes to moral issues.

The Irish priest who fathered Bruno (*The Mission Song*) is portrayed as dedicated and clever, but also a charmer and adventurer who – alone on the far flung mission station – paid more attention to practical matters like farming and building than preaching and praying. "In his seventieth year and last year of life my father's principal worry was whether he had enslaved more souls than he had liberated" (Le Carré 2006: 3). His love for his bastard son is not sustained at the various institutions where most of the white missionaries regard Bruno's presence as a "festering affront" (Le Carré 2006: 8) although some of them also occasionally pay him too much attention. When a conniving British Consul gets him registered as a British citizen, he is sent to a boarding school for Catholic orphans in Sussex. Various priests come to his aid; the most important one is Father Michael – enamoured of the bright young boy, his patronage tinged with paedophilic touches that Bruno accepts as part of the deal. Of course there are also the rule-driven priests, the abusive and the useless ones, but Bruno accepts this broad range – once again – as reflective of the world outside. Bruno remembers his past affectionately if superficially; his inheritance from this world is his father's talent for languages and his patron's golden heirloom watch.

In *The Poisonwood Bible* the focus falls exclusively on the warped Reverend Nathan Price. Nathan Price is a tragic figure – his passionate desire to convert the Congolese is only equalled by his utter inability to comprehend his own shortcomings and anybody else's point of view. Everything he does is based on error. His marriage to Orleana grew out of a misunderstanding, his departure for the Congo is not blessed by his Church and because of his bad command of the local language the meanings of his sermons come out all twisted and offensive. His enthusiastic gardening is a failure as he does not make concessions to the local climate and shuns the advice of a knowledgeable woman; his obsessive desire to baptize the children is doomed as he ignores

the local fear of crocodile infested rivers. His appearance and attitude underscore this portrayal: tall and thin and red haired with a scar on his face and one blind eye; his manner always admonishing or sarcastic. His family feared his physical and verbal assaults; eventually they despise and desert him (Kingsolver 2000: 419, 448).

Nathan is even shunned by his fellow American missionaries, though the Underwood couple is also depicted as shallow and selfish. In his death lies great irony. He is burnt alive as a “white witchdoctor” by an enraged tribe in revenge for his insistence to baptize their children. But the antithesis of Nathan Price also exists. His predecessor, Reverend Fowles, is portrayed as a humble and wise man, loved by the villagers; he sees God in nature and respects all forms of worship. He married a Congolese woman and has a large and happy family with her; he comes to the aid of the almost starving Price family despite Nathan’s uncivil attitude.<sup>4</sup> Towards the final part of the narrative Leah is cared for by a group of compassionate though often disapproving nuns at a French Catholic mission station, and when married to her Congolese husband, she speaks admiringly of those American missionaries who remained in the Congo after independence, “rooted by their faith.”<sup>5</sup>

In Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* the reader encounters the most extreme portrayal of perverted priesthood. Klein is a Jesuit priest from Ypres; a small, dark man – by all accounts a drunkard and a sadomasochistic tyrant. He is also involved in the slave trade; he sells off discarded or disobedient female inmates to the brothels of Zanzibar. He taunts and tortures people by his words and his acts, and his congregation lives in visible fear of him. His railings against and attitude towards both black and white are vicious and denigrating, behaviour he motivates by declaring “even Jesus had his staff” (Edric 2001: 299). Christianity is to Klein the road to power and material gain, though Frasier says about the run down mission station that “there was a great poverty about the place, spiritual as well as material, and this was reflected in everything that went on there” (Edric 2001: 91). Klein looks to the Muslim potentate Hammad for protection so as to build a church from where he can continue running his private empire. In his characterization there are no ameliorating features – Klein is evil personified. It is also significant that there is no other missionary figure present in this narrative, not even an allusion to such a character is made. Klein is the sole representative of the missionary ideal.

#### *“The tribes of Ham”<sup>6</sup>*

When Nathan Price’s five-year old daughter in all innocence repeats what she has been told at Sunday school about the Congolese, she verbalizes stereotypes about the “heathen” that existed quite commonly also amongst adult Christians, priests and missionaries. Although her Father’s superior attitude towards his congregation is in many aspects only a repetition of how he regards all people, but specifically his wife and daughters, his comments on the many mutilated members of his church are

indicative of his view of the village people: "They are living in darkness. Broken in body and soul, and don't even see how they could be healed" (Kingsolver 2000: 62). That his predecessor, the Reverend Fowles, was "kicked out for consorting with the natives too much" by the governing body of the Mission League, stands to reason (Kingsolver 2000: 281).

In *The Mission Song* different groups displayed quite different attitudes. Like Fowles, Bruno's father became fully integrated in his congregation, not only by fathering a child with the Headman's daughter, but through his useful labour and specifically through his learning of Congolese languages. In fact, this merging was so successful that when a band of marauding Simbas destroyed the neighbouring village and ransacked the mission, they broke with habit and started torturing this white priest because "since he spoke their language as well as they did, he was plainly a black devil in disguise" (Le Carré 2006: 6). The missionaries with whom Bruno stayed after his Father's death, display a more traditional point of view; they tolerated him with difficulty because "savages are by nature rash", but still they cared for and educated him (Le Carré 2006: 10).

The most extreme example of missionary zeal based upon disdain for the indigenous people, is that shown by Father Klein in *The Book of the Heathen*. Klein enslaves his congregation spiritually and physically; he publicly humiliates the two converted prostitutes by dressing them in mock nuns' habits; to touch a black other than to punish, "disgusts" him (Edric 2001: 88). There is a scene in the narrative where Frasier describes how a boat full of suffering captive animals is slowly sailing down the river – the cargo belonging to Hammad is intended for the coastal cities or the zoos of Europe and Asia. The pitiful sight of a caged giraffe forced onto her knees, the long neck bent at a fatal angle, and of chained exotic monkeys screeching in distress, speaks of the utmost disrespect for life itself. In his attitude towards the Congolese, Klein – who is linked by various shared interests to the powerful Hammad – parallels this horrifying abuse. Of course Klein must be judged with consideration for the historical realities of the late nineteenth century and the accompanying attitude of Western arrogance. But although his contempt is repeated in the actions and words of the whites and other non-Congolese (Hammad wipes himself with a cloth after having touched a black man), no-one else displays it to nearly the same degree.

When Father Thomas in *A Burnt-out Case* complains about what he regards as the lax attitude of the lay teachers in the mission school and disparagingly refers to the woman who has "a baby every year by a different man," the Superior responds with the idiom "*autres pays autres mœurs*. We are here to help [...] not condemn" (Greene 2004: 77). This tolerant approach is followed by most of his fellow priests. Father Joseph, for instance, works alongside the gang of lepers; "he had long ago caught the African habit of speaking as he moved, with his back turned, and his voice had the high African inflection" (Greene 2004: 11). The others accept the ambiguous beliefs of

the patients who call for both the help of the Catholic God and for their native Nzambe; they allow Deo Gratias to put a “wreath” on Querry’s grave, though they suspect that it is actually an offering to Nzambe. Father Thomas is the exception; he is afraid of the dark and the threatening forest, dissatisfied with the school where knowledge of the alphabet gets priority above prayers; he regards his stay at the leprosarium as “martyrdom” (Greene 2004: 80). But despite the great compassion that the priests feel for their patients and converts, it is a patronizing relationship. They see themselves indeed as *fathers*; it is an unequal association in which few of the black characters are recognized as individuals or have distinguishable faces; the Superior remembers one young patient only as “the little fellow who always came to me for sweets” (Greene 2004: 192). In his essay on Graham Greene, David Ward interprets the mysterious word *pendele* which Deo Gratias used to explain his disappearance into the forest, as referring to the “constricting relationship in the world of dependence which the well-meaning missionary Fathers have set up” (Ward 1989: 68). Deo Gratias motivated his flight by saying that he had felt constricted that day at the leprosarium; as Doctor Colin puts it: “These people here are dying – oh, I don’t mean of leprosy, I mean of us” (Greene 2004: 51).

#### *A lower sort of apostle*<sup>7</sup>

Marlow’s aunt praised the nineteenth century European companies and their traders as “emissaries of light” and “a lower sort of apostle” (Conrad 2003: 58), thereby clearly establishing a link between the missionary presence and colonialism. In *A Burnt-out Case* this bond between state and church is portrayed as self-evident; a benign and almost organic relationship. Chapter 11 starts off with a detailed description of the cooperation between the doctor and the Superior; how the state budget by which the hospital is run, is tweaked to channel more funds to the missionary work. In the provincial capital the Bishop and the Governor work closely together and are almost interchangeable figures; the church leader is “tall and rakish [...] with a roving eye”; the politician is “very small and with an appearance of moral intensity” (Greene 2004: 55). The businessman Rycker – who spent six years at a seminary – is an enthusiastic if not much appreciated supporter of the mission station.

This patently obvious union of money, state and religion gains more complex overtones in *The Poisonwood Bible*. When the Belgian doctor attends to Ruth May’s broken arm, he sarcastically tells a complacent Nathan that “missionary work is a great bargain for Belgium but it is a hell of a way to deliver the social services” (Kingsolver 2000: 137). Later Orleanna also articulates the idea that the government abused the missionaries to get done what the state was not prepared to do: “Your King Baudouin is living off the fat of the land, is what’s he’s doing, and leaving it up to penniless mission doctors and selfless men like my husband to take care of their every simple need. Is that how a father rules?” (Kingsolver 2000: 190).



This disparaging reference to the connection between missionary presence and colonial power acquires a different angle when Orleanna thinks about Dr. Livingstone as one of those “profiteers who’ve since walked out on Africa as a husband quits a wife, leaving her with her naked body curled around the emptied-out mine of her womb” (Kingsolver 2000: 10). In several instances there are references to America as the new colonial power replacing the Belgians as the extortionists (Kingsolver 2000: 37, 259, 443). Once the Price women have gone their separate ways, both Adah and Leah ponder the way Africa has been invaded and looted by foreigners, by men like Leopold and Stanley (Kingsolver 2000: 562), by men like their father, by all the fathers – king and priest – who in the end failed to impose their will on Africa. And both of them use the same biblical phrase to verbalize this history; they speak of “the sins of the father,” which are not insignificant and cannot be forgotten, even though it is necessary to move on (Kingsolver 2000: 561, 594).

In *The Book of the Heathen* the sins of the fathers are indeed significant though they may have become forgotten over time. According to Frasier a close connection had once existed between the British Company and the Jesuit mission headed by Klein. The termination of this relationship evidently enraged Klein and he declares that he will seek new patronage from his fellow Belgians and their allies.<sup>8</sup> Frasier’s remarks imply that the British support was withdrawn because of the involvement of the missionary station in supplying indentured labourers and female slaves (see pages 188–92). As one informant puts it, Klein is a “puppet. He may be of great value to someone who needs to take advantage of whatever influence he has, of what he still represents here, of who he represents” (Edric 2001: 197). In this case, “value” relates to the scheming of the Belgian companies and Hammad, trying to obtain a face of respectability for their financial ambitions. According to Klein himself he is valuable because “he might erect his new mission on their side of the river and thereby make it a more attractive place of employment for their own, ever growing God-fearing workforce” (Edric 2001: 228, 229). In this novel the connection between missionary and colonial power is explicit and ugly, and grounded in historical fact.<sup>9</sup>

The connection between priest and power is treated in a lighter, almost mocking tone in *The Mission Song*. Bruno’s only recollection of a manipulative government is when the Consul in Kampala manages to produce a fraudulent passport for him. However, he does remember that under Mobuto’s regime the missionaries were closely identified with the former colonial masters: “In the name of *Authenticity* foreign priests had been expelled for the crime of baptising babies with Western names, schools had been forbidden to teach the life of Jesus, and Christmas declared a normal working day” (Le Carré 2006: 6). Many years later one of the Congolese conspirators would write to Bruno: “In Bukavu it is business as usual [...] None of this deters white Bible-thumping American evangelists with perfect hair telling us to love George Bush [...]” (Le Carré 2006: 336). But Bruno’s story also clearly demonstrates how big business and

big government no longer require the reputable face of the church to hide their (new) colonial ambitions.<sup>10</sup> In today's secular world power and profit have attained a respectability of their own.

### *Veering from God's plan*<sup>11</sup>

In a detailed, well-researched account Vints and Etambula (1992) chronicle the century long history of the nuns of the Belgian Catholic Order of "Zusters van Liefde J. M." (Sisters of Love J. M.), doing missionary work in the Congo. Their presence in the Congo was directly sanctioned not only by the highest church authorities but also by King Leopold himself. What he needed was not so much nuns educating the indigenous people, but the dedication of those who had nursing skills and who could thus serve the white merchants and administrators (Vints and Etambula 1992: 24). When the "Sisters of Love J. M." arrived in the Congo at the beginning of January 1892 it would be to continue their specialist tasks of both teaching and nursing, focusing on medical care for the white colonials, but also educating Congolese women and orphaned children and later working in the mission hospitals and leprosariums. In the course of the next hundred years they would play a huge and pioneering part in the entire missionary undertaking; erecting and running schools, hospitals and sometimes whole towns, farming to produce their own food, eventually inspiring and training black sisters who today head the Congolese Orders.

It is remarkable that in the context of this long and very significant presence – and eventually there were numerous other female orders and individual missionaries from many other denominations active in the Congo – the novels discussed here have so little to say about the part that women played at the missionary stations. When there are any references to them, they are almost always made in a disparaging tone. Nuns only seem to be there to cook and wash and sometimes gossip; they are glorified housekeepers and child minders. In *A Burnt-out Case* this dismissive attitude is very obvious. Apart from the fact that the nuns at the station play hardly any part in the narrative, the little mention that is made of them is without exception condescending. Doctor Colin states that an old nun who was bewildered by the successful treatment of leprosy is a leprophil, and the Superior's "kind" response to these harsh words is: "Poor woman [...] an old maid, without imagination, anxious to do good, to be of use [...]" (Greene 2004: 15). Further references are limited to their bad cooking; to the washing of the hospital bandages that is their "province"; to the perception that they are ignorant, easily duped, given to hysterical reaction.

Their role – and only appearance – in *The Mission Song* is even more insignificant although it affords Bruno the chance to joke: "I was born, to be precise, behind the locked doors of a Carmelite convent in the town of Kisangani, or Stanleyville as was, being delivered by nuns who have vowed to keep their mouths shut, which to anybody but me sounds funny, surreal or plain invented." (Le Carré 2006: 3)

The belittling of female devotees develops into a more sinister issue in *The Book of the Heathen*. Klein dresses the two former prostitutes in mock religious habits, forcing them to accept his derision and his physical abuse in the name of penance and in the hope of salvation. The scenes in which he beats the naked bodies of Perpetua and Felicity, both with thorn "crowns" pressed onto their heads, cannot be read other than as scenes of sexual torture. Their deaths, ostensibly by suicide, must be put down to his instigation if it was not done by his own hand. Klein evidently exerts this abominable power over all the women at the mission; after Perpetua's and Felicity's death, many younger women are ready to take their places. Those that do not adhere to his rules he banishes into prostitution or slavery. The Catholic tradition of male dominance, and specifically when related to the hierarchy of the church, seems to be taken here to a fatal extreme.<sup>12</sup>

It is in the story of the Prices that this issue is articulated most unequivocally. *The Poisonwood Bible* links up the missionary ideal with strong emancipatory questions: the fearsome rule and misogynist Christianity of Nathan Price is played out in the family circle and amongst the congregation. Leah's adoration of her father and her energetic personality feed her desire to one day be a missionary herself – to help, to teach, to praise God. But her father states that God did not intend women to do so. "For Father the Kingdom of the Lord is an uncomplicated place, where tall handsome boys fight on the side that always wins. But where is the place for girls in that Kingdom?" (Kingsolver 2000: 274). And as Rachel noted, most of the time there "weren't any women in his services, so to speak of" (Kingsolver 2000: 54). However, in the course of the narrative it is clearly demonstrated that any degree of missionary success is to the credit of women: Orleanna's understanding of her Congolese sisters and her demonstration of Christian fellowship, the mutual empathy of the village women, the Price daughters opening themselves up to a new world. And when Leah is nursed and sheltered in the French convent, the nuns are regarded as individual women, each with her singular experience of life.

### *The mission is a ghost town now*<sup>13</sup>

An indication of how these missionary tales would conclude is already present in the titles of the books. Specifically *The Book of the Heathen* and *The Poisonwood Bible* give the most straightforward indication of the failure of the missionary undertaking.

*The Book of the Heathen* is set in a historical period when the missionary ideals were burning brightly and strongly (Vints and Etambula 1992: 15), yet the narrative articulates a sense of unavoidable doom. Before reaching the Jesuit mission at Kirasi and meeting there with Klein, Frasier recaps the former good relationship between the Company and the Mission. At the time of his story though, the mission hospital no longer offers any treatment, the teaching at the school is very superficial and Klein and his followers prepare to desert the place. After that only Klein's cruel and polit-

ically tinged activities are reported, and there is no mention of any other mission station where work is being done. But the narrative also suggests that Klein's wickedness does not exist in isolation. His disrespect for life is repeated in the actions of all the invaders: the evil Hammad, the boorish sergeant Bone, the ambitious senior clerk Abbot. The degree of indifferent sadism displayed by the so called Christian judges and the audience of European traders at a murder trial conducted by the Belgian authorities is gruesome. It is with reference to these incidents that the title takes on its ambiguous meaning. The teachings of the Bible on which the missionaries base their conversion of the heathen, are ignored by the very teachers in word and in deed, and so they have become even greater heathen.<sup>14</sup> In a scene reminiscent of Marlow's lies about Kurtz's death to the latter's Belgian fiancé (Conrad 2003: 144–49), Frasier intends sending his sister Caroline, who was in love with Frere, the condemned man's Bible. The book is supposed to contain a message of salvation, but in Frere's mind, it is "tainted" by all that had occurred (Edric 2001: 337). Taking into consideration the first motto, this narrative must also be read as a book that could have been written by the "so-called (Congolese) heathen" about the "shameful history" of the invasion of the Congo. One can only endorse A. Michael Matin's words about Conrad's novel in the introduction to the 2003 edition of *Heart of Darkness* when reading *The Book of the Heathen*: "In fact, much of the tale's energy is invested in systematically dismantling those binary oppositions (civilization/barbarism, Europe/Africa, Christianity/heathenism, white/black) that provided the ideological foundation of Anglo-European society of the era." (Matin in Conrad 2003: xxxix)

In *The Poisonwood Bible* the village headman intimidates Nathan Price into organizing, in imitation of the countrywide democratic ballot, a vote on whether Jesus should be chosen as the villagers' personal god. The outcome is a bad loss for Nathan (Kingsolver 2000: 380). This result may partly be ascribed to his inability to correctly pronounce the word *bangala*, which means something precious and dear. So that when he kept on shouting during all his sermons that "Tata Jesus is Bängala," using the wrong pronunciation, he was referring to something totally different, thus telling the Congolese that Jesus is a poisonwood tree and would therefore give them a deadly rash (Kingsolver 2000: 312). He also has to contend with changing times; the Belgian doctor warns him that the Congolese are not looking for "your kind of salvation. I think they are looking for Patrice Lumumba, the new soul of Africa" (Kingsolver 2000: 138). The Reverend Price is not only a total failure as regards converting the Congolese, he also turns his family against him and against God. In the five year old girl's words: "Father is trying to teach everybody to love Jesus, but with one thing and another around here, they don't. Some of them are scared of Jesus and some aren't, but I don't think they love him. [...] I'm scared of Jesus too." (Kingsolver 2000: 180). That he is burnt alive in an attack by villagers accusing him of being a "white witchdoctor," confirms this failure in a horrifying way.

According to Leah her father's efforts have been successful in only one respect: the Congolese loved the songs he taught them. It is also Leah who, after marrying Anatole and making a new life in Africa, states that in absolute contrast to the ideals of the colonial and missionary enterprise, Africa requires a new agriculture, a new sort of planning, a new religion. She desires to become an "un-missionary [...] beginning each day on my knees, asking to be converted" (Kingsolver 2000: 594). Adah, on the other hand, experiences Nathan's failure on a deeper personal level: "He was my father. I own half of his genes and all of his history. Believe this: the mistakes are part of the story. I am born of a man who believed he could tell nothing but the truth, while he set down for all time the Poisonwood Bible" (Kingsolver 2000: 603).

The usefulness of a missionary in *The Mission Song* is measured in the concrete signs of his presence: the schools, the agricultural activities, the building of infrastructure, the medical treatment. In this respect Bruno's father is singled out and his moral lapses forgiven, while the other missionaries barely earn a mention. That missionaries were persecuted under Mobutu's regime is ascribed to the dictator's follies, not theirs. The title of the book comes into play when Bruno hears the tapes which were recorded when the Congolese representative was being tortured by members of the British Secret Service, and when he recognizes the songs that Haj was singing as those taught at mission school. How this episode should be interpreted is also not absolutely clear. Does it refer to the fact that the Congolese sang the songs the Fathers wanted to hear, that the songs were associated with abuse, that singing these songs meant betraying their own interests? Or is the explanation a simpler one: that these songs gave comfort after confessing your sins? (Le Carré 2006: 210).

The questions regarding success and failure take on a perhaps more existential dimension in *A Burnt-out Case*. Query's view of the mission station is mainly positive: the hospital functions better than can be expected – taking the limited budget into consideration; the priests build and plant and teach with enthusiasm; the relationship with patients and converts is warm and caring; the Superior is a wise and dedicated man. By way of anecdote Query hears about one of the few failures of the mission hospital: a recovered patient wrote threatening letters as he believed that he was dismissed from hospital not because he was cured, but because the doctor wanted his banana grove plot. Distrust of all whites, fear of the new and the strange, and a firm belief in the occult are common hindrances. The real question of failure has, however, little to do with missionary work. Whether Query must be regarded a burnt-out case or had been "converted" by the spiritual experience of Deo Gratias, is much more important than whether the conversion of Deo Gratias can be considered successful when he still believes in Nzambi.<sup>15</sup>

Although the narrative accentuates the foolishness of the journalist writing his sensationalist stories and the naiveté of Father Thomas in wanting to believe them, neither are depicted as evil men – even if their actions contribute to Query's death.

In the final scene it is suggested that, despite the many obstacles, the work of the missionaries will continue; the doctor will do so because he believes in medical progress, the Superior because he believes in the salvation of the soul (Greene 2004: 191–92, see also foreword).<sup>16</sup> Foden, in his introduction to the 2004 edition, reads the novel as an investigation of post-Christian faith, a theological response to the human condition rather than to the particular cruelties (or failures) of the place or the age. This interpretation seems to fit with what Greene stated in the already mentioned foreword: that the reader would not find the places mentioned in this novel on any map, because “this Congo is a region of the mind” (Greene 2004: xiii).

### **It’s like all the songs we sang<sup>17</sup>**

When Query describes as “nauseating rubbish” the newspaper report written about him by a stalking journalist, much of his anger is caused by the sensationalist references to a journey through “the heart of Africa,” to Conrad and to the explorations of Stanley (Greene 2004: 125). It is interesting that those particular allusions should add to Query’s disgust, as in all four novels the strong intertextual links to these very two figures are manifest. In Bruno’s idiom: though the circumstances change, the mission songs are sung again and again.

Greene had said of his novel that “this Congo is a region of the mind” thus seeming to disassociate the Africa he portrays from historical reality, and to appropriate it as a symbolic territory. Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* expresses a similar view when she declares that “the Congo is only a long path that takes you from one hidden place to another” (Kingsolver 2000: 39). This sentiment has been identified in and sometimes severely criticized by readers of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Specifically Chinua Achebe takes issue with what he sees as “the preposterous and perverse arrogance in reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind” (Matin in Conrad 2003: xlvi). To counter that argument is not what this essay is about. What is of interest here is how those Conradian qualities, either allegorical or much more tangible, have been taken up by these four texts.

One could argue that *The Poisonwood Bible* is in many ways a late twentieth century, feminist anti-version of Conrad’s novel; there is, however, no mention of Conrad in the “Author’s note” and only a few direct references to that text in the narrative itself. The context in which they do appear though, is very significant. When Orleana tries to verbalize her feelings about her marriage and her inability to escape its devastating influence, she speaks of it as “being lodged in the heart of darkness” (Kingsolver 2000: 228). When Lumumba’s inaugural speech leaves Leah in rapture, it is because he promises to show Westerners that Africa can become “the heart of light” (Kingsolver 2000: 210). It seems as if Africa presents the Price women with a way out of the heart of darkness. In *The Mission Song* Bruno’s narrative also does not refer directly to Conrad’s

novel, but the motto printed before the beginning of chapter 1 is taken from Marlow's words in *Heart of Darkness*: "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." Foden (in Greene 2004: vii) points out various structural similarities between Conrad's novel and *A Burnt-out Case*. Apart from the far-fetched newspaper comparisons that so infuriated Query, there is the description of the Bishop's boat in which Query travels to the mission station: "powerfully reminiscent of the 'tin-pot steamer' in which Marlow undertook his journey up the river." He also observes many parallels between Marlow and Query, especially that they share a strong sense of moral disgust.

It is in *The Book of the Heathen* that the most remarkable intertextual connections with *Heart of Darkness* appear. The first of its three mottoes, and this one printed alone on a single page, is taken from the diary of Roger Casement.<sup>18</sup> Conrad was a close friend of and in constant contact with Casement, an Irishman who was in the Congo at the same time, who later became the British Consul and who afterwards spent most of his life publicizing the human rights abuses that had occurred there (Conrad 2003: xlix). Furthermore, the abominable Klein is easily recognizable as a replica of Conrad's Kurtz. Both have this ambiguous connection to the Company, exploit their official positions and both exert a tyrannical rule at the station in the interior; both can sway the Congolese through their emotive eloquence and both abuse their devoted handmaiden(s). In the original manuscript of *Heart of Darkness* the name "Klein," instead of Kurtz, was used for the first four times when referring to this character.<sup>19</sup> The final episodes in both novels in which the narrators intend to lie to the women waiting at home about the reason why and the manner in which their heroes have died are perhaps less blatantly alike, but persuasively evoke the same desolate mood.

By just looking at the Black Swan edition (2001) of *The Book of the Heathen*, another compelling link is established. According to information on the back, the cover illustration is taken from the archives of the Baptist Missionary Society, and is based on a late nineteenth century photograph of a white missionary overseeing some Congolese workers gathering palm fronds for thatching. There is an iconic similarity between this illustration and the jacket design of the recently published biography *Stanley, the Impossible Life of Africa's Greatest Explorer* (Jeal 2007). The background, the stance, the clothing and even the facial features of the two men are strikingly similar and seem to suggest that the depiction of Europeans in the Congo adhered to a stereotypical and approved model. But the comparisons to be made between Edric's fictional characters and the real life explorer Stanley are not only visual. Frere's life and circumstances in many instances mirror that of Henry Morton Stanley. The significance of the parallel contexts of an underprivileged boy wanting to make good by exploring the unknown and reporting on his discoveries, and the fact that also Stanley was made the scapegoat for the racism and abuse committed by others in his entou-

rage or company, is self-evident. The central episode constituting the charges against Frere, namely the killing of the girl who was captured by cannibals, is perhaps the most telling intertextual reference. Frere admits to Frasier that he was fascinated by the existence of cannibals, and his acceptance of his arrest and inevitable execution is based upon his feeling of guilt: he thinks he did not intervene soon enough. This horrible event is clearly based on what happened during one of Stanley's expeditions when a fellow traveler, the rich Irishman Jameson, had bought a young girl and then gave her to cannibals; observing and sketching her being dismembered, cooked and eaten (Jeal 2007: 356).

It is noteworthy that in *A Burnt-out Case* the error strewn report on Querry, spiced with erroneous references to the journeys by Stanley, is written by a journalist called Parkinson. This is also the name of the British journalist who was involved in Stanley's unhappy relationship with the press when he returned to Britain after he had encountered Livingstone (Jeal 2007: 142).

Apart from those noted above, the novels also reveal other meaningful intertextual links. In a snide remark about one of the English conspirators in *The Mission Song*, the man is called the "African Queen" (Le Carré 2006: 254). This is a mocking allusion to C. S. Forester's famous short story of the same name (written in 1935) about the sister of an English missionary who steered a boat called "African Queen" down a Congolese river, taking on a German ship patrolling the Central African lakes on the Congolese border. That the story was later filmed with Ava Gardner in the leading role, brought popular if misplaced recognition of this area from a new generation. Several indirect references are made in *The Poisonwood Bible* to the internationally best-selling popular history, *King Leopold's Ghost*, written also in 1998 by Adam Hochschild.<sup>20</sup> The reports about foremen at the Belgian rubber "plantations" cutting off the hands of the workers who had not met their quota, is repeatedly brought up (Hochschild 1998: 137, 164, 189). Reverend Fowles measures the success of one far-flung mission station by stating that "They've put old King Leopold's ghost to shame, I would say. If such a thing is possible" (Kingsolver 2000: 287).

It is interesting that each of the four novels represent a different genre of fiction writing: a spy novel (*The Mission Song*), an adventure novel (*A Burnt-out Case*), a historical novel (*The Book of the Heathen*) and a family epic (*The Poisonwood Bible*). But one recognizes in every narrative a shared outlook on similar themes. The events they portray denounce those religious lives, which are lived without practical impact or moral grace, and the open-minded or non-believers are often portrayed as the ones with greater empathy for the poor and the needy. There are several instances of inter-marriage or strong and loving relationships between Westerners and the Congolese people – in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Reverend Fowles as well as Leah), *The Mission Song* (Bruno's father) and *The Book of the Heathen* (the Dutch trader Cornelius van Kleef), and these are the people who are the best adapted to, and the most successfully



integrated with the African world. In the final paragraph of *The Mission Song*, while waiting to be deported, Bruno looks through his prison window at the coast and ends his story with the joyous exclamation “That’s where their England ends and my Africa begins” (Le Carré 2006: 337); Leah’s last, hopeful words are that “time erases whiteness altogether” (Kingsolver 2000: 595). This is perhaps the message that all these novels convey: where the missionary ideal becomes synonymous with Western supremacy, it is doomed to fail. In this context one also notices that not one of the novels is set in a present day missionary station – the narrators tell a story of what was, what is past. As if in support of this view, the novels include maps, explanatory author’s notes and detailed bibliographies. In this manner a documentary mode is created; it suggests that research has been done and now reports are written about that which is no more.

### **In conclusion**

Descriptions of the missionary presence have a somewhat chequered profile in the modern (written from the 1940’s onwards) English novel narrating the Congo. In his thesis completed in 1961, published in facsimile form as *A Survey of the Representative Modern Novel in English about Africa*, Tucker allocates one part of a short chapter named “The Role of the Police Officer, Journalist, Missionary and Anthropologist” to an overview of the portrayal of the missionary figure. His examples are mostly from books by British authors written about West Africa and South Africa (Tucker 1961: 243–57), but he makes several interesting points. According to Tucker the “tradition” of attacking the missionary in fiction originated at the end of the nineteenth century. Especially the then popular women writers like Mary Kingsley, Marguerite Steen and Mary Gaunt accused the missionaries of filing “exaggerated” reports on conflicts, cultural differences and immorality amongst the local tribes so as to encourage the British expansionist plans. The focus in the novels by these women and their contemporaries is on the British missionary as “a dupe of the government and his own blind dogma” (Tucker 1961: 246). Turning to the early twentieth century novels (Tucker discussed only those published up to the end of the 1950’s), he notices a changed point of view. Now the portrait is that of “a confused, idealistic man often forced by circumstances into acting the fool” (Tucker 1961: 257). The exception to this norm is, according to Tucker, some novels written by American authors or depicting American characters. He mentions several little-known authors in this respect (Tucker 1961: 254) – that is, by those admiring the missionary figure – and states that many of them write in an autobiographical style as they had once been connected to American mission stations in some or other way. In support of Tucker’s assertion – which is of course negated by *The Poisonwood Bible* – several children’s books or novels casting a positive light on a missionary childhood have been published recently in America.<sup>21</sup>

The number of famous authors who had during the course of the twentieth century chosen the Congo as the setting of their fictional worlds, writing either in English as their language of choice or their books becoming well known in English translations, is quite surprising.<sup>22</sup> A critical overview of these texts that form a body of works with a distinctive tradition is long overdue. Apart from the novels discussed in this essay, there is V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) – with a cursory, though meaningful missionary presence – and Ronan Bennett's *The Catastrophist* (1997) representing “high” literature. More popular works are those by Georges Simenon (translated as *African Trio*, 1979) and the South African Stuart Cloete who published two real body rippers. When the missionary does appear in these books, he is seldom cast in a positive light; all mention of Western philanthropy is ironic or negative. In all of these novels two spatial images occur repeatedly: the omnipresent river, whether it is the Congo or one of its mighty tributaries, and the impenetrable jungle, a mysterious menace to all invaders. In these spaces the European presence has little or no lasting impact. Frasier articulates this awareness while waiting for the Company's investigator:

Thus did we compose and prepare ourselves, and more forcibly than ever before did the wilderness surrounding our swept-out buildings and laundered flag strike me as something more permanent and invincible than anything else I could imagine, something as potent and indestructible as evil or truth itself, and something waiting only for our departure to reassert itself and to prove once and for all the insignificance of our brief and unremarkable existence within it. (Edric 2001: 202)

In Ward's analysis of *Heart of Darkness* he states that Marlow learns in Africa about the emptiness of a continent; not that of Africa, but the darkness in Europe – the Westerner, the missionary – itself (Ward 1989: 20). The closing sentence of Conrad's novel, describing the sun sinking over the Thames, surprisingly connects the familiar London scene to the Congo horror by stating that “the tranquil waterway seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” (Conrad 2003: 149). This is perhaps what the Congo novels also bring about: revealing the fragile and illusionary nature of the Christian presence in both the colonized “other” and the colonizing “self.”

#### Notes

- 1 The history of the missionary presence in the Congo, which was established during the first European voyages of “discovery” to this area from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, is succinctly described in words and pictures in Vints and Etambala (1992: 14–22).
- 2 See for example Ward's (1989: 61–64) discussion of “the indebtedness of Greene to the French Catholic literary tradition, [...] his concern with metaphysical suffering [and] the pre-occupation with questions of sin and imperfect belief” in his chapter on *The Heart of the Matter* (set in Sierra Leone, and published in 1948) and *A Burnt-out Case*.
- 3 Kingsolver (2000: 28–34): “They were such weird songs it took me a while to realize they followed the tunes of Christian hymns (like) ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ [...] which made my skin crawl [...] I wept for the sins of all who had brought my family to this dread dark shore.”

- 4 Fowles tells the isolated Prices about several other mission stations from where he also receives support. One is an American Baptist hospital mission: "That little outfit has done a world of good in the ways of guineaworm cure, literacy and human kindness. They've put old King Leopold's ghost to shame, I would say. If such a thing is possible" (Kingsolver 2000: 287).
- 5 "It's the only time I get homesick, when America lands on my doorstep in a missionary guise. There are others who didn't go back, like me. But they seem so sure of being right here where they are, so rooted in their faith [...] They are so unlike Father. As I bear the emptiness of a life without his God, it's a comfort to know these soft-spoken men who organize hospitals under thatched roofs, or stoop alongside village mamas to plant soybeans, or rig up electrical generators for a school. They've risked Mobuto and every imaginable parasite in the backwater places where children were left to die or endure when the Underdowns and their ilk fled the country. As Brother Fowles told us a long time ago: there are Christians, and there are Christians" (Kingsolver 2000: 492).
- 6 "God says the Africans are the tribes of Ham. Ham was the worst of Noah's three boys [...] So Noah cursed all Ham's children to be slaves for ever and ever. That's how come them to turn out dark" (Kingsolver 2000: 23). The thoughts are those of Ruth May, the Reverend Price's five-year old daughter when her family arrives at the mission station.
- 7 "I was also one of the Workers, with a capital – you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle [...] she talked about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" [...] I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit" (Conrad 2005: 58). In this case Marlow's aunt makes little distinction between the trading company and the missionary ideal.
- 8 "It was the saddest day of my life when your great lords and masters saw fit to withdraw their support from us. I am to accompany you back to Ukassa in the hope of securing some assistance from your competitors on the far shore. Our mother mission in Yaliembe was informed that their trading enterprise was expanding and that, in return for any assistance we might proffer, we might in some small way be remunerated for our help" (Edric 2001: 90).
- 9 During 1904 and 1905 several commissions of inquiry reported widespread abuses at the Belgian mission stations. Some of the most serious allegations were that the Belgian administration bought orphaned children from slave traders and unloaded them at the mission stations where they were brought up to provide indentured labourers for state and commercial institutions. Another charge concerned the establishment of church farms where so-called converts were forcibly held as unpaid labourers (Vints and Etambala 1992: 70).
- 10 "A new breed of philanthropists is pouring fortunes into the developing world [...] Many of the tycoons are approaching their philanthropy as they would a business deal. They are bypassing the traditional route of giving money through established charities, instead striking deals directly with African and Asian governments." The report continues by listing the Bill Clinton Foundation and the Anita Roddick Foundation amongst others ("A new breed of British philanthropist 'invests' in Africa" *Sunday Times*, 27 April 2008)
- 11 "When I try to picture the future I can't see myself as anything but a missionary or teacher or farmer, telling others how the Lord helps those that help themselves (but) my father says a girl who fails to marry veers from God's plan." (Kingsolver 2000: 170–71).
- 12 In describing the era when the missionary orders were founded, Vints and Etambala (1992) speak of the practical ruling according to which the Mother Superior was in all matters subjugated to the authority of the male priests, the nuns often did their work anonymously and a culture of female assertiveness did not exist.
- 13 In 1965, after three years of imprisonment, Leah's lover Anatole accompanies her to Bikoko, the rubber plantation and adjoining mission station where he was educated. The place is deserted – cleared of any signs that Europeans ever lived and worked there. As Leah describes it, "the mission is a ghost town now [...] the plantation is mostly rubble" (Kingsolver 2000: 489). The two are married inside the one building left standing – the empty library.
- 14 "Heathen" (noun): (a) An offensive term that deliberately insults somebody who does not acknowledge the God of the Bible, Torah, or Koran. (b) An offensive term that deliberately insults somebody's way of life, degree of knowledge or non-belief in religion.
- 15 "[...] the burnt-out cases. They are the lepers who lose everything that can be eaten away before they are cured" (Greene 2004: 101, see also 13, 170).

- 16 The foreword of *A Burnt-out Case* is dedicated to the real life mission doctor Michel Lechat. Greene ends the tribute with the words: "I only wish I had dedicated to you a better book in return for the limitless generosity I was shown at Yonda by you and the fathers of the Mission" (Greene 2004: xiii).
- 17 Le Carré (2006: 245): Bruno explains that the religious songs, which the Congolese leader sings while being tortured, are those songs, which all Congolese were taught to sing at the mission stations.
- 18 "Imagine how we might now be forced to reconsider our understanding of the situation were the so-called heathen of the Bula Matari (Congo Free State) to contain among his multitudes men capable of keeping accounts of these terrible events, of this shameful history told only once – imagine his own books and what they might tell us – imagine then how we might be forced to live with our disgraceful part in all of this." Roger Casement's *Diary*, 20 July 1893.
- 19 Georges Antoine Klein was a company agent who Conrad had met in Stanleyville. (See Conrad 2004: 238, note 12).
- 20 Hochschild's exposé of the cruel exploitation of the Congo by King Leopold takes its title from two lines in the poem "The Congo" by the American poet Vachel Lindsay. Its theme is racial discrimination in America, but it uses a series of images referring to the Congo. In the poem there is a very strong development of rhythmic sounds reminding the reader of drums beating, and the lines "Listen to the yell of Léopold's ghost / Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host" have become world famous. This book was reissued in 2005 with an "Afterword" in which Hochschild updates the facts, and in 2006 a documentary film with the same title was produced.
- 21 For example: Sanna Stanley's *The Rains are Coming* (1992) and *Monkey for Sale* (2002), and Margaret Myers' *Swimming in the Congo* (1995).
- 22 See the internet articles, "D.R. Congo's Literary Past" and "Tim Butcher's top 10 books about the Congo."

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