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Humans Eating Humans.
Representations of the Figure of the Cannibal and Cannibalism in Colonial and Postcolonial English Literature

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Preface

Preface

Coherently with the title, these pages deal with cannibals and cannibalism. However, the focus of the work is not on the man who eats human flesh or on the practice itself, but on the way they have been represented through time in some of the most significant novels of colonial and postcolonial English literature from the 18th-century classic *Robinson Crusoe* to the 1976 *A Fringe of Leaves* by Patrick White. Though the work is centred on these three centuries of literature on the subject, the first chapter exits the boundaries of literature and acts as a "scientific" introduction to the whole matter. Starting from the very first encounter with the cannibals at the end of 15th century with the discovery of the New World, the introducing chapter presents to the reader a wide overview of the study of cannibalism that goes from the almost mythological reports of the first European travellers to the evolution of 19th and 20th century proper anthropological studies, basically divided into two opposite schools of thought, the one defending, the other discrediting and questioning the existence of cannibalism as a cultural practice. With a closing section bringing to the attention of the reader the themes of representation, stereotype and colonial discourse, the pillars of the approach to the analysis of the novels in this work, the first chapter provides a fundamental tool for the comprehension of the considered topic and opens a parallelism between the scientific study of cannibalism and its influence on its literary transposition.

The second chapter opens the main part of the work dedicated to the analysis of the figure of the cannibal in literature. Indispensable starting point for this work is Daniel Defoe's 1719 *Robinson Crusoe*. This milestone of colonial English literature offers several points of analysis, from the fear of the other, to the superiority of the Western world and the necessity of colonialism to eradicate the horror of cannibalism. Jumping forward two centuries in time, the third chapter presents the study of the subject in the work of Joseph Conrad. Divided into two main sections

the chapter considers *Heart of Darkness* and the novella *Falk*. The 1899 masterpiece concerns symbolic cannibalism and the non-literal man-eating practices of colonial exploitation with a central importance of the themes of racism and negative stereotyping of the other. On the other hand, the 1903 novella *Falk. A Reminiscence* serves as the beginning of the analysis of what is known as survival cannibalism or "the custom of the sea", historically attested in many episodes of shipwrecks and sea disasters where the cannibal is not a native of the colonies but a white man. Closely linked to the chapter on Joseph Conrad's work, in particular to *Heart of Darkness*, chapter four deals with Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*, where the native cannibals are dehumanised and considered sometime worse than the wild beasts of the jungle. Central in this section are the themes of white man's natural superiority and racism that are both common features of all the novels analysed here, and of colonial English literature in general. The fifth and final chapter is centred on the parallelism between cultural cannibalism and the ritual of communion. As reported in chapter one of this work, the most common representation of the act of cannibalism as described in the reports of the travellers who witnessed, or said to have witnessed its occurrence, is always that of a feast engaging a community of people preceded by some kind of officiating ritual. Though this *cliché* for the representation of cannibalism is somehow respected in all the novels analysed in these pages, chapter five will be focused on Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*, where communion cannibalism is mirrored to the rite of the Christian Eucharist.

Based on a large series of books, essays, research studies and papers on cannibalism belonging to both the anthropological and the literary spheres, this work offers the possibility to go through a wide though incomplete portrait of how the figure of the cannibal and cannibalism have been represented in the context of colonialism when "cannibal" often rhymed with "other" and "enemy". At the same time, these pages aim at the development of the reader's awareness of how the unilateral point of view of the Western world that emerges from the interconnection between anthropological studies and literary world has created the negative iconic image of the cannibal as we think about it.

Chapter 1

Anthropological Points of View on Cannibalism

Chapter 1

1.1 The genesis of a myth

Cannibal: noun, a person who eats human flesh.[1] It is enough to open a common dictionary to feel a certain disease in front of a word that has threatened generations and generations of people in the past and which is still regarded with some kind of intellectual fear by most of the people who use to think about it as a social taboo. However, cannibals and cannibalism have never really been a taboo for travellers, missionaries, scholars and anthropologists considering the incredibly wide bibliography on the topic. From the very first appearance of the word itself in Christopher Columbus' Journal,[2] where the misunderstood name of a tribe, the *"Carib"*, became the word *"cannibal"* as we know it today, to the latest studies of our time, the scientific fascination for the man-eater has lost nothing of its magnetism.

Despite the fact that one of the first mentions of the anthropophagi is found in Herodotus' *Histories* and that this figure is present in the Western unconscious from ancient Greek mythology to the Bible and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it is only with the appearance of Caribbean cannibals at the end of 15th century that exits the field of fantasy enters the reality and shocks the world. A countless number of accounts and reports about savage populations practicing massive and systematic human sacrifice and anthropophagy raised the problem of cultural or institutionalised cannibalism which was inconceivable and therefore to be eradicated. However, this inextricable link between cannibalism and colonialism gave origin to some doubts and suspicions over the actual scale and reliability of the phenomenon. Particularly from the second

[1] The word "cannibal" in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.* 2005, Oxford University Press

[2] *The Journal of Cristopher Columbus (during his first voyage 1492 – 1493)*

half of the 20th century, right after the end of the golden age of imperialism, this debate encountered new interest and strength. As we will see in detail further on in this chapter, two are the main points of view of historians and anthropologists on the topic: the first (also chronologically) point of view, a kind of "defence" of institutionalised cannibalism, deals with some explanation and justification motivating and "supporting" the reliability of massive anthropophagy with religious and environmental reasons; the second, in complete opposition to the previous idea, has a recognizable origin in William Arens's 1979 book *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology & Anthropophagy*,[3] where the author dismantles cultural cannibalism questioning the existence of cannibalism itself as a tribal use, motivating his assertions with the fact that we do not have any certain eyewitness of the cannibal act, and raising the issue of Western colonial influence on the topic.

Far from solving the debate in one sense or the other, recent anthropological studies seem to place the truth in the middle, reducing the scale of institutionalised cannibalism and providing some reliable tribal accounts of ritual anthropophagy. It is undeniable, however, that the representation of the figure of the cannibal suffered the influence of colonialism and that, before the beginning of modern anthropology and its scientific studies on the topic (even though anthropology does not provide universal truth), literature and colonial reports contributed to the creation of a real myth that will never leave the imagination of human kind.

[3] Arens, William E., 1979, *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology & Anthropophagy*. New York, Oxford University Press

1.2 The defence of cannibalism

It was 1958 when Garry Hogg (1902-1976), an English author and journalist, published his book *Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice.*[4] In his work, Hogg takes us to a journey around the world to see what the cannibals and their practices were like and differed from one another according to the geographical context they were found in. From Fiji Islands to the Aztec Empire, from the Amazon Basin to Congo, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in Africa, from Indonesia and New Guinea to Australia and New Zealand, this cannibal world is presented to the reader in quite a sensational way. The fact that Garry Hogg was not a proper anthropologist and that he "only" reported in detail what travellers and first anthropologists wrote does not affect the importance of his book. It is in fact the first book in English entirely dedicated to the subject and it contributed somehow to awake the interest in a topic that was often neglected before. The general idea that the reader has from the pages of Hogg's book is that cannibalism is and has always been quite a diffused and institutionalised practice among savage tribes all over the world; in other words, the idea that the whole of the non-Western savage and primitive cultures were a place of brutal traditions as described in the first travellers journals is confirmed in these pages dedicated for the first time to a large public, larger than the scientific audience these kind of books used to be addressed to before.

Although, as said above, the 1958 edition of *Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice* proudly claims the title of first English book on cannibalism, we can go back more than twenty years, to 1935, to find our cannibals in a proper anthropological work. In her *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, American anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901-1978) reports her two years' life experience and research among what she calls three primitive societies in New Guinea, the Arapesh, the Mundugmor and the Ciambuli. As for the title, the book is dedicated to the description of the way of living of these tribes with a particular interest in the

[4] Hogg, Garry, 1958, *Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice*. Robert Hale Ltd.

different behaviour of the two sexes and their roles to the maintenance of their society. What interests our topic, however, comes in chapter 2, where the author talks about the Mundugmor, the tribe of the river. The title of the chapter cannot be misunderstood: "The Pace of Life in a Cannibal Tribe"; with this "rude" introduction to a new tribe (the Arapesh of the first chapter were described as quite a calm and lovely tribe), Mead seems to remind us that New Guinea is traditionally recognised as a land of cannibals. It is a member of the Arapesh tribe that warns the anthropologist and her group of colleagues that the Mundugmor were different from them, that they were a ferocious tribe of head hunters and cannibals and that they should have been careful while visiting their villages. Similarly to what happened to Christopher Columbus, when the Arawaks warned him about the anthropophagical uses of the Carib tribe, their rivals, here again we have the same accusation moved from one tribe to another. Despite the warnings, the expedition decided to go and meet the Mundugmor because, as Margaret Mead writes in a note in the text, cannibalism disappeared from that tribe only three years before her arrival after the prohibition proclaimed by Australian government; this, however, did not prevent Mead to provide quite a detailed description of a cannibal society.

The life of these Mundugmor were, according to Mead, closely linked to the river they lived close to; the river Yuat (that is the name of the river in question), in fact, provoked the division of what was once a unique tribal entity into two different groups: those who lived in both sides of the river and those who lived westwards the river. This distinction is quite important because according to this savage population, the water flow "appeared" only a few generations before their time and the consequent splitting of the tribe also caused a kind of social shock; before the appearance of the river, in fact, the Mundugmor practiced anthropophagy only against the war prisoner belonging to the Andoar tribe, another cannibal tribe they were at war with. In other words they practiced what is known as exocannibalism, the eating of the flesh of someone belonging to a different tribe or ethnic group, and they believed that eating the flesh of someone of their own tribe speaking the same language would have been dangerous for them. But, once they saw their society divided by the river, the two groups of Mundugmor started to consider themselves as

two different entities and, having seen that eating the flesh of a member of the other group had no consequences they not only began to do it regularly, but they also started to discourage the marriage between people of the two groups in order to strengthen their separation. In this example of savage society, cannibalism has, or had, quite a central role before its prohibition; in her work, Mead highlights the fact that the practice of anthropophagy was so radical to this population that a natural modification of the environment had as a consequence the creation of a new enemy to hunt for flesh.[5]

The social importance of cannibal practices, despite their inconceivability, were not a prerogative of the Mundugmor described by Margaret Mead. The accounts we have from the first conquistadores and missionaries from the New World talk about other savage groups of uncivilized anthropophagi; among them, an interesting case is that of the Brazilian Tupinamba. Owing their international "fame" to Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (first published in 1580)[6], they were not simply human eaters, but they combined torture and human sacrifice to cannibalism. In his 1977 work *Cannibals and Kings. The Origins of Cultures*,[7] the famous American anthropologist Marvin Harris (1927-2001), reports an episode of this macabre combination of torture, sacrifice and anthropophagy by the Tupinamba. The source for this detailed description is the account of an eyewitness, Hans Städen, a German sailor shipwrecked on the coast of Brazil at the beginning of the 17th century who was present at the event described. As for the New Guinean Mundugmor, also in the case of the Tupinamba the victim is a war prisoner of a different tribe or ethnic group (exocannibalism); trailed in the central place of the village and secured with a rope, the unlucky prisoner is scoffed and humiliated while the old women of the village danced around him showing him the pot where his blood would be cooked. After that, the prisoner had to engage in a mortal fight; he was symbolically given a cudgel and he was allowed to defend himself. In this way, he was not just killed but he was "defeated". Once the prisoner was executed, the old women arranged the corpse to be

[5] Mead, Margaret, 1935, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, William Morrow & C., New York
[6] Montaigne, Michel de 1580, *Essais*
[7] Harris, Marvin 1977, *Cannibals and Kings. The Origins of Cultures.* Random House, Inc., New York

roasted and all the population of the village voraciously participated in the cannibal feast and the whole of the body was consumed.[8]

Moving from Brazil, Harris focuses on another geographic area where cannibalism comes after ritual human sacrifice. This time the tribe is that of the Huron (or Wyandot people or Wendat) of lake Ontario in Canada. The victim here, in the described case a native Iroquoi, was captured not in war but while he was fishing, as if he was a hunting booty more than a war prisoner. Brutally tortured during the night, the victim was kept alive until sunrise because, as the Huron shaman commanded, it was important for him to see the sun light before being beheaded. After the end of the ritual, the corpse was cut into pieces and shared by the member of the tribe to be eaten. In this case, Harris is not as precise as he is for the Tupinamba about the modality of consumption of the flesh but for a vague mention of a group of missionaries who saw one of the Huron on his way home after the sacrifice holding a roasted hand of the victim.

Considering these examples of ritual cannibalism a question should be asked in order to give some kind of explanation to the phenomenon: why? Why these savage populations practiced anthropophagy, torture and human sacrifice? Psychoanalysis tried to explain these macabre uses as three expressions of the basic instinct of mankind for love and aggressiveness, shield together in these extreme outcomes ; it is true that in many epochs of the history of man torture and sacrifice were thought not only as a punishment for the victim, but also, and in some cases principally as an act of entertainment for the public. Examples can easily come to everyone's mind: the Romans with their amphitheatres where thousands of people assisted to mortal combats between gladiators or to the desperate fights of slaves against savage beasts; the Inquisition with its tortures and public execution of witches and heretics in the name of God and the religion; the "guillotine shows" in France during the Revolution. Against these evidences it is hard to go against the idea that man lived periods of fascination for this kind of sadism throughout his history, but, as Marvin

[8] Städen, Hans 1557, *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*

Harris states in his work, the same discourse is not enough to explain cannibalism. The act of eating another human being, except for the extreme cases where the consumption of a corpse is the only way to survive (shipwrecks for example), is harder to justify than torture and sacrifice. A further case mentioned by Harris, a sensational one for its scale and its wide bibliography, answers, or tries to answer the question of why cannibalism is practiced, at least for the ethnic group considered: the Aztecs.

The sources of the majority of information we have on the Aztecs are mainly three: the *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*[9](1632) by Bernal Diaz del Castillo (1492-1594) the chronicler of Hernán Cortés' 1519-1521 expedition for the conquest of the Aztec Empire; the *Relación de Algunas Cosas de las que Acaecieron al muy Ilustre Señor Don Hernando Cortés, Marqués Del Valle, desde que se Determinó a Ir a Descubrir Tierra en la Tierra Firme del Mar Océano*[10] by Andrés de Tapia (1498-1561), another Cortes' soldier who's work inspired the *Historia* of Bernal Diaz; and the
Historia universal de las cosas de Nueva España[11] (1569) also known as the *Florentine Codex,* by Bernardino de Sahagùn (1489-1590), a Spanish missionary whose work has been defined of a certain anthropological importance by 20th Century anthropologist Miguel León-Portilla.

On the basis of these three famous accounts of the "Conquista", Harris introduces the Aztecs mentioning what they are famous for: human sacrifice. What is peculiar of this famous pre-Columbian population is the scale of the practice, which is exponentially higher than that of any other ethnic groups mentioned in these pages. The figure of 20.000 human sacrificed per year is commonly estimated and seems to find credit in the accounts of Bernal Diaz del Castillo who talks about one hundred thousand human skulls exposed in order in the place of Xocotlan. The motivation for

[9] Del Castillo, Bernal Diaz 1632, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*
[10] De Tapia, Andrés, *Relación de Algunas Cosas de las que Acaecieron al muy Ilustre Señor Don Hernando Cortés, Marqués Del Valle, desde que se Determinó a Ir a Descubrir Tierra en la Tierra Firme del Mar Océano*, short chronicle written during the years of Hernán Cortés' expedition.
[11] De Sahagùn, Bernardino 1569, *Historia Universal de las Cosas de Nueva España*

this was that the gods of the Aztecs had an insatiable thirst for human blood and heart and all these sacrifices perpetuated with a proper rite on the top of all of the pyramids all over the Aztec Empire were necessary to please this gods' macabre appetite in order to grant their favour and benevolence to the people. The fact that the victim was most of the time a member of another Aztec group implied the necessity of the war for prisoners to be sacrificed; and a kind of perpetual war was in fact one of the main features of the Aztec Empire where the dominating group never established a total control over the other populations inhabiting the area of what came out to be a "chaotic" empire, unlike the Maya or the Incas (the other two main pre-Columbian cultures), the first being organised as a group of independent "city-state", the second having an organisation closer to our idea of unique empire.

However this thirst of the gods is hard to believe as the only explanation for Aztec human sacrifice. American anthropologist Sherburne Friend Cook (1896-1974) was the first to reject this religious motivation providing a different theory. In his 1946 essay *Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Colonial Mexico*[12], Cook stated that this large scale human sacrifice could not be a simple religious matter and that economical needs must be taken into consideration to explain the phenomenon. In short, Cook claimed that human sacrifice, together with warfare, were for the Aztecs a way to control demography and preserve their society from exceeding the number of people their environment was able to feed and sustain. Despite the mention of Cook's theory, however, Harris put the attention on a controversial point: why, if human sacrifice would be a way to control demography, capturing thousands of prisoners for sacrificial rite instead of killing them in the battlefield during the fight? Could it be that Aztec gods' thirst was so insatiable that the Aztecs were worried about killing too many enemies during the fight? Reports of battles between the Aztecs and the conquistadores talk about a certain surprise of the first in seeing the Spanish soldiers killing them without caring about making prisoners. Evidently the issue on Cook's theory has a sense, and the solution is to be

[12] Cook, Sherburne F. 1946, *Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Colonial Mexico*, Human Biology Vol. 18, No. 2 (MAY, 1946), pp. 81-102, Wayne State University Press

found in Michael Harner's 1977 *The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice*[13] and his 1977 *The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice*[14]; in these two important essays, Harner answers the question about the reasons of anthropophagy and human sacrifice, at least for the Aztec case. To understand the problem, the anthropologist starts with an overview of the environment in which the Aztec Empire developed itself: the Valley of Mexico. The Aztec land was (and still is), a well-watered and fertile area from which the inhabitants could get the carbohydrates necessary for life and sustainment by agriculture. On the contrary, in this Mesoamerican area there was a serious lack of herbivorous mammals to be domesticated in order to get protein food because, as reported by Harner, the ancient hunters eliminated them. To supply to this environmental deficiency, the Aztecs found quite a particular solution, and they found it at the basis of their pyramids: eating the corpses of the victims of their sacrifices.

What can seem an exaggeration both in terms of morality and reliability finds once again its support in the accounts of Bernal Diaz, Andrés de Tapia and Bernardino de Sahagùn; in the reports from their experience among the Aztecs, in fact, they confirm Harner's thesis. Once the prisoner was killed and his heart removed to "feed" the gods, the rest of the body was pulled down the stairs of the pyramids, picked up and butchered to become food; according to Harner, no one has ever wonder about the "end" of the thousands of corpses of the victims voluntarily in order to hide the macabre truth. So human flesh was a real source of proteins to exploit for sustainment in an environment where there were no sufficient alternatives and where agricultural crisis and famines were common and seriously damaging for the population. But the possibility to eat human flesh was a privilege; only the members of the aristocracy and the priests had the right to eat it. For the rest of the population, the only way to get some flesh to eat was to capture a prisoner in battle and this strategy adopted by the Aztec élite was thought ad hoc to grant an important number of people joining the army for their wars. This "large-scale cannibalism" (as Harner

[13] Harner, Michael 1977, *The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice*, American Ethnologist, February 1977, Vol. 4, Issue 1, pages 117–135
[14] Harner, Michael 1977, *The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice*, Natural History, April 1977, Vol. 86, No. 4, pages 46-51

himself named it) is quite impressive if we consider the commonly accepted figure of 20,000 human sacrificed per year on a population estimated of 2 million people at the time of the Conquest. But in his *The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice* Harner mentions another and even more shocking figure: reporting what was communicated to him by Woodrow Borah (1912-1999), a leading authority on the demography of pre-Colonial Central Mexico, Harner writes that the victim of human sacrifice, and consequently the amount of human flesh to eat was of 250,000 (a quarter of a million) per year on a population of 25 million. Despite the big difference between the two figures, what is out of doubt is that if Harner's theory were true, it would be enough to give a reason for the lack of uniformity and of a complete control of the leading group of Aztec on the rest of their empire. In relation to these data, in fact, the war becomes a necessary way for providing food for sustainment.

Both Shelburne Cook's theory of human sacrifice as a way of demographic regulation and Harner's theory of cannibalism as proteins source in a particular environment recall what Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1843) wrote in the second edition of his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*[15](1803). The English economist and demographer stated that cannibalism had a necessary regulating function on population expansion like war and death and that it was a use that "undoubtedly prevailed in many part of the new world". Such an influential work giving a big support to Harner's thesis of large scale cannibalism seems to leave no space for any kind of debate; however, the theory that institutionalised anthropophagy was so common in many part of the non-Western world and in some cases (the Aztec one) with quite an "epidemic" scale is not as strong as it seems to be from the analysis of the works and accounts considered. On the contrary, this theory has many weak points that became the bases for an opposite anthropological movement that discredits institutionalised cannibalism and questions its existence.

[15] Malthus, Thomas Robert 1803, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or, A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness : with an Inquiry into our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it Occasions*

1.3 Questioning institutionalised cannibalism

The fact that episodes of anthropophagy took place is proved and out of any possible doubt. However, what if institutionalised cannibalism was only a matter of prejudice and therefore not so commonly and widely practiced? This is what at a first look could seem the crazy thesis of William Arens's *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. The publication of this controversial work in 1979 marked the beginning of the contemporary debate on cannibalism. What Arens did with this work is to question the practice of institutionalised cannibalism and try to look at it without the influence of the prejudices that have corrupted the wide literature, both popular and scientific, on the topic. According to the author, in fact, the lack of care in the analysis of everything concerning cannibalism is somehow an original sin that gave birth to a negative myth. The first responsible for this is to be found in colonialism and Western culture "cultural cannibalism", something one must get rid of to reconsider the whole subject and look at it from a different, and possibly neutral point of view.

Arens begins with quite an interesting account of his personal experience. It was 1968 when, while he was in Tanzania for a research expedition, a native African asked to the scholar's native guide why she was walking with a *mchinjachinja*, the Swahili for "vampire". This bizarre accusation is not an isolated case; in fact, Arens reports many stories of Europeans being accused of vampirism or cannibalism by the Africans. This is quite significant because it is an example of how such an infamous accusation has been moved against every human ethnicity at least once in their history even when there were no evidences to support it. This happened for example to the Britons of Ireland accused by Strabo, the Greek geographer and historian, to be incestuous and anthropophagous even if he admitted that there were no eyewitnesses to confirm it. It is true that the scholars place cannibalism also in Europe, even if it is considered as a mere pre-historic practice completely eliminated by the progresses of western culture. On the contrary, for all the non-Western native populations

cannibalism is commonly accepted and it is said to have been prohibited only after the beginning of colonisation. Furthermore, an accusation against a Western white man as the one reported by Arens is undoubtedly regarded as defamation, while if an accusation of cannibalism is moved against a native group of Africa, South America or Oceania, it is considered true *a priori*, because of the supposed cultural inferiority of these populations.

The aprioristic credit given to savage or primitive non-Western ethnicities' cannibalism is, according to Arens, proper of all the accounts and reports from the discovery of the New World to the modern anthropological studies. To sustain his thesis, Arens examines one by one some of the most famous and apparently reliable cases of cannibalism belonging to both the age of the "Conquista" and the years before the publication of his work. The author begins his analysis from Hans Städen. This sailor is, as we mentioned above, the eyewitness of Tupinambas cannibalism. Städen reports in detail many of the macabre uses of the Brazilian tribe: the captivity of the prisoners, their killing and consumption, the dialogues between the Tupinamba and their victims, the central role of the women in the cannibal feasts and many other episodes he also represented with some illustrations. The question raised by Arens here is quite simple: how could a German man who lived for less than one year among the Tupinamba be able to report some conversations in a language he did not have time to learn? And how could he describe in detail the education and growth of Tupinamba children after such a short period of observation? In addition to these controversial points, Arens focuses his attention on the way Städen talks about the culture of this population; his main concern, in fact, seems to present the Tupinamba as an uncultivated bunch of savages unable to count to ten as to highlight the great difference between his civilization and the underdevelopment of the Brazilian tribe. Another suspect on the reliability of his account is given by the distinction he made between women and men: the women are represented as more cruel against the victim and as the material executors of the sacrifice and butchering of the corpse; on the other hand, the men are not even clearly described as responsible of anthropophagical acts. This centrality of the woman in cannibal episodes is a

common feature in many accounts of cannibalism in general as to recall the biblical Eve, the tempter woman of the original sin.

But Städen's account is not the only document we have about Tupinambas's cannibal uses. In *Singularities of France Antarctique*[16] by the French Franciscan priest and cosmographer André Thévet (1516-1590) and in *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la Terre du Brésil, autrement dit Amérique*[17]by the French Jean de Léry, we find similar reports about the Brazilian cannibal tribe. As in Städen work, in these two French accounts we find, some transcriptions of Tupinambas dialogues concerning cannibalism. At a first look, the similarities of these conversation to those reported by the German sailor could confirm its reliability; on the other hand, states Arens, this correspondence is suspect and it is plausible that what we find in the work of the two French author is a form of plagiarism of what Städen first reported in his memories. The eventuality of plagiarism, however, is not to be taken for granted, but the uniformity of the works of Städen, Thévet and De Léry in reporting dialogues uttered in a language that they probably did not understand is at least strange. If this explanation can be accepted, the wide documentation on the famous cannibal tribe of the Tupinamba would lose most of its volume and force.

As for the Tupinamba's conversations, the problem of the language is central in every account of cannibalism from the very first appearance of the word itself. As we already said, Christopher Columbus came to know about the existence of the anthropophagi "Caribs" (then become "Caniba") thanks to the Arawak tribe; the strange thing here is that his interpreter spoke Arabian and it is hard to believe that he understood any word in Arawak. Even more strange is the fact that once the Spanish crown decided to "destroy the germ of cannibalism" from the New World by enslaving or exterminating the cannibals, the initially innocent Arawak tribe entered the "Spanish black list" of cannibals; their resistance to the newly established Spanish dominion was for the Conquistadores an unconfutable evidence of their being cannibal, and therefore they could be sacrificed in the name of colonialism.

[16] Thévet, André 1557, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique, autrement nommee Amerique, & de plusieurs terres et isles decouvertes de nostre temps.*
[17] De Léry, Jean 578, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dit Amérique*.

The idea that cannibalism has been taken as a justification for colonialism is supported by the fact that Columbus had no evidences of the actual happening of what he was told by the Arawaks.

Once reconsidered the Tupinambas and Columbus' Caribs and Arawaks, Arens focuses his attention on what can seem the most structured and documented case of cannibalism: the Aztec one. As we saw in the previous point of our discussion, the literature on this case is wide and complete. Bernal Diaz, Andrés de Tapia and Bernardino de Sahagùn are the recognised sources of the documentation on Aztec cannibal practices. However, all these accounts are posthumous to the end of the Aztec culture and, for Arens, they are realised to justify the extermination of such an advanced non-Western population that needed to be discredited. To support this thesis, Arens explains that reports of cannibalism never occurred in the official letters between Hernan Cortés and his generals; furthermore, only in 2 of the 13 volumes of de Sahagùn's *Historia universal de las cosas de Nueva España*, the most "scientific" among the mentioned reports, there are some fragmented references to cannibalism, which is strange if we consider the scale the practice had according to some contemporary scholar. In particular Arens critics Michael Harner's theory of large scale cannibalism for proteins provision. The author mention the episode of the siege of Tenochtitlan as reported by Sahagùn, when the Aztec died for hunger instead of eating the corpses of the many deaths that were inside the city. In this extreme case of famine, the objection of Aztec exocannibalism, for which they did not eat the flesh of their fellows citizens for fear of being punished, is weak; extreme cases like siege of shipwrecks are in fact the most common cases of reported cannibalism. In addition, to discredit Harner's theory, Arens makes reference to an article by Montellano[18] where the scientist critiques the theory of the necessity of animal proteins labelling it as false and originated from a mere Western experience saying that, on the contrary, the area of the Aztec Empire were (and is) full of vegetable proteins and that the malnutrition there begun when the Spanish settlers imposed their diet.

[18] De Montellano, Bernard R. Ortiz 1978, *Aztec Cannibalism: An Ecological Necessity?*, Science, New Series, Vol. 200, No. 4342, 611-617.

It is evident from Arens' re-analysis of South-American episodes of cannibalism how colonialism and the "Christian need" to justify the genocide perpetuated by the Western world in the period of the Conquista influenced the scientific approach to the topic from the very beginning in the 16^{h} century to the 20th century work of Harner and Harris. But the "South-American case" is not the only field of cannibal study influenced by colonialism and the Western point of view; following the history of colonialism itself, Arens archives the discourse on what he calls "the classical cannibals of the New World" to focus on the second land of conquest for western colonisation: Africa. The 19th Century is the golden age of the quest for African colonies and slave trade and the problem of finding a justification for the immoralities perpetuated was solved once again with cannibalism. It is interesting that African slaves thought that the white men were there to take them from their land to eat them. Once again we have an unmotivated accusation of this kind which obviously finds its parallel in all the reports of African cannibalism with no support of any eyewitness. On the contrary, what we do have are accounts of explorers who lived among some of these tribes that discredit the myth of the African anthropophagi.

In his three years research period in Sudan (1927-1930), the British anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) lived among the Azande, one of the most "documented" cannibal tribes of Africa. In analysing the context, the British scholar discredited many of the stories about the Azande because, as for the Tupinamba of Brazil, many accounts reported conversations between African tribe members and European explorers, something impossible or at least improbable because of linguistic problems. Furthermore, his positive experience in the land stands as an evidence itself. However, as highlighted by Arens in his work, Evans-Pritchard did not completely clear the Azande from the accusation of being anthropophagi because he thought that the wide literature on the subject must have had some truth in its bases.

A complete absolution from cannibalism of an African group comes from the experience of the famous British explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873). The man who discovered and named the Victoria Falls and who dedicated all of his life to the exploration of the African continent can be by right considered an authority when dealing with Africa. Examining the subject of cannibalism in a tribe he knew well, and considering that in his long experience he never had any trouble of this kind he concluded with the significant assertion that if a court had to judge the case the outcome would be an acquittal for lack of evidence. Despite such an authoritative voice discrediting cannibalism in Africa, at least for the part of the continent explored by Livingstone, the myth of the cannibals lost nothing of its force in the mind of the other European explorers. It is significant that the leader of the expedition to find Livingstone, Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) talked about his African journey following what was Livingstone "safe path" as a never ending escape from African savage cannibals attacking his group. Arens reports that the reason for this difference of treatment between Livingstone and Stanley is to be found in the ambiguity of Arabian slave traders in the area. Stanley was in fact informed about the anthropophagical uses of the populations he was going to meet by these slave traders that at the same time warned the native tribes about the cannibal intention of Stanley's group; this chaos can explain the rude treatment received by the Welsh explorer and it is plausible that the slave trader had a certain interest in generating some confusion to take advantage for their business. In any case, the important thing here is that Stanley did not see any episode of cannibalism and, as for the rest of the literature on this subject for Africa, there are no evidences that this use was somewhere practiced. African cannibalism comes out to be, as Arens states in his work, a mere notion that perfectly encountered the need to justify the brutalities of the Western world in the Black Continent and that for this reason it has never been firmly contested. On the contrary, it was so entrenched in the unconscious that the missing evidences or eyewitnesses were motivated by the assertion that all the anthropologists and explorers arrived in Africa once the colonial civilising process had already eliminated the savage use.

This "pathological delay" is a common feature of the anthropologists of every epoch and area of research when talking about cannibalism. This is true also for the last frontier of anthropophagy, New Guinea. Arens highlights this fact mentioning the works of some scholars that devoted their life to the study of this area; among them, Margaret Mead is an emblematic case. As mentioned above, the anthropologist actually admitted in her work (*Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*) that cannibalism was prohibited three years before her arrival. Despite this, the account of cannibal practices she made in her book is written in present tense, which gives the impression of authenticity to something that is on the contrary the report of a never proved use. Similarly to Mead, the German Klaus-Friedrich Koch (1937-1979) who spent two years among the New Guinean Jalé tribe, reported to have been extremely lucky because one year after the end of his expedition two white missionaries had been eaten by the same tribe. Obviously during his two-year experience he had no occasion to eyewitness any cannibal episode.

Despite the missing evidence of anthropophagy in New Guinea, cannibalism has been indicated as the cause for the transmission of kuru illness among the Fore tribe. In his work Arens reports the process that led the American Doctor Daniel Carleton Gajdusek[19] (1923-2008) to this conclusion. Having spent ten months among the tribe, Gajdusek and his research team analysed the illness that manifested itself with a kind of tremor and brought people to death in one year. He also observed that the disease was more frequent among the adults and in particular among women, while it was equally spread, even if less frequent in male and female children. Because of this strange "sexual distribution" of the illness a genetic explanation was not plausible. At the beginning of the research, Gajdusek also discredited the thesis of cannibalism as the vehicle for the disease considering both the fact that he had no occasion to document it and that it would have been quite a strange way for an infection to spread itself. However, after a series of experiments where some monkeys were given the flesh of a dead infected person to eat, Gajdusek observed that the monkeys presented the same illness and he started to consider cannibalism as a possible

[19] Gajdusek, D.C. 1963, *Kuru*, Transaction of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, vol. 57, 151-169

reason, even if a strange one, for the diffusion of the kuru virus. To support this thesis he said that the fact that female tribe members were most hurt by the virus than male Fore was justifiable by the fact that women were said to practice anthropophagy more than men. Thanks to this research Gajdusek won the 1976 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. The problem for Arens here is that usually contact is enough for a virus to pass from a person to another; in the case of kuru illness, however, contact was not considered enough and cannibalism, which Arens underlines was never documented by Gajdusek or any other member of his team, was taken as a possible solution to the mysterious disease transmission. The fact that women are indicated as the principal actors in anthropophagy is, as written above, not an isolated consideration in the history of the study of cannibalism and in this case it inevitably raises doubts on the reliability of the conclusion of the whole study. In addition, the anthropologist Robert Glasse[20] (1930-1993) who followed Gajdusek in his research among the Fore reported that after every funeral the tribe members banqueted with pork and vegetables. This would prove the non-necessity of anthropophagy, but, quite surprisingly, the same Glasse validated the thesis of cannibalism as kuru spreading vehicle and supported it with the assertion that the number of cases of the illness dropped after the abolition of cannibalism thanks to western explorers and missionaries. To conclude his analysis of the case, Arens reports that in 1978, two years after the Nobel Prize, Gajdusek declared that in any case the theory of Fore cannibalism to explain the transmission of kuru virus was just one possible hypothesis and that they had no clear evidences of the fact that eating contaminated flesh could somehow infect a person.

The ones considered here are only a part of all the episodes, accounts and studies on cannibalism William Arens analyses from his critical point of view in *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy.* At this point it is undeniable that all the firm beliefs in the existence of cannibalism as an institution are weaker after such a structured work of rethinking and reconsidering the subject itself. The force of Arens theory is in the fact that he did not categorically deny institutionalised

[20] Glasse, Robert 1967, *Cannibalism in the Kuru Region of New Guinea*, Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 29, Issue 6 Series II, 748–754

cannibalism but he discredited almost every evidence, or what once was an evidence, highlighting on the other hand the influence of Western culture on the consideration of the topic from its very beginning in the 16th century. His study comes out to be more intellectually independent and scientifically correct than everything written before and his considerations are actually well constructed and undermine every thesis in favour of institutionalised cannibalism more than any firm denial. Despite this, and despite the fact that Arens always admitted the existence of anthropophagy in some extreme cases, the publication of his book provoked a firm reaction in the academic world. The author was brutally criticised by many scholars and some of them also compared his theory to the Holocaust denial. Among his critics, an important voice is that of Frank Lestringant. The French professor of 16th-century Literature at the Sorbonne University of Paris is one of the world's most recognised experts of the story of cannibalism, particularly in relation to the work of Michel de Montaigne, André Thevet and Jean de Léry. In his *Cannibals. The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*,[21] Lestringant labels Arens as a "sensation-hungry journalist" and mentions the similarity of his theories to those of Holocaust denial to further discredit his work.

On the other hand, of course, other important scholars gave credits to Arens's thesis. In his introduction to *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*,[22] Peter Hulme reinforces the theory of the influence of colonialism on the study and representation of the cannibal and the idea of cultural cannibalism of Western society, criticising the exaggeration of the paragon to the Holocaust of Arens's theory; in fact, says Hulme, Arens did not deny the existence of cannibalism but questioned it as an institution. Similarly to Hulme, Gananath Obeyesekere[23] defends Arens highlighting his non-denial and stating that cannibalism is first and foremost a discourse on the "other". In her work, in fact, she makes a distinction between cannibalism and anthropophagy considering the first as the Western fear or fantasy to be eaten by the savage man and

[21] Lestringant, Frank (1994), *Le Cannibale : Grandeur et Décadence*, Libraire Académique Perrin
[22] Barker, Francis/Hulme, Peter/Iversen, Margaret 1998, *Cultural Margins. Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Cambridge University Press
[23] Obeyesekere, Gananath 2005, *Cannibal Talk: the Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Sea*, University of California Press

the second as the actual act of consumption of human flesh. In divergence with Arens's idea of consumption only in extreme cases, Obeyesekere accepts the fact that ritual anthropophagy existed in connection to both human sacrifice and funeral practices; in fact, some recent studies seem to validate this thesis, particularly in connection with tribal funeral rites. In any case, the theory of large scale cannibalism seems to be seriously discredited by Arens's work, and the following analysis of an episode of institutionalised funeral anthropophagy cannot, by any means, give new strength to the exaggerations mentioned in the first part of the chapter.

1.4 Funeral cannibalism: a practiced and witnessed ritual

The strength of Arens's work, its meticulous reanalysis of anthropophagy and the debate that it originated, represented a real turning point that changed forever the approach to the subject of cannibalism. There is a case, however, for which his theory does not match. The case is that of the Pakaa Nova (or Wari) tribe of the village of Santo André at the borders between Brazil and Bolivia. In her *Consuming Grief. Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*,[24] the American anthropologist Beth Conklin, reports the outcomes of her two-year life experience among this tribe (1985-1987), one of the latest tribes reached by Western civilization. The first contact, in fact, is dated 1956 and a complete "civilization" of the Wari was only achieved in 1969. As for all the accounts of other anthropologists, the problem here is that of the "delay"; Conklin immediately admits that she did not witness any episode of anthropophagy because she arrived more than twenty years after the contact and therefore the abolition of cannibal practices. But the important difference in this case, is that the source of her report are the elders of the tribe themselves. The author highlights the singularity of the case; it is not common in fact for the members of a tribe to speak about their past uses, and in particular about cannibalism, to anthropologists and researchers who came to study them. Thanks to these favourable circumstances Conklin delivered a reliable and detailed account on Wari cannibal practices, particularly in connection to their funeral customs. After a brief mention of Wari war cannibalism, the author dedicates the whole book (as the title suggests) to funeral cannibalism; differently from exocannibalism (eating the flesh of someone belonging to a different tribe or ethnic group), this practice is one of endocannibalism because what was eaten were parts of the body of a dead member of the Wari tribe.

[24] Conklin, Beth. A 2001, *Consuming Grief. Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*. University of Texas Press

For the Wari it was normal to eat the flesh of their dead as part of their funeral rite; after three days of eulogy and ceremony the non-blood relatives of the departed roasted and ate parts or, in case it was a children, all of the corpse. Conklin highlights the temporal distance between the death and the flesh eating ceremony; after three days, the corpse is getting rot and therefore it is not easy to consume. Despite that, the Wari ate the corpse. It was in fact a kind of moral duty, and a refusal was taken as a severe offence to the dead one and to his family. Once eaten and burned, the body went through a process of eradication from the identity of the dead; it became something like a hunting game to feed his tribe and, after the process, the family members did not think much about their loss. In addition to the eating and burning of the corpse, in fact, they also burned the house and every belonging of the dead in order to completely eradicate it from the living Wari that continued their life. The whole process was a kind of radical overtaking of the mourning and it granted a way of escaping it in a society where death was a part of everyday life.

The importance funeral cannibalism had for the Wari emerges from their account of the traumatic and forced acceptance of its abolition. Burial was for them a dishonourable practice for the body of a beloved dead because they considered the ground as cold, wet and polluting; if they were asked, they preferred to be eaten by their tribe fellows instead of being buried. However, it was not just a matter of honour or preference; with burial, the relatives of a dead Wari were unable to overtake the mourning as they did with funeral cannibalism. Their thoughts were constantly directed to the body of the dead, which they considered as left abandoned under the ground to rot. It was so hard for them to accept, that in a first moment they tried to hide the funeral rite by practicing it in the forest but they were soon discovered and they had to abandon the custom forever. Another peculiarity of the Wari was in fact the “public dimension” of funeral cannibalism; as said above, it was a participated ceremony in the village. In another part of the world where endocannibalism is reliably reported, like Melanesia, the eating of parts of the corpse of a dead was something private, a kind of secret rite every family practiced inside their house. The social importance of the rite itself for the Wari can explain in part

the difficulties they encountered in accepting a new funerary custom and the cultural shock that followed.

In all the reports Conklin includes in her work, she focuses on the fact that the Wari talked about cannibalism as something an outsider could not understand; as the author writes, it was not only a problem for the outsiders, because also the younger members of the tribe who was not there before the contact consider funeral cannibalism as a strange use of their ancestors they heard about from their parents. Similarly to the foreigners, they cannot understand the strange custom and if asked they do not even consider the possibility to restart practicing it. On the other hand, one thing the Wari could not understand was the maniacal attention foreigners had for the topic. There was an occasion during Conklin research period in which she had a discussion with a member of the tribe; an old Wari she was talking to said he could not understand why anthropologists and researches only wandered about cannibalism and seemed to ignore all the other customs of his tribe. This observation of the Wari tribe man is emblematic and it summarizes the attitude Western culture had to cannibalism from the beginning; an ethnocentric attitude that influenced the idea of the "other" and that is at the bases of the exaggerate accounts of anthropophagy of many non-Western populations. These same accounts had a primary role in the identification of cannibalism as the most evident colonial justification for the brutalities perpetuated during the Conquista in South America or during colonialism and the slave trade in Africa. This ethnocentrism is at the centre of Peter Hulme's idea of cultural cannibalism that perfectly describes Western society's quest for cultural uniformity and the non-acceptance of anything different that is therefore to be repressed. At the same time, however, Conklin recognizes the germ of ethnocentrism also in the theories of those scholars that questioned the existence of institutionalized cannibalism. In the introducing chapter of her *Consuming Grief. Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*, the author raises this point by criticizing some of the major scholars and anthropologists belonging to this "revisionist school": Julio César Salas who, in his 1920 work *Etnografia Americana:*

los Indios Caribes. Estudio sobre el Origen del Mito de la Antropofagia,[25] claimed that the Caribs, the original Columbus' cannibals, did not practice cannibalism; Fernando Carneiro[26] who, having analysed the evidences of cannibalism in Brazil, came to the conclusion that the existence of the practice was dubious. Again Pierre Clastres,[27] the French ethnographer, exonerated South American savage tribes from the cannibal guilt; and finally William Arens, the author of *The Man-eating Myth*, the bible of the reconsideration of institutionalized cannibalism. Conklin critiques all of these authors and identifies in their work the same problem of ethnocentricity which manifests itself in an opposite way; discrediting and questioning cannibalism is not a way of siding the savage populations accused and defending their honour, on the contrary, it is a further example of non-acceptance of a different model of civilization in which institutionalized cannibalism was accepted and practiced. What comes out from this analysis is that the colonial exaggeration on the one hand and the rethinking of cannibalism on the other are two faces of the same coin. The difference is to be found in the outcomes of the two attitudes: the first gave origin to the colonial justification; the second can be read as part of the 20th century Western society's sense of guilt and its attempt of redemption for the sins of colonialism, slave trade and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources.

Having said that this is only one of the possible readings of the whole debate on cannibalism, it allows to balance the two extremes and to see that the truth about institutionalized cannibalism lies somewhere in between the large scale of the phenomenon and the possibility of its inconsistency. What is undeniable, however, is that cannibalism cannot be considered outside the colonial discourse and the stereotyped representation of the "other", two of the cornerstones of postcolonial studies in general.

[25] Salas, Julio César 1920, *Etnografia americana: los indios caribes. Estudio sobre el origen del mito de la antropofagia*, Madrid, Editorial-América
[26] Carneiro, J. Fernando 1946, *A Antropofagia entre os Indigenos do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Imprensa Nacional
[27] Clastres, Pierre 1974, *Society Against the State (La Société contre l'État : Recherches d'Anthropologie Politique)*

1.5 Representation, stereotype and colonial discourse

The brief consideration reported above on the historical and anthropological evolution of the study of cannibalism represents an essential, even if incomplete and summarized portrait of the subject. It should be clear by now that the consumption of human flesh actually took place in the past, recent or remote, as part of tribal funerary or war rituals. At the same time, what should be even clearer is the fact that the scale of the phenomenon cannot be the "epidemic" one theorized by Harris and Harner in their works, and, furthermore, human flesh has never been considered a source of food and proteins except for some extreme cases of hunger as in shipwrecks and city sieges. As highlighted above, the scarce reliability of most of the reports on cannibalism contributed to question the very existence of the phenomenon. At the basis of this debate there is the difficulty of Western culture to accept something which exits its conceptual universe, and the consequent need to differentiate itself and to represent it as a feature of the "other".

In his *The Other Question*,[28] Homi K. Bhabha theorized the concept of the "other" in colonial discourse; this concept can easily fit the topic of these pages because the cannibal is principally a way of representing this "other". Savagery and cannibalism have always been considered by colonial powers as two of the distinctive features of the non-Western populations to be conquered and their representation served the colonial purpose and provided its justification. Representation is in fact another central theme in colonial discourse and, as theorized by Stuart Hall in his work, the act of representation produces meaning[29]; in this case, it is possible to say that the meaning itself of the word "cannibal" has its origin in the first representation of the savage tribes of the New World made through the eye of the first Western man who meets them, Christopher Columbus. It is quite significant that from a first impression

[28] Bhabha, Homi K. 1996, *The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism*, Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader, Edited By Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg

[29] Hall, Stuart 1997, *The Work of Representation*, Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, The Open University 1997

in a context of absolute lack of knowledge and comprehension the meaning of "cannibal" acquired an immediate strength that characterized almost all the non-Western for centuries to come. The outcome of this discourse of colonial representation of the "other" is the creation of a negative myth, the stereotype of the savage uncivilized cannibal that can be considered as the extreme consequence of the process of differentiation between the Western civilization and the primitive rest of the world. This necessity of marking the difference[30] by representation follows the logic of production of meaning or, as per Michel Foucault, the production of knowledge.[31] For the French philosopher knowledge is closely related to power, and, limited to the subject of this work, the Western production of the knowledge on cannibalism provided at the same time the cultural power over the cannibals that justified their control and the repression of every incomprehensible (for the West) cannibal practice. In all of this, it is evident how the subject of "the other", in this case the cannibal, has always been considered from a Western external point of view that led to the production of a truth on cannibalism that does not coincide with reality. This is, in other words, a clear example of Foucault theory of power/knowledge and of what he called a "regime of truth", that is to say that something is true limitedly to a given cultural context. For cannibalism, this cultural context is the Western one, and the Western representation of cannibalism can be considered true limitedly to this cultural context.

These theories reported above are not or not only meant for cannibalism but, more generally, they have to be considered inside the wider context of colonial discourse. However, the representation of cannibalism can be analysed in these terms because, as highlighted in this chapter, the colonial discourse is its natural context. Colonialism and Western culture lie behind everything produced on the topic of cannibalism, from the scientific and anthropological production to the literary one, and the influence is so relevant that it would not be a hazard to say that the cannibal is first and foremost a product of colonialism itself; a "product" that resisted the end of the colonial period and that keeps its strength despite the changes and the cultural

[30] Hall, Stuart 1997, *The Spectacle of the "Other"*, Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, The Open University 1997
[31] Foucault, Michel 1980, *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, Harvester

progress of the last five centuries. The cannibal is in fact a recurring figure in the Western imaginary world and, through time, its capacity of "renovation" allowed it to continue being a myth in the 21st century and, what is more important, also outside colonial discourse. An example of this contemporary new environment for the figure of the cannibal is Doctor Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lamb*.[32] This is however only the last stage of the representation of this figure; the most influential sphere of representation of the cannibal is obviously colonial and postcolonial literature. In this literary field the man-eater has been presented in innumerable ways and through literature it became the myth we all know today.

The main object of this work is actually to analyse how the figure of the cannibal and cannibalism were represented in some of the most famous masterpieces of colonial literature. This first chapter is necessary to provide to the reader this basic but at the same time fundamental anthropological and historical background, in order to allow him/her to jump from the literary representation to the scientific one and to achieve a global understanding of the subject. The literary environment, in fact, presents the cannibal behind the "filter" of Western culture, but the awareness of the scientific debate and of the colonial tools of representation, otherness and colonial discourse can help to go beyond this filter and to read between the line of colonial literature to find out those "bricks" that built the myth of the cannibal and gave it its strength. From Daniel Defoe[33] to Edgar Rice Burroughs[34] the cannibal has undeniably been, in many ways, one of the main protagonists of colonial literature and it keeps its fascination despite the innumerable readings that the literary critique produced on this figure.

[32] Harris, Thomas 1988, *The Silence of the Lamb*
[33] Defoe, Daniel 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates*
[34] Burroughs, Edgar R. 1914, *Tarzan of the Apes*

Chapter 2

Robinson Crusoe

Chapter 2

2.1 Introduction and plot overview

When talking about *Robinson Crusoe*,[35] some say it is a novel expressing the working emphasis of 18th-century Great Britain, some talk about it as a novel on the relationship between man and nature, and others look at it as a portrait of the puritan ethics. Again, there are those who read it as a pedagogical novel on education and also those who consider it as the forefather of adventure books; finally this novel has often been recognised as the clearest synthesis of what colonialism is all about. Though all of these readings are by right possible, *Robinson Crusoe* is also "the" novel on cannibalism. Among its main themes, in fact, the fear of being eaten, the stereotype of the cannibal, its repression and finally the re-education of the savage anthropophagi thanks to Western civilisation and Christian religion are central, if not prevalent, in the story.

Daniel Defoe's 1719 most famous novel tells the story of Robinson Crusoe, an English man born in the city of York in 1632. Of German origins (his father was an immigrant from Bremen and his original surname was Kreutznaer) Robinson belongs to the middle class but, disobeying his family who wanted for him a future as a lawyer, he decides to follow his dream and to become a sailor. His career at sea, however, is from the beginning very unfortunate. The first time he goes to sea he lives quite a threatening experience because of a storm, and he is so scared that, praying God to save his life, he vows not to sail anymore and to follow the path his family wished for him. Forgetting his oath, however, Robinson decides to leave York by sea to travel to the coasts of North Africa where he is captured by the pirates. Being able to escape from this second misadventure in a little boat together with his

[35] Defoe, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Penguin Popular Classics 1994

servant Xury, Crusoe is rescued in the middle of the sea by a Portuguese ship whose captain kindly helps him to reach Brazil on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and there provides him with some plantations. Some years later, our hero (though the appropriateness of this definition in Crusoe's case can be discussed) joins a ship for Africa looking for slaves for his plantations. Unfortunately, a violent tropical storm catches the boat when off the coast of Venezuela, near the delta of the Orinoco river. Transported by the force of the sea to the shore of a desert island, Robinson realises in despair that he is the only one wo survived the shipwreck and that he is alone at the mercy of the savage island. Once he overcomes the shock, the protagonist works hard not just to survive but to live. He totally refuses the savage life and habits like nudity for example, and he little by little domesticates the island to the point he considers it his kingdom. One of the first things Robinson does is to build a tent and *"fortify it from any sudden attempt, either from man or beast."*(58) Crusoe spends the first twelve years in complete solitude and isolation from the rest of the world, working on his fortress, his fields, his flock of sheep and keeping a journal where he notes what happens during his days on the island filled with work and accompanied by the reading of the Bible. However, the ordinate universe he builds around him in the island collapses when one day, during one of his "expedition" he regularly made around his kingdom, he finds the footprint of another man on the shore. From that moment Robinson is terrorised by a possible arrival of cannibals, and not long after this event, he discovers the rests of a cannibal feast on the other side of the island. It is during a second "visit" of the cannibals that Robinson rescues Friday who will then become his loyal servant. From that moment, Crusoe starts to re-educate Friday according to the Western culture and the Christian religion and he makes of him a good man, eradicating from him every echo of cannibal savage culture. After some time Robinson and Friday rescue Friday's father and a Spanish sailor from the cannibals and shortly after the protagonist finally finds a way to leave his island thanks to a captain he helped to repress a mutiny. After 28 years, Robinson gets back to the world and discovers to be a wealthy man thanks to the good and loyal people who administrated his business during his absence.

In more than a quarter of a century of life experience on a desert island in the Caribbean, Robinson Crusoe went through a process of personal growth and moral changing. The man who returns from his long and half isolated captivity is not the same young dreamer looking for adventure on the sea of the beginning of the novel. At the end of the story he is an experienced man originated from a kind of second birth, the consequence of 28 years of gestation in the island. There Crusoe had the possibility to live a unique experience that made of him the ideal self-made man. He overcame the risk of an empty life because of the absence of relationships dedicating his live to work and to God, in a mixture of materialistic confidence on reason and blind faith on God's Providence according to the protestant principle that daily actions assure God's divine help. In this apparently idyllic situation, however, throughout the novel Robinson manifests one big anxiety, irrational and inexplicable if considered outside its context: the great fear of being eaten mixed with an innate hate for the cannibals. His main concern, even prevalent over food and water provision seems to be to escape the cannibal jaws, so much that the book is filled with uncountable mentions of this fear end of his plans to survive and defeat this terrible enemy. Through the eyes of his hero, Defoe provides to the reader an incredible portrait of the figure of the cannibal as it was seen or presented to the public in the 18th century, in a way that perfectly matches, as this chapter will show, the Western approach to the other, the necessity of a work of civilisation and the horror raised by the fear of being eaten.

2.2 The great fear

> Well, Xury," said I, "then I won't; but it may be we see men by day, who will be as bad to us as those lions. (p.29)

This passage taken from one of the first adventures of the novel is Crusoe's first reference to cannibalism. Answering Xury's concerns about wild beasts populating the African shore where they were about to land in the night looking for water, Robinson warns his fellow that the inhabitants of that area could be even worse than the roaring lions they heard. Comparing the savage populations of Africa to the fierce beasts Robinson manifests at once his cultural orientation to the other, the stereotyped ideas on the cannibal, and his consequent fear of it. In chapter 5 of his *Colonial Encounters,*[36] titled *Robinson Crusoe and Friday,* Peter Hulme provides quite an interesting explanation of Crusoe's innate fear of being eaten. The author sees in it the manifestation of what he calls a psychosis of European perception of Amerindian culture, and it is so prevalent in Robinson's unconscious that even after 12 years of life in isolation with no evidences of cannibalism or of the presence of any savage on the island he cannot overcome this fear which can't be understandable but at the beginning of the story when Robinson is still unexperienced.

Through the novel, before the discovery of any evidence of "the other" like the footprint, for example, the fact that Robinson is unable to overcome this initial fear originates in the protagonist a certain feeling of disease which could be translated as the awareness that the feared cannibal will soon or late appear in the novel. This awareness, this sense of waiting with anxiety for something to come that the reader can entirely share with Robinson is the first sign of how Crusoe's point of view is influenced by his Western culture and by "its truth" on cannibalism produced by colonisation and colonial power. The figure of the cannibal as presented in the whole novel is of course filtered by this one Western point of view, the one we are allowed

[36] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 175-222, Methuen & Co. Ltd

to look from, and the eyes of the protagonist are consequently the instrument Defoe provides to the reader to do so.

From the first moment of his arrival on the island to the first discovery of the remains of a cannibal feast, Crusoe's fear grows till it becomes an unsustainable state of anxiety. As he awakes on the shore of his island after the shipwreck his first concern was, in his words:

> I see any prospect before me but that of perishing with hunger or being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particular afflicting to me was that I had no weapon either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs. (p.50)

In these few lines reporting Robinson's first considerations after he realizes his condition there is an interesting parallelism between the necessity of food to live and the fear to become food for other creatures' sustainment, and it occurs twice in the space of these few words. Furthermore, in the second part of this extract, Robinson talks about *"any other creature"*, a clear, even if indirect reference to other human beings that, mentioned in this way, lose their humanity and are represented as more similar to wild beasts than to Crusoe himself. Exploring his island little by little, Robinson finds out that it is deserted and that there are no other creature, either wild beast or cannibal human being, that could damage him. However, his fear, or better his anxiety, does not seem to leave him. On the contrary, having distinguished the shape of land in the distance, Robinson considers that his island is not far from the Spanish South-American dominions where there was a still savage coast inhabited by the terrible cannibals. This proximity to the man-eaters is perceived as so dangerous by the protagonist that he raises some doubts also on the possibility to escape from his captivity because if the sea would take him to those shores he argues that:

> I might fall into the hands of savages, (…). That if I once came into their power, I should run a hazard more than a thousand to one of being killed and perhaps of being eaten; for I heard that the people of the

> Caribbean coasts were cannibals, or man-eaters, and I knew by the latitude that I could not be far off from that shore. (p.124)

This is not the only occurrence of Robinson's expression of worry about the close position of his island to the cannibal's land. In fact, after the first glimpse of the land, Crusoe thinks about it several times and reconsiders in a positive way his isolated situation where, after all, he has everything he needs to survive. Thanking God, he considers his arrival to the island as a sign of Providence.

The spiritual solace Robinson finds in religion and in his long and daily readings of the Bible, together with the material comfort given by his fortress, his goats and his fields by which he customized and civilized the island are the elements of his equilibrium. However, if on the one hand this little world he shaped according to his needs allows him to live in what to his eyes is closer to a civilised environment, on the other hand this idyllic place is not enough to preserve Crusoe from his anxiety and it is so fragile that the least contact with "the other" could be catastrophic. After a dangerous expedition on his canoe during which he had to fight against the stream that pushed him far from the shore, Robinson, exhausted, falls asleep and after a while he is awaken by a voice calling his name. Once realised that it was not a dream, the protagonist is:

> at first dreadfully frightened and started up in the utmost consternation. (…) However, even though I knew it was the parrot, and indeed it could be nobody else, it was a good while before I could compose myself. (p.141)

The episode of the parrot calling Robinson's name gives a fundamental contribution to increase the level of anxiety the protagonist feels towards the other and prepares the reader to the climax of the fear. What has been traced by now is an ideal path into Robinson's anxiety that reaches its top at the moment of the discovery of someone else's naked footprint on the shore. Crusoe cannot believe his eyes, the shock makes him think about it as an apparition and he needs to look at it several times to realize

that the footprint is not a matter of his imagination. The world he built around him in isolation was about to fall apart and, for the first time from his arrival in the island, he feels himself in real danger. Running back to his castle as if he was pursued he cannot understand how the footprint "arrived" there and he initially thinks that the devil himself could have make it in order to threaten Robinson. Rejecting this supernatural hypothesis, Crusoe comes to a terrible conclusion, an eventuality that is, for him, even worse that a visit of Satan:

> And I presently concluded then that it must be some more dangerous creature, viz., that it must be some of the savages of the mainland over against me (…).
>
> Then terrible thoughts racked my imagination about their having found my boat, and that there were people here; ad that if so, I should certainly have them come again in greater numbers, and devour me; (…) yet they would find my enclosure, destroy all my corn, carry away all my flock of tame goats, and I should perish at last for mere want. (p.153)

The discovery of the footprint is for Robinson the epiphany of the cannibal, the first material evidence. In his mind, in fact, that sign in the sand is literally a step forward the savage cannibals made towards him and his belongings that are vital for him and that he almost considers as a part of himself. It would not be wrong to say that the whole island is for Robinson a part of himself and that the little footprint is seen as an ideal first bite of the cannibals. From that moment his thoughts are entirely dedicated to the fear of being eaten, finding in God his only comfort. Furthermore, his imagining the cannibals coming back *"in greater numbers"* to feast on him gives a clear idea of how his psychosis detached his judgment from the reality or the verisimilitude of things.[37]

As for the discovery of the footprint, also the second manifestation of cannibalism in the novel is not "direct", meaning that Robinson does not witness the cannibals while feasting on human corpses. What he finds this time (two years after in the novel time, only a few pages forward in the book), however, is a much more alarming and

[37] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 196, Methuen & Co. Ltd

properly "material" evidence of anthropophagy: while exploring the other side of his island, Robinson sees the shore spread with human bones, hands, feet, skulls and the remains of a fire where those body parts were recently been cooked. In a moment Crusoe realizes that the island was the theatre of terrible cannibal rituals and that it was only by chance, or thanks to the Providence, that he shipwrecked on the opposite part of it where for more than ten years he could live not knowing what kind of brutalities regularly took place there. The reaction to this horrible spectacle is violent:

> my stomach grew sick, and I was just at the point of fainting, when Nature discharged the disorder from my stomach; and having vomited with an uncommon violence, I was a little relieved, but I could not bear to stay in the place a moment (p.163)

This physical sickness provoked by the cannibal feast's remains is a fundamental experience for Robinson's realisation of himself in opposition to the cannibals. From this moment, in fact, he clearly distinguishes himself from "the others", thanking God, once again, for being part of a world, the civilised one, where those terrible things are repulsed and the man is preserved from such an horror.[38]

The European psychotic perception of the Amerindian Caribbean, exemplified in the novel by Robinson's fear of being killed and devoured by the cannibal has also a significant metaphorical meaning. In his *Robinson Crusoe and the Fear of Being Eaten,*[39] Neil Heims describes how this fear of becoming a victim of the cannibals can be read as a metaphor of the fear of losing the material belongings. This would justify the capitalistic inclination for the accumulation of goods that goes beyond the mere necessity of sustainment. This is exactly what we find in the novel; first of all, as reported before, Robinson and his island are one unique entity, and his inclination to the accumulation and storage of goods creates a situation in which he will never be able to consume what he produced and reserved. Heims compares this predisposition

[38] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 201, Methuen & Co. Ltd

[39] Heims, Neil 1983, *Robinson Crusoe and the Fear of Being Eaten*, Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 19, no. 4, December 1983, p. 190-193

to overproduction or accumulation or exploitation of the resources of the island to cannibalism. The difference here is that what Crusoe practices is a "domestic" form of devouring, while that of the cannibals is a primitive form of appropriation. In this parallelism between the domestic/civilised and the savage/primitive Robinson's fear of being eaten finds its origin.

Coherently to Heims's essay, also Alex Mackintosh, in his *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*,[40] gives a certain importance to the fear of being eaten in relation to the fear of losing the material goods. Immediately after the discovery of the footprint, in fact, Robinson's concern is not only for his life, but (see note 42, page 37) also for his corns and goats. In addition to this, however, in his essay Mackintosh reports another interesting parallelism: he compares Crusoe's situation to that of a prey. This brings the whole thing back to the law of nature because, similarly to the animals, Robinson and the cannibals are both hunters and preys. Crusoe's first thoughts after the shipwreck move in the same direction: to eat and not being eaten.

The parable of Robinson Crusoe's fear of being eaten follows, as described above, a precise path, from the initial fear suggested by the stereotyped ideas of the protagonist, to the horror provoked by the feast's remains, passing from the climax of the fear with the "apparition" of the footprint. An attentive study of this "path", however raises the big paradox of the fear of the cannibal in the novel because this fear is in fact dependent on the absence of the figure of the cannibal itself,[41] a theory confirmed by the protagonist himself:

> I observe that the expectation of evil is more bitter than the suffering; especially if there is no room to shake off that expectation, or those apprehensions. (p.181)

[40] Mackintosh, Alex 2011, *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*, Critical Quarterly, Special Issue: Food, edited by Lucy Scholes and Matthew Taunton, Volume 53, Issue 3, October 2011, pages 24–43

[41] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 201, Methuen & Co. Ltd

When Robinson sees for the first time the savage anthropophagi in action he is somehow ready for the meeting with his bogeyman and the fear leaves the leading role of Crusoe's emotion to the desire of destroying the cannibals. Despite this changing of approach to "the other", Robinson will never completely overcome his irrational fear of being in constant danger because of the anthropophagi nor will be enough for him the pacific coexistence with Friday and the explanation his Caribbean servant gives him on how the savages kill and eat only their war prisoners, practicing in this sense a form of exocannibalism as described in chapter one.

2.3 Colonialism as a solution to the cannibal problem

The character of Robinson Crusoe is the synthesis of almost all the fears and concerns dictated by the prejudices of the Western world towards the "other" which, in the case of the Caribbean, rhymes with the figure of the cannibal. Defoe's novel, however, is also a metaphor of colonialism. Coherently with this important figurative meaning of the work, Robinson represents also the ideal colonist and his island is the land to conquest and civilize. The work of civilization Robinson has to accomplish is a work of domestication of the wild island in order to exploit its resources and prosper, but also a work of domestication, or better destruction, of the cannibals. The anthropophagi, often identified as the whole of the native Caribbean population in the period of the discovery and colonization of the New World, has always been considered a problem for the Western plans of expansion. Cannibalism in this sense functioned as the justification for the conquest and, what probably was a tribal primitive use with little occurrence, if not a mere tribal legend, was elevated to the state of a morally unsustainable horrific habit of the natives by the colonial propaganda. In the novel, Robinson expresses this need to save the world form cannibalism spending his time to plan the destruction of the savages:

> for night and day I could think of nothing but how I might destroy some of these monsters in their cruel bloody entertainment, and, if possible save the victim they should bring hither to destroy. (p.166)

In this quote that sounds much like a declaration of war, Robinson refers to the cannibal calling them "monsters" in an act of denigration which presents the savages as non-human. The contrast presented then is not against a human enemy, but against an entity which is *a priori* presented as the evil party of the story.

After this expression of Rage against the cannibals Robinsons considers the motivations and the consequences of the actions he is planning to accomplish. In a first moment Crusoe examines the horror of anthropophagy considering it as the

most unnatural custom of the people of that area of the world. The practice is so unexplainable to his eyes that the one reason he can think of for its existence is that God himself left these population abandoned to evil and let them degenerate to the horror they find themselves in. The absence of God would be enough for Robinson to fight the savages with no regret at all. However, the protagonist immediately realizes that he does not know God's judgement and he cannot say whether the savages perpetuate their horrific practices with the awareness that they are committing a sin or if, on the contrary, they consider the eating of human flesh as he considers the eating of animal meat. Furthermore, Robinson has no reason to attack and kill the savages because they did nothing to him and they do not even know about his presence on the island. In this manifestation of prudence in interpreting God's will and in the research of a valid reason to destroy the cannibals Crusoe moves a sharp critique to the Catholic Spaniards and to the brutalities they perpetuated against the natives. In fact, Robinson considers that committing a carnage:

> would justify the conduct of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practiced in America, where they destroyed millions of these people, who, however they were idolaters and barbarians and had several bloody and barbarous rites in their customs, such as sacrificing human bodies to their idols, were yet, as to the Spaniards, very innocent people; (p.169)

Crusoe openly critiques the barbarities of the Catholic Spaniards during the *Conquista* and, by this critique, he compares them to the cannibals, placing himself, the Englishman, between these two opponents equals in their barbarities.[42] This, however, is not the only moment of the novel where Robinson attacks the Catholics placing them at the same level of the cannibal or even worse. Through the end of the novel, in fact, the protagonist reveals that he:

> had rather be delivered up to the savages and be devoured alive than fall into the merciless claws of the priests and be carried into the Inquisition. (p.240)

[42] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 201, Methuen & Co. Ltd

The reference to the Spanish Inquisition is extremely significant for the discussion on the topic of cannibalism. The fact that the author put these particular words in the mouth of his character stands not only as another critique to the Spanish Catholic world but it is also a reference to the tortures and all the brutalities this institution of the Church perpetuated at the time against its enemies. Not surprisingly, then, Defoe decided to mention it in opposition to cannibalism and, as per Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, in France *manger un homme* (to eat a man) was a common way to indicate torture.[43]

Overtaking his doubts about his behaviour through the savage cannibals, Robinson finds himself in a euphoric state of mind. The colonist inside him awakes and he cannot wait for the moment he will meet them on the shore of his island. It is in this state of mind that Robinson dreams of the arrival of Friday. His thoughts are now directed to the possibility to capture, domesticate and manage some of the savages in order to transform them into his servants. This right Crusoe pretends to have over the cannibals marks a switch of the roles of the protagonists of the novel. Robinson, which once was, or considered himself, the victim now becomes the victimizer; on the contrary, the cannibals become the victim of Crusoe's colonial project to civilize and enslave themselves, justified in his will by the necessity to eradicate the brutalities they are guilty of.[44]

> I fancied myself able to manage one, nay, two or three savages, if I had them, so as to make them entirely slaves to me, to do whatever I should direct them, and to prevent their being able at any time to do me any hurt. (p.197)

In this changing of approach lies the essence of the colonial metaphor of the novel. This colonial reading of the novel raises another important issue considering cannibalism in both his material form, the act of eating the flesh of a human being,

[43] Montaigne, Michel de (1580), *Les Essais*, Book I, ch. XXXI, p. 403 edited by Emmanuel Naya, Delphine Reguig et Alexandre Tarrête, Paris, Gallimard, 2009

[44] Heims, Neil 1983, *Robinson Crusoe and the Fear of Being Eaten*, Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 19, no. 4, December 1983, p. 190-193

and in his symbolic one. It has been reported above of how, in many point of the text, Robinson downgrades the "status" of the savage cannibals to that of the animals. This dehumanization of the native Caribbean populations counterbalances, on the other side, the consideration Robinson has of his domesticated goats. Crusoe actually considers all his animals, not only the domestic ones like the parrot or the dog, as the subjects of his kingdom, the citizens of his island, the inhabitants of his own personal colony. In this sense, Robinson does not hide the disease he feels when he kills one of his subject/goat to eat it, a feeling that is not there when the protagonist killed a wild goat at the beginning of the novel or a savage cannibal at the moment of rescuing Friday for example.[45] The killing of the cannibals, as for the killing and subjugation of his domesticated animals, stands as a metaphor of the colonial violence of the West through the "other". At the same time, however, it is true that killing and eating his goats is not only the manifestation of colonial power but, as a consequence of the human features Robinson gives them, and in a context like that of this novel, it is also the expression of cannibalism itself. Reporting this discourse from the metaphor of the text to the historical exploitation of natural and human resources that took place during the colonial period, as for the Spanish Inquisition mentioned above, the consumption of the living body of human beings which is slavery, can undoubtedly be read as a cannibalistic form of exploitation. In the novel, however, Robinson wants to make clear what is the fundamental difference between his approach (the civilized one) to the killing of the cannibals, and the approach of the savages to their brutalities. He says, in fact, that the contrast lies in the regret a civilized man feels when committing a murder or when he kills domesticated goats, against the rage of the cannibals which makes them similar to wild beasts than to human beings. Again this is the difference that motivates, and justifies, Robinson colonial project.

This comparison of the power of the farmer over his domesticated animals to tyranny and colonial power is not new for Daniel Defoe. In his *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*, Alex Mackintosh highlights

[45] Mackintosh, Alex 2011, *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*, Critical Quarterly, Special Issue: Food, edited by Lucy Scholes and Matthew Taunton, Volume 53, Issue 3, October 2011, pages 24–43

how the author already explored this field in his 1706 *Jure Divino.*[46]In this satire of the divine rights of the kings[47] Defoe states that an instinct similar to cannibalism is at the basis of political tyranny which, justified by divine right, downgrades the subject man to the status of a farm animal to exploit. Something similar to this divine right is what Robinson thinks to be a proud holder of when civilizing the cannibals that, in the absence of God, commit their anthropophagical acts. In particular, the divine right to domesticate, civilize and convert, is an important concept for Robinson during his process of re-education of his servant Friday.

[46] Defoe, Daniel 1706, *Jure Divino: A Satyr. In Twelve Books*
[47] Backscheider, Paula R. 1988, *The Verse Essay, John Locke, and Defoe's Jure Divino*, ELH Vol. 55, No.1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 99-124, Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

2.4 Friday's re-education and the good cannibal

After having dominated or somehow repressed his fear of being eaten and having planned and fantasized over the destruction and enslavement of some of the native cannibals, the arrival of Friday represents for Robinson the moment to put into practice all his proposals. However, Friday comes out to be quite an extraordinary cannibal, almost a lovely one, very different from what Robinson expected to meet and from the figure he built into his imagination influenced by stereotypes. The halo of non-ordinary surrounding Friday emerges from the very first encounter between himself and Robinson. The meeting, in fact, actually takes place in the non-physical environment of Robinson's dream. There, for the first time, Robinson meets his "servant" he saved from the jaws of the cannibals, a servant he waited for so long, someone to speak with but also someone who knows the situation around his island and therefore can help him to escape from his kingdom/captivity. Robinson's dream was so well shaped, so real that, awakening, he almost fell into depression. Fortunately, the protagonist does not have to wait for long for the physical epiphany of the savage of his dream. Eighteen months after, his dream becomes true. Robinson finds himself living his fantasy as he imagined it; he rescued a native escaped from a group of cannibals that were about to feast upon him. The material meeting between Crusoe and Friday follows the script of Robinson's dream. However, despite the setting is now real, the description Robinson makes of the native he has just rescued is even more dreamlike than his fantasies:

> He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, (…). (…) he had all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool; (…) his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; (…) his nose small, not flat like the Negroes' (p.202)

Robinson's description of Friday is that of an idealized character. Despite the Caribbean origin, Friday's face, his hair, his skin and every other physical feature are

closer to the model of European beauty. In this pleasure Robinson feels at contemplating Friday, Peter Hulme sees the same happiness or satisfaction of a slave master to see his slaves being healthy and well-proportioned. Despite his voluntary service as a compensation for his rescue by Robinson, and despite the fact that Crusoe never seems to consider him as a slave, Friday actually is a slave, subjected to the power of his master. Although there are many ways of describing the relationship between the two (father/son, teacher/student), this master/slave approach is the one that fits better in the situation presented in the novel.[48]

However, what interests the topic of this analysis is the fact that Friday is first and foremost a cannibal. In other words, even though in the text he is presented as a poor victim, Friday is, or was before his meeting with Robinson, as savage and brutal as those cannibals who were about to kill him and it is only by chance that he found himself in the situation of being saved and not shut by his master. Robinson realizes this situation and from the first moments of their life together he immediately works out to repress and eradicate Friday's cannibal instinct in order to make a good servant of him. The first approach is quite rude. After the battle for his liberation, Friday wants to dig up the bodies of his just killed enemies to feat upon them with Robinson. Offended by this abhorrent offer, Crusoe makes his servant understand that he by no means accepts that kind of behaviours and that he would kill him if he discovers him eating the flesh of a human being. With this manifestation of power over his servant, Robinson acquired the right to decide what Friday can or cannot eat.[49] To change the tastes of the young cannibal, in fact, Robinson decides to teach him to cook and taste the flesh of his goats:

> in order to bring Friday off from his horrid way of feeding and from the relish of a cannibal's stomach, I ought to let him taste other flesh; (…) when he come to taste the flesh, he took so many ways to tell me how well he liked it that I could not but understand him; and at last he told me

[48] Hulme, Peter 1986, Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797. Ch. 5, p. 204-205, Methuen & Co. Ltd

[49] Mackintosh, Alex 2011, *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*, Critical Quarterly, Special Issue: Food, edited by Lucy Scholes and Matthew Taunton, Volume 53, Issue 3, October 2011, pages 24–43

> he would never eat man's flesh any more, which I was very glad to hear. (p.207-209)

These episodes reveals the low consideration the Western world has of the native populations of the Caribbean. To Robinson's eyes, in fact, Friday is so primitive and uncivilized that he has to teach him firstly that it is possible to eat also the flesh of the animals and secondly how to cook it. This of the barbecue, together with the episode in which Robinson teaches Friday to build a canoe, are two central moment of Friday education. The funny thing here is that both the canoe and the barbecue are two Caribbean words for an object (the canoe) and a cooking practice (barbecue) the Western world learned from the natives. By teaching these two things to Friday, Robinson expresses at once the refusal of the Western culture to admit the existence of another different civilization and its undiscussed superiority to the "other".[50]

The fact that Robinson has to teach Friday to eat the flesh of animals has another important implication. In fact, this raises many doubts in Crusoe's mind over the natural occurrence of cannibalism. If on the one hand the practice is for him unnatural and inexplicable, for Friday it is natural. Vice versa it is the eating of animals that needs to be taught.[51] As already analysed in this chapter, Robinson motivates this relativism of what is natural and what is not with the absence of God in the life of the cannibals. To supply to this lack of God, Robinson teaches Friday the true Christian religion and it is by the Bible (the only book he actually has), that he also teaches him to read and speak English. Crusoe shapes his servant according to his exigencies and his culture, transforming what at the beginning was a good cannibal into a good and respectful servant and a practicing Christian.

Fridays application in learning and the loyalty he daily shows to his master, however, are not enough for Robinson. As a jealous slave holder he is constantly worried about

[50] Hulme, Peter 1986, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492 – 1797*. Ch. 5, p. 210-211, Methuen & Co. Ltd

[51] Mackintosh, Alex 2011, *Crusoe's abattoir: cannibalism and animal slaughter in Robinson Crusoe*, Critical Quarterly, Special Issue: Food, edited by Lucy Scholes and Matthew Taunton, Volume 53, Issue 3, October 2011, pages 24–43

a possible escape of his man and about the reliability of the changing in Friday's behaviour and personality from a cannibal to a civil person. It is only after some years, and after a long inquiry in which Friday expresses his complete loyalty and his sincere desire to take him to his people in order to teach them how to live properly that Robinson can finally trust his servant to the point of teaching him how to use weapons to defend themselves and their kingdom from the future arrival of other cannibals. When the cannibals finally come back, the feelings of the two fellows are diametrically opposed. Surprisingly, Robinson acts with rationality; it is he who, like a father, tries to comfort Friday who is scared to death to be killed and eat by these new enemies. By this time Robinson has become a spiritual guide for Friday who obeys his master and fights on his side helping him in what is symbolically a work of colonization. Responding to Robinson's command to attack the cannibals *"in the name of God!"* (230) Friday does not even wonder about the possibility that the natives on the shore he is about to kill could be the member of his tribe of origin. His metamorphosis is accomplished. The primitive native cannibal only exists in the past and the new Friday that comes out from the end of the novel is a well-educated and civilised servant. Despite all his personal improvement, however, Friday will never reach his emancipation from his master. Robinson, in fact, remains his reference, his source of knowledge and comfort. For example, when the English mutineers reach the shore of the island with their prisoner captain, Friday is shocked:

> O master! you see English mans eat prisoner as well as savage mans. (p.246)

Robinson immediately informs Friday that, though the Englishmen seem to act as the savage cannibals, they will just kill without eating their prisoner. However, the episode is meaningful. The colonized and re-educated cannibal is shocked by the barbarities of the people his master belongs to. In this overturning of point of view lies the deepest meaning of Friday education as a metaphor of colonization, imposition of civilization, denaturalization and psychological manipulation of the

colonized population.[52] The lack of emancipation and the constant need of Robinsons teachings and explanations symbolically stand as Friday's acceptance of his inferiority to his master colonizer and all of his educational process is after all a metaphor of colonialism and slavery. In fact, if the final aim of education is to provide children with the "tools" to emancipate and live their life once separate from the parents, the education of Friday is shaped in order to create an inextricable umbilical cord of dependence and obedient service.

Defoe's novel is a milestone for the representation of the cannibal in colonial English literature. In no other novel is this figure presented in such an influential way. The success of the story contributed to fix in the Western imaginary the character of the cannibal as it is described by the eyes of Robinson, an Englishman and a colonizer. In other words, *Robinson Crusoe* is a synthesis of all the stereotypes on the Caribbean anthropophagi, from their ignorance, to their uncivilized and brutal uses, from their primitive condition to their cultural inferiority. The univocal point of view that perfectly fitted the historical context of the period of publication of the novel gave a fundamental contribution to the origin of what is the most famous portrait of the cannibal of English literature, a negative myth that has resisted centuries of re-readings and fervent anthropological attempts to dismantle it.

[52] Heims, Neil 1983, *Robinson Crusoe and the Fear of Being Eaten, Colby Library Quarterly*, Volume 19, no. 4, December 1983, p. 190-193

Chapter 3

Cannibalism in the Work of Joseph Conrad

Chapter 3

3.1 Conrad and cannibalism

In his *'Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' – Eating and Narrative in Conrad*,[53] the author Tony Tanner (1935-1998) reports some words from Joseph Conrad's preface to his wife's cookery book,[54] where he states that: *Good cooking is amoral agent… The decency of our life is for a great part a matter of good taste.* In these words, taken from a light-subject book, Tanner recognizes how Conrad connects what we eat to what we are in quite a significant way considering the importance of the subject in his work.

Of course it is not just for this brilliant anecdote that, in a discussion over the representation of cannibals and cannibalism in colonial and postcolonial English literature, the work of Joseph Conrad represents a veritable mile-stone. His novellas are a recognized crossroads of subjects like colonialism, imperialism and racism, three of the main elements that constitute the "natural environment" for the diffusion of accounts of cannibalism that is, differently from the neutral anthropophagy, a product of colonialism itself as seen in the previous chapters. In particular, two of Conrad's tales are central to the topic of these pages: the first is Joseph Conrad's masterpiece *Heart of Darkness* (1899)[55], the story of Marlow's journey along the Congo river to reach the inner station and save the mysterious Mr. Kurtz; the second

[53] Tanner, Tony 1976, *'Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' – Eating and Narrative in Conrad'*, Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1976
[54] Conrad, Jessie 1923, *A handbook of cookery for a small house*, William Heinemann, Limited
[55] Conrad, Joseph 1899, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin English Library, 2012

is the 1903 novella *Falk. A Reminiscence,* from the name of the protagonist who, to survive a ship break-down, had to eat parts of the bodies of his death fellows.[56]

The two tales provide to the reader a complete panorama of the representation of cannibalism in its two main forms: cultural cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* and survival cannibalism in *Falk*. However, the most important aspect of cannibalism in Conrad is its symbolism. As discussed in the following pages, for both the novels, cannibalism "rhymes" with conquest, capitalism and colonial slaves and goods exploitation. Particularly for *Heart of Darkness,* it is actually the presence of those elements, together with racism, prejudice and the fear of the other, that builds up the topic for our discussion. In fact, if in *Falk* cannibalism is central (although it is mentioned only at the end of the story), in *Heart of Darkness* there is a noisy absence of its material practice as we use to think about it. This absence opens a countless number of interpretations, among these, the one responding to the idea analysed in the first chapter, according to which cannibalism would be nothing but a production of Western civilization serving the purpose of justifying the conquest and exploitation of the primitive colonized populations.

[56] Conrad, Joseph 1903, *Falk. A Reminiscence,* A Public Domain Book, e-book

3.2 *Heart of Darkness*: the unexpected absence of the cannibal

At the time of its original publication in three episodes in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899, everything, from the context to the time and space setting of Joseph Conrad's most popular novel suggested that the reader would have almost certainly met some terrible cannibal feasting with rage on the body of a poor white colonizer killed, cooked and eaten by the primitive inhabitants of the Congo basin, an area of the world where cannibals were said to live in great number. While this was, and still is, a common expectation of the reader at the moment of the reading of *Heart of Darkness*, the novel presents an unexpected variation from the usual cliché of this kind of narrative; in fact, even if the text is full of references and symbolism dealing with cannibalism (that is the reason why the book must be considered whenever speaking about the topic) there is, on the other hand, a complete and at a first look unjustified absence of the material practice itself. The initial strange feeling of something missing, however, leaves the reader when approaching the text in a more attentive way. Just a couple of pages from the beginning of the novel, while celebrating the history and importance of the river Thames, the narrating voice mentions Sir John Franklin in a list of *all the men of whom the nation is proud*.[57] Sir John Franklin was the captain of two ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror* (also mentioned in the text), who, the narrator says, never returned from an expedition. No details about the reason of the non-return are given in the text. However, at the time of the publication of *Heart of Darkness*, the story of Sir John Franklin was well known by Conrad's reading public. The sea man and his crew never returned from an expedition to find the "northwest passage" in 1845. All of them died of starvation but, when the wrecks of the two ships were found, there were some apparent evidences of cannibalism.[58] Of course it is not by chance that Conrad decided to include this reference at the beginning of a tale like *Heart of Darkness*, a story that is central to the topic of these pages not because of the representation practice of

[57] *Heart of Darkness*, page 3
[58] Hewitt, Douglas 1987, *"'Heart of Darkness' and Some 'Old and Unpleasant Reports.'"* The Review of English Studies, New Series 38.151 (August 1987), pp. 374-376

cannibalism itself but, as repeatedly stated above, because of its richness of symbolism related to it.

The reference to Sir John Franklin unfortunate expedition, ended up in episodes of cannibalism of the survival kind, is just the first of a series of Easter eggs reporting the attention of the reader on the subject of cannibalism that the author hides in the text, so to prepare his public to the meeting with an episode of anthropophagy that in the end will not take place. When Marlow visits his beloved aunt before leaving for his job on the Congo river, the old woman welcomes him as a kind of hero because of the "mission" he was about to accomplish. In his narration, Marlow reports the words of his aunt that are quite illustrative of the general idea concerning the African natives at the time:

> She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. (p.13)

This short quote holds in few words all the racism and the colonial belief of superiority over *those ignorant millions* that constituted the most common opinion among white people at the time. However, what is even more significant of this quote is the reference to *their horrid ways*. In a context like that of the British Empire at the beginning of the 20th century a statement like that could only have reminded the reader of cannibalism and of the African native cannibals living in the Congo basin. Though no clear evidences of cultural cannibalism have ever been attested in this area, its existence was commonly accepted and the reasons for this are multiple. On the one hand, from a European point of view, many of the strange uses of the native populations were often misinterpreted as *horrid ways* related to man-eating practices even if they actually had nothing to do with cannibalism. In *Heart of Darkness*, for example, Marlow reports the case of the savage fireman of his boat who *had filed teeth too, the poor devil*.[59] This particular case of the filed teeth is emblematic because, as many dentists have noticed, this kind of tribal decoration

[59] *Heart of Darkness*, page 46

would make the chewing of flesh a more difficult process.[60] On the other hand, however, these misinterpreted practices cannot be enough to understand the reasons for the strength of the idea that cannibalism is a diffused practice in Africa. The main reason is that cannibalism is the most common strategy of colonial othering[61] and, in particular, the representation of the other as a cannibal is the projection of the fear to succumb to the unknown other. A consequence of this fear is the need to repress this entity which is translated with the necessity to establish the superiority of the colonizer to the inferior primitive native.[62] The tools to mark this diametrical difference are of course racism and denigration and in *Heart of Darkness* Marlow expresses this mix of fear, racism, denigration and repulsion to the native "other" in a passage of his storytelling that is worth reporting here:

> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of first ages – could comprehend. (p.46)

Marlow talks about the natives as of the *conquered monster*, but what scares him is not this monster himself; it is the intangible but still existent equality between himself (and his race) and the race of the natives. This awareness of similarity represents the outbreak of the racist artificial certainty of the colonizers to be different and superior. In his *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of*

[60] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism.* Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 5
[61] Klitson, Peter J. 2000, *'The Eucharist of Hell'; Or, Eating People is Right: Romantic Representations of Cannibalism*. Romanticism on the Net, Vol. 17
[62] Kaplan, Carola M. 1997, *Colonizers, Cannibals, and the Horror of Good Intentions in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 34.3, pp. 323-324

Darkness,[63] Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) firmly criticises Conrad and his novel for the racism of the work and, among other things, he recognizes in the passage reported above the fascination that this racist fear of being similar to the natives holds to the Western mind of Conrad's reading public. It is undeniable that racism is one of the main features of *Heart of Darkness* and the whole representation of the chaotic settings and native characters has the effect of providing an image of Africa as primitive and in complete contrast with the European order.

However, though Marlow's behaviour to the natives throughout the story is actually an expression of this supposed superiority and his consideration of the Africans as primitive and cannibal *a priori* can be read as an act of cultural violence,[64] it is also true that the protagonist/narrator has not only and not always a negative approach toward them. At the beginning of his narration Marlow mentions his departed predecessor, a Dane named Fresleven who was *killed in a scuffle with the natives.*[65] In this short passage the protagonist remembers the moment when he found the material remains of the poor departed he was looking for:

> but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell. (p.9)

This final annotation about the presence of all of the bones of the Dane predecessor is quite significant because it seems to support the inconsistency of the accusation of cannibalism against the natives. In fact, the body of Fresleven was left untouched by the supposed cannibals despite the fact that his behaviour could have perfectly fit with a revengeful feast with his flesh (he was killed because he beat the chief of the village after a simple misunderstanding about a couple of hens). This episode Conrad included in his novel comes from a true story he heard from a real life colonial

[63] Achebe, Chinua 1975, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Conrad, pp. 251-262
[64] Kaplan, Carola M. 1997, *Colonizers, Cannibals, and the Horror of Good Intentions in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 34.3, p. 330
[65] *Heart of Darkness*, page 8

Captain named Duhst who was at the head of a military expedition for punishing the murderers of the real Dane official Freiesleben (not Fresleven as Conrad misspelled the name in *Heart of Darkness*) whose family believed to have been eaten by the natives. Though the body was actually buried at Berge Sainte-Marie near the Belgian Catholic Mission, and only the hands and feet of the victim were removed from the body (probably to be smoked and shown as a trophy as per a tribal use of many native villages), it is quite significant that Conrad did not use this story to insert an episode of cannibalism in the novel, also considering the fact that a cannibal legend for this real episode already existed.[66]

The one quoted above is one of the two passages of the novella in which Marlow seems to express kindness and sympathy for the natives. The second one is probably the most emblematic passage of the whole story and its analysis follows several different directions. While narrating of the difficulties he and his crew had to overcome during his journey along the Congo, Marlow reports that

> More than once she *(the steamboat)* had to wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows – cannibals – in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. (p.44)

First of all, the fact that the cannibals preferred to eat rotten hippo-meat (until Marlow threw it away because of the unsustainable smell) and did not eat each other or any other member of the crew despite the situation of extreme hunger they were in is, like the remains of the Dane predecessor, another evidence of their "non-cannibalism" or better an episode that inevitably raises some doubts on the actual existence and scale of the phenomenon. However, what is more important in this passage is that "fine fellows" by which Marlow refers to the natives. This epithet

[66] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, pp. 5-7

does not simply highlight their irreproachable behaviour enhancing once again the theme of the awareness of the similarity between the Westerns and the natives but its full meaning is revealed in opposition to the epithet "pilgrims" by which Marlow refers, with disdain, to his Belgian fellows. This stands as an indication of the good consideration the protagonist has of the cannibals and, on the other hand, of the disgust he feels towards the Belgian colonists. Belgium was actually the other colonial power ruling the area of the Congo basin and, by this disgust expressed by Marlow, Conrad criticizes the Belgian model of colonization ruled by King Leopold II, a model that was considered as one of the most brutal and inhuman colonial regime operating in Africa.[67]

From another more symbolic and interesting point of view, however, the words *fine fellows – the cannibals – in their pla*ce, are not addressed to the natives. On the contrary, this assertion can also refers to the Europeans. In fact, if we consider cannibalism not just as a synonym of anthropophagy but as the attitude of metaphorically devouring and possessing and controlling everything, it is quite clear that European colonists respond better than the natives to this description. In their colonial dominion they actually exploited the natives and the resources of the conquered lands in such a brutal way that their non-physical anthropophagy is not enough to free them from the accusation of cultural and material cannibalism.[68] In this context, "in their place" inevitably refers to the fact that the same agents of the brutalities of colonialism are "fine fellows" when in their motherland. The clearest example of this kind of bipolarity is actually Mr. Kurtz, a notable man, a kind of hero, someone to be proud of at the eyes of his betrothed, a brutal man, the real cannibal of the novel, in his African mission.[69]

Before analysing the figure of Kurtz as the only cannibal in *Heart of Darkness*, it is necessary to take a step back to the cannibal natives of Marlow's crew and to their

[67] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 10
[68] Kaplan, Carola M. 1997, *Colonizers, Cannibals, and the Horror of Good Intentions in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 34.3, p. 330
[69] Rickard, John, *Eating Like a White Man: Nibbling at the Edges of Heart of Darkness*. Bucknell University, http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rickard/RickardEssay.htm

not practicing anthropophagy even in a "favourable" situation of hunger and in the presence of a possible white victim, a thing that the protagonist cannot explain:

> Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us – they were thirty to five – and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me now when I think of it. (…) And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. (…) I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, (…) when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear – or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less that chaff in a breeze. (…) It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's soul – than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. (p.52-53)

In this passage Marlow tries to give a reason for something incomprehensible for him. He cannot believe in some kind of *restraint* of the native cannibals who didn't feast on him and the other white men of his crew. It is from the comparison of this restraint to the brutality and the material avidity shown by Mr. Kurtz that his definition of the man as the cannibal of the story finds its legitimation. From the very first meeting Marlow has with the emblematic character, the words he uses immediately give to the reader the idea of a devouring entity:

> I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. (p.78)

And similarly when Marlow recalls Kurtz at the end of the story, the image that comes to his mind is almost the same:

> I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the hearth with all its mankind. (p.96)

It is interesting how Marlow's first impression coincides with his final souvenir of Mr. Kurtz. The attention is on the symbolism of his mouth wide open in the act of devouring or better swallowing everything, including *all the men before him* or *all* the *mankind*. This inclination, this vital need to devour all the otherness, finds its best description in cannibalism. Kurtz's will to assimilate all the "non-Kurtz" is the symbolic representation of the ultimate aim of colonialism, an insane, unnatural desire to possess, control and exploit the other.[70] In his *Unspeakable Rites,*[71] Claude Rawson describes Kurtz as a man who succumbed to the African savage seduction to the point of performing "unspeakable rites" that is, as the author explains, a common Victorian epithet to refer to the most terrible rites of the native tribes, among which there is of course cannibalism, even if nowhere Kurtz is directly said to have eaten human flesh. Furthermore, Kurtz is not only the victimizer in the story; his lack of restraint in his colonial experience outbreaks in *the horror* of the end, an horror he is not only responsible for but also the last victim of. Physically Kurtz is weak, and by the time Marlow comes to rescue him he is nothing but a voice, a powerful but fading entity. In *The Fascination of the Abomination,*[72] David Gill talks about a "flesh-eating forest" that actually ate Kurtz in his body and soul, a kind of external circumstance that together with the character's inner lack of restraint originated his cannibalism, that is no more simply figurative and comprehends both the material and the symbolic reality of colonialism.

The symbol of this "flesh-eating forest", this tempting force to which Kurtz succumbed, and in a certain sense the figure that collects in one image the dangerous fascination for the heart of darkness can be recognized in the savage dark woman. She is the manifestation of the forest, a magnetic force that attracts those who come and then disappear to manifest itself for a last desperate expression of primitive seduction only when Marlow, who differently from Kurtz resisted to her call, tried to

[70] Tanner, Tony 1976, *''Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' – Eating and Narrative in Conrad'*, Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1976
[71] Rawson, Claude 1999, *Unspeakable Rites: Cultural Reticence and the Cannibal Question*. Social Research, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp.186-187
[72] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 14

take Kurtz away from her clutches. Also physically she represents every features of the other that fascinates the Westerns: she is dark, of a different race, she is a woman and the power she has over them represents the fear of being devoured by the other and the colonial necessity to conquer it to avoid to succumb to it.

At the end of this study over the figure of the cannibal in *Heart of Darkness*, a categorization of the different types of cannibal the reader encounters in the novella is necessary to recollect the ideas and conclude the subject. Particularly interesting and coherent with what has been stated above in this section is the categorization that David Gill includes in his already mentioned essay.[73] The novel actually presents three main categories of cannibals: the stereotyped, the *fine fellows*, and Kurtz. The first type, the stereotyped one, is the cannibal as the Western colonists imagine it. It is the projection of the fear of the other, the justification provided to colonialism, slavery, conquest and exploitation. However, though it is the most common and powerful connotation of the word "cannibal", whose meaning still resists, this stereotyped cannibal has not, at least in *Heart of Darkness*, a physical counterpart, and, in the light of the anthropological studies reported in chapter one of this work, it is its same historical existence that is questioned.

The second category is that of the *fine fellows*. As analysed above, this epithet has a double connotation: it refers both to the natives and to the European. In the case of the natives it has a positive connotation, highlighting the fact that, as Marlow reports, *they did not eat each other before* [his] *face.*[74] In the case of the European colonists, on the contrary, the connotation is more sinister and negative, putting the attention on the fact that the barbarities and the acts of cultural cannibalism they perpetrates in Africa are unpredictable when considering this civilized Westerners in their everyday life in their motherland. After these European *fine fellows* there is the third category: Mr. Kurtz. He represents on his own a totally different, unique and independent group. He is the real cannibal of the story, the civilized man who completely lost his inhibition and succumbed to the primitive call of the heart of darkness, at the same

[73] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 12
[74] *Heart of Darkness*, page 44

time victim and victimizer of his inhuman hunger. Through the eye of Marlow, we can interpret Conrad's judgment over the three categories: he is scared and repulsed by the first type, influenced by the racist thoughts of his time; he respects the second type, only when *fine fellows* is referred to the natives, *men one could work with*,[75] and not to the Belgian *pilgrims* he denigrates; and finally, he is undeniably fascinated by the mysterious figure of Mr. Kurtz.

What comes out of the analysis in the pages above is that in *Heart of Darkness* cannibalism is first and foremost the symbol of the ultimate overtaking of the boundaries between human beings.[76] Independently from the actual existence of the phenomenon meant as anthropophagy of the natives, the most terrible form of cannibalism is the cultural one. Following this idea, in *Heart of Darkness* the colonists are the ones who break the boundaries between human beings and who, considering the unexpected absence of any episode of native cannibalism, have to be considered as the real, and in this case also the only, cannibals.

[75] *Heart of Darkness*, page 44
[76] Kaplan, Carola M. 1997, *Colonizers, Cannibals, and the Horror of Good Intentions in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 34.3, p. 329

3.3 *Falk*: the custom of the sea and social acceptance

To introduce the theme of the representation of the cannibal in *Falk*, it is worth thinking back for a moment to the passage from Jesse Conrad's *A handbook of cookery for a small house* reported at the beginning of this chapter, in which Joseph Conrad draws a connection between the decency of life and good taste in a culinary sense. These words perfectly fit with the story of the main character of the novella, Falk, who lost his place among society after an unfortunate adventure during which he ate human flesh to survive. This act of survival cannibalism represents for him the loss of the decency of his life, something he desperately wants back, and the novel is, in this sense, the account of his struggle to put an end to his self-isolation from society, a "happy ending" of his sad life story represented in the text by his courtship to the unnamed niece of Hermann.

While in *Heart of Darkness* there are no material episodes of cannibalism, at least not in its most common connotation, and the subject is mainly symbolic, in *Falk* the episode is central for the whole development of the novel even though the account of the act only occurs by the end of the story. However, the presence of physical anthropophagy in the novel does not prevent the subject to be, also in this case, highly symbolic, and to touch several spheres of life like those of economy, society, anthropology and also the linguistic one.

From the first pages the author takes the reader into a context of sea-stories, inside a hostelry on the familiar environment of the river Thames, the harbour of many of these stories of mariners and travels by sea, and, most importantly, a common starting point between *Falk* and *Heart of Darkness*. The narration starts with the description of a meal:

> the dinner was execrable, and all the feast was for the eyes.
> That flavor of salt-water which for so many of us had been the very water of life permeated our talk. He who hath known the bitterness of the

> Ocean shall have its taste forever in his mouth. But one or two of us, pampered by the life of the land, complained of hunger. It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff. And indeed there was a strange mustiness in everything. (p.13)

This meal raises in the reader a sense of alimentary disease, a sense of hunger and disgust connected to the theme of sea adventures. As the narrating voice goes ahead, the references to the meal of the first men *evolving the first rudiments of cookery*, to *the tales of hunger and hunt, old ships, sea-accidents, break-downs, wrecks, short rations and heroism – or at least* [of] *what the newspapers would have called heroism at sea*,[77] complete a portrait of what the story that is about to begin deals with.

Shipwrecks and sea-accidents were extremely common in a period in which imperialism lived on economic exchanges whose main vehicle were ships transporting people, and material and human goods from one part of the British Empire to its antipodes crossing the Oceans. When these accidents happened, it was not unusual to register episodes of survival cannibalism, at the time paraphrased as "a custom of the sea". *Falk* needs to be read inside this context and to do so, it is worth devoting some space to a brief digression to report in details one of the most famous cases of survival cannibalism that, because of the "popularity" it acquired at the time, has undoubtedly been a fundamental source of inspiration for Joseph Conrad at the moment of his work on *Falk*. The story in question is that of the *Mignonette* and of its crew, led by Captain Tom Dudley. The details of the episode and of the trial for cannibalism that followed are collected in Brian A. W. Simpson's 1984 *Cannibalism and the Common Law. A Victorian Yachting Tragedy.*[78] The *Mignonette* was a 52-foot yacht purchased in 1883 by an Australian politician named John Henry Want. The boat was in Southampton and even though it was not made for cross-oceanic voyages, it had to be taken to Sidney by sailing. Want finally found a crew that on 19 May 1884 left from Southampton to Sidney on board the

[77] *Falk. A Reminiscence*, page 14
[78] Simpson, Brian A. W. 1984, *Cannibalism and the Common Law. A Victorian Yachting Tragedy*, The University of Chicago Press

Mignonette. The crew was composed by Captain Tom Dudley and three members: Edwin Stephens, Edmund Brooks, and the 17 years old cabin boy Richard Parker. After a month of navigation the *Mignonette* sunk in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and the four crew members found themselves in a small lifeboat with no food or water. The young Parker got ill soon and fell in a coma as reported by the other three crew members. Lost and desperate they decided to kill the cabin boy and eat his flesh to survive longer and hope for a rescue. Fortunately, on the 29 July 1884 they were rescued by a German ship and brought back to Falmouth where, after their account, they were accused of murder and cannibalism. After a first moment of horror and repulsion, the three mariners found the sympathy of public opinion and Parker's brother decided to publicly forgive the men who killed and ate his young brother. The first outcome of the trial was a death sentence for murder but it was finally commuted to six months of prison.[79]

In the case of the *Mignonette*, social acceptance and sympathy is what allowed the surviving crew members to avoid death penalty and gave them the possibility to live once again a normal life. Getting back to *Falk*, also in this case it is social acceptance, as already mentioned above, that the main character of the story is looking for to accomplish his redemption from cannibalism. He is in fact an a-social strange character with a strange behaviour that reveals himself to the narrator (and consequently to the reader) in the story. The story is that of the Scandinavian Captain Falk who is the owner of the only tug boat of the harbour where the novella takes place (though unnamed, the place is inspired by Bangkok).[80] There the unnamed narrator needs Falk's help to leave the port but, unexpectedly, the Scandinavian Captain refuses to help him and takes out another ship, the *Diana*, owned by a German merchant named Hermann, friend of the narrator, who lives on his boat together with his wife, his two little children and his unnamed orphan niece. As the narrator tries to discover the reason for such a hostile behaviour on the part of Falk, it

[79] Spencer, J. R., Reviewed Work: *Cannibalism and the Common Law by A. W. Brian Simpson*, The University of Chicago Law Review, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 1265-1272

[80] Tanner, Tony 1976, *''Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' – Eating and Narrative in Conrad'*, Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1976

becomes clear that the Captain is desperately in love with Hermann niece and that he considers him as a rival to conquer the love of the woman. Once the two men solve this misunderstanding, Falk asks for the help of the narrator in his courtship to the niece. He has a terrible confession to make, something he cannot hide to a future bride. Falk finally reveals to the narrator and to Hermann that ten years before he ate human flesh to survive a ship break-down. Hermann's first reaction is brutal, he is horrified, and he seems to be inclined to refuse the marriage but, after a mediation of the narrator and once overtaken the initial shock, Hermann decides to allow Falk to marry his niece, first of all because for him the woman was just a servant and an undesired mouth to feed.

That Falk is a strange character is evident throughout the text. Considering his approach to food, the fact that he cannot stand the smell of meat being cooked and that he only eats boiled rice or fish should sound as an indication that his singular behaviour has an alimentary connotation. This is also highlighted in the text in a dialogue between the narrator and Schomberg, the owner of a hotel who detests Falk mainly because he never eats at his tavern:

> any damned native that can boil a pot of rice is good enough for Mr. Falk. Rice and little fish he buys for a few cents from the fishing boats outside is what he lives on. You would hardly credit it – eh? A white man, too…' (…)
>
> 'He's a vegetarian, perhaps,' I murmured instead.
>
> 'He's a miser. A miserable miser,' affirmed the hotel-keeper with great force. 'The meat here is not so good as at home – of course. And dear too. But look at me. I only charge a dollar and fifty cents for the dinner. Shoe me anything cheaper. (…)'
>
> (…)
>
> 'A white man should eat like a white man, dash it all,' he burst out impetuously. 'Ought to eat meat, must eat meat.' (p.46)

The complete meaning of this passage can be gathered by the reader only after the discovery of Falk's cannibalism. Knowing this, his repulsion for meat finds its justification. At the same time, the fact that he eats only boiled food has a precise motivation. By his anthropophagical act Falk "went native"; roasted and fried meat

recalls the first men behaviour mentioned at the beginning of the story. On the other hand, the act of boiling food is proper of culture and civilization. Cooking practices have to do with how a society relates to nature and culture, and in this contrast between nature and culture, Falk refuses the primitive natural way he was forced to choose in the past and decides to "side" with civilization.[81]

In the case of Falk, as for all the cases of survival cannibalism at sea, the moment in which a man decides to eat the flesh of another human being is a moment of pain, a drama that will never be overcome and it actually is the last resort to survive. In *Falk*, this desperation is exemplified in the regret the protagonist manifests when he thinks of all the rotten meat he and his crew got rid of at the beginning of the unfortunate journey on board the *Borgmester Dahl* (the boat of the accident):

> And again, as he was presently to tell me (alluding to an early incident of the disastrous voyage when some damaged meat had been flung overboard), he said that a time soon came when his heart ached (that was the expression he used), and he was ready to tear his hair out at the thought of all that rotten beef thrown away. (p.101)

This reference to rotten meat as a much preferable food than human flesh recalls *Heart of Darkness* when Marlow, disgusted by the smell of the rotten hippo-meat his cannibal crew ate during their journey, threw it overboard. Getting back to *Falk*, what Tony Tanner highlights in his illuminating essay is that in any case rotten meat like human flesh is "non-food" in a normal situation and it is only when out of society, when man is no more subject to any rule of morality or good sense, that rotten meat becomes desirable and cannibalism becomes possible.[82] The situation of Falk on board the *Borgmester Dahl* and similarly that of Marlow's crew in the Congo River are definitely two examples of this condition.

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[81] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 18

[82] Tanner, Tony 1976, *''Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' – Eating and Narrative in Conrad'*, Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1976

Having analysed the material aspects of survival cannibalism expressed in *Falk*, it is important to consider its symbolic aspects. The fact that cannibalism only happens in a non-social context where man is no longer what he is inside society is, in other words, a light description of the man as beast. Hermann's reaction to Falk's confessions actually suggests this. In translating to his wife and niece the horrible story of the Captain, he uses the German verb "fressen" which means "to eat" but it is commonly used to describe the act of eating of an animal, a beast ("essen" is the verb for human beings). However, when Falk explains in detail his story to the narrator, the impression we have is not quite that of a beast, but, on the contrary, that of the strongest among the men of the unfortunate crew. He was the last who tried to maintain order on board, it was he who rationed food and water, and it was only in the end, when his last friend on board, the carpenter of the boat attempted to his life, that he decided to kill and eat him to survive. It is actually his incredible will to survive that made of him the best man of the crew and not a beast, and his love for life represents his love for the civilization he wants to re-join. Falk feels unclean and unfortunate for what he did, but he does not feel guilty about it, and his desire to confess this sin is for him a necessity to become once again part of society. According to David Gill, his extreme manifestation of strength is regarded with sympathy by Hermann's niece who looks at him as a strong man, a possible good husband, a solid pillar of a family.[83]

For Falk, love actually represents a way-back into society and the final permission to the marriage represents a regained social acceptance. The difference from his past misadventure on board the chaotic *Borgmester Dahl* and the new life the main character aims at finds expression in the order of the *Diana*, the boat where Falk contemplates his beloved.[84] However, despite the apparent quietness (he just sits on board the *Diana* to feel close to Hermann's niece) his courtship has something morbose in itself:

[83] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 19

[84] Lutz, John 2000, *Centaurs and Other Savages: Patriarchy, Hunger, and Fetishism in 'Falk'*. Conradiana, pp. 177-193

> He was as frank as a child too. He was hungry for the girl, terribly hungry, as he had been terribly hungry for food.
> Don't be shocked if I declare that in my belief it was the same need, the same pain, the same torture. (p.101)

The narrator explains how the desire for the girl is more similar to a sense of hunger, the same hunger Falk had for food and for life. This insatiable need has at the same time a sexual connotation[85] and the traits of the innocent hunger of a child wanting for a maternal figure. This series of different states of need for food, life, woman and maternal figure can be interpreted as an autobiographical feature the author gave to his character. Joseph Conrad, in fact, was only a child when he lost his mother and his unsatisfied hunger for maternal love partly finds its expression in the figure of the tormented Captain Falk.[86]

The multifaceted symbolism of hunger in *Falk* is not limited to the figure of the main character. Throughout the novel, in fact, all the three main characters are involved in different states of perpetual hunger. Having considered Falk's situation which is of course the most interesting and varied, also the narrator and Hermann are represented in a constant state of anxiety dictated by the need for something, a desire that can be well defined as a real hunger. In the case of the narrator, for example, his need is to be transported out of the harbour by Captain Falk and finally take the sea. This need increases its importance as the story develops, and the behaviour of the narrator is exclusively focused on obtaining what he wants. When Falk asks him to act as his "ambassador" to obtain the hand of Hermann's niece, the narrator accepts this role not because of a particular sympathy towards Falk but because he finally sees the opportunity to leave the harbour. The other interesting case is that of Hermann. As a merchant his hunger is for money and for what is economically good for him. He is avaricious and opportunist and in this sense he is the real exploiter of the text. His niece is for him nothing more than a slave, an object, a undesired mouth to feed. When the narrator tells him that Falk wanted to discuss another matter before giving

[85] Sewlall, Harry 2006, *Cannibalism in the Colonial Imaginary: a Reading of Joseph Conrad's "Falk"*. Journal of Literary Studies, Vol. 22, pp. 158-174
[86] Gill, David 1999, *The Fascination of the Abomination: Conrad and Cannibalism*. Conradian, Vol. 24.2, p. 28

his consent to the marriage, Hermann's mind immediately goes to money and he states:

> 'What matter?' he said surlily. 'I have had enough of his nonsense. There's no matter at all, as he knows very well; the girl has nothing in the world. She came to un in one thin dress when my brother died, and I have a growing family.' (p.89)

It is evident that his concern here is about the eventuality of a dowry to give to his niece in case of marriage. Similarly, when he discovers what Falk's matter is about, the initial shock and disgust for what he defines *a common cannibal*[87] is rapidly overtaken by the opportunity to get rid of his niece saving both the money for a dowry and for a further second-class ticket on the ship for his journey back to Germany.[88]

The parallelism between economy and hunger finds its most evident, and in this case cannibalistic expression in Falk's working aptitude. As if he were the victim of a kind of primitive economic hunger, he exploits to the extreme consequences the monopoly he has in his work. This image is well expressed by the narrator when, describing Falk for the first time, he chooses a figure that could not have been more appropriate:

> I daresay there are yet a few shipmasters afloat who remember Falk and his tug very well. He extracted his pound and a half of flesh from each of us merchant-skippers with an inflexible sort of indifference which made him detested and even feared. (p.99)

In this quote hunger, consumption, fetishism and cannibalism in its symbolic connotation are put together and represent the central themes of the novella. In particular, each of the three main characters' hunger/need can be read as a

[87] *Falk. A Reminiscence*, page 99

[88] Tanner, Tony 1976, *''Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales'* – Eating and Narrative in Conrad', Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad, The Macmillan Press Ltd 1976

representation of egoism, exploitation and of the capitalist impulse to immoral accumulation, all of these being part of what can be considered as the dark side of the bourgeois world.[89]

The analysis of the cannibal matter in *Heart of Darkness* and *Falk* developed in this chapter delivers quite a complete image of the subject from many points of view. In these two works Joseph Conrad portrays a powerful figure that coincides with the common imaginary of the cannibal and at the same time breaks the boundaries of its classic interpretation. In both stories it is necessary to mark the difference between cannibalism and anthropophagy, the first being most of all a strategy of "othering", colonial othering in *Heart of Darkness* and self-othering in *Falk*, where the character actually exits humanity through cannibalism and struggles for the love of a woman, the most human of feelings, to re-join it.[90] On the other hand, anthropophagy, the physical act of consumption of human flesh is presented as quite an extraordinary practice at least in these two works; the only anthropophagous is a white man, Falk, a non-stereotypical cannibal and a Western character possessing all the features of humanity that in the eye of 19th century public opinion were not present in the native African tribes like those represented in *Heart of Darkness*. Because of its completeness, and because of the multitude and originality of elements dealing with the topic of these pages, the work of Joseph Conrad is a veritable reference for any study of the representation of cannibalism in literature and the large, varied and ever-growing bibliography it inspired stands as a confirmation.

[89] Lutz, John 2000, *Centaurs and Other Savages: Patriarchy, Hunger, and Fetishism in 'Falk'*. Conradiana, pp. 177-193

[90] Sewlall, Harry 2006, *Cannibalism in the Colonial Imaginary: a Reading of Joseph Conrad's "Falk"*. Journal of Literary Studies, Vol. 22, pp. 158-174

Chapter 4

Tarzan of the Apes: Civilization Defeats Cannibalism

Chapter 4

4.1 "Very remarkable" similarities: *Tarzan* and *Heart of Darkness*

From its first publication between 1911 and 1912 in the American pulp magazine *All-Story Magazine* and its first release as a single book in 1914, Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*[91] went through a story of increasing fortune. More than a century after its appearance and after 23 volumes of Tarzan's further adventures written from 1913 to 1965, always by Burroughs, the novel is still recognized as a classic of the 20th century and its popularity encouraged many re-readings and adaptations of the story, such as, the 1999 Disney classic *Tarzan.*[92] Despite this modern "fairy tale" version the original plot is not that of a book for kids. Tarzan, meanings "white skin" in the language of his apes tribe, is the son of an English Colonial officer Lord John Clayton Greystoke and his wife Lady Alice who, victims of a mutiny, were abandoned on a desert shore of Western equatorial Africa. After the death of his parents the little boy is adopted by Kala, an ape of the tribe of Kerchak. The little boy grows up as an ape protected from the hate of many of his tribe members by his ape-mother Kala. Becoming aware that he is not quite of the same species as his fellow apes Tarzan finds the answer in the cabin of his natural father where, thanks to the books his parents brought to Africa for the education of their little son, he discovers that he is a man and that the members of his tribe, even his mother Kala, are all apes. Twenty years after Tarzan's arrival in the jungle, another group of white men, victims of a mutiny, reaches the same shore of Tarzan's parents. With the arrival of Professor Archimedes Q. Porter, his daughter Jane, Samuel T. Philander, William Cecil Clayton (Tarzan's cousin who owns what should be Tarzan's fortune) and the servant Esmeralda, the life of the ape-man changes

[91] Burroughs, Edgar Rice 1912, *Tarzan of the Apes*, Penguin Twentieth- Century Classics, 1990
[92] Buck, Chris 1999, *Tarzan*, Walt Disney Feature Animation

radically. He immediately recognizes them as members of his own species, the white men, and he protects them from the dangers of jungle life saving their lives several times. Thanks to his knowledge of written English he is able to interact with them by written messages, even if they believe that the Tarzan who writes the messages and the ape-man who always comes to help them are two different persons. Tarzan's behaviour is motivated also by the love for Jane Porter. At the end of the novel, with the help of Lieutenant Paul D'Arnot, the French man he rescued from the cannibals, he learns how a civilized man should live and follows Jane in the United States to ask her to marry him. After the lady's suffered refusal Tarzan understands that he cannot live in the civilized world and, without confessing his identity as the son of Lord Greystoke and refusing to claim his rights on his cousin Cecil Clayton who is going to marry Jane, he decides to get back to his jungle where he grew up and where he recognizes his home.

Considering its place and time setting (equatorial Africa, end of 19th century) and the themes it develops, the novel belongs by right to the world of colonial English literature and, most important, it has a relevant role in the discussion of cannibalism and its representation. In particular, some aspects of the subject in Burroughs's novel takes the reader back to another well-known colonial story: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The parallelism between the two books does not stop at their first publication in a magazine or at the similar setting. In fact, there are many elements in the study of the figure of the cannibal that are found in both stories and that allow a compared analysis for their comprehension.[93]

In chapter 9 of *Tarzan of the Apes,* titled "Man and Man", an eighteen year-old Tarzan is studying his books in his parents' cabin when he hears some strange and unknown noises he later finds coming from a parade of *fifty black warriors*.[94] In describing these men, the first Tarzan has seen since he has become aware of not being an ape, the narrating voice notices that:

[93] Carey-Webb, Allen 2005, *Heart of Darkness, Tarzan, and the "Third World": Canons and Encounters in World Literature*, English 109, 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company, West Chester University
[94] *Tarzan of the Apes*, page 70

> Their yellow teeth were filed to sharp points, and their great protruding lips added still further to the low and bestial brutishness of their appearance. (p.71)

This image cannot help recalling another "filed teeth", those of the *poor devil*[95] described by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. The fierce savage with filed teeth is implied in both the American and the English novel as a cannibalistic reference and it is a typical feature of the stereotyped cannibal in the Western imaginary. However, this first example is not the only element of the ideal link of the representation of cannibalism between the two stories. The group of black men Tarzan saw in the jungle was looking for a new place to settle because they escaped from the white men who exploited them for ivory. In this passage it is not specified who these white men were. However, later in the narration, when Lieutenant D'Arnot is about to be tortured by Monbga's tribe (Mbonga is the king of the natives tribe), the narrator reports that their rage and brutality against the French man was not only a matter of their brutal and savage nature, but it was also motivated by

> the poignant memory of still crueler barbarities practiced upon them and theirs by the white officers of that arch hypocrite, Leopold II of Belgium, because of whose atrocities they had fled the Congo Free State – a pitiful remnant of what once had been a mighty tribe. (p.197)

As in *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow's disdain in talking about the Belgian pilgrims can be read as a critique Conrad made against Belgian Colonialism, we find the same critique also in this passage of *Tarzan of the Apes* with the difference that Edgar Rice Burroughs is far more direct and explicit than his English colleague. In both novels, this open criticism against Belgian colonialism stands as a strategy to mitigate the sins of the British model of colonisation. This acceptability or "kindness" of British colonialism is represented in both stories by the figures of two colonial officers, Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and Lord Greystoke in *Tarzan of the*

[95] *Heart of Darkness*, page 46

Apes, whose behaviour does not suggest the brutality attributed, on the contrary, to the Belgian colonists of King Leopold II.

At a more general level, the two novels share more than these surface parallelisms. In fact, several features that are typical of colonial literature are expressed in a similar way. For example the environment, the jungle in particular, is represented as a living force, hostile to civilization. Similarly in the representation of the natives what is highlighted is their inferiority and primitiveness and, as a consequence, racism lies between the lines.[96] The problem of racism in connection to the subject of cannibalism in *Tarzan of the Apes* is a central theme that will be discussed in detail in this chapter, but is anticipated here because the way it is expressed in both stories is a good example of the recurrence of this *cliché* in colonial literature.

[96] Carey-Webb, Allen 2005, *Heart of Darkness, Tarzan, and the "Third World": Canons and Encounters in World Literature*, English 109, 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company, West Chester University

4.2 Natives and apes: two tribes of cannibal beasts

Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* provides a couple of detailed descriptions of an act of cannibalism. Quite interestingly, the two episodes are similar and both of them may seem to be the representation of the cannibalistic rite of one single tribe. In the first description the narrator reports that:

> The females and young squatted in a thin line at the outer periphery of the circle, while just in front of them ranged the adult males.(…)
> Slowly and softly they began tapping upon the resounding surface of the drum (…).
> (…)
> When all the adult males had joined in the thin line of circling dancers the attack commenced.
> (…)
> Then, as one, the males rushed headlong upon the things which their terrific blows had reduced to a mass of hairy pulp. (p.59)

Similarly, later in the novel, the scene occurs again, raising in the reader the feeling of a *déjà vu*:

> In a larger circle squatted the women, yelling and beating upon drums.
> (…)
> The circle of warriors about the cringing captive drew closer and closer to their prey as they danced in wild and savage abandon to the maddening music of the drums. Presently a spear reached out and pricked the victim. It was the signal for fifty others.
> Eyes, ears, arms and legs were pierced; every inch of the poor writhing body that did not cover a vital organ became the target of the cruel lancers.
> (…)
> The warriors licked their hideous lips in anticipation of the feast to come, and vied with one another in the savagery and loathsomeness of the cruel indignities with which they tortured the still conscious prisoner. (p.90)

Despite the incredible similarity between the two actions reported here, they are not the work of the same tribe of cannibals. The first is the rite of the "Dum-Dum" of Tarzan fellow apes, a sort of death dance introducing a special ceremony. In this case they are preparing for a feast over the body of a dead rival ape, in other words an act of animal revenge cannibalism. The second description, on the other hand, is that of a cannibal rites of the Mbongas, a native tribe of the jungle. The development of the two rites is almost identical: the circular disposition of the participants, the women at the drums originating an ecstatic atmosphere of rage, the fury against the victim and finally the feast upon the body. Getting back for another moment to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, these episodes of cannibalism can be read as the representation of those "unspeakable rites" to which Mr. Kurtz is said to have participated in after he succumbed to the magnetic call of the jungle. Actually also Tarzan, that differently from Mr. Kurtz is a positive hero, participated to the "unspeakable rite" of the "Dum-Dum" with his ape tribe members but, as will be discussed later in these pages, the situation of Burroughs's hero is quite different from the mysterious character of Joseph Conrad's masterpiece.[97]

The fact that the cannibal rite of the apes is represented as an organised *mise en scène* so similar to that of the native cannibals of the story is of course a matter of Burroughs fantasy. However, by this brilliant strategy, the author provides an image of deep refusal of cannibalism in human society. The deepest outcome of this similitude of uses between man and beast, in fact, is not that of elevating the apes at the higher level of humanity but, on the contrary, to downgrade those humans practicing cannibalism to the level of wild beasts. Such a cultural downgrade of the cannibals finds its expression also in two other novels considered here: in *Robinson Crusoe*, with Robinson's low consideration of Friday to whom he teaches also how to make a canoe, an object and word proper of Friday's Caribbean world; and again in *Heart of Darkness*, when at the moment of Marlow's departure for Africa his aunt talks about *weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways*.[98] In *Tarzan of*

[97] Carey-Webb, Allen 2005, *Heart of Darkness, Tarzan, and the "Third World": Canons and Encounters in World Literature*, English 109, 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company, West Chester University
[98] *Heart of Darkness*, page 13

the Apes, however, Burroughs goes even further. Thanks to the presence of his hero Tarzan who, hiding in the jungle, witnesses the "ceremony" of the natives, the reader can judge by himself which of the two tribes of cannibals is the most brutal. And the judgement, in this case, cannot but coincide with Tarzan's thoughts. While watching the scene for the first time, in fact, the hero recognises what is happening thanks to the memory of his participation in the apes' "Dum-Dum" feast. However, despite his "bestial education", the ape-man notices that the men, those subjects belonging to the same species he belongs to, are even more "bestial" than the apes. What shocks Tarzan is the fact that the prisoner is tortured before being killed and eaten while the apes unleash their rage on the body of a dead enemy before feasting on it. This discovery raises in Tarzan a feeling of deep disappointment on men's behaviour:

> As he *[the prisoner]* was dragged, still resisting, into the village street, the women and children set upon him with sticks and stones, and Tarzan of the Apes, young an savage beast of the jungle, wondered at the cruel brutality of his own kind.
>
> Sheeta, the leopard, alone of all the jungle folk, tortured his prey. The ethics of all the others meted a quick and merciful death to their victims. (p.89)

The comparison Tarzan makes of the natives with the leopard, one of his jungle enemies, and the reference to a sort of "jungle ethics" which would be superior to that of the men, or at least to that of the natives Tarzan encounters in his jungle, represents the accomplishment of the dehumanisation of the cannibal.

As reported above, the rite of the apes being similar to that of the men is a strategy the author implies for his purpose of showing the inhumanity of cannibalism and, unless some researchers would find out that apes celebrate in this way this or other kinds of extraordinary events (in the book the narrator says that rarely the apes of Tarzan's tribe do eat meat), this apes' feast has to be considered as one of the many "fantastic" features of the story. However, concentrating on the representation of the natives scene, its description is almost identical to what Hans Städen, the 16th century German sailor shipwrecked on the coast of Brazil, included in his memories. It is quite interesting that the rite of the Brazilian Tupinamba described by Städen (here

reported at page 8, chapter 1) and that of the tribe of King Mbonga in Tarzan of the Apes have such a deep correspondence. Without considering the geographical distance between the two tribes, the historical existence of the Tupinamba of Brazil versus the fictional natives of the novel, it would be possible to imagine a certain influence of the memories of Städen at the moment of Burroughs's creation of this scene. But, since there are no evidences that Edgar Rice Burroughs knew that particular account, it is more likely that, in his documentation for the realisation of the book, the author had met similar accounts of ritual cannibalism. As analysed in the first chapter of this work, because of their high number and because of the frequency of the same images, these accounts may be considered like an expression of the Western imaginary on the cannibalistic rite more than authentic accounts of eyewitnesses survived to the cannibals. [99]

With reference to the classification of cultural cannibalism made in the first pages of this study, the Dum-Dum rite and the cannibal feast of the natives are both represented as an act of cannibalism motivated by a feeling of revenge against an enemy belonging to a different tribe or group. In this case, it is possible to talk about the representation of exocannibalism, that is actually what happens in the story. As the scene of the natives feast goes on, the narrator describes the preparation of the corpse for the "banquet":

> he *[Tarzan]* saw that all the women of the village were hastening to and from the various huts with pots and kettles. These they were filling with water and placing over a number of fires near the stake where the dying victim now hung, an inert and bloody mass of suffering.
> (…)
> The women were now preparing the prisoner for their cooking pots, while the men stood about resting after the fatigue of their mad revel. Comparative quiet reigned in the village. (p.92)

[99] Städen, Hans 1557, *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*

According to Jeff Berglund's essay on cannibalism in *Tarzan of the Apes*,[100] this passage would suggest an act of sustenance cannibalism more than an act of revenge cannibalism against an enemy as the first part of the rite represents. In his essay, the scholar questions the appropriateness of this mixture of rituals Burroughs presents to the reader, claiming that such a combination is hardly found in anthropological accounts of cannibalism. Even though pots and kettles are actually mentioned in the same account by Hans Städen considered above, it is also true that modern anthropologists tend to completely reject the possibility that cannibalism has ever been a way of sustenance for human beings, supporting in this way the thesis of the inadequacy of the scene.

The cannibal rite of the Mbongans has another occurrence in the novel. This time the victim is a white man, Lieutenant D'Arnot who is about to perish because of the tortures that preceded the butchering of the victim in the custom of the natives. Tarzan's intervention saves D'Arnot from the cannibal pot and interrupts the ritual. The interesting thing of this passage is that, as reported in the first section talking about the similitudes between *Tarzan of the Apes* and *Heart of Darkness*, Burroughs tries somehow to justify the brutality of the cannibalism of the natives, attributing to it the meaning of a reaction against the symbolic cannibalism of Belgian colonial exploitation. However, Berglund reports in his essay, this explanation could only be partial and loses its strength when the victim is, as in the first episode, a black native man of another tribe.

[100] Berglund, Jeff 2009, *Write, Right, White, Rite: Literacy, Imperialism, Race, and Cannibalism in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes*, 2009 ProQuest LLC, Northeastern University

4.3 The light of civilisation

The story of the life of Tarzan, the protagonist of Burroughs's masterpiece, is the incredible adventure of a man who, orphan of both his English aristocratic parents, survives in the jungle and grows up as an ape educated according to the customs of the jungle and following the rules of nature. On many occasions throughout his story he finds himself in dangerous situations he always overtakes thanks to the extraordinary strength he acquired but also thanks to the superior intelligence he discovers to have, and learns to use, little by little as he grows up. However, his mind is not just superior with regard to the apes. In fact, as analysed in this section, Tarzan shows his superiority also, and in particular, against the other men of the jungle, the natives, and this happens when the protagonist has to face some situations that are at the boundaries between humanity and bestiality, when he has to decide between the light of civilisation and the evil of cannibalism.

In Berglund's illuminating essay *Write, Right, White, Rite: Literacy, Imperialism, Race, and Cannibalism in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes,*[101] already mentioned in the previous section of the chapter, the author talks about a cultural heritage that the protagonist naturally inherited from his aristocratic parents. This heritage represents civilisation, which is for Tarzan a weapon against the bestiality of apes' and natives' societies he is in contact with. It is thanks to this that he can learn to read and write. By this knowledge of the written language of his fathers, the language of culture and of colonialism, Tarzan finally understands that he is a man and not an ape. However, the main use of these tools of reading and writing Tarzan makes is against cannibalism. According to Berglund it is this particular ability that preserves him from being a cannibal as the native Mbongans.

[101] Berglund, Jeff 2009, *Write, Right, White, Rite: Literacy, Imperialism, Race, and Cannibalism in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes*, 2009 ProQuest LLC, Northeastern University

Tarzan of the apes learns what cannibalism is from the reading of his books. In his life experience among the apes, in fact, he participates in a feast, the "Dum-Dum", during which he eats the flesh of an ape, even though the victim belonged to another tribe. On this occasion the narrating voice motivates Tarzan's action not only as something he learned from the behaviour of his tribe members but also as an innate need:

> Tarzan, more than the apes, craved and needed flesh. Descended from a race of meat eaters, never in his life, he thought, he had once satisfied his appetite for animal food; (p.61)

Since Tarzan is a man and what he eats is the flesh of an ape, this cannot be considered as proper cannibalism. However, because he lives as an ape among other apes, this event should teach him that the "jungle ethic", the same ethics that is absent among the natives, would allow cannibalism when practiced against someone of the same species belonging to a different group. On the other hand, cannibalism becomes a taboo, not acceptable and disgusting, when against an ape of his tribe. When Tarzan kills Tublat, his hated ape-father, right after the "Dum-Dum" cannibalistic feast, he rejects with disgust the idea of eating the flesh of the dead ape because it was that of a member of his tribe. In other words, jungle ethics allows something which could be defined as animal exocannibalism.

This logic, however, collapses completely when Tarzan meets the first man of his life, Kulonga. Son of Mbomga, the king of the natives' tribe, Kulonga killed Kala, Tarzan's ape-mother with the intention to eat some of her flesh. Failing to accomplish his purpose because of the arrival of the other apes, Kulonga runs away towards his village, but before he can reach it, Tarzan, furious for the loss of the only ape who ever showed him love and saved his life when he was an infant, catches and kills the murderer of his mother. The drama of the scene that follows is the expression of Tarzan's inner trouble between rage, revenge and his inherited civilisation powered by his reading of the books that makes him recognize Kulonga as a man of his own species. The narrator gives voice to this conflict reporting that:

> He examined and admired the tattooing on the forehead and breast. He marvelled at the sharp filed teeth. He investigated and appropriated the feathered headdress, and then prepared to get down to business, for Tarzan of the Apes was hungry, and here was meat; meat of the kill, which jungle ethics permitted him to eat.
>
> How may we judge him, by what standards, this ape-man with the heart and head and body of an English gentlemen, and the training of wild beast?
>
> Tublat, whom he had hated and who had hated him, he had killed in a fair fight, and yet never had the thought of eating Tublat's flesh entered his head. It would have been as revolting to him as is cannibalism to us.
>
> But who was Kulonga that he might not be eaten as fairly as Horta, the boar, or Bara, the deer? Was he not simply another of the countless wild things of the jungle who preyed upon one another to satisfy the cravings of hunger?
>
> Suddenly, a strange doubt stayed his hand. Had not his books taught him that he was a man? And was not The Archer a man, also?
>
> Did men eat men? Alas, he did not know. Why, then, this hesitancy! Once more he essayed the effort, but a qualm of nausea overwhelmed him. He did not understand.
>
> All he knew was that he could not eat the flesh of this black man, and thus hereditary instinct, ages old, usurped the functions of his untaught mind and saved him from transgressing a worldwide law of whose very existence he was ignorant.
>
> Quickly he lowered Kulonga's body to the ground, removed the noose, and took trees again. (p.79)

In the long passage reported here, the same narrating voice highlights that the natural law ruling Tarzan's existence would allow him to satisfy his physical and figurative hunger with the body of Kulonga. It is only the seeds of civilisation he inherited from his parents and nourished with the reading of his books that stop him before the body of another man, though black and quite different from his own. The "archer" of his books, the killer of his mother, is not quite as any other of the beasts inhabiting the jungle. The inexplicable force of Tarzan's hereditary instinct is stronger than twenty years of jungle education and life experience among the apes, which are, after all, a savage tribe of individuals. His refusal of cannibalism is the victory of civilisation

over bestiality and barbarity, and Tarzan represents the synthesis of all of this.[102] However, considering the fact that Tarzan is a white man and that the behaviour of the native men in the novel is sometime even worse than that of the jungle beasts, this light of civilisation seems to be an exclusive feature of an elected group of men, the whites, which would be naturally superior to the others.

This racist approach to the other emerges also from the analysis of the different approach Tarzan has toward the blacks and the whites. What immediately comes to the attention of the reader is that Tarzan does not rescue the black prisoner of the native cannibals and watches his execution and the ceremony that reminds him of the "Dum-Dum" of his apes tribe. On the contrary, whenever the white men of the crew of Professor Porter are somehow in danger, he is always there to rescue them from the cannibals as in the case of Lieutenant D'Arnot, or from the fierce beasts of the jungle like Numa the lioness or Terkoz, an exiled male ape of his tribe who kidnapped Jane Porter, the woman Tarzan loves.

From another point of observation, a less direct but more meaningful aspect of racism in *Tarzan of the Apes* is the absence of communication between the protagonist and the natives. Although he understands that those black individuals living in a village in the jungle are men as he is, Tarzan never tries to establish any kind of relationship with them nor does he try to communicate in any way. It is true that, since he only knew how to read and write in English communication may have failed, but this silence between Tarzan and the cannibal is significant when compared to the approach he has with the whites. As Berglund reports in his essay, one of the first things the protagonist does is to write a message to the group of white men approaching his father's cabin in the shore. It is possible that the restraint Tarzan shows toward the natives is justified by their brutal behaviour he witnessed in the occasion of the cannibal feast. However, the first impression he has of the whites is not much better. After he sees one of the mutineers who reached the shore killing

[102] Berglund, Jeff 2009, *Write, Right, White, Rite: Literacy, Imperialism, Race, and Cannibalism in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes*, 2009 ProQuest LLC, Northeastern University

one his fellows with a gunshot at the back for no apparent reasons, Tarzan considers that:

> The conduct of the white strangers it was that caused him the greatest perturbation. He puckered his brows into a frown of deep thought. It was well, thought he, that he had not given way to his first impulse to rush forward and greet these white men as brothers.
>
> They were evidently no different from the black men – no more civilised than the apes – no less cruel than Sabor. (p.112)

This impulse to approach the white men, however, is absent when the men are the natives. Evidently Tarzan understands that the different colour of his skin stands as an indication of social difference between himself and the natives and that, on the other hand, the same white colour of the skin he shares with Professor Porter's crew must suggest him that he belongs to that particular group.

Despite the first traumatic experience with the mutineers, Tarzan succeeds in communicating with Jane and the rest of the group thanks to written English. However, his lack of oral comprehension or production makes direct communication impossible and this raises a serious misunderstanding: the white group thinks that the Tarzan who writes, the owner of the cabin, and the strong ape-man who always saves them are two different subjects. In this chaos generated by non-communication, Tarzan is finally considered to be a native cannibal. Again, this is another example of how the absence of civilisation (in this case the supposed absence dictated by Tarzan's incapability to orally communicate) is the perfect environment for the accusation of cannibalism.[103] The same accusation against Tarzan is repeated in the text and assumes the typical connotation of colonial othering and fear of the other when Clayton, jealous of Jane's attention and care for the ape-man, explains to his beloved that:

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[103] Berglund, Jeff 2009, *Write, Right, White, Rite: Literacy, Imperialism, Race, and Cannibalism in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes*, 2009 ProQuest LLC, Northeastern University

> ‘There are no other human beings than savages within hundreds of miles, is Porter. He must belong to the tribes which attacked us, or to some other equally savage – he may even be a cannibal.’ (p.205)

The misunderstanding about the splitting of Tarzan’s personality between the civil though mysterious owner of the cabin and the native cannibal will not be solved until the end of the novel. However, this strategy allows Burroughs to put in the text another example of how knowledge and civilization are the only weapon against cannibalism.

The completeness of the representation of the figure of the cannibal in *Tarzan of the Apes*, from its institutionalized version practiced among the natives to the accusation of cannibalism employed as a strategy of colonial othering, supports by right the role of this novel as one of the pillars of the study of this figure in colonial English literature. Furthermore, the scene of cannibal remains on board the ship of the mutineers also includes in the text the representation of survival cannibalism or of “the custom of the sea”, already analysed in the previous chapter when talking about Joseph Conrad’s *Falk. A reminiscence,* a popular subject at the time of the publication of the two stories. Because of its many similitudes with *Heart of Darkness,* most of all in connection with racism and colonial othering, and because of this common aspect shared with *Falk*, *Tarzan of the Apes* stands a synthesis of the two books by Conrad for the study of the subject in these pages, and their compared analysis can help the reader to achieve a global comprehension of the topic.

Chapter 5

The Cannibal Eucharist

Chapter 5

5.1 Communion cannibalism in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*

From the analysis of its representation in the classic masterpieces of colonial English literature considered in the previous chapters, the figure of the cannibal acquires quite a multileveled dimension. As well as the subject (the cannibal), also the action of cannibalism itself is presented in several different ways, from the description of the remains of a cannibalistic barbeque on the shore in *Robinson Crusoe* to the wild dance of death in *Tarzan of the Apes*, from its non-material representation in *Heart of Darkness* to its most dramatic and attested form of survival cannibalism as in *Falk*. Despite all the possible differences one can notice in the description of the rite in the various texts and despite the differences in time, place and subjects participating in the feast in the episodes considered, there is a common feature, an evident *fil rouge* that keeps them all together: the ritualistic dimension of cannibalism.

In the novels considered in these pages cannibalism is never presented as an individual activity of feeding or as a mere group feast. Though hunger is always there in both its symbolic and literal meaning, the act of cannibalism, which is not simple anthropophagy, is more similar to the ritual of Christian communion than to a common banquet. Also in *Falk*, where the killing of the carpenter is presented like a hunting scene, the consumption of the corpse assumes the connotation of a ritual of communion in which the body of the sacrificed victim is shared by the survived mariners. In all the analysed works cannibalism is presented as a moment of sharing, reunion and communion. It is not an exaggeration to consider it as the representation of a Mass, a kind of devilish Mass where there is a celebrant and a group of people contemplating the ritual and then participating in the cannibal Eucharist receiving the flesh of the sacrificial victim.

In *Tarzan of the Apes*, for example, this aspect is present in both the scenes of animal and human cannibalism where Kerchak, king of the apes, and Mbonga, king of the native tribe, have the role of the priest officiating the ceremony and initiating the consumption of the victim. The representation of cannibalism as a ritual group celebration is also present in other colonial novels not studied in these pages like, for example, Henry Rider Haggard's 1887 *She: A History of Adventure*.[104] Here the unfortunate protagonists of the story, a group of white explorers, are invited to participate in a banquet by a group of natives. During this party the members of the tribe started performing a sort of questions and answers formula wondering about the food they will eat. After this verbal exchange that recalls once again that of the priest with the followers of a Mass, a woman approached one of the white guests to kill him and to make him the victim for the feast.

However, a novel in which the dimension of cannibalism as an act of communion is more explicit and has a direct parallelism with the Christian Mass and Eucharist is *A Fringe of Leaves*[105] by Patrick White (1912-1990). In his 1976 novel, the Australian author awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 tells the story of the adventures, or better the misadventures, of a young English woman, Ellen Gluyas, named Roxburgh after the marriage with her invalid husband Austin, during their journey to Australia. In the returns trip to England, their ship, the *Bristol Maid* runs aground off Frazer Island, Queensland, and in the following attempt of the crew to reach the shore Ellen is the only one who survives. After this terrible experience the woman is rescued by a tribe of Australian aborigines which employ her as a nanny for their children. In this period of native and primitive life, Ellen goes through a process of adaptation to her new life condition marked by hunger and disease that takes her beyond the limit of humanity when she eats the flesh of a dead aboriginal woman. The scene begins when one morning during a period of famine Ellen finds the members of her tribe in a wood, interrupting them at the end of quite a strange and secret rite:

[104] Haggard, Henry Rider 1887, *She: A History of Adventure*, 2010, Indoeuropeanpublishing.Com
[105] White, Patrick 1976, *A Fringe of Leaves*, Vintage 1997

> All appeared and sounded languid as a result of their night's activities; their faces when turned towards the intruder wore expressions which were resentful and at the same time curiously mystical. She realised she had blundered upon the performance of rites she was not intended to witness. There was no immediate indication of what these were; most likely the ceremony was over, for she sensed something akin to the atmosphere surrounding communicants coming out of church looking bland and forgiven after the early service. (ch.7.pos.5167.kindle)

Disgusted, Ellen understands from the remains of the body of the aboriginal woman killed the previous night by another woman of the tribe that what she interrupted was a cannibal feast. Significantly, the image that comes to her mind when she looks at the behaviour of her tribe members is that of people after a Christian service. Escaping from the "church" of the lustful celebration, Ellen finds a thigh-bone of the poor victim, and the reaction she has is quite unexpected even for herself:

> Renewed disgust prepared her to kick the bone out of sight. Then, instead, she found herself stooping to pick it up. There were one or two shreds of half-cooked flesh and gobbets of burnt fat still adhering to this monstrous object. (…) She had raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which her throat threatened to return. But did not. (…) The exquisite innocence of this forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note endlessly repeated, tempted her to believe that she had partaken of a sacrament. But there reminded what amounted to an abomination of human behaviour, a headache, and the first signs of indigestions. In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again. (ch.7.pos.5175.kindle)

Here again, to describe her act of cannibalism, Ellen needs to refer to the Christian communion which in this case is both a sacrament like Eucharist and a terrible sin that goes against her Christian morality that forces her to forget about the episode.[106] Cannibalism represents for Ellen the culmination of her adaptation to the primitive life she experiences during her period of captivity among the aborigines, a kind of

[106] Bliss, Carolyn 1986, *Patrick White's Fiction. The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*, Macmillan

initiation rite that, despite her repulsion, marks a new starting point for her life and provides her a deeper understanding of what society and civilisation are in opposition to the primitiveness she went through in this particular moment of her story of misadventures.[107]

Though the scenes analysed above are the essential representation of cannibalism as an act of communion, in *A Fringe of Leaves* a previous passage introducing Ellen's cannibal act makes even more explicit the vicinity of cannibalism to the act of Christian Eucharist and the deep parallelism existing between the two rituals, the sacred and the abominable. Right before the turbulent arrival on the shore where Ellen is the only survival, the crew is on board the ship in a desperate situation of extreme hunger. After the death of a steward named Spurgeon, the one with which Ellen's husband Austin Roxburgh established some kind of human contact, his body is thrown off the ship. The following night, Austin dreams something that, as stated above, prepares the reader to what comes after:[108]

> As one who had hungered all his life after friendship which eluded him, Austin Roxburgh did luxuriate on losing a solitary allegiance. It stimulated his actual hunger until now dormant, and he fell to thinking how the steward, had he not been such an unappetising morsel, might have contributed appreciably to an exhausted larder. At once Mr Roxburgh's self-disgust knew no bounds. He was glad that night had fallen and that everyone around him was sleeping. Yet his thoughts were only cut to a traditional pattern, as Captain Purdew must have recognized, who now came stepping between the heads of the sleepers, to bend and whisper, *This is the body of Spurgeon which I have reserved for thee, take eat, and give thanks for a boil which was spiritual matter…* Austin Roxburgh was not only ravenous for the living flesh, but found himself anxiously licking the corners of his mouth to prevent any overflow of precious blood. (ch.6.pos.4435.kindle)

Austin repeats the exact words of the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist. The body of the steward Spurgeon becomes the divine lamb, the body of Christ who

[107] Shepherd R., Singh K. 1978, *Patrick White. A Critical Symposium*, Adelaide, Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English

[108] Bliss, Carolyn 1986, *Patrick White's Fiction. The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*, Macmillan

sacrificed himself for the saviour of the souls of mankind. In this case, however, the blaspheme communion with the sacrificial body of Spurgeon would have condemned the men to damnation.

As studied in these pages, Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* representation of cannibalism as a spiritual act of communion linked to the Christian Eucharist is made explicit as never before at least in any of the other colonial works considered. However, leaving for a moment the path of colonial and post-colonial English literature reporting the analysis of the aspect of cannibalism considered in this chapter to another context, it comes out that the comparison to the Eucharist finds its origin at the very beginning of the interest towards cannibalism between the 15th and the 16th century after Christopher Columbus first mention of the word itself in his diaries.[109] In the second half of the 16th century, between 1562 and 1598, France was devastated by the Wars of Religion in which Catholics and Protestants (the Huguenots) fought one another in a series of terrible civil wars. The conflict between the two groups was not only military but also theological as the historical name "Religion Wars" suggests. In particular, what interests our subject is the debate about the Eucharist. On one side, Catholics of the time believed in the miracle of transubstantiation thanks to which the holy bread of the Eucharist would physically become the flesh of Jesus Christ when in their mouth, even if the taste and the shape of the host remained the same; on the other side, the Huguenots firmly criticised this Catholic dogma moving against it a series of satirical attacks where they accused their opponents to believe in absurd magical ritual and, most importantly, they accused the Catholics of theophagism, the eating of the divinity. This and other religious debates of France Religious War are studied in detail in Frank Lestringant's *Une Sainte Horreur*,[110] where the French scholar draws a complete portrait of the period, reporting also some episodes of survival cannibalism like the infamous case of the siege of the protestant city of Sancerre in 1573.

[109] *The Journal of Cristopher Columbus (during his first voyage 1492 – 1493)*
[110] Lestringant, Frank 1996, *Une Sainte Horreur ou le voyage en Eucharistie XVIe – XVIIIe siècle*, Histoires - collection dirigée par Pierre Chanu, Paris, PUF

Not surprisingly cannibalism as an act of communion finds its inevitable correspondences in the Eucharist not only in colonial English literature but, as reported here with the French case, this parallelism is proper of all the Western imaginary. The spiritual though devilish aspect of the practice as represented in literature supports the image of cannibalism as a cultural and institutional act among primitive tribes all over the world, as seen in the first chapter of this work with the analysis of some of the theories of defence of cannibalism reported. However, as the latest studies seem to confirm, cannibalism was not as spread and organised as it seemed, and its literary representation, though poetic and in a certain sense romantic, is weakened under the point of view of its supposed realism or scientific reliability once granted by the first studies and reports on the subject.

Conclusions

Conclusions

From the newly discovered South America to sub-Saharan Africa, from New Guinea, the last boundary of cannibalism, to the open sea, the theatre of dramatic shipwrecks, where no social rules have any value; from the Caribbean of *Robinson Crusoe* to the wild Africa of Conrad and Burroughs, and finally to Patrick White's aboriginal Australia, these pages have taken the reader to a journey between historical chronicles and fictional novels following the footprints of cannibalism and of its actors. At the end of this reading that considers the topic in a wide context of time and space, the figure of the cannibal emerges as a kaleidoscopic entity that changes its shape depending on the point of observation.

It is undeniable that the literary works analysed in this paper mainly provide what should be considered as the classic point of view, the point of view of the Western world, and it is clear how the representation of the cannibal as we find it in these colonial and post-colonial English novels has in all the cases the shape of the accusation dictated by the fear of the other. The cannibal, in fact, is essentially a depiction of the other, the materialisation of the fear of man to be eaten and at the same time the fear of a model of civilisation to be symbolically devoured by another one. The only possible defence from it is the use, or better the abuse of power against the other, an abuse justified by cannibalism itself considered as a synonym of primitiveness, brutality and lack of civilisation.

The mention of the contemporary development of ideas questioning cannibalism presented in the first chapter of this work is important to understand that another point of observation is possible. From this new perspective, the analysis of the representation of cannibalism presented in literature delivers the other face of the coin of colonisation. What is on one side a defence from cannibalism, becomes on the other side that same devouring entity. Independently from the historical

reliability of the phenomenon, what comes out of its representation in literature is a mixture of both these points of view, a circular force that does not allow a clear and unique distinction between the victim and the victimiser. If the horrible cannibal practices of the native populations are hard to understand and accept today as in the past centuries, at the same time cannibalism is not enough to justify the horror of colonisation such as human exploiting, torture, slavery and genocides. All of these practices can undeniably be described as a form of cannibalism themselves, not a material but of course a symbolic form of it. One of the meanings attributed to cannibalism today is in fact that of an aptitude to possess, control, and take everything leaving nothing to others. This is one of the best possible ways to describe the colonial *modus operandi*, and this is not only true for the Belgian model of colonialism, as reported and denounced in *Heart of Darkness* or *Tarzan of the Apes*, but also for any other colonial power including the British.

Considering the relevance of the discourse on cannibalism in the colonial period and the importance that cannibalism itself has in the process of colonial othering it is interesting to see how, even in the case of survival cannibalism, when the cannibal is a white man, the aspect of social othering produced by the act of anthropophagy keeps its relevance. In *Falk*, in fact, the protagonist goes through a process of self-othering, a kind of self-ostracism from the civilised society as a consequence of the unacceptable sin committed. This way of representing what was an unfortunately diffused practice as the occurrence of those extreme cases is an example of the "civilised" world's repulsion for cannibalism and its considering it as a non-human activity.

Leaving aside the attested survival cannibalism and not thinking of the historical reliability or to the effective range of its cultural and institutionalised form among native populations subjected to colonialism, the one thing that clearly emerges from this research is that, in the case of the representation of the cannibal and cannibalism, colonial English literature has efficiently served its purpose as a powerful instrument for propaganda. Literature, in fact, has publicised a negative stereotype of the subject and has exaggerated the real diffusion of a practice that the most recent studies tend

to discredit. Presenting cannibalism as the justification for the crimes of colonialism it became a kind of shield to cover up its colonial symbolic counterpart. If this is only partly true for Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*, where the focus of the representation is the parallelism between communion and cannibalism, this aspect is easily recognisable in the rest of the novels studied in these pages. Considering the force that this negative stereotype still has in contemporary Western imagination it is finally possible to say that the figure of the cannibal and cannibalism as presented in literature are an indelible bequest of colonialism, proved by the fact that the last century of revolutionary studies questioning the phenomenon, of which this work is but a short and incomplete summary, has not even scraped the myth of the bloodthirsty cannibal.

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Appendix

Uomini che Mangiano Uomini.

Rappresentazioni della Figura del Cannibale e del Cannibalismo nella Letteratura Coloniale e Postcoloniale Inglese

Presentazione

Intitolato *Humans Eating Humans. Representations of the Figure of the Cannibal and Cannibalism in Colonial and Postcolonial English Literature* (in Italiano, *Uomini che Mangiano Uomini. Rappresentazioni della Figura del Cannibale e del Cannibalismo nella Letteratura Coloniale e Postcoloniale Inglese*), il lavoro, del quale viene qui presentata una sintesi, verte principalmente, come deducibile dalla descrizione nel titolo, sulla figura del cannibale e del cannibalismo nel contesto coloniale inglese. Fondamentale per il corretto approccio all'elaborato è pero la parola "rappresentazioni" che rivela come quanto riportato nelle pagine della tesi non miri ad essere uno studio antropologico di un particolare tipo di comportamento e di chi ne è l'artefice. Al contrario, il fine principale dello studio qui riassunto è quello di analizzare come tale pratica, il cannibalismo, ed i suoi attori, appunto i cannibali, siano stati rappresentati nella letteratura coloniale e postcoloniale inglese, di esaminare come e quanto queste rappresentazioni letterarie siano state influenzate dallo studio scientifico e antropologico del fenomeno, sia esso come si vedrà fedele o meno alla realtà dei fatti, e di osservare in quale modo e misura esse abbiano influenzato l'immaginario comune producendo gli stereotipi del cannibale e del cannibalismo che ancora oggi emergono al momento dell'incontro con queste figure.

A tal fine, lo scritto prende in considerazione alcune delle principali opere letterarie del periodo interessato in cui il soggetto in questione, il cannibalismo, abbia una particolare rilevanza, dividendo lo studio in capitoli relativi ognuno dei romanzi selezionati, primo fra questi è il capolavoro di Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). A seguire, i successivi capitoli saranno dedicati, nell'ordine, alla figura del cannibale in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) e *Falk. A Reminiscence* (1903) di Joseph Conrad, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) dell'americano Edgar Rice Burroughs ed infine *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) di Patrick White, scrittore australiano, premio Nobel per la letteratura 1973.

Capitolo 1: Punti di Vista Antropologici sul Cannibalismo / Anthropological Points of View on Cannibalism

Contravvenendo immediatamente ai propositi descritti sopra per i quali il principale interesse del presente elaborato non è lo studio antropologico del fenomeno, il primo capitolo traccia una vasta anche se incompleta panoramica degli studi di tale disciplina sul cannibalismo e i cannibali, dagli albori della "scoperta" del fenomeno fino ai più recenti sviluppi del secolo scorso. Si parla simbolicamente di scoperta poiché la stessa parola "cannibale" viene usata per la prima volta niente meno che da Cristoforo Colombo nel suo giornale di viaggio redatto durante la sua prima spedizione nel Nuovo Mondo per indicare una popolazione di nativi che, secondo altri indigeni incontrati da Colombo, sarebbero stati dediti all'antropofagia. Nonostante all'epoca tale pratica fosse già ben nota nel Vecchio Mondo e facesse già parte dell'immaginario letterario occidentale in quanto figurava in numerose opere del passato, come le *Storie* di Erodoto o la *Divina Commedia*, è solo con l'avvento dei cannibali nel periodo coloniale che si sviluppa una vera e propria mitologia del fenomeno dominata da un interesse morboso e dalla paura.

Dopo una breve introduzione sulla nascita del mito, il capitolo si divide essenzialmente secondo le due principali correnti di pensiero antropologiche sul cannibalismo, una a supportarne, l'altra a screditarne la reale portata storica. La prima di queste, che potrebbe essere definita come una difesa del cannibalismo come pratica istituzionalizzata, fonda le sue radici nelle numerose testimonianze di viaggiatori ed esploratori della prima ora che, sopravvissuti a naufragi e fatti prigionieri dalle tribù native, hanno assistito ad episodi di cannibalismo salvo poi scampare dall'orrenda fine toccata ai loro compagni o ad altri uomini e raccontare ai posteri quanto vissuto. Naturalmente, a supportare la tesi della reale esistenza del cannibalismo non sono solo le testimonianze risalenti al XV e XVI secolo, ma, al contrario, esistono studi antropologici redatti nel XX secolo che ne danno un sostegno scientifico. Tra i principali lavori considerati nell'elaborato vi è *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* dell'antropologa americana Margaret Mead che in questo suo studio del 1935 riporta la sua biennale esperienza di vita a

contatto con tre tribù primitive della Nuova Guinea, una delle quali, i Mundugmor, praticava l'antropofagia contro i prigionieri di guerra appartenenti ad una delle tribù rivali. Altro studio considerato è *Cannibals and Kings. The Origins of Cultures*, del 1977, nel quale l'autore, Marvin Harris, presenta alcune delle società cannibali esistite, dai brasiliani Tupinamba, citati anche da Montaigne nei suoi *Essais* (1580), agli Wyandot del Canada. Ultimo e più significativo degli studi antropologici considerati è il lavoro di Michael Harner che nel 1977, con la pubblicazione di *The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice* e di *The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice*, conferisce al cannibalismo un ruolo fondamentale all'interno della civiltà Azteca. Secondo la sua tesi i sacrifici umani avrebbero avuto come fine principale, accanto a quello di offerta agli dei, quello di fungere da fonte di proteine per la popolazione di alto rango essendo tale tipo di nutrimento difficile da reperire nell'ecosistema da essi abitato.

Diametralmente opposta a quanto sopra riportato è la seconda corrente di pensiero considerata che mira a screditare e rimettere in questione la concezione del cannibalismo come pratica culturale diffusa nelle società primitive. Tale tesi si basa quasi esclusivamente sul lavoro di William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, pubblicato nel 1979. Accolta come un terremoto abbattutosi sullo studio antropologico del cannibalismo, l'opera parte dall'idea che non vi siano testimonianze veritiere e affidabili della pratica in questione e che tutti i racconti pervenuti non siano appunto altro che racconti privi di fondamento. Arens motiva la sua affermazione mostrando come in molte di queste testimonianze siano riconoscibili elementi simili, quasi facenti parte di un corpus narrativo. L'autore, inoltre mette in evidenza come, anche nei più recenti studi, compreso quello sopracitato dell'americana Mead, manchi completamente la testimonianza diretta del fenomeno, e come in ogni occasione la tribù cannibale assuma tale connotazione perché denunciata da un gruppo nemico; è il caso dei Mundugmor della Nuova Guinea, dei Tupinamba brasiliani e perfino dei primi cannibali, i Caribs, presentati a Colombo come una tribù di antropofagi dagli Arawak, una tribù rivale. Per quanto riguarda il caso Azteco, che vede il cannibalismo come necessaria fonte di proteine in una situazione di insufficienza ambientale, Arens cita una serie di studi che screditano completamente le tesi di Harner, in particolare *Aztec Cannibalism: An*

Ecological Necessity? (1978), di Bernard De Montellano, in cui si spiega come l'area dell'impero Azteco fornisse alle popolazioni indigene numerose fonti di proteine vegetali e che carestia e malnutrizione della popolazione coincidano invece con l'arrivo degli spagnoli e l'imposizione delle loro diete. Denigrata da numerosi studiosi al pari delle teorie negazioniste, la tesi opportunamente sostenuta da Arens non mira a negare l'esistenza del cannibalismo ma ne propone uno studio più attento ed approfondito, avente un approccio più scientifico e libero da falsi miti.

Una sorta di punto d'incontro tra le teorie che difendono e quelle che screditano il cannibalismo culturale è riscontrabile in *Consuming Grief. Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (2001), dell'antropologa americana Beth Conklin. In questo lavoro la studiosa presenta il rituale del cannibalismo funebre praticato prima dell'incontro con la civiltà da una delle ultime tribù selvagge della foresta Amazonica. Anche in questo caso manca la testimonianza oculare in quanto la pratica fu abolita prima dell'arrivo del gruppo di ricerca di Conklin nel 1985. Tuttavia, le descrizioni dei rituali antropofagici si basano sui racconti dei membri della tribù che ne ricordano la pratica da parte dei loro padri nel periodo antecedente l'incontro con la civiltà occidentale.

Il primo capitolo si chiude con una rapida descrizione delle teorie sulla rappresentazione, l'altro, lo stereotipo, il contesto coloniale ed il rapporto tra il potere e la conoscenza di studiosi quali Stewart Hall, Homi Bhabha e Michel Foucault, le cui idee hanno influenzato l'approccio tenuto nel presente lavoro al momento dell'analisi delle rappresentazioni figura del cannibale nelle opere letterarie considerate.

Capitolo 2: *Robinson Crusoe*

Il secondo capitolo della tesi verte interamente sul capolavoro di Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* del 1719. Nell'opera il cannibalismo e i cannibali sono una presenza costante, come si vedrà, già da prima del naufragio del protagonista sulla

sua isola, e la funzione che svolgono è di primaria importanza per l'intero svolgimento della narrazione. Molte delle azioni compiute da Robinson, infatti, sono motivate principalmente dalla paura verso l'altro, che nel romanzo si identifica principalmente con il cannibale. La prima delle tre parti in cui il capitolo è diviso è dedicata appunto alla paura. Nonostante il pluriennale isolamento nel quale il protagonista si trova a vivere ed a provvedere per la propria sopravvivenza, uno dei pensieri costanti di Robinson è quello di trovare il modo di ripararsi dall'eventualità di finire in pasto ai cannibali. Tale necessità è a volte prevalente perfino nei confronti del bisogno di cibo e acqua, senza i quali egli andrebbe in contro ad una morte certa ma meno spaventosa delle fauci dei cannibali. Nell'opera la paura segue una sorta di parabola ascendente che parte dalle idee stereotipate proprie di Robinson e della sua cultura fino al climax del ritrovamento dei resti di un macabro banchetto su una spiaggia dell'isola, passando per la scoperta dell'impronta del piede di un essere umano che rompe la precaria quiete garantita dal totale isolamento nel quale Robinson credeva di trovarsi.

Nella seconda sezione del capitolo viene considerato il mutamento nell'approccio di Robinson verso i cannibali. Pur senza scomparire completamente, la paura lascia il posto ad un sentimento opposto che si sviluppa nell'animo del protagonista: l'odio per la disumana pratica e la necessità di distruggere i selvaggi. Questa ira è però quasi subito mitigata da una sorta di crisi mistica che porta Robinson ad interrogarsi sul perché alcuni esseri umani possano arrivare a tanto. Illuminato, egli trova la risposta nella mancanza della parola di Dio tra i cannibali e capisce che non è lo sterminio la soluzione divina. Al contrario Robinson denigra quanti prima di lui, in particolare gli spagnoli, hanno distrutto e seminato morte tra le incolpevoli tribù del Nuovo Mondo, e presenta un'immagine brutale del cattolicesimo e dell'Inquisizione le cui malvagità superano di gran lunga l'orrore del cannibalismo. Robinson si pone quindi a fautore della civilizzazione dei cannibali ed in questo senso egli identifica in se l'attitudine coloniale.

Come conseguenza di questa sua vocazione, nella terza parte del capitolo viene analizzato il rapporto di Robinson con il "proprio" cannibale, Friday. Malgrado la

sua magnanimità nei confronti del selvaggio, Robinson tiene a consolidare la sua posizione di indiscussa superiorità rispetto al suo servo. Dal momento del salvataggio di Friday inizia quindi una sorta di percorso che mira alla rieducazione del selvaggio ed al suo completo mutamento. Erigendosi a maestro, Robinson si fa sintesi della superiorità della propria civiltà nei confronti di quella "primitiva" di Friday, inferiore al punto che il protagonista si trova ad insegnare al proprio allievo perfino come costruire una canoa o come fare un barbecue, un oggetto ed un'usanza che, con le rispettive parole, provengono proprio dalle popolazioni dei Caraibi, luogo d'origine di Friday.

Capitolo 3: Il Cannibalismo nell'Opera di Joseph Conrad / Cannibalism in the Work of Joseph Conrad

Non ad una ma principalmente a due opere letterarie è dedicata l'analisi della figura del cannibale e del cannibalismo nel terzo capitolo. Rappresentative dell'opera di Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) e *Falk. A Reminiscence* (1903) costituiscono una imprescindibile fonte di interesse per il soggetto della tesi. Inaspettatamente, in *Heart of Darkness* manca completamente l'immagine comune del cannibale intento a cibarsi di un malcapitato essere umano sia esso un esploratore occidentale, un qualche funzionario coloniale od un selvaggio di una tribù nemica. Quanto viene presentato, invece, è un insieme di immagini negative e stereotipate sull'altro, il cannibale, che non trovano corrispondenza nei fatti descritti nel corso della narrazione. In molte occasioni i terribili cannibali avrebbero avuto l'opportunità di cibarsi di Marlow o di altri funzionari bianchi, ma in nessun caso questo accade. Il cannibalismo che emerge dal capolavoro di Conrad è diverso, non materiale, simbolico, ma non per questo meno brutale. Il pregiudizio, lo sfruttamento, l'abuso di potere dei coloni, il tutto sintetizzato al meglio nell'emblematica figura di Mr. Kurts, costituiscono il vero cannibale della storia, in cui cannibalismo e colonialismo, non solo il modello belga apertamente denunciato nel testo per mitigare la posizione britannica, diventano due concetti difficilmente distinguibili, allo stesso modo orribili e disumani.

Con *Falk*, l'analisi presentata entra in un contesto completamente nuovo, quello del cannibalismo come ultima risorsa, pratica tristemente comune in un'epoca nella quale la frequenza e la pericolosità dei viaggi per mare davano spesso vita a situazioni estreme in cui i sopravvissuti si cibavano dei resti dei propri compagni. Ispirato ai numerosi episodi che riempivano le cronache di mare del XIX secolo è il caso del capitano Falk, unico traghettatore di un non precisato porto asiatico (ispirato a Bangkok), che nel corso di una sfortunata spedizione si è trovato nella condizione sopradescritta per sopravvivere. Profondamente segnato dall'episodio (tra le altre cose Falk rifiuta di mangiare carne) tutto in lui, dall'avarizia manifestata nella sua attività della quale detiene il monopolio, alla morbosità con la quale vive l'amore per la nipote del mercante tedesco Hermann, è indicazione di un malessere provocato dal suo sfortunato incidente. La vergogna ed il dispiacere per l'atto antropofagico compiuto, infatti, lo hanno condotto ad una sorta di auto isolamento dalla società, una società che ripudia il cannibalismo ed alla quale egli mira a riavvicinarsi attraverso la confessione del proprio peccato ed al suo perdono certificato dal ricambiato amore della giovane.

Capitolo 4: *Tarzan of the Apes*: la Civiltà Sconfigge il Cannibalismo / *Tarzan of the Apes*: Civilization Defeats Cannibalism

Opera considerata nel quarto capitolo è *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), primo dei romanzi incentrati sulla figura dell'omonimo personaggio nato dalla penna di Edgar Rice Burroughs. Nella prima sezione vengono presentate una serie di interessanti similitudini che il romanzo ha in comune con *Heart of Darkness*, soprattutto relativamente alla figura del cannibale. Oltre alla medesima ambientazione spazio-temporale (Africa equatoriale, fine del XIX secolo), i due romanzi sviluppano tematiche simili quali la critica verso il modello coloniale belga che indirettamente mitiga la posizione britannica, ma soprattutto in entrambi viene fornita l'immagine quasi identica del cannibale dai denti affilati, stereotipo della rappresentazione fisica di tale figura che risulta familiare al lettore.

Passando all'analisi vera e propria del cannibalismo in *Tarzan of the Apes*, è interessante vedere come l'autore rappresenti in modo quasi speculare i rituali cannibalistici, l'uno umano, l'altro animale, della tribù di neri nativi e della tribù di scimmie in cui Tarzan è cresciuto, macchiandosi anche lui di tale peccato anche se solo indirettamente, essendo lui un essere umano, diverso dalle scimmie della sua tribù. Conseguenza di tale rappresentazione parallela dei due rituali è una disumanizzazione dei selvaggi nativi che, in quanto cannibali, sono considerati al pari delle bestie feroci della giungla con le quali condividono più di quanto non abbiano in comune con l'uomo bianco civilizzato.

Infine, dall'analisi del comportamento di Tarzan, si vede come il romanzo produca un'idea di superiorità naturale dell'uomo bianco rispetto ai selvaggi cannibali. Superiorità naturale, e non semplicemente culturale, in quanto Tarzan, a dispetto di un'educazione "bestiale", sviluppa un'intelligenza che gli permette non solo di riconoscere che lui è un uomo e non una scimmia, ma che lo porta anche a distinguere i "buoni" intesi come i bianchi, gli occidentali, dai "cattivi", i neri nativi. Con questi ultimi, infatti, il protagonista non cerca mai di instaurare un dialogo e anzi li identifica presto come dei nemici. Al contrario, egli è attratto quasi istintivamente dagli uomini bianchi riconoscendo in loro il proprio "branco" da proteggere e cercando da subito una modalità di comunicazione.

Capitolo 5: L'Eucarestia Cannibale / The Cannibal Eucharist

Il quinto e ultimo capitolo considera come, nelle opere presentate in precedenza e più in generale in gran parte della letteratura coloniale e postcoloniale inglese dove il cannibalismo abbia una certa rilevanza, il rituale antropofagico sia sempre rappresentato come un rito di comunione. In particolare, tale aspetto viene analizzato all'interno di un ulteriore romanzo, *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), dell'australiano Patrick White. Qui la protagonista Ellen Roxburgh scopre gli aborigeni dei quali è prigioniera al termine di un banchetto cannibale dal quale era stata esclusa. La

protagonista descrive l'atteggiamento degli aborigeni come quello dei fedeli all'uscita dalla chiesa dopo una Messa. Il riferimento qui presentato riporta chiaramente al rito cristiano della comunione, il quale già in precedenza emerge nel racconto. In una scena poco precedente, infatti, trovandosi in una situazione di fame estrema, il marito (poi deceduto) di Ellen sogna di cibarsi del corpo di un marinaio morto e ripete nel sonno la formula officiante l'eucarestia dei preti. Tale parallelismo tra eucarestia e cannibalismo è proprio non solo della letteratura inglese postcoloniale ma anzi fonda le sue radici all'origine stessa del dibattito sul cannibalismo quando, nel XVI secolo, in occasione delle guerre di religione francesi (1562-1598), i protestanti accusavano sarcasticamente i cattolici di "teofagismo" (cibarsi della divinità), criticando la loro fede nel miracolo della transubstanziazione secondo il quale, durante il rituale dell'eucarestia, l'ostia si trasformava effettivamente nel corpo di Cristo.