1 Colonial Encounters: Rulers and Subjects

These stories take place during the colonial period. The one by Conrad (An Outpost of Progress) is set at the height of European imperialism and the others reflect the gradual decline of the British Empire.

1.1 An Outpost of Progress

The story is about failure of colonization.

Kayerts and Carlier fail because of their laziness, because they are unable to cope with the conditions and because they don’t take on the job of a leader and let Makola do it instead, who treats the natives badly without being told off by the colonizers.

Kayerts and Carlier do not fulfill the tasks they’re given. They lack proper work ethic which is shown by their neglect of their business and everyday work in the household. The situation becomes worst when they start a fight about that last lump of sugar.

The story is very ironic, starting with the title: There is no much progress in the outpost suffering from its leader’s laziness.

1.1.1 Setting

The story is set in the Belgian colony of Congo in the late 19th century, at the height of British and European empires.

1.1.2 Plot

Two Europeans, Kayerts and Carlier, have been put in charge to run an unimportant trading station in the Congo and are left with food for six months, a time in which the steamer of the trading company is to come back and fetch them. Both are lazy and the outpost in fact is run by Makola, a Negro storekeeper. One night Makola secretly sells the station’s ten native workers to some African slave dealers for ivory. When Kayerts and Carlier eventually find out they are horrified, but do not do anything about it. The natives of the surrounding villages, who up to now supplied them with extra food stay away out of fear. The relationship of the two Europeans starts to deteriorate and in a quarrel over the last lump of sugar, Kayerts accidentally shoots Carlier and then hangs himself, just the day before the steamer comes back.

1.1.3 Characters

Kayerts is short and fat, Carlier is tall with a large hat. They both had been unsuccessful in Europe and hope to get rich in Africa.
Makola is the one really running the outpost. He is more or less just working for his own benefit and belongs neither fully to the natives (he even got a European name, Henry Price) nor to the Europeans.

Gobila is the leader of the local native tribe. He is seen as inferior by the Europeans but in fact they are dependent on him bringing them food.

1.2 The Force of Circumstance

The story is about racism and the colonizer’s fear of going native.

Doris is racist because she cannot bear the thought of her husband being with a black woman and Guy is racist because he treats the Malay woman like an object which can be thrown away as soon as he finds a suitable white woman.

Maugham shows how colonization dehumanizes the European colonizers who start behaving different from the social norms when they are this far away from home. They exploit the colonized and behave irresponsible.

1.2.1 Setting

The story is set in British Borneo (Malaysia) at the beginning of the 20th century, at the decline of empires.

1.2.2 Plot

Guy, an small British colonial outpost’s administrator, has been in Borneo for over ten years. On his trip home to Britain he met a young woman, Doris, and they married four weeks later. After they returned to his outpost, they are very happy but only until Doris notices a young Malay woman with a baby in her arms keeping to hang around their bungalow. This upsets Guy but he refuses to tell Doris the reason. Eventually, he confesses that he used to live with the woman and that her two half-caste children are his.

Doris asks for time to consider this news and, in the meantime, refuses to share her bedroom with her husband. The atmosphere remains strained why they continue to live as before. Even though she can understand that he acted out of loneliness, she cannot bear the thought of him being with the Malay woman and after six months she decides to return to England. Unhappy and lonely, Guy allows the Malay woman and their children to come back.

1.2.3 Characters

Guy is a fun-loving and happy person, who likes to have a good time and to laugh. The moral responsibility towards his family is limited to material terms. He does not feel affection for his two children.

Doris is a ‘typical English girl’ who is the opposite of Guy in many aspects. She is pretty and self-contained.

The Malay woman is somehow omnipresent but rarely really part of the scene.

1.3 Shooting an Elephant

The story is about the conflict people are in who represent the Empire but are not really comfortable with imperialism and the conflict between group pressure and conscience. The dying Elephant is a symbol for the Raj, the British reign in India. The narrator rejects the role of authoritarian sahib and hates to see the English humiliating the Burmese. Nevertheless, by allowing the crowd to dictate to him he becomes the very type of person he hates, a puppet of the imperial masters.
1.3.1 Setting

The story is set in the British colony of Burma at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, at the decline of empires.

1.3.2 Plot

The story begins with the narrator describing the terrible position he is in as a colonial policeman in Burma because of the natives’ hatred and resentment of the British. He himself detests imperialism and the part he is forced to play in it. He is caught between sympathizing with the Burmese and anger at the way they treat him.

He is called to deal with an elephant gone wild who has broken loose from its chains. The animal is destroying a hut and for his self-defense he sends for an elephant rifle. The huge crowd which has gathered expects him to shoot the elephant, partly because they want to have some ‘fun’ and partly because they see it as his duty. He does not want to shoot the elephant, partly because it is very valuable. Not shooting the elephant would be seen as incompetence and because of the pressure he finally shoots the elephant. He is ashamed of himself and glad to be able to hide behind the legal justification for his action when he finds out that the elephant had killed someone.

1.4 The Second Hut

The story is about the problems of isolation, incompetence and the relationship between three ethnic groups.

1.4.1 Setting

The story is set in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia in about 1930 when white settlers demanded independence and black Africans lose more and more rights.

1.4.2 Plot

The farm of an English immigrant to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, Major Carruthers, is about to fail. When he first bought it, his wife was enthusiastic about it but over time she has become discouraged and now spends all her time in bed, suffering from depression. The Major realizes that he cannot manage on his own and needs an assistant. An Afrikaner, Van Heerden, applies and although Britains and Afrikaners are traditional enemies neither of them has a choice.

The Dutchman moves into a small hut on the farm and things begin to get better. Van Heerden is great at handling animals and Major Carruthers, who does not realize that Van Heerden treat the native workers very badly, is satisfied with him and refuses when the natives want him to fire Van Heerden.

Major Carruthers eventually finds out that Van Heerden has secretly moved his wife and nine children into his tiny hut. The kind, sensitive Major feels obliged to build them a second hut. The African workers are unhappy to build a hut for the hated Africaner, especially since they are supposed to do it on their free day. However, the Major manages to persuade them and the family moves into the second hut. The following night the second hut is on fire and burns down. It is obvious that someone set fire to the hut but nothing can be proved.

The fate of Van Heerden and his family makes the Major realize that before long his farm will fail completely and he finally admits defeat and does what his wife has been asking for a long time: He swallows his pride and writes to his brother in England, asking for help in finding a job back home.

1.4.3 Characters

**Major Carruthers** Unsuccessful in Britain he wants to escape from his family’s expectations and become a ‘gentleman farmer’ in Africa but is not able to manage a farm. He is friendly, but
weak. His wife is depressive and his children are on a boarding school back home in Britain.

Mr Van Heerden looks the opposite of Carruthers, strong, young and energetic. He is able to deal with animals but is not friendly and treats the native workers with cruelty.

Mrs Van Heerden is the complete opposite of Mrs Carruthers, full of life and energy. She gave birth to nine children and when one dies in the fire, the next is just about to come. To the Major she represents nature itself, “less a human being than the expression of an elemental, irrepressible force”.

2 Cross-Cultural Experiences: Transition and Conflict

The three short stories in the second chapter are by Indian, Nigerian and Kenyan writers. All of those three countries were once British colonies and since independence have joined the Commonwealth of Nations.

2.1 Dead Men’s Path

The story is about the necessary failure if one tries to blindly force Western values onto someone without respecting the former believes.

2.1.1 Setting


2.1.2 Plot

The young Michael Obi is made headmaster of a school in order to modernize it. Besides improving academic standards Obi and his wife feel that in order to be modern the school must have a beautiful garden.

One evening Obi discovers a path going right through the new garden and immediately closes it. The village priest try to persuade him to let the villagers walk through the school compound because the path, leading to the burial ground, is very important to them. They believe the dead and the babies use this path but Obi completely rejects these ideas as backward superstitions which he is determined to eradicate.

However, when a woman dies in childbirth the villagers blame Obi for blocking the path. They destroy the garden and part of the school. When the school inspector arrives, he writes a negative report about Obi’s over-enthusiastic, misguided approach.

2.1.3 Characters

Michael Obi has a passion for ‘modern methods’ and wants to improve the educational standards in the region. He is intolerant of anyone who does not share his ideas and looks down on older, less modern teachers and traditional believes.

Nancy Obi is also interested in modern methods but in contrast to her husband not on an academical level but more like a Bildungstrager in modernity. She unthinkingly takes over Western ideas and even imitates the phrases she reads in European women’s magazines. She fully supports her husband.

Ani (the village priest) is the opposite of Michael: Old and wise, he has better communication skills and tries to solve the conflict by dialogue. He is able to admit that someone else may be right and remains calm in any situation. He suggests a compromise when Obi says that he wants to destroy the villagers’ religious beliefs.
2.2 A Horse and Two Goats

The story is about a gap between languages as well as about a gap between Western and Indian values, between material property and spirituality.

2.2.1 Setting

A village in Southern India between 1945 and 1960 in the times of decolonization and independence.

2.2.2 Plot

An old Indian man, Muni, is grazing his goats near the statue of a horse somewhere in a small village. The horse had been very important to the villagers, but does no longer. An American tourist drives up and stops at the sight of the statue.

They try to have a conversation but neither of them understands the other’s language. The American thinks that Muni owns the statue and wants to buy it from him, the Indian is at first afraid, imagining that the visitor is a policeman questioning him about a murder until he realizes that the American man is talking about the statue and then starts to tell him about the statue’s spiritual history.

When the stranger takes out money to buy the statue, Muni thinks he wants to buy his two goats, he wanted to sell for a long time. He takes the money and goes home. The American, believing that he is now the owner of the statue, thinks that Muni has gone to fetch help and settles down to wait for him.

2.3 A Meetings in the Dark

The story is about the impact of dogmatic Christianity on traditional tribal societies.

2.3.1 Setting


2.3.2 Plot

A bright young boy, Jon, is going to leave his native village for university. The whole village is proud of him, especially his father, a local preacher. Besides wanting him to have good education, his father also tries to turn the boy into what he sees as a model Christian, but is dogmatic and tries to control every aspect of his son’s life.

John’s girlfriend is a girl who lives according to the village traditions. His father would never accept the relationship because he expects a more ‘modern’ lifestyle from his son. When the girl becomes pregnant John fears that this would stop his plans of going to university and is terribly afraid of his fathers reactions. When the girl refuses to lie about the father, he sees no way out and kills her.

2.3.3 Characters

Stanley is John’s father. In his youth, he slept with Susana before they married and to save his soul, he converted to Christianity – this is why he does not want his son to repeat his ‘sin’. He symbolizes the negative and destructive aspects of the Christian religion.

Susana is John’s mother. She is more thoughtful than Stanley and although she outwardly supports him, she does criticize John’s behaviour towards his son.

Wamuhu is John’s girlfriend. Wamuhu and her family represent the tribal traditions. She is beautiful but uneducated and according to tribal tradition, she has been circumcised, a procedure that is opposed and described as cruel by Western people.
John does not belong to either of the groups. He is liked by the Western-oriented like the headmaster, because he is well-educated and liked by the villagers because he respects the traditions. He is alienated from all other youths. He fears his both his father’s and God’s anger.

3 Post-Colonial Consequences: Searching for New Identities

Three of the four stories are set in modern Britain at the time when large numbers of people migrated from former colonies to Britain. One of the stories is about a Pakistan woman supposed to migrate to Britain. The stories are about the problems a multicultural society and migrants have to face.

3.1 The Black Madonna

The story is about snobbishness, hypocrisy and stereotypes.

3.1.1 Setting

Whitney Clay Town, near Liverpool

3.1.2 Plot

Raymond and Lou Parker live in a council flat in a Catholic area of an English town. They are the only childless couple around and desperately want to have a child. They like to see themselves as modern, middle-class and liberal-minded. When two Jamaicans start to work in Raymond’s department, they make friends with the young men.

When they take the Jamaicans to meet Lou’s poor sister Elisabeth who lives in a London slum with eight children even though Raymond and Lou support her financially and is neglected by the Raymonds who had avoided her for many years. The visit is only intended to show of their tolerance in befriending blacks.

When one of the Jamaicans, Oxford St. John, makes a suggestive remark to her, she prays to a statue that he will leave town. He does, and when the other Jamaican, Henry Pierce, is ill she prays again to the black Madonna and Pierce indeed gets better. Finally, she and Raymond start praying for a child.

Shortly after, Lou becomes pregnant. Their joy is shortlived: The child is black. Everybody thinks the father is one of the Jamaicans, even though tests prove that it is Raymond’s child. The explanation is that there is negro blood in Lou’s family. To avoid rumours, the Parkers decide to have their baby adopted and move to London.

3.1.3 Characters

The Parkers like to see themself as open-minded but this is only a fassade. They are snobbish and think that they are better than their neighbors because they don’t have a TV, own a car and only watch movies recommended by The Observer, a middle-class paper. They call themselves middle-class but Raymond is just a worker in a factory.

3.2 Good Advice Is Rarer than Rubies

The story is about immigration and the realization that life is not automatically better in Britain than in the Third World.

3.2.1 Setting

British Consulate in Pakistan; restriction of New Commonwealth immigrants to Britain, especially from 1968 onwards.
3.2.2 Plot

*Good Advice Is Rarer than Rubies* is the story of a young Pakistani woman, Miss Rehana, who goes to the British Consulate to apply for a British passport in order to join her fiancé in England. Her fiancé is twenty years older – he had promised to her parents that he would care for her and when her parents died, he ent for her. However, they are strangers to another, since he emigrated to England many years ago.

Miss Rehana is one of the many ‘Tuesday womens’ who arrive at the Consulate every Tuesday wanting a passport. The officials test the women in embarrassing interviews because they suspect many of the applications to be not genuine. An old man, Muhammed Ali, exploits the women by offering them false passports for money.

When he approaches Miss Rehana he is stunned by her beauty and offers her his ‘help’ for free, something which even surprises himself. Miss Rehana refuses and goes for her interview. She returns very happy and Muhammed thinks she has been successful, but in fact she gave wrong answers to the questions she was asked and so was refused a passport. She has obviously decided that her lie in Pakistan is preferable to an uncertain future with a stranger in Britain. Her smile was the happiest thing Ali has ever seen.

3.2.3 Characters

**Miss Rehana** is beautiful and self-confident. She is the only woman waiting in front of the consulate all alone and the only one who does not look afraid. She is honest and does not want to “justify the low opinion the Consulate sahibs have of us all”. She does not war a veil which might be a sign that she does not unquestioningly accept religious ideas.

**Muhammed Ali** is a petty crook but still somehow likeable. He is a tragi-comic figure who is completely overwhelmed by Miss Rehanas beauty and innocence. He is funny when he “nodded with what he hoped looked like wisdom” but we know that he had a hart, unhappy life.

3.3 A Pair of Jeans

The story is about second-generation immigrants being caught between the traditional culture of their parents and the culture of the country they live in.

3.3.1 Setting

Manchester, England; first and second generation immigrants.

3.3.2 Plot

Miriam is a young Pakistani college student in Britain. She just returns from a walk in the country with sine friends, when she meets her future parents-in-law Ayub and Begum just before her home. They want to make arrangements for the wedding of Miriam and their son, Farook, which is supposed to take place in six month’s time.

They see Miriam in Western-style clothes with a naked waist and are shocked. She quickly changes into traditional dress, but the damage has been done. Ayub and Begum fear that Miriam might not be the docile and obedient daughter-in-law they expect and cancel the engagement.

Miriam and her family are humiliated. Her mother seems to accept the decision but Miriam is very angry.

In the first ending, Miriam appears to be so disappointed that she cannot marry Farook that she rejects her Western-style clothes and, presumably, the whole system of values which go with it. She seems to be willing to conform to the traditional stereotype of women in order to marry her fiancé.

In the second ending, Miriam refuses to allow herself to be treated in this way and calls Farook to discuss the matter. The ending is open.
3.3.3 Characters

**Miriam** is raised with Western traditions in mind and places a high value on personal freedom. She has learned that men and women are equal. She is respectful to the traditions but makes clear that she wants to make the decisions for her life by herself.

**Fatima** is Miriam’s mother and has accepted Western values. She herself still sticks to Muslim traditions but gives her daughter a lot of freedom and is willing to discuss problems openly.

**Farook** is Miriam’s fiancé.

**Ayub** is Farook’s father. He is very strict about Muslim traditions and is unwilling to change his ideas. He is grown up in a society where men have the complete authority and does not discuss, he just makes decisions.

**Begum** is Farook’s mother and Ayub’s wife. She outwardly tries to defend Miriam a little, although she is supposed to just obey her husband, but inwardly basically shares his opinion.

3.4 My Son the Fanatic

The story is about the conflict and lack of identity second-generation immigrants often suffer from.

3.4.1 Setting

Bradford, Northern England; first and second generation immigrants.

3.4.2 Plot

Parvez is a first generation Pakistani immigrant to Britain and a taxi driver who has completely adopted Western lifestyle. His son Ali suddenly starts behaving strangely: he has given away his possessions, dropped is friends and broke up with his English girlfriend. Bettina, a prostitute Parvez is befriended with, suggests that Ali might be taking drugs and Parvez starts to spy on him but cannot find any evidence.

Ali starts growing a beard and praying five times a day. Parvez wants to ask his son what made him religious ‘over night’ but Ali first refuses to talk about it. Finally, in a restaurant, Ali accuses his father of breaking Islamic rules and of having become to integrated into British society. Parvez is trying to explain why he tries to adopt the lifestyle of the country he lives in but Ali starts raging about the sinfulness of Western materialism and refuses any compromise. Horrified, Parvez drinks to much and on the way home he tells that he loves Britain because of the freedom it allows the individual – which is exactly what Ali hates about it.

Ali decides to give up his studies in accounting and, instead, does charity work for other Muslims. This destroys Parvez dream who has worked hard for many years to enable Ali to have a better life.

Bettina suggests Parvez to remain calm, which he does. When the two of them accidentally see Ali while driving in the taxi, they stop and invite Ali in the car. He is so rude to Bettina that she leaves. Back home, Parvez is angry and drinks a lot of alcohol. Eventually he beats up Ali, who does not hit him back but accuses his father of being a fanatic.

3.4.3 Characters

**Parvez** works hard just for his son’s future. He was forced to religion with cruelty in his youth and is no longer interested in it. He likes Western lifestyle, drinks a lot and maybe cheats on his wife with Bettina, but is a caring father.

**Ali** suffers from a problem many second generation immigrants have: He neither fully belongs to the Pakistani world nor to the British. In the process of searching his identity, he becomes a
religious fundamentalist: The strict rules and the unquestionable dogmas give him the security he is looking for.

**Quellen**

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