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## The Motifs of Demonizing and Feminizing Nature in *King Solomon's Mines* and *Heart of Darkness*: An Ecocritical Analysis

Ashenafi Belay Adugna<sup>1\*</sup> and Tesfaye Gebremariam Hailu<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of nature in two colonial novels set in Africa, specifically analyzing the recurring motifs of demonization and feminization. Drawing on ecocriticism attuned to postcolonial and ecofeminist perspectives, it examines how *King Solomon's Mines* and *Heart of Darkness* depict the African landscape. The study collected data from the novels through close reading, focusing on how the characters and narrators interact with nature. Using the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, the study analyzed the use of literary devices such as metaphors and metonymy to understand the symbolic representation of the human-nature relationship in the novel. The study reveals how the African landscape is depicted as a labyrinthine, savage, and feminine space that white male protagonists must conquer. This demonization and feminization, the study argues, are rooted in the ideological justifications for imperialism and Victorian anxieties about the unknown and the feminine. By revealing these narrative strategies and considering the specific historical context of their production, the study contends that the narratives in these novels aimed to legitimize the colonization of Africa and the subjugation of its people. By deconstructing these literary portrayals, the study opens doors to explore the environmental consciousness of counter-discourses offered by earlier African novelists, potentially challenging the colonial gaze and its lasting effects.

**Keywords:** Colonial discourse, Demonized nature, Environmental imperialism, Feminized nature, Nature, Representation

### 1. Introduction

Literary works are cultural products capable of creating and conveying the relationship between different ecological entities. By analyzing how this relationship is represented in the works, we can better understand the discourses created and perpetuated within them (Bate, 2000). Accordingly, by examining the construction of nature in representational practices, we can bring to light the cultural politics that are inherent in every portrayal of nature.

Representations in literary works are discourses that are linked with those in the material world. They are influenced by and reflect the realities of the material world. This interaction between the discursive and the material worlds, as described by Hekman (2010), is a continual interpenetration rather than a separation, and occurs through the process and impact of representation. Therefore, literary works are viewed as texts that are both influenced by the discourses of the material world and influential in shaping them (Stephens, 1992).

<sup>1\*</sup> Corresponding Author, Jimma University, Details about the authors is given at the end of this manuscript.

This study examines the portrayal of nature in colonial novels set in Africa using postcolonial environmental framework seeking to critique Westernized representations of nature. Postcolonial environmentalism uncovers the workings of colonial power by way of questioning conventional conceptualization of nature. It delves into the colonizing power inherent in certain ways of depicting landscapes, examining the intersection of power, knowledge, and spatiality in colonial practices (Crane, 2012). In this way, the postcolonial discourse asserts that the imaginative portrayal of places is inherently linked to the dynamics of power. Indeed, colonialism/imperialism is preceded by such act of imagining new territories and claiming ownership over them. Said (1978), in his seminal work *Orientalism*, reveals that travel narratives and literature of the West depicted the orient as Others to justify their claim of control. Said argued that Western European discourses on the "Orient" did not reflect the actual historical coloniality of the Middle East, but rather constituted a negative, othering projection of the West itself (Loomba, 1998).

The representation of the African landscape had its earlier construal in the wilderness narratives of the imperial west. These narratives presented a demeaning image of the landscape and the people. This ideology was particularly prevalent in the description of African societies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fanon, for instance, shows the hierarchical arrangement of life forms in the imperial design and the way such a framework was used to denigrate Africans as bestial and therefore inferior. The debasement was not restricted to conjuring up animality, as several colonialist writings positioned the African continent as being in a wild state and devoid of history. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon states:

*when the colonist speaks of the colonized, he uses zoological terms. Allusion is made to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odors from the "native" quarters to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavors at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary (1963, p.7).*

McClintock (1995) and Pratt (2007) have provided insightful interpretations of colonialist discourse, particularly in its tendency to portray Africa as a natural, untamed space. McClintock (1995) highlights how colonized African spaces were feminized and sexualized, with women and nature being conflated in a distorted colonial language. This categorization of Africa as virgin, empty land was especially prevalent in the nineteenth century. Even in the 1950s, representations the continent tended to overlook or diminish the presence of African people who had long coexisted with wild animals. Beinart and Hughes (2007, p.231) note that these colonial texts often omitted or downplayed the presence of African people, instead portraying the environment as wild and in need of taming and control. When humans were included in these depictions, they were often portrayed as savage and lacking rational sensibility. Overall, these depictions served to justify the exploitation of both human and nonhuman resources in the territories, under the guise of civilization and progress. These readings shed light on the ideological underpinnings of colonial rule and its impact on the representation of African landscapes and people.

Western exploitation of other peoples is inseparable from attitudes and practices relating to other species and the extra-human environment generally (Tiffin, 2007). Beinart (2000) argues that the way that European scholars have categorized Africa has led to a "systematic and systemic manufacturing of a continent" that is labeled as inferior, uncivilized, and pre-logical. These prejudices against Africans have been recycled by many scholars since then and have contributed to the view of Africa as a dark continent with no legacy of democracy. European scholars have created a narrative about Africa that is based on their own sense of superiority.

In English literature, the misrepresentation of Africa began with the earliest novels. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), set in Africa, depicts the landscape as a foreign and hostile environment that needs to be tamed and controlled. This novel is one of the first English novels and reflects the early 18<sup>th</sup> century belief in the superiority of rational civilization over nature and slavery. It also reinforces the developing British Empire's self-image through its encounters with its colonial subjects. It presents Africa as a place that is wild, dangerous,

and uncivilized, and as a place that needs to be brought under the control of European civilization. This reflects the views of the British Empire at the time, which was expanding its colonial possessions around the world.

In the late Victorian era, writers continued to portray Africa as a strange and foreign land, which justified European imperialism (Brantlinger, 2009; Franey, 2003). This is evident in the works of *King Solomon's Mines (KSM)* and *Heart of Darkness (HD)*, which were written during the time of Scramble for Africa. These novels are the targets of this article. The article explores particularly how the novels project a demonized and feminized image of the African landscape as motifs to justify imperial possession. Using the frameworks of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism, the study analyzes the conceptualization of nature, its symbolic association with women and the ideological grounds for the portrayals in the narratives.

Haggard and Conrad wrote novels primarily set in exotic locations, mainly in Africa. Their stories are situated within the lighter side of Victorian literature, featuring civilized European heroes compelled to journey into unknown territories and encounter supernatural forces. Both authors traveled to Africa and are believed to have used their knowledge of the continent to creatively construct the settings of their stories (Brantlinger, 2009). Haggard's concept of a journey into the "darkest Africa" that becomes a spiritual quest has been adopted by several writers, including Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1902. Conrad wrote stories and novels mostly with a maritime backdrop and is renowned for his emotionally powerful and psychologically penetrating novels, many of which are set in exotic locations. Haggard published three novels in 1887: *She, Jess, and Allan Quatermain*, all set in Africa. Some of Conrad's works include the novels *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Heart of Darkness* (1902).

Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) are novels that tell stories about Africa and were written before any African writers published novels. Both novels were written during the historical period known as the "scramble for Africa," when European powers agreed to divide Africa amongst themselves at the Berlin Conference. Haggard's KSM was published only six months after the conference, and Conrad's HD was published five years later. The colonial discourse of the time emphasized the separation between society (mostly Europeans) and nature (including the natives). The narratives of the period, whether fictional or not, were influenced by the ideologies of the time and were used as important tools to spread hegemonic discourses.

*King Solomon's Mines*, published in 1885, is an adventure story about a group of men venturing into the heart of Africa in search of hidden riches. The protagonist, Quatermain, recounts their dangerous journey through unknown territory in pursuit of diamonds, accompanied by Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, first serialized in 1899 and later published as a novella in 1902, tells the story of Marlow's journey to the Belgian Congo to find the enigmatic Kurtz, who has become a savage figure revered by the native Africans. Both novels are set in an exotic and frightening African wilderness, reflecting the colonial ideologies of the time.

While previous scholarship has undeniably explored the human cost of colonialism in colonial novels including the novels considered in this study (Brantlinger, 2009), a crucial gap remains in our understanding of the environmental narratives embedded within these novels. Existing studies have primarily focused on the human aspects of the colonial project, neglecting the way these works portray the African landscape itself. This study aims to bridge this gap by employing an ecocritical lens. Through an analysis of the recurring motifs of demonization and feminization of nature, it investigates how Haggard and Conrad construct the African environment not simply as a backdrop for adventure, but as a justification for European domination. By deconstructing the portrayal of nature in these novels, this study seeks to shed light on the environmental consequences of colonialism and the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice. Ultimately, this analysis aspires to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between colonialism and the environment.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study analyzes portrayal of nature in two colonial narratives set in Africa. To explicate the discourses embedded in the narratives, it uses an ecocritical framework which attunes to the postcolonial and ecofeminist projects of debunking ideologies of hierarchy in cultural texts.

The intersection of ecocriticism, postcolonialism, and ecofeminism offers a powerful lens for examining the complex and interconnected nature of environmental problem. These frameworks can help us to understand the root causes of environmental problems, identify the voices that are often marginalized in literary environmental discourse, and develop more inclusive perspective in addressing ecological voices.

Although ecocriticism is generally understood as the examination of how nature is portrayed in literature, there are different interpretations of its meaning. These interpretations range from broad descriptions that outline its focus to more detailed explanations that emphasize activism. Glotfelty (1996) defined the field as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (p.430), indicating its general concern. Buell (1995) also provided a similarly influential definition, describing it as the exploration "of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (p.67), emphasizing the commitment to environmental activism in the criticism. However, Coupe (2000) offered a more detailed explanation of ecocriticism, defining it as a "branch of green studies" that "considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction" (p.302). This definition places the term within the broader field of "green studies" and, like Buell (1995), advocates for a spirit of commitment to environmental causes.

The theory of ecocriticism is based on the idea that human culture is interconnected with the natural world, influencing, and being influenced by it (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996, p.45). Ecocriticism examines how literature and other cultural forms represent and shape our perceptions of nature (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty, 1996). Therefore, ecocritics aim to demonstrate how literature can help people understand their place in the environment and their duty to preserve it. They argue that literature can be used to challenge anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are the most important species on the planet (Love, 2003).

In the broad scope of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and postcolonialism are utilized as relevant frameworks for analyzing the interconnectedness of gender, race/ethnicity, and nature with institutionalized practices such as gender domination, racial discrimination, and environmental exploitation (Sze, 2002, p.166). Both perspectives share a common focus on addressing issues of oppression and power relations. Ecofeminism examines the interrelated oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, while postcolonialism emphasizes the association between the mastery over the landscape and the exploitation of indigenous peoples under the guise of their perceived inferiority (alterity).

Mukherjee (2010) perceives the integration between ecocriticism and postcolonialism as lying in their common struggle against late capitalism. He notes that the cross-fertilization is eminent in addressing the issues of culture and environment in a coordinated manner. For him the roots of social and environmental justice are visibly linked through the decolonization struggles of the late twentieth century. Wright (2010) begins her study of postcolonial ecocriticism by challenging the idea of nature as separate from humans, a concept that has been constructed by Western thinking. She argues that this understanding of nature is based on a binary system that privileges humans over the natural world. She criticizes the use of the "colonizer/colonized" binary, not because it does not fit within hierarchical thinking, but because it often fails to address the larger issue of humanity's relationship with nature. Huggan and Tiffin (2010, p.7) also suggest that postcolonial ecocriticism must focus on breaking down the "species boundary" in order to combat oppression at its roots.

Ecofeminism combines the goals of feminist and environmental movements, challenging the dualistic thinking that leads to the belief in the superiority of one thing over another (Kolondy, 1996). Ecofeminists

argue that there are connections between the oppression of women in patriarchal societies and the exploitation of nonhuman nature in Western anthropocentric worldviews (Plumwood, 1993). By questioning oppositional dualisms, ecofeminism provides a helpful perspective for examining the associations made between nature and human beings in terms of gender.

Ecofeminism and postcolonial criticism both shed light on the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and the exploitation and degradation of the environment by a male-dominated culture. They also emphasize how the colonization of land and people are intertwined through the representation of the landscape of the colonized and the natives. These perspectives effectively address power dynamics, revealing how Western ideology has elevated human culture over the perceived inferiority of the nonhuman other. Colonial and patriarchal views of nature have also depicted certain groups of people as more closely associated with nature, and therefore less than fully human. This institutionalizes and normalizes power dynamics, creating a system of interconnected and mutually reinforcing dualisms that perpetuate oppression. Binary oppositions such as civilized/primitive, male/female, and culture/nature directly correspond to and naturalize race, gender, and nature oppressions (Di Chiro, 1995; Plumwood, 1993).

### 3. Methods and Materials

This study is purely a qualitative inquiry that examines how nature is portrayed in fictional works. The study focuses on analysis of rhetorical, textual, and intertextual features employed to foreground the representation of nature in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). These novels were chosen because they are among the earliest narratives to depict the African landscape and have had a significant impact on shaping the world's perception of Africa. The research aims to explore how Western authors represented the African environment and the indigenous people as "other" in their narratives.

The study collected data from the novels through close reading, focusing on how the characters and narrators interact with nature. The researchers paid particular attention to the characters' relationships with nature, as well as how their social identities and ideological beliefs influenced their portrayal of the natural environment. The study also analyzed the use of literary devices such as metaphors and metonymy to understand the symbolic representation of the human-nature relationship in the novel.

The study utilized the theoretical framework of ecocriticism to analyze the data obtained from the novels. According to Howarth (1996, p.81), ecocriticism aims to examine "how metaphors of nature and land are used and abused" in literature. Accordingly, the analysis involved the appraisal of the "metaphors that set up human beings apart from the environment and others that display them as an integral part of the world system" (Harre, Brockneir, & Muhlhausler 1999, p.117). The study also incorporated a postcolonial approach to scrutinize metaphors in terms of the realities they present and the values they uphold. This approach allowed for the examination of ideologies embedded in dominant metaphors, particularly those that establish human-centered perspectives in the interaction between human and non-human nature depicted in the narratives. Additionally, the study explored the use of metonymy, a figurative language that connects two things through a shared property, to shed light on the relationship between human and non-human nature in the novels (Stephens and Waterhouse 1990, p.26). This analysis also addressed the ecofeminist argument regarding the association between women and nature, particularly the feminization of nature and naturalization of women.

The textual analysis in this study also goes beyond simply looking at the explicit features of the texts. It also seeks to uncover the hidden or implicit motivations behind the texts, what Culler (1997, p.87) calls "the invisible rather than the visible". This is done by examining the underlying assumptions and ideological biases that are present in the texts. The analysis is also presented in a transparent way, with specific passages from the texts being used to support the interpretations. Overall, by drawing on ecocriticism, postcolonialism and ecofeminism, the study aimed to shed light on the complex relationship between humans and non-human nature as depicted in the texts, and to uncover the underlying values and ideologies that shape these representations.

## 4. Results

This section explores how *King Solomon's Mines* and *Heart of Darkness* utilize the tactics of demonizing and feminizing the African landscape to justify colonial control. Before delving into this analysis, a brief introduction to each novel provides essential context.

### 4.1. Synopsis of the Novels

***King Solomon's Mines (1885)*:** This seminal adventure novel centers around Allan Quatermain, a seasoned African explorer. He is tasked by Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good to locate Sir Henry's missing brother, George Neville, who vanished while searching for the legendary mines of King Solomon. The journey begins with Quatermain's recounting of a mysterious map, allegedly showing the way to the hidden mines, given to him by a dying Portuguese explorer. Intrigued by the promise of untold riches and driven by the hope of finding George alive, the trio sets off into the treacherous African wilderness. Along the way, they are joined by an enigmatic Zulu warrior named Umbopa, who later reveals his identity and crucial connection to their quest. Their expedition is fraught with numerous obstacles and dangers. They traverse vast deserts, scale formidable mountain ranges, and survive deadly encounters with wild animals. They also face the constant threat of dehydration and starvation in the unforgiving landscape. Despite these hardships, they press on, motivated by courage, friendship, and the lure of adventure. As they penetrate deeper into the heart of Africa, they enter the territory of the Kukuanas, a powerful and secretive tribe. Here, the story takes a dramatic turn. Umbopa reveals himself as Ignosi, the rightful heir to the Kukuana throne, and with the help of Quatermain and his companions, he leads a rebellion against the tyrannical ruler, King Twala. The conflict culminates in a fierce battle, with Quatermain and his friends playing a pivotal role in restoring Ignosi to his rightful position. With the political turmoil resolved, Ignosi honors his promise to guide them to the legendary mines. The adventurers discover the fabled treasure chamber, laden with diamonds, gold, and precious artifacts. However, their triumph is tempered by the realization that the journey has been perilous and costly. The return journey proves equally challenging, with the party narrowly escaping with their lives and only a portion of the treasure.

***Heart of Darkness (1899)*:** This haunting novella unfolds through the narration of Charles Marlow, a sailor, who recounts his journey up the Congo River in Africa to a group of friends aboard a boat anchored on the river Thames. Employed by a Belgian trading company, his mission is to retrieve Kurtz, a charismatic but enigmatic ivory trader who has become an almost mythical figure among the company's agents. As Marlow travels deeper into the heart of Africa, he encounters the brutal exploitation and inhumanity inflicted by European colonizers upon the native African population. The journey upriver becomes increasingly surreal and nightmarish. Marlow witnesses the devastating effects of colonialism, on the land and its people. The deeper he ventures, the more he learns about Kurtz, who is revered by some as a genius and a god but feared by others as a madman. The narrative builds an intense sense of anticipation and dread about the encounter with Kurtz. When Marlow finally reaches Kurtz's station, he discovers that Kurtz has indeed succumbed to the darkness and savagery of the jungle. He has set himself up as a demigod among the local tribes, indulging in unspeakable acts and becoming consumed by his own power and madness. Marlow finds Kurtz gravely ill and hears his infamous final words, "The horror! The horror!" Marlow ultimately brings Kurtz back to the steamboat, but Kurtz dies during the journey. Back in Europe, Marlow visits Kurtz's fiancée and, unable to reveal the dark truth of Kurtz's last days, tells her that Kurtz's final words were her name.

### 4.2. Claiming Subjugation through Demonizing Nature

Nature is represented in literary works through various symbols, metaphors, and techniques to create a specific image in the reader's imagination. The two colonial novels examined, *King Solomon's Mines* and *Heart*

*of Darkness*, portray the image of nonhuman nature primarily as a menacing force that requires appeasement and control through employing such strategies.

Haggard's novel *KSM* depicts nature as a menacing force that poses a threat to the European characters. The negative portrayal of nature in the novel is achieved through various strategies that project a hostile image onto the African landscape. The adventure story is set in an unexplored African landscape filled with dangerous animals, mysterious jungles, and scorching deserts. The narrator, Quatermain, and his two associates refer to Africa as a "dark land" (Haggard, 1885, p.13), giving it an image of a ruined city.

The novel portrays the natural environment as a formidable and threatening adversary for the European characters, including the Portuguese explorer Jose da Silvestra whose letter and map are used by the three British characters. The treasure site they are heading to is described as impenetrable due to the deserts and dangerous jungles filled with predators. Silvestra's letter depicts the wilderness as extremely challenging, as he is "dying of hunger" in a "little cave" and brings nothing out of the place but his "life" (Haggard, 1885, p.16). He appeals to the King to send an army to extract the diamonds, emphasizing the difficulty of surviving the desert and mountains. These descriptions present an antagonistic image of the landscape, adding to the challenge posed by the presence of the cannibalistic witch called Gagool.

In various parts of the narrative, the narrator, who is also taking part in the journey, represents nature as threatening (p.16), inaccessible (p.62), and occult (p.64). This establishes a dominant urge to pacify nature. The demonic feature of the African wilderness is contrasted with gardens, which for the narrator represents serenity, opposed to the apprehensive feature of the wilderness. The garden is represented as an antidote to the wilderness. The impulse to tame and pacify the wilderness is reflected several times in the narrator's description of the setting. An instance of this impulse to dominate is observed in the allusion made to the Biblical Eden, which the narrator thinks was improved with Eve's action.

*For to my mind, however beautiful a view may be, it requires the presence of man to make it complete, but perhaps that is because I have lived so much in the wilderness, and therefore know the value of civilization, though to be sure it drives away the game. The Garden of Eden, no doubt, looked fair before man was, but I always think that it must have been fairer when Eve adorned it* (Haggard, 1885, p. 26)

The narrator in this passage evaluates nature based on human-centered perspectives and only sees value in nature when it benefits humanity. The assertion that nature is only whole when humans intervene indicates a desire to control. The narrator's conflicting views on the value of human intervention in nature and the fear of negative consequences from such intervention reveal his vacillation between embracing life in the wild and transforming it into a civilized environment. The underlying ideology behind this ambivalence is the human-centered belief in appropriating nature to serve human needs.

The novel depicts a desire to control and tame the wilderness, as seen in the frequent references to botanical gardens as symbols of civilization. The narrator views gardens as safe havens for research and contrasts them with the unpredictable and dangerous wilderness. He describes a garden in Cape Town as "...the botanical garden, which seems to me likely to confer a great benefit to the country" (Haggard, 1885, p.7). The portrayal of gardening as a peaceful activity, in contrast to the disinterest of the natives, further emphasizes the urge to dominate nature. This is also reflected in the association of natives with the wilderness and the British with the garden. The narrator expresses:

*...but there is a good garden with the best loquat trees in it that I know, and some nice young mangoes, of which I hope great things. The curator of the botanical gardens gave them to me. It is looked after by an old hunter of mine named Jack, whose thigh was so badly broken by a buffalo cow in Sikukunis country that he will never hunt again. But he can potter about and garden, being a Griqua by birth. You will never persuade a Zulu to take much interest in gardening. It is a peaceful art, and peaceful arts are not in his line (Haggard, 1885, p.26).*

The narrator's perspective on the relationship between nature and the native people, as well as the Europeans, is highlighted in the last statement of the extract above. Gardening, which is seen as a peaceful human approach to nature, is associated with the Europeans, while hunting, which represents a more discordant relationship with nature, is linked to the Africans. The idea of enclosing nature and viewing non-enclosed nature as a threatening wilderness also reflects a dichotomized view of nature. The frequent references to gardens in the novel indicate a strong desire among the characters to control or contain nature. By portraying the wilderness and the native people in a negative light, the narrative presents an 'othered' image of both nature and the natives.

Quatermain's descriptions in the narrative aim to transform the threatening wilderness into a pleasant environment through bravery and hard work. The desire to civilize nature requires exploring the mysterious wilderness. This is exemplified by Umbopa's chant, which tells the adventures of heroes.

*For a while we tramped on in silence, till Umbopa, who was marching in front, broke into a Zulu chant about how some brave men, tired of life and the tameness of things, started off into a vast wilderness to find new things or die, and how, lo and behold! When they had travelled far into the wilderness, they found that it was not a wilderness at all, but a beautiful place full of young wives and fat cattle, of game to hunt and enemies to kill (Haggard, 1885, p.31).*

The narrator's description once again portrays the African wilderness as a threatening place to explore. The fear of facing death in the wild drives the narrator to search for reasons to venture into it. Umbopa, a native Zulu, chants about the heroic adventures of brave men, suggesting that it is possible to conquer the deadly wilderness and turn it into a place of enjoyment. The heart of the wilderness is described as "not a wilderness," challenging the fear associated with it and promoting the idea of taming the wild. The narrator seems to be psychologically preparing for the journey by finding reasons for it to end in pleasure, such as indulging in desires like sex, food, hunting, and killing. The chant about the journey of brave men symbolizes the exploration of the three main characters, all of whom are tired of their mundane lives and seek to discover something new in an unknown land, even if it means risking their lives to prove their bravery. The discussions between the characters before embarking on the journey to the mines align with the themes present in the chant. Hence, the portrayal of the African wilderness as a dangerous yet enticing place serves to separate it from human civilization.

Like Haggard's KSM, Conrad's HD is a wilderness narrative. In fact, it is considered one of the foundational narratives that spread a simplistic and negative image of Africa to the Western world. The novel presents a very dark and terrifying picture of the African landscape, and the entire plot relies on creating the image of an occult wilderness that poses a threat to humanity. The landscape appears so depressing in the narrator's view. It is demonized and appears as "so hopeless", "so dark", "so impenetrable", and "so pitiless" as described below:

*I looked around, and I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have been with him, of course?' I said. (Conrad, 1902, p.42)*



Marlow finds the entire physical environment around him — the land, the river, the jungle, and the sky — to be hostile, gloomy, and impassable. The way that the passage depicts nature as a merciless creature creates the idea that nature is separate from humanity and that there is an antagonistic relationship between the two. The passage never allows for any kind of connection between humans and the physical environment, unless the oppressive figure of the wilderness is seen as a ruthless colonizer of humans, especially Europeans.

The setting of the novel, the African jungle, is described as devoid of any human touch, which makes the narrator anxious. He says, "the consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet--as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill--made me uneasy" (Conrad, 1902, p.42). The jungle is silent and deserted, which would be a nightmare for a "civilized" man who is used to the peaceful and bustling environment of home. The narrator's projection of darkness and solitude onto the landscape may come from his fear of the unknown. However, as we will see later, the discourse of depicting Africa as a troubling landscape is also used to justify the imperialistic project of dominating nature and the native people.

From the very beginning of the novel, Conrad uses the image of the African jungle to represent the darkness and danger of the unknown. Marlow, the narrator, is contemplating his journey to the heart of darkness, which he begins on the shores of the Thames River in England. The Thames is depicted as a peaceful and civilized river, and it is a symbol of the European mission to bring civilization to Africa. However, Marlow comments that the Thames has also been "one of the dark places of the earth." This foreshadows the troubled and terrifying journey that he is about to embark on.

*The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more somber every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun* (Conrad, 1902, p.2).

A comparison of the two excerpts shows that there is a stark contrast between the settings. The Thames River in England is described as peaceful, with calm waters, a kind sky, and shiny mist hanging from the trees. The river remains undisturbed even at nightfall, and it has served the people on its banks for centuries. It flows with a dignified tranquility, like "a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth" (p.2). In contrast, the African landscape is described as hopeless, dark, impenetrable, and pitiless. The representation of the Thames has symbolic significance in the novel. As the narrator travels away from the peaceful Thames River and into the heart of Africa, the setting becomes increasingly gloomy and threatening. The wilderness is described as full of impassable woods, swamps, fog, storms, disease, and the threat of death. This description creates a sense of danger and foreboding: "death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush..." (Conrad, 1902, p.4). The passage also suggests that the wilderness needs to be controlled and civilized to avoid the dangers that it poses. This is an indirect way of promoting the imperialist view that European colonialism is necessary to bring civilization to Africa.

The narrator feels lost and oppressed in the African wilderness. He feels like a needle lost in a haystack, overwhelmed by the vastness and danger of the unknown. "... and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him, --all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men" (Conrad, 1902, p.4). The people he encounters also seem wild and savage to him. The portrayal of the wilderness in the novel suggests that it needs to be civilized by Europeans.

The novel's depiction of the African landscape as being very different from human civilization conceals the desire to conquer nature and the people who live there. The novel also portrays the land as being empty, which is another way of justifying control and appropriation. However, the novel also criticizes the idea of conquest, even though its overall logic suggests that it is appropriate. For example, the narrator says

*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. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . .* (Conrad, 1902, p.4)

Marlow's assertion in this extract that conquest only appears ugly under excessive scrutiny exposes a deep hypocrisy. This statement directly contradicts the novel's dominant theme: the pervasive desire to control and exploit the African wilderness and its inhabitants. The ease with which Marlow dismisses the ugliness of conquest suggests a troubling willingness to overlook brutality for the sake of personal gain. The implication is that conquest becomes acceptable if its messy realities remain conveniently obscured. Furthermore, the novel's justification for conquest falls back on the well-worn trope of "civilizing" the natives and "taming" the land. This is a classic strategy employed by imperialist narratives to legitimize the subjugation and exploitation of colonized peoples. By framing European intervention as a necessary act of progress, the novel masks the violence and self-interest inherent in colonial expansion.

Marlow's descriptions of the African landscape reveal a deep-seated Eurocentric bias. He portrays it as an "untouched wilderness," where nature reigns supreme and humanity struggles for control. This characterization evokes the concept of the "primeval savage," a trope used by colonial narratives to depict colonized lands as existing outside the march of civilization. His metaphorical comparisons of traveling up the river to journeying back in time reinforce this notion. He implies that Africa represents an earlier stage in human development compared to Europe. This perspective aligns with the prevailing racist and social Darwinist ideologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which positioned Europeans at the pinnacle of evolution and Africans as inherently "savage" or "primitive."

*Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once--somewhere--far away--in another existence perhaps* (Conrad, 1902, p.26).

The journey to the heart of Africa is a journey into the past, and the wilderness that the narrator encounters is both strange and terrifying. It is a place where his imagination is constantly running wild, and the landscape itself seems to be trying to trouble him. The narrator describes the wilderness as being "stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention." (Conrad, 1902, p.26). In other words, he sees it as a mysterious and threatening force. The narrator tries to distance himself from the wilderness by seeing it as an occult place, a place that is haunted by spirits. His presence in the wilderness cuts him off from the present world and places him in a different, more primitive state of mind. The forest is impenetrable, the air is heavy and sluggish, and nothing around him, even the silence, seems to be peaceful. The narrator's personification of the wilderness as an avenging force further emphasizes the distance between humans and nature.

In HD, Conrad conceptualizes the African landscape as a hostile force that opposes the encroachment of civilization. The familiar landscapes of the narrator's home appear unnatural and monstrous in Africa. Even the men in the jungle seem inhuman, and their humanity is only gradually recognized. This conceptualization of African nature calls for the same kind of project of taming the wilderness. This view is consistent with the prevailing European attitudes towards Africa at the time, which saw the continent as a savage and uncivilized place.

### 4.3. Feminization and Naturalization as a Strategy of Control

One of the key themes in the two colonial novels is the feminization of the African landscape. Haggard employs this trope, common in colonial literature, to represent the African environment as desirable and ultimately submissive to European domination. While the wilderness also embodies the narrator's anxieties, the erotic language used to describe the feminized landscapes suggests a connection between male desire and colonial conquest.

The feminized landscapes in KSM also carry a strong undercurrent of male erotic desire. While the wilderness may represent the narrator's deepest fears, it simultaneously exerts a strange fascination. Haggard's descriptive prose becomes particularly charged when depicting these landscapes, often evoking imagery suggestive of female body parts.

*... glittering like silver in the early rays of the morning sun, soared Sheba's Breasts; and stretching away for hundreds of miles on either side of them ran the great Suliman Berg. Now that, sitting here, I attempt to describe the extraordinary grandeur and beauty of that sight, language seems to fail me. I am impotent even before its memory. Straight before us, rose two enormous mountains, the like of which are not, I believe, to be seen in Africa... These mountains placed thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped after the fashion of a woman's breasts, and at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep. Their bases swell gently from the plain, looking at that distance perfectly round and smooth; and upon the top of each is a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast (Haggard, 1885, p.55).*

In this excerpt, Haggard uses language rich with sensuality, comparing the valley's slopes to a woman's curves. This imagery links the beauty and abundance of the land with female sexuality. By portraying the landscape as alluring and ultimately submissive to the male gaze, Haggard reinforces the idea that Africa, like a desirable woman, can be possessed and controlled by European men. By naming the mountains "Sheba's Breasts" and using terms like "round" and "smooth," he reduces the majestic peaks to mere female body parts. This act of feminization serves a complex purpose. On the surface, it allows the narrator to exert a sense of control over the landscape. By sexualizing nature, he objectifies it and diminishes its power. This aligns with the broader project of colonialism, where European nations sought to dominate and exploit the natural resources of Africa. Furthermore, Haggard reinforces the trope of the "male explorer" conquering the "feminine wilderness" through his portrayal of Allan Quatermain and his companions. These white, masculine figures navigate the dangers of the feminized landscape, ultimately emerging victorious and claiming the riches of King Solomon's Mines.

The excerpt also highlights a significant difference in Haggard's portrayal of the African landscape. Here, the wilderness is no longer a monstrous "other" to be feared, as depicted earlier in the novel. Instead, it is transformed into a beautiful and "embracing" feminine figure. This shift suggests that Haggard links beauty and potential danger with the feminized landscape. The "wild forest" devoid of this sexualized description remains a source of unease. By portraying the landscape as alluring and ultimately submissive to the male gaze, Haggard reinforces the idea that Africa, like a desirable woman, can be possessed and controlled by European men. This narrative aligns with the concept of the "male explorer" conquering the "feminine wilderness," justifying the subjugation of the land and its people.

In other parts of the novel, the narrator also describes the mountains in a way that suggests that they are feminine and captivating, while other natural features, such as cliffs and gorges, are masculine and terrifying. For example, on pages 156-157, the narrator describes a mountain as "nude" and "beautiful," while describing cliffs and gorges as "draped" and "terrifying." This suggests that the narrator is constructing nature in a way that feminizes it. In other words, the author is using the feminine imagery to describe the beauty and allure of the mountains, while using the masculine imagery to describe the danger and fear that the other natural features evoke.

In addition to feminizing the landscape, Haggard's novel *KSM* represents women through the androcentric discourse of naturalizing femininity. While there are few women in the novel, those who are included are represented as natural sexual objects. This portrayal is connected to the impulse to control the landscape, as the demonization of the land is supported by the demonization of the woman Gagool, whom all the white men, including the first explorer, recommend controlling. In his letter, the troubles of the landscape are associated with Gagool's witchcraft. The woman and the land are seen as obstacles to be overcome. The suggestion to kill Gagool and subdue the land comes from the desire to remove these obstructions. To the three white explorers, Gagool appears as a horrifying animal. The narrator describes her as a "frightful vulture-headed" and "ill-omened" creature (Haggard, 1885, p.101), emphasizing her animalistic qualities. This is further reinforced in the following extract, which depicts Gagool as the embodiment of the evil of the land.

*She is the evil genius of the land," he answered, "and I shall kill her, and all the witch doctors with her! She has lived so long that none can remember when she was not very old, and she it is who has always trained the witch hunters, and made the land wicked in the sight of the heavens above (Haggard, 1885, p.149).*

In Haggard's novel, the white male explorers use the image of the African landscape as a seductive and terrifying feminine figure to justify their dominance over the land and the African people. By portraying nature as feminine, the explorers are able to create a distance between themselves and the land, which they see as something to be controlled and conquered. Haggard's novel uses the gendering of nature to justify European colonialism and racism.

In addition to portraying the African landscape as a dangerous and uninhabited wilderness, Conrad's *HD* also uses gendered language to describe nature. Like Haggard's *KSM*, it presents nature as a feminine figure that is waiting to be controlled and colonized. The feminization of nature is achieved through the use of feminine pronouns and tropes, the projection of female body parts (breast, genitals, womb, etc.) onto the landscape, and the depiction of the landscape as a chaotic feminine figure that attracts male explorers.

In Conrad's novel, the narrator uses language to describe the African landscape in a way that suggests that it is feminine. He does this by comparing the jungle to women and by giving it human-like qualities. For example, he describes the jungle as having "breasts" and a "womb." He also says that the jungle "whispers" and "breathes." The narrator's depiction of the jungle as feminine is significant because it suggests that he sees it as something to be controlled and dominated, just like a woman. This is further reinforced by the fact that the jungle is home to the African people, who are referred to as "savages," and the European colonizer Kurtz. In other words, the narrator's use of gendered language to describe the African landscape is a way for him to justify the violence that the European colonizers inflict on the land and the African people.

As seen in *KSM*, nature is conceptualized as a feminine figure when the discourse aims at extending masculine control over nature. The same happens in Conrad's *HD*. The feminization of nature is constructed through various techniques, and in the work, nature appears as an object of masculine control and manipulation through forming a discourse of penetration. The use of expressions like "explore" and "penetration" in representing acts of the wonders in the jungle clicks disturbing questions about sexuality and landscape. Especially, in the context of the inherent pervasive Western nature/culture dualism on which the project of colonialism was based, penetration into the wilderness could simply be associated with the project of dominion. In such instances, the explorer becomes a rapist who manipulates an 'Other' virgin environment at will.

From this perspective, *HD* presents a canvas portrait of the African landscape as a feminine figure waiting to be penetrated by the European explorer. Various techniques are used to feminize the landscape, such as mirroring places with feminine features, referring to nature with feminine pronouns, and describing landform features in terms of female anatomy, with an emphasis on erotic and reproductive organs such as the breasts, genitals, and womb. Beyond these techniques, however, the novel abounds in representations of the African wilderness as a chaotic feminine figure with the power to arouse the male explorer's intense emotions.

The narrator's childhood fantasies about Africa are fueled by the excitement of exploring a virgin territory. The novel's plot is also structured around the metaphorical feminization of African nature as an alluring but overwhelming force. The desire to penetrate the mysteries of the wilderness is driven by the fear of being corrupted by its overwhelming power, which is seen as capable of undoing progress. This involves another aspect of the land as a woman, namely as an irresistible temptress. However, not all nature is depicted in this way; sometimes, it appears as a passive and nurturing mother figure. Nevertheless, the dominant conception of nature in the novel is as a tempestuous and uncontrollable wilderness that poses a danger to humanity and must be subdued. The feminization of African nature in the novel reflects the narrator's own ambivalence towards it. On the one hand, he sees it as a seductive and mysterious force. On the other hand, he sees it as a dangerous and uncontrollable wilderness that must be subdued.

The wilderness is symbolized by the native woman, and at the same time, it is given the human qualities of a particular type of femininity. The woman comes to represent the terrifying and destructive embrace of the wilderness and darkness that Marlow identifies as the cause of Kurtz's downfall, and from which Marlow is only protected by his self-control. The narrative also suggests that the wilderness is associated with a particular type of femininity, namely a femininity that is dangerous and destructive. This contrasts with the more traditional view of femininity as nurturing and protective.

*Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace (Conrad, 1902, p.78).*

The native woman seems to embrace nature (the sky, the river, and the earth) with intense sexual desire. In a similar way, the landscape appears to embrace the native man, who is beaten against its bosom like a mother (Conrad, 1902, p.18). The landscape is also feminized using personification. It is constructed as an entity that speaks and acts and is therefore made to seem alive. Human characteristics are bestowed on the wilderness, and to the narrator, the forest seems to be watching him. The analogy drawn between the wilderness and the native woman is manifested in the descriptive words used by the narrator to portray the landscape. The jungle has a face, it has a heart (p.48), and it looks at the narrator with a vengeful expression (p.49). The image of the woman in the jungle disintegrates into the image of the jungle itself, as observed in the following extract.

*She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it has been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose (Conrad, 1902, p.77).*

The narrative depicts the wilderness and the native woman as equally threatening. The wilderness is represented as a living figure that looks at the woman as if she is its own soul (p.77). To the narrator, the woman is both alluring and terrifying, just like the wilderness. Both the wilderness and the native woman are portrayed as silent, thoughtful, and brooding. This depiction creates a sense of hierarchical distance between the explorers (represented by Marlow) and the natives and the jungle, which are seen as one and the same. The feminization of nature and the naturalization of women in the passage suggest that the explorers seek to dominate the land and the people through the politics of distancing (othering). In this context, it appears logical for the narrator to resist the "other" (nature and the native woman) and attempt to subdue it for fear of being consumed by it.

The African wilderness lures explorers in the same way that women lure men, with the promise of penetration. By drawing parallels between women and nature, the narrator of HD constructs a justification for

controlling both. Marlow's account of his childhood passion for maps reveals his mystification and gendered conceptualization of Africa. He sees the African landscape as a blank space of "delightful mystery" (p.12). This description of the land is infused with the desire to penetrate this unexplored blank space and reveal its secrets. Enticed by the jungle's seductive call, Marlow travels deep into its heart. The masculine explorer is the subject who explores the unexplored blank spaces (virgin lands), and the act of exploration is seen as delightful and sexualized. This view is justified by the construction of a parallel between women and nature, which suggests that both are objects of male desire and control.

Another aspect of the association between women and nature in the novel is the way that both are depicted as chaotic. The landscape is described as "featureless" and "monotonous" (Conrad, 1902, p.19), and this chaotic landscape is feminized. This draws a parallel between the chaotic nature of women and nature in Africa from the narrator's point of view: "all along the formless coast was bordered by dangerous surf, *as if Nature herself* had tried to ward off intruders" (p.20, emphasis added). The narrator sees the landscape as a chaotic and resistant woman who challenges the penetrative discourse of the masculine figure. The association between nature and women through the use of the feminine pronoun is intended to justify the claim of authority over nature. Given that women are controlled by men in a patriarchal society, it seems logical to the narrator to extend this control to nature by bringing it into what appears to be ideologically natural.

In Conrad's narrative, the landscape is often sexualized and feminized. This is done through the use of metaphors such as "virgin forest" (p.12) and "fertile soil," (p.19) as well as through the description of the landscape as having feminine qualities such as passivity, inviolability, mystery, and allure (p.20). This sexualization and feminization of the landscape is then used to justify the patriarchal and imperialistic control of nature and women.

The masculine narrator's depiction of the landscape is therefore not simply a neutral description of the physical environment. It is a way of constructing the landscape as something that is to be possessed, conquered, tamed, mastered, or subdued. This is seen in the narrator's desire to penetrate the interior of the forest and to uncover its mysteries. It is also seen in the narrator's view of the wilderness as a gateway to the colonization of the natives. The sexualization and feminization of the landscape is a powerful tool for controlling nature and women. It allows the narrator to see both as objects to be conquered and possessed. It also allows him to justify the violence that is often inflicted on nature and women in the name of progress and civilization.

## 5. Discussion

This analysis explores the portrayal of nature in two colonial novels set against the backdrop of late 19<sup>th</sup> century African imperialism: *King Solomon's Mines* by Rider Haggard and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. Both novels depict the African landscape as a feminized and demonized force – a mysterious and dangerous entity that must be conquered and controlled. This portrayal aligns with the prevailing imperialist ideology of the era, as Brantlinger argues in *Rule of Darkness* (2013). The era viewed the colonized lands as savage and unruly, in need of the civilizing influence of European powers (Crosby, 1986). By demonizing and feminizing nature, these novels establish a justification for the exploitation and conquest of foreign lands, reflecting the inherent power dynamics embedded within colonial narratives.

Pertaining to the motif of demonizing nature, KSM portrays the African wilderness as a dangerous and hostile place. This aligns with the observations of critics like Brantlinger (2013), who argues that adventure narratives of the colonial era depict the colonized world as "a threatening and exotic wilderness" (p.27). In the novel, the white protagonists, Quatermain and Curtis, appear constantly on guard against wild animals, hostile tribes, and the elements. This constant state of threat reinforces the notion of the wilderness as a dangerous "other" that must be conquered. As Pratt suggests in *Imperial Eyes*, colonial texts often portray the colonized landscape as "marked by peril and mystery" (Pratt, 2007, p.54). Encounters with treacherous landscapes, and potentially hostile tribes all contribute to this portrayal reflecting the imperialist view of the colonized world as a place of savagery and barbarity. The dangers faced by Quatermain and Curtis in the uncharted African

wilderness of KSM can be seen as a way of constructing Africa as a mysterious and potentially dangerous space that needs to be "discovered" and ultimately controlled by Europeans. Hence, by depicting the African wilderness as enigmatic, the discourse of the novel justifies the need for white imperialism. This aligns with the concept of the "civilizing mission," a tenet of colonialism that positioned European intervention as necessary to bring order and progress to "uncivilized" regions.

Similar to KSM, HD utilizes the motif of demonized nature to create a sense of mystery and danger. However, Conrad goes beyond simply portraying the African wilderness as hostile. He uses it as a powerful symbol to reflect the imperialist attitudes of his time. Conrad masterfully employs imagery and symbolism to paint the Congo as a dark, dangerous, and mysterious force threatening the white protagonists. The frequent descriptions of the African tribes as "savage" and "in tune with the darkness" (Conrad, 1902, p.47) echo the colonial trope of the "uncivilized" native, aligning them with the threatening wilderness. This creates a constant sense of foreboding and danger, reinforcing the "otherness" of the African landscape. This connects with the work of Achebe, who criticizes how colonial literature often portrays Africans as "primitive" to justify European dominance (Achebe, 1976, p.17). This trope, identified by critics like Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, suggests that the colonized are inherently linked to their "uncivilized" surroundings (Said, 1994, p.187). This connection between the "savage" tribes and the "savage" landscape ultimately implies that nature itself is a place where human beings can lose their humanity. Hence, this demonization of nature in HD serves a crucial function of justifying the white protagonists' sense of superiority and their right to conquer and exploit Congo.

Beyond demonization, both KSM and HD utilize the motif of feminized nature to assert the discourse of colonial possession. However, their approaches differ. Haggard's KSM presents a more complex portrayal, showcasing the African landscape as a powerful and awe-inspiring force, embodying both beauty and destruction. Haggard feminizes nature through his use of imagery and symbolism. Lush greenery, fertile plains, and abundant wildlife evoke the feminine qualities of fertility and abundance. This aligns with Levine's observation in *Gender and Empire* that colonized landscapes were often feminized as sources of untapped wealth and potential (Levine, 2007). However, this beauty masks a hidden danger. Descriptions of poisonous plants and lurking predators introduce the feminine as a source of mystery and potential threat. This duality also reflects the Victorian anxieties surrounding female sexuality, often seen as alluring and dangerous. The feminization of nature in KSM is undoubtedly a product of its time. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of rampant European imperialism. As Gaard (1997) argues in *Ecofeminism and Wilderness*, European imperialists often viewed colonized landscapes as feminine entities that needed to be controlled and exploited – a perspective mirrored in the novel. By conquering and possessing this "feminized" wilderness, the white male protagonists assert their dominance and justify resource extraction.

Conrad, in HD, takes a more stereotypical approach to feminized nature. The Congo River itself becomes a symbol of the feminine. Described as "mighty" yet "treacherous," the river embodies the seductive allure and potential danger often associated with femininity in colonial discourse. This aligns with the concept of the "femme fatale" – a beautiful yet destructive woman – a trope explored by scholars like Bronfen (2004). Marlow's initial descriptions of the river as "resembling an immense snake uncoiled" further reinforce this association. Snakes, with their association with seduction and danger, become a recurring motif throughout the novella. Marlow's description of the river as "The snake had charmed me"(p.12) and "And the river was there—fascinating—deadly—like a snake" (p.18) reinforce this connection. Here, the river's power and mystery are equated with the captivating and potentially dangerous nature of the feminine. This connects with the Victorian anxieties surrounding female sexuality, often seen as alluring and threatening.

However, Conrad does not simply portray nature as a passive feminine force. The lushness and fertility of the jungle also evoke the feminine qualities of abundance and potential. This duality reflects the complex colonial mentality, where colonized lands were seen as sources of wealth and untamed wilderness. Marlow's descent into darkness further underscores the connection between the feminized and the corrupting. As he ventures deeper into Congo, his obsession with Kurtz and the "uncivilized" world mirrors the novel's growing

emphasis on the feminized and dangerous aspects of nature. This suggests that the feminization of nature can indeed be a gateway to darkness and corruption. This aligns with ecofeminist critiques of colonialism, which argue that the domination of nature is linked to the oppression of women (Gaard, 1993).

In a nutshell, KSM and HD expose the deep-seated imperialist beliefs of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through their portrayal of the African landscape. By demonizing nature as dangerous, hostile, and filled with savagery, these narratives justify colonial control. The "civilizing mission" becomes the supposed reason for conquering foreign lands, implying that the natives are incapable of managing their own environment. Furthermore, the feminization of nature in both novels serves a specific function. Ecofeminist scholars like Soper (1995) argue that this practice of coding nature as female is a common trope used to justify domination. By portraying the wilderness as feminine, the novels implicitly suggest that the colonizers are protecting the "primitive" natives from themselves. This further dehumanizes the indigenous population and bolsters the claim that European intervention is necessary. As Merchant (1996) observes, viewing nature as a passive resource to be exploited by a masculine culture reinforces a social hierarchy that subordinates women and those deemed closest to nature. Both novels reflect this hierarchy, ultimately justifying the subjugation of the land and its people.

The demonization and feminization of nature in KSM and HD are not merely literary devices; they are deeply rooted in the ideological and cultural anxieties of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These anxieties stemmed from a confluence of historical factors, as critics like Brantlinger argue. The rapid advancements of the Industrial Revolution and the fervent expansion of the British Empire created a sense of unease and doubt about the established order (Brantlinger, 2013). Nature, in its untamed and unfamiliar state, became a convenient target for these anxieties. By portraying the African landscape as demonic – dangerous, hostile, and shrouded in mystery – the novels provided a sense of security in the familiar. This vilification served as a way to cope with the anxieties of the unknown, as Pratt suggests. The threatening and exotic wilderness became a canvas onto which Victorian anxieties about progress and order were projected (Pratt, 2007). This connection between the "feminine" wilderness and the need for control is particularly evident in HD. Marlow's descent into darkness parallels the increasing feminization of the jungle in his descriptions. This reinforces the notion that the "uncivilized" nature, within the environment and within women, needed to be tamed and dominated. Therefore, the demonization and feminization of nature in these novels are not simply literary devices but deeply rooted in the historical context. They reveal the ideological justifications for imperialism while simultaneously exposing the anxieties of the Victorian psyche. Ultimately, this study sheds light on the environmental consequences of colonialism as portrayed in literature, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between these two forces. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. Firstly, the analysis is based solely on literary representations in KSM and HD. This focus may not fully capture the ecological realities (out of literary discourses) experienced during the colonial period in Africa. Secondly, the study does not consider counter-discourses from African writers who emerged later. These voices offer valuable insights often missing from colonial narratives. These limitations present valuable opportunities for further exploration in future scholarship.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of construal of nature in literary practices can shed light on the cultural politics behind representational discourses as depictions are constituted and guided by ideologies. This study examined the motifs of demonization and feminization used in two colonial novels to assert the possession through depicting them as Others. Using postcolonial ecocritical and ecofeminist frameworks, the study delved into how KSM and HD commonly depict the image of nature and women in Africa as targets of control and exploitation. Framed by the imperialistic ideology of the time and the Victorian apprehension about the unfamiliar and the feminine, the discourses in the novels project a horrendous as well as enticing image to the landscape. The novels were written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, during a time of European imperialism. During this period, European imperialists often saw the African wilderness as vehement and feminine force that needed to be



controlled and exploited. In representing the landscape as apprehensive and with feminine qualities, the narratives call for the male, patriarchal imperialist explorer to have dominion over nature and women. Haggard and Conrad present the African wilderness as a beautiful and seductive place, often using feminine imagery and metaphors to describe it. At the same time, they depict how it can be dangerous and threatening using the same style. Haggard, for instance, compares the wilderness to a siren who lures sailors to their deaths. Ultimately, the demonization and feminization of nature in KSM and HD are ideological tools that are used to justify imperialism and the exploitation of the colonized world. By portraying the colonized world as a place of savagery, barbarity, and mystery, the novels create a sense of entitlement that legitimizes imperialist ambitions. The image created by these works had a profound effect that the discourses created in the narratives were used to justify the western colonization of Africa. The tendency to view Africa with the same marginalization persists. It is such a portrayal of the African landscape and the people which led to a counter-discursive portrayal of the image of Africa which was spearheaded by African earlier writers like Achebe and Ngugi in the mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In conclusion, the study contributes to expanding knowledge on colonialism's ecological impact by unveiling the hidden environmental discourses in colonial narratives. It addresses a critical gap in literary scholarship, which has traditionally focused on the human costs of colonialism while neglecting the embedded environmental portrayals. By employing an ecocritical lens, the analysis reveals how the demonization and feminization of nature function as justifications for environmental control. This approach sheds light on the interconnectedness of environmental and social injustice, highlighting the link between the subjugation of nature and the oppression of women. Ultimately, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between literary discourses on colonialism and the environment. Furthermore, it paves the way for further research by establishing a framework for analyzing environmental themes in colonial literature. Future studies could explore the counter-narratives offered by later African writers, enriching our understanding of this complex dynamic.

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#### Authors' Details

<sup>1</sup> Jimma University; Department of English Language and Literature [ashenafi.belay@ju.edu.et](mailto:ashenafi.belay@ju.edu.et) / [hireebirraa@gmail.com](mailto:hireebirraa@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Addis Ababa University, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, [TesGM2@yahoo.com](mailto:TesGM2@yahoo.com)

#### Authors' Contributions

1. Ashenafi Belay Adugna: conceptualized the project, conducted the study, collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, and wrote the manuscript.
2. Tesfaye Gebremariam Hailu: supervised the project, edited the manuscript, and offered comments.

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Corresponding author's signature:  Ashenafi Belay Adugna

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