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**Paradoxes and Absurdity as a Means of Expression in Joseph Conrad's
*Heart of Darkness***

Conrad often uses the rhetorical figure of catachresis - a combination of semantically incompatible words or rhetorical figures that express the absurd. In regular speech, phrases like "wilderness had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know", or "[silence] that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well" would represent a logical absurdity. They can only be perceived in a figurative sense, as symbolic images, and it is only when they acquire the rhetorical quality that they become catachreses. There is no explanation for what such images mean with Conrad, because they do not have any specific meaning.

What we find in *Heart of Darkness* is not a metaphorical thinking in the regular sense - a regular image always has a specific tenor that connects its vehicle with reality because the image itself is taken from that reality. In contrast, Marlow's figurative references are vague, paradoxical, and at the same time highly suggestive - like those that can be encountered in an alchemical treatise or an esoteric text. In fact, it is the system of veils behind which nothing is hidden. It is these 'veils' or non-referential images that create the absurdist hyper reality of Conrad's Africa.

The 'dream reality' described by Marlow, or 'unreality' as he calls it, is a fascinating device with correlates Conrad's artistic method with the recent postmodernist idea of hyper reality. Africa of *Heart of Darkness* is quite perceivable as a "simulated" reality, as it is essentially non-mimetic and constructed from the chaos of Marlow's extremely subjective impressions. The reality imagined this way clearly resembles an artistic analogue of J. Baudrillard's non-referential reality, which also represents a system of signs with no denotations, or in case of metaphoric thinking, vehicles with no tenors. There is nothing behind the non-referential system of signs, only the absurd, 'emptiness', and 'nothingness' manifested in horror.