

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of the English Language and Literature

## BACHELOR THESIS

A comparison of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* with  
the videogame *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*

Srovnání románu Josepha Conrada *Srdce temnoty* s videohrou  
*Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*

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## Declaration:

I hereby declare that I have elaborated this thesis individually and that all the sources that were used are listed on the Works Cited section. No other sources were used. Furthermore, I confirm that this work has not been used to obtain another or the same title before.

Prague, 20th April 2018

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* inspired the videogame *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*, in particular in its contemporary political views and historical events. The theoretical part introduces the Victorian world of Colonialism and Eurocentrism, as well as the relevant aspects of J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, lastly presenting the videogame *Victoria II* and its later addition, *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*. The practical part then explores the various aspects of the videogame and its inspiration by the original book, finding out just what exact aspects the videogame takes from its namesake.

Key words: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, *Victoria II*, *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*, Paradox Interactive, Grand Strategy, Videogames, History, Colonialism, Imperialism, Congo, Belgium, Leopold II, Scramble for Africa, Genocide

## Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je prozkoumat jak J. Conradovo *Srdce temnoty* inspirovalo videohru *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*, především v oblasti dobových politických názorů a historických událostí. Teoretická část představí eurocentrismus a kolonialismus Viktoriánské doby bok po boku s pro práci významnými aspekty Conradova *Srdce temnoty*. Nakonec bude v teoretické části představena sama videohra *Victoria II* a její pozdější dodatek, *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*. V praktické části budou poté prozkoumány různé aspekty videohry a způsoby inspirace videohry Conradovým dílem za účelem zjištění co přesně si videohra bere od své knižní předlohy.

Klíčová slova: Joseph Conrad, *Srdce temnoty*, *Viktoria II*, *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*, Paradox Interactive, velkostrategie, videohry, dějiny, kolonialismus, imperialismus, Kongo, Belgie, Leopold druhý, dělení Afriky, genocida

# Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2 Theoretical Part.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 History.....	8
As with all stories, it is useful to understand which events preceded what and how the situation unfolded to its current state.....	8
2.1.1 The Kingdom of Kongo.....	8
2.1.2 Belgium.....	9
2.1.3 Leopold II.....	10
2.1.4 The United Kingdom.....	11
2.1.5 Queen Victoria.....	12
2.1.6 Imperialism & Racism.....	13
2.1.6.1 Racism.....	13
2.1.6.2 Imperialism.....	14
2.1.7 The Scramble for Africa.....	15
2.1.8 Technology.....	16
2.1.8.1 Steam Engine.....	16
2.1.8.2 Steam Boat.....	16
2.1.8.3 Weapons.....	17
2.2 Heart of Darkness.....	18
2.2.1 Public reception.....	18
2.2.1.1 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.....	18
2.2.1.2 Chinua Achebe.....	19
2.2.1.3 Lindqvist.....	20
2.2.2 Lindqvist and Conrad's life.....	22
2.3 Victoria 2.....	22
2.3.1 Paradox Interactive.....	22
2.3.2 Development - Dev diaries.....	24
<b>3 Practical part.....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1 Racism, Slavery, and Africans.....	27
3.1.1 Heart of Darkness.....	27
3.1.1.1 Africans.....	27
3.1.1.2 Racism.....	28
3.1.2 Victoria 2.....	29
3.1.3 Synthesis.....	31
3.2 Religion.....	31
3.2.1 Heart of Darkness.....	31
3.2.1.1 God.....	31
3.2.1.2 Devil.....	32
3.2.2 Victoria 2.....	32
3.2.3 Synthesis.....	32
3.3 The Sea and its Ships.....	33
3.3.1 Heart of Darkness.....	33

3.3.1.1 Ships.....	33
3.3.1.2 The Sea.....	34
3.3.2 Victoria 2.....	34
3.3.2.1 Ships.....	34
3.3.2.2 Sea.....	35
3.3.3 Synthesis.....	36
3.4 Africa.....	36
3.4.1 Heart of Darkness.....	36
3.4.2 Victoria 2.....	37
3.4.2.1 The Portrayal of Africa.....	37
3.4.3 Synthesis.....	38
3.5 Women.....	39
3.5.1 Heart of Darkness.....	39
3.5.2 Victoria 2.....	40
3.5.3 Synthesis.....	41
3.6 Technology.....	41
3.6.1 Heart of Darkness.....	41
3.6.2 Victoria 2.....	42
3.6.3 Synthesis.....	43
3.7 Goods.....	43
3.7.1 Heart of Darkness.....	43
3.7.2 Victoria 2.....	44
3.7.3 Synthesis.....	45
3.8 Europe.....	45
3.8.1 Heart of Darkness.....	45
3.8.3 Synthesis.....	47
3.9 Europeans.....	47
3.9.1 Heart of Darkness.....	47
3.9.1.1 Foreigners.....	47
3.9.1.2 White Men.....	48
3.9.1.3 Kurtz.....	49
3.9.2 Victoria 2.....	49
3.9.3 Synthesis.....	50
3.10 Courtesy of Victoria 2.....	51
3.10.1 Music.....	51
3.10.2 Artwork.....	51
3.11 Courtesy of Heart of Darkness.....	51
<b>4 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>5 Sources.....</b>	<b>52</b>

# 1 Introduction

I am a child of the Internet. I grew up surrounded by the primordial soup of three-colour websites, various tutorials for barely legal crafts, and many and all ventures all who entered the place cared to embark on, still mainly uncensored by the contemporary mainstream and general attention. Even ten years ago, the Internet was still a very different place from today, and while it has entered the general subconscious as memes and news engulfed nigh every corner of the modern society, and even as the term ‘geek’ has slowly lost its pejorative meaning, it was still a place much less constrained than it is today.

One could think of the 2010s as a limbo between the Internet of old and the Internet of today, and it was very undoubtedly so for video games. However, most of the popular video games of relevance released in 2010 were video games from major studios, such as Bioware’s *Mass Effect 2*, Blizzard’s *Starcraft 2* or *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, or Ubisoft’s legendary *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. These were all games which dealt with their own interpretations of history and literature. They were modern pieces of art, some of which very much stand as equals, in their literary exposition, to canonical works of the past. However, these video games were made for the masses. They were flashy, catchy, with enormous budgets ranging from dozens to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Yet these were not the only games coming out in the video game industry. There were many smaller, independent ‘indie’ studios, making their own pieces of art, with much smaller budgets, of course, but often with profound talent behind them. Unlike the followers and developers of the major game franchises, these indie developers were often children of the Internet; Erudite people many a time rejected by society, as their interests lay not in the popular and the catchy, but in meticulous delving into the past of our world. History, sciences, futurism; they took an approach much more faithful to what they believed in, instead of ‘selling out’ to the mainstream, just as many faithful gamers like to claim big studios have begun doing.

One of these faithful and passionate studios was Paradox Interactive. And one of their works would be *Victoria II*, a game of controlling a nation as an unspecified, never mentioned entity, in a world at the dawn of Queen Victoria’s reign.



This 'spreadsheet simulator', as many like to jokingly call it, would be one of the several titles which would pave Paradox Interactive's path to greatness. And as video games are still ultimately a business venture, the release of two subsequent expansions to the main game only confirms that a video game concept of 'looking at a map' can achieve tremendous success.

However, it would be the later expansions which would cement the game's place in the sun. First, *Victoria 2: House Divided*, concerned with the American Civil War, and then yet another expansion, released in 2013, with a very peculiar and meaningful name. *Victoria 2: Heart of Darkness*.

*Victoria 2: Heart of Darkness*, and how exactly it has borrowed the contemporary influences found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is going to be the main topic of this thesis.

Firstly, in the theoretical part, concepts mandatory for understanding the 19th century world will be explored, such as the Belgian or British historical backgrounds, Racism, and Imperialism. Attention will also be given to *Heart of Darkness*' presence in popular culture preceding the release of the videogame, its expansions, and the underlying philosophies the developers adopted for the creation process.

The third section of the theoretical part will delve into Paradox Interactive itself, its history, and present *Victoria II: Heart of Darkness*.

The practical part of the thesis will then focus on comparing several contemporary themes of the age, such as the game's and the book's representation of Africa, or how relevant various technologies are for their understanding.

The premeditated goal is to simply meditate on how two works, bearing the same name, a hundred years apart, understand the Victorian world, and to discover whether *Victoria 2: Heart of Darkness* took any inspiration from its namesake, other than considering it a representative of the age.

## 2 Theoretical Part

### 2.1 History

When comparing works which are closely related to history, one of them itself being an important work of history, it is very useful to understand the historical context, and what events preceded the time period under the lens. As such, this section will present several historical areas crucial for understanding the Victorian world.

#### 2.1.1 The Kingdom of Kongo

The Congo basin was not always 'empty' in a way of not being ruled by a centralised state. There used to exist a powerful, centralised Kingdom of Kongo, "The kingdom was already a powerful and extensive domain when the first Portuguese arrived in 1483," (Bostoen 17) with which the Portuguese started trading with, even thought that "Portuguese (aim) was mainly to find minerals, soon trade relations focused on the sale of slaves." (Bostoen 3) which the Kongo kingdom is known for hunting and selling themselves.

The Kingdom of Kongo was a centralised state with its own traditions "Kongo's traditions are the letters of Kongo's King Afonso Mvemba a Nzinga" (Bostoen 19) and an elaborate slave culture tied to one's class, wherein "In African terms "class struggle" pits chiefs against their rivals to determine who will be free, who will be a slave" (Bostoen 47)

Unfortunately, however, due to royal struggles, "The new Count of Soyo , Paulo da Silva , intervened in Kongo soon after the battle, overthrowing Á lvaro VII , who had taken over from several rivals to represent the Kinlaza , and installing his own Kimpanzu king as Á lvaro VIII" (Bostoen 121), and the outside Portugues influences, as clearly present in the ruler names themselves, the Kingdom of Kongo fell into destructive civil wars from which it never recovered, decentralising, and ultimately disappearing forever.

#### 2.1.2 Belgium

Half the globe away from the hot Congolese jungles and one and a half centuries later, Belgium emerged as a new nation on the European stage, "Belgium itself was barely older than its young monarch. After spells of Spanish, Austrian, French, and Dutch rule, it had only become independent in 1830, following a revolt against Holland" (Hochschild 40) seeing themselves not as a grand people, but as "Petit pays, petits gens" (small country, small people)," (Hochschild 43), albeit they did not lack ambition, "Belgium would become one of

the richest countries in the world." (Hochschild 43) as Leopold II once stated, representing both his later oratory genius and the thinking of the Belgian people.

Belgium, by itself, bore little colonial ambition, as there was a "widespread feeling in Belgium that, for a small country, a colony would be a money-losing extravagance." (Hochschild 74) The country, after all, posed little threat to their neighbours. "The French did not feel threatened by tiny Belgium or by the vast size of Leopold's claims." (Hochschild 93) and besides Leopold, most of Belgium wished to keep it so.

However, through their ambitious ruler's efforts, they would partake in the colonial experience, eventually even embracing the prestige Leopold's colonial ventures brought, as "Colonial-heroic literature elevated it to a central place in the period's official mythology, echoes of which can be heard in Belgium to this day." (Hochschild 148)

Belgians did not object to the immense riches their ruler's pet project had brought them, either "What mattered was keeping the ivory flowing back to Belgium." (Hochschild 155) often in the form of valuable goods, acquired at the cost of immense human suffering. "The ship that took the Congolese back to their homeland probably returned to Belgium with a cargo of rubber, for the riches of the Congo were now flowing to Europe on a regular schedule." (Hochschild 198)

However, the early history of Belgium cannot be clearly understood without exploring the mind of its first ruler, Leopold II.

### 2.1.3 Leopold II

After gaining its independence from Holland, as a proper European nation, Belgium, of course, as was right and proper for a country, had to have a monarch. As such, "Leopold II had inherited the distinctive title by which his country's monarchs were known, King of the Belgians" (Hochschild 40)

Leopold himself was, in his early years, a rather outlandish and unpleasant character. "He was an ungainly, haughty young man whom his first cousin Queen Victoria of England thought "very odd" and in the habit of "saying disagreeable things to people." (Hochschild 42)

However, more than a monarch, he was a man with a business acumen, and it became his firm belief that, "Il faut à la Belgique une colonie (Belgium must have a colony)" (Hochschild 45)

Most of the world, was, however, taken. At first, Leopold was rather bold in his interest. “visited the East Indian islands owned, to his irritation, by Belgium's next-door neighbor, Holland,” (Hochschild 44)

But, after years of searching, he did spot his target, and began plotting a majestic plan, which ultimately succeeded, during which he would outwit even the Iron Chancellor himself, and gain Europe’s and America’s support for his supposedly well-intended ownership of the Congo, his final obstacle, curiously, being the Belgian parliament itself. “To obtain this approval, he had to promise that the Congo would never be a financial drain on Belgium.” (Hochschild 103)

Leopold had become a skilful manipulator, being known and well liked as Europe’s philanthropist, recruiting such people as Henry Morton Stanley “Leopold invited Stanley to Belgium for a week.” (Hochschild 106), and rebranding himself from an uncanny man to “a pleasant and entertaining conversationalist.” (Hochschild 120)

After his success, and exploitation of the Congo for “his company's ships arriving filled to the hatch covers with valuable cargoes of rubber and ivory.” (Hochschild 1), the consequences of his rule would be nigh a genocide. “This would mean, according to the estimates, that during the Leopold period and its immediate aftermath the population of the territory dropped by approximately ten million people.” (Hochschild 259)

This murderous spree, during which he “never saw a drop of blood spilled in anger. He never set foot in the Congo.” (Hochschild 10) ultimately resulted, through brave efforts of many journalists, in the exposure of the Congo genocide. And, in a last act of spite, “He would sell it. And Belgium, the buyer, would have to pay dearly” (Hochschild 286) to none other than his own nation, finally settling at “110 million francs' worth of debts, the nearly 32 million francs worth of loans Leopold had never paid back., 45.5 million francs toward completing certain of the king's pet building projects” (Hochschild 287)

#### 2.1.4 The United Kingdom

The history of the United Kingdom begins almost two millennia ago, when “Its involvement with Rome started before the Conquest launched by Claudius in AD 43” (Morgan 9)

However, as venerable the length of its story is, for the events of the book, a more recent England is required. Firstly, the British became known for their navy, which, historically, they learned to utilise to the fullest during their wars with Spain, “Moreover, although later

generations boasted that she kept Spain at bay at minimum cost by avoiding foreign alliances and relying on the royal navy. (Morgan 309)

After the defeat of the Spanish Armada 1588, they became invested in the colonial rush for anything Spain or Portugal did not already settle. “rivalries in the colonial spheres (South Asia, Africa, North, Central, and South America) were intensifying, no territories were ceded and expansion continued steadily” (Morgan 343), gaining experience in Colonial warfare during “The Nine Years War (1688-97) and the War of Spanish Succession (1702-13) involved Britain in both Continental and colonial warfare” (Morgan 402)

As the British colonies developed, they began “to be seen primarily as valuable sources of raw materials “ (Morgan 426) and “By the 1750s, the full importance of the thirteen American colonies was beginning to be appreciated” (Morgan 426)

Furthermore, with the establishment of the autonomous “In India, the advantage enjoyed by the British East India Company was marginal but it was decisive” (Morgan 451), the United Kingdom gained rule over the Asian jewel.

With its massively growing power, “The expression 'the empire on which the sun never sets' was quite accurately applied to the British Empire of the 18th and 19th centuries.” (phrases.org.uk), even though “The first empire so described was the Spanish Empire of the 17th century.” (phrases.org.uk) the phrase became widely used for the British Empire during the Victorian era, as Queen Victoria became the embodiment of the height of British power.

### 2.1.5 Queen Victoria

“On the 24th May 1819, Victoire gave birth at Kensington Palace to the child who would later be named Victoria.” (Hourly History 8) The Queen was born. Many decades later, Queen Victoria would become the embodiment of an era, and centuries later would still continue to mysticise as a ruler embodying a set of very conservative, traditional, and to some, even melancholic values.

Coronated at the Westminster Abbey on 27th June 1838, she then married Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, initially by the design of his grandmother, Duchess Augusta. However, “Albert swept her off her feet.” (Hourly History 17) and they became partners, who achieved many great things together.

She ruled the United Kingdom through extraordinarily difficult times. “The 1840s... referred to by many as the Hungry Forties. In Ireland the Great Famine... killed over 1 million people

with a million more leaving Ireland” as “The people of rural Scotland were hit by the Highland Clearances, during which thousands of Scottish farmers were forced from their lands, and in England and Wales the new urban working class swelled to epic proportions, bringing the quality of life in Britain’s industrial cities to terrible new lows.” (Hourly History 26)

Despite that, she persevered, and lived to oversee the “Great Exhibition... successful in its aim to show the world that Great Britain was an industrial leader and held the key to a better future for all.” (Hourly History 27) where “Over six million people attended” and which “the Queen herself visited three times. (Hourly History 27)

Unfortunately, on the 14th December 1861, Prince Albert died, aged 42; an event the queen would never fully recover from, and thanks to which she would hide in seclusion for several years, as she “refused to return to any real for of public life for most of the rest of her life” (Hourly History 35)

Later on in her life, though, in “1873... Victoria expressed a desire to take on the title of Empress of India. The East India Trading Company had been forcing India to succumb to British rule since the 1750s.” (Hourly History 44)

“Victoria died of a cerebral haemorrhage on the 22nd January 1901 at Osborne House.” (Hourly History 46, marking an end to an era, and being, indirectly, the beginning of Britain’s fall from primacy.

## 2.1.6 Imperialism & Racism

### 2.1.6.1 Racism

To truly understand European Imperialism, one needs to first understand European racism. Many characters contributed to its rise, however, while being preceded by many various ad hoc philosophies of race, Charles Darwin would end up being one of its main contributors, even though “In a sense, Charles Darwin’s humanitarianism made him an unlikely convert to racism.” (Beasley 97). In his earlier works, Darwin refuses the idea of applying biological pressures on the Human race, “Therefore, Darwin concludes, humanity is highly variable at the individual level. We are not therefore a ‘racial’ species, for we are in a different biological category” (Beasley 101), and proving his abolitionist stance “against... background of scepticism about race in *The Origin of Species*, Darwin’s abolitionist sympathies ran free in

the 1860s. Darwin was revolted by the openly racist violence of Governor Eyre in Jamaica.” (Beasley 99).

However, ultimately, something changed, and “In *The Descent of Man* ( 1871 ), Darwin made public his conviction. Today between the primates and civilized man are intermediate forms such as gorillas and savages, he says in chapter 6” (Lindqvist 100). The change being so drastic that, the former abolitionist he was, “Darwin is not above crude racist humour: ‘The resemblance of *Pithecia satanas* with his jet black skin, white rolling eyeballs, and hair parted on the top of the head, to a negro in miniature, is almost ludicrous” (Beasley 102)

After Darwin, one of the more prominent torchbearers of racism would be Robert Knox. He was not unique in his view, but rather terribly contemporary, “From total ignorance, via this autopsy, Knox takes a giant stride directly to statements such as: "To me, race, or hereditary descent, is everything; it stamps the man:" and "Race is everything: literature, science, art, in a word, civilization, depend on it." (Beasley 118) These statements also prove a growing idea of a link between race and civilisation, which would, over time, lead to the excuse we now call Imperialism and its noble ‘Mission to Civilise.’

“Can the dark races become civilized? "I should say not:" says Knox. "Their future history, then, must resemble the past. The Saxon race will never tolerate them-never amalgamate-never be at peace” (Beasley 120) Knox claims, adding yet another layer to the increasingly elaborate racist sciences, by promoting the ‘Saxon race’ above other races, claiming them to be those with an inherent right to judge and rule all others.

#### 2.1.6.2 Imperialism

Imperialism. “1826, "advocacy of empire, devotion to imperial interests," originally in a Napoleonic context, also of Rome and of British foreign policy; from imperial + -ism. At times in British usage (and briefly in U.S.) with a neutral or positive sense relating to national interests or the spread of the benefits of Western civilization, but from the beginning usually more or less a term of reproach. General sense of "one country's rule over another," first recorded 1878.” (etymonline.com)

Lindqvist portrays Imperialism, first, through the lens of technology and symbolism, “Soon hundreds of steamers were to be found on the rivers of Europe. In the middle of the nineteenth century, steamers started carrying European cannons deep into the interior of Asia and Africa. With that a new epoch in the history of imperialism was introduced” (Lindqvist 46), and indeed, “the "gunboat" became a symbol of imperialism on all the major African rivers” the

gunboat did become a symbol of Imperialism, alongside all other philosophies and technologies rapidly being exported from Europe. Or, perhaps more accurately, the steam technology did, as, even in *Heart of Darkness*, even through all the excuses of race, it is technology which ultimately gives Europeans all the power they have.

In a display of Imperialism in art, Rudyard Kipling later took to promote Imperialism in his poem 'The White Man's Burden', where he wrote "Take up the white man's burden, Send forth the best ye breed, Go bind your sons to exile, To serve your captives' need" (Lindqvist 57)

And while, "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, eighteenth-century criticism of imperialism still lived on, and for many it was self-evident to take a stand against genocide." (Lindqvist 56), many in that uncanny version of Europe were not of the same thinking, as "these smaller, more ad hoc groupings were no longer in vogue by the period of the New Imperialism in the 1880s. Newer, bigger ideas of 'race' were there for the taking. Even Weld could pick up on them. The golden age of racism had begun. (Lindqvist 146)

All of these events led to one worse atrocity than the other. The Congolese genocide, the Scramble for Africa, or, as Lindqvist argues, "Adolf Hitler... The air he and all other Western people in his childhood breathed was soaked in the conviction that imperialism is a biologically necessary process, which, according to the laws of nature, leads to the inevitable destruction of the lower races." (Lindqvist 135) led directly to the rise of the Nazi state and their understanding of Race.

### 2.1.7 The Scramble for Africa

The Scramble for Africa was an unprecedented event where European nations, with the power they possessed, gathered in Berlin in 1884 and decided the fate of Africa, without Africans, "The Berlin West Africa Conference (and the Act it promulgated) is often regarded as pivotal in the developing momentum of the scramble. Representatives of fourteen countries met in Berlin in November 1884 at the invitation of Germany and France." (Brooke-Smith 38)

Previously, Henry Morton Stanley had conducted an expedition on the Congo for King Leopold of Belgium in order to establish Belgian influence there and he met the Frenchman De Brazza who was engaged in a similar exploit on behalf of the French." (Brooke-Smith 38)

These events are an important part of Hochschild's book, where he ventures deep into Stanley's life. However, for the King of the Belgians, he was an invaluable partner, who proved the discovery of the African interior is, in fact, possible.



The Berlin Conference listed many points, which are, frankly, a very curious read. For example, "The navigation of the Congo, without excepting any of its branches or outlets, is, and shall remain, free for the merchant ships of all nations equally" (Brooke-Smith 41), or presenting the point that "Since the Conference had refused to deal explicitly with the acquisition of territory other than coastlands, 'the hinterland theory'- made in Germany... gradually received acceptance in so far as the 'rights' of the European Powers and their relations towards each other in the partition were concerned." What this meant in practice was that "By this dictum a power in possession of coastlands was entitled to claim the exclusive right to exercise political influence for an indefinite distance inland." (Brooke-Smith 41) meaning in practice that beyond the coastline, any land was up for the taking, and the faster the nation was, the bigger slice of the African cake they could get. Something which the United Kingdom greatly capitalised upon.

The Scramble for Africa led to the deaths of thousands of Africans, and was ultimately epitomised, and initiated, by King Leopold II of Belgium, whose own scramble would lead to the deaths of up to ten million Africans.

### 2.1.8 Technology

Technological developments were, next to philosophical advancements of the Enlightenment, which itself allowed for the technological rise in the first place, the most important aspect of the 19th and the 20th centuries. In regards to the video game, the book, and the era in general, some do require to be specifically mentioned.

#### 2.1.8.1 Steam Engine

The steam engine was the most important technology of them all. It was the foundation of sailing the seas without sails, independent of the weather, and the tool which allowed to sail inland rivers at fast speeds.

One of the first inventors of steam power technology was Herbert Spencer, an engineer. "His illustration of this idea by reference to the manifold effects of the introduction of steam-power and its latest embodiment, the locomotive-engine, is one of the strongest passages in his work. The power of the steam-engine, and its inconceivable importance as an agent of civilization." (Thurston 11)

The technology underwent many advancements, as it was swiftly widely adopted and used across Europe and the US. An important advancement came when "at the beginning of the

eighteenth century every element of the modern type of steam engine had been separately invented and practically applied... The importance of utilizing the power of steam... had been actually and successfully attempted by Morland, Papin, and Savery.” (Thurston 58), making the steam engine both widely available, but mainly properly and widely understood, allowing for its common use and improvement.

Later on, in the middle of the 19th century, types of the steam engine of the side lever type, which represents the engine of the Pacific, designed by Mr. Charles W. Copeland, and built by the Allaire Works. (Thurston 241) would be the most likely iteration of the steam engine used by the boat Marlow sails some fifty years later.

#### 2.1.8.2 Steam Boat

The steam engine technology then gave rise to the steamboat. In the American context, an example of steamboats coming into common use would be “new machinery which was built at Newport, R. I., by John Babcock and Robert L. Thurston, for one of the first steamboats that ever ran between that city and New York engine” (Thurston 12)

A few decades later, steamboats did become commonplace, not only for sailing between continents, but while navigating rivers and harbours. “Notwithstanding these successful passages across the ocean, and the complete success of the steamboat in rivers and harbors, it was asserted, as late as 1838, by many who were regarded as authority” (Thurston 238)

The advancements of the steam engine, and the designs of the steamboat, became so mind-bogglingly brilliant that incredibly massive steamers were constructed, made to deliver, of all things, mail, across the ocean. “The form of steam engine in most general use at this time, on transatlantic steamers, was that known as the " side lever engine." It was first given the standard form by Messrs. Maudsley & Co., of London, about 1835, and was built by them for steamers supplied to the British Government for general mail service.” (Thurston 240) with a ship that “is 680 feet long, 83 feet wide, 58 feet deep, 28 feet draught, and of 24,000 tons measurement.” not being even the largest made in that time, while still being a towering behemoth.

#### 2.1.8.3 Weapons

Besides the steam technology, and the Imperialist philosophy, weapons were the last piece in the puzzle of European dominance. Leaps in weaponry were made during the American Civil War, which “also saw the introduction of weapons that were “hightech” for their time.” such

as breech-loaded rifles, which “Union cavalry rode into battle armed with breech-loading weapons like the Burnside and Sharps carbines.” (Wills 118)

Besides breech-loaded rifles, lever-action rifles grew in popularity, even being directly mentioned in *Heart of Darkness* itself, as well as being known as the “gun which won the West” as “Around the same time, the Winchester Repeating Arms Co. was developing a lever-action magazine rifle, which it introduced in 1866; its successor, the Model 1873, proved immensely popular” (Wills 133)

Lastly, an image from hell itself for any native unfortunate enough to irk its moods, would be the Maxim Gun. “Although it had competition from weapons like the British Gardner gun and the Swedish Nordenfelt gun, the Maxim design was adopted by a number of nations from the 1880s through the early 1900s. Appearing at the high point of European imperialism, the Maxim and other rapid-re guns proved useful in slaughtering indigenous peoples in colonial conflicts, prompting British writer Hilaire Belloc to rhyme sardonically: “Whatever happens, we have got/The Maxim gun, and they have not.” (Wills 203) and while I would like to pointlessly comment about and add my own notions, I believe this bit from Wills embodies the Maxim gun perfectly and in all the ways necessary.

## 2.2 Heart of Darkness

### 2.2.1 Public reception

The public reception of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* has been mixed. Some deeply admire it, claiming it a genius piece of literature which defends Africans and points towards European hypocrisies, while others admonish the work for its inaccurate portrayal and dehumanisation of Africans, as they claim Conrad to have been a simple racist.

#### 2.2.1.1 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

In an elaborate comment on an “Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s superb essay on *Heart of Darkness*, ‘L’horreur occidentale, translated now as ‘The Horror of the West’.” (Lawtoo 17) edited by Nidesh Lawtoo, the author ventures into an interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* by a French philosopher, who Lawtoo claims to have been, “an extremely learned, original and distinguished philosopher.” (Lawtoo 18)

Starting some hundred pages later, Lawtoo presents Labarthe’s first stances and thinking. “When I say, ‘*Heart of Darkness* is one of the greatest texts of Western literature’, I am thinking, simultaneously and inextricably, of two things: its mythical power and what

constitutes it as an event of thought [événement de pensée].” (Lawtoo 112) It would be a curious read in the original, and knowing all the philosophical terms beforehand would be of help either, to truly appreciate Labarthe’s coming words. However, it is still clear to any reader that Labarthe intends to sing praise to both the work and the author.

It is also interesting to consider the critique’s focus, that being the mention of mythical power and the event of thought, likely referring to the book becoming a mythos of sorts, and how Conrad uses flow of thought throughout the book, something both celebrated and shunned as either brilliantly insightful into Marlow’s psyche, or admonished as simply being confusing and chaotic.

In a later section, Labarthe continues by delving into one of Conrad’s main ideas, “And it is this truth, the truth of the West, to which he seeks to bear witness in such a complex way. Conrad’s entire undertaking consists in trying to find a witness for that which he wants to bear witness to.” (Lawtoo 114) referring to the popular consideration of Conrad’s novel as a satiric portrayal of the West, intent on exposing its hypocrisies and lies, to which the philosopher adds a rather curious point, that “Heart of Darkness.. It is not an allegory – say, a metaphysicopolitical allegory – at all. It is the tautegory of the West – that is, of art (of techne). That this art, in this particular instance, is literature itself – in other words, the mythical usage of the original techne that is language – leaves open a question that the analytical outline I have just offered here cannot pretend to answer” (Lawtoo 120) This is a very unconventional perception of Heart of Darkness. In-depth in a way most readers and critics will not reach or consider. It is curious to ponder that someone so deeply learned in matters of history and philosophy is also the one who finds this much appreciation for Conrad’s work.

#### 2.2.1.2 Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe’s critique of *Heart of Darkness* is, on the other hand, one of the more infamous and well-known responses. While it does begin with disclosing that the critic is aware of Conrad’s skill, “Conrad, on the other hand, is undoubtedly one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good storyteller into the bargain.” (Achebe 15), Achebe quickly takes to pointing towards Conrad’s vileness, and the way in which he uses language, which is, to his perception, not at all unintentional, “The eagle-eyed English critic F. R. Leavis drew attention long ago to Conrad’s “adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery.” (Achebe 16)

To move on to the more direct critique of Conrad, later on in the work, Achebe mentions something very curious in Conrad's story, that being the African woman near the end of the novel. "This Amazon is drawn in considerable details, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval; and second, she fulfills a structural requirement of the story; a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story:" (Achebe 18) He proposes the beautiful portrayal is not of genuine reverence, but because of Conrad's, to an extent, twisted understanding of the woman, and as long as she 'knows her place', Conrad has it in himself to offer praises.

Achebe then continues on to critique Conrad's cowardice. "Certainly, Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his story. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator." (Achebe 19) hinting, as he had previously, at Conrad's linguistic dishonesty.

Achebe offers few other comments, or rather jabs, on the contemporary 'liberal tradition' "Marlow comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English liberal tradition which required all Englishmen of decency to be deeply shocked by atrocities in Bulgaria or the Congo of King Leopold of the Belgians or wherever." (Achebe 20), claiming that Marlow is not genuinely shocked, but rather that he represents an ideology, a *modus operandi* of sorts, which the sailor simply follows, Achebe later elaborating that "The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe, and America. It took different forms in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people." (Achebe 20), once again making the claim which does not dispute Conrad's satirical portrayal of Europe, but the writer's wholehearted disregard of moral honesty towards Africans.

The last, and most direct, or perhaps most aggressive, claim Achebe makes, is accusing Conrad of racism. "The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist." (Achebe 21) He does this by quoting various parts of the book, *Heart of Darkness* or others, which use the N-word and portray Africans in a very unpleasant light. Achebe makes a claim that "Certainly Conrad had a problem with ni\*gers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts." (Achebe 22), referring to Achebe's own heritage, and claiming that, while it may not be Conrad's fault, he is still a representation of the age.

### 2.2.1.3 Lindqvist

While elaborate and mostly indirect, and further used to venture into Conrad himself in the next subsection of this thesis, Lindqvist, in his *Exterminate all the Brutes*, does present a very positive and visionary portrayal of Conrad and his work, stating that “I read Conrad as a prophetic author who had foreseen all the horrors that were to come.” (Lindqvist 1), even making reference to other authors to further his claim, by stating that, “Hannah Arendt knew better. She saw that Conrad was writing about the genocides of his own time.” (Lindqvist 1), or referring to Conrad’s own influence by stating that “Perhaps it was Conrad who inspired Wells to write another story of colonialism, *The Invisible Man* ( 1897 ).” (Lindqvist 68), after which Lindqvist presents just what exact influences Conrad may have had.

It was not beyond Lindqvist to praise Conrad’s linguistic skills, as is a common theme among all the mentioned critics, albeit the praise being for various purposes, in Lindqvist’s case meant to showcase Conrad’s hidden intentions with the story. “The word Europe comes from a Semitic word that simply means "darkness."6 The sentence glowing there on the screen is truly European.” (Lindqvist 9), and to offer an insight into Conrad’s psyche. Something Lindqvist does very often throughout his own work.

Besides *Heart of Darkness*, Lindqvist refers to Conrad’s other works a lot, using them to paint a complete picture of the writer’s thinking, “It was natural that Joseph Conrad's "*An Outpost of Progress*:" at its first publication in *Cosmopolis*, should have been seen as a comment on the jubilee.” (Lindqvist 16), a publication which Lindqvist connects to Conrad’s own supposed venture to the Congo, and his growing terrors and realisations with the state of racism in Africa, “What happened in July 1896 that made Conrad interrupt both his honeymoon and the novel he was writing and instead write a story about the Congo?” (Lindqvist 17)

Lindqvist, of course, elaborates further still in the following, “When, in 1898, Joseph Conrad was writing about the unemployed sea captain Marlow seeking a job as skipper in Africa, he was building on memories of the autumn of 1889, when he himself, the unemployed sea captain Josef Konrad Korzeniowski, aged thirty-one, was applying for a post as skipper on the Congo river” (Lindqvist 33), using the relation to Conrad’s past to often imply Conrad’s own experience and just how impossible it was for him to mean *Heart of Darkness* in any other way than as a warning.

A very persuasive claim of this truth is made by Lindqvist later in his work, by referring to “the autumn of 1898,” when “Conrad was working on his novel *The Rescue*, about a noble

and chivalrous imperialist who puts his whole existence at risk to help a Malayan friend who had once saved his life.” (Lindqvist 77) A theme which sounds like a celebration of the natives, as Lindqvist himself claims, “The theme is the exact opposite of that in *Heart of Darkness*.” However, for some reason “The novel caused Conrad endless torment and brought him several times to the brink of suicide.” (Lindqvist 77) Why that was Lindqvist explains further by quoting the book itself, ““And if the inferior race must perish, it is a gain, a step towards the perfecting of society which is the aim of progress?”” (The Rescue), clearly being anathema to everything Conrad tried to stand for in *Heart of Darkness*.

Additionally, Lindqvist often compares Conrad’s work to other writers, in particular Kipling, claiming that “While Kipling was writing ‘The White Man’s Burden,’ Joseph Conrad was writing *Heart of Darkness*” (Lindqvist 58)

Lastly, of course, Lindqvist shows a clear understanding of what monster Kurtz was a mirror to, “When Marlow lies to Kurtz’s “intended” at the end of Conrad’s story, he not only does what Stanley himself did, but also what official Britain and the general public were doing while Conrad was writing the story. They were lying.” (Lindqvist 42) and using said display to exemplify what Conrad was desperately trying to expose.

### 2.2.2 Lindqvist and Conrad’s life

According to Lindqvist, Conrad did not have a happy childhood. He “lost his mother when he was seven and his father when he was eleven.” (Lindqvist) To further make his life difficult, “He emigrated from Poland to France, from France to England. He served on sixteen different ships” (Lindqvist 63), which, without any further need for elaboration, tells a story of a man who was existing in between a rock and a hard place ever since he uttered his first words. Conrad, over the years, served on many different vessels, and it is curious just how fast he managed to learn English after starting to serve on English ships, ultimately becoming known as “a Polish writer who often thought in French but wrote in English:” (Lindqvist 9)

Depending on whose interpretation of the man is presented, Conrad could be considered an individual deeply troubled by the events in the Congo, “What happened in July 1896 that made Conrad interrupt both his honeymoon and the novel he was writing and instead write a story about the Congo?” (Lindqvist 17) to be one so disturbed as to sail away from an event which would, as far as we assume, be rather pleasant.

## 2.3 Victoria 2

### 2.3.1 Paradox Interactive

Paradox Interactive is a video game developing and publishing company from Sweden. It is most known for its Grand Strategy titles; games, which focus on nation-ruling, unlike regular strategies, which either focus on small maps entirely, such as legendary Age of Empires, or a mix of nation-building and battles, such as Sega's Total War series.

It is a company loved by many, as it produces great titles and fosters a healthy community, besides offering a rather unique gaming experience. "Over the last decade Paradox Interactive has earned a mixed reputation. The Swedish developer is known primarily for its unique brand of deep historical simulation games that take a long time to master but allow players experiences that can't be found elsewhere." (Polygon)

However, as with every company, they do have their share of problems. Besides their games being outrageously expensive for both the industry standard and the quality they offer, it "seems that for every well-reviewed epic strategy title, Paradox releases a buggy, broken mess." (Polygon) Still, the company has made its name known, and it is well entrenched in the gaming world, albeit still not large enough to tackle the task of developing any AAA titles.

The history of the company begins with a man called "Fredrik Wester, the CEO who wears the crown at Paradox Interactive." (Polygon) He is a gamer by heart, as "Wester has been playing games since he was 6, growing up with an Atari and later a ZX Spectrum." (Polygon)

Knowing this man's nature and origin, it helps to understand what sort of person is at the helm of the company, and who makes executive decisions about what games are being produced, giving consumers at least somewhat of an idea what to expect from the company. To hear his own words on the matter, "Today's Paradox Interactive is, to hear Wester tell it, a different company than the one founded more than a decade ago. It's not enough for its games to be unique. They need to be able to find a broader audience." (Polygon) Showing that he has got both the experience of the earlier game-making era, as well as a good grasp on the modern making industry, which can be observed by Paradox Interactive still being relevant and thriving to this day.

Back in those older days, "It was in 2003, more than 15 years after his inauspicious start in video games that Wester returned to the industry. He took a consulting job writing a business



plan for Paradox Entertainment, a media company that split its time between licensing intellectual property and making video games.” (Polygon) He continued working for the company for quite some time. The management had great plans for the video game making section of their firm, however, their projects ultimately failed, and the company itself decided its intention was to focus on the licensing area. Wester, however, “saw an opportunity. Along with the former CEO of Paradox Entertainment, he bought out the computer games division and took those seven staff members, and rights to all their games, to form Paradox Interactive.” (Polygon)

After the purchase, Wester would not be alone in his endeavours, as the studio “also acquired a veteran game developer named Johan Andersson.” (Polygon) who “was only 30 years old... but he was already an old hand in the games business.” (Polygon)

A cute story makes regular rounds in the Paradox community regarding Johan. Supposedly, he just walked into the PDX Interactive headquarters one day, full of confidence, and proclaimed, “I am the guy you need.” And they took him.

Being another man who shapes the face and vision of PDX these days, “He had begun his career in the early ‘90s after dropping out of Stockholm University, despite the objections of his family.” (Polygon)

As with many who chose to pursue a video game related career in the early 2000s, he shares a story that “My grandfather was very suspicious, ‘Why are you dropping out? I mean, you’re going to get a good education there. You’re smart!’” However, Johan stayed, and got to work. “The first game he worked on at Paradox Entertainment was Europa Universalis, based on an obscure French board game by the same name.”(Polygon) A game which is still immensely popular to this day, with its newest release being Europa Universalis 4, and its newest DLC being released no later than in 2023. However, it took some effort to get to this level of success, and they owe this to both one other company and their own business creativity. “In 2005, on the heels of Valve’s successful Steam marketplace which had launched just a year previous, Wester ran an experiment. He sold an expansion to Paradox’s worst-selling title, *Victoria: An Empire Under the Sun*, via download only.” (Polygon) Just like with many new projects, and many similar platforms, which had tried and failed similar ideas, it may have been a risk. However, Valve was, and still is, one of the most successful gaming companies of our era. As a result, “ The experiment surprised him, and the expansion sold well. That encouraged the company to open Paradox On Demand. Before long they changed the name of the service to GamersGate. It became a European hub for titles that weren’t available at retail

around the world, and the success gave Paradox the cash flow it had been so sorely lacking.”(Polygon) filling a hole in the market, as Valve is an American company, and back in the day, simply branching out likely wasn’t a matter of a few clicks like it can often be today.

The Polygon article is from 2013. It is relevant for Victoria 2, and states that “Paradox has grown from seven employees in a basement to over 100.” (Polygon) A statistic from [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), alongside other sources, shows that as of December 2022, Paradox Interactive has got well over 650 employees.

To close off with the developers’ words, which still ring true to this day, “We still have a very long way to go, but so would most gaming companies I would say.” (Polygon)

### 2.3.2 Development - Dev diaries

As mentioned in the previous section, Paradox Interactive fosters a tight gaming community. One of the ways by which they do this is through their moderated forums and by sharing various snippets of their game development, including Dev Diaries, in which they present various improvements and changes they make to their games, alongside insights to their thinking, which, to this thesis, are quite valuable.

The very first sentence of the first Dev Diary for Vicky 2 looks like this, “Well this is it, the first developer diary for Victoria 2. You’ll be seeing a lot more of these over the coming weeks;” (Dev Diary 1) The poster of this Dev Diary, going by the acronym King, follows up by disclosing the various internal and game development reasons for why they decided to proceed with a sequel to the first game, as “So the first question you must all be wondering, why Victoria 2? It is probably no secret that Victoria was not Paradox’s most commercially successful title. 1” (Dev Diary 1)

In the following Dev Diaries, the writers venture into various mechanicals aspects of the game. What is important for this thesis, however, is the philosophy behind the setting and the main idea of the game, “Victoria 2 is all about changing history as well as making it.” (Dev Diary 3) This offers us a first insight into the developer’s thinking about how they view history and how they want their game to be interpreted. They expand further, by stating that “At the same time this is a historical game, so instead of adding in hard coded scripts to steer a country, we add game mechanics that place historical constraints on your freedom of action.” (Dev Diary 3) This explains that, while they wish to steer the player in a historical direction, they still intend to grant them some level of freedom in their decisions, and the option of changing the course of history altogether. The last important comment from the

third Dev Diary states that “It is more than simply just painting the map your colour. It is about politics and economics.” (Dev Diary 3), stating the intent of making the game more nuanced, rather than entirely focused on conquest. Something which is rather curious later on in the thesis, as this does not quite apply for any sub-Saharan nations.

The next two dozen Dev Diaries are virtually a listing of game mechanics intended for the game. However, in the last Dev Diary intended for the base game, they return with their philosophy for the video game, which the people were supposedly asking for, and with the most important insight for the comparison with *Heart of Darkness* they can possibly offer. “Uncivilised” nations are essentially those considered to be backward from the western perspective of the era.” (Dev Diary 29.2)

It is a strong statement, though they do show awareness of it, explaining further in the following sentence. “It may be harsh, and some would say Euro-centric, but we make no apologies for that. Victoria 2 is trying to capture the zenith of European power. World War I would herald the decline of the European dominance of the world which began in the 15th century, so of course the game by its very nature is Euro-centric.” (Dev Diary 29.2) This entirely correlates with the contemporary European understanding of the world, and how the world was seen by most people on Earth during that time. To explain further, they state that “This is the sort of choice you have to make when designing this type of game.” (Dev Diary 29.2)

And to further provide the player with steering the course of history to their liking, “However, all is not lost for the uncivilised nations. Every uncivilised country has a decision to allow them to civilise. We require a certain number of technologies, some prestige and enough of a military.” (Dev Diary 29.2) even showing awareness of historicity of the time, stating that “Japan we treat as a special case. Not only did they civilise, but also they became one of the great powers. Thus, Japan has a special decision; the Meiji Restoration. Japan gets a bigger boost from westernising and has lower requirements.” (Dev Diary 29.2)

This is the end of Dev Diaries for the base game, and, unfortunately, we do not get such a great philosophical view in any subsequent diaries. The next important one is the eight diary for the House Divided expansion, intended to portray the American Civil War, “The topic for today is Foreign Investment. In the Victorian era, as well as today, diplomatic and economic influence often go hand in hand and we wanted to capture this” (House Divided Dev Diary 8) This concept is slightly important for the book, as foreign investments is something inherently

present when it comes to 19th century business ventures; something omnipresent throughout the book, be it the by the presence of various companies, or the search and trade for Ivory.

Lastly, the developers shared several Dev Diaries on the *Heart of Darkness expansion*.

Unfortunately, they offer little to no insight into the developer's philosophy. The most useful example is from the fifth Dev Diary, "The answer for Nations with far-flung colonial empires is Dominions. You can spin off your Colonies into self-governing puppets. The downside, of course, is that you no longer harvest their resources or gather taxes directly, but as long as they remain in your SoI you still have good access to what they produce" (Heart of Darkness Dev Diary 5) showing further options of manipulating colonies, once they have been firmly established.

This should, still, offer us a meaningful insight into Paradox Interactive, and how they see their games' development, including the influences and thinking which led to the creation of *Victoria 2*. Something which will make areas explored in the Practical section of the thesis much clearer.

## 3 Practical part

The practical part of the thesis will focus on exploring the primary portrayals of the end of the 19th century, both in the video game, and in the book. It will explore how various peoples were perceived, with the focus on Africans and Europeans. It will also delve into the technologies used at that time, several philosophical concepts, religious themes, and processes and materials prevalent during said era.

Each section will have its title, reflecting the aspect which is being focused on. This section will then be separated into a look at *Heart of Darkness* and how this aspect is present in the book, and then at *Victoria 2*, and its own interpretation of the theme. Each section may have further subsections, should the clarification be required.

### 3.1 Racism, Slavery, and Africans

#### 3.1.1 Heart of Darkness

##### 3.1.1.1 Africans

Conrad describes Africans as people who are deeply unfortunate because of their skin colour and their way of living.

One of the ways in which he describes African natives is them looking like only bones covered in skin, and as beings being treated like criminals, as servants, or, in some instances, almost like animals, “I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.” (Conrad 6)

Besides the derogatory descriptions, Conrad seems to show an understanding that Africans are still human. He points towards the way they are treated, being denied their natural needs and basic living standards, alongside the confusion of their situation and their local segregation. Contrary to the previous view on Africans, Conrad displays a much more nuanced understanding of the native situation, as he proves throughout the entire book by contrasting many different themes. ““They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now— nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom.” (Conrad 17)

Conrad does not forget to mention the legal issues, as Hochschild points out, “Stanley and his white assistants had used a variety of tricks, such as fooling Africans into thinking that whites had supernatural powers, to get Congo chiefs to sign their land over to Leopold.” (Hochschild 124) and the borderline false contracts, which were used to legally bind slaves into forced labour in an unfamiliar environment, entirely disconnected from their original habitat, which was, oftentimes, located deep within the Congo jungle. Their bodies were, naturally, influenced by the change of their environment as well, leading to sleep deprivation, catching diseases, and overall weakness, which mattered little to those whose patronage they found themselves under, and who exploited them for their last drop of hope and strength, which led to suboptimal conditions and high mortality rates. “Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.” (Conrad 17)

To add yet another layer of complexity to the understanding of the native situation, Conrad does not forget to include native items and tools. However, it carries an inherent idea that the items were taken, likely forcibly, from the natives and it also brings up the fact that they may possibly be on display, as local items often were during the era “Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies.” (Conrad 24), such as during the Belgian native exposition, which itself later turned into, from our modern understanding, a heinous display of inhumanity. “Africans were suffering indigestion because

of candy given them by the public, he ordered up the equivalent of a zoo's don't-feed-the-animals sign. The placard said: THE BLACKS ARE FED BY THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE.” (Hochschild 198)

### 3.1.1.2 Racism

The theme of racism is initially explored in one of its most direct forms, Eugenics, in the book, portrayed by a doctor asking Marlow to take his head measurements. These thoughts originated in a twisted form of Darwinism, were one of the justifications for Imperialism and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, and later on would help form the Nazi ideology propagate and take root in people's minds.

It is presented in a very nonchalant manner, betraying the modern idea of racial measurements being something taboo, but rather something commonplace, in fact a very scientific field, with elaborate systems and a defined idea of European racial differences, such as the English and the French, “asked me whether I would let him measure my head... always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,... you are the first Englishman coming under my observation” (Conrad 11)

With the common theme of contrasts found in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad contrasts the previous picture of weak Africans, starving and disease-ridden, with a display of people of colour who are, likely, well fed and full of vitality, providing us with a more nuanced picture of what African natives were like, in particular under their European guardians. It celebrates their strength, but perhaps points towards their physical capabilities, such as strength and vitality, and much less towards their intellectual faculties, something which would align with the contemporary racial understanding “it was paddled by black fellows... their eyeballs glistening... shouted, sang; ... but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement,” (Conrad 14)

Another show of African natives are those who are well incorporated into the local system of the European rule, as shown in this example of an African soldier who is acutely aware of various cultural hierarchies, “He had a uniform jacket with one button off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust.” (Conrad 16) The soldier has seen of the treatment of his kin, yet he comes off as acclimatised to the environment; something many of

the keener individuals would be capable of, in particular after the Portuguese and the Kingdom of Kongo experience.

Particularly in contrast to the previous quote of an African not being able to tell Europeans apart, Europeans display a similar attitude, where they are unable, or refuse to, tell Africans apart from each other, proving further that Conrad did understand Africans were not inherently racially inferior and that Europeans were also filled with flaws, “The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with them it’s hard to tell.” (Conrad 17)

Africans were kept on a tight leash, and Europeans tolerated little transgression, distributing harsh punishments and instilling the notion that it is inherently acceptable to treat Africans in an inhumane way, and for Africans to become used to the idea that they are, in fact, below Europeans and that the punishments are given righteously, ““Serve him right. Transgression—punishment—bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That’s the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager ...” (Conrad 26)

### 3.1.2 Victoria 2

In *Victoria 2*, with its political focus, the three issues of racism, slavery and Africans are condensed and very disconnected from the core of the game. Africans lack a face, so to speak. With *Victoria 2*’s portrayal of Africa as an empty slate with very few actual nations present, the issue of slavery is mostly pushed aside and mentioned little besides being a political footnote, should a nation’s populace become too liberal and Abolitionism become a major societal topic. At that point, Abolitionist numbers will grow, leaving the player with the choice to either give into their demands, or to suppress the movement by either political or military force.

Should the player choose to listen to the demands of their populace, their country will suffer a slight economic setback, along with a hit to relations with those countries which have yet to abolish slavery. However, it will also increase the immigration pull of the country by 1%, seeing how liberal the country is when compared to other corners of the world.

The Slave populace itself is in its own category in the Population tab, portrayed by an icon of a starving man dressed in loincloth, standing upright, with a pillory around his arms and neck. They are employed in various raw material fields, such as gathering cotton, lumber, fruit, or fishing, to name a few. Slaves have their own nationalities, religions, dominant social issues, and even ideologies, albeit the latter two do not have much of an impact. Still, being the detailed game *Victoria 2* is, these details are present, even for slaves.

The issue of slavery, further portrayed in the game's events, is often focused on the American issue of Abolitionism, added in the *House Divided* DLC, through such events as Knights of The Golden Circle, or Fugitive Slave. However, even when facing the issue of slavery, the results of these events are much less interested in the actual fate of the slaves, at least directly, and much more about the upcoming American Civil War, paying attention as to whether the player chooses to pursue reconciliation with the south, leading to slaves never reaching abolition, or to confront the south, inciting the Civil War, and freeing the slaves, should the North emerge victorious.

Other events in *Victoria 2*, in relation to slavery, are much more disconnected from the main events of the game, usually bearing the description of 'flavour events'. Examples of these are the Slave rebellion in the Danish West Indies, which briefly describes said rebellion of 1848, and allows the player to choose to either suppress the revolt or free the slaves, therefore outlawing slavery, or the World Anti-Slavery Convention, which is sparked when the Woman's Suffrage issue begins to grow in significance, and allows the player to either consider these issues, making the populace more liberal, or claim that "women talking in public is becoming silly."

The last notion in relation to these issues, an indirect one at that, is the various historical references to issues, more or less connected, to the development of racism.

In the Technology section, under the Culture tab, the player can find several 'technologies'. Firstly, in the Philosophy section, under Biologism, lie two technologies. Darwinism, which, as Lindqvist claims in the theoretical section, is the direct predecessor of European Racism and Eugenics. And Social Darwinism, which is the idea of biological competition extrapolated onto the society, and unapologetically racist in its contemporary use.

Next to the Philosophy section is located the Political thought section. There, two subtechnologies are of importance. First, the Mission to Civilise; a contemporary excuse of imperialist nations, deeply explored in both Lindqvist and Hochschild, where Europeans believed themselves to be the chosen race, destined to civilise the darkness of the world.

The second being Manifest Destiny, which was an American form of Imperialism, meant to legally allow the US to subjugate the American natives and claim their land as their own.



### 3.1.3 Synthesis

While both portrayals of racism and slavery are unsettling in their own right, Conrad's view is much more visceral and real, showing the direct consequences of these actions in their raw glory, as well as portraying the racial differences between Europeans and Africans caused by their contemporary social status. In *Victoria 2*, however, racism and slavery are much more indirect, the game itself being little about individual characters, and as such, slaves and their fates, or rather them being an insignificant footnote to begin with, are a simple byproduct of the game's Eurocentrism.

The main difference between the game and Conrad's work then being that while the game's disregard of this 19th century state of Africans is purely reflective of the age, Conrad's portrayal is very direct and intentional, meant to arouse a reaction from the reader.

## 3.2 Religion

### 3.2.1 Heart of Darkness

#### 3.2.1.1 God

Conrad uses the motif mostly in the form of exclamatives, such as "Why, in God's name?" (Conrad 15) or "Good Lord! mustn't a man ever" (Conrad 47), reflecting the contemporary language, rather than an intentional use of the religious theme.

Religion is further used in the theme of fear, or rather a proof of bravery, "he feared neither God nor devil" (Conrad 28)

Additionally, the theme of Christianity can be seen as present in some mentioned architecture, in particular in the reference to the iconic church bell, "bells in a Christian country" (Conrad 20) or in Conrad's reference to the Sepulchral city, "I found myself back in the sepulchral city" (Conrad 70)

#### 3.2.1.2 Devil

Curiously, however, God's very adversary has got a much more present role in the story. Conrad uses the word Devil to often describe temptations, "I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire;" (Conrad 16) reflecting the contemporary religious understanding of all unfortunate and bad happenings being the acts of the Devil.

The devil is also present in the contemporary language, "and devil knows what else" (Conrad 25), to describe characters, "Clear this poor devil out" (Conrad 31)

The other name of Lucifer is mentioned when Marlow listens to a group of Africans talking, “were like the responses of some satanic litany” (Conrad 67) likening their speech to something rather unholy.

### 3.2.2 Victoria 2

Religion does not play a significant role in *Victoria 2*. With the rise of the nation state and the secular state, religious institutions lost much of their institutional power and sway over the populace. In particular, during the Springtime of Nations, both the historical event and the event in the videogame, it led to the rise of liberal values (important to mention that 19th century liberalism is vastly different to our modern understanding), and the role of the state becoming the predominant force in shaping the hearts and minds of the people.

Unlike in *Victoria 2*'s chronological predecessors, such as *Europa Universalis* or *Crusader Kings*, religion does not even have a map mode present in the game, and not a single Event is related to religion, either, besides steering people in certain ways during elections. Something, which pales in comparison to other voting factors.

Religion, to an extent, has a function when it comes to the Upper and Lower houses during the election process where, depending on the type of religion, people have a tendency to lean into various attitudes towards religion, which the player can influence through various events. The main attitudes towards religion are Atheism, Secularism, Moralism, Pluralism, with the last three being predominant throughout most of the game, while Atheism usually appears alongside the rise of Communism.

### 3.2.3 Synthesis

When compared, religion in both the book and the videogame is present to a forgettable degree. In the videogame, it is a footnote, meant to incorporate contemporary thinkings, while making way to the power of the nation state, while in the book, it serves as a display of contemporary language, with the only serious religious display being that all the bad things in the world, in particular events, tend to be attributed to the Devil himself.

In conclusion, both works do not make religion their focus, and instead simply, to various degrees, reflect contemporary religious values.

## 3.3 The Sea and its Ships

### 3.3.1 Heart of Darkness

#### 3.3.1.1 Ships

Ships in *Heart of Darkness* serve, initially, to the purpose of establishing a sea-faring mood, familiar to the contemporary sailors of the end of the 19th century, first displayed by the use of a very basic vessel, “The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest.” (Conrad 1)

Much less a contemporary matter, Conrad, or rather Marlow, proceed to rant on about the British glorious past, and while likening the pre-Roman Britain to the African wilderness, an ancient type of seacraft is mentioned, “trireme in the Mediterranean” (Conrad 6), which, in the celebratory mood of the past, is also described as, “a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina” (Conrad 6)

To add in to the familiarity and the seafaring setting, ship names are included, something a seafaring tradition dictates, and descriptions of the nature of the ships is given, “GOLDEN HIND returning with her rotund flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen’s Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the EREBUS and TERROR” (Conrad 4)

*Heart of Darkness* is famous for its representation of the Steamer, of course, the word being used no less than nineteen times throughout the story, and while other steamers do get a note throughout the tale, “, the steamer Fresleven commanded” (Conrad 9) or “I left in a French steamer,” (Conrad 13) the main focus of the story is the steamer which takes Marlow and his crew across the Congo to reach Kurtz in the depths of the Jungle, curiously though, being referred to as a battered, reliable companion, rather than an impenetrable fortress, “friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat... like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; ... nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her.” (Conrad 29)

#### 3.3.1.2 The Sea

Conrad begins with elaborate descriptions of the sea, initiating the ever-present themes of light and darkness, and their various forms found throughout the tale, “The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway.” (Conrad 1)

Being the vessel for both the trip to and back from Africa, it is celebrated throughout the story and made part of Marlow's personality, while also displaying various aspects of the seafaring culture, "Between sailors—you know—good English tobacco." (Conrad 63)

It is glorified, serving as a spreading field for many a noble man to venture to, "Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea" (Conrad 4) and for various others, who call the sea their home, in particular during Marlow's hiatus on the dark British past and the Roman Mission to Civilise, "the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark 'interlopers' of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned 'generals' of East India fleets." (Conrad 4) however still remembering to connect it to the present and to organisations vital for the British Empire.

Conrad does not forget to mention some other local names, such as, "The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat" (Conrad 5) or to give credit to the various other seas of the world, outside of the scope of the book, "I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas—a regular dose of the East". (Conrad 7)

Lastly, during the events of the story, Marlow chances upon a book by a man called Towser, "Its title was, AN INQUIRY INTO SOME POINTS OF SEAMANSHIP, by a man Towser, Towson—some such name—Master in his Majesty's Navy." (Conrad 37) He begins to describe the contents of the book, and marvel at the in-depth knowledge found within, "Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters." (Conrad 37) and while Marlow is intrigued by the cipher he finds there, that point is not of any relevance to this thesis.

### 3.3.2 Victoria 2

#### 3.3.2.1 Ships

Ships in *Victoria 2* serve primarily to transport troops using either the Clipper or Steamer transport, or to fight naval battles using various types of other vessels.

The types of vessels which the player is able to construct depends on several factors. First, whether the ship type is researched to begin with. Every nation begins the game with Clippers, Frigates, and Man'o'war vessels, though these quickly give way to Steam ships. Those, then, need the appropriate infrastructure to be constructed, meaning Steel mines,

Ship-parts manufactories, and high-enough level ports to sustain the ship. In the 1890s, it is possible to see some Cruisers or Battleships already sailing the seas; behemoths of steel, which pack enough firepower to wipe out small villages.

As such, the presence of Steam transports, and its various iterations, is already widely common in the 19th century, and these transports are vastly superior to their cousins, first discovered in 1836 (in the videogame), being faster, more durable, more dangerous, and much better supplied.

A lovely detail is that each ship has its own name, randomly selected from a set of premade names, giving those players who seek such a detail the experience of authenticity, as every ship does have its given name, and sails the seas under such moniker.

### 3.3.2.2 Sea

The seas themselves are fairly straightforward in their execution. For an average player, they are no different from provinces, between which ships move after a certain amount of days passes. However, if a player looks closer, they will notice each sea has its own name.

Unlike later Paradox Interactive editions, which classify bodies of water into lakes, rivers, and even inland deep seas, *Victoria 2* does not make such a distinction. Still, it is fairly wondrous to zoom in and see tens of thousands of men being transported on steamers across the Straits of Dover, after having set sail from London to the Dogger bank, making their way to the Gulf of Kongo, and landing ashore to pacify local rebels.

The game includes the Colonial mapmode. This serves one function, and that is to display which provinces are available for the nation to colonise. For coastal provinces, this includes the added detail of Colonial range, which is a number determined by the closest province and by the level of its port. Essentially how many civilian ships can reliably reach the province without suffering significant attrition along the way.

Naval Bases are an important aspect of the seafaring part of the video game. They expand Colonial range, provide supplies for the nation's vessels, are incredibly expensive to build, and provide the last piece of infrastructure necessary to craft larger vessels, such as Cruisers or Dreadnaughts.

They can be researched in the Naval Doctrine section of the Technology tab, and the one corresponding with what would be commonly present in the 1890 in larger parts of the world would be the Blue and Brown Water Schools, which correlate to a level 4 port in terms of the game's mechanics.

### 3.3.3 Synthesis

In both works, the sea plays a significant role. In Conrad's book, it is an expanse which allows the story to take place, the main character's heart's home, and their past, as well as the reflection of Conrad himself, his life, and his own experiences. It paints the sea in a camaraderie-like, and a fairly romanticised, way, with many beautiful descriptions unfolding while sailing along European and African coasts.

In the video game, the sea contains much detail and flavour in its naming. It serves as a playground for many technologies, and allows for both colonisation and overseas conquest. It also displays just how much effort was put into the sea race, and how different nations developed faster thanks to the access to global trade, reflecting the naval technological advancement, giving birth to terrifying sailing behemoths, such as the Dreadnaught.

All in all, while being used with, for the most part, a different intention, the scale of the presence of the sea is similar in both works; most of the events happen inland, but being allowed thanks to, and working with, the blue expanses outside.

## 3.4 Africa

### 3.4.1 Heart of Darkness

Africa has got a very specific portrayal in *Heart of Darkness*. Initially, it is described in a very infamous manner as being a blank, or a dark, place, "But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after." (Conrad 8) However, in a rather eerie manner, connecting Africa to the title of the book, Marlow states how the blank places become filled with names, places, rivers, and how, "It had become a place of darkness." (Conrad 8)

Without question, Africa, or specifically its inland areas, are referred to as the heart of darkness, "We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness." (Conrad 35)

With this unsettling understanding of an overall concept of African inland, the book then, in Africa itself, takes great effort to describe Africa how it is seen, be it with the focus on the Congo river, "The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances." (Conrad 33) the local fauna, "On silvery sand-banks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side." (Conrad 33) Africa's exotic, and almost otherworldly, habitat, "Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high;" (Conrad 35) while not forgetting to include Marlow's, and like Conrad's, own feelings when

viewing this African darkness, “like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico.” (Conrad 35) making sure to include the theme of darkness, as on other various occasions, within the description of his feelings towards the African jungle as well, “till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once”. (Conrad 34)

### 3.4.2 Victoria 2

#### 3.4.2.1 The Portrayal of Africa

One of the most potent correlations to the book is the first view of Africa presented by the game. It is empty. There are no nations present except for the North of Africa, Sokoto in the centre, and some colonies alongside the Zulu kingdom in the South.

Africa was a vastly populated region with many different kingdoms and tribes with elaborate legal systems and cultures. In the videogame, however, it is not so.

What it is is a playground. Europeans, or any nations capable of technologically catching up to them, can prepare the naval infrastructure necessary to partake in the Scramble for Africa, which begins in the 1870s with the discovery of the Mission of Civilise sub-technology. Once that happens, Africa will be painted in the colours of European nations in no longer than a few dozen years.

The only view of the colourful African ethnic diversity the player can get is to view the world map in the Nationalities mode, seeing that Africa is, in fact, not an empty wasteland.

However, this is but flavour for the game, and has little to no actual impact on any practical aspects of the game, besides migration, which, given the game lasts until the year 1931, remains insignificantly small.

The game, then, attempts to provide the player with some further African experience by displaying events such as the search for the source of Nile, discovering Tutankhamon’s tomb, venturing on a botanical expedition, which can have many results, including being eaten by cannibals, or colonial crisis, where the region gains unrest, which can result in rebels appearing, or, if very unlucky, into a world-wide crisis.

The last mention of how Africa is displayed in the video game is the artwork. Right upon starting the videogame, after a series of beautiful European and American artworks, the player enters the main menu, where they will be greeted by one of the most brilliant artworks resembling the title *Heart of Darkness* one could ever draw.

Besides the main menu screen, however, the only artwork remotely related to Africa is the Jungle province image, much lacking in detail compared to the main menu screen; the colonisation process, displaying colonial soldiers and outposts, and some events, which show very well crafted artwork ranging from slaves rebelling to a small African child being struck by chickenpox.

### 3.4.3 Synthesis

Both the video game and the book share some similarities in their portrayal of Africa. They both mention, or display, it as a blank place, ready to be explored, conquered, or painted. The difference in this being that in *Victoria 2*, it is already explored, with rivers and lakes already having been mapped, as it simply needs to be painted in European colours, whereas in *Heart of Darkness*, it is a dark place, still somewhat mapped, but largely unexplored.

The book gives the reader a much better picture of Congo's jungles and fauna, as it delves into the descriptions in vast detail, whereas the videogame offers mostly just the menu screen, which, while very telling, overshadows any other African art display in the videogame, and fails to deliver the same imagery as the book does.

All in all, there are pronounced similarities in how the video game and how the book sees Africa, and while the differences are visible, it is not nearly as pronounced as in other areas.

## 3.5 Women

### 3.5.1 Heart of Darkness

Women in *Heart of Darkness* are displayed in various, and quite contrasting, ways. The first woman the reader encounters along the journey is Marlow's aunt, "One thing more remained to do—say good-bye to my excellent aunt" (Conrad 12) who, despite her, certainly from the modern view of woman, rather unappealing and derogatory description, "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether," (Conrad 12) is the one who makes the events of the story possible to happen to begin with, as she is the one who gets Marlow on the steamboat.

The unpleasant understanding of the female role in the world is reinforced later on, "They—the women, I mean— are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse." (Conrad 48) showing just how below himself Marlow, and perhaps then Conrad, saw women to be. However, this view of women



is, in fact, much more nuanced, and it could be argued that from Conrad's point of view, this was not a derogatory view at all, but as with the racist views, simply a contemporary perception.

In the female intermezzi of sorts, women do not play any significant role, simply being local characters, such as, "Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool." (Conrad 10)

However, the last two women of importance in the story are very, very interesting to observe. Firstly, the African woman, who visits Marlow's boat after they had already reached Kurtz. It is, frankly, stunning, just how much reverence Conrad shows when describing her, "She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high"(Conrad 60). The reader will find no sense of inferiority and, while the characters do later comment that, "'If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her'" (Conrad 60) after she had attempted some sort of illegible negotiation, "She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge" (Conrad 61) Conrad puts vast amounts of effort and vivid vocabulary to write just how much of a presence this woman has, "She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent" (Conrad 61) being stunning in particular because of the celebration of her wild savagery, which, while sometimes present throughout the story, mostly falls into the background next to the usual descriptions of Africans as weak, wretched souls.

After returning to Europe, the reader meets the last woman of the story, who, while shown much more respect than Marlow's aunt, still fills the shoes of the domesticated/homely, kind, and affectionate, "She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself." (Conrad 72) while still somehow a 'silly' "yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features" (Conrad 72) creature. It is Kurtz's fiancée, and in a sense, she is meant to be his own reflection, "She struck me as beautiful— I mean she had a beautiful expression." (Conrad 72) continuing the theme, and mainly the image, everyone outside of the depths of Congo has had of Kurtz.

She displays lasting loyalty, "'She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning.'" (Conrad 73) and when talking to Marlow, clearly shows both her deep love and admiration for the legend of the man known as Kurtz, "'It was impossible not to—' "Love him,' she finished eagerly,". (Conrad 74)

### 3.5.2 Victoria 2

Firstly, there is Queen Victoria herself. She is present only in several events, which are her coronation, her marriage, and the decision to crown her as the Empress of India, all of which provide the United Kingdom with various bonuses to prestige. Other than that, she plays no significant role in the story, besides being the namesake of the game itself.

The only other direct mention of women is in relation to Women's Suffrage. This appears across several events, such as Mud March, where 3000 women marched in Brussels, or in the World Anti-Slavery Convention, instigated by the suffragettes, where the player has the option to either accept their points, or to claim them silly.

Additionally, after 1870, there is the choice for the player to Enact Women's Suffrage, which, during war time, reduces War Exhaustion by two points, and lessens the voting strength of both the Rich and the Aristocrats.

Women are not even mentioned in the total population, which is a number present in the game. The only detail there is the Adult Male population, which reflects the game's pragmatic nature and men being the necessary force both as factory workers and as soldiers.

### 3.5.3 Synthesis

Both the video game and the book's portrayal of women could be summarised by one word; insignificance. The video game has women perhaps as a footnote, and overshadows even the book's disregard of them, as it only presents them by few historical footnotes and a tiny mention of Women's Suffrage.

The book, then, portrays women degradingly, as silly creatures, living in a naïve world, where they belong. However, it does beautiful justice to one African woman, displaying her as a beautiful creature of the jungle, almost an idol, painting a wonderful contrast to both the game and the book.

To close out, it is unfortunate the videogame, created a century later, still failed to do this topic justice, however, in a sense, it is understandable, as the focus, like with many different contemporary aspects, was simply on different areas of the age.

## 3.6 Technology

### 3.6.1 Heart of Darkness

Technology itself is not a significant focus of Conrad's story, much more being a contemporary phenomenon which indirectly allows the events to take place to begin with, and, while Imperialism certainly was the excuse, it was the European technological advances which ultimately allowed them to conquer the world.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the railway, one of the most important technologies for the 18th century, is only mentioned briefly during Marlow's stay at the station, "an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air." (Conrad 15) as both the infrastructure would not be present, with the railway being built and finished two to three decades after the events of the story, instead. Some basic infrastructure would, of course, be present, but the main 'technology' used for transport would be human labour and animals, "by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes". (Conrad 30)

Most of the advanced technology the reader encounters is present on the steamboat and in the various European establishments throughout the Congo.

The former is mainly found along the journey across the river. First, the reader unavoidably encounters different descriptions of the various technologies found in and on the steamboat, such as "steam-gauge and at the watergauge" (Conrad 36) the "the stern-wheel" (Conrad 35) or the more basic forms, such as "I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod," (Conrad 68) with one technology being cutely described from a cannibal's point of view, "the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst" (Conrad 37)

The latter is present, for example, during Marlow's visit to the old doctor, who asked for permission to measure his head, using "when he produced a thing like calipers" (Conrad 11) measuring tools which, while seemingly mundane when compared to the printing press or the steamboat, would be the very foundation of all other technologies.

Additionally, some technologies outside of the scope of the steamboat itself, are mentioned as well, such as the legendary Winchester rifle, which 'conquered the wild west' and the natives attacking the steamboat, "with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands" (Conrad 40) or a bit more basic technology, which the natives would still natively not have an access to, such as "three pieces of brass wire." (Conrad 41)

Lastly, it is interesting to compare these European advancements with what the natives bring to the table, be it art, which is often present in European offices in the Congo, “I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles” (Conrad 26) weaponry, again, stored as trophies, “a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies” (Conrad 24) or used in battle “We are too late; he has vanished— the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club.” (Conrad 47) or the basic vessels used by the African natives, “If they left the bank in their canoes” (Conrad 42)

### 3.6.2 Victoria 2

Technology is an integral part of the video game. First, technology is researched through research points. This has a base number, however, that is influenced by other technologies in the Culture section, such as Idealism or Empiricism, but primarily through the nation population’s plurality, reflecting the overall influence on education of the technological advancements.

Technology, then, is separated into five categories. Army, Navy, Commerce, Culture, and Industry. Each of these categories have their subsections, and influence, in one way or another, every single aspect of the game, ranging from military doctrines, to tax collection methods, to the discovery of dynamite.

Each technology has got its own contemporary icon, with beautifully representative art, showing, with their own portrait, either the character who made the discovery, the image of the production method, an image of a hussar for the corresponding hussar technology, or a picture of men preparing ground for laying rails in the Limited-Access Roads technology.

Examples which are relevant to the events of the *Heart of Darkness* book are Breech-Loaded rifles in the Army section, which is one of the technologies related to the Winchester rifle. Then the Steel Steamers in the Navy section, being the latest iteration of the Steam transport, providing both durability and speed. Stock Exchange in the Commerce section, which is indirectly related to the book’s events in a way where local companies exploiting natives often sold their stocks and bonds, something King Leopold II greatly benefited from.

Biologism, under which lies Darwinism and Social Darwinism, which we can find in the book in many iterations, ranging from the n-word, to the old doctor, to European superiority, to how Africans are treated. And lastly, in the Industry section, Interchangeable parts, which were a critical component in the repair and functioning of Marlow’s steamboat along his journey to find Kurtz.

### 3.6.3 Synthesis

When compared, technology plays a much more significant role in the video game than it does in the book. It is a core component, permeating and influencing every aspect and every section of the game, while as in the book, it is a contemporary influence, working in the background of the story, and neither the focus nor the result of the events unfolding throughout.

## 3.7 Goods

### 3.7.1 Heart of Darkness

Besides one exception, most of the goods mentioned during the story are similar in how technology is used, that being rather a contemporary phenomenon than a significant factor to the main events of the actual story.

The one commodity which does serve a significant purpose in the story is Ivory. It is the reason why Kurtz ventured so deep into the heart of darkness, “Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading-post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at ‘the very bottom of there.’” (Conrad 19) or why he was so precious to the company, “Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together ...” (Conrad 19)

Ivory also brought what they lacked, as they exchanged various goods for it, supplying the hunters, “a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory.” (Conrad 18) Conrad cutely mentioning a proper name of one specific company, “Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter;” (Conrad 29) possibly serving as a display of European colonial reach and capitalist influence over the Congo, further present in the later mention of, “Martini-Henry cartridges” (Conrad 63) more specifically used for shooting.

### 3.7.2 Victoria 2

The video game takes a vastly different approach to goods and commodities from the book. Firstly, the game does not contain Ivory, besides, perhaps, the Ivory Coast sea name. Instead, it is focused on the much more practical aspects of the 19th century world economy.

On the world map, under the RGO output mapmode, the player can view various Raw Materials, as the game classifies them, which different provinces across the world produce. Each province produces one type of Raw Material, which, of course, would not be literally

true, and many different places produce many different products, but for the sake of game mechanics, the developers decided to simplify the system, as that still includes hundreds, if not thousands, of provinces with specific goods.

These Raw Materials, then, are harvested naturally. However, the harvesting process can be sped up by using factories. Factories, of which we will not find many in the *Heart of Darkness* book, also produce other types of commodities, such as Industrial, Consumer, or Military goods, which the player then has the power to either direct to their own country, or send into the world market, depending on the type of government in place. For example, a Liberal government might be much more inclined to trade goods, while a Conservative government might begin to store the resource for personal needs.

Trade, then, allows countries to sell an excess of goods and to purchase lacking goods on the global market. There is a popular joke among the *Vicky 2* community that “One guy made the system, nobody knows how it works, and at this point, we are too afraid to change it.”

Colonisation, then, brings more goods to the market, the goods found in the Congo being coffee and fruit. However, there are some amazing things the player can do outside of the scope of this African corner. With the Chinese market being closed off, for example, should the player control a nation such as the United States, and force the Chinese market to open, they could collapse and cripple the global market in a couple of months and completely change the course of history through trade alone.

However, in terms of the Congo, what the player is working with is little more than a tiny, insignificant boost to their economy.

### 3.7.3 Synthesis

Similarly to the Technology section, goods and commodities play a much more significant role in the video game than they play in the book. The difference here is that the book has an important motif of ivory, which significantly reflects the contemporary events and drives, or is a cause, of many of the events in the story, while being entirely omitted from the video game as a concept.

The video game makes up for that by having an over-the-top trading and manufacturing system, which functions in tremendous detail, and overshadows anything the book has to offer.

Lastly, both the video game and the book contain names of specific companies of that time, painting a vivid picture of the age and its capitalist nature.

## 3.8 Europe

### 3.8.1 Heart of Darkness

Europe itself is present in the beginning of the story, with Marlow leaving towards, “The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway.” (Conrad 1) and with the mention of the local names, rooting the scene near mainland England, “They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith” (Conrad 4) with curious descriptions of England as the source of civilisation “bearers of a spark from the sacred fire” (Conrad 5) and as a rather gloomy and dark place, “The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom” (Conrad 1)

While in Africa, Europe becomes a distant matter, however, still very influential. First by the presence of companies “This devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition,” (Conrad 30) which, depending on their patron and purpose, could have various purposes, ranging from establishing relations with the natives to violently genociding opposing tribes.

The other use of Europe, or rather its consequence, is a racial one, perhaps best exemplified by various Europeans and European companies present in the Congo “Her captain was a Swede” (Conrad 14) “Fresleven—that was the fellow’s name, a Dane” (Conrad 9) “It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house” (Conrad 53) or a character’s reaction to Englishness of people, in particular when a very rich-looking character, “The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug-nose up to me. ‘You English?’ he asked, all smiles. ‘Are you?’ I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment.” (Conrad 53) exemplifying the idealised English racial superiority and the British influence over the globe.

The last use of Europe during the stay in the Congo is Europe’s pressure, and essentially control, of everything outside of its mainland. White characters ‘run the show’, so to speak, in Africa, and even they are shown to be mainly worried about what those in Europe think, ““Your success in Europe is assured in any case,”” (Conrad 65)

Upon Marlow’s return to Europe, it is simply used as a reflection to Marlow’s growing distaste for the city life, “I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of

people hurrying through” (Conrad 70) and a location of Kurtz’s wife, when Marlow visits her.”

### 3.8.2 Victoria 2

The portrayal of Europe in *Victoria 2* is a direct contrast to its display of Africa. Europe is full of vibrant colour, spheres of influence, large nations competing over trade, building up large militaries, threatening each other’s borders, while pertaining in the concert of Europe, as ships sail the seas and men, on foot or on horseback, march across the European cities, crossing the colourful political background dotted with details of the terrain and hundreds of names of individual European provinces.

It is the undisputed centre of the world. Seven of the eight Great Powers are located in Europe, if Turkey is included, with the only outsider being the still very young United States.

European Nations begin the campaign with the highest technological and infrastructure levels of all the nations in the world, with such flavour as the UK having the most developed Naval sector with technological school of Sea Power & The Merchant Marine, which allows to to always keep an edge in the Maritime areas, while Prussia begins with an advantage in the Military sector, itself having a school of technology dedicated to Military and Industrial dominance.

Besides this, most of the game’s events are focused on Europe, and most of the decisions any nations can take are, too, dedicated to European events, some of the most important being the formation of Germany or the concession of Austria-Hungary.

Other nations in the world do, however, have the chance to catch up. Should they invest enough effort into inviting Western intellectuals, artists, and soldiers, then, after sufficient time, they will be able to press the Westernisation button, allowing them to develop advanced technologies and grant them the possibility of becoming a great power. This, specifically, tends to be the aim of Japan or China.

### 3.8.3 Synthesis

When compared, Europe in both works presents the centre of the world and the source of all the strength and power. It is feared, it is revered, it is the start and it is the end. However, they take a different approach to it, as, while the game allows European nations to extend their influence over the globe, and mainly focuses on them, the events of the book take place in



Africa, and it is its primary focus. The difference, then, is not the portrayal of Europe, but the varying focus which both works present.

However, as far as its image is concerned, they are very similar.

## 3.9 Europeans

### 3.9.1 Heart of Darkness

#### 3.9.1.1 Foreigners

Europeans are present throughout the entirety of the book. They come from various corners of Europe, such as Denmark, “Fresleven—that was the fellow’s name, a Dane” (Conrad 9) France, “He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. BON VOYAGE.” (Conrad 10) or Russia, ““Brother sailor ... honour ... pleasure ... delight ... introduce myself ... Russian ... son of an arch-priest ... Government of Tambov ... What? Tobacco! English tobacco;” (Conrad 53)

The purpose they serve in the story varies. The Dane serves as an example of European hypocrisy and tendency to fall to tyranny, “Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs... Therefore he whacked the old ni\*ger mercilessly” (Conrad 9) or to familiarise Marlow and present him in a seafaring environment, tying two cultures in their common heritage, “Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge.” (Conrad 14) whereas the Dutch make an appearance as traders, “ a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods” (Conrad 53) fitting their reputation and heritage.

Curiously, the Russian, “The Russian was explaining to me that it was only lately that Mr. Kurtz had come down to the river” (Conrad 56) does not serve a role of Russness in the story, but rather, exemplifies Kurtz’s entourage, and presents an alternative, an outside view of what man he truly was.

#### 3.9.1.2 White Men

White men themselves, then have a fairly distinct picture in the story. Besides Marlow himself being white, he is shown as someone connected to other places of the world, “Buddha preaching in European clothes” (Conrad 6)

They are often depicted as sacred and, in a way, ancient. Marlow himself begins this depiction during his first rant of the British pre-Roman past, mentioning Roman legionaries, “put in

charge of one of these craft the legionaries” (Conrad 6)

When Fresleven is mentioned later, after he had been stabbed, even his corpse is seen with natives’ reverence, “They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell.” (Conrad 9)

After encountering many African natives, who are given less-than-pleasing descriptions, Marlow appreciates meeting a fellow European, “I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of getup that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision.” (Conrad 18) who is clearly portrayed as more civilised than anything Africa has to offer.

As with the Dane, further contrast between European superiority and cheapness are presented with another character’s greed, “what he meant by coming there at all. ‘To make money, of course. What do you think?’ he said, scornfully. Then he got fever, and had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole.” (Conrad 20) showing both the man’s lack of character and lack of resilience.

The overall white superiority is further proposed by a character disregarding any societal threat by any African, “nobody here, you understand, HERE, can endanger your position. And why The danger is in Europe;” (Conrad 32)

Lastly, Conrad/Marlow do make a few direct comparisons of Europeans and Africans during the read. However, they are rarely clearly stated or directly opinionated, and much more left for the reader to interpret, “It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew” (Conrad 40)

### 3.9.1.3 Kurtz

Kurtz himself is an important representation of an ideal European man and, of course, its deconstruction.

His racial origin is often emphasised, “English half-caste clerk Kurtz” (Conrad 32) pointing towards his European heritage “His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz;” (Conrad 49)

He is seen as a genius, “Kurtz was a ‘universal genius,’ but even a genius would find it easier to work with ‘adequate tools—intelligent men.’” (Conrad 28) and a leader.

Throughout the story, however, his character is deconstructed. While Ivory greatly contributed to his initial success, “Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together” (Conrad 19) that, later on, is used to show his weakness, turning Ivory, and its ownership, to sort of an

addiction, “‘My ivory.’ Oh, yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—’ everything belonged to him.” (Conrad 48) foreshadowing the coming of his tyrannical nature.

When Marlow comes closer, and meets the people who worked with Kurtz, his character, through their own experiences, is deconstructed even further, “He could be very terrible. You can’t judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man.” (Conrad 56) attributing madness to his genius, and his previously celebrated European heritage is, instead, turned, through the use of semantics, into a flaw, “Kurtz—Kurtz— that means short in German—don’t it?” (Conrad 59)

Kurtz’s story ends in a death on a deathbed, “Suddenly the manager’s boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt: ‘Mistah Kurtz—he dead.’” (Conrad 69) being preceded by vile actions, and madness, writing in his increasingly erratic diary, “Exterminate all the brutes” (Conrad 50) and his last words being, “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad 69)

### 3.9.2 Victoria 2

Europeans in *Victoria 2* have an undisputedly dominant role. Not to repeat the points mentioned in the game’s portrayal of Europe, there are two points which need to be mentioned. Firstly, the player can view European ethnicities through the Nationality map mode, or in the population tab (sadly, the game does not distinguish Ethnicity and Nationality). However, this is no different from any other nation, except indirectly showing that the continent with, at best above average, population density is the undisputed centre of the world. (And it must be mentioned that, after London, Prague is the second most populous region in the game.)

The game is, for the most part, more about nations and numbers, as some people like to call it a ‘glorified excel sheet’, and not so much about characters.

However, we can find European characters’ presence in portraits. Be it Queen Victoria herself, a Southern men congress in The Slave Power event, a white man giving a speech in the Springtime of Nations event, a white colonist in the Botanical Expedition event, or several European colonial soldiers conversing in the Colonial Incident event, Europeans are the predominant ethnicity portrayed throughout the entire game.

The other area where a European male influence is impossible not to notice is the Technology section. There is not a single non-European portrait present, likely due to the vast majority, if

not all, the technologies being discovered in Europe or in the US. Be it pictures of white soldiers in the Army section, a portrait of Karl Marx at the Collectivist theory, Lenin giving a speech in Revolution & Counterrevolution technology, or the portrait of John Locke in the Associationism technology, white men penetrate every section of Technology, and take the main stage of the game's portrayal of the 19th century world.

### 3.9.3 Synthesis

The amount of presence of Europeans in the video game and the book is not equal and very differently portrayed. The video game oozes European from its every pore, showing characters in its artwork and displaying them and their influence, directly and indirectly. However, when the sheer amount of show is taken into account, the book displays many more Europeans, in particular characters. The video game does not have characters, per se, but only historical references. The book, however, contains many characters, which either influence, or are part of the story.

All in all, the book and the video game share the European image of dominance and reverence, however, the book contains many more actual, fleshed out characters, while the game presents many more historical references.

## 3.10 Courtesy of Victoria 2

### 3.10.1 Music

Being a videogame, *Victoria 2* has got some aspects which the book simply cannot mimic. Firstly, the music. The music in *Victoria 2* is extraordinary. It is a delight to listen to, and paints a beyond beautiful picture of a world where Eurocentrism is not seen as something to be ashamed of, but something to indulge in and to be celebrated.

Right as the artwork of the first loading screens begin to roll, glorious drums and trumpets of the 210 second composition named The Coronation bless the players ears, welcoming them into this idealised, 19th century world of the Victorian era.

Once the player selects their nation and is taken into the game, any song can begin to play. However, be it the gloriously melancholic violins of the Buckingham Palace, or the simple harmonicas of the DLC song Battle Hymn of the Republic, the potent atmosphere of the game envelops the listener, and having started the game one too many times, the notes of these songs become firmly etched into the sensation of observing the map and taking the numbers of the game in.

### 3.10.2 Artwork

*Victoria 2* contains beautiful artwork. It attempts to mimic the contemporary style, while usually keeping to a beige and black colour palette. The style itself can only be described as timeless, and it is used for both photo-like portraits, caricatures, or various artworks, directly referencing the works of that time.

### 3.11 Courtesy of Heart of Darkness

While many video games contain elaborately written stories, and sometimes even entire books, or even Visual Novels, which are a curious merge of video games and books, *Heart of Darkness* can offer detailed characters and portrayals which are, sadly, simply not present in the game. Most importantly, however, it offers Joseph Conrad himself, with his genius.

The game lacks a story. As was mentioned by the developers themselves that it is much more about allowing the player to steer the course of history. However, Conrad's work is precise, detailed, handcrafted. It does not allow the reader to steer the course of the story, instead offering a handcrafted and very intentional experience.

## 4 Conclusion

The focus of this thesis was to present the videogame *Victoria 2: Heart of Darkness* and the book *Heart of Darkness*, and to compare their individual portrayals of the 19th century. It is safe to say that while *Victoria 2* did take contemporary inspiration, it is not concerned with the events of the book in the slightest. Instead, it takes *Heart of Darkness* as a namesake, a representative of the era, which, in itself, proves the canonical value of *Heart of Darkness*, as well as people's awareness of the book, albeit not awareness of the messages it carries.

This difference in focus is embodied by just how integral areas not particularly essential to the book are, such as technology, which permeates the game, while only being a footnote of the book, or goods and commodities; an area where Conrad selects a very niche, albeit affluent, theme, while the game attempts to encompass a much broader scale, and as consequence, disregards money-making ventures in favour of nation-making commodities.

On the other hand, representations of Africa and Africans, while carrying certain potent similarities, differ greatly at their core. The video game, in this regard, is like nature. Indifferent. It does not carry any will, be it good or ill. It simply represents the contemporary understanding of Europe being the centre of the world. This whole concept could be seen, to

an extent, as similar to Conrad, however, this could not be farther from the truth. Conrad's depictions are full of intent, full of hidden emotion, and whether good or bad, it cannot be denied by any critic that the depiction of the sub-Saharan is a very important matter to Conrad.

And let us not forget the overall mood. *Heart of Darkness* is a very grim story, in which, perhaps, European things offer some sort of respite. But it does not celebrate much.

*Victoria 2* is the embodiment of celebration and glorification. It sings praises to the Victorian, and paints it in the most vivid light possible, crafting an image of until then unknown melancholy of the romanticised world passed where everything had its place, and to be entirely and brutally blunt; where the European whites indisputably ruled the world. And I can easily claim from experience and knowing what sort of folk circle these types of games - there are many of the more radical kind and who enjoy this specific type of allure. However, let it also be said that I have met many intelligent and kindhearted people while playing these games as well. It is simply the unfortunate truth that these games attract these sorts, too.

*To conclude*, *Heart of Darkness* is a very contradictory work. It is accused of both vileness and manipulation, as well as brilliance and heralded as a visionary of what was to come. No matter the opinion, its literary value cannot be understated, and the fact it inspired so many strong stances throughout the times only proves further its immense impact.

*Victoria 2: Heart of Darkness*, on the other hand, does not seek controversy. It does not attempt to make the player contemplate, nor is it its intention to point towards lapses in logic or to reveal hidden truths, lies, and deceit. Its goal is to entertain. To provide the player with a pleasant experience which is disconnected from the pain of everyday life. An experience in an idealised world of the past, brought to life; an experience where the person is not a pawn, an insignificant nobody, but one who has the power to control everything.

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