

Which Nightmare to Choose?
A Study of Heart of Darkness.

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Letters
and the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of Bilkent University
in partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in
English Language and Literature

by
Ruhican Tul
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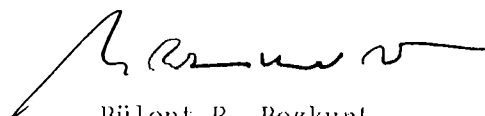
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We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our combined opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.



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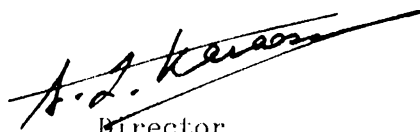
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They know why or should.

ABSTRACT

This study of Conrad's Heart of Darkness aims at a close textual analysis of the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz, the two main characters of the novel, and of the role civilisation plays in determining the fate of that relationship in the light Freudian theory sheds on the problems that arise from a reading of the novel.

Chapter one is an examination of an introductory nature. Attention is focused on previous literary criticism on Heart of Darkness, and on what Freud himself has to say on the nature of civilisation and the individual.

Chapter two aims at a close textual analysis of the novel, particular attention being given to Marlow, who, after embarking on a journey in need of an assertion of his individuality, experiences a curious transformation of his feelings during the journey.

Chapter three takes up where Chapter two leaves off. Attention is now focused; first on the identification between Marlow and Kurtz, secondly on Marlow's rejection of what Kurtz stands for, and lastly on his return to civilisation.

Chapter four is a discussion and a summary of what has been said of the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz, and of the effect of civilisation on that relationship.

ÖZET

Bu tez Conrad'ın Karanlığın Yüresi adlı eserindeki iki ana karakter -Marlow ve Kurtz- arasındaki ilişkiyi textüel analiz yoluyla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken, bu ilişkinin ortaya koyduğu sorunlar Freudcu yöntemden yararlanılarak çözümlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Birinci bölüm giriş niteliğindedir. Bu bölümde Karanlığın Yüresi'ne ilişkin yapılmış edebi eleştirilerden ve Freud'un uygarlık ve bireyin doğasına ilişkin kuramından söz edilmiştir.

İkinci bölüm romanın ayrıntılı textüel analizini amaçlamaktadır. Bu bölümde ağırlık, bireyliğini vurgulama amacıyla bir yolculuğa -fizikötesi düzlemde de- çıkan, ancak daha sonra önemli bir değişime uğrayan Marlow'a verilmiştir.

Üçüncü bölüm ikinci bölümün devamı niteliğindedir. Bu defa ağırlık ilk olarak Marlow ve Kurtz arasında gelişen özdeşleşmeye, daha sonra Marlow'un Kurtz'un simgelediği olguyu reddine, son olarakta Marlow'un uygarlığa geri dönüşüne verilmiştir.

Dördüncü ve son bölüme Marlow ve Kurtz arasındaki ilişkiye dair söylenenlerin ve uygarlık kavramının bu ilişki üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesinin özeti olarak bakılabilir.

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Chapter 1

General

Conrad's Heart of Darkness can be looked upon as operating on a highly symbolic level, being, under the surface structure, a description of a journey into the unconscious, into the darkness of the Freudian id, over which man is supposed to maintain conscious control under normal circumstances.¹ This implies that when the individual somehow achieves complete freedom and gains access to his unconscious, having been deprived of the external checks imposed by society, he is confronted with a multitude of mysterious and normally repressed forces. These forces can be said to constitute the essence of the inner self or the id, which links man with the primordial and the unknown, and which acts as an incentive to what we do and think, whether good or evil. The primal element of the human psychical apparatus, the id contains, according to Freud:

everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution -above all, therefore the instincts, which originate from the somatic organisation and which find a first psychical expression here (in the id) in forms unknown to us.²

The id, wholly unconscious and irrational, home of instinctual desires, socially unacceptable drives, has close ties with the ego, the rational and conscious part of the psychical structure. Wrote Freud:

In relation to the id, the ego performs the task of self-preservation by gaining control over the demands of the instincts, by deciding whether they are to be allowed satisfaction, by postponing that satisfaction, to times and circumstances favourable in the external world or by suppressing their excitations entirely. ³

Thus, mental life can be viewed as a field of battle. The conflict between the instinctual desires contained within the id and the repression carried out by the ego at the behest of the "external world," e.g., civilisation, produce in the individual's mind dreams or even neurotic symptoms as a means whereby these repressed forces manifest themselves. This conflict between the id which demands direct satisfaction of instinctual desires and the ego as a means of repressing them arises in fact as a corollary of the incompatibility of individual wishes and societal demands. Therefore, it would appear that civilisation can ultimately be viewed as a larger kind of ego that employs the individual's ego as a means of repression on the id.

Thus, out of the incompatibility of a direct gratification of the individual's wishes and the demands of the civilised world to renounce such direct gratification, a terrible conflict arises between the individual and society, the means whereby the conflict can be solved being a dream on the part of the individual.

The story told in Heart of Darkness involves Marlow's setting on a journey into the unconscious, the unknown and mysterious forces

of which, as stated above, can only manifest themselves either in dreams or even in neurotic symptoms. In fact, Marlow's narrative has a dream-like quality to it, as pointed out by Albert J. Guerard:

The true night journey can occur (except during analysis) only in sleep or in the waking dream of a profoundly intuitive mind. Marlow insists more than is necessary on the dream-like quality of his narrative. "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream -making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt...." ⁴

The assumption that the narrative is that of a journey within is further supported by K.K. Ruthven:

Certainly the journey up the Congo as Conrad describes it is something in the nature of a psychic voyage into the innermost recesses of the mind, to a point at which European morality has not even begun to operate. ⁵

Of the figures Marlow comes across in quest of his inner self, Kurtz appears to be the one in whose person the unconscious reveals itself most clearly. Indeed, it is in Kurtz that the fatal confrontation of the individual with his unconscious is fully illustrated. Having come face to face with his unconscious and achieved complete freedom from the dictates of the civilised world, Kurtz, a being to whose making all Europe has contributed, looks

within himself and becomes a representation of the totally destructive but latent element in the human character, as his actions perfectly illustrate. It is at this point that the assertion of individuality is realised; Kurtz becomes something different from an ordinary, run-of-the mill individual and takes on an almost abstract significance. The moment he looks within himself and breaks free from external control mechanisms, Kurtz becomes a representation of the Freudian id, with the qualification that there is definitely a tragic dimension to his character because he is an extraordinarily perceptive creature able to see through the deception, having matured beyond humanity. K.K. Ruthven admits that Kurtz becomes a representation of the totally destructive in the human heart:

Kurtz surrenders his European heritage, exploits the natives by making them think him a god, and abandons the moral values in which he has been educated by participating in certain unspecified but "unspeakable rites"(p.118).⁶

However, a few lines later, Ruthven talks of the heroism of Kurtz as the exceptionally perceptive individual who, having matured beyond the realm of commonplace human knowledge, beyond humanity, chooses to die:

It is possible to regard Kurtz as the hero of this story because he not only has the courage to reject the obsolete values of a dying civilisation, but risks destruction by facing the unknown and tackling it on its own terms; and if Kurtz is the hero, Heart of Darkness is implicitly an attack on the

values of western society and an annunciation of the Savage God.⁷

A similar opinion is offered by J. Guetti to the effect that by rejecting civilisation, its morals and ideas, Kurtz becomes a god-like figure, towering above commonplaceness, and knowing all:

Kurtz's "degradation" is not the traditional result of a moral failure; it is "exalted and incredible," perhaps god-like; it is the effect of his setting himself apart from the earth -apart, even, from the language of the earth with which he had such magnificent facility.... And in releasing himself from this general morality, Kurtz has illustrated not only the possibility of such a release but also, as Marlow suggests, the possible inadequacy and irrelevance of morality to all men.⁸

The difference between Marlow and Kurtz is that the former is able to exercise throughout his journey, and at the climax of it, a restraint of which Kurtz is incapable, and which he has no intention of exercising any more. Though Marlow, too, feels the power of the wilderness and cannot but identify with Kurtz as a representation of it, he returns to his "civilised" society, having gained a certain amount of knowledge, through Kurtz, of his and/or man's inner self and of man's unbounded capacity for evil. We are given to understand that the evil in the human heart, the id under the grand facade of the ego has' a tendency to surface whenever it has the opportunity to break free from the artificial external checks of the superstructure, of the civilised world.

The story ends with Marlow's return to civilisation, his capacity for self-control, restraint, and inborn strength having

been tested. True that his involvement with Kurtz amounts to a plunge into the depths of his own soul, that his consequent identification with Kurtz almost kills him, causing him to go through a fatal struggle against death, and that all his former assumptions about man are shattered. And yet Marlow returns to civilisation. How does one answer the obvious question whether Marlow is just another complacent Victorian? Why does he choose to lie to Kurtz's Intended at the end of the story? What happens to Marlow that he decides to go back after all his journey puts him through?

The possible answers to the above questions lie in a preliminary analysis of Marlow's character. Thomas Hardy Leabey speaks of the heightening sense of guilt Freud saw in members of society:

In a phrase, the topic of Civilisation and its Discontents is the unhappiness of civilised people. Wrote Freud: "The sense of guilt is the most important problem in the development of civilisation and... the price we pay for our advance in civilisation is a loss of happiness through the heightening of a sense of guilt." Each person seeks happiness, and according to Freud the strongest feelings of happiness come from direct satisfaction of our instinctual ... desires. Civilisation, however, demands that we renounce to large degree such direct gratification....⁹

The inhibitions of a complacent society and what it has done to other cultures, its repressive stance towards the individual, have made Marlow a keenly perceptive and vulnerable character, and that

seems to be the reason why he embarks on a journey in the first place, great emphasis being placed, as has been stated, on the dream-like quality of the journey throughout. It seems that Marlow, whose difference from the other characters in the novel -with the exception of Kurtz- is his capacity for moral discrimination and a greater power of perception, chooses to start on a journey into the unconscious, nearly succeeds in a complete identification with Kurtz/the wilderness, but in the end loses the war, being unable to mature beyond humanity as Kurtz does. Victorian complacency in particular, or rather the civilised world in general, does away with Marlow's chance to utter what Kurtz was able to utter as to the hidden truth in the human heart. As James Guetti points out, Marlow's return to civilisation ultimately implies a failure on his part:

Although he struggles into the heart of darkness, declares his sympathetic allegiance to Kurtz, watches the man die, and journeys out again, he ends where he began.¹⁰

Furthermore, this quest, this journey within is not merely one of Marlow's discovery of the inner self, but rather the journey of all civilisation from its then-present state back to its original, primitive roots. In other words, just as Kurtz can be viewed as the Freudian id let loose, so western civilisation can be interpreted as the material manifestation of the abstract Freudian concept of ego; under the surface structure of civilisation lies a brute force which is all too ready to exercise its unbounded capacity for destruction the moment it has broken away from a controlling

mechanism. Through its "civilised" representatives, western civilisation eats at the heart of Africa, destroys it, plunders its wealth under the pretext of civilising it. In other words, Africa is where the id of civilisation is released from under the grand facade of the ego, the truth of which only Kurtz is totally able to face as J. Tessitore points out:

Kurtz has confronted the dark truth that the cultural claims of the group are irreconcilable with the individual's claim to freedom, and the vision grows still darker by the individual's willingness to put his desires before those of the community whenever it is physically possible to do so. Kurtz is willing to subjugate and exploit the tribes of the interior just as all Europe is willing to take part in the gruesome rape and slaughter of the entire Congo.¹¹

While it is true that Marlow thinks of Kurtz as being hollow and lacking restraint until the moment he starts identifying with him, Kurtz, who might have been just another "papier-mache Mephistopheles"(p.36), gains a different, and ultimately tragic dimension, being a man able to see through the surface reality, to recognise the horror of the lie in man's -civilisation's- heart, and finally to choose death as the only possible alternative to escape from a nightmare existence, a fact supported by J. Tessitore's statement:

At the moment of his death Kurtz confronts the most untenable reality of all -that the civilisation to which he once subscribed, together with all its policemen and kind

neighbours and public opinion, is itself an instrument of pure brute force.¹²

Therefore, Kurtz should be viewed not only as a towering representation of the Freudian id under the surface of western civilisation, but also as a tragic hero, crushed under the burden of the glimpsed truth, the truth of the horror in the human heart.

Chapter 2

Marlow and the Question of a Nightmare Existence

In Civilisation and its Discontents, Freud writes of an increasing sense of guilt on the part of the individual as the most important problem in the development of civilisation.¹ He sees an unbridgeable gap between the instinctual desires of the individual and the demands of civilisation on the individual to renounce the possibility of the direct gratification of those desires. Consequently, the internalisation of the demands of civilisation burdens the individual with a heightening sense of guilt for his immoral thoughts as well as actions, "immoral" being the label with which civilisation forces the individual to sacrifice the possibility of the direct gratification of his instinctual desires, and thus lose his happiness. On the other hand, it would appear that without a means of restraining the potential aggression the individual is capable of, civilisation runs the risk of dissolving into a state of a war of all against all. Therefore, civilisation can be said to present a dilemma for the individual from which there is no easy way out. On the one hand, civilisation is the protector of the individual, while on the other it demands that the individual should feel guilty for his "immorality". It seems that civilisation demands unhappiness and a guilt-ridden mind and even neurosis in return for its protection. And yet there might be a way out for the guilt-ridden, bored, almost neurotic individual as in Marlow's case. Freud viewed dreams as the individual's means of expressing and fulfilling his wishes, the

repression of which by civilisation helps create a guilty conscience. In other words, what Marlow does at the beginning is to renounce civilisation and return to a state where a guilt-free existence may be possible. And this he does by dreaming a dream. The dream is his way out, it is the means he makes use of in an attempt to find his inner self, to understand the truth in the human heart.

But the dream comes to an end. Marlow gives up on the idea, ending up at the place where he had started, e.g., in the civilised world from which he had decided to escape. Although Marlow gains a certain amount of knowledge, and even succeeds in a temporary identification with Kurtz, he cannot mature beyond humanity as Kurtz does. Marlow proves too complacent in the end. It is only Kurtz who dreams the dream to the end.

I

Marlow, the bored individual, searches for a way out. While speaking of the Romans who had conquered Britain, then an unknown wild island, he calls them "men enough to face the darkness"(p.12). Marlow wants to face the darkness; he admits that he is fascinated by the idea of finding a way out of the civilised world to get in touch with the place of darkness:

It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled.... And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird -a silly little bird.... The snake

had charmed me. (p.14)

Marlow is aware that he must have the courage to try to break free from civilisation in order to see through his exterior, to find his inner self, and finally to possibly gratify his wishes as an individual. It seems that he has grown aware that what calls itself civilisation is in fact a means of exerting brute force and of negating other cultures:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. (p.13)

The problem with Marlow is that he does look into it too much and consequently feels the need to assert himself as an individual in the place of darkness.

Marlow has in fact gone as far as feeling deep down inside that civilisation, the so-called bringer of light, has already died, which comes to mean that it is devoid of any means or values whereby the individual can gratify his wishes. When Marlow crosses the Channel to show himself to his employers, he arrives in a city "that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre"(p.16). Civilisation exhibits all signs of having turned into a wasteland where nothing vital, nothing individual is possible. Marlow finds the Company's offices "in a narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with Venetian blinds, a dead silence"(p.16). He goes up "a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert" (p.17). There is "something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just

as though I had been let into some conspiracy -I don't know-something not quite right"(p.17). Everything in the centre of civilisation is arid, waste, ultimately dead as corpses in a sepulchre. Thus, Marlow is ready to leave the arid atmosphere, sensing its deadness at the core. The ominous atmosphere Marlow feels himself surrounded with is emphasised by R.A. Gekoski as well:

He finds, at the offices of the steamship company in Brussels, an atmosphere reeking with images of death, and is sensitive enough to note the "ominous" atmosphere; he is far from deterred, however, and leaves Brussels.²

To Marlow, what redeems civilisation and its activities directed against individuals is only:

an idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; an unselfish belief in the idea -something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to (p.13)

But does the idea really redeem civilisation? Is the means whereby civilisation supports itself, e.g., the mere cogs in the machine, the men in Africa, capable of unselfish belief? The answers to these questions lies in an analysis of the behaviour of civilised men in Africa.

II

As a means whereby Marlow, the individual, can assert himself, express and perhaps ultimately fulfill his wishes, Marlow's dream, his journey into the unconscious, starts, providing Marlow with the opportunity to utter words as to the true meaning of the experience:

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed to throw a kind of light on everything about me -and into my thoughts. (p.14)

The dream-like quality of Marlow's narrative and the creation of a dreamscape through natural descriptions point out the fact that Marlow really dreams a dream and that the dream-journey provides the individual with an opportunity to find his inner self. Marlow places great emphasis on the dream-like quality of his story:

Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream -making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt; that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams.... (p.37)

When Marlow sets off upstream with the aim of finding and relieving Kurtz at the Inner Station, he feels he is thoroughly immersed in a dream, "cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps"(p.45). To Marlow:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings.... There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself: but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of

plants, and water, and silence. (p.45)

The dream seems to be the only opportunity offered to the individual to find a reality of his own, to see himself and others around him for what they really are. To repeat, that is the reason why Marlow calls the dream "the culminating point of my experience"(p.14).

Western civilisation is supposedly a bringer of light. Redeemed by "an idea at the back of it"(p.13), the conquest of other cultures is justifiable as long as the application of the idea is carried out by representatives with an "unselfish belief" (p.13) in the idea. However, it seems that the application of the idea in an environment where there are no external checks has helped civilisation to make a crack on the grand facade; the representatives, the bringers of light, e.g., civilisation and its values, inhibitions, have gone berserk. In other words, civilisation, the centuries-old accumulation of values, repressions, refinements, has in Africa found an opportunity to test its own inner strength and run amuck as witness the activities of its instruments which are suffused with an incredible amount of egotism. The idea does not redeem civilisation. The exterior falls in. The id is let loose, finds the ego already dead, and consequently is hollow, incapable of doing anything effectual, anything vital.

As Marlow penetrates deeper into the dream-journey he becomes more and more aware of the truth in the heart of civilisation, or

rather in the heart of the individual, since civilisation is only a construct made up of the accumulation of values, thoughts, and activities of the individual. The ultimate question is whether Marlow can stand the idea of maturing beyond humanity and eventually resolve to die -like Kurtz- rather than go back and be complacent as before, even though he gains knowledge of the truth.

The seemingly noble purpose of the conquest of Africa, and of its instruments amounts to nothing. The Central Station strikes Marlow as ominous, purposeless, and unreal:

There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else -as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. (p.34)

Nothing happens even though the id of civilisation has been released in Africa. As Marlow sails down the coast at the beginning of his journey, he comes across a French man-of-war firing into the continent:

In the empty immensity of the earth, sky, and water there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech -and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. (p.22)

Marlow feels that the devil he is about to become acquainted with on the continent, the devil/id of civilisation is of a "flabby, pretending, weak-eyed" sort (p.24). It is the devil of a

"rapacious and pitiless folly"(p.24).The above statement is inextricably linked with the idea that civilisation is dead, that even though its devil/id is released in an environment with no external checks, it can accomplish nothing, being null and void.

The work goes on, mines go off, but all activities related to civilisation have no purpose or effect whatsoever. The agents of civilisation, personifications of the "flabby devil" do nothing, either, except to keep up appearances. Marlow finds all of them hollow through and through. What Marlow calls "backbone"(p.26) is only the ability to keep "starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts"(p.26). Are they really what Marlow calls them? Are they "backbone" and furthermore "achievements of character"(p.26)? Do they not rather point out the fact that all civilisation amounts to nothing, that under the exterior it is as nothing, be it the devil/id of it, or its cultured, refined surface?

Marlow comes across many an instrument of the "flabby devil"(p.24). The brickmaker of the Central Station strikes Marlow as a "papier-mache Mephistopheles"(p.36), just as every other instrument he meets on his way to Kurtz:

It seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. (p.36)

The Eldorado Exploring Expedition Marlow meets while waiting for his rivets further emphasises the fact that the idea at the back of the conquest does not and cannot justify it because civilisation is already dead:

To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. (p.41)

In Africa, civilisation has kicked itself free, but in consequence lost its unselfish belief in the idea, and so have the instruments, because it is a sham already dead along with the instruments. Only that they cannot recognise the obvious fact. It takes a man man enough to face the darkness. It is Kurtz, and it could have been Marlow.

III

Can the Marlow of the previous boring, repressive existence benefit from the journey within? True that he senses even before setting off that civilisation is dead, that in consequence the devil/id of it is ineffectual and dead as well, and that he feels deep down "just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness"(p.47) of the call of the wild. And most important of all, in the character of Kurtz, Marlow meets the most remarkable human being he has ever known and will ever know. He even manages to identify with this larger-than-life creature, though only on a temporary basis. In spite of all this, incredible as it seems, Marlow chooses to go back to the other nightmare existence although he seems to prefer at the beginning the nightmare Kurtz offers him. Why is it that Marlow goes back? Why is it that Marlow, perhaps deliberately, chooses to obliterate his chance to find, once and for all, his true identity? There can only be one simple answer to

questions of this sort; that Marlow cannot mature beyond humanity -unlike Kurtz- and complacency gets the better of him in the end. The last laugh belongs to civilisation, even though on returning to it, Marlow still feels its deadness.

In fact, after the initial act of embarking on his journey to get away from the oppressively close and ominous atmosphere of Europe, Marlow's subsequent mode of narration seems to follow in a confused and/or confusing vein in that a conflict arises between the original aim of the journey and an inordinate emphasis on the significance of work and restraint.

To Marlow, the significance of work can only be understood if one is able to regard work as something with which the inner truth can be hid, despite the fact that his initial statement seems to put forth the view that work is what helps one to find one's own reality:

I don't like work -no man does- but I like what is in the work, -the chance to find yourself. Your own reality -for yourself, not for others, what no other man can ever know. (p.39)

However, the view forwarded by the above statement is suddenly contradicted by what seems to be a more candid one; what is important to Marlow now is the ability to hide reality under the "mere incidents" of the surface, work turns to monkey tricks:

When you have to attend to things of the sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality, I tell you -fades. The inner truth is hidden -luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks. (p.45)

This confused stance adopted by Marlow is given particular attention by C.B.Cox. After quoting the above statements by Marlow, he asks:

Is work "monkey tricks" or self-discovery? Is the wilderness the primary reality, and Marlow's occupation on the steamboat merely an artificial fiction which conceals the truth from him?³

What has happened to Marlow? Why this sudden celebration of the ability to hide the inner truth under the surface? Marlow seems to be confused as to what he really wants to do; to find his inner truth or repress it? The latter part of the novel revolves around this question and Marlow's doomed struggle to find an answer to the question. And indeed the word "luckily," repeated twice as if to emphasise the candour of the Marlow of civilisation, gives one a sense of foreshadowing of the events to come; Marlow is going to lose the war.

Another key word that reveals Marlow's candour appears in his final assessment of Kurtz towards the end of the novel:

True he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all the truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. (p.89)

The word "hesitation" helps define Marlow as an individual, who, though with great powers of perception and a broad vision, hides the inner truth under the surface and is "permitted" to draw

back his hesitating foot from the edge of the abyss. Marlow has no other choice than to go back in the end.

Why does Marlow hesitate? And why is he "permitted" to draw himself back? In other words, what guarantees Marlow's drawing his foot back, even when he nearly succeeds in an identification with Kurtz?

Part of the answer has been given above; work, monkey tricks help one to hide the truth under the mere incidents of the surface. The remainder of the answer can be found in Marlow's idea of restraint that stops him from making "that last stride" that Kurtz feels free to make. And yet the ultimate question is: is restraint necessary after all? Is it not better to step over the edge, and thus mature beyond humanity, when you have looked deep into the abyss of the human heart?

This, of course, necessitates an examination of the relationship between Kurtz and Marlow. While the former chooses to step over the edge, the latter refuses to. Therefore, an analysis of the relationship -of the eventual identification, too- and of the effect of the concept of restraint on that relationship must be made.

Chapter 3

The Resolution Offered by a Choice of Nightmares

Up to the point where the foundations of their intimacy are laid, Marlow seems to be continually taken aback by Kurtz's misdemeanour, of whom he thinks as an extremely enlightened European, as evidenced by what all the other agents have to say of him. To the chief accountant of the Outer Station, Kurtz is a "very remarkable person"(p.26). The station manager thinks of Kurtz as an "exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the company" (p.32). The brickmaker calls him a "prodigy, an emissary of pity and science and progress, and devil knows what else"(p.33). Later on, he attaches to Kurtz the label of a "universal genius"(p.38). We learn that "his mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz"(p.64), and that "most appropriately the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance"(p.64).

However, Marlow's curiosity as to what would happen to Kurtz, "who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort"(p.41), is satisfied and his mind baffled when he learns that Kurtz has turned:

his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. (p.43)

Confused, Marlow admits:"I did not know the motive."

I

Travelling upriver, Marlow sounds in a sudden outburst of emotion -in keeping with his initial aim to journey out to Africa- his confusion over whether to respond to the terrible frankness of a primordial call, which may perhaps be viewed as a foreshadowing of his eventual identification with Kurtz.

But if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just 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. And why not? (p.47)

This passionate exclamation belongs, of course, to the Marlow of old, to the repressed individual in search of his inner self. But his confusion over whether to find and face his inner truth or hide it continues as witness the fact that this possible response to the wilderness is held in check first by the discovery of the book written by the old sailor, who has restrained himself by not giving in to the wilderness, having been able to write a book in the middle of it:

Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work.... (p.50)

Then by the baffling restraint of the savage crew who are starving to death, having nothing to eat on the journey upriver:

And I saw that something restraining, one of those human

secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there....
Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from
a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battle field. But
there was the fact facing me. (p.54)

And finally by the peculiar kind of restraint of the manager who
sounds utterly sincere to Marlow when he talks of his possible
desolation should anything bad happen to Kurtz:

I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere.
He was just the kind of man who would wish to preserve
appearances. That was his restraint. (p.55)

So, for the time being, the concept of restraint overpowers the
possibility of an identification with the wilderness, which would,
of course, mean an identification with Kurtz as well.

Upon this, Marlow's bafflement over Kurtz's behaviour
turns to a positive distrust of him as an individual who has
possibly gone berserk: Marlow has been overpowered by restraint, a
concept of great significance for the civilised world.

Marlow claims that Kurtz has been taken in hand by the
wilderness, that a lust for material possessions, ivory in this
case, has been eating at his heart:

The wilderness had patted him on the head, and behold, it was
like a ball; it had caressed him, and -lo!- he had withered; it
had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins,
consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by
the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish intimation. He was
its spoiled and pampered favorite. (p.62)

Marlow is of the decided opinion that Kurtz is the victim of an identity crisis; he has sacrificed his European integrity as a responsible and concerned citizen to an incredible egotism caused by his lust for power and material possessions:

You should have heard him say, "My ivory. Oh yes, I heard him.

"My intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my-" everything belonged to him. (p.62)

Marlow's opinion that Kurtz has been claimed by the wilderness for its own through "some devilish intimation" is furthered by the following statement to the effect that Kurtz's material possessions are as nothing in themselves; what counts is the fact that a European, a civilised man, has been besieged and taken captive by the wilderness.

Everything belonged to him -but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. (p.63)

Having been overpowered by civilised value judgements, Marlow admits that one cannot understand the why and wherefore of Kurtz's behaviour:

He had taken a high seat among the devils of the land. -I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you? -with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums These little things make all

the difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (p.63)

But does Marlow himself understand? In the end, he does not. And that is why he goes back and utter the above words to the audience on the boat.

Marlow's accusing stance reaches its culminating point where he talks of Kurtz's lack of restraint in an environment where he should have tried to exert the utmost prudence to shun the call of the wilderness. When he realises that the round knobs on the stakes around Kurtz's cottage are actually decapitated human heads, he utters what seems to be his final judgement on Kurtz:

They [human heads] showed that Mr Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him -some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last -only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude -and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. (p.73-4)

One should always bear in mind the fact that Marlow utters

this judgement on Kurtz after he goes back. The judgement, therefore, can be interpreted as an utterly candid one. Can it also be said that it is a true one? Yes, but only from Marlow's viewpoint: the wilderness proved irresistible for Kurtz, it echoed loudly within him till he died, and it echoed precisely because Kurtz was hollow.

II

But the obvious fact remains: Marlow, despite his final judgement, does go through a temporary identification with Kurtz. He accepts the nightmare Kurtz offers him at first.

This fact is foreshadowed by an intense sort of admiration Marlow feels for the black woman, a gorgeous, erotic creation of nature, who seems to charm Marlow:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent.... And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.... (p.77)

The charmed attitude Marlow assumes toward the black woman as a reflection of the wilderness has been observed by C.B. Cox as well:

Kurtz's native woman appears to Marlow as a wild and gorgeous apparition. She is savage and superb, he tells us... treads the earth proudly, her body covered with barbarous ornaments.... For Marlow she embodies the spirit of the dark forests.

The terrible frankness beckons again. Being the means with which Kurtz has his soul sealed to the wilderness, the black woman of the "inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish intimation"(p.62) calls on Marlow as well to "brood over" and finally understand the "inscrutable purpose"(p.77).

And this time Marlow heeds the call. Aboard his steamboat Kurtz's offering is accepted. The wilderness seems to have gained another disciple:

Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares.... I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. (p.79)

The identification seems to have been achieved at long last. Marlow, the individual, seems to have been able to do away with the superficial reality of civilisation and to have found the hidden truth in Kurtz, and finally to have accepted the nightmarish, but true reality that Kurtz offers him. And at least for the time being, the fact that Kurtz's reality, that of the id free from all restraint and ready to perform "inconceivable ceremonies"(p.62) is also a nightmare does not matter at all. When Kurtz disappears from the steamboat, Marlow acknowledges the enormous effect of the incident on himself. Kurtz has come to mean so much to him:

What made this emotion so overpowering was -how shall I define it?- the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous... had been thrust upon me unexpectedly.... I did not

betray Mr Kurtz -it was ordered I should never betray him- it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice.
(p.81)

But does Marlow remain loyal to the "nightmare" of his choice? The betrayal of Kurtz is as much a spiritual matter as it is a physical one. The fact that Marlow tries to persuade Kurtz to go back to the steamboat amounts to a spiritual betrayal of Kurtz, and to an ultimate betrayal of himself as well. By trying to break "the heavy mute spell of the wilderness that seemed to draw him [Kurtz] to its pitiless breast"(p.83), Marlow denies the reality of the identification between himself and Kurtz. The betrayal happens, even though Marlow accepts the greatness of Kurtz; he is helpless before Kurtz, a man with the power to pierce the superficial:

There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! He had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. (p.83)

To Marlow's question whether he understands the black woman's cry and the natives' response to it, Kurtz's answer is simple: "Do I not?"(p.85). Simple enough, but with a world of meaning. Even though in his delirium Kurtz goes through a terrible conflict whether to go back to civilisation -as exemplified by his nonsensical talk in which he wants "to have kings meet him"(p.86) on his return, or to cling to his understanding of the nature of civilisation and man, he shows that he really understands the meaning of the cry in the end; he

chooses death, uttering the words "The horror! The horror!" twice (p.87).

At the moment of his death, Kurtz's cry points out the fact that he has been able to face the most frightening reality of all human existence -that there lies brutality and deception and a horrid lust for power within the heart of civilisation and man.

It is this reality that forces Kurtz to choose death as the only alternative out of a nightmare existence. And this is where the tragedy and victory of Kurtz are acknowledged by Marlow:

He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe; piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in darkness. He had summed up -he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction... it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth It was an affirmation, a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!

(p.88-9)

Kurtz, who takes on a different significance as the reflection of the totally destructive, but hidden element in the human character, has this extraordinary ability to see through the deception of civilisation and man, and therefore chooses death. It is Marlow who chooses to go back, to back out.

Yet it is true that he, too, goes through a life-or-death confrontation with the ultimate reality as a result of his indetermination as to whether to go back or to make the last stride:

I have wrestled with death If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. (p.88)

Marlow loses the possibility of a victory; after the illness, a result of his confusion, he finds that he has nothing to say. It is Kurtz who had something to say and who said it by dying. For the individual to die would be to assert his individuality in the true sense of the word. This Kurtz does, through his death as a rejection of what lies beneath the exterior of civilisation and man.

Marlow's final weakness to step over the edge reveals the fact that his quest for an identity fails. He has said before: "The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling"(p.51). As Lionel Trilling points out:

The fact that Kurtz could utter this cry at the point of death, while Marlow himself, when death threatens him, can know it only as a weary grayness, marks the difference between an ordinary man and a hero of the spirit. Is this not the essence of the modern belief about the nature of the artist, the man who goes down into that hell which is the historical beginning of the human soul, a beginning not outgrown but

established in humanity as we know it now, preferring the reality of this hell to the bland lies of the civilisation that has overlaid it?²

To repeat, Kurtz is the hero who understands all, and who chooses freely. He is the individual. Marlow loses the war. If he had not buried the essential truth of the matter, he would not have gone back and be complacent again, his quest for an identity and his need of assertion as an individual would find a satisfying answer, even though the answer be found in death.

So Marlow goes back. And the question crosses one's mind; is it possible for Marlow to find contentment back where he started, back at the place he had deserted because of its deadness, and because of his need for an identity? The description of the city he goes back to gives us an answer. He has a vision of Kurtz "before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery"(p.91).

The city is still as it was when he had turned away from it. It is still a cemetery where the walking dead are buried. And Marlow comes to hate humanity, members of a dead entity.

They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating presence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew.
(p.89)

Yet Marlow thinks that Kurtz's vision and all that it asks for, e.g., "a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush"(p.92), should be kept back for the walking dead in

general, and for the "salvation"(p.92) of the Intended in particular.

The imagery of death gathers more and more force as Marlow progresses deeper into the Intended's house:

The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. (p.92)

And then the Intended comes forward, with whose entrance the room seems "to grow darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead"(p.93). This sad light taking refuge on her forehead attributes an interesting quality to the Intended; in her person civilisation suffused with darkness under the surface seems to be represented. After all, her "mature capacity for fidelity"(p.93) is a plaything of darkness. It belongs to an illusion:

That great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her -from which I could not even defend myself. (p.95)

Therefore civilisation, and the members of it who feel obligated to live within it, need a lie to live by to be able to defend themselves.

Marlow, who has seen it all, who has even identified with the wilderness, provides the lie: "The last word he [Kurtz] pronounced was your name"(p.96).

Her name? Nowhere in the novel is the reader told her name, but one immediately becomes aware that it is not just a matter of

uttering a mere name. That name Kurtz supposedly utters amounts to civilisation, its values, its restraint, its work, its superficial reality; all that Kurtz detested. Marlow tells a deliberate lie in an attempt to defend humanity in general.

As to why he returns to walk among the walking dead, and why he tells the lie, Marlow tells the crew on board the Nellie:

It seemed to me that the heavens would collapse before I could escape [from the Intended's house], that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I could not tell her. It would have been too dark, -too dark altogether. (p.96)

Marlow has become a "civilised" man again. The newly-initiated member of society has now lost his one and only chance to find the inner truth of civilisation's, and of man's heart, as Kurtz was able to find it. Marlow has become one of the walking dead: an "old knitter of black wool"(p.18). "Ave!" Marlow, "Morituri te salutant"(p.18).

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Heart of Darkness revolves around the questions of what happens to the individual when the external checks imposed on him by society are somehow lifted, and of whether to try to erect another barrier or to give in to the wilderness. As Walter Allen sums up:

Fidelity is the barrier man erects against nothingness, against corruption, against evil which is all about him, insidious, waiting to engulf him, and which is, in some sense, within him unacknowledged. But what happens to a man when the barrier breaks down, when the evil without is acknowledged by the evil within, and fidelity is submerged? This, rather than fidelity itself, is Conrad's theme at his greatest.¹

In this respect, both Marlow and Kurtz seem to go through the same experience with the qualification that the former cannot help trying to erect another barrier in the end in the place of the one he had broken through, while the latter chooses death in contempt of the evil lying beneath the ego of civilisation and man. Although Marlow is compelled to acknowledge the fact that somewhat curiously the foundations of intimacy between himself and Kurtz are laid, that there forms a bond between them, in the end he manages to exorcise Kurtz, whom he senses he might become.

Heart of Darkness provides one with an insight into the hidden truth beneath the superficiality of waking life. Firstly, the journey

up the Congo, as K.K. Rutven says, "is something in the nature of a psychic voyage into the innermost recesses of the mind...."² This journey into the unconscious is embarked upon by Marlow, whose difference from others around him lies in his capacity for a greater power of moral discrimination and of perception. Crushed under the repressive burden of Victorian society which he senses is already dead, Marlow feels himself compelled to assert himself as an individual and sets off in quest of the hidden truth in the human heart, e.g., the unconscious reality under the exterior.

Secondly, the Marlow of civilisation, the individual embarking on a journey within in consequence of his repression by society and hidden guilt-feelings arising from civilisation's negation of other cultures, goes through a transformation during the journey. Although there are moments when, perhaps as a foreshadowing of his temporary identification with Kurtz, Marlow feels like responding to the "terrible frankness"(p.47), the merits he attaches to work and restraint get the better of him until he meets Kurtz. Marlow has come to distrust him as an individual who has lost his European integrity, and who lacks "restraint in the gratification of his various lusts"(p.73).

Thirdly, despite the fact that Marlow thinks of Kurtz as being hollow and lacking restraint, he comes to identify with him, who, as well as being a reflection of the Freudian id let loose due to a lack of external checks, takes on a tragic dimension in the end. Kurtz, who might have become just like the rest, can see what lies beneath the surface, can see the horror of the lie in the heart of

civilisation and man, and chooses not to become like the rest. Doomed by the burden of the glimpsed truth, Kurtz chooses death as the only alternative. He is the hero, the only one alive among the walking dead. He dies a great human being. As John Tessitore points out, Kurtz has confronted the "dark truth."³ And he chooses to die, crying out twice the words, "The horror! The horror!"(p.87). Tessitore writes :

He [Kurtz] cried out twice. Perhaps once for himself, perhaps once for all the rest.⁴

Lastly, Marlow goes back after a nearly complete identification with Kurtz/the wilderness. The identification is only partial and temporary. Victorian complacency in particular, civilisation in general, annihilates Marlow's one and only chance to utter what Kurtz was able to utter as to the inner truth which mere incidents hide "luckily, luckily"(p.45). Now that Marlow has been able to exercise his restraint, and exorcise the possibility of a possession by Kurtz/the wilderness, he becomes "civilised" again. Marlow's lie to the Intended, to himself in fact, can only suggest one thing. This suggestion is, according to R.A. Gekoski:

That truth is unendurable in the context of everyday life, that what one needs in order to maintain an assurance of safety and comfort is some sustaining illusion to which one can be faithful.⁵

Notes

Chapter 1

1 Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (Reading: Pan Books, 1980).

All references to Heart of Darkness are to this edition and are shown in parentheses in the text.

2 Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis (New York: PermaBooks, 1958) 144.

3 Freud 145.

4 Albert J. Gurerard, "The Journey Within," Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes, ed. C.B. Cox (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1987) 54.

5 K.K. Ruthven, "The Savage God," Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes, ed. C.B. Cox (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1987) 79.

6 Ruthven 78.

7 Ruthven 78.

8 James Guetti, "The Failure of the Imagination," Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes, ed. C.B. Cox (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1987) 68.

9 Thomas Hardy Leahey, A History of Psychology (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987) 266.

10 Guetti 74.

11 John Tessitore, "Freud, Conrad, and Heart of Darkness," Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 102.

12 Tessitore 103.

Chapter 2

1 Sigmund Freud, Civilisation and Its Discontents (New York: Norton, 1961).

2 R.A. Gekoski, "Heart of Darkness," Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 60.

3 C.B. Cox, "Heart of Darkness: A Choice of Nightmares?" Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 33.

Chapter 3

1 C.B. Cox, "Heart of Darkness: A Choice of Nightmares?" Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1987) 29.

2 Lionel Trilling, "Kurtz, Hero of the Spirit," Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes, ed. C.B. Cox (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1987) 64.

Chapter 4

1 Walter Allen, The English Novel (Reading: Penguin, 1984) 304.

2 K.K. Ruthven, "The Savage God," Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes, ed. C.B.Cox (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1987) 79.

3 John Tessitore, "Freud, Conrad, and Heart of Darkness," Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 102.

4 Tessitore, 103.

5 R.A. Gekoski, "Heart of Darkness," Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 75.

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