

### **A New Historical Reading of Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress***

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#### **Abstract**

This article situates Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* in its socio-historical context to unveil the various subtexts embedded in it. Colonization and surveillance are the subtexts being signified in the story. The panoptical model Michel Foucault (1977) proposed is utilized to understand how knowledge as well as capital leads to omnipotent surveillance and observation. The article questions the aesthetic principle that art is produced for its own sake; it argues that art is entrenched deeply in its historical context. It further questions the extent of Kayerts and Carlier's liberty and sovereignty as colonial agents. The significance of this study stems from its new historical presumption that events of history should be examined as critically as those of fiction. This entails that Conrad's story should be appreciated for its historical and artistic value. New historicism, which repudiates the autonomy of text and history, is the methodology through which the research topic and Conrad's story are approached. The article finds that Kayerts and Carlier are devoid of individuality and agency, considering their exposition to and internalization of the colonial ideology. The enlistment of incompetent agents such as Kayerts and Carlier, it also finds, never undermines the perseverance of the empire to conquer and civilize Africa. In addition to the introduction, the article consists of four sections, the first of which reviews the plot, the second reviews the history of trading posts in Africa, the third reviews literature on Conrad's story, and the fourth discusses the assumptions made in the introduction. The findings and inferences are presented in the conclusion. A list of references is given at the end of the article.

**Keywords:** colonization, Joseph Conrad, new historicism, outpost of progress, surveillance

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