Heart of Darkness
Atlantic Critical Studies Series:

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Contents:

Chapter One

Introduction

We can have an idea of the stature of Joseph Conrad, whom M. C. Bradbrook, the noted critic, described as 'Poland's English genius', from the reaction of Ernest Hemingway on the death of Conrad in 1924. Hemingway wrote in *Transatlantic Review* (October 1924):

> If I knew that grinding Mr. Eliot into a fine dry powder and sprinkling that powder over Mr. Conrad's grave Mr. Conrad would shortly appear very annoyed at the forced return and commence writing, I would leave for London early tomorrow morning with a sausage grinder.

T.S.Eliot had already published *The Waste Land* (1922), the epoch-making poem that, along with Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) ushered in Modernism. Eliot would receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948, and would turn out to be the greatest poet-critic of the twentieth century. Ernest Hemingway would also go a long way with a series of remarkable novels like *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *For Whom the Bell Tolls*(1940), and *The Old Man and the Sea*(1952), and would also receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. Conrad, however, never received any Nobel Prize, for that matter, and he also declined the knighthood when offered. The remarks of Hemingway, a potential Nobel laureate in 1924, about Eliot, another potential Nobel laureate, vis-à-vis Conrad, not only show Hemingway's preference of Conrad to Eliot as artist, but also reveals Conrad's established reputation as a great writer, whom F.R.Leavis would later consider as part of the 'great tradition'. Is it not really amazing that it is only at the age of twenty one, in 1878 to be precise, when Conrad heard the 'first words of

spoken English' on the *Mavis*, a British steamer bound for Malta! It was also in this *Mavis* that Conrad visited England for the first time. He was really 'a genius'.

Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was born on 3 December 1857 at Berdichev in Podolia, one of the Ukranian provinces of Poland. His father, who was involved in the patriotic activities, was arrested by the Russian police when Conrad was only three years old. In 1862 when his parents were sent on exile to northern Russia Conrad also accompanied them. There in April 1865 Conrad's mother died of consumption.

Conrad's father was a good translator and had translated many French and English authors into Polish. We learn from *A Personal Record* that his father's translation of Victor Hugo's *The Toilers of the Sea* arrived when his father was seriously ill. Conrad is said to have read the entire book – though in galley proofs – to his father. It is believed that the experience of reading the book inspired in Conrad who was barely eight years old at the time, a strong desire for the sea. The book simply fired the imagination of the sensitive boy, a voracious reader who had already been acquainted with Shakespeare through his father's translation. Since life in that part of the country was not congenial to education, Conrad's father, much to his pains, sent the young boy to his maternal uncle, Bobrowski, at Cracow for further education. Conrad did study in schools in Poland but did not find any interest. His biographer Jean Aubrey feels that rigorous and stifling atmosphere of the school coupled with lonely childhood and the feeling of resentment as the service and sacrifice of his parents and his sufferings went unrecognized fuelled his desire for the sea. So even though his uncle tried to dissuade him Conrad left for Marseilles in 1874 to become a sailor. In 1875 he worked as an apprentice on board the

ship *Mont. Blanc*, bound for the West Indies. He again went to the West Indies in 1876 on S*aint Antoinne*. After passing the necessary examination he worked as the third mate in various ships in the Indian ocean. It was during this period that he came to India twice, once in 1884, and again in 1885. In 1884 he reached Madras, went to Bombay by rail and then left by ship. In 1886 he arrived at Calcutta and spent three weeks at the port before he left for Dundee. In 1886 he obtained his certificate as a master mariner, and it was in this year that he also became the naturalized British citizen. It was in 1890 that he went to the Belgian Congo and had an experience which would be later distilled into *Heart of Darkness*, a novel that we shall study in detail. On 10 May 1890 he sailed from Bordeaux for the Belgian Congo on the *Ville de Maceio*, supposed to be 'the most traumatic journey of his life'.

Conrad's first book, *Almayer's Folly* came out in 1895. In 1896 Conrad married Jessie George and settled down as a writer to use the real storehouse of his experience of the sea for writing novels and novellas to present/reveal, albeit indirectly, his perception of life. We shall briefly touch upon his major works in the next section. Suffice it to say, at this point, that for some time he was considered second only to Hardy among the living authors. Stephen Crane and Henry James considered him a major inventor and stylist.

The period between *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is generally regarded as the major phase of his creative career. Conrad, accompanied by his wife and two sons, revisited Poland in 1914. It may be mentioned, however, that Conrad was never accepted by the Poles as their own. On the contrary, they accused him of deserting his fatherland. Little did they care to think of the enormous sufferings that Conrad underwent, first on account of the undeserved sufferings of his

parents , and then as an orphaned child. Nor did they realize that he had put Poland in the international map of the English literary world.

Conrad died of heart attack on 3 August 1924.

Major Works:

Almayer's Folly:

Almayer's Folly (1895) is Conrad's first novel. Located in the Dutch West Indies the story is spun round the development of love between Nina, Almayer's daughter and Dain Maroola, Nina's Malay lover, son of Lakamba, Rajah of Sambar. 'Almayer's Folly' is the name of the house that Almayer constructed to receive the British. He abandoned the project when he realized that the British could not come and a company of Dutch seamen named the house "Almayer's Folly". Mrs. Almayer, a Malay wanted her daughter to remain native and encouraged the love between Nina and Dain. Dain went away after promising Almayer that he would help him in tracking the goldmine that he had been in search of. Meanwhile Lakamba wanted to poison Almayer, who was of Dutch extraction and who would side with the Dutch. Next day the dead body of a Malay was seen floating in the river. On the basis of the anklet and the ring, the body, the face of which was completely smashed was identified as Dain's. But actually it was the body of Dain's slave, who was used at the instance of Mrs Almayer to hoodwink the Dutch. Nina went to the hiding where Dain was hiding. Learning from a slave girl about their hideout Almayer went to the spot to persuade Nina to return home, but when she stubbornly refused , took them to the mouth of the river from where they could escape their pursuers. A broken hearted man, Almayer returned to his place, put his old office on fire and he

spent the rest of his life in "Almayer's Folly". Though not a masterpiece, the novel shows Conrad's interest in the motivations of his characters, his ability to keep up the suspense and his love of the exotic.

The Nigger of the 'Narcissus':

The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (1897), with which Conrad's major phase begins is more a study in human psychology than a story of a sea voyage. The 'nigger' of the title is a huge Negro named James Wait, the last crew member to come aboard. He was sick and he believed that he would die soon. The tension of imminent death brought out both the good qualities and the bad qualities of the crew. While some believed that he would surely die and pitied him for the sake of it, and tried to help him in every possible manner, there were others who thought that his talk of death was only a ruse to avoid work. The first mate finally sent him below to his bunk and left him to his lot. On the thirty-second day out of Bombay the ship was in trouble. On the storm-tossed sea it lay for hours on its sides and the crew huddled against and hugged on the various. projections on the deck. Then somebody remembered that Wait had been lying trapped in the deckhouse with the door jammed by the heavy wave. Six people went down, battered the planks, made a large hole, and with great difficulty pulled Wait out. After the tumult was over Wait was again placed in the deckhouse, and again doubts were raised about the certainty of his death, and the crew threatened mutiny. The captain, however, was able to convince the crew that Wait was sure to die and the mutiny was averted. But as the ship approached the Flores Islands Wait looked better. The older sailors were happy because they believed in the common superstition that dying men on board waited till they could see the land, to breathe their last. And that happened exactly. Wait died as the Flores

Islands were seen in the distant horizon. He was buried at sea. All the crew were greatly relieved as if they were relieved of the burden of death itself.

Conrad held that his success or failure as a creator depended on the success or failure of the book; because it is here that he discovered his authentic identity as a creator to capture the subtle nuances of human psychology and the dark regions of the self and the universe. It reveals Conrad's understanding of human character 'under the tests of endurance and survival at sea'. With the passage of time and growth of maturity Conrad will gradually have a clearer vision of the two worlds – life as a patterned existence and life as threatened by some dark forces that defy clarification.

Lord Jim: (1990)

Jim was the chief mate on board the *Patna* that was carrying Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Jim was young and an idealist. So when the *Patna* was about to sink he decided to sink with it and not to abandon the pilgrims. But at the last moment, rather impulsively and involuntarily, he jumped to join the other white men in the lifeboat. But the ship does not sink, and Jim, among all the crew, has to face a court of enquiry. Marlow, a white man sat at the enquiry, became friendly with Jim, and realized that Jim , a conscience-stricken man, was determined to regain his honour. He did not know why or when he actually jumped into the lifeboat. Jim became a wanderer, moving from place to place where people did not know him, and eventually arrived at an obscure settlement at Patusan. There he mixed with the natives and soon became their leader and was called Tuan (Lord) Jim. Dain Waris, son of the chieftain became his friend. Then one day one Gentleman Brown came to loot Jim's stronghold. Jim was away at that time, but Dain Waris with the help of the natives was able to isolate Brown and his people but was

unable to capture them. On his return Jim had a long talk with Brown who agreed to leave peacefully if the siege were lifted. Trusting him Jim persuaded the natives to lift the siege, but Brown returned Jim's magnanimity by treacherously killing Dain Waris. Then, mortified by a sense of guilt Lord Jim went unflinchingly to offer himself to the chieftain as the cause of the death of his son. The chief, Doramin, shot him and Jim willingly accepted the honorable death, and Marlow, who had followed Jim's life closely, felt that Jim had at last regained his lost honour.

The novel is particularly noted for the multiple perspectives that it offers to the *Patna* incident. The same incident is narrated by different persons, from different points of view because truth cannot be attained. But the more the points of view, the closer one comes to truth. That the moral dilemma emerging out of the inscrutable forces of darkness haunts Jim, remains the chief concern of Conrad as a novelist. In this novel Conrad tries to illustrate in Jim's weakness and strength the mysterious nature of the human character and the hidden springs of human conduct. *Lord Jim* prepares the ground for *Heart of Darkness.*

Since the focus of this study is on *Heart of Darkness* which we shall discuss in great detail, we do not take it up here now. The only point we should bear in mind is that *Heart of Darkness* powerfully reinforces the central theme of Conrad's writings: the conflict between the familiar and comprehensible surface world and the unknown forces of darkness lying hidden in the deepest recesses of the human psyche.

Nostromo: (1904)

Like most of Conrad's novels here also the story begins in the middle of things, and then is developed through a series of flashbacks.

In the Republic of Castiguana, an imaginary South American country, Charles Gould ran a silver mine in the principal town of Sulaco. As the Republic was in a state of revolt threatened by the imminent danger of being seized by the rebel forces Gould, obsessed with the idea of saving the silver loads the ingots in a lighter and puts it out to the sea. Nostromo, an Italian sailor, handsome, courageous, strong, and liked by all, sails off with Decoud, a newspaper editor of great courage. But on the way the lighter bumps into a ship. Nostromo then moved to a nearby island, buried the silver there, left Decoud behind and swam back to the shore. On his return Nostromo gave the impression that the silver had been lost during the voyage as the lighter sank. Nostromo wanted to get rich slowly. One day he took a small boat and went to the island to discover that Decoud, sick of loneliness tied four ingots to his body, went out to the boat, shot himself and was drowned. Subsequently a lighthouse is erected in the island with Nostromo's old friend Viola as its caretaker. So nobody suspected Nostromo's going to the island. But one day he was shot when he was mistaken as an intruder. He died without being able to confess his crime to Emilia.

The story of Nostromo, like the story of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* also reveals Conrad's favourite theory that deep down man is a beast: greedy, selfish, and self-centered. The apparently 'incorruptible' Nostromo succumbs to the temptation of greed and is disintegrated. What greed for ivory does in *Heart of Darkness* is done by silver in *Nostromo.* Nostromo, like Kurtz, falls victim to the forces of darkness.

Under Western Eyes (1911) written partly as a protest against the widely prevalent notion that Conrad was mainly a sea- story writer, deals , like quite a few others novels – like *Nostromo* for example – with various aspects of Europe. Even *Heart of Darkness* is

not just a sea story of adventure but a critique of colonialism and the historic forces operating at the time. In *Under Western Eyes* the story is built round a solitary, introvert, scholarly boy, Razumov , a student of St Petersburg University . He dreamed of winning academic honours and had no intention of being involved in the revolutionary activities while one of his casual friends, Victor Haldin was a revolutionary. One day Haldin killed a government official and took shelter at the residence of Razumov. Razumov was in a fix. He knew he would unnecessarily be dragged into the police enquiries and tried to get Haldin out of it in vain. At last he reported the matter to Prince K – who at once brought it to the notice of the authorities, as a result of which Haldin was promptly apprehended and executed. When Haldin's family, living in Geneva, learnt about the execution they were grief-stricken but had no idea about the circumstances leading to the execution. When they learnt that Haldin's 'friend' Razumov was coming to Geneva they thought they would learn the circumstances of Haldin's death from him. On his arrival Razumov was received as a revolutionary and treated as a hero. To keep up the agenda, he started mixing with all the revolutionaries, but finally broke down under the strain of keeping his two-fold deception, and on an impulse told the revolutionaries that he was a government spy. Brutally beaten he was carried to the hospital. On recovery Razumov returned home and shared a villa with his devoted friend Tekla. Some of the revolutionaries regretted the cruel treatment Razumov had received in their hands; they were stimulated by his original views on politics, society and morality.

Many critics believe that Conrad's interpretation of the Russian mind and temperament has hardly been surpassed by any other writer for sharpness of vision and objectivity of treatment.

It should be evident even from the brief outlines of some of the major works of Conrad that his primary interest is in psychological realism and the unpredictable complexity of human characters. It is also evident that his 'stories' are full of adventures, exotic settings, unexpected turn of events, and often remain inconclusive. Another important aspect of the novels is Conrad's use of multiperspectivity or multiple point of view and an experimentation with narrative strategy. The complexity of the narrative strategy adopted by Conrad is often determined by the complexity of the vision or perception of life that Conrad wants to project through a particular tale. But the predominant interest of Conrad, as we have said earlier, lies in his perception of the conflict between two worlds. One world is the surface world, tangible, knowable, and is governed by a system of laws, customs, accepted beliefs and habits of behaviour, and well-defined moral values and moral strata. Here life is patterned and a man lives a conditioned existence. Then there is the world of the unknown, the darker regions and reserves of his mind, the hidden areas of his self and the universe where, once faced with the dark forces lying within him he loses all sense of direction because his cultivated values fail to sustain him or give any direction. He suddenly finds his life threatened by the sudden intrusion of some power, the terrors of the dark. It is then that he must draw sustenance from within and stand on his own resources. Nina goes away with Dain and Almayer burns his old office and drops the key in the river. Jim who was determined not to leave the boat impulsively jumps to take the lifeboat and gains a stigma which is partly removed only when he presents himself to the chieftain and gets shot at the breast and regains his honour. Razumov fails to keep up his double deception and is cruelly tortured by the revolutionaries. Nostromo, the strong, brave, upright man, decides to steal the

silver and grow rich slowly. And we should remember that Conrad started writing and began to plumb the unconscious well before Sigmund Freud appeared on the scene.

Chapter Two

Heart of Darkness:

The Story Outline

A nameless narrator introduces the story with a group of men on board the *Nellie*, a cruising yawl anchored on the Thames estuary in a quiet evening. In addition to the nameless narrator there are four others: the Director of the company, the lawyer, the accountant and Marlow. Thus all together there are five people. One of the seamen, Marlow, begins reflectively that Thames area had been, once upon a time, say about two thousand years ago when the Romans invaded England, a backward and uncivilized country. It was then one of the dark and barbarous areas of the North. Drawing historical parallels between England at the time of Roman invasion and the present day Africa, he begins to talk about the experience of the blackest and most barbarous part of Africa, the dark continent, – the Belgian Congo. He then begins to narrate how he happened to be there. A young man he was out of job and he was interested in the Congo since he was 'a little chap'. When he came to know that there was a company for trade on the Congo he decided that he must get a job there, and 'set the women at work – to get a job'. Finally through the influence of his aunt he got his appointment as a commander of a river steamer for one of the trading companies with interests in the Belgian Congo. He got his

job rather quickly because one of their captains had recently been killed in a scuffle with the natives. He also learnt at Brussels in Belgium, the headquarters, that very few of the officials actually expected him to come back alive. When he went for the medical examination the doctor asked him in a matter – of-fact tone whether there was any history of insanity in the family, politely implying thereby that it was actually insane to go to the Congo, and face death in an alien land in midst of the savages. Anyway, after saying 'good bye' to his aunt whom he found 'triumphant' he joined his post and took a French steamer and started for the mouth of the Congo. During this journey the streamer had stopped at many places and as Marlow saw the jungles he was impressed by its sameness as he was fascinated by its mysterious aspects. At one point they passed by a French steamer– a man-of-war–anchored off the coast, firing shells into the jungle. He was told that there was 'a camp of natives' somewhere. But to Marlow it appeared that there was 'a touch of insanity in the proceeding.'

At the mouth of the Congo Marlow took a little seagoing streamer commanded by a Swede captain and is told about a Swede who had committed suicide. During this journey he saw a lot of people black and naked' moving about like ants. He also saw the miserable sight of black men, 'black shadows of disease and starvation'. Marlow spends ten days at the Company Station. He had a feeling that he had 'stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno'. It is here that he meets the Company's chief accountant, a white man with 'a high starched collar, white cuffs, a bright alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie and varnished boots'. In the context of the misery and squalor all around the man appeared to Marlow as a 'miracle'. It is in this Company Station that Marlow hears about Kurtz for the first time from the Company's chief accountant who describes him as

‘a very remarkable person’. Marlow also learns from him that Kurtz sends ‘as much ivory as all the others put together’. He is also told that Kurtz will be ‘somebody in the administration before long.’

After spending ten days at the Company Station Marlow resumes his journey up the river. He leaves with a caravan of sixty men for a two hundred miles journey through the jungle, because the river was not navigable at that stretch. Marlow passed through several abandoned villages, almost stumbled on the body of ‘a middle-aged Negro with a bullet-hole on the forehead’. On the fifteenth day he reached the Central Station. Somebody asked him to meet the Company manager immediately. But when he went to meet the Company manager he did not even tell him to sit down although he had arrived there ‘after twenty-mile walk’. The man had the peculiar talent for inspiring uneasiness. He was ‘neither civil nor uncivil’ and began to talk as soon as he saw Marlow. He talked about Kurtz , assured him that Kurtz ‘was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company’, and that Kurtz was reportedly seriously ill. But to his dismay Marlow learnt that he would not be able to start at once, because the streamer that he was to pilot sank near the south-bank. Marlow now has not only to raise the streamer but also to repair it. He needed rivets to stop the hole but there were no rivets, although all along the journey there were ‘cases of them down at the coast – cases – piled up – burnt–split!’ It took about three months before the rivets were obtained and the journey could be resumed.

During his stay in the Central Station one day while lying flat on the deck of his steamboat Marlow overheard the talk of two people. They were talking about Kurtz. From their talk Marlow came to know that once Kurtz had intended to return and took

with him a fleet of canoes full of ivory and an English halfcaste that Kurtz had with him. But after having come three hundred miles Kurtz had suddenly decided to go back, alone, in a small dugout with four paddlers. Marlow says that he 'seemed to see Kurtz for the first time'. From their conversation Marlow also learnt that the Company manager was Kurtz's implacable enemy and hoped that the climate of the Congo would do away with his rival. The uncle of the manager with a gesture pointed out the forest, the creek, the mud, the river 'that seemed to beckon with a dishonouring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of the heart'(47). He also told that Kurtz's new methods were ruining the district. It was actually the Company manager and his uncle who were discussing Kurtz. Marlow who had been listening and watching was so startled by the suggestion that he leapt to his feet and looked down at the forest as if he had expected some sort of an answer to 'that black display of confidence' (47).

The steamer was finally repaired and made ready for use, and a party of 'pilgrims' along with the chief agent sailed to visit Kurtz at the inner station, far up the river. The journey was difficult and perilous, because, in the first place, it was an upstream journey, and secondly, there were too many snags and frequent fogs on the way. It was like 'a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road' (49). For the crew Marlow had a party of twenty cannibals who had to splash around and push the boat whenever the river was shallow. As the boat moves up the river Marlow is increasingly fascinated by the primitive nature of the landscape and the country around him. He had a feeling that they 'penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness' (50). Occasionally, at a bend they would hear 'a burst of yells', a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of

feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of a heavy and motionless foliage' (51). Marlow would not understand the cause of this apparent revelry. It was absolutely incomprehensible, and Marlow and the 'pilgrims' glided past them like 'phantoms'. The strain of constantly attending to the sights and sounds of a mysterious landscape and the 'fiendish row' gives Marlow a feeling that 'they are travelling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign and no memories' (51). He felt a vague, distant kinship with the primitive world in spite of the trappings of the society. He even felt an undefined urge to join the savages, but he did not, and, he says, he could not, because he had to pay the full attention to the steering of the ship. Even the savage who 'ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank' was deeply engrossed in his duty as a fireman. Thus neither the fireman, a savage, nor Marlow, a civilized white man, could indulge in their 'creepy thoughts' (53).

When they reached some fifty miles below Kurtz's Inner Station they found a hut of reeds and a signboard, almost illegible, warning them to be cautious in their approach. The signature was so long that it could not be Kurtz's. On entering the deserted hut Marlow had an 'extraordinary find', a book entitled *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* by some Tower or Towson. To find such a book at such an obscure place is strange enough. But what was still more astonishing was that the man who had lived in that hut and had read the book made notes in the margin – not in pencil because he did not have any – but in cipher. A man 'lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it – and making notes – in cipher at that' was 'an extravagant mystery'(54).

Meanwhile the ship is refuelled and readied for further journey. Towards the evening of the second day the ship was about eight miles from Kurtz's station. Marlow wanted to push on but the manager said that the navigation up there was so dangerous that it would not be advisable to travel in the dark. He also called attention to the warning 'Approach Cautiously' that they had seen on the way. Marlow conceded, because eight miles meant three hours' steering and how did it matter when they had already spent months in the journey? Around three in the morning there was a loud splash of a fish that sounded like the firing of a gun and Marlow became frightened. In the morning when the sun rose there was a dense fog all around so that they could neither see anything nor move on. At eight or nine the fog thinned and they started making preparation for moving forward when suddenly they heard a very loud cry, which 'culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short' (53) leaving Marlow and the crew in great tension and anxiety in the 'excessive silence' that followed the cry. The 'pilgrims' apprehended an attack by the natives and were terribly scared. But eventually nothing happened and the steamer continued to move up the river.

But the attack did take place, though not then but a few hours later when the ship was about a mile and a half below Kurtz's station. Marlow spotted an islet in the middle of the stream. So there was no alternative but to move close to the bank. Since Kurtz's station was on the west Marlow headed for the western passage. But the passage was so narrow that the ship had to practically brush the shore. Then suddenly Marlow saw the fireman abandoning his business and lying flat on the deck. Then he saw the fireman ducking his head. Then came the swarms of arrows and spears. There was a lot of scramble and confusion on the board. The crew tried to fire at random and soon were short of

ammunition. During the attack the helmsman is struck by a spear thrown by the natives and dies in a pool of blood. Marlow's shoes and socks are soaked in the blood of the helmsman. About the time Marlow blew the boat's steam whistle and 'jerked out screech after screech hurriedly'. It had a magic effect. Whatever the natives might think of the loud whistling they were obviously terribly scared and the shooting stopped. There was a great commotion in the bush as the natives tried to flee the scene as fast as they could.

As the fusillade is over, Marlow throws his blood-soaked shoes overboard one by one and with the death of the helmsman his thought turns to Kurtz and Marlow thinks that Kurtz also must be dead by now. Many pilgrims on board also discuss the possibility of Kurtz's death. But he takes care to see the burial of the helmsman in the sea, particularly because some of the cannibals were apparently tempted to eat him. But Marlow out of human consideration for his dead helmsman decided that if he was to be eaten at all, 'the fishes alone should have him'. The journey is resumed with Marlow at the wheel. Soon Marlow sees the outlines of some sort of building, and is told by the manager that that was Kurtz's station. As Marlow scans the area with his glasses he sees a long decaying building on the top of a hill. There were large holes on the roof. There was no fence as such but near the house 'half –a–dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls' (75). Then as the boat docked some gentleman who appeared to Marlow like a harlequin, welcomed him on board. Soon Marlow learnt that he was the Russian who had left that book – *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* – in the deserted hut miles down the river. He tells Marlow that Kurtz is seriously ill. The Russian also tells him how, when a boy, he had run away from school, went to sea in a Russian ship, ran away again and served for a

while in English ships. He believed that when young one must see things. To Marlow's exclamation, 'Here!' he says, 'You can never tell. Here I met Kurtz' (77). He also spoke emotionally about Van Shuyten, a good old Dutchman, to whom also he was indebted in many ways. As Marlow hands over his book, the only book he had left behind, his joy knew no bounds. It is from him, again, that Marlow gets the latest information that the natives attacked them because they don't want Kurtz to go.

The Russian has known Kurtz for about two years now and has developed such an attachment for Kurtz that he cannot leave him. He tells Marlow a lot about Kurtz. We learn from him that the Russian had spent many nights with Kurtz and they had talked about everything including love. Kurtz, he says, was a fine narrator and he could make one see things. Kurtz had a passion for ivory and he would often be away for weeks in search of ivory. The appetite for ivory 'had got the better of […] the less material aspirations'(82). But Kurtz was lying helpless now. He was very ill and the Russian who had nursed him back to health twice earlier had come again to help him. As Marlow once more directed his glass to Kurtz's house he had a nearer view and realized that the round knobs on the posts that he had taken to be ornamental are human heads 'black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids' (82). Marlow learned that Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts' (83) and consequently was corrupted by the very natives whom he had once in youthful idealism hoped to enlighten. He degenerated into a savage and participated in savage rites. Although deathly sick, he still had hold on the natives, but instead of he changing them, they had debased him into an atavistic savage. Marlow feels that Kurtz succumbed to the forces of darkness 'because he was hollow at the core'. Marlow also learnt later from the Russian that it was Kurtz who had ordered the natives

to attack the steamer, so that the white men would run away and leave Kurtz to die among his fellow savages in the wilderness.

Marlow suddenly notices that ‘streams of human beings with spears, bows and shields and ‘savage movements’ (85) were moving towards the house of Kurtz. The Russian is afraid that if Kurtz does not dissuade them from fighting all the white men will be ‘done for’. Meanwhile the ‘pilgrims’ also are moving towards the house of Kurtz with a stretcher to bring him back to the boat. There rose a distinct possibility of a confrontation but luckily Kurtz told the natives something that made them disappear.. To Marlow Kurtz appeared very tall, seven feet, with a bald head and piercing eyes. The pilgrims brought Kurtz and his papers on the stretcher to the boat and laid him in one of the little cabins. Marlow says he was ‘struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression’ (86).

As Kurtz was in the cabin a lot of natives gathered at a distance from the bank, and two of the natives kept watch on the shore. They were ‘bronze figures’ with ‘fantastic head-dresses and spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose’ (87). And with them there was a woman. She was apparently a very rich native woman, ‘wild and gorgeous’ (87). Her movement was majestic and she held her head high. She was heavily decorated, not only with ornaments of all sorts but also with ‘bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch–men’, etc. Marlow says that she was ‘savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent’ (87). She walked up to the water’s edge and scanned the people on board the boat, raised her arms to the sky as if in anger and desolation and then, to the great relief of all concerned, she turned away slowly and went into the bushes. Then the Russian tells Marlow that this was the woman who had practically possessed Kurtz and

refers to the occasion when during Kurtz's illness she had come to visit him and was furious about the Russian. He says that for the last fortnight he had been trying to keep her out of Kurtz's house, and it was quite a job.

Suddenly Marlow hears Kurtz shouting at the manager behind the curtain. Kurtz says that the manager is not actually interested in him but in his ivory, and claims that he is not as sick as the manager thinks him to be: he would return and carry out his plans,. Coming out of the cabin as the sees Marlow the manager tells him that Kurtz's methods were wrong because the time was not yet ripe for them, although Marlow, in his turn, would insist that that was no method at all. Before leaving the Russian gives Marlow the shocking information that it was Kurtz himself who had ordered the natives to attack the ship so that Marlow and his men would run away and leave Kurtz to continue his atavistic savage life lording over the natives. He also warned that Kurtz might again try to escape and Marlow should keep a close watch on him.

At night Marlow had dozed off leaning over the rail. Suddenly, around midnight, 'an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy '(92) woke him up 'in a bewildered wonder', when abruptly the yells stopped at the camp where Kurtz's adorers kept an uneasy vigil. Marlow casually glanced into Kurtz's cabin and discovered that the Russian's warning had come out true; Kurtz had disappeared. Marlow first thought of raising an alarm, but it at once dawned on him that that would only lead to 'onslaught and massacre'. So without awakening anybody he began to silently pursue Kurtz. When about thirty feet from the nearest fire Marlow caught up with Kurtz, and tried to make him see reason. Kurtz insists that he would stay back to carry

out his ‘immense plans’ (94). After convincing him that his reputation in Europe is assured, he is at last able to bring him back – almost half-carrying him–to the boat.

The riverboat left next day at noon. Lots of natives gathered on the shore and ‘two thousand eyes’ closely watched all the movements of the boat. There were three men– bizarrely dressed – in front. They were possibly witch -men uttering incantations in an apparently nonhuman language. Then the woman with ‘helmeted head and tawny cheeks’ rushed out to the fringe of the river and shouted something at the top of her lungs. The natives responded in a roaring chorus. The pilgrims, suspecting an attack, began to get their rifles ready. Then Marlow used the steam whistle repeatedly, and the crowd was scattered, ran helter-skelter. But the ‘barbarous and superb’ woman stood her ground unflinchingly. It was at this point that the pilgrims ‘started their little fun’ by opening fire, and Marlow could see nothing more for smoke. All this time lying on his couch in the port house where he had been moved because there was more air there, Kurtz looked on through the open shutter.

Now Marlow had an opportunity to have long conversation with Kurtz. Kurtz tells him about his plans, about the girl he intends to marry, about his station, his subjects etc., and Marlow is simply charmed by his voice. Sometimes like a child he wished to have kings meet him at the railway stations who, he believed, would recognize his ability if he convinced them of some profitable enterprise. One morning Kurtz gave Marlow a packet of papers and a photograph of his ‘Intended’, the girl he wanted to marry. He kept them in Marlow’s custody not because, at that moment, he thought he would not survive, but to avoid the prying curiosity of the manager. Then one evening, coming in with a candle, he heard Kurtz say, ‘I am lying here in the dark waiting for death’. It was not really dark; the

light was within a foot of his eyes' (99), but he was losing his vision; he was really nearing death. And then he 'cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath – 'The horror! The horror!' ' . Later in the night when Marlow was having his dinner in the mess room, the manager's boy reported, 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead' (100). Next day Kurtz was buried. Marlow says, 'And then they very nearly buried him', because Marlow also fell so gravely ill, possibly from jungle fever but luckily came round.

Marlow's next memory is of being back to the 'sepulchral city' where he resented the sight of the so – called civilized people running around for money. One day one spectacled man came on behalf of the Company and asked for the papers of Kurtz. Marlow offered him Kurtz's report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs'. The man sniffed the paper with contempt and left. Two days later came Kurtz's cousin who wanted to know the details of Kurtz's last moments. It is from him that Marlow learnt that Kurtz was a great musician. So Kurtz had so many talents that it was difficult to say what was Kurtz's real profession, and Marlow agreed with the cousin when he said that Kurtz was a universal genius. He left with some family letters of Kurtz. Then came a journalist who opined that Kurtz did not have a flair for journalism but he was a good talker. 'He electrified large meetings', he said. On being asked what it was that induced Kurtz to go to the Congo, Marlow forthwith handed him the famous Report. The journalist thought it was just good enough for publication.

Now Marlow was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the portrait of Kurtz's Intended. The girl looked beautiful in the photograph and Marlow had a feeling that there

was a ‘delicate shade of truthfulness’ (104) about her features. Marlow decided to visit her and hand over the letters and the portrait personally.

With the memory of Kurtz constantly haunting him, Marlow went to Brussels to meet the girl one evening about a year after his return to civilization. As he rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor he seemed to hear the whispered cry, ‘The horror! The horror!’ It was evening time and as he waited for the lady to come he noticed the expensive furniture, long windows from floor to ceiling ‘like three luminous and bedraped columns’, tall marble fireplace, a grand piano standing massively in a corner – all giving an idea of rich, aristocratic culture. Then the girl appeared and closed the door behind her. She was all in black. She was in mourning although more than a year had passed after the death of Kurtz. The girl had pale visage and dark eyes and her glance was ‘guileless, profound, confident and trustful’ (106). What struck Marlow was her ‘mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering (106). She was obviously not a ‘plaything’ of time. Still deeply attached emotionally to Kurtz she wanted to know from Marlow the last words of Kurtz, because Marlow was with him till the end. Obviously she took it for granted that Kurtz must have died with her name on his lips. But, unfortunately, that was not the fact of the matter. Marlow was in a fix. The last words of Kurtz – ‘The horror! The horror!’ dinned in his ears. But Marlow also felt that the girl needed something to live by. So, though he detested lies, he lied to the girl saying that the last words Kurtz pronounced was her name. The girl exulted and gave out a triumphant cry, ‘I knew it – I was sure!’

It is at this point that Marlow’s story ends, and then he ‘sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha’(111).

Chapter Three

(i) The Historical Background:

When Livingstone disappeared into the African bush. between 1856 and 1871 the *New York Herald* sent Stanley, a Welshman by birth and full of Celtic imagination, in search of Livingstone, to Congo. He not only found Livingstone–though after a vigorous search for 236 days– but also saw the prospect of a new career that was to change the course of African history. At that time Leopold II was the king – the first king in fact–of Belgium. A man of ambition, vision and fine political acumen, he felt that on account of its peculiar and difficult geographical position – narrow approach to the sea and obscurity– Congo was ideal for a colonial enterprise and commercial ventures. He also expected little opposition if he concentrated on that area. In 1876 Leopold held a conference at Brussels to examine the African situation and declared with pontifical solemnity that he desired 'to open to civilization the only part of the globe where Christianity has not penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population' (Quoted by Maurice N. Hennessy in *From Congo* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964). He sent Henry Stanley as his chief agent to go to the Congo and make the country Leopold's personal possession. Stanley is said to have got treatises signed by more than four hundred native kings and chiefs who surrendered their rights to the soil. The authenticity of these treatises has been questioned later but at that time after possessing the vast tract of land in the Congo Leopold formed an International Association of the Congo and himself became its President and Treasurer. But contrary to Leopold's expectations quite a few nations with territorial ambitions in Africa also jumped into the fray and in 1884 Bismarck called a conference in Berlin to come to an understanding among the nations

about these African enterprises. The conference laid down certain rules and heard the claims of nations like France and Portugal. The language of the resolution was, however, in the words of Hennessy 'as hypocritical as it was inapt'.

The conquest of the Congo by Leopold II of Belgium, and the consequent coercion and exploitation of his people sent to the Congo resulted in the high death toll of at least 12 million African people. History records how Leopold would send his private army into village after village. The soldiers would capture the women and hold them hostages to compel the men folk to go to the rain forest to collect rubber and force them to work for weeks and months on near starvation diet. Many would die from over-work and from diseases caused by malnutrition, and hundreds of the Africans who took part in rebellions were shot down. Leopold's rule and his horrendous slave labour system and inhuman atrocities constitute one of the darkest and blackest periods of the history of Africa.

However, in August 1885 Leopold notified that the International Association of the Congo would constitute the Independent State of Congo or Congo Free State. But Leopold had complete control of the Congo Free State till his death in 1908.

[ii]The Autobiographical Background

Right from his childhood Conrad had a passion for maps. When he was about nine years old he had put his finger on the blank space – 'the blankest of the blank places on the earth – that still remained an unsolved mystery of the African continent. Conrad said to himself 'with absolute assurance and amazing audacity': 'When I grow up I shall go there'. The place referred to as 'there' would later turn out to be the region of Stanley Falls, a part of the Belgian Congo. It is a strange case of coincidence that Conrad in his

youth did go to the Congo in the summer of 1890. Thanks to his 'aunt', Marguerite Poradowska's zeal and influence Conrad was able to sign in Brussels a contract to serve the New Anonymous Society for Commerce at High Congo, for three years as an officer on river steamboats. An experienced seaman Conrad had gone to the Congo in June 1890 to command the *Roi des Belges* (the King of the Belgians) for the upstream journey. This stay of Conrad in the Congo from 12 June to 4 December 1890 had a tremendous physical and moral impact on Conrad. He was almost mesmerized by the Congo as much by the country as by the river. The feeling is voiced by Marlow: 'Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of this world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings (48)'. He was also appalled by the deplorable state of the inefficiency of the Belgian Congo. He could see through the hypocrisy of the so-called 'white moral burden'. We have an account of Conrad's experience of the Congo in the *Congo Diary* and in the pages of the *Up-River Book*. We learn that, like Kurtz of the novel, he left Europe full of energy and expectations and with a civilizing mission. But, like Marlow of the novel, he returned gravely ill and severely disillusioned. However there are many autobiographical elements in *Heart of Darkness,* because Conrad's Congo experience provides the source material for the book but there is no reason to believe that Marlow's journey up the Congo corresponds exactly to Conrad's journey nor is there any perfect correspondence between Kurtz and Klein , the ailing agent of the company whom Conrad went to relieve, although the words 'kurtz' and 'klein' have semantic similarities : in German 'kurtz' and 'klein' mean 'short' and 'small' respectively. But the overall pattern of the Congo presented in *Heart of Darkness* is supported by his *Diary*.

The first story based on Conrad's Congo experiences is "An Outpost of Progress". It was first published in *Cosmopolis* in 1896. On 22 July 1896 Conrad wrote to his publisher Fisher Unwin about it saying, 'It is the story of the Congo.[…] All the bitterness of those days, all my puzzled wonder as to the meaning of all I saw – all my indignation at masquerading philanthropy – have been with me again while I wrote.'(Quoted in Bachelor, *The Life…*). Again on 31 August 1898 Conrad wrote to Blackwood that he had a story almost ready for *Blackwood's Magazine.* It was, he pointed out, a narrative after the manner of "Youth" and narrated by the same narrator, Marlow. In theme it was similar to *An Outpost for Progress* but 'a little wider'. He wrote:

> The title I am thinking of it is *'The Heart of Darkness',* but the narrator is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time distinctly – though not topically treated. It is a story as much as my *Outpost of Progress* was, but, so to speak, 'takes in' more – is a little wider and less concentrated upon individuals.

What Conrad had originally titled as "The Heart of Darkness" for the *Blackwood's Magazine* was written in about ten days' time starting sometime in mid-December. Obviously he wrote at a great speed. The manuscript of *Heart of Darkness* which is kept in the Beinecke Library, Yale, is written in pencil, and bears evidence of Conrad's assured confidence, firm grip on the narration and an excellent command of the language. The book titled 'The Heart of Darkness' was serialized in *The Blackwood's Magazine* during the period from February to April, 1899. Later in 1902 when Conrad published the story in its slightly revised version in *Youth: A Narration and Two Other Stories*, Conrad

dropped ‘The’, and changed the title to ‘Heart of Darkness’. Many critics including Cedric Watts, for example, think that the omission of ‘The’ has made the title ambiguous. It can mean both ‘the centre of a dark (sinister, evil, corrupt, malevolent, mysterious or obscure) region’ and ‘the heart which has the quality of darkness’.

Chapter Four

Detailed Critical Analysis of the Title and the Text

We have already noted that although the original title of the story, when it was serialized in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in [Feb-April] 1899, was ‘The Heart of Darkness’, later the revised version of the story was published as ‘Heart of Darkness’. In the book form also the title is *Heart of Darkness*. We have already suggested that the change or the omission of ‘The’ has enriched the novel, by making the title ambiguous. But when we look more closely at it we notice that the title is enigmatic and we shall see later, how it assumes an enormous thematic significance. To begin with, the title is not after some character, like *Tom Jones* or *Emma* and that means that it is not meant to be a character-novel. The title is not relational like *Sons and Lovers* or *The Old Man and the Sea*. It must then be thematic and as enigmatic as the theme. How can heart be attributed a kind of strategic centrality within the formless abstraction of darkness?

The two nouns in the title ‘heart’ and ‘darkness’ belong to two different categories, one concrete, and the other abstract. How can there be something concrete in an abstract thing? Again, both the words are charged with physical and moral suggestions.

Metaphorically, heart is the centre, like 'heart of the city', and thus heart of darkness would mean the centre of darkness, possibly suggesting the densest part of darkness. Metaphorically then 'heart of darkness' stands for the Belgian Congo, the darkest part of Africa. At the moral level heart is associated with what is good while darkness is associated with evil. In that case 'heart of darkness' becomes a puzzle, because of the incompatibility of heart and darkness; Darkness is also associated with ignorance. Knowledge is light; ignorance is darkness. Heart of darkness thus could possibly mean the profoundest aspect of ignorance. Furthermore, as it will be abundantly clear to us when we shall get down to the text that in the novel there is not just one kind of darkness, literal or metaphorical, but many forms of darkness. First, there is the physical darkness, the darkness of the jungle, the darkness that man cannot penetrate on account of the forest. There is another form of physical darkness, – darkness of the night after the sun goes down. The physical form of the darkness of the jungle has the metaphorical analogue in the 'night of the first ages' (69), or 'darkness of savagery', the Romans at rampage ('[…] was here yesterday) leading to wild physical abandon, or outbreak of a madhouse analogues to the infancy of the human race, and the infancy of the individual psyche or the 'unseen presence of victorious corruption'(34). The darkness of the jungle will finally be embodied in Kurtz's black woman. There is also the darkness of blindness. Many colonizers who considered themselves, as civilizers were blind to the fact that they were actually collaborating in an elaborate enterprise of deceit and exploitation. Kurtz's painting that Marlow notices succinctly sums up the darkness of blindness in the visual form. In the painting the woman who is bearing the torch is blindfolded.

Then I noticed a small sketch in oil, on a panel, representing a woman draped and

> blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the new effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister . (36)

Kurtz, originally inspired by idealism and a missionary zeal to civilize the uncivilized, to carry the 'white man's burden' obviously considered the torch as a symbol dispelling darkness. He believed that every station towards the Congo should lead to better things reflecting continuous progress. But ironically the woman representing the spirit of civilization is blindfolded. She cannot see. Thus it is the darkness of blindness. Kurtz also did not know at that stage that he was actually going to contribute to the enterprise of exploitation. We should also note that the woman is not actually blind but blindfolded. She refuses to see. But a time will come, we know, in the case of Kurtz when the bandage will fall off. His eyes will be opened and he will realize the truth evident in his last words, 'The horror! The horror!' The darkness of blindness leads to the darkness of damnation. In this context Marlow's comments are revealing:

> I have seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red–eyed devils, that swayed and drove men I tell you. But as I stood on the hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would be acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther (23).

There are two kinds of colonizers. One was blatantly greedy and violent. But there was a smaller breed of colonizers who, like Kurtz, start earnestly with a noble mission and then

gradually surrender to the temptations and human weaknesses arising out of 'rapacious and pitiless folly'.

The idea of the darkness of damnation also brings out the idea of the darkness of shade or more precisely the darkness of hell. At one point Marlow remarks, 'I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno' (24). There are so many references to hell in the novel, and such an abundance of the imagery of hell that it seems to be part of Conrad's conscious design to evoke the shades of hell or the darkness of shadow. The Africans are often described as shades, 'black shadows of disease and starvation' (24). The black shades conjure up the darkness of death in such a way that it brings in its wake almost naturally the ideas of ghosts, phantoms and even disembodied voice. Kurtz is often referred to as a 'phantom', just a 'voice' [–] 'The man presented himself as a voice' (67)] Marlow also refers to him as a 'shadow of splendid appearance' or 'like a vapour exhaled by the earth'(93) –or even as an 'animated image of death' (85). In the grove of death black shadow looks at his 'brother phantom'. Even the savage girl is described as an 'apparition' (87). The darkness of shadow is also associated with the darkness of hidden reality lurking in the unconscious of a person and the darkness of reality is spectrally apparent in the jungle: 'The forest stood up *spectrally* to the moonlight and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very *heart* – to mystery, its greatness, the *amazing reality of its concealed life* (37; emphasis added). The 'concealed life' is the 'hidden evil' (47), an appeal to 'the profound darkness of heart' (47).

With the benefit of hindsight we can now realize that the darkness of the jungle, the darkness of blindness, and the darkness of shade – all converge on the darkness of heart.

Man is unaware of his hidden primitivism, the dark forces lying hidden in the unconscious. The jungle as well as the river of the 'first ages' refers to the primitive in man. The primitive in nature is the concealed reality about which man remains blissfully ignorant till suddenly left to himself one day he is stormed by it. The title 'Heart of Darkness' therefore actually and ironically stands for the darkness of heart. The title thus is significantly enigmatic in keeping with the enigma or riddle of human existence which is governed by the conscious mind only at the surface plane of existence, but is actually controlled by the unconscious. We have already pointed out that the phrase 'heart of darkness' is ambiguous: (i) heart as the centre of a dark area, and (ii) heart made of darkness or heart which has the quality of darkness.. The content of the novel is not only amenable to both the meanings; it actually subsumes both the meanings and integrates them into Conrad's perception of human existence. He discovers that the Inferno is lying right within our heart.

… … …

Part One:

The nameless narrator whom we can take as Conrad begins the novel. It is evening time and the *Nellie*, a cruising yawl is anchored at the mouth of the Thames. A yawl is a small boat generally with four or six oars. A boat or a ship is like a small island where people on board the ship form a homogeneous community. They are bound by a common bond

of the sea. The narrator says therefore that there was 'the bond of the sea' among the five people on board the *Nellie*, which was at rest. The first paragraph sets the scene and focuses on the ship, and it gives us a hint that the novel is going to be a sea tale. It is also to be noted that the ship was at rest thus creating a congenial atmosphere for the telling of a story as a pastime.

The second paragraph describes the Thames as stretching before the people on board as a vast expanse joining the sea and the sky. The use of the word 'us' ('The Thames stretched before *us*'; emphasis added) tells us that it is going to be a first person narrative. But soon we shall see that the present narrator will introduce a character – Marlow -who will actually tell the story. Thus the present narrator may be referred only as the frame narrator or a surrogate narrator or just the nameless narrator. The blending of the sea and the sky gives a huge cosmic dimension to the scene and later we will see that is quite appropriate in respect to the universality of the novel. In other words, though the novel will ostensibly tell the experience of Marlow, the impact of Marlow's experience is meant to be universal. In the paragraph a number of words associated with light and darkness are also used: 'luminous', 'dark', 'haze', etc. The time is evening. The choice of evening as the time of telling the story is not accidental, as it will be revealed in course of the novel that what is presented as literal, physical evening at present will slowly assume metaphorical significance, when evening will refer to the twilight zone between consciousness and unconsciousness, between illusion and reality. We will also see that as in the title, so in Conrad's use of the imagery of light and the shadow, the ideas will be revealed that as 'heart of darkness' actually stands for 'darkness of heart' similarly light will be seen as blinding and darkness illuminating. In Conrad's scheme of things light

hides while darkness reveals. The huge heavenly bodies which are thousand times bigger than the sun cannot be seen in daylight. One has to wait for the sun to go down to see the whole sky suddenly filled with innumerable stars. Light in the novel will be gradually associated with illusion, consciousness, white and civilization while darkness will stand for reality, the unconscious, black and the primitive.

The narrator then introduces the crew who would be Marlow's audience. The Captain being the captain was looking seaward, probably trying to make a reconnoitre of the situation, the Lawyer was relaxing on 'the only rug', that the yawl had, and the Accountant was in a playful mood, 'toying architecturally with the bones'. Then the focus is shifted to Marlow. The fact that the narrator comes to Marlow at the end after summarily describing the other crew shows the importance he wants to extend to Marlow. The posture of Marlow is described in some detail.

> Marlow sat cross-legged right aft leaning against the mizzen – mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. (6)

The posture of Marlow as presented is in sharp contrast to the pictures of the other crew. While others are in a relaxed mood, Marlow is sitting with a 'straight back'. One should also note the point with which the description begins – Marlow sat 'cross-legged'. Surely, 'cross –legged' is not a normal Western posture; it is Eastern. Marlow must have got the posture from his voyages into the Eastern world. The cross – legged posture, furthermore, is a posture of meditation. This is confirmed by the narrator's use of the phrase '*ascetic* aspect' (6; emphasis added). With his 'palms of hands outward' the picture of meditative posture is further developed to lead the narrator to conclude, 'he

resembled an idol'. What idol he actually resembled will be clear when we come to the end of the book, to the last paragraph, in fact, when, after Marlow's tale is over, the narrator will comment that Marlow sat apart 'in the pose of a meditating Buddha' (111). Even at the initial stage, however, we are given enough hints that Marlow is the meditative type.

'The day was ending', the narrator says and that suggests the advent of the night,. the time of darkness in course of which Marlow will tell his illuminating tale. The passage of the evening gradually melting in the night is described in poetical terms:. [at] last in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red, without rays and without heat, as if to go out suddenly, *stricken to death by the touch of the gloom* over a crowd of men'(6; emphasis added). It is not for nothing that Conrad describes the advance of the night in such detail. It has already been said that the novel abounds in patterned use of symbolic imagery of light and shade. If the sun is stricken to death by the touch of the gloom it will only mean proleptically that in course of the novel the strappings of the society, the vestiges of culture will fall to pieces at the touch of the forces of darkness. The wilderness will tap on Kurtz's head and will find him hollow within. Fresleven, a civilized gentleman, will lose his life over a quarrel about a couple of black hen. Furthermore, as the idea of Buddha implied in the description of Marlow's posture in the beginning will be made explicit at the end, similarly the evening in which the story is told will be replaced by another evening in another town in Brussels in Belgium when Marlow will meet Kurtz's Intended and tell a lie about the last words of Kurtz. It can be seen, therefore, that from the very beginning Conrad prepares for a story that will be neatly encapsulated between two evenings. The 'ascetic aspect in the

beginning and the meditating Buddha at the end will only reinforce the antithetical balance between the first evening when the story is told and the last when the story ends. The reader will also see how the device of reversal which is noticed in the title, will also be used in the end, and Marlow who detests lie will consciously tell a lie.

Another reason for describing the landscape in such detail is that it is the landscape both during the journey and at the Congo which will play a significant role in the development of the theme, through Marlow's experience of the entire journey from Brussels to the Congo and back.

The narrator then tells us that forthwith 'a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant and more profound' (6). Serenity is a precondition of profundity and the truth of the statement is borne out by the profound thoughts that now occur to the narrator. As he looks on the Thames the whole past is conjured up in his vision. He thinks of the good services done to the race by those who peopled it, built habitations and made voyages to the distant lands in the distant parts. To a seaman, the narrator says in partial justification of his rumination, that nothing is easier than 'to evoke the great spirit of the past', as his mind is crowded with memories of the adventurers and explorers down the ages who had journeyed on the Thames, for different motives though:

> *Hunters for gold,* or *pursuers of fame,* they all had gone out on that stream *bearing the sword,* and often *the torch,* messengers of might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness has not floated on the ebb of that river into *the mystery of an unknown* earth! … *The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires*(7; emphasis added).

The first categories of voyagers – 'hunters for gold' and 'pursuers of fame' – imply unambiguous categories. But they are not as simple as it appears. 'The hunters for gold' carried the sword to loot the natives of a foreign land but Conrad adds, glibly, 'often the torch', 'spark from the sacred fire'. Already very cleverly but almost imperceptibly Conrad has introduced one of his major themes in the novel – violence and hypocrisy. This combination of violence and the façade of the torchbearer will later emerge as the essential features of the 'dreams of men', the 'seeds of commonwealth, the germs of empire'. All these dreams, commonwealth and empires, as Marlow will reveal in course of the story, are marked by violence and hypocrisy. The meditations of the narrator prepare the ground for Marlow's tale.

Then the sun set. The 'dusk fell on the stream and lights began to appear along the shore'(7). But while the dusk is genuinely natural, the lights are artificial. By the end of the paragraph the narrator refers to the '*monstrous* town' (emphasis added) marked '*ominously* on the sky' (emphasis added), 'a *brooding* gloom in sunshine'(emphasis added), a lurid glare under the sky. The town referred to is London, discerned at a distance, but the use of adjectives -'monstrous', 'ominous' and 'brooding gloom'- reveals indirectly the narrator's attitude to the city of London or, by extension, the civilized world in general.

So, now the stage is all set for Marlow to take over. The observations on the Thames flowing down not only physically from the past uninterrupted, but also flowing down from the past to the present in the memory of the narrator, create an atmosphere of introspection bringing the past and the present into a continuous, though dynamic, relationship. We will see how throughout the novel the past is often brought into a

relationship with the present through shifting time scales, and the use of the frame narrator to highlight the timeless and universal nature of the problem that Marlow will be trying to bring home to his auditors. The very atmosphere that is most congenial to Marlow to give vent to his thoughts has already been created.

> 'And *this also*,' Marlow said *suddenly*, 'has been one of the *dark* places of the earth' (7 emphasis added).

The most important word in the sentence is 'also', a word that suggests that Marlow had been brooding on some other 'dark place'. Then suddenly it dawns in him that London, the most civilized country of the world at the time, or even England for that matter, was also a 'dark' place. What does the 'also' refer to? There is an element of suspense here, a suspense that will be soon be over when Marlow will begin to tell about the experience of his journey to the Congo. Then it will be clear to us that the other place implied in 'also' is Africa, the dark continent. The word 'suddenly' is also important, because it indicates that the likeness strikes him all of a sudden. It comes as a sudden revelation. Marlow has already suggested a historical parallel between England of the past and some other country. The narrator intercedes and begins to comment on the difference between Marlow and other seamen. 'He did not represent his class' (8). He was a seaman no doubt, but he was also a wanderer while other seamen led a sedentary life. They may take a casual stroll or a casual spree on the shore after the work and that is all. But for Marlow, the 'changing immensity of life' was veiled in mystery and he was interested in unraveling the mystery as much as he could. So, the other seamen's tales were simple and direct, the sole meaning of the tale lying 'within the shell of a cracked nut' (8). In other

words, in an ordinary seaman's tale the form was separable from the content as the kernel can be separated from the nut. But Marlow's narrative was of a different kind altogether.

It should be borne in mind that we have not been told what is the other country that England parallels. Instead, the narrator prepares us for a new kind of seaman's tale, -- Marlow's tale which is radically different from an ordinary seaman's yarn. We will later learn the rationale of the difference, but for the time being let us see how the narrator tries to describe Marlow's narrative strategy. He says:

> To him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a *glow* brings out a *haze*, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made *visible* by the *spectral illumination* of the *moonshine*.(8; emphasis added)

The statement fairly neatly sums up Marlow's (Conrad's) narrative technique. The narrative, for Marlow, is only the smaller inside sphere that reveals a huge circumambient universe of meanings. Furthermore, these meanings are not normally visible and one cannot see them unless one associates them with the story just as the haze appears only when there is a glow. As in a flame and a halo, the flame is finite and measurable but the halo expands to the infinite and remains immeasurable, similarly the geometric nature of the haze, the outer sphere of the larger meaning that is theoretically infinite and intangible blends with the finite, the glow. The haze can no more be separated from the glow than a dancer can be separated from the dance. We have already said that *Heart of Darkness* abounds in the light imagery and even in the description of Marlow's narrative style all the italicized words belong to the register of light. We will presently see how the references to light, fog, illumination, etc. relate Marlow's narration to Impressionism and

Symbolism. For the Impressionists the most important character in a painting was light where fog would stand for myriad impressions. And for the Symbolists it is the inner light of spirit that illuminates a part of the surrounding darkness. Marlow's narration employs both the impressionistic and the symbolist modes. But before we proceed further let us stop and ponder: why not simple, direct narration? Why the use of impressionism and symbolism? The reason is, as it will be abundantly clear when we come to the end of the novel, that life is such a huge affair that it can never be neatly summed up in a mathematical formula. Virginia Woolf wrote in "Modern Fiction"(1916): 'Life is not a series of gig lamp symmetrically arranged […] life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'. In order to capture life, therefore, with all its immensity, complexity and inscrutability one has to take recourse to symbols. Conrad wrote to Barret Clark.. in 1918:

> A work of art is very seldom limited to one conclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this is for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character […] all the great creations of literature have been symbolic and in that way we have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty.
>
> (In Aubrey, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*. Vol.2)

Virginia Woolf's basic metaphor is the 'luminous halo', a distinct and not very distant echo of Conrad's 'misty halo' like a glow bringing out the haze. The novel must penetrate the semi-transparent envelope of the world. The approach of both Conrad and Woolf is impressionistic. But instead of the external light which was the most important character of the impressionistic painting Conrad's interest is in the inner light – the real

light is insight – that illuminates the surrounding darkness. The emphasis on the inner light naturally implies the primacy of the private individual vision. Starting with Claude Monet's 'The Sun Rising: An Impression' (*Le soleil levant, un impression)* the impressionists tried to present their vision of an object under particular conditions. What was important is not what everybody saw but, in the language of Ian Watt, 'ephemeral indefiniteness of private experience – what the individual sees'. Marlow's tale is Marlow's individual vision of the colonial enterprise, a public event visible to everybody. But Marlow does not just present the appearances: he tries to present it as he perceives it—the inner reality which 'lies hidden'. In the conclusion to *The Renaissance* Pater pointed out how 'each mind [keeps] as a solitary prisoner its own dreams of the world', which enables him to experience directly 'the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, memories' etc. But to present the private vision in its concrete individuality impressionism is not enough. The ideas that belong to the inner world of consciousness, the vision which is individual and elusive to the public gaze can be presented only through symbols. The kind of experience or the vision arising out of the experience cannot be stated, because it is actually incommunicable. Any attempt to state it will inevitably lead to forfeiture, to the exclusion of many essentials. So an incommunicable vision cannot be stated: it can only be suggested. It can be impressed upon the consciousness of the audience only in the shape of symbols, which, like the haze surrounding the glow can evoke infinite suggestions. Yeats rightly described symbol as 'the only possible expression of some individual essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame'. Yeats's metaphor of the lamp and the flame for the personal and private way in which the object and the meaning come together also harks back to and reaffirms

Conrad's metaphor of the two spheres. We shall see gradually how in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad fuses Impressionism and Symbolism in a symbiotic relationship.

But before we proceed further let us first try to understand what the word 'symbol' means. The word, derived from Greek 'symballein' or French 'symboler' (to throw together), indicates a similarity between the sign and the signified.' A symbol is a sign of something other than the idea or the object it literally or scientifically denotes. Symbolism has been defined as 'the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another'. A symbol thus suggests another level of meaning related to the spirit of the inner being of man or the mysteries of life, etc. According to Whitehead, the aim of symbolism is 'the enhancement of the importance of what it symbolizes'.

Now, coming back to the way the nameless narrator calls attention to the distinctive nature of Marlow's narration It implies that while an ordinary seaman's story is centripetal leading to the central core of the story, the kernel, Marlow's narration on the other hand, is centrifugal. The narrative vehicle is the inner sphere, the glow, and its function is to reveal a continuously widening circle of a circumambient universe of suggested meanings which can be visible or perceived only in association with the story. As the haze does not appear without the glow, and cannot be seen without the glow, similarly the infinite meanings can be apprehended only in relation with the story, as they are suggested by the story in other words.

After preparing us for the peculiar nature of Marlow's tale the narrator tells us that Marlow's remark ['And this also… has been one of the dark places of the earth'] was 'accepted in silence'. The comment indicates that the other seamen had genuine respect

for Marlow and the ‘silence’ also prepares the right atmosphere for the story, which the listeners expect to be of a profound nature. Then Marlow said, ‘very slow’ (8). The word ‘slow’ suggests Marlow’s rumination, the way he was organizing his thought and the profound nature of the experience he was going to narrate. As Marlow begins to narrate we learn what was meant by ‘this also’, the deferred meaning is now clear. Marlow is thinking of the Romans of ancient times, of some two thousand years ago, who came to England nineteen hundred years ago—‘the other day’. Marlow began his narrative by saying that he was ‘thinking of very old times’ but now he says ‘the other day’. Already Marlow has placed the Roman invasion in the backdrop of history. So while historically it was a long time ago, ‘very old times’ (8) it also appears as ‘the other day’ (8). The juxtaposition of presenting a period of ‘nineteen hundred years ago’ as ‘very old times’ and as ‘the other day’ shows that in the context of infinity or even the history of human civilization the period of nineteen hundred years is nothing but ‘the other day’. A whole period of history becomes just a mammoth moment, at best, a day when seen in the context of Time. The remarks also suggest very strongly the timelessness of the historical parallel between the present day Africa and the past of England. It also suggests that human nature has not changed over the years. Whether it is the Romans or the British all are guided by their latent desires, by the primitive in them. It should also be noted that Marlow’s narrative is not only slow but is also often punctuated by dots and dashes. All the dots and dashes indicate that the movement of Marlow’s thought is slow; he is thinking as he is narrating. His vision is taking shape as he narrates. The experience of the journey to the Congo is a historic event bound by definite space and time, but his interpretation of that experience is simultaneous and co-terminus with the shaping of his

vision. The narrative becomes dialogic as Marlow interacts with his silent listeners on his presumption of their relation to his statements. He agrees ('Yes:') but at once disagrees and lifts the question to a philosophic level. "Light came out of this river since—you say knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds" (8). And then, as if to justify his observation, , he raises the issue to a philosophical level. "We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling!(8). The revelations come only momentarily as a lightning flash, but darkness is all-pervasive. Then with a sudden shift in the time scale the narration moves back from the present to the past as Marlow takes us back in history to the period when the Romans came to England. The focus is now on the Romans of yore, the difficult situation in which the Romans were placed away from home and hearth in a place where there was nothing to eat, let alone the amenities of civilization. So, '[the] utter savagery had closed round ['the decent citizen in toga'], -all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men." He had experienced the fascination of the abomination', an experience that Kurtz will also share later in the novel and fall victim to. Marlow 'paused'. We have already pointed out that pauses and – both actual, physical silence or silence suggested by the means of punctuation, -- commas, dashes, colons and semicolons, and incomplete utterances—are integral to the story. As functional elements and narrative devices these silences not only give a sense of spontaneity and instantaneity to Marlow's utterances but also captivate the reader's attention, hold him in suspense and point to the philosophical profundity of the nature of the vision Marlow is trying to communicate. We shall discuss these aspects in much greater detail later when we take up Conrad's narrative technique separately The words

‘he paused’, said by the narrator, suddenly brings us back to the present, to the board, the *Nellie,* on which Marlow is telling the story to the other seaman. In course of the novel and shifting of the time scale , from the past to the present, and again from the present to the past, is not only meant to make a text develop but more importantly , to give a dimension of timelessness to the story. As the narrator resumes Marlow’s tale he once more makes us aware of Marlow’s Buddhist posture. ‘Lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower’.(10). Earlier it was stated that Marlow’s posture resembled an idol and now the idol is named – it is Buddha, the enlightened one. The reinforcement of the image of Buddha in relation to Marlow suggests that what we are going to hear is a story of enlightenment—an enlightenment that comes from within and not from without.

Then Marlow makes a remark that is worth noting. He says, ‘Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this’ (10). Why does Marlow say this? He says it because he wants to make a distinction between simple looting and looting under the ‘philanthropic pretence’ of the colonial enterprise. He points out that they ‘grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind’ (10), and then he adds, ‘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’(10). It is an act of looting, an expression of man’s innate greed and violence. So when Marlow says, “none of us would feel exactly like this’, he is suggesting a difference between invasion for looting and colonialism. That is why he says, ‘What redeems it is

the idea only' (10) or 'what saves us is efficiency' or devotion to efficiency' (10). Gradually it will be revealed that there is an essential difference between invasion for looting and colonization for civilizing the uncivilized. What happens to be the 'white man's burden' is nothing but an excuse for looting. Both the invaders and the colonizers loot, but while the invader loots without an alibi, the colonizers loot under the garb of the 'white man's burden'. The novel would make it unequivocally clear that the main purpose of colonialism is also to rob those 'who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses'. Marlow's enlightenment would consist partly in seeing through the hypocrisy and then colonialism would appear as the elaborate enterprise of exploitation – biological, moral, and cultural. Marlow will also experience in course of his journey that the much talked about efficiency is conspicuously absent in the working of colonialism. So, when Marlow says that 'what redeems us is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to…'(10), he says it only ironically, although the irony is not evident at this stage.

Marlow then breaks off. He has already let loose a number of narrative threads and different ideas. He, therefore, needs time to make his listeners comprehend and absorb those ideas. That he has already been successful in rousing the interest of his listeners by rousing their curiosity through his successful and thought-provoking introduction is clear from the recorded reaction of his listeners : 'We looked on, waiting patiently'. They are eager to hear what Marlow has further to say but Marlow resumes his narration 'only after a long silence'. The long silence is possibly due to the fact Marlow was trying to organize the memory of his journey, his experience of the Congo to be able to verbalize

it. Then Marlow said in a 'hesitating voice' that his listeners were aware that he was once a 'fresh-water sailor for a bit' .Why this hesitation or hesitating voice? One possible explanation is he was not sure whether the stuff would be suitable for his listeners. The other possibility is that he was not sure whether he would be able to communicate an experience, which was, to him, incommunicable. Such ambiguities abound in the novel, but the important point about these ambiguities is that they are, to use an oxymoron, unambiguously ambiguous. The fact that the listeners would not either fully appreciate the story or understand the import is expressed in the word 'fated' in 'we know we are fated […] to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences' (10). Marlow's listeners, the ordinary seamen as they are, do not quite enjoy an inconclusive experience. The comment also proleptically anticipates and prepares the readers for the lack of closure to the story, which will again leave the story ambiguous and open-ended. But Marlow's story has to be inconclusive, because, as Marlow would say later, 'it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence […]'(39). Life is such a huge, complex affair that it can never be summed up neatly in a mathematical formula. The turn of the nineteenth century philosophers like F.H.Bradley, T.E.Hulme, and William James *et al* have already established the fact that uncertainty is the only certainty in life. One can be certain only about uncertainties. What is often presented as the happy denouément – the marriage of the lovers after trials and tribulations – as a solution so that 'they lived happily thereafter', may actually turn out ,in life, to be the beginning of the problem. The apparent solution can be worse than the real problem. So the narratives – particularly the kind of narrative that Marlow is going to tell is found to be 'inconclusive'. After hearing the tale we can draw our own inferences but

there can be no guarantee that the inferences are right. Guided by individual passions and prejudices different people will draw different inferences, and so, in the process, the tale is bound to remain 'inconclusive'.

Marlow assures at the very outset that he is not going to bother them with what happened to him personally. The assurance is also meant for the readers. It is not his experience but the effect of that experience on him that is important. So the narrator of the experience is narrating only to make the listeners understand, as far as possible, the effect of the experience which 'seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about' him and into his thoughts. He further adds: 'It was sombre enough too, -- and pitiful – and not extraordinary in any way – not very clear either'. Mark the use of the dashes or pauses adding weight to the adjectives (sombre, pitiful, extraordinary, clear) that are used after deliberate and searching understanding of the various aspects of the experience. We are given a foretaste of the kind of tale we are going to hear – sombre, pitiful, and not extraordinary, and not very clear. But the particular point he wants to emphasize is the lack of clarity: 'No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light.' The statement again harks back to, and reinforces, the idea of the 'misty halo'. The mist is also evident in the words 'seemed' and *some* (in 'some kind of light'). Obviously nothing is definitely stated but something, though ambiguous, is eloquently suggested. Thus we are given a glimpse – again 'not very clear' – about the nature of the effect of Marlow's experience on him. Marlow's narration, then, is meant to shed some light on his experience that he expects to share with his listeners.

The narration has already been taken over by Marlow, and from now on we shall hear Marlow more than the nameless narrator although the nameless narrator will intrude from

time to time to remind us that the story is being narrated in the present, on board the *Nellie,* anchored at the mouth of the Thames. This will only bring the past into a dynamic relationship with the present but also will relieve the monotony of a continuous tale and make it dialogic. Marlow begins his story in the fairly recent past—exact period is left uncertain, like so many uncertainties used in the novel. After doing a lot of the Eastern seas for about six years, he spent his resting time in teasing his sea men friends. He says: "I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got *a heavenly mission to civilize you*" (11 emphasis added). Even the casual, playful remark, when seen in the colonial context of the novel, sums up in a way what the colonizers were doing in the colonies. They set upon themselves the sacred task, the 'heavenly mission' to civilize the colonized. The remarks, though casually made to his friends, show how deeply ingrained the colonial experience has been for Marlow. The note of irony in 'heavenly mission' is unmistakable.

Tired of resting, Marlow began to look for a ship but could not get any. At this point without proceeding further in the linear narration Marlow goes back to his childhood and tells about his early passion for maps: 'Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps' (11). He says that at that time there were many 'blank spaces on the earth' and 'there was one yet – the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after', and he had said, 'When I grow up I will go there'. In keeping with the suspenseful nature of the narrative the name of the place is not mentioned at this stage. Even in the next paragraph when Marlow returns to the present he does not name the mighty river that resembled 'an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land' (12), and the

snake fascinated him, charmed him. Although Marlow does not name the river or the country we know from Conrad's *Congo Diary* and from his biography that the river is the Congo and the place is the Belgian Congo, which is now known as Zaire. The snake is associated with evil, with deceit and crookedness. The Congo rising in Africa and going down to the Mediterranean is a mighty snake, enormous and deceitful. The entire journey of Marlow up the Congo is not only a hazardous and difficult upstream journey but also a journey full of evidences of deceit and crookedness of the colonizers. Conrad deliberately refrains from naming the place and the river because he is not so much concerned with what happened in a particular place at a particular situation or at a particular time, as with the universality of the theme. Man being essentially primitive, what happens in the Congo can happen to any place where a man is free from any external control. What happens to Kurtz, it is implied, can happen to any civilized man placed in an uncivilized society when the trappings of the society are removed, if he lacks inner strength..

Marlow learnt that there was a continental concern, a trading company that operated there. His relatives in the continent tried to dissuade him but he was determined to 'get there by hook or by crook' (12). He tried with men and when they failed he set the women at work. He had an aunt, 'a dear enthusiastic soul'(12) who wrote to 'the wife of a very high personage in the Administration'(12) with a lot of influence and finally got Marlow the appointment to the post fallen vacant on account of the death of one Fresleven, a Dane who had been 'killed in a scuffle with the natives'(13). We shall come to Fresleven later, but before that we should note that 'the aunt' is the first woman we meet in the novel. We shall meet a few more women of different sorts in course of the novel. Actions are louder than words. That the aunt is 'a dear enthusiastic soul' is borne

out by the fact that she had written to the wife of a high dignitary and a lot of people strongly recommending Marlow as an 'exceptional and gifted creature' (17). With a few strokes of the brush the aunt is brought to life. We can clearly visualize the typical Victorian lady with a lot of just and good intentions. The wife of the dignitary also exerted her influence in getting Marlow the job. Conrad's treatment of these two women also offer a glimpse of the role and influence of women in the nineteenth century continental society. It does not seem to be much different from the high society women of the Victorian period in England.. We shall meet this aunt again when Marlow goes to visit her before his departure. The meeting will reveal some other aspects of the nineteenth century high society women.

Anyway, Marlow got his appointment. He says, 'I got my appointment – of course' (13). The dash after 'appointment' followed by 'of course' is another emphatic reaffirmation of the influence of high society women in the society. 'Of course' suggests that once he had set the women at work he was sure to get the job. The statement gives a lie to the widely prevalent notion that a woman in the Victorian period was just 'an angel in the house'. Marlow's statement falsifies the notion at least to the extent that that the so-called 'angel in the house' wielded great power, though indirectly, in the society. But at the same time, the effectiveness of the influence also shows that chivalry was still a dominant force in the society. The 'high dignitary' got Marlow the appointment because he wanted to be chivalrous to Marlow's aunt whose recommendation for Marlow came through his wife.

The fact that Marlow got the appointment rather quickly is of course a different matter. A post suddenly fell vacant when one of the captains of the Company 'had been

killed in a scuffle with the natives' (13). The circumstances that led to Marlow's early appointment are significant in the context of the theme of the novel: Marlow's perception of the colonial experience. The man who died was a Dane named Fresleven, and Marlow says that Fresleven was 'the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs' (13). It was about a couple of years that he had been at the post there serving 'the noble cause' of civilizing the uncivilized. But, then, how did he die? We are told that he died on account of a quarrel he had picked up with the natives, over a couple of black hens. One wonders how could such a man like Fresleven, 'the gentlest, quietest creature', quarrel with the natives, and that, too, over a petty matter like 'two black hens'! Herein lies the key to Marlow's perception of the human nature, which is essentially primitive. Even just two years' stay away from civilization and the trapping of the civilized society the primitive in him came out. The 'gentlest, quietest creature' quarreled with the natives, beat up the chief of the village with a stick. In other words, he succumbed to the forces of darkness, the darkness of heart lying hidden within. The son of the village chief whom Fresleven had been beating mercilessly responded to the desperate yell of his father and 'made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man' and Fresleven died on the spot. The episode also brings to light the superstitious nature of the natives. They thought that now that a white man – a lord, if not a god for them – has been killed by a native, a great sin has been committed and therefore a great calamity would fall on them. So, leaving Freshener's body uncared for they first 'cleared into the forest' and then deserted the village. Marlow comments, 'Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned.'(14). Later when Marlow would visit the place he would see that 'the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his

bones' (13). A bizarre kind of funeral, in fact. Marlow quickly shifts back to the present and says in an ironical tone which assumes the tone of a banter: "What became of the hens I don't know either. I should think the *cause of progress* got them, anyhow (14; emphasis added). In a sarcastic tone then he refers to the circumstances leading to his appointment as a 'glorious affair'. He 'stepped into his (Fresleven's) shoes' (13). The introduction of Fresleven introduces the idea of death in the novel and throughout the novel we shall find the idea of death scattered through various images. The description of the city of Brussels (not named though) as 'a whited sepulchre' (14) reinforces the idea of death introduced in the Fresleven episode.

The narration again becomes linear as Marlow describes how he made to get ready; he crossed the English Channel and in a few hours arrived at the city which he describes as a 'whited sepulchre'. The city, we know, is Brussels, the capital of Belgium, but it should be noted that Marlow does not name it for the same reason that prevents him to name earlier the river Congo or the place, the Belgian Congo. In the city he learnt that it was a big company that was "going to run an over-sea empire, and make *no end of coin by trade*' (14 emphasis added). The subtle suggestion that will be gradually developed in course of the novel is that the main purpose of an empire is to make money whatever may be the ostensible reason offered.

Marlow's description of the city as he goes to meet his employees is presented in a manner that substantiates the idea of a 'whited sepulchre' or a dead city. The sentence does not have any verb or predicate but consists only of the objects seen through the eyes of Marlow: 'A narrow and *deserted* street in deep *shadow*, high houses, innumerable windows with Venetian blinds, a *dead silence*, *grass sprouting beneath the stones*,

imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar.'(14 emphasis added). The deserted street at once harks back to the deserted village of the Fresleven episode; 'dead silence' is already associated with death, and the 'grass sprouting between the stones' startlingly reminds us of 'the grass sprouting through the ribs of Fresleven'. The idea of death is further reinforced as Marlow enters the room: 'Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on a straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool' (14). At this stage the women are very briefly described only just as 'fat' and 'slim' but just after some time Marlow would say shifting the time scale briefly, "Often far 'away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall. ..] (16). The idea of death looms large in the background of the story and Marlow's journey to the Belgian Congo has been likened to a journey to hell. The two women knitting *black wool,* one having 'the dress as plain as an umbrella-cover' (the word 'umbrella' is derived from Latin 'umbra' which means shade) and looking 'uncanny and fearful' create the uncanny atmosphere associated with death and hell. Marlow feels that 'there was something ominous in the atmosphere' (15). That the sight of somebody knitting black wool had a serious effect on Marlow as something ominous is evident from the fact in course of less than two pages the knitting of black wool is referred to no less than four times. Marlow says that very few people who looked at the woman knitting black wool had ever returned. So he says, '*Morituri te salutant'*(Those who are about to die salute you). From now on these knitting women will haunt Marlow's memory and towards the end of the novel during his encounter with Kurtz he would admit, 'The knitting woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory […](9]). It has been suggested that these two women knitting black wool allude to the Greek idea of

the three sisters sitting at a spinning wheel and controlling the fate of man. They are Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Clotho had the distaff; Lachesis drew off the threads; and Atropos cut it short. Thus the knitting women, like the three Greek sisters at the spinning wheel were the makers of the destiny of the people going to the Congo. We also get the pictures of knitting women in literature in as different cases as Penelope, Madame Defarge and the Lady of Shalott. However, what is important here is that through this interview episode Marlow prepares us for the dangers with which the journey is fraught and the hellish nature of the colonial venture. Marlow also had a feeling that he 'had been let into some conspiracy' (15).

The visit to the doctor, that is about to follow, is in keeping with the general atmosphere of eeriness that has already been created by the women knitting black wool. The young chap – a clerk, was to take Marlow to the doctor. But as he was a little too early for the doctor, Marlow proposed a drink to the clerk who was 'shabby and careless with ink-stains on his jacket' (16). The man glorified the Company's business, but when asked why he did not go out there he quoted Plato: 'I am not such a fool as I look'. The clerk was obviously a hypocrite, or was trying to keep Marlow in good cheer. Even during this short encounter with the clerk Marlow does not fail to harp on the theme of death. 'The house was as still as a house in the city of the dead' (16). The 'city of the dead' reinforces the idea of 'whited sepulchre' during his visit to the doctor who was also something of an 'alienist' or some kind of a psychiatrist. The doctor wanted to know in a 'matter-of-fact tone' whether there was any madness in the family. The doctor who was supposed to simply clinically examine Marlow's physical fitness asks this question because he believes that it was insane to go to the Congo and those who decide to go

there must be insane. The doctor expressed his surprise to see that Marlow was the first Englishman he had examined, implying thereby that he must be an abnormal Englishman. But Marlow assured him at once that he was 'not in the least typical', and in justification of his claim he said, 'If I were[…] I wouldn't be talking like this with you' (17). But the doctor is not convinced; he considers it 'probably erroneous' and without entering into any argument advises him to avoid 'irritation more than the exposure to the sun' (17). This advice is interesting and deserves some consideration. Normally it is believed that for an Englishman coming from a cold country an exposure to the sun could be both painful and harmful. But the doctor advises him to avoid irritation and to keep calm. Irritation is more dangerous than exposure to the sun, because the hot sun may be physically painful for a man coming from a cold country, but irritation brings out dark forces lying hidden in the mind. Once irritated the man loses control on his mind and falls a prey to the primitive elements in him. This is what happened to Fresleven. It is his irritation occasioned by the quarrel over two black hens that eventually let loose the primitive in him and finally caused his death. The moment one is irritated the superstructure of civilization begins to collapse. So, the final warning of the doctor: '*Du calme, du calme, Adieu*' (17).

Next Marlow visits his aunt to say good-bye to her. We have already learnt how Marlow got his appointment through the influence of his aunt, the 'dear, enthusiastic soul' (14). The farewell visit sheds more light on the aunt and in the process gives us an idea of Marlow's (or Conrad's, whose mouthpiece, to a great extent, is Marlow) attitude to women. The first thing Marlow says is: 'I found her triumphant'. She was triumphant because in the first place she was successful in fulfilling her mission of getting Marlow

the job, the job that he wanted. But, more importantly, her success proved her influence in the society. She is triumphant because her influence has been confirmed. In the earlier reference to the aunt she was described as ‘dear’ and ‘enthusiastic’. Her enthusiasm is already established by fact; she has been able to carry her enthusiasm into effect. That she is affectionate is evident in her solicitations for Marlow—‘wear flannel, be sure to write often and so on’. But all these things are peripheral. What is central to the novel is the aunt’s attitude to colonialism. For her it was a glorious thing to be a worker in the Company, something ‘like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle’ (20). The aunt has no idea of the reality. She was a prisoner of illusion and official propaganda. Marlow says: ‘There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time’(20) and the lady living in the thick of all this propaganda lost touch with reality, and therefore talked about weaning these ignorant millions from their horrid ways. To her Marlow’s mission was to enlighten the savages in the Congo. That was the ‘white man’s burden’, that was the white man’s moral responsibility, We will see later that Kurtz also started with the same illusion but was soon dashed to reality. But Marlow from the beginning is free from such illusion. So he feels uncomfortable. In fact, he tried to hint that the Company was run for profit. But the hint went unheeded and Marlow wonders:

> It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset.(20)

And by drawing a distinction between men and women Marlow further comments:

> Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.(20)

The aunt, Marlow asserts, represents hundreds of women who were so protected from the 'confounded fact' which would otherwise destroy the beautiful world of illusion. It is this idea that would compel Marlow to tell a lie to Kurtz's Intended about the last words of Kurtz, because she desperately needed something 'to live with' (110).

Marlow's comments like this have led many critics to believe that Conrad's attitude to women is typically Victorian, that a woman meant the frail and fragile, beautiful, tender, sophisticated 'angel of the house', confined to illusion. But such a generalization would be erroneous and misleading. We have already met the women – one old and fat and the other young and slim, the women knitting black wool, and. Marlow's description of their actions and behaviour makes it abundantly clear that they are no creatures of illusion. They understand all the implications of the business of imperial trade and colonization. Marlow, however, attributes them a status, which as we have already seen, is analogous to the Greek Fates who keep on spinning outside the gates of Hades. In other words, the ambivalence which characterizes the entire novel as well as Conrad's treatment of colonialism also characterizes his treatment of women. Conrad achieves this ambivalence by largely 'dehumanizing' the woman knitting black wool, so that we no longer look upon them as women but as strange creatures, uncannily guarding the door of darkness or Hell. We shall discuss these matters at length when we consider all the women characters in the novel together from various perspectives. We shall also see the roles that Conrad's women play in the context of Western imperialist values and practices.

One observation of Marlow that he makes about his feeling after he came out of his aunt's house often passes unnoticed. But it is of great significance. Marlow tells the seamen that he, a kind of man who could sail off to any part of the world on twenty-four hours' notice, had unexpectedly and suddenly had a moment of 'startled pause'. He says: 'The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth.'(28). It is a large hint that the journey to the Congo is going to be a journey to the centre of the earth, journey to hell. Though the knowledge comes in the form of a sudden epiphany, the experience of the journey will give an iron confirmation to it.

Marlow thus describes his experience of the journey in a French steamer from Brussels (although Marlow does not name it: it is described as 'sepulchral', 'city of the dead' etc.) to the mouth of the Congo (again the river is not deliberately named: it is just mentioned as 'the big river'). The steamer stops almost at every port mainly for landing soldiers and customhouse affairs. Marlow is impressed by the sameness of the jungle landscape and to him the coast appears as a mystery, 'an enigma' (19), always 'mute with an air of whispering'. The description of the jungle landscape, as 'smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering' (19) is significant in the context of the symbolic significance with which the jungle will be used in the novel. The jungle, as we have already noticed, represents a particular form of darkness, the darkness of the primitive, or, the unconscious. The word 'whispering' is of particular significance because Marlow gives human attributes to the jungle and the word with its sinister association will be recurrently used in the novel most significantly in relation to Kurtz: 'But the wilderness had found him 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' (83 emphasis added). In Marlow's first experience of the jungle even from a distance he becomes aware of the 'air of whisper', a kind of mysteriousness, 'an enigma' which is fascinating. The whisper seems to say 'Come and find out', and that is exactly what Marlow would be eventually doing in course of his journey to the Congo and his encounter with Kurtz. The importance of the passage, therefore, lies in giving us an early hint of the symbolic significance of the jungle landscape – a significance that will assume increasingly huge proportion as we plod through the novel. Another highlight of the journey is Marlow's occasional though 'momentary' contact with reality when the paddling black fellows come to his view. Like the jungle, this is also Marlow's first experience of the natives in action. The description is appreciative and does not contain any touch of hatred or disgust that we generally find in the attitude of the white 'civilized' man to the 'uncivilized' black. The blacks, as Marlow sees them, are full of vitality. 'They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration[…] they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast[. …]. They were a great comfort to look at' (20 emphasis added). Marlow is vividly impressed by the 'black fellows' and the impression – that they are natural and true – will also be the last impression of Marlow. Thus in the contrast between the white and the black Marlow's sympathy with the black is suggested quite early in the novel. Marlow's tale will gradually reveal that the one main point of contrast between the white and the black is that the white are artificial and false while the black are 'natural and true'. The

assessment has a solid foundation on the relation between the conscious plane of existence and the unconscious, between the civilized and the primitive. The black men representing the primitive are natural and true as the primitive is natural and true. Civilization is only an artificial superstructure imposed on the primitive. Much later, towards the end of the novel Marlow would describe the black tribal woman of Kurtz as 'savage and superb' (87).

The picture of the black fellows of bursting vitality is immediately followed by a picture of civilized savagery. Marlow comes upon a French steamer anchored off the coast, and though 'there wasn't even a shade there' the gunboat continuously fired shells in the jungle: 'In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was incomprehensible, firing into a continent' (20). But nothing happened, because nothing could really happen in that emptiness. Marlow then comments: 'There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight'(20). Somebody tries to convince Marlow in vain that there were some natives hidden somewhere. Marlow is not convinced and he is surprised if not shocked when these supposedly hidden natives are described as 'enemies'.

To Marlow, this short experience of the journey from Brussels to the mouth of the Congo lets loose a number of narrative threads and most of the important ideas that constitute the ideational matrix of the novel. It is here that the mysterious and, therefore, fascinating, nature of the jungle is introduced. It is here again that the natives are introduced as 'natural and true' while the cruel and uncivilized nature of the white man is also brought under sharp focus through the incident of their mercilessly shelling the jungle with the intention of killing the simple natives whom they consider their

‘enemies’. Conrad is going to build up the novel as a studied contrast between the black and the white, and would gradually reveal with a reversal of values how the so-called civilized are cruel, hypocritical and unreal and, therefore, actually uncivilized, while the natives, the so-called savages are true to themselves They are simple and real and, therefore, actually civilized. Marlow sums up his experience of this part of the journey thus: ‘Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me’ (21), and then comments: ‘It was like a weary pilgrimage among hints of for nightmares’ (21). The last sentence introduces two interlinked ideas. :’a weary pilgrimage’ and ‘nightmares’. A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place in search of wisdom. The idea of this journey as a ‘pilgrimage’ brings in a religious association and the dangers with which such a journey is fraught. But it is a journey ‘amongst hints of nightmares’. So it is not a pleasant journey. It is a different, trying and tiring journey that one must undertake if he wants to arrive at truth, however dangerous or harrowing the journey may be. At the surface level Marlow undertakes a physical journey from Brussels to the Belgian Congo. It is an upstream journey and therefore difficult. Furthermore, as the river is at places very narrow or shallow or full of snags, the journey is not only difficult: it is dangerous as well. With the use of the words like ‘pilgrimage’ and ‘nightmare’ the journey at once assumes a symbolic significance and approximates a journey to hell. These two parallel journeys together with the idea of the Buddha introduced in the beginning of the novel hints at another journey – the journey within, the journey that Buddha had undertaken for enlightenment. It will be increasingly clear to us that Marlow’s journey calls for several interpretations, as the narration develops simultaneously on two planes, one physical, the

other symbolic. The symbolic journey, again, is two-fold. On the one hand it is a symbolic journey to hell full of nightmares, and on the other a psychic journey into the unconscious or the darkest recesses of the inner self on which man normally keeps a conscious control. Real illumination of the true self is impossible unless one penetrates into the heart of darkness after passing through and conquering many nightmares. The journey to hell is also made – as it was made by Aeneas in *The Aeneid* or Dante in *The Divine Comedy* to meet a shade to collect a piece of wisdom. We shall discuss these aspects in detail in a separate section. For the moment however we should just bear in mind that all these journeys – the physical journey, the journey within and the journey to hell – take place simultaneously. They are coeval and co- terminal.

On reaching the mouth of the Congo Marlow boards a small sea-going steamer and starts on the first day of his journey up the river. The captain of the steamer was a Swede. During the conversation between the Swede and Marlow, the Swede expresses his contempt for those who go to the Congo just for 'a few francs a month', and then he adds: 'I wonder what happens to that kind when it goes up country?'(21). The observation of the Swede reveals two things. First, a lot of people decide to go to the strange lands full of hazards just for money to make a living. While it refers to the poor economic conditions of the people who go there, it also suggests that such men are prompted by greed. We shall learn later in Kurtz's case 'it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there' (108). But once there, his latent greed began to manifest itself and collecting ivory by hook or by crook became a passion for him. But we should also remember that what is true about an individual taking the risk of living in an unknown land, is equally true of the colonizers. What prompts the colonizers

to set up colonies in such far off, hazardous, strange lands is simply greed. This is the reason why Marlow would say very soon: 'I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire' (25). This is also Marlow's belated answer to the Swede's question, 'I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up country?' to which Marlow replied that he expected 'to see that soon'. He would actually see it soon after he reaches the port of the Company Station and goes on foot to the Company. However, the other observation of the Swede is quite alarming. He tells Marlow of a Swede 'who had hanged himself'. Marlow, at this stage, is still ignorant of the dangerous effect of the jungle on the people who walk in it. So, terribly shocked, Marlow expresses his bewilderment. 'Hanged himself! Why on God's name?'(21). The Swede did not know and then after thinking for a while remarked, 'Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps' (21). We are not told about Marlow's reaction. But a ponderous question has been posed and Marlow's experience of the journey will gradually reveal to him that it is the forces of darkness represented by the jungle that compel a man to behave or act in strange ways. The jungle brings out the primitive in man.

As the steamer reached near the port Marlow has his second sight of the natives, but natives who work as bonded labour in the Company. The picture is in sharp contrast to the picture of free natives in a paddling boat, whom Marlow saw during his journey from Brussels to the mouth of the Congo. The present one is pitiable: 'A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants!'(21-22). This is seen in long shot from the steamer. The sight is as depressing as it is miserable. The reaction of Marlow is presented through the light imagery: 'A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden

recrudescence of glare' (22). There could be no better way of expressing Marlow's shocking/blinding revelation of the miserable condition of the natives.

The Swede points out the Company Station made of 'three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope'. As Marlow proceeds to the Company Station, he experiences two things: the visible signs of inefficient administration, 'a boiler wallowing in the grass', 'an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with wheels in the air', 'pieces of decaying machinery' etc. The inefficiency undercuts the proud, self-aggrandized notion of the 'white man's burden', 'the redeeming idea'. It is also on account of the pervasive inefficiency of administration that later Marlow's journey will be delayed by three months at a later stage. The use of animal imagery also should be noted. The natives look like 'ants'. The boiler 'wallows', the capsized truck looks as 'dead as the carcass of some animal', etc. In a novel, one of the main concerns of which is to foreground the latent bestiality in man, the abundance of animal imagery used functionally is meant to strengthen the theme of the novel.

Now coming back to the natives. A clinking sound made Marlow turn his head and what he saw is described in detail:

> Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. *I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs* were like knots in a rope; each *had an iron collar on his neck,* and all were *connected together with a chain* whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking (22 emphasis added).

It is a shocking picture of the dehumanization of man by man. The natives – the bonded labour – are underfed if not often starved so that every rib could be seen. How different is the picture from the paddling natives that Marlow had earlier seen! The two pictures suggest what the natives are naturally and what the colonizers have made of them. They are treated like animals with an iron collar on their necks. The picture is drawn up in detail to indicate, in the first place, Marlow's keen though shocked observation of the inhumanity or brutality of men who do not care to rob another group of human beings of their dignity. The natives have been reduced to tamed animals. Why should Marlow observe them so keenly? It is possibly because he cannot believe his eyes; he cannot imagine what man can make of man. In Conrad's critique of colonialism, colonialism means, at one level, biological exploitation. The natives are mercilessly treated, mercilessly killed. As Marlow watches the miserable people he hears a gunshot that reminds him of the French steamer shelling on the bush. Both are equally careless and casual. Both represent 'the same kind of ominous voice' (22). Marlow, sensible as he is and as he looks at the whole affair with dispassionate curiosity he becomes convinced that these men, by no stretch of imagination, could be called 'enemies' (22). They cannot be criminals as the colonizers give it out. A man newly reclaimed and in a uniform jacket with one button off (again a sign of inefficiency and carelessness at the individual level) and a rifle was leading the procession. He first took Marlow, a white man, as a higher officer and saluted him by raising his rifle, and then reassured, greeted him with a grin. Marlow says he seemed to take Marlow 'into partnership in his exalted trust', and then Marlow comments: 'After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings'(23). The phrase 'After all' indicates the sad realization that now that he was

an employee of the same Company he was also ‘a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.’ The tone is conspicuously ironical, as Marlow has already felt the hypocrisy lying behind the ‘great cause’ and has also expressed his feelings that the proceedings were far from ‘just’. Marlow tries to put the chained gang out of sight not so much because he is tender but because that was the only way of resisting what he ‘had blundered into’. Marlow has already realized that colonial enterprise is only an elaborate deceit. The realization engenders a sense of self-pity in him but at the same time it helps him in developing defensive mechanism by remaining alert of the possible degeneration that he must consciously avoid. That is why he says: ‘I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I could become acquainted with a flabby, pretending weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly’ (23). This is Marlow’s first premonition of the evil consequences of the colonial enterprise of greed, violence and desire. With Marlow’s view of the inhuman conditions in which the natives are kept and his reference to the pervasive indifference and mindless shelling we have a foretaste of *Heart of Darkness* as a critique of colonialism. At this stage, however, he does not know, he cannot imagine in fact to what depravity a civilized man can descend when conquered by the forces of darkness. Marlow says, ‘How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles further.’(23), This reference to Kurtz, though Kurtz is not mentioned by Marlow, makes it clear that Marlow still maintains a dispassionate objectivity in his assessment of the colonial situation. Naturally therefore he ‘stood appalled, as though by a warning’ (23). The warning is in regard to his possible degeneration unless he constantly remains alert of the hidden evil.

As Marlow moves on he comes across an artificial hole' which was presumably dug 'with the philanthropic purpose of giving the criminals something to do' (24). This is also another aspect of the colonizer's cruelty. They won't allow the bonded labour any leisure. If there is no work to do they are asked to dig a hole just to keep them engaged. It is thus that the natives who obviously were not enemies or criminals were reduced to something unearthly, 'black shadows of disease and starvation' (24), 'bundles of acute angles' (25). They presented a picture of 'a massacre or pestilence' (25). It was a picture of hell with human beings reduced to shadows, and Marlow had a feeling that he 'had stepped into the gloomy circle of Inferno'. *Inferno* is the first part of Dante's *La Divina Commedia*, (*The Divine Comedy),* the other parts being *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradiso* (Paradise). The Company Station stands for the limbo. While the Central Station will parallel the Abode of the Fraudulent and Kurtz may be seen both as 'a traitor to the kindred' and Lucifer, and when Marlow will reach the Station of Kurtz he will find a dense fog there, a fog that reminds one of a similar scene in *Inferno*. From the very beginning Conrad builds up a hellish atmosphere through imagery and descriptions. We have already seen how the two women knitting at the Company Office at Brussels recall the Greek Fates weaving human destiny with heartless unconcern. The idea of the Inferno, however, is not Greek but Italian, not pagan but Christian. Thus Conrad uses both the pagan and Christian stories of journey to hell. In the *Odyssey*, Book XI , Odysseus undertakes a journey to hell where he meets Tiresias, among others and collects some valuable information. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI, Aeneas goes to the underworld to meet the shade of his father Anchises. In Dante's *The Divine Comedy* Dante, accompanied by Virgil, goes to the underworld. Although the books are written in Greek

, Latin, and Italian respectively and they belong to different periods of European civilization the points that all three journeys have in common are: (i) the journey is undertaken for some piece of valuable information which is extremely important to the person undertaking the journey;(ii) the person met some shades who provided the information; and (iii) the person descending to hell again returns to earth alive. The journey to hell is dangerous and is fraught with many dangers. Once in hell the hero finds a misty, clouded atmosphere and when he meets people (the shades) they usually appear vague and indistinct to him. Like Odysseus, Aeneas and Dante, Marlow could also finally return to the civilized world after meeting the 'shade' of Kurtz and getting the final message, 'The horror!', The horror!' for him. So, it should be borne in mind that Marlow's frequent use of words like 'shade', 'shadow', 'darkness', etc is a deliberate attempt to make Marlow's journey to the Congo memorable as journey to hell.

In the Company Station where everything was in disarray, Marlow suddenly meets a white man who was meticulously dressed and was devoted to books, which were in 'apple-pie order'. In the hellish atmosphere of broken machinery, futile exercises, and dying natives such a man was incongruous. In the words of Marlow:

> I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of getup that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, and a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. (25)

It is not unnatural that Marlow first 'took him for a sort of vision', and describes him as a 'miracle', because one can never expect such perfection in a place like that and also 'a hair-dresser's dummy' because he appeared so unreal, so artificial. On being asked how

the man could keep himself so trim, so spick and span, and his dress so trim and tidy the man 'had the faintest blush and said modestly' (26) that he was 'teaching one of the native women about the station'. What is the relation between 'snowy trousers' and the teaching of the native woman? But when he adds, 'she had a distaste for the work' we infer that the native woman must have been used to wash the clothes and iron them. The 'blush' is apparently due to Marlow's recognition of his smart dressing, but it can also be due to the detected evidence of his exploitation of a native woman. . It is not easy to keep the chin up in the midst of such decay and squalor as the Company Station is, and so Marlow comments commendably, 'In the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character' (26), and more so when we consider that he had been out there 'for nearly three years'. In order to underscore the achievement of the man Marlow once more calls attention to the disorder of the station. 'Everything else was in a muddle – heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed."(26). Marlow also does not fail to point at the depressing exploitation of the natives by the colonizer :' […]a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, and brass-wire sent into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory'.(26)

It is for the first time that ivory is mentioned and ivory will assume increasingly greater significance in course of the novel as we move on to meet Kurtz.

The 'miracle' or the 'hair-dresser's dummy' was the Company's chief accountant. Marlow had to spend ten days at the Company Station. In order to be 'out of the chaos' he sometimes went to the accountant. It is during one of these meetings that the chief

accountant tells Marlow about Kurtz. On Marlow's asking who Kurtz was he said that Kurtz was 'a first class agent' (27). It is important to note here that the aspect of Kurtz which first comes to the mind of the accountant, and which he wants to highlight as Kurtz's greatest distinction, is that he is a first class agent, because he sends in 'as much ivory as all the other agents put together' (27). We can recall that during his meeting with his aunt before he left for the Congo Marlow tried to tell his aunt when she became ecstatic about the noble cause that Marlow was going to serve by joining the Company that the Company is run for profit. The idea is now corroborated by the accountant's consideration of Kurtz as 'a first-class agent' because he contributes more than 'all others put together' to the profit of the Company. It is on account of this commercial success of Kurtz that the accountant considers him 'a very remarkable person'. It should be noted that the tribute – 'a very remarkable person' – would be used about Kurtz by different persons in different contexts with different implications. For example, when Marlow says about Kurtz, 'He was a remarkable man' (107) it is because Kurtz, according to Marlow, was able to confront reality, to know himself before his death. It may just be mentioned, in passing, that one important method of Conrad's development of a character is by picking up impressions of different characters about him. Here at this stage Marlow is introduced to Kurtz through the accountant's impression of him. In other words, he is obliged to see Kurtz through the eyes of the accountant. He will later come across the impressions of others about Kurtz. The process will continue till Marlow actually meets Kurtz and compares the received impressions with his own impression based on the actual experience of his encounter with Kurtz. The accountant has a great confidence in the capabilities of Kurtz and believes, 'he will go far, very far.[…]. He will be somebody

in the Administration before long' (28), and he requests Marlow to recommend him to Kurtz: 'When you see Mr Kurtz tell him from me that everything here is *satisfactory*' (27 emphasis added). There is again a touch of irony here, because we have already seen that the place is a 'picture of massacre or pestilence', 'a grove of death' and a native dying a few yards away from the chief accountant. So everything is 'satisfactory' only from the commercial point of view. The Company is run for profit and the chief accountant keeps an account of it, so he should know. The contrastive pictures of 'pestilence', the miserable condition of the natives and the immaculately dressed white man, making correct entries, absolutely impervious to what is happening around, functions as a microcosm of the two faces of colonialism.

After spending ten days at the Company Station Marlow resumes his journey. But this time he has to make a journey through the jungle – 'a two hundred miles tramp', because the river is not navigable for a stretch of two hundred miles during the journey. Marlow sees further signs of inefficiency and chaos that pervade the colonial administration. He passes through 'several abandoned villages'. He comes across a white man in an unbuttoned uniform who said he was looking after the maintenance of the road, but Marlow could not fail to notice that the roads were badly maintained, and remarks sarcastically, 'Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged Negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I stumbled three miles further on, may be considered as a permanent improvement' (29). The facts thus falsify the statement of the man looking after the upkeep of the road.

In this section Marlow refers to a very heavy white companion, who felt very uncomfortable in the heat, fell sick, had to be carried in a hammock much to the chagrin

of the native carriers, because he weighed sixteen stone. When asked why had he come there, he bluntly replies, 'To make money, of course'. The reply also sheds light on one aspect of colonialism. The colonizers who left their country and went to far-off countries, even to the tropical countries, did so not out of any zeal to civilize the savage, but simply to make money. Thus material motive which is true about most colonizers is true about the colonial venture as well. When this white man just referred to is badly treated by the native carriers he was 'very anxious' for Marlow to kill somebody. Why should he want to kill somebody? Marlow is at once reminded of the doctor that changes took place in the brain. While on the one hand the reference to the doctor acts as a linking device between the past and the present it also suggests the sinister effect of the jungle on the mind of man.

On the fifteenth day Marlow arrived at the Central Station and one of the white men tells him 'with great volubility and many digressions' (30) that the steamer which Marlow was to use for his upward journey is at the bottom of the river. So, Marlow's first experience on reaching the Central Station is one of inefficiency, a feeling that a 'flabby devil was running that show (30)'. While Marlow was anxious to move on in a hurry he was now obliged to wait till he could raise the ship and repair the bottom. As he meets the Company manager, the manager does not even invite him to sit down although Marlow had just walked twenty miles to reach the Station. Marlow's description of this man is interesting. 'He was commonplace in complexion in feature, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build' (30). And his eyes were remarkably blue, were perhaps remarkably cold and he certainly could make his glance fall as trenchant and heavy as an axe' (30). Interestingly, he inspired neither love, nor fear nor

even respect. But his power was the power of his unfailing health. We should take note of Marlow's reference to the eyes of the manager and their effect on a person. We should bear in mind that Marlow is very sensitive and his description of the eyes of the manager must be taken seriously. Like Eliot later and Dante earlier Conrad had great fascination for the double role that the eyes play in revealing a person's character and in controlling another character. In Dante, in Paradise, when Beatrice appears before Dante in a dream, Dante becomes conscious of his own inadequacies, and his eyes fail; he cannot face Beatrice. Similarly in Eliot's *The Waste Land* when the narrator meets the hyacinth girl his eyes fail and in "The Hollow Man" 'The eyes are not here/ There are no eyes here' . Eyes reveal the character, as in *Julius Caesar* Cassius has 'lean and hungry look', for example. In *Heart of Darkness* during the meeting of Marlow with Kurtz's Intended, it is the 'guileless, profound, confident and trustful' (106) glance of the girl, 'the appealing fixity of her gaze' (107), her intense look ('She looked at me with intensity' 108) that had such a tremendous power that Marlow could not betray her trust. In a way, the Company manager's glance, 'trenchant and heavy as an axe', has an interesting affinity with the glance of the girl, in the sense that both the glances are searching and triumphant.

It is from this manager that Marlow gets further information about Kurtz. He learnt that there was a rumour that the Inner Station was in danger, because Kurtz is seriously ill, and according to the manager, Kurtz was 'the best agent he had'. Although the manager was a 'chattering idiot' he was precisely right in saying that the repair of the ship would take three months. During these months one day the shed caught fire, 'burst into a blaze'(33) suddenly, and Marlow noticed that the pail with which one stout man was trying to extinguish the fire had a hole in the bottom. The point of this episode is to

give another instance of the administrative inefficiency. The pail is there but it has a hole at the bottom, and naturally the shed collapsed into a heap of ember. Marlow also noticed that a nigger was being beaten, presumably because he was thought to be causing the fire. The man fell sick and after a few days went back to the wilderness which, Marlow comments, 'without a sound took him into its bosom again' (36). Marlow suggests that the nigger naturally belongs to wilderness. This apparently innocent sentence is profoundly significant when we look at it in the context of colonialism. With the advent of colonialism the natives were uprooted from their natural habitat and were forced to adopt an alien culture. The sentence is almost Wordsworthian in its import.

Marlow notices several other incidents of inefficiency. There was a brick maker but there was not a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station (36), and he was waiting interminably for an ingredient – 'straw maybe' (34). Marlow himself had to wait for the rivets at the station although they were strewn all over the station two hundred miles down the river: 'There were cases of them down at the coast – cases—piled up—burst – split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station-yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down – and there wasn't one rivet to be found when it was wanted' (40). What was still more frustrating is that bare plates were there but no rivets to fasten them with. And the most amazing thing was that every week caravans would come with all kinds of trade goods but no rivets. All these marks of inefficiency make Marlow look upon the whole business as 'the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern' (35). The agents were only interested in getting 'appointed to a trading port where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages' (35). It becomes obvious to Marlow that there is

a clear dichotomy between appearance and reality, between the precept and the practice, between the avowed philanthropy and the naked greed, a dichotomy that characterizes the entire colonial venture.

It was at this station that Marlow heard more about Kurtz. One day he found himself walking at the back of two men talking. One was the manager and the other an agent, the ostensible brick maker. Marlow heard one of them mentioning Kurtz and then asking the other man to 'take advantage of the unfortunate accident' (34). It is not clear who is the actual speaker and what is the advantage he was talking about. But in all probability it is the brick maker, a first class agent who, as we are told later, acts as the manager's spy on the other agents. He was counseling the manager. After the manager leaves the brick maker 'young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose' (34) becomes friendly with Marlow and takes him to his room. As he struck a match Marlow noticed that 'this young aristocrat had not only a silver mounted dressing case but also a whole candle all to himself' (34) while the manager was the only person who had the right to keep candles. The episode sheds light on another aspect of colonialism: corruption. Now during the conversation the agent was very sociable but Marlow realized from the nature of his questions – the questions about his acquaintances in Brussels – that he wanted to find out Marlow's connections, because he believed that the same people who sent Kurtz to the specially important station, had also recommended Marlow. Marlow clammed up. It is in his room that suddenly Marlow's eyes fell on a sketch in oil:

> Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the

face was sinister . (36)

The painting arrested the attention of Marlow and the agent told him that it was done by Kurtz more than a year ago when he was waiting for a transport to go to the trading port. On being asked 'Who is this Kurtz?' the agent at first simply said, that Kurtz is the Chief of the Inner Station. Marlow wanted to know more about Kurtz, and after some silence the man answered ecstatically, 'He is a prodigy. He is an emissary of pity, science, and progress, and devil knows what else' (36). He further added: 'We want for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose,' and 'so *he* [Kurtz] comes here [as] a special being' (36). The drift of the talk indicates that the agent looks upon Marlow as one of 'the new gang – the gang of virtue', the 'gang' represented by Kurtz, because Marlow was recommended by the same people who had sent Kurtz.

Marlow's meeting with the agent, the brick maker is thematically important in many ways. It not only furthers the plot but also foregrounds the theme of the novel and sheds new light on the colonizers. To come back to the sketch. The sketch represents Kurtz's idealistic vision of colonialism. The lady with the lighted torch symbolically represents the colonizers who look upon themselves as bearers of torch, harbingers of light in the dark continent. They bring light to the heart of darkness. The lady is blindfolded, because she is not meant to be biased in any way. She is expected to decide things entirely on merit without taking any personal interest in consideration. Kurtz was an idealist, but the way the agent describes him ('and devil knows what else') indicates that his admiration is not real: it smacks of jealousy and rancour. Marlow also discovers a note of irony in the sketch made by Kurtz. For Kurtz the woman, an embodiment of the ideal of colonialism,

is blindfolded because he wants to represent her unbiased and dispassionate. But for Marlow who had already seen through the hypocrisy embedded in the colonial venture , 'the blindfold' represents the blindness of the colonizers who , like Kurtz, were prisoners of the illusion of idealism, and blind to reality. The lighted torch only made the blindness of the woman more prominent. Marlow says that 'the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister'. The effect is sinister because once in the colony, the colonizer becomes drunk with power, greed and desire. Kurtz here is the epitome of the idealism implied in the 'white man's burden', 'an emissary of pity, science and progress' but when the agent says, 'and devil knows what else', it at once strikes a note of discord and we have a feeling that the agent is talking contemptuously with tongue in cheek. That the agent obviously does not subscribe to the idealist notion represented by Kurtz becomes evident to Marlow as he says, 'he began to *declaim* suddenly' (emphasis added). The word 'declaim' implies that the agent was only mechanically repeating the ideas widely associated with the idealist notion and since he believes that Marlow had been sent by the same people who had sent Kurtz he refers to Kurtz as 'a special being', a man with 'higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose'. He tells Marlow pointblank, -- 'You are of the new gang – the gang of virtue'. The use of the word 'gang' reveals his distrust and contempt for the idealist notion. A little later this contempt will be reinforced by the conversation that Marlow will overhear lying on the deck: '[Kurtz]) bothered me enough when he was here' (49), said the chief agent, and repeated the words of Kurtz: 'Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing' (47). The tone ,

Marlow says, was of 'excessive indignation' as Kurtz is referred to by the chief agent as 'that ass! (147).

The real attitude of the colonizers like the agent, the brick maker becomes clear when Marlow and the agent are out of the agent's hut. On hearing the groaning of the beaten nigger he wants to punish him pitilessly so that there would be no 'conflagration for the future' (37). But the same man as soon as he notices the presence of the manager expresses 'servile heartiness'. It is, therefore, natural that Marlow describes this man as 'papier-mâché Mephistopheles'. He was a hollow man with 'nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe' (37).

As this 'papier-mâché Mephistopheles' went on pleading his case to Marlow, thinking him to be a man close to Kurtz or at least near the centre of power, Marlow understood that he 'had been planning to be assistant manager by- and- by under the present man' and that 'the coming of Kurtz had upset them both not a little (37-38). Since Marlow allowed the young man to imagine his influence in Europe without contradicting him Marlow also 'became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims' (39). Marlow says that he detests lies. But he 'went near enough to it' by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine regarding his influence in Europe. On this occasion Marlow also refers to another occasion when for Kurtz he went 'near enough to a lie' (38). This is a reference to the lie he told Kurtz's Intended. But there is a difference between these two lies, in relation to the agent and vis-à-vis Kurtz's Intended. In the case of the agent Marlow does not actually tell a lie but allows the young man to believe what is not true. Here he is only indirectly involved in falsehood, 'a pretence', as he describes it. But, in the case of the Intended he will deliberately tell a lie

and therefore will be directly involved in the act of falsehood. We shall discuss Marlow's lies in detail in a separate section later.

In his defence Marlow says that he did not try to correct the notion of the agent about his influence, because he 'had a notion it somehow could be of help to that Kurtz' (39) whom he had not yet 'seen' (in the sense of having a clear idea of him) and who was 'just a word' for him. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the conversation takes place outdoor in a moonlit night with the silent forest around. Marlow says: 'Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart – its mystery, its greatness, the *amazing reality of its concealed life'* (37; emphasis added). And again: 'I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk and perhaps was deaf as well' (38).

The reference to the jungle with 'the amazing reality' of a 'concealed life' and as a sinister and primitive power that corrupts a man by drawing out the primitive elements of him is significant . Marlow says, 'Yet somehow the jungle did not bring nay image with it – no more than if I had been told an angel or a friend was in there(38)'. Marlow says that Kurtz was there. But is he an angel or a friend? Marlow's experience will reveal that Kurtz started as an angel and ended up by degenerating into a friend. Ultimately it is the force of the primitive that defeats man.

The section is also important in shedding light on Conrad's narrative techniques. Referring to Kurtz, Marlow says that he had not seen Kurtz yet. Then he asks his listeners, 'Do you see him?' He makes a distinction between telling and showing and then gives primacy to 'telling as showing'. Conrad, through Marlow, tries to show things, present the things in a way in which one can see the things. Much later in the novel Marlow would be ecstatically told by the Russian that Kurtz's talk 'made [the Russian]) see things – things'(79). But at this stage Marlow realizes the difficulty of showing somebody one's dream. He says, '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 of the very essence of dreams[…'(]39). Life is such a huge, complex affair and the riddle of existence is so inscrutable that it is well nigh impossible to convey one's experience in words. The perception of life that experience brings is as exclusively personal and private as our dream. Marlow was 'silent for a while' (39), because as we have noted earlier he occasionally falls silent either because words fail him or because he tries to organize his thought before he can verbally express it. In this particular case as he tries to organize his thoughts and verbalize them he becomes conscious of its highly esoteric nature and the realization dawns on him that 'it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence (39). Then he reaffirms, "It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone' (39). After pausing for a while, Marlow added, 'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know…' The point Marlow is trying to

make is that for Marlow life in the Congo, or Kurtz in particular, was a new experience. But the listeners have the benefit of having a better idea of Kurtz because they can see Kurtz through Marlow's eyes. So, the nameless narrator says he 'listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give [him] the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river' (39). The narration, he implies, takes shape as much through words and sentences as by the extra linguistic postures ('without human lips') like silence and gestures. We shall take these aspects in greater detail in a later section in our discussion of the narrative technique of Conrad.

In connection with his efforts to repair the ship Marlow comments on the real value of work and the comment has strong thematic relevance. Marlow says: '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. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means' (41). One of the major themes of the novel is search for truth, and the need to know oneself. Marlow's comments on the value of work have a direct bearing on this aspect of the novel. In fact, during the journey on several occasions it is Marlow's dogged adherence to work – either repairing the bottom of the ship or plugging a hole in the steam boat, or watching the snags – that enables him to hold back the primitive in him.

Towards the end of this part Marlow again underscores the exploitation that goes in the name of colonialism. First, there is a touch of irony in the name Eldorado Exploring Expedition by which the devoted band of pilgrims called itself, because 'metaphorically Eldorado is applied to any place that offers opportunities of getting rich

quickly'[*Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*]. Marlow tells in unequivocal terms, that the talk of these pilgrims 'was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things were wanted for the work of the world. *To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe*' (43-44 emphasis added).

This part ends with Marlow's thought again going back to Kurtz. The nameless narrator had told us quite early on that Marlow is the meditating type and here Marlow says: 'I had plenty of time (because the rivets had not arrived) for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz' (44). He had already heard about Kurtz at the Company Station; he got further information from the brick maker at the Central Station. He had already learnt that Kurtz was a first class agent shipping more ivory than all other agents put together. He had also learnt about Kurtz's idealism from the brick maker and about his artistic talent in expressing that idealism in a sketch in oil. But Marlow's experience of the jungle and the forms of darkness as well as the hypocrisy of the whites makes him wonder if Kurtz will be able to keep up his idealism or succumb to the forces of darkness. Thus he has already some apprehensions about the possible consequences as is evident from his admission: 'I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there' (44). We should not forget that Marlow had noticed a sinister effect of the light on the face of the woman with a lighted torch. He was also not sure whether he was 'angel or a fiend' (38).

This part thus ends with references to Kurtz on a suspenseful note. Like Marlow we are also curious to know more about Kurtz and what becomes of him.

Part Two:

Just as Part One opened with Marlow on board the *Nellie*, Part Two also opens with Marlow on the deck of another boat. The time in Part One was evening. This part also opens in the evening with all the symbolical implications of the evening, the border zone between the conscious and the unconscious. Lying on the deck Marlow overhears the conversation between the manager and his uncle who was leading the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. They were 'talking about Kurtz'. He learns from their conversation that once Kurtz, after coming down nearly three hundred miles, accompanied by a half-caste clerk, went back to his station in a small dugout with four paddlers (46). Why was he coming back with the ivory and why did he go back then after covering three hundred miles? The manager thinks that Kurtz was probably homesick and wanted to return to Europe, but about his going back the two fellows 'were at a loss for an adequate motive'. But Marlow thinks that perhaps 'he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake' (46). To Marlow it was his sense of duty, his spirit of idealism that eventually got the better of him and forced him to return to his post, though at a great risk. Marlow is impressed by Kurtz's sense of discipline as well as his courage and his pluck. He 'seemed to see Kurtz for the first time' (46). Marlow says: 'It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning 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' (46). The word

'perhaps' in 'Perhaps he was just a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake' makes the statement uncertain and ambivalent in keeping with the general nature of the narration. Was it his sense of duty or the irresistible attraction of 'the depth of wilderness'? Later on we will see, even when seriously ill, Kurtz would not like to leave his station where he wielded great power over the natives. The conversation between the manager and his uncle reveals the jealousy and rancour that were rampant among the workers in the colonial enterprise. Now that the half – caste English clerk brought the news of Kurtz's illness, they would not even mind to stoop as low as expecting and expediting Kurtz's death by delaying Marlow's journey to the Inner Station to bring back Kurtz to Europe for a proper medical care. The uncle takes in the entire jungle in the sweep of his hand and assures his nephew, 'I say trust to this'. Although the manager has a sound health 'like a charm' (47), most pilgrims die quite quickly: they cannot stand the tropical climate largely created by the jungle. But when the uncle says, 'I say trust to this' Marlow is so startled that he at once leaps to his feet and looks at the jungle, and in the last lurid glow of the setting sun the jungle appears to him to have 'a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart' (47). The idea of the jungle as a sinister force and a hidden evil is reinforced. As the manager who is also the chief agent of the Central Station and his uncle became aware of the presence of Marlow within the earshot they left 'pretending not to know anything of my (Marlow's) existence (47). The retreating gesture appears to Marlow as 'two ridiculous shadows'. We have already noticed that shadows of various kinds fall across the novel, as Marlow's journey becomes an analogue of journey to hell.

In a few days the news came of the failure of the 'Eldorado Expedition'. All the donkeys were dead, but with sarcasm Marlow remarks: 'I knew nothing of *the less valuable animals*' (48). Does he mean the black crew who, to the eyes of the white, were less valuable because less useful than the donkeys. But Marlow does not clarify. Leaving the reader to suspense he moves on to 'the prospect of meeting Kurtz' very soon (48). Marlow hastens to add, 'When I say very soon I mean it comparatively. It was just two months from the day we left the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz's station' (48). In a journey when one has to wait for three months to repair the ship, two months is really a short period. As Marlow resumes his upstream journey it becomes an indefatigable encounter with the primitive forces of nature where 'the big trees were kings'. The boat was virtually mobbed by wooded islands and he would not know how to find the channel and occasionally he would have a feeling of being 'bewitched and cut off forever from everything you had known once – somewhere – far away – in another existence […]'(48). The strangeness of the situation and the experience it offered makes Marlow feel as if he was 'travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world' (48). The deep engagement with the problems at hand that had to be tackled immediately did not give him much time to think. But he was having what may be called 'the direct sensuous apprehension' of the primitive. The jungle seems to have a life of its own and it seemed to watch his 'monkey tricks' to avoid the snags and other obstacles. Marlow remarks, 'When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality -- the reality, I tell you – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily'. The inner truth is hidden like a snag or the underwater rocks in a river.

‘Luckily’ because it is evil, it is sinister. The inner truth is that deep down man is a beast, a primitive with all the primal elements.

Just when we are absorbed in listening to Marlow’s experience of the river and the jungle, and practically moving along with him in the steamboat up the Congo, we are suddenly dashed back to the present, the deck of the *Nellie* as a voice interacts with Marlow and asks him to be ‘civil’. In the next moment, however, Marlow resumes his description of the journey. It was like ‘a blindfolded man set to drive a van on a bad road’ (49). Yet the responsibility of a seaman is immense. He must keep the boat afloat. Nothing is more shameful for a seaman than to scrape the boat or the ship. Marlow had to keep the ship afloat in a river with all kinds of obstacles and it becomes an obsession that precludes the possibility of any serious, coherent thinking. He only experiences the mystery of the wilderness, the feeling that they are ‘the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance’ (51), that they are traveling ‘in the night of the first ages’ (51) and the ‘earth seemed unearthly’ (51).

An important aspect of this part of the narration is Marlow’s encounter with the jungle, which seems to have a life of its own and his feeling of its mysterious nature. So much so that as the reaches opened before and closed behind he had a strange feeling that ‘the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return’ (50). In the background of the forest, ‘millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high’ (50), the steamboat, like a ‘grimy beetle’, slowly crawling on to its destination. The destination was different for different people. For the pilgrims the destination was the place where they could get money, to fulfill their greed while for Marlow the destination he looked forward to, was a meeting with Kurtz for an answer to the questions that have been

baffling him since the beginning of his journey up the Congo. Marlow has a conviction that they were penetrating ‘deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness’, which is parallelled by journey to the darkness of heart.

This is further reinforced by Marlow’s description of the ‘black and incomprehensible frenzy’ (50) that he finds in the riotous revelry and merriment of the natives that came to his view occasionally: ‘a burst of yell, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of body’s swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage’ (51). It is in these primal elements that the truth lives, ‘truth stripped of its cloak of time’ (52). A man must ‘meet the truth with his own true stuff – with his inborn strength’ (52). The education of the society, training and discipline do not help. They all ‘fly off at the first good shock’. The essential man comes out as soon as he is stormed by the forces of darkness.

Marlow says that although he felt a remote kinship with the reveling natives he could not join them because he had to be preoccupied with the job of attending to many urgent things to ‘get the tin-pot along’. In this connection Marlow refers to the fireman, who was a savage but an ‘improved specimen’ (52), like ‘a dog in the parody of breeches and a feather-hat, walking on his hind legs’ (52). To Marlow he is a caricature because he is no longer true to himself. He ‘ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank’ (52-53). However, in keeping with his savage background he believed that there was an ever thirsty evil spirit in the boiler that demanded that there should always be water in the boiler and used ‘an impromptu charm, made of rags tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone’.

However neither Marlow, a man from the civilized world, nor the fireman, a man from the savage world, had any time to respond to their primal instincts.

Some fifty miles before Kurtz's Inner Station the steamer comes upon an abandoned hut of reeds, 'an inclined and *melancholy* pole' (53 emphasis added), tattered flag and 'a neatly stacked woodpile'. On the stack of the firewood was a message in pencil written on a placard, saying, 'Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously'. What strikes at once is the element of contradiction. The deserted hut is in a very bad shape. The inscription is almost illegible. But the woodpile is neatly stacked. Again, they are asked to hurry and approach cautiously, that implies to slow down, simultaneously. Inside the hut there was a book, with English title, *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*, which suggested that the occupant was an Englishman. Marlow 'handled this amazing ambiguity with the greatest possible tenderness' (52). The Englishman also wrote in the margin with cipher, yet strangely he had left it behind. Marlow, a seaman, becomes so engrossed in reading the book that he does not notice the woodpile had already been transferred to the boat and the pilgrims were waiting for him return to the boat and resume the journey. To Marlow the book appears to be a single sign of civilization in midst of chaos or disorder all around. After travelling hundreds of miles in the Congo slowly penetrating into the heart of darkness, a sudden discovery of a book, a seaman's manual, thrills him. It was like meeting an old friend suddenly in a most unexpected place. So leaving the book was 'like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship' (54-55). The manager of the ship thought that the owner of the hut must be a miserable trader and an intruder and even if he were an Englishman as Marlow thought him to be, he would be in trouble if he were not careful. But Marlow's reaction to

his observation – ‘no man was safe from trouble in this world’ (55) – though profoundly philosophical is perfectly in keeping with the central themes of the novel, as the real trouble comes not from without but from within. The episode of the deserted hut is replete with similes – signs that make one think and draw the possible meaning. The absent man is made present with what he has left behind and we have already pointed out that in the novel Marlow’s constant effort has been to convey his perception through suggestion. The passage is also important in regard to Marlow’s art of characterization. We said earlier that actions are louder than words. We are here made to see the absent character through his actions – his devotion to the book and his solicitations for the sailors who will come to that port and venture their journey upward. This is evident both in his keeping a neatly stacked woodpile as well as the warning that he gives to the ongoing sailors.

The journey becomes more difficult now as ‘the steamer seemed at her last gasp’ (55), which could give up at any moment. The manager ‘displayed a beautiful resignation’ (55), but Marlow, eager to meet Kurtz, was arguing with himself whether he would ‘talk openly with Kurtz’. There is an ambiguity about this. What is he thinking to talk openly with Kurtz about? Is it about the conversation about Kurtz, between the manager and his uncle, that he had overheard , or is it simply to satisfy his curiosity about the way the mind of Kurtz worked. But soon it dawned on him that the talk – the surface level interaction – will not be of much use, because he knew that the ‘essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond [his] reach, and beyond [his] power of meddling’(55) .

Marlow is again dibbling, not only because he has to keep up the suspense of his listeners who, thanks to Marlow's interest in Kurtz, are equally curious to know what comes out of the interaction between Marlow and Kurtz, but also because Marlow even at this stage does not really know the possible outcome of the encounter. In other words, the suspense is as much applicable to Marlow as it is applicable to the readers. This is, again, in keeping with the general design of the tale. Marlow is narrating his experience of a journey and at any particular point he can communicate what he has known or he surmised so far. Moreover, the increasing difficulty that Marlow experiences as he comes closer and closer to Kurtz, also parallels the psychic journey as one comes nearer and nearer to enlightenment, or the journey to hell as one approaches the shade.

Marlow's comment that the 'essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface' (55) harks back to Marlow's earlier comment that 'the inner truth is hidden luckily—luckily' (49).

Towards the evening of the second day they were about eight miles from Kurtz's station. Precipitated by urge and impatience to meet Kurtz Marlow wanted to continue the journey, which by his estimate should take three hours. But the manager recalled the message of caution that they had seen in the last stop. Moreover it would be difficult to journey in the fog, and since there was plenty of wood Marlow, the captain, agreed to stop for the night. But in the morning when the sun rose 'there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night' (56). At eight or nine the fog lifted, and the huge jungle, 'the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it' (56) came in view. But again the ship was surrounded by fog and Marlow again ordered to put down the chain. Then suddenly

‘there was a cry, a very loud cry, of infinite desolation’ (56). The whites on the board are afraid that the natives will attack and they, confined to the small boat as they are, will be completely annihilated, and they ready their guns for shooting. Marlow thinks that they will not attack, because the nature of the cry, far from being a war cry, was one of desolation, an expression of the agony of some bereavement. This would later lead Marlow to think that Kurtz is possibly dead and the natives are mourning the death of Kurtz.

While the whites are all scared of the possible attack the blacks want the attack to take place so that they can catch some of the natives and eat them. However, nothing happens this time though the attack is made a little later when, on account of a snag in the river, Marlow is compelled to bring the boat very close to the shore. Suddenly thousands of arrows fly in, Marlow notices that ‘the bank was swarming with human limbs’ and ‘vague forms of men running bent double, leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent’ (65). The whites opened fire, and in the encounter the ‘fool-helmsman’ (65), a savage who had foolishly exposed himself to the attack, died, smitten by a spear shot at him by the natives. The man died in a pool of blood and Marlow’s shoes were full of his blood. Marlow throws the shoes overboard. But the memory of the helmsman will haunt him, because though a savage, for months he had been a help to Marlow and ‘thus a subtle bond had been created’ (73) of which Marlow became aware only when the bond was snapped. The profundity of the look that the dying helmsman gave to Marlow was ‘ like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment’ (73).

Now coming back to the blacks’ interest in the attack, when the head of the blacks said that he wanted to catch the natives and eat them, it suddenly dawned on Marlow that

the blacks on board the ship must be very hungry. That opens up another dark side of colonialism or more precisely a difference between the 'civilized' whites and the 'uncivilized' black. The blacks who had no sense of time were engaged for some months and 'it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live' (58). Instead of food, everywhere they were given 'three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long' (59) with which they were supposed to buy their provisions from nearby villages. But the irony is that there were no villages around or the director would not like to stop when the villages came by. The whites had no problem because they had tinned food 'with an occasional old he-goat thrown in' (59), but all the blacks had to depend mainly upon 'rotten hippo-meat' (58) and 'some half-cooked dough', of a dirty lavender colour' (59), 'wrapped in leaves' that they had brought along. Constantly underfed, 'their veins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard'(59).

The situation not only reveals the callous indifference of the whites in regard to the basic physical need of the blacks who serve them, but also their conscious cheating of the blacks by giving them brass wire instead of food or not stopping at the villages because the whites themselves had enough to eat. Marlow knows that '[No] fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is' (60) and therefore wonders what could prevent the blacks – thirty to thirty -five 'big powerful men' from eating the whites. The only answer is that the blacks had 'inborn strength to fight hunger properly' (60) and had imposed a very severe kind of discipline on themselves. They would go hungry for days rather than eat their employers however unsympathetic and deceitful they may be. The logical conclusion Marlow is driving at is that the savage cannibals are more civilized than the so-called 'civilized' whites.

However, even in midst of the action-packed situation the figure of Kurtz constantly looms large in the background. The distance of the ship is always measured from 'Kurtz's station' (55). The loud cry of the natives makes Marlow think that Kurtz is possibly dead. The approach to Kurtz is 'beset by as many dangers as though [Kurtz] had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle' (61). The dead body of the helmsman makes Marlow think, 'I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time' (67), and becomes intensely aware that he 'was looking forward to – a talk with Kurtz' (67). Marlow says 'a talk' after a pause suggested by the dash, because by now to his imagination Kurtz presented himself as a voice' (67). Kurtz had many gifts but the supreme gift was 'the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness' (68). We should bear in mind also that Satan had an excellent gift of the gab, the rhetorical skill to impress his followers, the host of fallen angels. We should also remember that Marlow has not yet met Kurtz and he cannot have any idea of Kurtz's voice. So the voice, at this stage, must be taken metaphorically, like the 'voice of America', but what is metaphorical will turn out to be literally true when Marlow actually meets Kurtz: 'And I was right too. A voice. He was little more than a voice'(69).

Another important aspect of the section is that when Marlow says that he would feel curiously desolate if he cannot meet Kurtz, somebody on the deck of the *Nellie* let out a sigh. This act of the listener at once wrenches us away from the proximity of Kurtz's station up the Congo with all the attendant difficulties, to the present, from Africa to

England. It is a dramatic device, which Conrad uses frequently in the novel as part of his narrative strategy.

The audible sigh of the man on the deck irritates him: 'Why do you shy in that beastly way, somebody?' Is it that they found Marlow's tale absurd? Yes, it may appear absurd to the listeners, but it is not absurd. He expresses his helplessness about his inability to carry conviction. His ultimate expression 'Good Lord! mustn't a man ever'(68) – which shows his exasperation, is immediately followed by 'Here, give me some tobacco' (68) The asking for tobacco implies that Marlow needs some time to turn the whole thing over in his mind and explore the ways in which he can make them understand . The image of Marlow that we get in the 'flicker of the tiny flame' of the matchstick is one of a contemplating person – 'lean face … worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention' (68). But when he exclaims, 'Absurd! This is the worst of trying to tell' (68) the word 'absurd' is used to suggest that it is so difficult to tell the story that it is absurd to try to tell it. In other words, to tell it is impossible. Then he realizes why the story sounds absurd to his listeners and he tries to make them understand the reason. The listeners belong to the civilized society 'with two good addresses' (66) and all their needs are taken care of by the society. There is a butcher to supply them meat, for example. Then there is a policeman to protect them and to monitor their behaviour. They cannot imagine 'what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude – utter solitude without a policeman – by the way of silence – utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion?'(70) In other words, the listeners cannot imagine to what depravity they can descend when the controls of the

society – the checks and safety valves – are removed. Then one has to depend entirely on one's own strength, and it is there that most fail. Then with a flash forward he begins to talk about Kurtz, about. an experience that he had through his association with Kurtz.

We should remember at this point that until now Marlow's narration has been mainly linear starting with his journey up the Congo, through Company Station, Central Station, fifty miles from Kurtz's station, eight miles from Kurtz's station, etc. He has not yet met Kurtz. The flash forward is thus necessitated by his desire to authenticate his point. Kurtz had his education in England and that may explain his values and ideas about colonialism. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French (71), and thus [all[Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz'(71), and he had in him both the English idealism and the continental opportunism. We recall that Marlow's aunt, a Belgian, used her influences to get Marlow a job. Anyway, Kurtz was entrusted by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to create a report for its future guidance. Marlow had read this report, 'a beautiful piece of writing' (71) with a meaningful peroration. Sincere benevolence for the savage, a desire to do good to them, and a belief that 'by the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded' (72) marked the report, and it made Marlow 'tingle with enthusiasm'. But what happened to this Kurtz later? With the controlling forces withdrawn, Kurtz began to degenerate; he began to fulfill his atavistic desires. He participated in 'unspeakable rites'. His degeneration is evident in the note at the foot of the last page, 'scrawled evidently much later', that said: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'(72). The note was, Marlow says, 'like a flash of lightning in a serene sky' (72). The note revealed the real Kurtz, the later Kurtz. In the Congo his inner strength failed him as the late helmsman failed at the last

moment; he left his post, opened the shutter and met his end. Marlow suggests that the helmsman was just like Kurtz, 'a tree swayed by the wind'. As Marlow did the funeral of the helmsman in the sea by tipping him overboard, he heard 'a scandalous murmur' about the promptness with which he threw the body overboard. Marlow does not know why they wanted to keep the body but felt that the savages on board wanted to eat his flesh.

After the quick funeral is over Kurtz again assumes the centre stage as Marlow finds the pilgrims making all kinds of surmises about Kurtz. 'They had given up Kurtz, Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt—and so on and so on' (74). And when some pilgrim boasts of avenging Kurtz by killing the natives Marlow tells him bluntly that all the shots from the ship had gone too high and the natives left because the screeching of the steam whistle had frightened them beyond measure. Just then Kurtz's Inner Station comes in view.

Marlow tried to scan the area. With his telescope he spotted 'a long decaying building on the summit' 'half-buried in the high grass' with jungle and woods in the background. This was Kurtz's lodging. Marlow further noticed that there was no enclosure or fencing but there was a row of about half-a-dozen slim posts 'with their upper ends ornamented with round curved balls' (75). The decaying building with many holes in it may be taken as a fitting symbol for Kurtz, the decaying man with many lapses. If the building is on the summit so is Kurtz's position in the locality. He is the most important man dying there, but like the building half-buried in high grass, Kurtz's original character and his civilized ideals have also gone into hiding in course of time. At the moment we see Kurtz's house through the eyes of Marlow, and that too from a distance with the help of a telescope. Only later we will learn with Marlow as our guide that what Marlow took for 'ornamental

round curved balls' are actually human skulls of people – Kurtz's adversaries whom Kurtz had killed and whose heads he kept on display as the exemplary evidence of his power and as a warning to the potential rebels. The unknown heads metaphorically speak volumes about the degeneration of Kurtz.

The long shot on Kurtz's building now makes room for a comparatively close up on the white man there 'beckoning persistently with his whole arm' (73). When the manager shouts back to him about the attack the ship had suffered he does not pay much heed to it. ('I know—I know. It's all right' 75), because he knew that there would be an attack and that is why he had left that warning at the Central Station. But at this point we do not know that the white man on the shore is the man who had kept a pile of neatly stacked wood and a warning at the Central Station. We do not suspect anything also about his nationality when he says in short sentences 'Come along. It's all right. I am glad'. We shall learn later that he is a Russian and served sometime in English ships.

To Marlow the man with his dress covered all over with bright patches of all hue, looked like a harlequin. But Marlow also did not fail to notice that all the patching had been done neatly and beautifully. This art of neat patching harks back to and reinforces the sense of rigour and discipline that Marlow found in the deserted hut at the Central Station, that suggested one solitary touch of order in midst of utter chaos all around. A thorough gentleman he felt sad at the disappointment of Marlow when he told him that he was not English. But he does not reveal his nationality at this stage. The readers, like Marlow, are all kept in suspense. Later on we shall learn from his broken sentences that he is a Russian fellow sailor, son of an arch-priest, has the sailor's foresight and practicality (he points out there is one more snag between the ship and the shore), had

wandered about the river for two years alone after he was able to persuade a Dutch Trading House on the coast to take him with stores and provisions, and was grateful to Van Shuyten, the good old Dutchman for complying with his request, and had sent him 'a small piece of ivory' a year ago as a token of his gratitude. He believed that when one is young one should gather experiences, ideas. About Marlow's puzzled query- what could he gather at the Inner Station?- his simple answer is 'Here I met Kurtz'. The obvious implication is that to meet Kurtz is to know a lot about life. , a point that Marlow would also subscribe to. He feels delighted to get back Towson's book, which he had left behind by mistake and, on enquiry, Marlow learns that the notes in the margin were written in Russian, and that is why Marlow could not read them, thought them to have been in cipher. About the natives the Russian emphatically says that they are simple people and would run away with one screech of the steam-whistle,Why did they attack the ship then? The Russian's answer is 'They didn't want [Kurtz] to go' (78).

An important aspect of this section is the series of departures between Marlow's impression about things and the actual facts – the disparity between appearance and reality. With his binoculars what Marlow takes for ornamental round carved balls are, in reality, human skulls. He takes the white man on shore as a harlequin but he turns out to be a fine gentleman. He takes him to be English, but he is actually Russian. He thought that the notes in the margin of Towson's book were written in cipher, but they were actually written in Russian. He was afraid of the natives but learns that they are simple people. All this only reaffirms the notorious unreliability of judgments based on first impressions.

As in all the previous sections, here also the figure of Kurtz dominates. Apart from Kurtz's house on the summit of a hill – metaphorically 'a high seat amongst the devils of the land', and the slightly earlier reference to Kurtz by Marlow as whatever he was, 'he was not common' (71), the harlequin refers to the charms of Kurtz's talk to which he has fallen a victim, 'You don't talk with him – you listen to him' and believes that this man (Kurtz) has enlarged [his] mind' (78). So this part also has contributed a good deal to the development of Kurtz's character though impressions of other characters. Marlow has not yet met Kurtz and so his impression of Kurtz is formed out of other people's impressions about Kurtz. But the primacy of the primitive about which he has a growing conviction during his experience of the journey is yet to be confirmed through his personal encounter with Kurtz as a case study. It has also to be seen how the judgment of the people who had spoken to Marlow about Kurtz were partial, touching on one or the other aspect of Kurtz.

Part Three:

Part III begins with Marlow's astonishment about the young Russian in motley who gives Marlow a lot of information about Kurtz during his conversation on the deck. Marlow is astonished because he cannot explain how this young Russian has retained his integrity all these years and Marlow almost envies him of his 'absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure' (79), his possession of the 'modest and clear flame' (79). He has been associated with Kurtz for about two years and is devoted to him. He nursed Kurtz back to health on two occasions and is enthralled by Kurtz's power of speaking.

Kurtz talked about everything including love and made him ‘see things – things’ (79). But at this point Marlow looks around and has a conviction that ‘this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of the blazing sky […] so hopeless and so dark’ was ‘impenetrable to human thought’ and ‘pitiless to human weakness’ (79-80). The comment of Marlow warns us about the reliability of the Russian’s understanding of Kurtz and also prepares us for the gradual revelation of the ‘human weakness’ of Kurtz. The weakness becomes evident when Marlow learns from the Russian that Kurtz would often make expeditions for ivory and since he had nothing much to barter with he would use force with his gun, because he had in his possession a lot of cartridges. He became so possessive, so overbearing that ‘there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased’ (81). The ‘appetite for ivory’ was so strong in him that he would have even stabbed the Russian had he not handed over to him the ‘small lot of ivory’ that the chief of a village had given him.

After one haul of ivory Kurtz would again ‘go off on another ivory hunt: disappear for weeks: forget himself amongst these people – forget himself – you know’ (81). The Russian particularly calls attention to the fact that Kurtz would be a different man altogether in his obsession with and greed for ivory. It is here that we get a hint of the ‘other Kurtz’ – the Kurtz who would abandon his civilized self and become a savage and a victim to innate human weaknesses. The Russian does not normally approve of such action of Kurtz but he, like the villagers of the Inner Station , is charmed by Kurtz and the moral dilemma is reflected in his ‘mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz’(80). But he knew and insisted that one could not judge Kurtz ‘as you could an ordinary man’(80). The comment at once reminds us of Marlow’s comment earlier

‘Whatever he was, he was not common’ (72). Now Kurtz is very ill and the young Russian requests Marlow to take him away as early as possible. Towards the end of the Russian’s narration Marlow once more takes up the binocular and the consciousness of their being people in the beach made him uneasy. By looking at nature one could not imagine the evil forces that were lying hidden in it. ‘The woods were unmoved, like a *mask* , like the closed door of a prison – they looked with their *hidden knowledge,* of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence’(81 emphasis added). Incidentally, what Marlow says about the Russian’s tale—‘not so much told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs’ (81) is equally applicable to Marlow’s narration of his experience to the listeners on board, the *Nellie,* partly because both Marlow and the Russian do talk about as complex and inscrutable a character as Kurtz. At the end of the Russian’s narrative Marlow has ‘suddenly a nearer view’ of the poles and the sight shocks him beyond measure. The statement, again, like many others, is intended to create a suspense in his listeners, activate their imagination as to what it might be and then keeps up the suspense by saying, ‘These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing – *food for thought* and also for vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky’ (82 emphasis added)), and then after keeping his listeners on tenterhooks for quite some time, he dispels the suspense. They were human heads on stakes, all with their faces turned towards the house, except one facing outward, ‘black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids’ (82). To Marlow the heads only showed ‘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' (83). The 'wilderness had found him early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion' (83). In this connection Ian Watt writes: 'Following the traditional African practice of kingship, Kurtz takes on semi-divine attributes. Like the contemporary African ruler Msiri at Bunkeya in the Southern Congo, he decorates the fence poles round his house with human heads […]' (Watt 166). Watt connects these heads with the 'unspeakable rites'. Stephen A. Reid also in his critical essay, "The 'Unspeakable Rites' in *Heart of Darkness"* connects them to the 'unspeakable rites' in which Kurtz participates. Marlow describes the only head that faces him thus:'[…] it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids- a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of teeth, was smiling, too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber' (82-83).

These remarks of Marlow are of momentous significance because the remarks illustrate Conrad's thesis that unless there is an inborn strength one is bound to become victim of the forces of darkness. In an issue of *The Explicator* Andrera Church suggests that this particular head symbolizes Kurtz,' for, because of the effects of the wilderness, he has a black, dried, sunken and hollow inner core – a heart of darkness 'satiated with primitive emotions he cannot restrain'. His eyes are closed to the degrading effects primitive tradition can have on a 'remarkable genius', and for a while he sleeps in comfort on top of his power pole knowing he can maintain his ascendancy by manipulating 'certain unspeakable rites'. Church also suggests that the shrunken lips indicate the futility of voice of Kurtz, and the heads in addition to shedding light on the darkness of Kurtz's soul also suggest entrapment. The heads facing the house assume the

air of keeping a watch on the house of Kurtz who is under house arrest as it were. The heads, according to Church, 'symbolically accuse him for taking advantage of sacred rites and mirror his decline'. Before we proceed further it my be worthwhile to refer to an article, " In the Beginning was the Footnote" published in *The Asian Age* (2 January 2000) by arrangement with the *Washington Post Book World* in which the writer, Adam Hochschild refers to the Congo-based white men's hobby of collecting African heads Hochschild writes about several accounts of 'White men who boasted about collecting severed African heads. Four such men in fact: one of whom even packed an African head in a box of salt and sent it to be stuffed and mounted by his London taxidermist' He also refers to one young Belgian named Leon Rom who had used twenty-two severed African heads as a border around his flower bed. Hochschild also suggests affinities between Rom and Kurtz on many points. Interesting in its own right though, these do not immediately concern us. So, to come back to Kurtz, the Russian tells Marlow, 'You don't know how such a life dries a man *like Kurtz*' (emphasis added). In spite of spending a life in solitude the Russian did not degenerate, because in the first place he was not as talented as Kurtz was and therefore not susceptible to temptation, and secondly because he was not hollow within. He was in possession of 'the modest and clear flame' to safeguard him against the onslaught of the forces of darkness. Marlow further says that the heads drying on the stacks was only 'a savage sight .but says that 'unspeakable savagery' is better than the crooked savagery of subtle horrors committed by the civilized.

Now, Kurtz, the subject of the discussion between Marlow and the Russian, appears himself on the scene. The pilgrims, who left as soon as the ship reached the Inner Station

to make a move to Kurtz's residence, leaving Marlow on the ship, come out with Kurtz on a stretcher. Immediately a cry arose and lots of natives came out of the bushes with their bows and arrows and spears. The situation was tense: they could attack any moment, and everything depended on what Kurtz said to them. Marlow resented the dishonouring necessity 'to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom' (Kurtz). However, as. Kurtz sat up and said something to the natives and, to the great relief of Marlow, they at once retreated and vanished in the bushes.

It should be noted that this is the first time that Marlow has a sight of Kurtz. It is, therefore, important to note his reaction to the sight of a person who has occupied his thought all these months throughout his journey. Kurtz is described as a 'phantom', an 'apparition' partly because of his emaciated figure, but also because he has been reduced to a shadow, a denizen of the underworld. He was so emaciated that Marlow could see 'the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arms waving' (85). To Marlow he appeared like 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory' (85), as his body emerged from the covering like dead body coming out of a winding sheet. The sight was both pitiful and appalling. Since he has been associated all along with ivory that became an obsession with him, to Marlow the image comes naturally.

Yet this 'animated image of death' was at least seven feet tall, although the name 'Kurtz' means short in German, and from the distance Marlow could see that he had a deep voice. With a mixture of irony and symbols Marlow calls him the 'pitiful Jupiter', – Jupiter because he ruled over the natives with the authority of the king of gods, yet pitiful because he had now lost his strength, though not his hold on the natives.

Kurtz's appearance on the scene is presented by Conrad most dramatically. In a drama first the stage is set and then the characters begin to appear and we see them before we hear them. Here Marlow with his binoculars and the Russian on the deck form the spectators who are looking on the event of Kurtz's appearance. On the summit of the hill at a distance lies Kurtz's building. The background is made of jungles and bushes and in the front is the river where Marlow's ship has entered. Marlow has distanced himself and acts as a dispassionate observer with his binoculars that brings distance to a close vision. The Russian with his two years' acquaintance with Kurtz and the place does not need any binocular. The natives are hiding in the bush, in the wings as it were. Then the pilgrims come out bringing Kurtz on a stretcher. So the first view that Marlow has of Kurtz is that of a sick man laid on a stretcher. Here is a fallen man, as it were. As the pilgrims come down the slope of the hill there is a sharp, shrill cry and then the natives armed with bows and arrows and spears begin to stream out of the bush. A dramatic scene has been created with Kurtz occupying the centre stage. As he sits up to address the natives Marlow has a view of sitting Kurtz – a seven feet tall man reduced to skin and bone. Kurtz says something to the natives, but he is impressed by Kurtz's deep voice and can understand the command Kurtz still has on the natives from the fact that after Kurtz addresses the natives the howling mob is turned into docile, obedient assembly and the people go back to the bushes. To Marlow Kurtz appears to be 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory', not only because the skin and bone white man resembles ivory, but also because the man was obsessed by his passion for ivory. Marlow is visibly, though shockingly, impressed by the 'shadow' of Kurtz.

In the next scene as Kurtz is laid down in one of the little cabins with his papers, Marlow has a clear look at Kurtz and is struck by 'the fire in his eyes' and the composed languor of his expression' (86). Marlow's reference to the eyes of Kurtz should be considered in the light of Conrad's intimate concern with the important role that eyes play in revealing the character. The 'fire' in the eyes of Kurtz reflects his egoism, almost Satanic in its dimension, and his extraordinary character. The mighty man who was practically at large at the Inner Station of the Belgian Congo is now literally 'cribbed, cabined and confined'.

So by now Marlow has seen Kurtz from a distance as well as from close quarters and has formed his impressions of the man, which he shared with his listeners. Next comes the vocal articulation. As Kurtz looks straight in the face of Marlow and welcomes him: 'I am glad' (86) two things happen. First, Marlow at once realizes that some special recommendations were sent to Kurtz about Marlow and the realization makes the past – the influence of Marlow's aunt, for that matter—bear on the present. Secondly the expression 'I am glad' brings about a cordial relationship between Kurtz and Marlow and suggests a kind of confidence, which leads Kurtz to keep a parcel of papers and a photograph in the custody of Marlow. Thirdly, as Marlow hears Kurtz he is amazed by his voice, by the 'volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips' (86). Surprisingly the voice was 'grave, profound, vibrating while the man did not seem capable of a whimper (86). The idea of the voice or the voice representing Kurtz is perfectly in keeping with the idea of the shadow ('The *shadow* looked satiated and calm'… 86; emphasis added) and fits perfectly in the pattern of the narrative as a journey to hell with Kurtz as a shadow and a disembodied voice.

So, if this scene takes place in the little cabin with Kurtz and Marlow, in the next scene Marlow goes out and the manager comes in. Kurtz and the manager are in the cabin behind the curtain and Marlow and the Russian are outside the cabin. What happens inside the cabin will be brought to our notice after we are through with what happens outside the cabin.

Again Marlow and the Russian are the spectators. Two of the natives – 'two bronze figures' with fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins stood leaning on the tall spears, and kept a watch on the ship, and in addition to them, a third 'a wild and gorgeous *apparition* of a woman' (87) moved about the shore. The main job of the two natives was possibly to accompany and protect the woman.

Marlow spends a good deal of creative energy in delineating the woman, because the 'wild and gorgeous' woman appeared to Marlow as an embodiment of wilderness. She was 'savage and superb', '*wild-eyed* and magnificent' (87; emphasis added).. The scare and the tension of the pilgrims is described by Marlow in dramatic terms: 'A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back' (87). Nobody knew what she was actually up to. But Marlow does not fail to focus on her look. 'She *looked* at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her *glance*' (87-88; emphasis added). However, she did nothing. She went back. Only once '*her eyes* gleamed back' (88; emphasis added) at the people on the deck. However, she will appear later before the river–boat leaves the Inner Station. She apparently loves Kurtz very much and would not like him to be taken away.

Let us now turn to the cabin and see what was happening there in the meantime. We know that the manager entered the cabin when Marlow had come out of it. We cannot see them but we can hear them. We know from the conversation that Marlow had overheard at the Central Station that the manager carries a bit of jealousy and rancour against Kurtz whose position he wants to usurp and would be most happy if Kurtz died. From what we can hear now we gather that the manager and Kurtz have an argument in Kurtz's cabin. Kurtz does not believe that the manager is really interested in saving him. He is only interested in the ivory, not in Kurtz, and tells him he is not as sick as the manager 'would like to believe' (88). Marlow had noticed fire in the eyes of Kurtz and we get a glimpse of the fire in the way the ruined man thunders against the manager.

Marlow's sympathy, however, is with Kurtz and not with the manager because he happens to have had an access to his conspiratorial moves. He can, therefore, see through the lip sympathy of the manager when, coming out of the cabin, the manager deplores the miserable condition of Kurtz and says, 'He is very low, very low'. Marlow's ironical comment is 'He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful' (88). Then, taking Marlow as a man whose opinion would carry weight he tries to malign Kurtz, and accuses him of bringing the Company to a precarious position by adopting an unsound method. When Marlow agreed that let alone an 'unsound method' it was no method at all the Manager thought that Marlow was with him and said, 'It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter'. Then Marlow said that the brick maker, who, Marlow knows, is a secret agent of the manager, would do it. The manager becomes confounded, because he had no idea that Marlow was aware of his relation with the brick maker. And then Marlow remarked with a sense of finality, 'Nevertheless I

think Mr Kurtz is a remarkable man' (89). The startled manager made his last dig: 'He *was*'.

Marlow realized that by commending Kurtz he had lumped himself along with Kurtz as 'a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe' (89). He says that he has the choice of nightmares only. On one side is the depravity of Kurtz and on the other the meanness of the manager, and if he has to choose between depravity and meanness, he will choose depravity as the more heroic of the two vices. Marlow himself, however, is neither mean nor does he become depraved. He is a normal man and acts as a basis of comparison in our estimate of the pilgrims and Kurtz.

As Marlow is lost in thoughts about the nightmares and about the depravity of Kurtz, he feels 'an intolerable weight oppressing[his] breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption , the darkness of an impenetrable night'(89). The Russian comes back to give him further information about Kurtz to whom he was deeply attached. Marlow assures him that he was 'Mr. Kurtz's friend – in a way' and Kurtz's reputation was safe with him. He then tells Marlow that it was Kurtz himself who ordered the attack upon the steamboat, because he hated the idea of being taken away. He was also not sure whether Kurtz would engineer another attack. The Russian elicited a promise of 'complete discretion' from Marlow, collected a few cartridges, a pair of old shoes and some 'good English tobacco' from Marlow, and then left. But before leaving he reiterated with conviction that Kurtz enlarged his mind.

Thus the Russian who heartily welcomed Marlow ashore at the Inner Station leaves the ship with cartridges in one pocket and Towson's book, his precious possession, in the other. In the novel, however, he contributes an important structural element. It is he who

tells Marlow the things about Kurtz, about the gorgeous woman, which Kurtz possibly could not /would not tell. Thus he helps us in developing the picture of Kurtz. Moreover the fact that he is a Russian also shows that Kurtz had enormous influence not only on the natives but also on a white man.

Shortly after midnight 'an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke [Marlow] up in a bewildered wonder' (92). Upon peering into Kurtz's cabin he discovers that the Russian's warning has been all prophetic: 'A light was burning within; but Kurtz was not there'(92). Marlow had an instant desire to raise an alarm; then he realized that that would only lead to a massacre and, more importantly, he must stick to his choice of nightmares: he must save Kurtz's reputation. As he leapt ashore he was sure to catch up with Kurtz quickly because Kurtz was sick and wasted, and followed the broad trail through the grass. It was a boyish game, and such was the attraction of the wilderness, that for a moment he thought he would never get back to the steamer and imagined himself living alone in the jungle. He also even confounded the beating of the drum with the beating of his heart. But soon, as he confronted Kurtz he came to his senses. He realized the danger of the situation he was in with the nearest native only thirty yards away. He realized that applying force would be insane because Kurtz's adorers were close by. So he has recourse to persuasion, tells him that his success in Europe is assured. In fact, Marlow decides to appeal to his reason, because although his soul was lost his intelligence was intact. Marlow wins, and half-carries Kurtz back to the riverboat, and as he was struck by his voice, he is now amazed by the heavy weight – of half-a-ton – of the wasted man. He once again becomes conscious of the difference between appearance and reality.

The episode sheds further light on the character of Kurtz. Though sick and wasted the appeal of wilderness was irresistible to Kurtz. The appeal is so strong that even Marlow in a moment of delusion felt like responding to it by staying back. The episode also shows the reversal of the power structure between Kurtz and the natives. The fleeing Kurtz must depend on the natives for his rescue. He must crawl the way the native chiefs used to crawl up to him ceremonially. In keeping with the analogous journey to hell Kurtz is described as a shade. 'He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me' (93). The episode also reveals Marlow's practical sense, his moral dilemma and his loyalty to the nightmare of his choice. Marlow has narrowly won his spiritual and not physical battle with Kurtz. Earlier we were told that Marlow had felt a distant kinship with Kurtz, and it is possible to see Kurtz as Marlow's alter ego. Thus his battle with Kurtz is metaphorically a battle with himself. By confronting Kurtz he confronts himself. It is a confrontation with his unrealized potentialities suggested in his momentary desire not to go back to the steamer and embrace the life of the jungle.

The riverboat leaves next day at noon in view of the thousand natives that 'flowed out of the woods' (96) and as the riverboat swung downstream the natives gathered on the shore. In the first rank three tribal men, grotesquely dressed tried to exercise charms through magic and incantation in words that 'resembled no sounds of human language' (96). It sounded like a 'satanic litany'. The woman with her 'helmeted head and tawny cheeks', whom we have already met, rushed to the brink of the stream and shouted something. Kurtz from pilothouse looked out with 'fiery, longing eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate' (97). It should be noted that while the elaborate

ceremonies of the witch men do not have any effect on Kurtz the chorus of shouts occasioned by the helmeted woman brings forth an expression of 'wistfulness and hate' from Kurtz. The ambivalence of attraction and repulsion for the woman is built into Kurtz's attitude to wilderness that the woman epitomizes.

As the natives began to shout on a chorus in response to the shout of the helmeted woman the trigger-happy pilgrims on deck got their rifles ready 'anticipating a jolly dark'(97), and to avoid bloodshed Marlow blows the steamer whistle again and again until the frightened natives ran helter- skelter. The three natives of the first rank fell 'flat on their face on the shore, as though they had been shot dead' (97). Marlow thinks that to the natives the steamboat must appear to be a 'splashing, thumping fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air' (97). Only the 'barbarous and superb' woman remained unmoved by the screeching noise of the whistle. At this point the pilgrims opened fire on the natives. Marlow contemptuously remarks, 'And then the imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun' (97). The comment reveals how barbarous the civilized pilgrims actually are.

The episode reinforces 'the superb and savage' aspects of the native woman and her conspicuous passion for Kurtz. The tremendous energy that she displays in her movement and behaviour shows how real she is. Kurtz's reaction, as revealed in his expression of 'wistfulness and hatred', suggests a reciprocation of feelings. The episode also underscores the superstitious nature of the simple natives, their belief in witchcraft as well as their adoration of Kurtz whom they would not like to part with. That the majestic woman who represents wilderness also shares these superstitions is evident in the fact that she had on her body 'bizarre things, charms […] gifts of witch men.

Now that Kurtz was placed in the pilot's cabin Marlow had greater opportunity to converse with him. But we have already been told that with Kurtz you do not talk, you only listen to him. Marlow, as earlier, is impressed by his voice, which 'rang deep to the very last', and its sonority and his 'unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression' (90). But the magnificent voice is deceptive; it was used to hide 'the barren darkness of the heart' (98). During his long talks he told Marlow about his Intended, his station, his career, his ideas. The original Kurtz was juxtaposed with the shade of Kurtz. He became the battleground of conflicting forces of 'the diabolic love and unearthly hate' (98) while the mundane world moved on as usual. The trees looked patiently after Kurtz, the 'grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings' (98).

The downstream journey was quite fast. As the river was fast running down toward the sea, Kurtz's life was also ebbing out swiftly and the manager was happy about the prospect of Kurtz's imminent death. Kurtz's confidence was also shaken when owing to a breakdown the journey was delayed. Marlow himself was also not well. He had a jungle fever, probably malaria and was 'so to speak numbered with the dead' (97). This is important because Marlow would say later that he could understand Kurtz better because it is Kurtz's extremity that he seemed to have lived through during his illness when he went very near the edge. But Kurtz 'had made the last stride, he had stepped over the edge while [Marlow] had been permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot' (101). But that makes all the difference, because Marlow believes that 'perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible' (101). Although Marlow was 'within a

hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement' he would have nothing to say. But Kurtz had something to say and he had said it, and since Marlow 'had peeped over the edge' himself he understood the meaning of Kurtz's stare better.

One evening Kurtz told Marlow 'a little tremulously' that he was lying there in the dark waiting for death. But '[the] light was within a foot of his eyes' (99). Kurtz had lost vision. Marlow tries to comfort him but suddenly notices a change of expression on 'the ivory face' of Kurtz. It was 'the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair' (99). In that 'supreme moment of complete knowledge' he cried in 'a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath – 'The horror! The horror!' (100). Kurtz had his grimmest insight at the moment of death when he had lost his physical vision.

Later that evening the manager's boy reported in the dining hall, 'in a tone of scathing contempt [Had he shared the contempt of his master, the manager?]—'Mistah Kurtz – he dead' (100).

Critics have broken their lances on the possible implications of Kurtz's last agonized cry: 'The horror! The horror!' Many writers think that it is Kurtz's spontaneous and possibly instantaneous reaction to his realization of the truth which is hidden 'luckily' for most of us. It is a succinct summing up of his degeneration and the dark forces that led to the degeneration. Everybody is not able to confront Reality. Even Marlow who, on account of his severe illness, – possibly some jungle fever, went right up to the 'edge' that is the border line between life and death, is not sure whether he would have been able to sum up life the way Kurtz did. Kurtz, according to Marlow, did confront reality with enormous pluck and courage of conviction, and, therefore, he is 'a remarkable man'.

Seen in that light Kurtz's cry can be taken as his own judgment on his life full of misdeeds.

Marlow asserts, in fact, later that '[Kurtz] had summed up – he had judged' (101). But Marlow does not say precisely what he summed up or what 'he had judged' and thus keeps the statement deliberately ambiguous and open to different interpretations. He does say soon afterwards, however, that Kurtz had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth' (100). And later he insists that his final cry was 'an affirmation, a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions' (101). But many critics question how can Marlow or any reader for that matter, know exactly what Kurtz means by his final cry? The moral reading of Kurtz's final words is Marlow's reading and is naturally conditioned by Marlow's sensibility. In other words, it is quite possible that Marlow is reading a meaning which is different, if not far, from the meaning intended by Kurtz, particularly when we bear in mind that throughout the narrative Marlow presents himself as the only sane man in midst of a host of hypocrites. In all fairness, the meaning of the cry should remain, like Marlow's tale, 'inconclusive', amenable to multiple interpretations.

The reporting of the manager's boy about Kurtz's death –'Mistah Kurtz – he dead', short and laconic, is in keeping with the cultural level of the reporter. The sentence is grammatically wrong. In its right form it should have been 'Mr Kurtz is dead'. The boy says, 'Mistah' because he cannot pronounce 'mister'. Then, after 'Mistah Kurtz in place of verb [is] there is only a dash, a short suspenseful silence, followed by the pronoun 'he' – a reinforcement of the subject, which is grammatically unnecessary. A verb suggests action. Replacement of the verb by silence, though grammatically wrong, is semantically

significant, because Kurtz has now passed into eternal silence, incapable of any action whatsoever. Moreover 'is' is a form of the verb, 'to be', and Kurtz, by dying, has ceased to be. It is not for nothing that Eliot used these words – 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead*'* – as epigraph to his famous poem, "The Hollow Men".

The announcement of Kurtz's death once more calls Marlow's attention to the scheming manager who was trying to hide his gleeful feeling of jubilation, 'the unexpressed depths of his madness' (100) with a peculiar smile.

The next day the pilgrims buried Kurtz and Marlow's next comment is that 'they very nearly buried [him]. Marlow had already referred to 'the shakes too bad to stand' (99) that he had suffered from. His subsequent remarks indicate that he was deadly ill for a period which he can 'remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire' (101). His next memories are of being back to the 'sepulchral city'.

Marlow returns to the 'sepulchral city' as a changed man with his perception of life changed by the experience of his journey to the Congo and his association with Kurtz whose extremity he had also vicariously experienced through his serious sickness, his wrestle with death. When he first came to the city he came for a job; he was inexperienced. But now he believes that the richness of his experience has made him superior to the people who live on the surface plane of existence, 'hurrying through streets to fetch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams' (102). He felt like 'laughing in their faces so full of stupid ignorance' (102). He was sure that 'they could not possibly know the things [he] knew' (102). His imagination was so charged with his

knowledge that he says that ‘it was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing’ (102).

In the ‘sepulchral city’ Marlow receives a number of visitors on account of his association with Kurtz. First came a clean-shaved spectacled man on behalf of the Company and pressed him for the documents. But Marlow was determined, because of his ‘two rows with the manager on the subject’, not to ‘give up the smallest scrap out of that package’ (103). So there was an altercation and the man left empty-handed, and angrily. Then two days later came another fellow introducing himself as ‘Kurtz’s cousin’ (103). Marlow does not say that the man was Kurtz’s cousin, but says that the man called himself Kurtz’s cousin, thus making it vague and uncertain whether he was really Kurtz’s cousin or just pretended to be so. He wanted to know the details about Kurtz’s last moments. From him Marlow learns that Kurtz was ‘essentially a great musician’ (103, while Marlow had taken him to be either a painter who wrote for journals, or a journalist who could paint. Both, however, agree that he was ‘a universal genius’. After the man had left Marlow was left only with some family letters and memoranda. Then came a journalist who believed Kurtz had no flair for writing but was a fine speaker. It is really surprising that Marlow read the report written by Kurtz and was much impressed by that ‘excellent piece of writing’, and yet does not object to the view expressed by the journalist. However, he gave him the Report without the postscriptum which he had already torn off, for publication.. Why had Marlow torn off the postscriptum that said, ‘Exterminate all brutes’? He did so because he had undertaken, on his own, and had promised the Russian, that he would save the reputation of Kurtz. The postscriptum would have seriously jeopardized the reputation of Kurtz who was supposed to carry out

the ideals of colonialism of doing welfare to the savage, to carry into effect the ‘white man’s burden’.

So Marlow was left only with a slim packet of letters and a portrait of Kurtz’s Intended. He decided to hand over these to the girl personally. Before we meet the girl, however, Marlow gives us an idea of the girl by his study of the portrait. First, the girl looked beautiful and had a beautiful expression. However both the look and the impression may be deceptive, because ‘the sunlight can be made to lie’ (104). But there was ‘a delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features’ (104), which can never be manipulated. In other words, there could be no doubt about her truthfulness. The full significance of Marlow’s insistence on her definite truthfulness will be clear to us only towards the end of the novel when her truthfulness will compel Marlow to lie to her.

Marlow, being a man of contemplative disposition tries to understand why he wants to visit the girl and hand over the packet and the photograph. One reason is he wanted to consign all the physical objects associated with the memory of Kurtz, to oblivion. Another reason might be ‘an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence’ (104). Marlow was not sure. But there could be another reason also. His reading of the photograph gave him the impression that the girl would be ‘ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself’ (104), and he possibly thought he would be able to tell her the truth about Kurtz without being misunderstood. But the fact will falsify his impression. She will turn out to be just the reverse of this impression. She would be more talking than ‘ready to listen’. And with more ‘mental reservation’ than without it, and

more thought of herself than 'without a thought for herself' (104). Marlow has often made a mistake in taking appearance for reality.

As Marlow proceeds to the girl's house his mind is full of memories of Kurtz who, Marlow says, 'lived as much as he had ever lived – a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence' (105). Kurtz, in other words, was a diabolical character – magnificent in appearance but deceitful to the core. Marlow remembers 'the colossal scale of his abject desires, the manners, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul' (105). His 'collected languid manner' was evident in her possessiveness, the way he wanted to claim the collected ivory as his own treasure because he had 'collected it [himself] at great personal risk' (106). He wanted justice, he said. Haunted by these crowded memories Marlow rang the bell, all the time being conscious of Kurtz's unseen presence and his whispered cry: 'The horror! The horror!' It is the last words of Kurtz that keep on dinning in his ears as he waits before 'a mahogany door on the first floor' (106).

The mention of the mahogany door is the first hint that the girl belonged to the rich class of the society. More evidences of her aristocratic position will follow in the description of the drawing room with its long windows, the shining gilt legs and backs of furniture, the tall marble fireplace, and the grand piano; and this is important, because later we shall learn that the marriage between Kurtz and the Intended did not come off mainly because of the social barrier, because the family of Kurtz was not rich enough for him to marry into aristocracy. This knowledge will assume huge proportion when considered in the light of Kurtz's position in the Congo, his frantic and fanatic desire to

get rich by fair means or foul. The fact that he could not marry the girl he intended to marry, because he had not enough money, turns him into a monomaniac in his love of the lucre.

However, as Marlow waits in the lofty drawing room, burdened with the memories of Kurtz, the evening sets in. 'The dusk was falling' (106). This time of the evening is significant, because we have already noticed the thematic relevance of Conrad's use of light and darkness. Here it is evening – the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious, between appearance and reality. We should also note that the atmosphere of the drawing room in the evening time, and with Marlow haunted by the memory of Kurtz, has something Gothic about it. The appearance of the girl 'all in black' and 'floating towards [him] in the dusk' (106) further contribute to the Gothic atmosphere. The girl was dressed in black as a sign of mourning although it was more than a year that Kurtz had died. To Marlow, therefore, it seemed as though she would mourn forever. That she really wanted to 'mourn forever' will be clear by the end of the meeting when she would have something to live by, to mourn forever. In an intimate personal touch she took both the hands of Marlow in hers and murmured that she had heard that he would come to visit her. The murmur shows her tenderness with which she was looking forward to the meeting. 'She was not very young' and Marlow had a feeling that she 'had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering' (106). In a spirit of dedication to her love for Kurtz who was no more she would sacrifice her life for the dead lover. Marlow says that with her entrance the room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead'(106). She became an embodiment of mourning. Her 'fair hair', 'pale visage', and 'pure brow' surrounded by 'an ashy halo'

and her ‘dark eyes’ with which she looked at Marlow contributed further to the uncanny, Gothic atmosphere of the place. We should remember the importance that Conrad attaches to the eyes when Marlow says that the glance of the dark eyes ‘was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful’ (106). It is to the force of the glance that Marlow will surrender and tell a lie. She was proud of her sorrow and was determined to keep that sorrow alive so that for her Kurtz had died ‘only yesterday’. Marlow had the physical sensation of apprehending her sorrow and Kurtz’s death simultaneously. The image of his death melts into the sorrowful image of the girl so that they become inextricably interlinked. The sensations of a simultaneous existence of Kurtz’s actual death and the girl’s sacrifice of life or symbolic death creates panic in Marlow who feels that he had ‘blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold’ (107). The atmosphere becomes intensely Gothic as if Marlow has entered a charnel house.

As they sit the girl begins to control the conversation and makes him agree to what she says. She takes for granted that Marlow ‘knew him well’, that Marlow ‘admires him’, because ‘it was impossible to know him and not to admire him’. Marlow first simply replies, ‘He was a remarkable man’, for reasons that we have already discussed -- the reasons that are beyond the reach of the girl, but ‘before *the appalling fixity of her gaze’* (107 emphasis added) he resumed, ‘It was impossible not to…’. But the Intended did not allow him to complete the sentence. She put words in his mouth and completed the sentence with ‘… love him’. Marlow’s ‘appalled dumbness’ is an indication that he has already started losing to the Intended and the situation prepares us for his final defeat. Marlow’s next defeat is when he fails to question the Intended’s claim that ‘[she] knew

him best' and on the contrary, is forced to agree with her: 'You know him best'. With every conceding word the room grows darker and 'only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the inextinguishable light of belief and love'. Though not Time's fool, she was a creature of illusions, and she went on talking volubly as 'thirsty men drink', giving vent to her emotions pent up for over a year and made claims in the process – 'I understood him better than any one on earth', for example. But Marlow, the captive auditor, cannot protest, cannot question, and cannot argue. He only listens and his uneasiness is expressed in metaphorical terms: 'The darkness deepened' (108).

The past again strikes into the present as while listening to the girl Marlow remembers that 'her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people'. 'He was not rich enough or something', and 'it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there' (108). As the girl speaks of Kurtz's voice, 'the gift of the great', the heap of broken images of his encounter with Kurtz along with his last words crowd his mind. Marlow is losing ground and he is aware of it, but he is helpless and with 'despair in [his] heart' he surrenders to 'the *faith* that was in her[…] the great and *saving illusion* that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the *triumphant darkness* from which [he] could not have defended her – from which [he] could not even defend [himself]' (108-109 emphasis added). The Intended constructs a mythic image of Kurtz and sacrifices herself at its altar, and for Marlow her illusion is so strong, her flame so stirring, her faith so unflinching that he cannot confront her with truth. Both become confined to darkness, though in different ways.

We have already noticed that it is the girl who controls the conversation and as in the case of Kurtz you didn't talk, you only listened, so here also Marlow is more a listener, a

captive auditor than a participant in the conversation. The drift of her talk takes in its course Kurtz's greatness, his generous heart, his vast plans and the loss caused to the world by his death. She veers round her memory and her words. And as she expressed her bereavement in the poignant words, 'I cannot believe that I shall never see him again , that nobody will see him again, never, never, never'(a clear echo of Lear's lamentation at the death of Cordelia) she 'put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, *stretching them back* and with clasped *pale hands* across the fading and narrow sheen of the window'(109 emphasis added). At one level she assumes the figure of a floating creature in keeping with the manner of her entrance (floating) and intensifies the already established Gothic atmosphere of the room. But at still another level, a more important level, with her outstretched arms she at once reminds Marlow of the black woman at the Inner Station, who raised her arms as if in a gesture of supplication to Kurtz, her departing god. But while the black woman made the entreaty to a living person who was about to die soon, the Intended's entreaty is directed to the living memory of the dead man. To Marlow both these figures are shades, eloquent phantoms, tragic and familiar.

The Intended's sudden observation about Kurtz, 'He died as he lived' has an element of ambiguity about it. It is not quite clear what she means. She possibly means that in life he was governed by his missionary zeal and died for it. In other words, he dedicated his life to the cause of idealism for which he lived. But the ungrammatical nature of the sentence (it should have been 'He died as he had lived') makes it amenable to another meaning: even when he was alive he was actually dead. Because of his degeneration, his Satanic life, it was a 'death-in-life' existence. He was metaphorically dead even when he

lived. This interpretation can be validated by Marlow's belief that lying is dying, that disintegration equates decomposition.

Marlow sustains further loss of ground when the girl claims that Kurtz's end 'was in every way worthy of his life', Marlow knows how far from truth the statement is. He feels angry but cannot say anything in protest as 'a feeling of infinite pity' overpowers him. As she increasingly succeeds in wearing down Marlow's resistance, making him agree with her, putting words in his mouth, Marlow in a weak unguarded moment admits, 'I heard his very last words', and realizing the blunder he had made, stops 'in a fright'. The girl pounces upon his admission and requests him to repeat them and strengthens her request with a pitiful appeal – made in emotionally charged broken pieces of words and phrases. 'I want – I want—something—something—to—to live with'. Marlow is in a precarious moral dilemma. He detests lies, and the girl wants 'something […] to live with'. He knows that if he tells the truth the girl with her fidelity will not be able to bear the shock. He remains silent. The last words of Kurtz keep on dinning in his ears, and then the girl again insists, --'the last word to live with'. Marlow collects himself together, bucks up all the courage he is capable of and then tells the lie: 'The last word he pronounced was – your name'. The pause before he says 'your name' is a vibrant pause that precedes 'to live with' in the girl's appeal. The girl, a creature of illusion, gets her illusion confirmed by the lie—'I knew it – I was sure!'

Why did Marlow, a man who says he detests lies, tell a lie? According to some critics the girl's trustfulness forces Marlow to tell a lie, because if the truth is told the very basis of the truth will be destroyed. With this lie Marlow is not only able to preserve the innocence of Kurtz's Intended but he is also able to save her life. Marlow's lie is an act of

darkness but it is also a means, if not the only means, to keep back the darkness, to give her the protection of a saving illusion. In terms of the thematic matrix of the novel Marlow prefers the shades to horrid truth, as an inescapable accompaniment of life. Man lives by illusion. The paradox of the loss, for Marlow, is a finding of the truth. A life-saving lie is possibly better than a killing truth. It transcends the ordinary morality and establishes a morality of a higher order.

Marlow's lie may also be seen to be in keeping with his attitude to women. He believes that women, like his aunt, are normally creatures of illusion and they cannot stand too much reality. Marlow's lie thus provides a bulwark necessary to protect the saving illusion.

Marlow's journey ends with the knowledge of a peculiar illusion that allows him to survive tragic knowledge without incurring self-deception. Awareness of the darkness is a kind of enlightenment. In the end of Marlow's tale we find him, in the words of the nameless narrator, 'indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha' (111). In the beginning of the tale also 'Marlow sat cross-legged' and 'he had the pose of a Buddha'. The Buddha image at the end of the novel is linked up with the Buddha image in the beginning, and confirms the symbolic nature of the journey as a voyage within, a journey like the Buddha's for enlightenment.

At the end of the novel we are back to the *Nellie* on the Thames. The story begins on the *Nellie* and ends on the *Nellie*, and in the inner circle Marlow's journey begins at the 'sepulchral city' and ends at the 'sepulchral city'.

Chapter Five: Issues

(i) Critique of Colonialism

Heart of Darkness is a very complex and rich work of art, which is amenable to multiple interpretations. It is possible to explore its significance at multiple levels. On the most obvious level perhaps, it is an enquiry into the nature of colonialism or imperialism and severe denunciation of it. Marlow's trip to the Congo is a forceful comment on 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and of geographical exploration' (In Guerard 34). At the same time it questions the value of white civilization and the desirability of its transplantation in the so-called primitive countries.

As Marlow indirectly suggests by referring to the Roman invasion of Britain, colonialism has existed since time immemorial. But Conrad presents colonialism not merely as a political and economic venture, but as an offshoot of the individual's lust for power and possessiveness and even as an epitome of man's capacity for evil. Of course, in the process he distinguishes between a conqueror and a colonialist while he refers to the Romans and the British. While a colonialist has commitments to the place and the people among whom he lives and is expected to identify himself as a member of the native society, a conqueror has no commitment to anybody whatsoever. By sheer brute force he conquers and plunders the weaker people. The Roman invasion was an act of the conquerors who grabbed what they could for the sake of what was to be got. It was just 'robbery' with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale. It was 'merely a squeeze'.

Conrad presents different approaches to colonialism. The frame narrator sees it only as a glorious adventure. But by calling the English conquerors 'hunters for gold or pursuers of fame' he unwittingly associates them with the Roman invaders and the other characters in Marlow's tale who take part in the colonial enterprise for selfish purposes. Moreover, by pointing to the two symbols of that enterprise – the sword and the torch – he actually refers to brutal force and to the negation of native culture by the so-called light of civilization. Similarly Marlow's aunt has an idealistic view of colonialism. Its motive, she thinks, is to civilize conquered peoples 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'. Her view of the colonialist intention recalls Kipling's idealistic and philanthropic view of 'the white man's burden'. Marlow, on the other hand, points to the evils of conquest. Although he asserts that the modern European colonizers are different from the Roman invaders, the point that Marlow tries to suggest, at least initially, is that while an invasion is a sheer, naked looting, colonialism is informed by some glorious idea, the idea of civilizing the uncivilized .

Let us now consider the extent to which this ambivalent distinction between Roman invasion and European colonialism is sustained by the narrative and by Marlow's confrontation with reality. Marlow first has an uneasy apprehension of colonialism in Brussels. At this point we should hasten to add that Conrad does not name either the city or the river or the Belgian Congo in the course of the novel. One purpose of course may be that he wants to give the tale a universal dimension and does not want to confine it to any particular place and time. The death- like atmosphere of the 'sepulchral city' and of the company headquarters, together with the weird behaviour of the people he meets there, seems ominous to him. His uneasiness grows during his journey to Africa, which

gives him a first glimpse into the colonialist enterprise. On his way along the African coast he sees a man-of- war firing insanely and incomprehensively into an apparently empty continent. Even at this early stage the colonial expedition strikes him as a 'merry dance of death and trade', a nexus between commerce and death, or as 'a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares'. Not until he comes to the grove of death, however, does he realize the full extent of the destructive process in which the whites are engaged in Africa.

When he reaches the Company Station he is deeply shocked by what he discovers. His suspicion that he will be acquainted with a 'flabby, pretending, week-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly' (23) is immediately confirmed when he comes upon the dying Negroes. He finds that no effort is made by the colonialists to understand the natives whom they exploit in various ways. Although he does not convey his reaction in indignant tones, his vivid imagery heightened in its effect by a sinister background of aggressive, futile activity shocks the reader into an awareness of the effects of the white man's presence in Africa.

What he ironically calls 'the work' is an irrational and meaningless violation of the land and its people. Phrases such as 'objectless blasting', 'a waste of evocations' and 'inhabited devastation' create a striking picture of destructiveness. The images of decaying machinery, 'the boiler wallowing in the grass', the railway-truck 'lying on its back with its wheels in the air' and looking like ' the carcass of some animal' (22) add up to the general lifelessness of the setting and comment on the uselessness of transportation, of the trappings of white civilization.

Even worse is the degree of dehumanization that Marlow witnesses; black slaves, each having ‘an iron collar on his neck’ and all connected with a chain, carry baskets of earth from one place to another. Their ribs and joints visible ‘like knot in a rope’, ghostly figures of natives – over-worked, starved, and too weak to move – are left to die in the ‘greenish gloom’ of the forest. The condition of the men suggests ‘a massacre of pestilence’. Men are described as ‘shapes’, ‘phantoms’, ‘bundles of acute angles’ to suggest how they have been dehumanized by the colonizers. Marlow feels that he has entered into the ‘gloomy circle of some Inferno’. Marlow’s indignation is conveyed not so much by words as by the ironical tone with which he uses the words. The fact that the so-called criminals punished by the ‘outraged law’, and the blacks dying of disease and starvation were all brought ‘in all the legality of time contracts’ only points to the hypocrisy of the white man’s enterprise. He refers to this as ‘the great cause of this high and just proceeding’. The best example of dramatic irony lies in the contrast between the grove of death and the image of light provided by the accountant. We realize that his is not the true light of civilization but mere external appearance. We are horrified by the insensitiveness of a man whose books are ‘in apple-pie order’ yet who is blind to the surrounding ‘inferno’. This illustrates the reality of colonialism at its worst. As Marlow’s insistence on blackness, disease and death indicates, it is not light but darkness that the white man has brought with him, unless it be the false light radiated by the chief accountant whose immaculate dress and devotion to book keeping may be seen as inhuman indifference to the agony of the dying native just outside his office.

At the Central Station Marlow meets men who do not even pretend to have come on a philanthropic mission; they talk unashamedly of the riches they could extract from the

country. The manager is a ‘common trader’ and his agents have turned ivory into a god. The sole desire of Eldorado explorers is to ‘tear treasure out of the bowels of the land[…]with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe’ (44).

In the novel Kurtz epitomizes the reality behind the myth of colonization and whatever is carried on in the name of ‘progress’ – its hypocrisy, its brutality, its corruption, its unrestrained lust, its greed, its inhumanity, the discrepancy between the precept and the practice, its self deception and its capacity for evil.

Kurtz comes to Africa as a civilizer, as ‘an emissary of pity, and science, and progress’ (36) but in the solitude of the jungle he is consumed by the wilderness outside and within himself because of his lack of self-restraint. In a place untrammelled by trappings of civilization and devoid of external checks the beast in him overtakes his social self and turns him into a megalomaniac exploiter who is prepared to kill anybody for a little ivory. Instead of turning his station into ‘beacon on the road towards better things’ (47), as he intended to, ‘a center […] for humanizing, improving, instructing’ (47), he gives in to the ‘fascination of the abomination’ as his participation in ‘unspeakable rites’ and the human heads on poles around his house indicate. Kurtz gradually assumes the status of a man-god by duping and frightening the natives and abrogates to himself the power to destroy all those who are different from him. This helps to conduct a three-level, brute exploitation of the natives – biological, economic and cultural. The contradiction in his report between the ‘burning noble words’ expressing the ‘every altruistic sentiment’ and the postscriptum, ‘Exterminate all the brutes!’ reveals

not only his self – deception but the failure of white civilization to put its ideals into practice and the perversion of those ideals.

All along Marlow tries to understand the 'otherness' of the natives of Africa and takes pity on their inhuman suffering. His sympathetic observation serves to explode the myth of the 'white man's burden', which is nothing, but a colossal hoax that hides the greed, violence and lust for power, and corruption of the exploiting colonialists. He questions the righteousness of colonial expansion. His Congo experience has shown him that colonialism is, at bottom, only an elaborate arrangement for exploration at three levels: biological, economic and cultural. Even the 'idea' at the back of it cannot save it. It can at best be a 'great saving illusion'. Thus Marlow's journey to the Belgian Congo, which gives real illumination about himself, also serves to enlighten him about the nature of man, his capacity for evil.

Hunt Hawkins in an interesting article argues that in the present era of decolonization people are interested in *Heart of Darkness* because 'the story is one of fiction's strongest statements about imperialism', in addition to various other themes that the novel deals with. He points out that four major critics have tried to interpret differently the three passages that are crucial to any understanding of Conrad's attitude. The first passage is spoken by the nameless narrator and it is a glorification of the 'knight-errant' who sailed down the Thames with a spark of the sacred fire and also the seed of the commonwealth. The other two passages are spoken by Marlow. One is the point where Marlow, looking at the 'vast amount of red in a map of Africa, remarks that it is good to see it because one knows that some real work is done in there'. The comment of Marlow suggests that he is trying to justify British imperialism on the ground that it is trying to carry out a noble

idea efficiently. Efficiency and idea are the two criteria for 'good' imperialism. 'What saves us is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps [the Romans] were not of much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind- as is very proper for those who tackle darkness. The conquest of 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. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to…' (10)

Shall we presume, then, that Conrad is opposed to wasteful imperialism, and the critical attitude that we find in the novel is due to the fact that Conrad's own personal experience of the Congo as presented through Marlow's experience of the journey made it abundantly clear that there was no efficiency. On the contrary his whole journey was seriously affected by the inefficiency of the company as the 'noble' idea with which the colonizers started was soon thrown to the winds, John Raskin in *The Mythology of Imperialism* (1971) holds that Conrad's experience of the Congo turned him against imperialism not in particular relation to the Congo but in general. Eloise Knapp Hay, however, would like to make a difference between Conrad's attitude to imperialism and Marlow's. She argues in *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1963) that while Conrad

was opposed to any kind of imperial power, Marlow was a British conservative and failed to see that if ' [all] Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz', England was no exception.

Conrad's complex attitude to colonialism can possibly be partly explained by his complex family background. His father was a nationalist revolutionary leader, suffered imprisonment and exile for his activities against the Russian rule. But, as Fleishman points out in *Conrad's Politics* (1967), he was a member of the *szlachta* or Polish gentry, which means that his was a family of colonialists. Moreover Podoloia, the place fro where Conrad's father came had only twelve per cent Polish population but it is they who owned most of the land as a legacy of colonialism. Ukraine where Conrad was born and spent the first four years of his life had only three per cent Polish population , but again, it is they who owned most of the land. Thus while Conrad's father was anti-imperialist he was also , at the same time, pro-colonialism in his support of the prerogatives of the landowners. Conrad's attitude to colonialism is further complicated by the fact that two of his uncles took positions different from his father's in the contemporary politics.

In this context it is worth recalling what Conrad wrote in his *Last Essays*: 'If I am to believe that colonialism was undertaken for the cause of democracy, it is enough to make you die laughing'. This statement will also give a lie to Achebe's contention that Conrad was a 'thoroughgoing racist'.

Achebe however combats such a view. While he concedes that Conrad 'appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his story', he argues that 'if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator his care seems

to [him] totally wasted because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters.'. He further adds, 'It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Conrad seems to me to approve of Marlow, with only minor reservations- a fact reinforced by the similarities between their two careers...'. Avon Fleishman adopts a middle of the road attitude when he suggests that Conrad might not accept Marlow's justification of imperialism by good work but he believed that it could really be redeemed by an 'idea'. In *Conrad's Politics* (1967) he points out that Conrad condemned 'exploitative conquerors' like Alamyer in *Almayer's Folly,* Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands* and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* , but seems to approve Tom Lingard in his trilogy and Jim in *Lord Jim.* But the arguments do not appear convincing. Since we are primarily concerned with *Heart of Darkness* there is no need to discuss in detail the arguments of Fleishman. Suffice it to say that the central theme and the ideational structure of the novel and Marlow's view of human life would give lie to any such contention.

Furthermore, the two criteria of efficiency and idea are also not very clearly defined. It was social Darwinism that promoted in the nineteenth century the value of efficiency as it believed in the theory of the survival of the fittest. But survival of the fittest does not mean survival of the best. By 'idea' does Conrad mean 'an identification of oneself as a member of the native society' or the notion of 'civilizing mission' in keeping with the ideas expressed in Kipling's "The White Man's Burden"? In the context of the novel it seems that the second notion, 'we can exert a power for good practically unbounded', as Kurtz had written at an early stage, is the idea that Conrad might have had in mind. But

what comes of that idea Marlow has clearly seen in the progressive degradation of Kurtz and the postscriptum of the Report, 'Exterminate all brutes'. In fact, as John Hobson pointed out long back in 1902 in *Imperialism: A Study* that the colonies were necessary for the industrialized Europe for collection of raw materials and for marketing finished goods as the home market ceased to be commercially attractive. So the idea of ' the white man's burden' was more a garb than a real responsibility. The main motive was commercial advancement. It is interesting to note how Benita Parry – very poignantly and pointedly – makes the point. Parry writes:

> To explain and justify the west's galactic ambitions and establish its title to global paramountcy, imperialism's propagandists devised the heady conceit of Europe's messianic destiny as the saviour of benighted peoples, asserted as proven the existence of a master race and represented the species' interactive relationship with its material conditions as one demanding total control of the physical environment . (9)

There is no reason to believe, either, that Conrad denounces European colonialism or Belgian colonialism and supports British colonialism. Such an idea draws on Marlow's account of the large shining map he sees in the company office at Brussels: 'There was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there' (14). And 'red' signifies the colonial activity of the British. In the first place, neither the city nor the country, nor the river nor even Africa is mentioned in the novel. It is on the basis of Conrad's account of the Congo experience that the spatiality of Marlow's experience is identified. Moreover, one can trace a number of internal evidences of the British involvement in the novel: Marlow and his British listeners,

Marlow's discovery of the English book in the deserted hut of the Russian, the pilot-house with couch and camp stool , the Martini Henry rifles manufactured in England, etc. There can be little doubt about Marlow's denunciation of colonialism. It takes, broadly speaking, three forms. First, there is direct attack when he draws historical parallels between the ancient England and contemporary Africa; secondly, in his use of the ironical tone in expressions like, 'noble cause', the 'jolly pioneers of progress', 'the improved specimen' etc. ; then, thirdly, the use of metaphors like 'sepulchral city', 'whited sepulchre', the company office, 'a house in a city of the dead', 'a bundle of acute angles' etc. so as to suggest the dehumanizing effect of the colonial rule on the colonized.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad's critique of colonialism must be seen in the light of his perception of man. To him colonialism is not only a political and economic venture, but also an offshoot of the individual's lust for power and possessiveness and even as an epitome of man's propensity to and capacity for evil. It will be no exaggeration to say that Kurtz epitomizes the reality behind the myth of colonialism and whatever that is carried on in the name of progress – its hypocrisy, its corruption, its untainted lust, its greed, its brutality, its inhumanity, the discrepancy between the idea and the actuality, its self-deception and hypocrisy. While it is true that colonialism may take different forms in different colonized countries and may also vary with the varying colonizers, the fact remains, nevertheless, that the primitive in man is bound to ultimately come out and man is bound to be conquered by the forces of darkness, the darkness lying within one's heart unless one has restraint and is sustained by inner strength.

[ii]Levels of journey

At the surface level *Heart of Darkness* is an account of Marlow's journey to the Congo in his youth that he had undertaken as an employee of a Belgian company working in the Congo. Since the Belgian Congo is situated in the deepest part of Africa, generally known as Dark Continent, the journey to the Congo is described as a journey to the heart of darkness. It is a physical journey. But even as a physical journey it is a difficult journey, because it is an upstream journey and the journey is fraught with many dangers. The river is full of snags and at places very shallow so that Marlow as a captain has to be extremely cautious and alert to every possible danger of the journey. Marlow starts from Brussels, the sepulchral city, in a French steamer and reaches the mouth of the Congo river in thirty days. At the mouth of the river he takes a smaller steamer commanded by a Swede captain and goes to the Company Station. After spending about ten days at the Company Station he covers the next two hundred miles on foot because the river is not navigable at that stretch. The journey through the jungle is also a hazardous journey that takes fifteen days. At the end of this journey on foot he reaches the Central Station, and just when he is eager to move on he learns to his dismay that the ship which he has to take is at the bottom of the river and he must repair it first before he can resume his journey. On account of the nonavailability of the rivets with which he can repair the ship he is stranded there for a lot of time. The lack of rivets also shows the inefficiency of the administration because rivets were strewn all over the road when he had come through the jungle. Anyway it took two months before he could again start his journey. When he stops at a place fifty miles below Kurtz's station he gets the warning

that he should go-slow and be cautious. The caution proves true because this part of the journey was very difficult because of the snags and shallowness of the river at places. When Marlow is eight miles below Kurtz's station there is a dense fog and later the boat faces an attack from the natives. Marlow's helmsman dies during the attack.

Finally Marlow reaches Kurtz's station. All along the journey that took nearly four months was as strenuous as it was risky. There were other problems as well. Kurtz, whom the pilgrims brought to the boat, ran away at night and it was quite a problem for Marlow to get him back to the boat at the risk of his own life. Moreover, during his return journey Marlow became so ill, possibly due to some jungle fever that he had caught in course of the journey, that the pilgrims almost lost hope of his survival, and it took nearly a year for him to come back to normalcy; even his dear aunt, who held him in great affection and on whose recommendation he had got the job, could not easily nurse him back to health.

The journey up the Congo is certainly a very real journey up a real river. The natives are beings of flesh and blood and the whites at the stations and in Brussels are real persons with real jobs to do. But this realistic superstructure of the novel exists in connection with the less realistic substructures. At the beginning of the novel the reader is warned that the real meaning of the novel envelops 'the tale which brought about it only as a glow brings out a haze'. The haze which is brought out is the haze of man's primitive past, a past which Marlow learns to recognize and control at a great cost.

The 'heart of darkness' is at once the heart of Africa, the heart of evil, the primitive in man – everything that is nihilistic, corrupt and malign – and perhaps the heart of man. Marlow tells the story in the dense atmosphere of decay, death and cruelties of

imperialistic exploitation. It relates Marlow's experience of the blackness of Africa, its otherness, everything that lies beyond the concept of fidelity – and of the terrible presence of Mr Kurtz, the only man in the novel who looked into the heart of darkness.

The area of darkness exists not only in time and space, but also within the mind of man. Not only is man completely surrounded by an external nature, that is hostile to him, or at least indifferent, there is also a traitor within, an inheritance of the primitive, which threatens to break through the safeguards of civilization. Kurtz's dying exclamation, 'The horror! The horror!' may be an evaluation of his own degeneration and a summing up of his judgment of his life, but the words reverberate with resounding echoes. We realize that the words could be equally applicable to Marlow's judgment of life, or any human life for that matter. In the novel Kurtz can be seen as only a distant objectification of Marlow, in the sense that Kurtz is today what Marlow might have become had he not met Kurtz, or Marlow is what Kurtz had been in his youth. What Kurtz looks into as he dies is his own nature and what he sees is the darkness within the heart of man. In this respect Marlow's journey into the heart of darkness is actually a journey into his own heart; his discovery of the primitive within himself. The suggestion of a journey into the heart, a journey within, is suggested by the nameless narrator when he tells us that Marlow sat in the pose of Buddha. Buddha made a journey into his heart and became enlightened. The idea is reinforced at the end of the novel when after telling his story Marlow is found to be sitting in the posture of the meditating Buddha.

It would be wrong to suppose, however, that *Heart of Darkness* is only an exploration of the human heart. On the contrary, Conrad's genius creates a work that is consistent at several levels. From the outset Marlow invests the journey with an almost supernatural

significance. Brussels is described as a sepulchral city, 'a whited sepulchre', a city of death. During the journey he finds the grass growing through the ribs of Fresleven who lost his life at the hands of the natives during a quarrel over a pair of black hens. Again further on, Marlow sees grass growing between the stones. The grass growing through the ribs strangely connects the geographical space and the human space. Gradually the journey assumes the nature of a journey to hell. This idea is systematically reinforced by patterned use of the words like 'shade', 'shadow', 'disembodied voice', 'ashy halo' and sometimes direct statement like 'I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno', etc. In this respect Marlow's journey up the Congo parallels a journey to Hell that we find in Homer, Virgil and Dante. In *The Odyssey, The Aeneid* and *The Divine Comedy*, for example. In the classical tales – both pagan and Christian-- the hero descends into hell to meet a shade to discover some piece of valuable information. The journey to Hell is dangerous and is fraught with many perils on all sides. Once in hell the hero finds a misty, clouded scene. When he meets people they appear to him usually vague and indistinct. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow often describes Kurtz only as a voice, a shade, and even as 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory'. There is fog and mist when Marlow reaches Kurtz's station, and the entire journey has been fraught with danger. And finally when Marlow returns to Europe he returns a changed and a wiser man. He knew things, which others could not possibly know.

In order to ensure that we do not miss this point – Marlow's journey up the Congo as a metaphorical journey to Hell – in the very beginning, in fact even before Marlow has undertaken the journey, we have been made to encounter two women knitting black wool, 'guarding the door of Darkness'. The knitting old woman with a cat haunts

Marlow throughout the journey. Let alone Kurtz or the natives, even the powerful and majestic woman – savage and superb – is described as an 'apparition'. As in the classical descent into Hell, Marlow meets the shade of Kurtz and learns about the innate propensity of man to evil.

But the Hell lies in the subconscious or the unconscious region of man's mind. Just before meeting Kurtz we find Marlow being confronted with the threat of attack from the savages in the jungle. Marlow admits that the dreaded attack 'was really an attempt to repulse[…] in its essence it was purely protective.' Literally of course the natives are protecting Kurtz. But in terms of the journey to the deepest recesses of the heart of man the forces of the subconscious are protecting Marlow from the full vision of Kurtz, for if Marlow looks into the subconscious and survives he will be able to eventually conquer darkness. He will be enlightened. Guerard writes:

> ' The important thing is that the introspective plunge and powerful dream seem true; and are therefore inevitably moving'(39).

If Marlow's journey up the Congo is away from light and toward darkness it is also away from order and toward disorder or chaos. From its outer shell of humanitarian idealism the story progresses to Marlow's reliance on his own skill or craft, to the enigmatic and seductive behaviour of the natives, to Kurtz's lusts and eventually to his "Intended". On one side there are marble buildings, steamships and railroads, on the other, there is rank vegetation and stock-piled ivory. On the one hand there is formulated commercial plan; on the other the indiscriminate greed. Sometimes the light and darkness are intermingled in a complex pattern, so that what appears as light finally turns out to be

only a form of darkness. The blindfolded torchbearer is an example. The light of the torch only reveals the blindness of the torchbearer.

The conscious parallels with descent into Hell and the oriental overtones take the reader instantly beneath the mere historical surface of the Congo expedition. Reading the story repeatedly we know that the dark English coast before him recalls for Marlow the darkness of modern Africa which is the natural darkness of the jungle but more than that the darkness of moral vacuity leading to the atrocities he has beheld in Africa as well as the profound vacuity of Kurtz. In this connection Guerard argues that ' [s]ubstantially and in its central emphasis "Heart of Darkness" concerns Marlow […] and his journey toward and through certain facets or potentialities of self.'(38). Guerard says that it is the exposure of a white man, who was once an idealist but later succumbed to the call of the wilderness, to 'the fascination of the abomination', the temptation of atavism.

Reading the story repeatedly we know that the dark English coast before him recalls for Marlow the darkness of modern Africa which is the natural darkness of the jungle but more than that the darkness of moral vacuity leading to the atrocities he has beheld in Africa. This moral darkness of Africa, we learn later is not the simple darkness of the ignorance of the natives, but of the white men who blinded themselves and corrupted the natives by their claim to be the light bearers. On his return to Europe Marlow finds it shrouded in the darkness symbolized by Africa and the mean and greedy phantoms sauntering on it.

The journey that Marlow undertakes, therefore, takes place simultaneously at three levels. At the first or surface level it is a physical journey. At the second it is to hell and at the third it is a journey into one's own self. All the journeys begin and end

simultaneously The closer Marlow comes to Kurtz the deeper he goes down in his mind and nearer he goes to Hell. It is only natural that such a journey should have a dream like quality, and Marlow's narrative precisely gives that impression.

[iii] Forms of Darkness

After we have discussed the appropriateness of the title in relation to the darkness of heart we can now look more closely at the text and discuss in greater detail the different forms of darkness that we encounter in the novel. The sun is about to set when the nameless narrator or the frame narrator begins the story.

> In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished spirits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was *dark* above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a *mournful gloom*, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth' (5 ; emphasis added).

The darkness that is referred to here is the physical darkness that envelops the earth after sunset. It is not yet completely dark, but the use of the words 'dark' and 'gloom' makes us conscious of the imminent darkness. But what is significant even at this stage is that the 'gloom' is given a human attribute', 'mournful', and thereby is made to give a hint of the metaphorical nature of the darkness. Later the jungle will also be invested with a spirit of its own. The word 'gloom' is repeated in the next paragraph in combination with

another adjective, 'brooding'. The mournful gloom and brooding gloom will soon find their metaphorical analogues in the nature of Marlow's tale which the brooding Marlow will relate. Thus in the very beginning we are given the idea that darkness will be used in the novel in different ways with different meanings. However we are here mainly concerned with the physical darkness as the day was 'ending'. Very soon, '[t] he sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, [….]'. As Marlow takes over we meet the brooding Marlow ('I was thinking'), and the moment he remarks, 'But darkness was here yesterday', referring to the period of Roman invasion of nineteen hundred years ago, we at once realize that Conrad is using darkness metaphorically. As he draws historical parallels between Africa of today and England of nineteen hundred years ago and refers to this period of nineteen hundred years as 'yesterday', it dawns on us that he is referring to something universal and timeless in terms of 'darkness'. What unites the Romans and the British in terms of darkness is described as '[t]he fascination of the abomination'(9) It is in this sense that the word is used when he talks about people 'who tackle darkness'. Another kind of darkness, a rather common one, is used when he refers to the Congo as 'a place of darkness' (12). Here darkness stands for ignorance, as light normally stands for knowledge. To be in the dark is to be ignorant about something. Africa is referred to as a dark continent because people there are ignorant; they have not received the light of civilization. But another form of darkness begins to creep in when Marlow goes to the Company office in Brussels along a 'narrow and deserted street in *deep shadow'* (14 emphasis added). At first the shadow seems to be natural darkness caused by the high houses on both sides. But as he meets the two women – one fat and the other slim – knitting black wool and the slim one wearing a dress as dark as an

umbrella-cover, the idea of shadow of death begins to loom large in the background. This becomes explicit when Marlow refers to the two women as ‘guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pal’ (16)). The idea of death is reinforced through recurring images associated with death. Marlow has a feeling that he had ‘stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno’ (24), sent into ‘the depths of darkness’(26), Brussels is described as a ‘sepulchral city’(35), the forests stand up ‘spectrally in the moonlight’(37), the forest makes ‘a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart’(47), Marlow has a feeling that he, along with the pilgrims, ‘penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness’(50). The forest was ‘gloomy’ with a ‘broad strip of shadow’. The black natives are described as ‘vague forms of men’ (65). To Marlow Kurtz appears as ‘a disembodied voice’ (67). Marlow repeats later that Kurtz was ‘little more than a voice’ (69), and talks about the ‘ghost of his gifts’ (69). Marlow notices the ‘black, dried, sunken’ look and the ‘closed eyelids’ (82) of the native rebels whom Kurtz had killed and whose heads he had put on the tops of the poles around his house. Kurtz is again referred to as an ‘atrocious phantom’, an ‘apparition’ and an animated image of death’ (85). He is again referred to as a ‘shadow’ and ‘a voice’ (86). The native woman of flesh and blood is referred to as ‘a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman’ (87). Marlow again speaks of ‘the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night’ (89). Kurtz is again referred to as a shadow in the sentence, ‘I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone (92). He has ‘to invoke him’ (95). Marlow talks about the brown current running ‘swiftly out of the heart of darkness (97) Marlow says he lived ‘in an infernal mess’(99 To Marlow Kurtz appears as ‘a vision of greyness without form’(101) On being

back to Brussels Marlow again describes the city as 'the sepulchral city'(102) Kurtz again described and ' a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances', a 'shadow darker than the night'(105) The Intended's head seems to be surrounded by 'an ashy halo'(106) as she comes 'floating' towards Marlow(106), as if she was not a living being but a phantom. Marlow talks about 'an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness' (109) that he notices in the 'saving illusion' of the girl. The girl is described as an 'eloquent phantom' (110), 'a tragic and familiar Shade' (110) with her bare brown arms stretching over 'the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness' (110), and in the last sentence again the literal and the metaphorical darkness are fused: 'The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the *heart of an immense darkness' (*111; emphasis added).

It is evident from the above that the idea of darkness in its different forms – physical, psychic and infernal -- are scattered throughout the entire gamut of the novel. H.M.Daleski has identified three major forms of darkness used in the novel. These are: the darkness of the jungle, the darkness of blindness and darkness of shadow. The darkness of the jungle is physical at the first level, because the sun cannot penetrate through the lush growth of the dense forest. But the metaphorical analogue of this darkness of the jungle is the 'night of the first ages' or the darkness of savagery; the kind of savagery that we find in the behaviour of the Romans when they invaded England or when Fresleven quarreled with the natives for two black hens and lost his life in the process, and then most eminently and most conspicuously in the behaviour of Kurtz in the Congo when he gradually degenerates into a savage. The darkness of the jungle

becomes manifest in a physical abandon leading to the corruption of the flesh and cannibalism. The darkness of the jungle, however, is also associated with abundant vitality. The helmeted native girl whom Marlow describes as 'superb and savage' is an embodiment of the wilderness and the darkness of the jungle.

Darkness of blindness is manifest in the idealistic attitude of the colonizers who are inspired by the noble mission of civilizing the uncivilized. Little do they know that what they are aspiring after is an illusion, because they are blind to the hidden motives and desires that will soon rear their heads and pull them down. Marlow's aunt suffered from this blindness, but incidentally she had no opportunity to know about her blindness, because she remained confined to her illusion and had no occasion to face reality. All the pilgrims suffered from this blindness. Moreover, many like Kurtz were not aware, as Marlow was aware, that the Company was run for profit. They did not know, they were blind to the fact that the civilizers were, at bottom, racialist plunderers. In other words, the declared ideals were only a cloak, a civilized garb to hide the greed that was behind the establishment of colonies. In the blinding sunshine of Africa the pilgrims ultimately face the blindness of their damnation. This darkness of blindness is best presented in the oil painting of Kurtz that Marlow notices at the Central Station in the room of the brick maker. Kurtz tries to give an embodiment to his ideals as a colonizer in the picture of the woman carrying a lighted torch. Symbolically she is the torch bearer carrying light to the dark continent, or any uncivilized country for that matter, to dispel the darkness of ignorance. She represents Kurtz's mission to be 'an emissary of pity, and science and progress'. But Marlow notices that the woman is blindfolded; she cannot see the darkness around, nor can see what is inside her. Kurtz might mean that the civilizer can go

confidently, blindly, so to speak, to his mission, but to Marlow the effect of the light on her face appears sinister, because the illuminated torch only reveals the blindness of the torch bearer. At this stage Kurtz is seriously and sincerely inspired by his idealism, but he is blind to his inner weaknesses, as will be revealed when he will start living in the Congo

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The third form of darkness is the darkness of shadow, the shadow that assumes diverse forms and , therefore, have diverse implications. At one level it means unsubstantial shadow as opposed to substance; at another level it means the darkness of a powerful but hidden reality. But most importantly shadows are presented as phantoms, apparitions, or shadows of death. Kurtz is repeatedly referred to as a shade, a shadow 'satiated and calm', 'a phantom', 'an animated image of death', or a disembodied 'voice'. He is a shade that one meets in Hell. Again, Marlow sees the natives as 'black shadows of disease and death'. The majestic native woman, Kurtz's consort, is described as an 'apparition'. References to 'the gloomy circle of some Inferno', the 'grove of death, 'streams of life in death' and many other images of death that are scattered throughout the novel strengthen the impression of darkness of death and develop the idea of darkness of Hell. This is perfectly in keeping with Marlow's journey which, as we have already seen, is a symbolic journey to Hell.

However, in a rich and complex text like *Heart of Darkness* it is not expected that these different forms of darkness would appear as separate, individual entities. On the contrary, they are all fused by Marlow's powerful, creative imagination, so that all the forms of darkness finally merge in the darkness of heart, the primitive in man. The darkness of the jungle metaphorically refers to the jungle or the primitive in man. It is the

primitive in man that lies hidden in the unconscious of his mind, makes him blind to his inner and innate weaknesses and eventually leads him to , and envelops him in, the darkness of Hell. Kurtz embodies all these forms of darkness and his actions and inevitable degeneration are manifestations of various forms of darkness. His taking part in 'unspeakable rites', in cannibalism, is a manifestation of the darkness of the jungle. His obsession for ivory, his possessiveness, his acts of cruelty, give a lie to his idealistic mission with which he stared for the Congo, and thus reveal the darkness of his blindness, and his life with his gradual decline and fall ultimately lands him in Hell and envelops him with the darkness of Hell.

Reading the story repeatedly we know that the dark English coast before him recalls for Marlow the darkness of modern Africa which is the natural darkness of the jungle but more than that the darkness of moral vacuity leading to the atrocities he has beheld in Africa. This moral darkness of Africa, we learn later, is not the simple darkness of the ignorance of the natives, but of the white men who blinded themselves and corrupted the natives by their claim to be the light-bearers. On his return to Europe Marlow finds it shrouded in the darkness symbolized by Africa and the mean and greedy phantoms haunting it.

[iv] Image of Africa

Although the story of *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends on the deck of the *Nellie* anchored at the estuary of the Thames, the locale of the story Marlow tells is Africa. The story is based largely on Conrad's own experience of the journey he had made to the Belgian Congo in 1890. To the civilized world Africa was known as the dark continent,

because the people there were illiterate, savage, uncivilized. So the journey to Africa is a journey to a dark continent and the journey to the Belgian Congo, the darkest part of Africa, is a journey to the heart of darkness.

The novel thus begins with a standard image of Africa in the European mind. Marlow's experience of the journey to Africa is expected to confirm or modify or contradict this image. Marlow, as a sensitive young man of the contemplative type, begins to construct the image of Africa on the basis of his own experience. In other words, the image is gradually built up (an image means a picture and a picture is painted slowly step by step) till it is completed with the completion of Marlow's journey. Conrad follows the impressionistic mode in his narrative and every impression that Marlow gathers contributes to the construction of the final image.

The first impression of the coastline, which is a part of the landscape, is one of enigma. Marlow says: 'watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out' (19). With the colossal jungle, so dark- green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf and the fierce sun, the land 'seemed to glisten and drip with steam'. Africa is noted for its dense forest and the blazing sun and these two important aspects are foregrounded quite early on. These aspects will be reinforced later with redoubtable force as Marlow would move further up: 'Going up the river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest' (48). And again: 'Trees, trees, million of trees, massive, immense, running up high' (50). The mighty river and the dense forest

bring in the association of the primitive and bring the landscape into a cogent relation with the people. The first picture of the blacks that we get in Marlow's account is one of a group of healthy vigorous people as strong and vivacious as the tree or the river; 'You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; *they had faces like grotesque masks*-- these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at' (20; emphasis added). The sight visibly impresses Marlow. He does not understand the content of their song or shouting, but he understands from their eloquent gestures that they are a happy lot. However, Conrad does not forget to call attention to their exotic nature, their being the Other, and this he does by describing their faces as masks.

This picture of wild vitality, natural joy of life is soon undercut by the 'merry dance of death and trade' (20) that he sees in many places on the way. Subsequently it is the element of dance of death that will be a major constituent of the image of the African people. Opening on a reach Marlow sees a rocky cliff, houses dotted on a hill or hanging to the declivity and then his eyes fall on the people: 'A lot of people mostly black and naked moved about like ants'. The nakedness of the blacks reflects their poverty and animal-like existence [The blacks of the Eldorado Expedition are described as 'less valuable animals' (48)] on account of that poverty. Even otherwise the blacks are described as animals. This is a new constituent to the image of Africa – a poor country full of 'black shadows of starvation and death' (24). The image is reinforced as Marlow passes through 'several abandoned villages' (28). He notices the miserable condition of a

nigger being mercilessly beaten up. Looking closely at the natives Marlow has first a feeling that they are not human and yet has 'a suspicion of their not being inhuman' (51), because they 'howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces' (51) and Marlow has a strange feeling of ' remote kinship' (51) with them. The idea that Marlow is trying to suggest is that the civilized man sees in them his primordial form. It is again the animal image that is highlighted, though a relationship is suggested between the civilized European and the uncivilized Africans. We shall see later in our discussion how Achebe would pounce upon these images and sarcastically comment on them with ruthless banter. Achebe would also sharply criticize Conrad's presentation of the fireman, an improved specimen, to look at whom was 'as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and feather hat walking on his hind-legs' (52). The picture of the fireman does not fit in the image of Africa as experienced by Marlow, possibly because he is not in his place. He is an odd man out. But Conrad takes special care to mention his physical features which are typically African: 'filed teeth, […] the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks'(52).

Till now we have not heard any native speak. But when the boat is under the threat of an attack from the natives on the shore and the crew exchange 'short, grunting phrases' which were not comprehensible to Marlow the headman responded to Marlow's 'Ah' in English, with the words, "Catch 'im ,Give 'im to us"(58). The headman is drawn in sharp colours : [… young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair done up in oily ringlets' (58) While giving the sharp physical image of an African Conrad also gives one more dimension to the image by pointing out that an African is a cannibal. Achebe, who would consider Conrad a

‘bloody racist’, would argue that Conrad has not given voice to the natives except occasionally allowing them some ‘ short, grunting phrases’, and when he gives, as in this case, he gives it with the sinister purpose of tarnishing the image of Africa. The purpose here, according to Achebe, is to give a first hand confirmation of the belief that Africans are cannibals by making a native asking for the human flesh. But this is possibly not true, because soon afterwards Marlow is full of praise and sympathy for the natives on the boat: ‘ They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard’.(59) What Marlow admires most is their restraint , a quality of supreme importance to Marlow. Kurtz degenerated into a savage because he had no restraint. But these black people, though cannibals and hungry, did not eat the whites up. The helmsman, another native who dies on account of foolishness, provides another aspect of the African image : lack of intelligence. The Russian confirms this image when he remarks : ‘They are simple people’(76). The image of Africa , however, becomes complete , authentic and vibrant with the appearance of the native girl on the bank of the river. Her features, her outfits, her ornaments , the charms and gifts of witch-men all build up the image of an Africa with all its savage and superb aspects subsuming in the process all its superstitions, bizarre things, primitivism and wilderness If ivory is the main resource of Africa she has ‘the value of several tusks upon her’(87).

Conrad builds up the image of Africa- the place and the people-- realistically through the authenticity of Marlow’s first hand experience. In order to bring out the distinctive features of the African people he invariably describes their physical features, physical decorations and dresses which are so different from an European’s.

No discussion of Conrad's depiction of the place and the people of Africa can be complete without reference to Chinua Achebe's bombardment on Conrad in his lecture entitled 'An Image of Africa', later published in *Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1977 :782-94), in which he calls Conrad 'a bloody racist' and Cedric Watts's brilliant defence of Conrad in his article , " 'A Bloody Racist' : About Achebe's View of Conrad'', published in *The Yearbook of English Studies*: *Colonial and Imperial Theme Special Number* , Vol.13 (Leeds, 1983 : 196-209). Achebe argues that Conrad in the 'offensive and totally deplorable *Heart of Darkness*', has won the admiration of white readers by confirming their prejudices . Thus,

> *Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by 'triumphant bestiality' and the desire in western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations, at once remote and vaguely familiar , in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.

In the novel the blacks are dehumanized and they are denied speech instead, they are given only 'a violent babble of sound' , or 'exchange' of 'short grunting phrases' or speech , that two only on two occasions, only to condemn themselves. Furthermore, according to Achebe, Conrad is a 'purveyor of comforting myths' – the myth that white civilization is morally superior to savagery, that imperialism is the philanthropic endeavour of 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'. Watts has shown and, convincingly, that 'it is precisely against […] dehumanization that the tale protests'. Of all the people depicted the first group of blacks paddling the canoe is 'by far the

happiest, healthiest, and most vital' and the degradation and deprivation of the blacks that we see later ,is the result of the atrocities of the whites . About Conrad's support of the western myth of superiority of the white culture Watts points out that in the very opening section of he novel Conrad subverts this myth when Marlow remarks, 'And this also […] has been one of the darkest places of the earth'. Marlow's experience of the journey clearly brings out and highlights the hypocritical elements in the western civilization. In fact, the superiority of the western civilization turns out to be myth.. In the words of Watts, '[t]he narrative obliges the reader to ask whether civilization is valuable, fragile improvement on savagery, or a hypocritical elaboration of it'.

Achebe also thinks that in the contrast between the black mistress of Kurtz and the white Intended ,the white has been privileged, because she has been given speech which has been withheld from the other. This accusation, Watts points out, is 'maladroit', because the black woman has been given speech, as the Russian tells Marlow, 'she got one day and kicked up a row[…] talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour'. Marlow cannot converse with her as he can converse with the Intended, because he does not know the language of the tribal woman, though Kurtz does ('Do you understand this? […] 'Do I not? 96-97). Watts deplores : 'The blacks have enough enemies; it is saddening to see Achebe attack one of their friends. To criticize colonial enterprise as an elaborate enterprise of exploitation during the heyday of imperialism when Queen Victoria was still on throne, needed a lot of courage and it is with great courage of conviction that Conrad presents an image of Africa and the Africans which was historically valid in 1899 when the novel was first published in its serialized form in *Blackwood's Magazine.*

[v] The Narrative Technique

Before we begin to discuss the narrative technique used by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* we should remember that for a significant writer narrative technique is always determined by the nature of the story he is going to tell. In other words, the nature of the story, the vision that the author wants to convey, determines the particular kind of narrative strategy that an author will employ. The main interest of *Heart of Darkness* does not lie in the story; in fact it has a little story, so to speak. Nor is it mainly concerned with a particular character like Tom Jones or Tess, for example. It is mainly concerned with an idea, a kind of perception of life, a vision. , So the traditional form of narrative, like the linear narration by an omniscient narrator, will not do, because it is not a conventional novel . Even the modern stream of consciousness technique which was later introduced by Joyce would not do in this case, because it is primarily a first person narrative and the narrator has to have an interaction with the narratees or the listeners.

As we begin to read the novel we have a feeling that we are going to read a conventional novel with an omniscient narrator. But soon we realize that the speaker is only the frame narrator who was actually one of the listeners on board the *Nellie* when Marlow told his tale. Soon the tale is taken over by Marlow. In other words, the narrator is telling the story that he had heard from Marlow. This nameless narrator introduces Marlow . Thus it is a story within a story. Since the nameless narrator is repeating what he had heard from Marlow in Marlow's words we are already one degree removed from the original experience of Marlow. The tale that the nameless narrator tells us is actually Marlow's tale but is bound to be modified by the sensibility of the frame narrator. The

introduction of the surface narrator , Marlow, and a number of listeners makes the narration dramatic and gives it a dialogic structure.

On the surface level, the frame narrator begins the story and ends the story on the deck of the Nellie, and his story contains Marlow's story. Marlow's story also will contain Kurtz's story with a number of narrative islands. Since it is mainly Marlow's story that constitutes the main burden of the novel the frame narrator warns us quite early that we should not expect a conventional story, and therefore no conventional narrative mode either. He says:

> …Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns is excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine'(8)

The narrative vehicle is the smaller inside sphere and its function is to reveal a circumambient universe of meanings which are not normally visible and cannot be seen except in association with the story, just as the haze appears only when there is a glow. The geometric nature of the haze , the outer sphere of larger meaning , intangible and theoretically infinite, is made to blend with the finite.

The nameless narrator's comment on the nature of Marlow's narration makes two things clear. First, in case of Marlow's tale the form can not be separated from the content. There is an inseparability of form and content .Secondly, and more importantly, the tale is presented in such a way that we cannot hope to grasp it in concrete and tangible terms. It remains vague and indistinct like the moonshine or like objects seen through

fog. This is so, as the tale abundantly makes clear, because what Marlow wants to convey is his impression of life, and this cannot be presented or even summed up neatly in a mathematical formula. The analogy that the nameless narrator uses to describe the nature of Marlow's tale has a dreamlike quality and we shall hear Marlow frequently to insist that he is trying to convey dream sensations. "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 dream'(39). He realizes in course of his frantic efforts to convey his vision that it is 'impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle, and penetrating essence'(39) He realizes that he has set upon himself an impossible task The vision that he wants to communicate cannot be stated in clear, logical and syllogistic terms; it can, at best , only be suggested. The best way for suggesting something is to use symbols .So Conrad uses the symbolic mode while the dream-like quality of the experience gives the narration an impressionistic texture. This is implied in the nameless narrator's description of the nature of Conrad's metaphor of Marlow's narration: the metaphor of the haze around the glow. Since the meaning of the tale is larger than either the glow or the haze, it is symbolic in character and similarly, the sensory quality of the metaphor, along with the mist and haze, clearly implies the impressionistic texture of the novel., and suggests a complementary and symbiotic relationship of the symbolic and the impressionistic.

In France Impressionism started with the painting of Claude Monet entitled 'Impression, soleil levant' (Impression, Sunrise). In 1872, instead of trying to present an objective or realistic picture of the sunrise Monet tried to present his impression which was naturally a blurred vision of the sunrise. The most important character in an impressionist painting was the light and its effect on an object. Since it is not possible to see an object clearly through fog the vision is sure to be blurred. One recalls Monet's angry remarks : 'Poor idiots. They want us to see everything clearly, even through fog'. The literal haze for the artist as the metaphorical haze for Marlow is not accidental atmospheric interference. It suggests that the difficulty and obscurity are essential parts of what the artist is trying to convey. In Conrad the images of light and shade that we find throughout the novel contribute to the impressionistic texture of the novel and at the same time assume symbolic significance The novel begins in the evening and ends in the evening and during the period of the narration we are repeatedly made conscious of the dreamlike quality of the narration. Take for example the following passage :

> The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! Was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver – over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the greatest river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur'(38)

The dreamlike quality of the passage lends it an impressionistic texture, because the impression of Marlow is presented through dream sensations. Here is another example of

impressionistic texture of a different kind: ‘Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in net work of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with eat; and a solitude, nobody, not a hut’(28). Marlow is trying to present his impression of the physical sensations that he has at the sight with a sense of immediacy. But what is significant is that unlike the French impressionist painters he pays as much attention to the inside as to the outside, to the meaning as to the appearance so that for him the world of senses transcends the status of a picture and becomes a presence. What is still more significant is that in Conrad the impressionistic images become symbols and add a new dimension to the narration while helping to develop the theme of the novel.

Now about Conrad’s use of symbols. Conrad believed that all great art is essentially symbolic. He said : ‘a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character’ (Quoted by Ian Watt). In *Heart of Darkness* the journey itself is symbolic. We have already seen how Marlow’s journey up the Congo symbolically stands for a journey to Hell and a journey to the innermost recesses of Marlow’s mind. The images of light and shade and the subsidiary images of fog, cloud, darkness etc. are also used symbolically to stand for the various degrees of mental states between the conscious and the unconscious. The boat is a simple symbol of a civilized island in midst of wilderness or the vast expanse of the river or the sea.. The jungle is the symbol of the primitive forces of darkness as well as the unconscious. The oil painting of Kurtz symbolically represents the ideals of colonialism. The image of the meditating Buddha becomes a symbolic reference to Marlow’s inward journey. The

two women vigorously knitting black wool become symbols of the classical Fates controlling human life, and here guarding the doors of Darkness. But Conrad's most powerful use of symbols consists in his presentation of certain characters in a way that they go beyond themselves and become symbols. Thus the helmeted native girl- 'savage and superb' becomes a symbol of wilderness. Kurtz in his degeneration symbolizes the true, essential nature of the colonial enterprise. He has become a symbolic text. Kurtz's Intended becomes a symbol of the creatures of illusion as the native girl represents reality.

As Marlow experiences great difficulty in communicating his vision he is often seen to be silent, contemplating how to verbalize his experience. This silence is a very important part of the narrative technique of Conrad, because it not only makes the tale highly realistic and convincing but it also gives us a sense of the immediacy of the present. Throughout the novel Marlow falls silent umpteen times: 'He paused'(9), 'he was silent for a while'(39), etc. Corollary to this silence are short pauses indicated by dashes which are expressions of irritation, desperation and the like. Not infrequently he would have recourse to even extra-linguistic devices like shrugs and gestures of various kinds. What Marlow says about the tale of the Russian is eminently applicable to his own tale . Marlow says : 'There was no sign on the face of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs'(81).

Another important aspect of the narrative strategy in keeping with the nature of the theme of the novel is the frequent shifting of the time scale The story begins in the present with the *Nellie* anchored in the estuary of the Thames . Then Marlow narrates his

past experience. But from time to time the nameless narrator intrudes and we are brought back to the deck of the ship. Thematically this is important because Conrad wants to give Marlow's tale a universal and timeless dimension.

In brief, every device that Conrad uses as part of his narrative strategy is functionally governed by the nature of the tale that he tries to present through Marlow, who may be regarded as his spokesman to a great extent.

[vi]Symbols, Images, Metaphors, and Irony etc.

We have already seen, in course of our detailed critical discussion of the text of the novel and Conrad's narrative technique , how Conrad uses various symbols and images to communicate Marlow's perception of life arising out of his Congo experience. Here we should touch upon *some* of the dominant images and symbols which are integral to the thematic matrix of the novel.

Illusion and Reality:

Consciousness and Unconsciousness:

Civilization and Primitivism:

Light and Dark:

White and Black:

City and Jungle:

i) Imagery of light and shade or darkness, with the entire range of glaring sunlight, flash of a matchstick, dense fog, thin mist, twilight etc., symbolizing the vast region lying between the conscious and the unconscious states of mind.

ii) White and black: Chiaroscuro and Contrast.

iii) White : consciousness, illusion, civilization.;

iv) Black : the unconscious, the primitive , the real.

v) Again, related to 'white' is the bone and the ivory suggesting evil: grass growing through the bones of Fresleven, Kurtz, 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory', the Accountant on board the *Nellie* toying with dominoes,('28 rectangular pieces of ivory or bones', (*SOD*)

vi) The jungle: the primal, the unconscious, the forces of darkness.

vii) The Thames : personified, a witness of many imperial invasions and colonial enterprises.

Animal imagery:

(i) The Congo: imaged as an immense snake with its head on the sea and its lost in the depths of the land.

(ii) Marlow imaged as a bird charmed by the snake.

(iii) The natives have black rags that 'waggled to and fro like tails'.

(iv) The natives 'black and naked moved, like ants'.

(v) The overturned truck 'as dead as the carcass of some animal'.

(vi) The boiler wallows in the grass.

(vii) The wrecked steamer is hauled up like a carcass of some big river animal

Symbolic Images:

(i) Marlow's posture: an image of the Buddha, meditative and enlightened.

(ii) Fresleven with grass growing through his ribs: the vulnerability of the colonial venture.

(iii) French boat shelling in the bush : mindless brutality of the colonizers.

(iv) The knitting women : Greek Fates; guards of the gate of Hell which is the metaphorical destination of the journey of Marlow.

(v) Knitting: metaphorically knitting the destiny of the people going to the Congo.

(vi) The black woman, Kurtz's consort, putting out her hands ; symbolic image of supplication, earnest entreaty .The white woman, Kurtz's Intended, also put out her arms.

(vii) The company women 'knitting black wool as for a warm pall' : ominous, suggests death.

(viii) Marlow's aunt: popular illusion about colonialism as a noble enterprise.

(ix) The native woman: wilderness; forces of darkness; reality.

(x) The Intended: absolute trust; illusion.

(xi) The Company's chief accountant : moral strength to stick to one's job; heartless indifference to the miserable condition of the natives.

(xii) Laundress: exploitation of the blacks by the whites.

(xiii) The ship: a floating island carrying civilized people; a metaphor for civilization.

(xiv) The boat at the bottom of the river: inefficiency of the colonizers: under repair it fuses the land and the river.

(xv) The boat waiting for rivets: a metaphor for colonialism in need of repair.

(xvi) The oil painting: Kurtz's idealistic vision of colonialism.

(xvii) The torch: enlightenment/ illuminating a limited area which lapses into darkness as soon as the torch moves on ; deepening the darkness around.

(xviii) The woman: colonialism embodied and personified.

(xix) The blindfold: impartiality/ blindness of the colonizers.

(xx) The brick maker : 'papier-mâché Mephistopheles': clique and conspiracy rampant in the colonial administration.

(xxi) The Russian: 'unreflecting audacity' ,the only white man in the Congo influenced by Kurtz; simple soul; spirit of selfless adventure.

(xxii) Kurtz: an epitome of the colonialism: the ideal and the reality.

(xxiii) Kurtz's report and the postscriptum: the ideal and the real.

(xxiv) Finally colonialism itself may be seen as a metaphor for man's innate cravings for wish fulfillment.

Some Stylistic Features:

(i) Racy, (ii) conversational, (iii) dialogic, (iv) polyphonic, (v) repetitive , (vi) giving a sense of urgency and immediacy .

(vii) Tone: ironical . Just a few examples:

(a) The white men , the colonizers on board the ship going to the Congo, are described as *pilgrims* undertaking the journey , although they are not in quest of any holy grail or religious purpose but are only in search of money; not prompted by any religious fervour but simply by material prospects.

(b) Some expressions indicating the ironical tone :

'jolly pioneers of progress'(25)

'the effect of the torch light on the face was *sinister'*(36)

'Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, *a center for trade of course,* but also for humanizing, improving, instructing'.

Six black men […] walked erect and slow balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads[…](22). Erect, not because they are proud warriors, but because they are virtually beasts of burden carrying baskets of earth on their heads.

(c)The biggest irony, however, is just as *Heart of Darkness* is about the darkness of heart similarly the novel which is ostensibly meant to be about Africa, the dark continent with black natives, finally emerges as a novel about white civilization of Europe. Europe's encounter with Africa only helps Europe to know its own real nature, as Marlow's encounter with Kurtz only helps to make him conscious about the forces of darkness lying hidden within him. It appears that Europe contains an Africa within itself and Marlow carries a Kurtz within himself.

[vii] The Title

On 22 July 1896 Conrad wrote to Fisher Unwin who had published Conrad's first two novels – *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896)- about 'An Outpost of Progress' : 'It is a story of the Congo….All the bitterness of those days, all my indignation at masquerading philanthropy – have been with me again while I wrote'.

Then on 31 December 1898 Conrad wrote to Blackwood that he had almost ready a story for *Blackwood's Magazine*, and that the narrative was in the manner of *Youth* and was told by the same man and similar to "An Outpost of Progress" but 'a little wider'. Conrad wrote ;

> The title I am thinking of is 'The Heart of darkness' but the narrative is not gloomy, The criminality of inefficiency and our selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time[…] though not topically treated. It is a story as much as my *Outpost of Progress* was but, so to speak, 'takes in' a little more – is a little wider – is less concentrated upon individuals'.

The story was serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* from February-April 1899 under the title "The Heart of Darkness". But later in the revised version in which it was published in book form Conrad changed the tile from *The Heart of Darkness* to *Heart of Darkness* by dropping 'The' of the original title. The change is deliberate and significant, because it is unusual and ungrammatical. The usual practice is to put 'The' as we have it in Sir Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) or in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). The omission of 'The' by Conrad makes the title ambiguous and enigmatic. Heart is something concrete and organic while darkness is abstract and inorganic. How can there be something organic and concrete in midst of something which is abstract and inorganic? Furthermore, the heart is associated with something good; it has a good connotation as in expressions like 'he has a heart of gold' or a 'hearty welcome', etc. But darkness, on the contrary, is associated with something bad; it has a bad connotation as in expressions like 'dark deeds' or ' he is a dark character'. It

has to be seen how this enigmatic title can be justified. But before we proceed further let us look back at the letter Conrad had written to Blackwood . In the part of the letter that we have quoted Conrad says that the book 'is less concentrated on individuals' and by saying this Conrad makes it very clear that the focus of the novel is not on any particular character as we have in novels like *Tom Jones, Clarissa , Robinson Crusoe, Adam Bede*, or even in Conrad's own novels like *Lord Jim* or *Nostromo*. So by Conrad's own testimony Conrad's main interest is not to portray any particular character. What he is interested in is expressing an idea and that idea is embodied in characters and situations. The two contrastive nouns of the title point to the complex nature of the idea.

Heart means the innermost part, the impenetrable, mysterious seat of the pulsating life. Secondly the heart means the seat of good human feeling particularly love, sympathy and positive aspiration for life Darkness as used in the novel has a multiple meaning It refers to the physical and the spiritual darkness, the inferno within human heart. Darkness of the historical past is inside the present in the beginning of Marlow's story. He draws a parallel between the situation in the Congo and that in England during the Roman invasion. In contrast to the modern city of London pulsating with its grave night, the historical past of the place is one of darkness. 'Darkness was here yesterday', says Marlow. He refers to a young Roman officer who came here with the conquering army, found himself engulfed by the darkness of the swampy place, the massive wilderness, and pestilential diseases. Similar situations now prevail in the present Congo invaded by the European colonizers with their 'masquerading philanthropy'. But the basic difference is that the Romans came to conquer, to loot and then they went away leaving

the ransacked place to the natives while the European colonizers loot the natives in the name of the philanthropic responsibility of the white man's burden. So the tales of the Congo river are similar to the tales of the Thames both flowing out from the heart of darkness.

Then there is the geographical darkness – the dark continent, the impenetrable wilderness, the thrill and the fever of the unknown, the distant drum- beat, the midnight howling and mournful cry of the primitive people – all these build up the formidable image of an enormous continent of darkness which waits with patience and may devour any moment all the hypocritical acts of civilization done in the name of philanthropy of progress. Marlow describes the Congo river as a huge snake with its mouth opening into the seas and its tail lost in the wilderness. He describes the voyage up the river as 'travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world, to the night of the first ages'. As he penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness, it gradually becomes the image of inferno. Marlow says that he had a feeling that he had 'stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno'. In this infernal region he finds only the picture of a massacre or a pestilence and nothing but black shadows of disease and death. . The victims of this inferno are the black labourers crawling towards the river bank for water, the dying figure of a huge man reclining at the foot of a tree and looking with blank eyes at him. The traders, the manager, the accountant and the agents are the veritable devils in this inferno. They are not only looting the resources of the land but also torturing the natives in unimaginable ways. Marlow has a vision of 'the flabby ,weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly'. The devil is an incarnation of the imperialistic trade carried on under the philanthropic pretence. The culminating point of the experience of Marlow

of this devil is when he gets an ineffaceable impression of the impenetrable darkness of Kurtz's heart. He knows about his greatness, his many talents in music , painting, report writing, and above all his remarkable success as a 'first class agent' shipping more ivory than all the agents could. But in order to achieve his wonderful success he transformed himself into a primitive demi-god presiding over 'unspeakable rites' and participating in human sacrifice and flesh-eating. In brief, Kurtz, an educated civilized man of many parts, degenerated into a primitive man and became atavistic in his desires. But Marlow through his experience of the journey and a fairly intimate association with Kurtz comes to realize that the impenetrable darkness lying in the heart of Kurtz does not belong to Kurtz alone Every man is a potential Kurtz. Various forms of darkness that abound in the novel ultimately merge in the darkness of heart and become crystallized in the enigmatic phrase 'heart of darkness' and justify the title, *Heart of Darkness*.

[viii]Conrad's Treatment of Women

The charge that is often leveled against Conrad's treatment of women is that they are not treated seriously. They are neither dynamic nor round, particularly when compared with the powerful male characters that we meet in Conrad's novels. The attitude seems to be, as voiced by Marlow, the women cannot bear too much reality, and so they must be at once protected from truth and denied it. Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended possibly because he believes that the girl needs a bulwark to protect the saving illusion. In *Heart of Darkness* the women characters may appear to be minor ones in comparison with the

characters like Kurtz or Marlow or even the Russian from whom we learn a great deal about Kurtz . But a closer scrutiny would reveal that in the novel women play important functional roles and they are treated in different ways; sometimes they are saints; sometimes they are seductresses. If the Intended is an embodiment of innocence and fidelity, the helmeted native girl, 'superb and savage', is an embodiment of voluptuousness. If Marlow's aunt is specimen of Victorian model of motherly women – loving and affectionate-- the women knitting black wool at the Company office are stern and severe, 'guarding the door of Darkness', without any touch of tenderness about them. It is not true that the women characters of Conrad are only expressions of Marlow's idealized conception of womanhood, though it may be only partly true.

When Marlow has a longing to go to the Congo and decides to go there 'by hook or by crook'(12) and fails to get the job in the normal way he decides to use the influence of women. He says: 'I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work – to get a job'(12). The idea lying behind the statement is the belief that women constitute a strong force in the society, and what cannot be achieved in the normal way can be achieved with the influence of women. This sheds light on the position of women in the Victorian society. Even in Brussels, in the continent in fact, the position is the same. The aunt , 'a dear enthusiastic soul', held Marlow in great affection, and this is evident in her response to Marlow's request : 'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you', apparently for two reasons . The first reason is obvious: she loves her nephew and she must try to help him . But the other reason-- not so obvious -- comes to light with her next comment: 'It is a glorious idea' . She took the job so seriously because she believed

that a worker in a colonial enterprise is something 'like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle' engaged in 'weaning those great millions from their horrid ways'(18) . For her Marlow's mission was to enlighten the uncivilized natives of the Belgian Congo. She advises 'You forget Charlie that the labourer is worthy of his hire'(18) Marlow feels uncomfortable as he sees 'how out of touch with truth women are'(18), and tries to hint that 'the Company [is] run for profit'(18).

Here Conrad's attitude to women is certainly typically Victorian: women must be beautiful, sophisticated, chaste, tender, dignified 'angel of the house'; but must be confined to illusion, never trying to grasp the essence of reality and self-realization. The male thought of confinement was necessary to maintain the stability and prosperity of home and state. One recalls that when Charlotte Bronte sought inspiration from Southey, he discouraged her. He asked her to leave literary sphere and concentrate on her family life. Mary Ann Evans had to take the pseudonym of a male writer, George Eliot. Conrad, through Marlow who may be regarded as his mouthpiece , seems to express the same attitude-- though tinged with tenderness :

> It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had been nothing like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over'(18)

The women whom we meet next through Marlow's eyes are the two women Marlow meets in the office of the Company. The women, 'one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool'(14) The slim one, 'whose dress was as plain

as an umbrella-cover', met Marlow with downcast eyes while continuing with her knitting and looked up only when Marlow was about to leave. Without uttering a single word she led Marlow into a waiting room. The old one sitting on a chair with a cat on her lap was watching everyone over her spectacles . She glanced at Marlow above the glasses, and the 'swift and indifferent placidity' of her look made Marlow feel uncomfortable. To Marlow she seemed to know all about him and an 'eerie feeling' came over Marlow. To him the woman seemed 'uncanny and fearful'. These two figures are charged with symbolic significance. Marlow says : 'Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned eyes'(16). These two ominous figures give a hint that the future of Marlow or of anybody going to the Belgian Congo for that matter would not be happy. The black wool implies the darkness which Marlow has to encounter in near future. The knitting also becomes symbolic. The women , like the Greek Fate sisters, were knitting the dark destiny of Marlow and others, as it were. Much later, deep in Congo, Marlow would be haunted by the thought of these knitting women, particularly the 'knitting old woman with the cat who would [obtrude] herself upon [his] memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair'(93).

Conrad's treatment of these two knitting women deserves some special attention in view of the widely prevalent notion that Conrad was Victorian in his attitude to women. It should be noted that, unlike Marlow's aunt, they are no creatures of illusion.. Their placidity, unconcerned wisdom and studied silence clearly indicate that they are aware of the reality of the Congo enterprise. They know that the young men who are coming

for jobs in the Congo will have a bleak future; all of them will have a difficult life and most of them will die there. But as they are employees of the Company they cannot warn them, because then they will lose their job. All that they can do, therefore , is to maintain an ominous grim silence and cast looks that speak volumes.

The next woman that we meet is the black and tall, native girl, Kurtz's consort in Congo . When Kurtz has been taken out on the boat by the pilgrims she appears on the bank of the river with a group of black men, and 'from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman'(87).Conrad describes her realistically in great detail:

> She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbows, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of grass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men , that hung about her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress.(87)

The woman is presented with the juxtaposed contrastive ideas – 'savage and superb', 'ominous and stately', 'wild-eyed and magnificent' etc. The juxtaposition is a deliberate device of Conrad to symbolize the forces of darkness which are simultaneously savage and superb. The woman is gorgeous with her high and well-arranged locks which she gathers in the shape of a helmet, her gauntlets and innumerable savage ornaments on her breast which are the gifts of her admirers, 'witch-men'. These glitter and sparkle, and

radiate her glory at every step. She is the complete woman with all her dignity and sense of reality . Unlike Marlow's aunt whom we have already met or Kurtz's Intended whom we will meet later she is no creature of illusion. She is strongly grounded in reality. She has drawn Kurtz from the civilized world where the sophisticated women cannot bear reality to the world of savage reality. Conrad seems to believe that the essential woman can only be found in the uncivilized world. It is significant that in sharp contrast to the general atmosphere of darkness that pervades the novel the whole scene is lit up in a dazzling sunlight with the appearance of the savage woman. She may be taken as a seductress determined to fulfill her sincere desire to possess Kurtz for whom a white lady has been waiting in the civilized world . Kurtz cannot resist the seductive charm of the dark lady and the darkness under the surface level of the human mind engulfs him. The transformed man-god is destroyed at last. The savage girl ,the dark lady may then be taken to be a *femme fatale* with a long literary ancestry in Cleopatra, Helen, and Dido, among others whose passionate love eventually destroys the beloved. The departure of Kurtz gives her face ' a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve'(87). This time she quietly goes away only to appear again when the boat leaves the next day at noon. She rushes out to the very brink of the stream, remains unmoved and undaunted by the fearful steam-whistle and puts out her hands in a fervent appeal to stop Kurtz from leaving as it were , and shouts something. And when Marlow asks Kurtz if he understood what she shouted Kurtz gives 'an expression of wistfulness and hate'. The expression of 'wistfulness and hate' shows that she has been a victim of Kurtz's passion

devoid of any tenderness of emotion. She is thus more a victim than a seductress as it would appear at first.

The last woman we meet in the novel is Kurtz's Intended. We meet her when Marlow goes to meet her in order to give her the small packet of letters and her small portrait which were handed over to him by Kurtz before his death. In the portrait the girl looked beautiful, but Marlow hastens to add: 'I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie too'(104). Yet Marlow had a feeling that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself (104). When Marlow actually meets her he notices that she is not girlish and that she had 'a mature capacity for fidelity' . The impression of 'truthfulness' that Marlow had on seeing the portrait is confirmed by Marlow's impression of 'her capacity for fidelity, for belief ,for suffering'(106). Her dark eyes were 'guileless, profound, confident, and trustful' (106). As she comes forward Marlow notices that she is still in black, she is still in mourning although more than a year has passed since Kurtz's death. It seems that she will mourn for ever. As Conrad presents her she is not a complete woman but a phantom eloquent and imprisoned in her illusion of reality. This illusion expresses the typical Victorian attitude to women that they must be chaste, elegant, soft but innocent of the dark reality. She expresses her illusory ideas about Kurtz: his promise, his greatness, his generous mind, his noble heart and the vast plans he had, how men 'looked up to him' and how 'his goodness shone in every act'. Now that he is no more she wants something to live with, and so, in a heart-rending murmur compels Marlow to repeat the last words of Kurtz with the conviction that the

last words of Kurtz were her name. Marlow cannot bear the dazzling chastity of her eyes; he cannot utter the bitter and terrible truth that the last words of Kurtz were not her name but 'The horror! The horror!'. He tells a lie; 'The last words he pronounced were – your name'.

The Intended as presented by Conrad is not meant to be an authentic girl. In contrast to the bursting vitality of the savage girl she is a ghostly figure with her pale head and 'floating towards [Marlow] in the dusk'. A creature of illusion, she has the image of Kurtz frozen in her memory and forces Marlow to agree with her. Marlow knows that her assessments are all wrong but he cannot tell her the truth before 'the appealing fixity of her gaze' (107). She controls the entire conversation and compels Marlow to accept her words. She is a very strong character but she derives her strength from her illusion and her absolute, uncritical trust in which she holds Kurtz. Even Marlow who claims that he detests lies cannot break her trust or dispel her illusion. It seems that she is more in love with her love for an ideal Kurtz than really in love with the real Kurtz , she constructs an image of Kurtz, which is frozen in time as she refuses to be Time's fool.

Women in *Heart of Darkness*, though few in number, offer an interesting variety., Marlow's aunt, the females in the outer office in Brussels, the savage woman in Congo and Kurtz's Intended are all unique in their own ways. But they share certain common qualities. All of them are essentially feminine, unselfish and protective. And each of them demonstrates fidelity. The aunt of Marlow is as sincere in her efforts to get her nephew the job as the women knitting wool are loyal to the company they serve. The fidelity of

the savage girl to Kurtz is no less strong than the fidelity of the Intended. They only offer different kinds of perspectives.

[ix] Marlow's Lies

In course of his narration to the listeners on board, the *Nellie* about his meeting with the brick-maker, the 'papier-mâché Mephistopheles', Marlow says :

> you know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of morality in lies- which is what I hate and detest in the world – what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do' (38-39).

The language Marlow uses reinforcing the same idea with synonyms like 'hate' and 'detest' and its natural consequence, 'can't bear it', shows how forceful he is in his denunciation of lies.

A close scrutiny of the novel, however, reveals that there are many kinds of lies in which he gets involved in course of the novel. Some of these lies are passive or receptive where Marlow does not contradict a lie, or deliberately accommodates them. There are lies which are built into the narrative by the contemporary social ethos, and there are lies in which he is actively involved.

Since the story is presented in the form of a dramatic monologue with which the listeners occasionally interact, though in a very small way, the active influence of the listeners is bound to influence the addressivity, in the Bakhtinian sense , of the speaker.

In other words, since the listeners -- the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, the Accountant and the frame narrator -- are all whites and belong to the same cultural group representing the English establishment or an imperialist establishment, they are bound to influence the speaker who would not mind to distort his tale to meet the expectations of his listeners to keep up the suspense. Here Marlow is party to a lie which is a function of the imperialist establishment built into the matrix of the monological narrative.

Now ,coming to Marlow's narration, while distinguishing between Roman invasion and modern imperialism Marlow says, 'What saves us is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency. But [the Romans] were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect'(10) . The implied idea is that the contemporary European colonists have efficiency while their Roman counterparts lacked it. But in the story what Marlow experiences during his journey is only inefficiency. He is stranded at the Central Station for months because there were no rivets to repair the ship with while he had seen rivets strewn all over the road during his two hundred mile tramp through the forest. Marlow's experience clearly demonstrates that efficiency is not a defence against 'the powerless disgust […] the hate'. Since Marlow is narrating a past experience , and has already seen that facts falsify his claim , the statement about efficiency has the taint of falsehood. It is thus a kind of deliberate lie , and Marlow tells it possibly because he knows that it will find easy acceptance of his listeners of the imperial establishment.

The same motive is applicable to his claim, 'What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in

the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before ,and offer a sacrifice to …'(10). But Marlow's own experience has clearly shown that idea cannot redeem imperialism. Kurtz had started with 'an unselfish belief in the idea; his painting shows that he had 'set up something to bow down before', but the idea did not save him. He was in a way blinded by his ideas and could not see the immorality of his acts.

In the Central Station when the brick maker, the manager's spy, tells him 'You are the new gang – the gang of virtue. The same people who sent [Kurtz] specially also recommended you. Oh, don't say no. I've my own eyes to trust' (36), Marlow knows that the brick maker is wrong, but he does not contradict him and thus passively allows the lie to perpetrate. Had a lie really 'appalled' him he would have sharply objected to it. Dilworth suggests that he deceives the brick maker possibly 'partly out of spite partly because he sides with Kurtz', and also ' partly to get the rivets needed to repair the steamer he has taken charge of'. Marlow, however, admits that he 'went near enough to [lie] by letting the young fool believe anything he liked to imagine as to [his] influence in Europe' and he 'became in an instant as much a pretence as the rest of the pilgrims'(39).

We again find Marlow telling a deliberate lie - this time to Kurtz – when Kurtz has escaped from the boat to join the natives, and Marlow has gone to bring him back . He tells Kurtz : 'Your success in Europe is assured in any case' . Marlow tells his audience : 'I affirmed steadily' (94). It is a different matter that the exigency of the situation demanded that Kurtz must be somehow persuaded to come back to the boat without the knowledge of his admirers, the natives, but the fact remains nevertheless that it was a lie

which Marlow told deliberately though for him lie has 'a taint of death, a flavour of mortality'(38).

Marlow again accommodates a lie when '[o]ne evening coming with a candle [he]was startled to hear [Kurtz] say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death', sees that the 'light was within a foot of his eyes'(99)' but does not correct Kurtz. Why does he not correct him? Is it because Kurtz had already lost his vision, and Marlow did not want to break the news to him? If that is so then Marlow's obvious intention is to accommodate the audience who would not like Kurtz to be told about his loss of vision.

Marlow's last lie, the most momentous lie that puts the entire narrative in a reverse gear, as it were, and yet the climactic lie to which the series of passive lies were moving inevitably, is the lie that Marlow tells Kurtz's Intended about the last words of Kurtz. In this dialogic listener-speaker scene of the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz's Intended it is the Intended who controls the conversation. It is evening, and the entire atmosphere is emotionally highly charged. The girl has been in mourning for more than a year and to Marlow it seems that she will mourn for ever. The woman with the 'inextinguishable light of belief and love' in her eyes, 'the fixity of her gaze', her 'mature capacity for fidelity' , forces Marlow to accommodate her ideas which Marlow knows are not true. Marlow has to agree with her , though passively, that she knew Kurtz best, that he was full of promise, greatness, had a generous mind and a noble heart, had vast plans, that his goodness shone in every act, that he was a great loss to the world, etc. By passively agreeing with her he confirms her romantic notions about Kurtz's exemplary qualities. It is only when the girl asks Marlow to repeat the last words of Kurtz, giving him the

impression that Kurtz must have died with her name on his lips, Marlow is in a fix. Either he must tell the biter truth which will be too shocking for her, or tell a lie and fulfill her expectation. Marlow bows 'before the faith that was in her, before the great saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness' and as the girl pitifully appeals to him for ' [Kurtz's] last word- to live with', Marlow pulls himself together and speaks slowly- as he is very consciously telling a lie when the actual words, 'The horror! The horror' are dinning in his ears – 'The last word he pronounced was- your name' (110).

Two questions at once arise. Why does Marlow who says he detests lies consciously tells a lie? And secondly, does it make him morally corrupt? Marlow lies because he realizes that truth will kill the girl while the lie can save her, can really give her a saving illusion, something to live with. It is thus, as Daleski has observed, is a white lie, 'a humane expression of compassion without devious moral implications, and by no stretch of imagination can we regard it as evincing a form of corruption on his part'. Marlow's lie suggests a transvaluation of values where a lie can be nobler than truth.

That Conrad himself was conscious of such a transcendence is evident from his letter to Blackwood where he stated that 'in the last pages of *Heart of Darkness* […]the interview of the man and the girl locks in – as it were- the whole 30,000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life, and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa…' (Quoted by Daleski 73).

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[x] *Heart of Darkness* and Modernism

Modernity is a matter of sensibility. To be modern is to be aware of the contemporary scenario as changed by the growth of knowledge The perennial stuff of literature as reality is an on-going process: it keeps on changing with the development of knowledge. Apart from the huge knowledge explosion that took place in last decade of the nineteenth century -- inventions of cinematography, X-rays, wireless telegraphy; discoveries of electron and radium etc. -- the turn of the century philosophers – Bergson , Nietzsche and Hume - were also concerned with the epistemological issue, i.e., the opposition between conceptual abstractions and immediate experience. There is a general agreement among them that objective truths cannot be ascertained through the application of reason and science. Then there were others : Darwin ,Marx and Freud, and the modern writers had to come to terms with their views of human beings emerging from the ideas of these philosophers.

It is difficult to find a clear date for the beginning of the modern period in the history of English literature. For Frank Kermode the eighteen nineties are the forerunner of modernism. Richard Ellmann would prefer 1900. Lawrence would go in for 1915 and Virginia Woolf for 1910. Harry Levin, however, would like to fix it at 1922, the year of a rich literary harvest : *Ulysses, The Waste Land, Jacob's Room, Aaron's Rod* etc, in England and Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, Brecht's first play, *Baal*, Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah* in the continent.

Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (*Modernism*, 1976) have identified four major preoccupations of modern writers. These are : preoccupation with the complexities of form, preoccupation with the representation of inward states of

consciousness, preoccupation with a sense of the nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and finally preoccupation with the freedom of the narrative art.

Seen in the light of the above it looks amazing how *Heart of Darkness*, originally published in 1899, reflects the modern sensibility. The novel has an extremely complex form. It is monologic and yet at the same time it is dialogic and polyphonic. It has affinities with an adventure story as well as a detective story. In this connection Peter Brooks writes in "An Unreadable Report : Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*": 'In its representation of an effort to reach endings that would retrospectively illuminate beginnings and middles, it pursues a reflection on the formal limits of narrative, but within a frame of discourse that appears to subvert form. If representation of .the inward states of consciousness is a sign of modern sensibility the novel eminently fulfils this requirement. Throughout the novel Marlow is preoccupied with the workings of the human mind and levels of consciousness in the presentation of characters and actions. Marlow's journey is from the conscious to the unconscious, from the surface level of existence to the deepest recesses of the human mind. The conscious level is equated with illusion while truth resides in the unconscious. It is worth remembering that Conrad wrote this novel before he became acquainted with Freud's insights into the human mind and his ideas about the unconscious are ideas that endorse the perception of Conrad.

Again, a close reading of the novel clearly indicates that Marlow does not believe in the ordered surface of reality. One of the themes of the novel is to make the readers aware of this nihilistic disorder through the delineation of the character of Kurtz.

We have already touched upon Conrad's preoccupation with the narrative art in course of out discussion of Conrad's narrative technique. What we can further point out now is that the disruption of the linear order of the narrative with frequent flash back and flash forward, the presentation of the women knitting black wool in a mysterious colour, the incongruity of the impeccable order of the chief accountant in midst of a surrounding disorder and chaos,, the general atmosphere of dream and nightmare, and many such elements are formal devices to destabilize the traditional form of a novel and help the presentation of a glimpse of the hidden reality lying in the unconscious.

Another important aspect of the modernity of the novel is its rich ambiguity. The title itself, as we have seen, is enigmatically ambiguous. The tale, again a modern feature, is open-ended and inconclusive. Even Kurtz's last words are amenable to multiple interpretations. One can also discern the modern mythic element in the novel. First the entire novel can be seen as an enactment of the quest myth. Then, there are mythic hints of the classical Fate sisters in the knitting women , and according to some critics in the savage woman also, particularly when by raising her hands she encompasses the ship carrying Kurtz in their shadow.

In Marlow's insistence that 'We live, as we dream – alone' one hears the voice of modern man suffering from an existential anguish.

Though published in the last year of the nineteenth century when Dickens was still writing, *Heart of Darkness* is, indeed, eminently a modernist text in terms of theme, treatment and technique.

[xi] *Heart of Darkness* and existentialism

Heart of Darkness registers an existential quest both on the parts of Kurtz and Marlow for the authentic self-hood. The novel ends for Kurtz as well as for Marlow on a note of profound self-discovery. In his life in the Congo Kurtz gives himself away to the forces of darkness and thereby discovers his deepest self, and experiences a depth of existence recorded in his dying words, 'The horror! The horror!'. This was possible for him because he lived away from the civilized society, away from the policeman, in his 'utter solitude without a policeman' (70). To Marlow Kurtz's last words, though enigmatic, suggested some profound discovery that Kurtz had made about himself and the world. To the face of the dying Kurtz came the 'expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror-- of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during 'the supreme moment of his complete knowledge'? At one point Marlow says that the only valuable work is the kind of work that gives 'a chance to find yourself. Your own reality – for your self, not for others.- what no other man can know'. Kierkegaard had said that man is ever in the process of becoming and this is as eminently true of Kurtz as it is true of Marlow. Kurtz begins as a highly talented, idealist young man, and eventually becomes a veritable savage. Marlow starts with ignorance but returns with a piece of wisdom. Existentialism believes that every man is an alienated self and mankind has no shared existence. Every man, as an individual, must create his own particular essence, must discover his real self in the historical period of his existence. The multiplicity of the human existence cannot be reduced to any simple mathematical formula. On the one hand there is the unpredictable complexity of human nature largely due to the chaotic nature of the

unconscious, and on the other hand there is the vast area of darkness lying inside one's unconscious. Marlow says : 'The mind of man is capable of anything- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage – who can tell?-- but truth – truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder – the man knows, and can look on without a wink. *But he must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his inborn strength. Principles won't do'* (emphasis added). And again, 'When [the external controls] are gone you must fall back upon *your own innate strength*, upon your own capacity for faithfulness'(70 ; emphasis added). What Kurtz perceived at the moment of his death, may be regarded as an existential reading of the hollowness of his self and the world, and he was obliged to invent his own values and pass judgment on himself through an agonized struggle with himself.

In the case of Marlow his entire journey is a quest for self-discovery, and he discovers himself through his critical study of the life of Kurtz, his decline and fall. In Kurtz he discovers his inner self, his alter ego, his double or a distant objectification of his real self. His knowledge becomes complete with his discovery of the forces of darkness lying within him. It is this knowledge , this experience of self-discovery that makes him look with supreme disdain at the ordinary people after his return to the 'sepulchral city' as a wiser man.

As an existential novel or a novel with existential underpinnings it is more Heideggerian than Kierkegaardian , because of the absolute lack of what Kierkegaard calls 'leap of faith'.

[xii]*Heart of Darkness* and New Historicism

Heart of Darkness makes itself eminently amenable to a New Historicist reading., and may be regarded as one of the early specimens of New Historicism in its implicit challenge of the nineteenth century belief that history provides the background to literature or that history gives an accurate view of things as they were or that historians can offer a unified and consistent world view. New Historicism believes that all history is subjective, because if man governs he is also governed by the spirit of his time. Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher and others believe that a literary text is culture in action and believe that there is hardly any real difference between history and other artistic productions or any kind of social production for that matter. New Historicism believes in the complex interconnectedness of all human activities. It believes, for example, that there is an intricate connection between a literary text and society and that a text cannot be judged in isolation or by decontextualizing it from the historical forces of the time, the societal concerns of the author and various other cultural elements inscribed in the text. Every literary work is caught in a web of historical conditions, relationships and influences. Therefore, to a New Historicist the old distinction between literature and history is blurred. So, when Conrad says in *Notes on Life and Letters* that 'Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing' he is actually anticipating the views of New Historicism.

Conrad further believes that fiction is more than history, because it is 'based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting on second hand impression'. And then he makes the bold claim : 'Thus fiction is nearer truth'. But, mark, 'nearer' only;

never attaining truth. We can, Conrad would suggest, come only closer to truth if we try to see Conrad as a historian of human experience. As a historian of human experience the artist must be true to himself. In this connection let us briefly look at the letter Conrad wrote to Noble on 02 November 1895. He writes :

> Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life,-- a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me.

The statement is as much valid for existentialism as for New Historicism.

Chapter Seven

Characters in *Heart of Darkness*

Since there is no omniscient author narrating the story of *Heart of Darkness* there is no scope for Conrad to present the characters in any great detail. He cannot, as an omniscient narrator could, tell us about what is happening in the mind of a character. He cannot offer any explanation for any action of a character. Instead, a character must be developed through his/her utterances, actions, and interactions with other characters of the novel. In a novel such as *Heart of Darkness* therefore we are obliged to see the characters through the eyes of other characters and draw our own inferences. In other words, our understanding of a character is limited by the sensibility of the narrator.

In the beginning of the novel we have a nameless narrator or a frame narrator who tells us about the setting , and introduces the characters on board the *Nellie,* till Marlow takes over and narrates his experience of the journey to the Belgian Congo.

We can now take up the characters of the novel mainly in order of their appearance in the novel.

The Nameless Narrator:

The nameless narrator presents us the characters on the boat, but his sensibility is limited to the superficial level of things. Unlike Marlow, he cannot see into the heart of things. He describes the characters as he sees them. For example, about the Director of Companies he simply says, 'he stood in the bows looking seaward' (5), or about the Lawyer, that he had ' the only cushion on the deck, and was lying on the only rug'(5),or that the Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes and was toying architecturally with the bones'(5-6). About Marlow also-- who would be the prime narrator of the story-- his description is confined to the externals only, about Marlow's physical features – his sunken cheeks, yellow complexion, straight back etc, for example. To him, at this stage Marlow's ascetic posture resembles an idol . A man of obtuse sensibility, he cannot identify the idol at this stage, but after the story has been told he will identify the posture as that of a meditating Buddha . He is a reporter, and his main function in the novel is to occasionally intrude in the novel to remind the readers of the fact that the story, though concerned with a past experience of Marlow, is being narrated in the present . His observations like, 'And this also', said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth' (7), or 'He was silent for a while'(39) or, [t']here

was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared…' etc, for example serve this purpose. However, it is he who by presenting Marlow as resembling Buddha in his posture in the beginning of the novel and again at the end, serves the important function of completing the narrative circuit.

The Director of the Companies:

He is the captain of the yacht and as the boat is waiting in the estuary of the Thames for a turn of the tide we find him looking seaward. This simple action, however, shows that he is a serious man . Only when he feeIs satisfied that the anchor has a good hold that he makes his way aft and sits down amongst others. In the novel we never hear him speak although the members of the group are said to have 'exchanged a few words lazily'. Nor does he take part in any action. But he does one important job for Conrad. As Director of Companies he is part of the English establishment, the frame of reference for the colonial enterprise.

The Lawyer:

About the Lawyer we are told that he is an old, experienced man. The frame narrator says that he is a man of many virtues but he does not mention any. But since he uses the only cushion and the only rug available on the deck it may be presumed that he commands the respect of the other members of the company. Like the Director of the Companies he also does not utter a single word in course of the novel, but like him, again, he is also a part of the English establishment.

The Accountant:

We have no idea about his features or his professional expertise. Actions are louder than words. The fact that he brings out a box of dominoes and toys with the bones shows that on the deck he is in a relaxed, playful mood. He also does not speak in course of the novel, but he also is a part of the English establishment.

Marlow:

The frame narrator tells us two things about Marlow : first, about his physical features, his ascetic aspect and his sitting posture which resembled an idol; secondly, about the distinctive nature of Marlow's narration . Though a seaman, Marlow 'was not typical'. His narration does not have the simplicity of the ordinary seamen's yarns. Both the statements, though presented innocently at the surface level, assume enormous importance as we begin to probe the character of Marlow as depicted by Conrad.

Unlike other seamen who live at the surface level of existence Marlow is the meditating type. His sitting posture also shows his difference from the normal western man . A European does not sit 'cross legged' with 'his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards'. Marlow's narration of his rich Congo experience shows that he is an intelligent man of fine sensibility. He tells us about his passion for maps and how when he was still a small boy he put his finger on one of the unexplored spaces on the map and expressed his determination to go there when he would come of age. This simple anecdote of his boyhood shows that Marlow had a spirit of adventure from the very beginning. However, his determination, on coming of age, to go there 'by hook or by crook'(12) shows that he is not really an honest man or even a man of integrity. A man

who is determined to fulfill his desire 'by hook or by crook' is a man of tact and firmness. This becomes clearer when he decides to use the influence of women for the job. His decision to use the influence of women shows, on the one hand ,his perception of women as a strong force operating in the society, and, on the other hand, his willingness to compromise for selfish ends. The passive lies he becomes responsible for in the course of the novel actually stem from this element in his character. He does not correct the brick maker's idea that he is a party to Kurtz's mission, because the wrong notion would be more helpful to him than if it were corrected . There is a touch of egoism also in his boasting, 'I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work-- to get a job'(12).

Once appointed Marlow is very serious about his job. We see him honestly trying his best to reach the Inner Station as early as possible, though his journey is delayed first by the fact that part of the river is not navigable or very shallow, and secondly because it took months to get the rivets necessary for repairing the boat with which he was to make the journey. During the journey we see him paying alert attention to the ship. He takes care to avoid the snags, repairs the defects whenever necessary and finally safely brings it to the Inner Station . All this shows his efficiency as a captain in charge of a ship undertaking a difficult upstream journey.

His accounts of what he sees in the journey show his eye for the essential characteristics of the beauty of the African landscape and his sympathy for the miserable condition of the natives , largely due to colonial exploitation. His repeated references to the disease and deprivation of the natives also underscore his criticism of the whites, their hypocrisy, cruelty, greed , possessiveness and exploitation of various kinds. He does not fail to notice, for example, that the natives are given brass wire by selling

which they are to buy their provisions while either there will be no habitations for long stretches, or the steamer will not stop where there is one. As a result the natives have to manage with the rotten hippo meat or go hungry. But the whites had their food neatly packed in tins. He also notices that although the blacks were hungry and cannibals they were decent enough not to eat up the whites. All these accounts show that Marlow had not only a keen observation but also an unbiased , objective assessment of the situations. Though a white himself, Marlow is not blind to the hypocrisy and cruelty of the whites. His reactions also show his profound sympathy for the suffering natives. Another aspect of Marlow's character comes to light in his reaction to the death of the helmsman. Foolishly the helmsman opened the shutters which Marlow had closed with great difficulty during the attack from the land, and got killed by a spear shot from the land . The helmsman was a savage, but Marlow's profound sympathy and commiseration are evident in his statement that the look that the dying helmsman gave to Marlow still haunts him as it was 'like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment'(73). Marlow does not disown the helmsman; on the contrary he says 'Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back-- a help-- an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me – I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken' (73). Marlow's stated reaction to the death of the helmsman bears testimony to the profound sympathy and commiseration he had for the helmsman with whom he had developed a sense of solidarity. Marlow has to explain the reason for his sense of solidarity in so many words, possibly because he was

addressing a white audience to whom the death of a black helmsman is no more important than the death of a domestic animal.

Our assessment of a character begins with the externals, with the kind of dress one is wearing, for example. As one begins to speak we get further ideas of his character, and then his actions reveal him in the clearest possible light. And in the process of assessing another character the character also reveals himself. This is exactly what happens in the case of Marlow's understanding of the Russian. At first he looked 'like a harlequin' with his motley with colouered patches all over, though Marlow could see 'how beautifully all this patching had been done'(75). But gradually Marlow is impressed by his simplicity, his devotion to Kurtz, his sense of order, his spirit of adventure . Marlow goes to the extent of saying, 'I almost envied him the possession of […] modest and clear flame'(79). Marlow's changing attitude to the Russian shows that he is not dogmatic; he can change his opinion with the availability of fresh knowledge. But more importantly, Marlow's admiration for this man's sense of order, his ability to remain firm in midst of hostile circumstances, shows Marlow's own sense of the values. It is humility that he admires the Russian for, -- the quality he thinks he himself is largely deficient of.

Some of the very important aspects of Marlow's character come to light during his interaction with Kurtz and his ruminations about the degeneration of Kurtz. He first sees Kurtz from his boat through his binoculars. Even this long-shot view of Kurtz, to meet whom Marlow has come all the way undertaking a hazardous journey, shows Marlow's fine sensitive perception of the figure of Kurtz as the latter is brought down the hill by a host of pilgrims; it evidently brings out his poetic qualities, his ability to capture a person in a perfect image; 'It was as though an animated image of death carved out of

old ivory' (85) . The picture is heavily loaded with highly charged associations between Kurtz and ivory. It is, in fact, this poetic quality of Marlow that informs his entire narration and keeps up the interest of the listeners/readers and holds the suspense till the end.

However, though a man of poetic quality, fine sensibility and keen observation, Marlow is not devoid of practical sense. This becomes abundantly clear in the way Marlow persuades Kurtz back to the boat after he had run away to join the natives by appealing to his reason and flattering his ego ('Your success in Europe is assured in any case' 94). His conversations with Kurtz and his understanding of Kurtz's character show his capacity for plumbing the depths of the human mind. When he says, 'Kurtz is a remarkable man' he has the entire life of Kurtz and all his qualities in mind. Not only that; he is also able to discover his distant affinity with Kurtz on account of which he promises the Russian to see that Kurtz's reputation is safe in Europe. And he kept his promise even at the cost of the loss of his personal self when he told the lie to Kurtz's Intended.

Marlow's meeting with Kurtz's Intended further reveals that Marlow is basically a soft, tender-hearted gentleman so that for him a life-saving lie is preferable to a life-killing truth. This last act of Marlow, his lie, shows the unpredictable complexity of human character , and his ability to transcend himself.

Marlow's Aunt:

We learn from Marlow that in the continent, in Belgium precisely, he had an aunt whom he wanted to use for getting the job he was interested in. We also learn from

Marlow that she was ‘a dear enthusiastic soul’(12) . She promised to Marlow that she would do anything for him and assured Marlow that she would exercise her influence through her acquaintances, in the high-up to get him the job .That she is really an enthusiastic soul is evident from her repetitive expressions, ’I am ready to do *anything, anything* for you’(12 .emphasis added). The assurance shows that Marlow’s aunt is really a very affectionate lady and holds her nephew in great affection. But what prompts her to be so up and doing is not her affection only. The reason is that she considers it ‘a glorious idea’ to enable Marlow to serve the noble cause of civilizing the uncivilized by joining the Company and thereby working in the dark regions of the Belgian Congo. Her explicit admission that she would try to exercise her influence not only shows the social structure of the contemporary society where jobs are secured more by influence than by merit, but also the glib acceptance of such a situation as something quite normal. When later Marlow goes to take leave of her he finds her triumphant, obviously because her influence has worked. This feeling of triumph on her part brings to light the egoistic trait of her character. The conversation between Marlow and his aunt reveals that the aunt is a good pleader and would not mind exaggerating the qualities of her nephew to get him a place in the Company. It is in course of this conversation that we come to know why in her letter she thought Marlow’s willingness to get the job a glorious idea . It is because, she thought, Marlow’s job would give him a chance of ‘ weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways’(18), and become something ‘like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle’(18). Marlow knows that this is all bunk and tries ‘to hint that the Company was run for profit’(18). But the hint goes unheeded,

and Marlow comments, in a general way though, 'It's queer how out of touch with truth women are'.

Marlow's aunt represents the typical nineteenth century Victorian aristocratic lady in her ideas, feelings and actions.

Fresleven:

Fresleven was a Dane. He was an employee of the Company for about two years, and had been in charge of a ship operating in the Congo region .It is the post vacated by his untimely death that Marlow joins. Fresleven was a very gentle and quiet person . But he died in a most unexpected way. He had picked up a quarrel with the natives over a couple of black hens. Fresleven thought he had been somehow wronged and he wanted to avenge himself. So he left the ship, went ashore and started mercilessly beating the chief with a stick in front of the big crowd, till , unable to stand his father's agony anymore, the chief's son killed Fresleven with a spear. There was a panic all around, the ship left in charge of the engineer and the whole crowd out of some superstitious fear for killing a white man left the forest. The body of Fresleven was left uncared for. Months afterwards when Marlow came across the body he found tall grass had grown through his ribs and covered the bones. It was a strange kind of burial. Marlow focuses on two opposite aspects of Fresleven's character. On the one hand he was very gentle – 'the gentlest , quietest creature that ever walked on two legs'(13)-- and on the other, an extremely brutal person who was about to beat the chief to death. Fresleven's character reveals the unpredictable complexity of human nature and illustrates Conrad's thesis that

there is a primitive hidden inside every civilized man, even in the 'gentlest' Fresleven. Conrad's characterization of Fresleven, in this sense , is realistic in psychological terms.

The Knitting Women:

Unlike Marlow's aunt or Fresleven about whom we are not given the faintest idea about their physical features or dresses, in the case of the knitting women the characters are delineated through their appearances, dresses and engagements. There are two knitting women – one fat, the other slim. Thus Conrad is presenting these two characters in studied contrast marked by affinities and differences . Both are knitting black wool. The dress of the slim girl is 'as plain as an umbrella-cover'. The old girl wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek and had silver-rimmed spectacles hanging on the tip of her nose. Furthermore, she had a cat on her lap. She glanced at everybody above the glasses. The woman is captured in her concrete individuality.

Both the girls are busy in knitting black wool and none is heard to speak .But it is the old girl with her cat and curious, searching glances that gives Marlow a feeling of eeriness., and it is this girl who will haunt Marlow's memory even when he is thousands of miles away from the 'sepulchral city' office where he meets her. Conrad's characterization of these two knitting women – the awe that they evoke – is essentially gothic. The girls have come down, as it were, from some macabre gothic novel. Conrad's characterization of these two women in a gothic manner ominously associating them with death is thematically relevant, because Marlow's journey up the Congo is meant to be a symbolic journey to Hell. So Conrad presents these women on the model of the classical fates weaving the destiny of the employees of the Company.

Conrad's art of characterization varies according to the purpose he wants a particular character to serve.

The Paddling Black Fellows:

During his journey from Brussels to the mouth of the Congo Marlow sees from a distance a group of paddling black fellows. The characters are presented as Marlow sees them. The characters are painted with a few powerful strokes highlighting their excellent physique, wild vitality and naturalness. Conrad does say that these black fellows were happy;, he makes us see their happiness in their singing and shouting and energy of movement, thus dramatizing their feeling through action.

Thematically these characters, brought to life with a few powerful strokes, are to act as the frame of reference for the miserable conditions of the natives along the journey.

The Swede Captain:

The Swede is the captain of the sea-going steamer which will take Marlow to the Company Station. The Swede is a young man 'lean, fair, and morose'(21). He is a cynical bitter man and is contemptuous of the persons who go to the Congo just 'for a few francs a-month'. He gives a hint that people undergo changes there, and , to make his point, as it were, tells Marlow of another Swede who had hanged himself on the road. The Swede is a weathered man full of cynical bitterness. Instead of welcoming Marlow or encouraging him in any way he tries to scare him with a bleak prospect and imaginary fears.

Conrad's characters have a rich variety. If we have met the ebullient aunt we now meet a cynical man whose cynicism is meant to infect Marlow. Thematically, however, the function of this character is to give Marlow a foretaste of the life up in Congo, the degeneration of Kurtz and also to show that all the members of the colonial venture were not victims of illusion. The Swede is a very realistic character, the kind of which we often meet in any society.

Six Black Men : (12)

This is the second group of black men that Marlow sees. As in the case of the first group of black men, the paddling ones, here also, for his characterization, Conrad has recourse to the dramatic method of presenting a character through action. Conrad does not comment; he only presents a picture: six black men , scantily dressed, with iron collar on the neck, trudge on slowly carrying small baskets of earth on their heads. Marlow can see their limbs. It is a tell-tale picture of exploitation, misery and starvation. With powerful visual images Conrad dramatically presents the characters.

Company's Chief Accountant: (25-28)

Marlow meets the chief accountant at the Company Station. He is a white man . We see him through Marlow's eyes and the character is developed in the impressionistic mode. In other words, Conrad describes the impression of Marlow as he sees this man, and it is his impressions that build up the character. Marlow's first impression is that he is seeing a miracle, because in midst of broken machineries, sights of black shadows of

disease and deprivation, signs of inefficiency all around, here was a man who was trim and tidy and , immaculately dressed. Marlow scans him from head to foot 'a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie and varnished boots'(25). He had his hair parted ,brushed and oiled. As he had come out for a breath of fresh air he had a green-lined parasol in his big white hand. The man was visibly devoted to his job of book-keeping despite the fact that he did not have any congenial atmosphere for work. His office was built of horizontal planks, 'and so bad that as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight.[…] it was hot there ,too ; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting but stabbed'. Even in such a hostile atmosphere the chief accountant, perching on a high stool, went on doing his job most meticulously. Even when there is a great noise outside his office Marlow finds him 'making correct entries of perfectly correct transaction'(28).

On seeing this man Marlow's first impression is that he is having a 'vision' because of the incongruity of such perfection in a hopelessly imperfect surroundings. Then he concedes that he is a 'miracle' and later admits that although he looked like 'a hairdresser's dummy' his 'starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character'.(26) The chief accountant evinces great moral strength of character and exemplary devotion to duty. Conrad possibly wants to suggest that in the Company there were some exceptional characters as well. Seen in that light Conrad's presentation of the colonial characters becomes more realistic . Incidentally it is from this man that Marlow first heard about Kurtz, about his importance, his achievements and his sickness.

The White Man on the Road: (29)

During his two hundred mile tramp Marlow saw a white man camping by the wayside. Again as we see him through Marlow's eyes we notice that he is a white man, with unbuttoned uniform and an armed native escort. The man is very hospitable and is in a festive mood . His job was to take care of the upkeep of the road, but Marlow says that during his tramp he neither saw any road nor any upkeep. This white man who is absolutely careless about his duties and is busy enjoying himself also represents a large section of the workers in the colonial enterprise who went to the colonies only to enjoy themselves in an exotic land in gay abandon. He is a sharp contrast to the Chief Accountant.

The White Companion in Marlow's Retinue :(29)

Marlow had a white companion in his retinue. He was too fleshy and had a tendency to faint due to exasperation. So, much against his willingness, Marlow had to hold his coat over his head like a parasol whenever he was about to faint. He weighed sixteen stone and the carriers had a lot of trouble to carry him in a hammock. They resented and Marlow gave them a speech in English which nobody understood, and forced them to carry the load however, when an hour afterwards when 'the whole concern wrecked in a bush' and as the 'heavy pole had skinned his nose' he wanted Marlow to kill somebody as a punishment. The character of this white man shows how selfish and self-centered a man can be. The climate does not suit him, and he has neither any adaptability nor any desire to adjust to the difficult circumstances. When Marlow asks him why had he decided to come there at all, his answer is 'To make money, of course'(29) ; he thus distantly confirms the Swede captain's remarks on the sea-going steamer, 'It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a-month'(21). The white

companion's reply shows that he is not at all inspired by any kind of idealism – real or pretentious-- his interest is entirely materialistic, to get rich quick, possibly. His attitude to the natives also shows his complete indifference to their difficulties in carrying the heavy load that he is. On the contrary just because his nose has been skinned he would even like to get one of the natives killed as an exemplary punishment for not taking proper care of him. He represents another class of white workers for whom money was the only motive.

The Manager of the Central Station: (30-33, 44-48)

Marlow says that his first interview with the manager was 'curious', because as it becomes subsequently evident, in a most inconsiderate manner he did not ask Marlow to sit although he knew fully well that Marlow had just come after a twenty mile walk, and was hungry as well. The manager is commonplace in his features, complexion, in manners and voice. But his eyes were remarkably cold; he could kill somebody with his glance, it seemed. During the interview he practically monopolizes all the talk, and from his talk we learn that he enjoys a very sound health which Marlow considers 'a kind of power' (31). He originated nothing; he has no imagination; he can only mechanically keep a routine going. With his subordinates he is the bossing type. When at the dining table the white men quarreled over their seats of precedence he ordered a large round table and wherever he sat that was the first position and the only definite position; the other seats had no positions whatsoever. His behavior with Marlow and his behavior with the subordinate white men only reveal his sense of self-importance and his love of power.

The Stout Man with Moustaches: (33)

We meet his man very briefly through the eyes of Marlow as usual when fire broke out at the station. The man comes down to river with a tin pail in his hand and assures Marlow that everybody was 'behaving splendidly'. He collected some water and when he hurriedly left Marlow noticed the there was a hole in the bottom of the pail.

The man's behavior shows that he is basically a good man who has volunteered to help extinguish the fire, is appreciative of others and is serious about the job at hand; he does not spend any time in gossiping. But his weakness is that in his enthusiasm he does not notice, as Marlow has noticed, that there is a hole in the bottom of the pail. In other words all his efforts will go waste. In terms of the theme of the novel he does one important function : he illustrates the administrative inefficiency by revealing a leaky pail.

The Brick Maker (34)

Marlow meets the brick maker in the company of the manager when the fire broke out at the station. The brick maker is a first class agent, 'young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose'. He is officious in his dealing with the other agents, and although officially he is a brick maker 'there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in he station' (34). Other agents believed that he was the manager's spy. During his conversation with the brick man Marlow feels that 'the fellow was trying to get at something' (35). Gradually it becomes clear that he took Marlow as one of 'the new gang' (36) to which Kurtz belonged, because he believed that the same people who had sent Kurtz also sent him. It is in his room that Marlow sees Kurtz's oil painting-- a visual representation of his idealism-- and the brick maker talks a lot about Kurtz's

idealism. But the way he mentions it [‘and he is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, *and devil knows what else’* (36; emphasis added)] shows that he has no faith in such idealism. Marlow describes him as ‘the indefatigable man with the moustaches’ (37), and more contemptuously as a ‘papier-mâché Mephistopheles’ (37). He is a hollow man.

The brick maker, a first class agent, who is the spy of the manager and engaged in various cliquish and conspiratorial activities, is also a type, which was quite common amongst the white employees of a colonial venture.

The Manager’s Uncle : (44)

The uncle of the manager was the leader of a group of ostensibly ‘devoted band’ of pilgrims that called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition .Actually they were nothing but ‘sordid buccaneers’(43). We get a glimpse of the man’s actual character in the conversation with his nephew, which Marlow overhears. He gives moral support to the manager in his desire to do away with Kurtz, and is equally happy that Kurtz is seriously ill, and assures him that the typical tropical climate will destroy Kurtz : ‘Ah my boy, trust to this – I say trust to this’(47). He was happy that his nephew enjoys sound health and has a charmed life, so to speak. The picture of the uncle that we get shows him as an affectionate person no doubt but that his affection makes him an accomplice in a conspiracy shows that he is not basically a good character. On the contrary as leader of the Eldorado Expedition he is interested in tearing ‘treasure out of the bowels of the land’(44) without any moral purpose. It is significant that ‘he resembled a butcher in a

poor neighborhood, and his eyes had a sleepy cunning' and 'carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs'(44) In brief he is a nasty, greedy and hypocritical character.

The Fireman :(52)

The fireman was a savage but an improved specimen, more intelligent than the other savages; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He had undergone a few months' training for the job he was doing, and that, Marlow thinks, had partly spoilt his natural character. With filed teeth, his pate shaved into queer patterns and ornamental scars on his cheeks he looked a typical savage, but because of the training he had undergone he was not completely a savage. So Marlow comments that 'to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs'(52). Marlow's contemptuous analogy arises out of his conviction that one is best in his own place, otherwise it comes down to aping. It may be true, as Achebe has suggested, that Marlow's analogy comes from Conrad's privileging the whites over the blacks, the fact remains, nevertheless, that the fireman knows his job, is serious about it and is therefore a commendable character. He represents a particular state of the civilizing process.

The Headman:

The headman was 'a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets' (58). As usual Conrad focuses on the physical features and the dress as we see the headman through the eyes of Marlow. He is not at all scared of the possible attack from the shore. On the contrary he wants to catch the attackers and eat them. In the context of the novel the function of this character is to remind the readers that Africans were cannibals.

The Helmsman : (63-66, 73)

The character of the helmsman is developed in snatches. As usual, the things that are noticed first are described first: pair of brass wire rings and blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles. In action he is an 'unstable kind of fool' (63); he swaggers about his job when he knows that somebody sees him working. Otherwise he lapses into lethargy. His foolishness becomes evident in his action. He tries to threaten the attackers by 'shaking empty rifle and yelling at the shore', and gets killed in the process when he foolishly exposes himself to the attackers. A spear shot at him by some attackers from the shores kills him.

Though a savage and a fool, Conrad treats him endearingly. Marlow is aware that the 'the regret for a savage'(73) might appear strange to his white, civilized listeners, but ,in recognition of his intimate association with him as a fellow worker in the boat he even affirms a 'distant kinship'(73) with him.

The Russian:

Marlow first notices the Russian as 'a white man under a hat'(75) when the Russian beckons him persistently with 'his whole arm', to welcome him to the Inner Station. First comes in view his dress : old Holland stuff with many patches of different colours, but one cannot fail to notice 'how beautifully all the patching had been done'(75). This is the first reference to the man's sense of order and decency reflected even in the patching. Then follows the physical description : boyish face, little blue eyes, peeling nose and very fair complexion. We gradually learn that he is a Russian, is son of an archpriest. , has an insatiable spirit of adventure and that he believes that 'when one is

young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge his mind'(77). He had wandered about the river for nearly two years alone till he met Kurtz and got stuck to him. It was he who had kept the pile of woodstock ready for Marlow some fifty miles below the Inner Station. He is deeply attached to Kurtz, nursed him back to health on several occasions and he is very sad that Kurtz is gravely ill. A good soul, he has all the sympathy for the natives whom he considers 'simple people'. He is very happy, almost ecstatic, to get his book back, the book he had taken to have been lost.

It is from him that Marlow learns a lot of things about Kurtz, and after he secures Marlow's assurance that Kurtz's reputation will be safe with him he gives Marlow the shocking information that it was Kurtz himself who had ordered the attack, because he does not want to go back and the natives also do not want him to go back, and it is he, again, who warns Marlow that the natives may attack again not to allow Marlow and the pilgrims to take away Kurtz, their god. It is also the Russian who will tell Marlow about the savage girl and her relation with Kurtz.

The Russian first appears to Marlow as a 'harlequin' but emerges gradually as a strong and round character. He is extremely disciplined, serious about seamanship, has a strong spirit of adventure and thirst for knowledge. He is selflessly devoted to Kurtz and has sympathy for Kurtz and the natives, and above all, he is full of human values. This is also evident in his attitude to Van Shuyten, the good old Dutchman who gave him 'some cheap things and a few guns' to enable him to wander about the river. The Russian had sent him some ivory as a token of gratitude. Marlow says : 'If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it rules this be-patched youth, I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame'(79).

In terms of the plot-structure of the novel the function of the Russian is to give the information about Kurtz which Kurtz himself would not give and Marlow himself would never know. Thus the Russian equips Marlow with many relevant information about Kurtz which enables Marlow and the readers to see Kurtz in a proper perspective.

Kurtz:

Marlow sees Kurtz for the first time when he is being brought down from his house on the hill top, by a group of pilgrims on a stretcher. It has already been pointed out that Conrad follows the impressionistic method in the depiction of his character. We see each character through the eyes of Marlow and the character is shaped by Marlow's impressions. Nowhere it is more evident than in the case of Kurtz that Marlow's impressions begin to be formed long before he actually meets Kurtz. Marlow first hears of Kurtz from the chief accountant in the Company Station who describes Kurtz as 'a very remarkable person'(27). Marlow further learns that he was 'at present in charge of a trading post, a very important one in the true ivory country', and sends in 'as much ivory as all the others put together'(27). So the first impression of Kurtz that Marlow has is that he is a first class agent and a remarkable person possibly because he sends more ivory than all the other agents put together.

Marlow again hears of Kurtz when he notices an oil painting in the room of the brick maker at the central station, and on asking learns that the painting was a work of Kurtz. . The brick maker tells him , though in a tone of derision because of personal jealousy, that Kurtz is the chief of the Inner Station. He is 'a prodigy, an emissary of pity, and science and progress' and that he belongs to the 'new gang of virtue'(36) . So, while in

his talk with the chief accountant at the Company Station Marlow got the impression that Kurtz is a very successful agent here , at the Central Station he becomes aware of Kurtz's talent as an artist and his missionary zeal . Even now all that he had heard of him did not develop into a concrete image : 'Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it – no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there'(38). Marlow gets further impressions of Kurtz when he overhears the conversation between the manager and his uncle. It is from their conversation that he learns that Kurtz has a great influence in the Company, hears about his collection of ivory, how he once intended to return and after coming about three hundred miles 'suddenly decided to go back'(48) and left in a small dug out with four paddlers. The action of Kurtz gives Marlow the impression of a man of enormous pluck and courage, an extraordinary man, so to speak. He also learnt from their conversation that Kurtz was very ill and these men did not want him to survive. The impression of Marlow is thus modified by what he hears now about Kurtz : his huge collection of ivory, his courage and his illness. About eight miles from Kurtz's station he gathers from the talk with the 'pilgrims' that Kurtz might be dead by the time they reach the Inner Station. To Marlow now Kurtz seems to be 'an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle'(61). His further impressions are formed by what he hears from the Russian at the Inner Station. He learns about Kurtz's passion for ivory, his hold on the natives, his self-aggrandizement, his ferocity and vindictiveness, about his black mistress, and most importantly about his gift of the gab, his remarkable power of persuasive conversation. Even from a distance as Marlow sees Kurtz through his binoculars and sees him talk, he is impressed, and when in the boat he says to Marlow,' I am glad' Marlow is amazed by the volume of his tone.

So, Marlow's personal impression begins to confirm and modify his earlier impressions of Kurtz attained through conversation with others and makes Conrad's depiction of the character of Kurtz cubist, -- the cube being formed by layers of impressions that Marlow has gathered in course of his journey. Again, when Marlow reads the report written by Kurtz, he is impressed by Kurtz's 'unbounded power of eloquence – of words, of burning noble words […] the magic current of phrases'(72). But what impresses Marlow most is his voice: 'It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart'(98). Kurtz loses his vision shortly before his death and dies with the words, 'The horror! The horror!'(100). Later on his return to Brussels Marlow learns from Kurtz's cousin that he was a fine musician, and from a journalist that he was a fine orator, and that his marriage did not come off because of his comparative poverty.

Now as the picture of Kurtz is developed slowly through the impressions of others and Marlow's own impressions, which subsume all the previous impressions, we can, with the benefit of hindsight, try to make an assessment of the character of Kurtz. Kurtz, whose mother was half-English, and father half-French, had been educated partly in England, and the International Society for Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the task of making a report. He had written it and it was an excellent piece of writing, but must have been written before he fell prey to the forces of darkness and began 'to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites'(71).

As a young man Kurtz was genuinely inspired by idealism. He was a gifted person. He was an artist, a musician, a journalist and a fine orator. As a young man he was also in love with a girl whom he wanted to marry. But the relatives of the girl did not approve of

the match because Kurtz belonged to a lower stratum of the society. He was not rich enough. Perhaps it is this fact of being denied the fulfillment of his love on account of his poverty that fuelled his determination to become rich by any means. The Company provided him the opportunity. He had talents, he could impress his employers and get a posting in the 'ivory country'. But once there he became increasingly greedy and power-maniac. Gradually the primitive in him began to come out in the open and eclipse his civilized self. He killed the rebels and put their heads on poles around his house as an exemplary punishment for rebellion. He took part in 'unspeakable rites', started fulfilling his atavistic desires and degenerated into a savage. This could happen because there was no external control; it was 'utter solitude without a policeman' (70). He had no innate strength to fight the forces of darkness: 'the wilderness had patted him on the head […], 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 initiation' (69). As he lacked restraint the whispers of the forces of darkness 'proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core'(83).

But what half redeems Kurtz is his ability to confront his real self before his death when he said, 'The horror! The horror!'(100). Marlow says he had summed up his life and he had judged. So while others consider Kurtz as a remarkable man for his efficiency as an agent, or for his various talents, Marlow's final assessment of Kurtz as a remarkable man is based on his conviction that at last, before his death Kurtz was able to confront reality.

The Savage Girl : (87-89, 97)

The savage girl makes her first appearance in the novel after Kurtz has been taken to the boat . Marlow's first impression is the figure of 'a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman' 'moving from right to left of the lighted shore'(87). As Marlow focuses on her he notices her stately gait, her dress draped in striped and fringed patterns. She has 'barbarous ornaments' that flash and jingle as she moves. She holds her head erect and her hair is collected in the shape of a helmet. She is heavily decorated with rich ornament. She carries gifts of witch-men about her. To Marlow she appears 'savage and superb', 'wild-eyed and magnificent'. She becomes the image of the 'tenebrous and passionate soul' of the sorrowful natives that gathered on the bank of the river. As she came close to the steamer Marlow noticed the 'unswerving steadiness of her glance'(87-88), and then saw her throwing her arms rigidly to the sky, the shadow of her hands encompassing the ship in the process. Then she went back. She would come again the next day and remain undaunted by the steam whistle and throw her bare arms in the sky over 'the somber and glittering river'(97). Marlow learns from the Russian that she was Kurtz's savage mistress and would not like Kurtz to go away. Only the other day she had talked like a fury to Kurtz in the presence of the Russian.

A few things become clear from Marlow's description of the savage girl. She is rich by the standard of her tribe, savagely beautiful, has many admirers, has hold on the natives, and is fearless. She is passionate in her love for Kurtz and makes a last frantic effort with her hands raised to the sky both as a gesture of a prayer to God in heaven and as an appeal to stop her parting god. As a tribal she has superstitious beliefs in the effectiveness of the charms supplied to her by the witch-men. But she is tragic, first because the magic charms supplied by the witch-men become ineffective in thwarting

the departure of Kurtz, and secondly, and more importantly, because she is in love with a man who was passionately involved with her, yet abandons her apparently without any compunction. In his agonized cry, 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my…'(70) the savage girl is not mentioned. As 'savage and superb' the girl becomes an embodiment of the wilderness which is primal and real. She is an authentic person without any touch of illusion about her. Later we will see that the feminine in her has an affinity with the feminine in the Intended, although one is black and the other white, one is savage and the other civilized, one lives in the forest, the other in a modern city.

Achebe has complained that Conrad has not given the natives any speech. Marlow does say that after putting out her hands she 'shouted something'(96) either for the hearing of God or for the hearing of Kurtz in a language which Kurtz understood but Marlow could not. The Russian also referred to her shouting to Kurtz for an hour. So it is not true that Conrad has not given her any speech, but for obvious reasons of the barrier of language it was not possible for Marlow to establish any verbal communication with her. The amount of creative energy that Conrad has lavished on the savage girl, the detailed, meticulous manner in which he has described her features, her gait, her dresses, her movements, her pathetic appeal would tempt one to believe that Conrad himself as a creator fell in love with the image of this girl. , like Pope unknowingly falling in love with Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*, as he luxuriates in describing her charms.

The Cabin Boy: (100)

The cabin boy is practically described in one sentence, 'Suddenly the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of contempt—'Mistah

Kurtz--he dead'(100). But even in this one short sentence the character comes to life. He is black, insolent and has a scathing contempt for Kurtz. By using the polyphonic method of incorporating the actual statement of the boy Conrad is also able to give us an idea of his low cultural level and his poor knowledge of the English grammar. It is not very clear why he holds Kurtz in so much contempt. Is it because he was dimly aware of the sinister activities of Kurtz or just because he was the manager's boy and shared the manager's attitude to Kurtz?

The Man from the Company: (102-3)

The man presumably from the Company was a clean shaved man and had gold-rimmed spectacles. He is presented as an officious fellow, bent upon procuring he documents Kurtz had left in the custody of Marlow before his death. The man seems to be a cunning fellow as he used various strategies – assertion of legal rights, flattery etc--, to get hold of the documents. But he was disappointed when , after much pestering, Marlow gave him the report. The Company expected different kind of report from a man like Kurtz. The function of this character is to bring out the discrepancy between the actual interest of Kurtz and the Company's expectations from him.

Kurtz's Cousin:(103)

If the man from the Company was concerned with Kurtz in official capacity the cousin of Kurtz-- a man with 'lank grey hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar' (103) -- introduces a tender, domestic and familial aspect. His anxiety to hear 'all the details about his dear relative's last moments' (103) is touched with pathos and reflects a very

tender familial sentiment. The man was an organist and Marlow learns from him that Kurtz was a great musician.

The Journalist: (104)

The journalist with 'furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short' and 'an eye-glass on a broad ribbon', says that Kurtz was no journalist but reaffirms Kurtz's elocutionary powers, his 'capacity to [electrify] meetings'. The function of the journalist is, thus, to give an external confirmation to, and reinforce Marlow's judgment of , Kurtz's voice and speech.

The Intended:

The girl referred to as the Intended is the girl whom Kurtz intended to marry but could not because of his comparatively poor status. By presenting the girl in mourning even more than a year after Kurtz's death Conrad hints at her romantic disposition. She was deeply in love with Kurtz who became an idealized person or an idol to be worshipped. The strong point of her character is her absolute trust in Kurtz's capabilities, and her fidelity to him. She is a strong character who forces Marlow to agree with her on all the points. For Marlow, though he would like to , cannot protest or contradict her. She grows hysterical when she cries, 'I want- I want- something-something- to- to live with'(110) and pitifully prays to Marlow for telling her the last words of Kurtz to live with, and compels Marlow to tell a lie.

Despite many obvious differences between the savage girl and the Intended, Kurtz's black consort and white lady-love , the two girls have something in common. Both

wanted to possess Kurtz and both evince remarkable fidelity to Kurtz in their love for him. The savage girl raising her hands in supplication to stop her parting lover – one recalls the abandonment of Dido by Aeneas – finds its counterpart in the way the white girl '[puts]her arms as if after a retreating figure'(107). In Marlow's consciousness the image of the Intended melts into the image of the savage girl : 'I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live , And I shall see her, too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness'(110).

Chapter Six

[i] Some Relevant Excerpts from Conrad's Own Writings

'When I speak about writing from an inward point of view, - I mean from the depth of our own inwardness. […] Everyone must talk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life,-- a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me.'

(From a letter to Noble, 2 November 1895)

‘Fiction- if it at all aspires to be art- appeals to temperament. And in truth must be like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses, and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music – which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care of the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.’

Again,

‘My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel- it is, before all, to make you see. That- and no more, and it is everything.’

(From *Preface* to *The Nigger of the’Narcissus’*)

‘It is a strange fact that everything that I have, of set artistic purpose, laboured to leave indefinite, suggestive, in the penumbra of initial inspiration, should have that light turned on to it and its significance[…] exposed for any fool to comment upon or even for average minds to be disappointed with.[…]Explicitness,[…] is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion.

From a letter to Richard Curle (24 April 1922)

‘My manner of telling, perfectly devoid of familiarity as between author and reader,[is] aimed essentially at the intimacy of a personal communication, without any thought of other effects. As a matter of fact, the thought for effects is there all the same (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative) and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective, which are purely temperamental and wherein all my art “consists”.

From a letter to Richard Curle (14 July 1923)

‘Every novel contains an element of autobiography – and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only explain himself in his creations.’

(From Arthur Symons (1865-1945), *Notes on Joseph Conrad with Some Unpublished Letters*)

[ii] Some Critical Responses

Edward Garnett

‘For the art of ‘Heart of Darkness’--as in every psychological masterpiece-- lies in the relation of the things of the spirit to the things of the flesh, of the invisible life to the visible, of the sub-conscious life within us, our obscure motives and instincts, to our conscious actions, feelings and outlook.’

(From *Academy and Literature* 6 December 1902)

F.R.Leavis

'The same vocabulary, the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery, is applied to the evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors; to magnifying a thrilled sense of the unspeakable potentialities of the human soul. The actual effect is not to magnify but rather to muffle. The essential vibration emanates from the interaction of the particular incidents, actions, and perceptions that are evoked with such charged concreteness.'

(From *The Great Tradition*)

Frederick R. Karl

'*Heart of Darkness* is possibly the greatest short novel in English and is one of the greatest in any language. Like all great fiction, it involves the reader in dramatic, critically difficult moral decisions which parallel those of the central characters. It asks troublesome questions, disturbs preconceptions, forces curious confrontations, and possibly changes us.'

'Kurtz's savage career is every man's wish- fulfillment, although by dying he conveniently disappears before we all become his disciples.

But *not* before we are filled with a sense of the absurd – a sense of the absurd gap between what we profess to be and what we are, a sense of our consequently and inevitably skewed relationship with objects, with our milieu, with the universe itself.'

(In Murfin)

Adena Rosemarin

'The question of the lie, the fabrication by Marlow of his tale, and, within the tale, what he tells the Intended, can be rephrased as a question of self, of the reader's self as well as of the tale-teller's self. *Heart of Darkness* raises the one question explicitly, the other by implication.' (In Murfin)

Johanna M. Smith

'The core of Marlow's feminine predicament, the contradiction between beliefs that he feels powerless to reconcile, results in the portraits of his aunt and the Intended. Both portraits involve attempts by Marlow to extricate himself from his feminine predicament. Through them he creates a feminine sphere of belief that can stand alongside the masculine sphere of Kurtz's final, horrible belief; located in separate domains, these contradictory ideologies need not confront each other.'(In Murfin)

J. Hillis Miller

'All Conrad's work turns on[…] double paradox: first the paradox of the two senses of seeing, seeing as physical vision and seeing as seeing through, as penetrating to or unveiling the hidden invisible truth, and second the paradox of seeing the darkness in terms of the light.' (In Murfin)

Brook Thomas

' [In} Conrad's story what seems to be an encounter with another turns out to be an encounter with the self – so that Marlow's encounter with Kurtz really becomes an encounter with himself and readers' encounters with Marlow transform into encounters with themselves…' (In Murfin)

Harold Bloom

'*Heart of Darkness* may always be a critical battleground between readers who regard it as an aesthetic triumph, and those like myself who doubt its ability to rescue us from its own hopeless obscurantism.'

'*Heart of Darkness* has taken on some of the power of myth, even if the book is limited by its involuntary obscurantism. It has haunted American literature from T.S.Eliot's poetry through our major novelists of the era 1920 to 1940, on to a line of movies that go from *Citizen Cane* of Orson Wells (a substitute for an abandoned Wells project to film *Heart of Darkness*) on to Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. In this instance, Conrad's formlessness seems to have worked as an aid, so diffusing his conception as to have made it available to an almost universal audience.' (In Bloom)

Albert J. Guerard

'*Heart of Darkness* is the most famous of [Conrad's] personal short novels: a Pilgrim's Progress for our pessimistic and psychologizing age'

Heart of Darkness has its important public side, as an angry document on absurd and brutal exploitation.'

Heart of Darkness remains […]one of the great dark meditations in literature, and one of the purest expressions of a melancholy temperament.'.

(From *Conrad the Novelist*)

James Guetti

'*Heart of Darkness* […] as the account of a journey into the center of things – of Africa, of Kurtz, of Marlow, and of human existence – poses itself as the refutation of such a journey and as the reference of the general metaphorical conception that meaning may be found within, beneath, at the center. At the end of the search we encounter a darkness,

and it is no more defined than at the beginning of the journey and the narrative continues to exist only as something unapproachable.'

(From *The Limits of Metaphor*)

C.B.Cox

'[…]*Heart of Darkness* is an attack on the values of Western society, and an annunciation of the Savage God. The choice of nightmares is between a bad Europe and a bad Africa. But whereas Europe is sepulchral, Africa is horrific and vital. Marlow, according to this theory, remains solidly Victorian in his adherence to the work ethic, while Conrad's heroes such as Kurtz, immerse themselves in the destructive element. Kurtz releases his id from European restraint; he is a pioneer in a psychic wilderness.'

(From *Joseph Conrad : The Modern Imagination)*

Ian Watt

' Heart of Darkness […] expresses a perspective that was very representative of many currents of thought in late nineteenth century England; but it is representative in a very tangential way. Conrad's imaginative world seem wholly independent; the ideas don't stick out, or ask for support or confirmation.'

(From *Partisan Review* 45,no.1 (1978) . Reprinted in Bloom)

Cedric Watts

'The tale has somber implications, and so has the story of its reception over the years, but the eloquence, virtuosity, and intensity with which 'Heart of Darkness' addressed its era were exemplary, and seem likely to ensure its longevity.'

(From *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*)

H.M.Daleski

'As Marlow struggles to get to the bottom of things, to the underlying truth of the affair, the aesthetic which Conrad enunciated in the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* becomes the ethic of 'Heart of Darkness'.

(From Joseph Conrad : *The Way of Dispossession*)

Nina Pelikan Straus

'Marlow speaks in *Heart of Darkness* to other men, and although he speaks about women, there is no indication that women might be included among his hearers, nor that his existence depends upon his 'hanging together' with a 'humanity' that includes the second sex […].The peculiar density and inaccessibility of *Heart of Darkness* may be the result of its extremely masculine historical referentiality, its insistence on a male circle of readers.'

(In J*oseph Conrad : Contemporary Critical Essays*)

Benita Parry

'*Heart of Darkness* registers its manifold preoccupations in a title which by signifying a geographical location, a metaphysical landscape and a theological category, addresses itself simultaneously to Europe's exploitation of Africa, the primeval human situation, an archaic aspect of the mind's structure and a condition of moral baseness.'

(From *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers*)

Jacques Berthoud

'Mythical correspondences (the journey as a quest), literary allusions (the Dantesque grove of death)' symbolic oppositions (light/darkness, white/black), anthromorphism (the forest as 'an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention'), and the like, are not solely or even mainly (as some critics have complained) means of inflating significance; they also express – and on the whole with remarkable success – the sense of dream, of phantasmagoria and nightmare, which Marlow claims is of the essence of his experience.'

(From *Joseph Conrad : The Major Phase*)

Ruth L. Nandelhaft

'With *Heart of Darkness* Conrad turns overtly to the confrontation and analysis of Western imperialist values and practices; in this context, women from the first play a complex and apparently contradictory set of roles.'

(From *Joseph Conrad*)

Chinua Achebe

'[…]Conrad chose his subject well – one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance.

'[…] Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked.'

(From "An Image of Africa")

Cedric Watts

'Far from being a 'purveyor of comforting myths', Conrad most deliberately and incisively debunks such myths. The myth of inevitable progress, for example; the myth

that white civilization is necessarily morally superior to 'savagery'; the myth that imperialism is the altruistic matter of 'weaning those ignorant millions from heir horrid ways': all these are mocked by the tale. It is an organizational principle of Heart of Darkness that reassuring clichés are evoked and then subverted, just as salutary affirmatives are sought, briefly established, and then undermined.'

(From "'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad")

[iii]A Short Outline of Conrad Chronology

1857 Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski is born on 3rd December at . .. ……Berdichev in the Ukraine in Russian-occupied Poland. Parents : Apollo and Ewa Korzeniowski.

1859 ……. The family moves to Zhitomir.

1860 …….. The family moves to Warsaw. Apollo is involved in political activities, gets arrested and spends a few months in prison. Ewa is also accused
.

1862. Both Apollo and Ewa are sentenced to deportation. Conrad accompanies them

1863. .Conrad is already an avid reader. Ewa takes Conrad to her brother Tadeusz in Nowachwastow.

1865 Ewa dies of tuberculosis.

1866 Conrad spends the summer with his uncle and his grandmother. He falls ill, is . . taken to Kiev for treatment. Apollo becomes seriously ill.

1868 Apollo is permitted to go back to Poland. Apollo and Conrad settle in Lvov

1869 They move to Cracow. Apollo dies. Conrad's uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski becomes Conrad's guardian.

1872 Conrad begins to nurse an ambition to go to the sea.

1873 Conrad suffers from chest trouble, and is sent to Switzerland.

1874 Leaves Cracow for Marseilles, and then sails for St Pierre.

1875 Leaves St Pierre, returns to Marseilles and sails to Le Havre as an apprentice. Goes to Marseilles by train.

1876 After six months in Marseilles sails again for St Pierre as a steward.

1877 Arrives back in Marseilles.

1878 Sets sail on the *Mavis.* It is on this ship that he hears the spoken English for the first time. Sets foot on the English soil for the first time. Finds employment as an ordinary seaman, makes three trips on the *Skimmer of the Sea* between Lowestoft and Newcastle , picks English from the crew. In October joins the *Duke of Sutherland* at Gravesend (the locale of *Heart of Darkness*) as an ordinary seaman.

1879 Leaves London as a member of the crew of the Europa.

1880 Qualifies himself as second mate.. In August sails from Tilbury as third mate of the *Loch Etive*

1881 Joins the *Palestine* as the second mate
1883 Joins the *Riversdale* as second mate, reaches Madras on 8 April 1884. Goes to Bombay by train. Joins *Narcissus* as second mate. Spends the winter in London. Qualifies himself as first mate.

1885 Second mate of the *Tilkhurst*. Arrives in Calcutta on 21 November and spends seven weeks at the port.

1886 Leaves Calcutta on 8 January. Becomes a British citizen.

1887 Joins the *Highland Forest* as first mate. Falls ill. Spends six weeks in the European hospital in Singapore. Joins the *Vidar* as first mate.

1888 Leaves the *Vidar*. Becomes the captain of the Otago.

1889 Declines the invitation of his employers to take the ship again to Mauritius. Resigns his command. Released from the status of a Russian subject. '[Sits] down to write' . Begins *Almayer's Folly*. In November goes to Brussels for an interview for the command of a ship boat to take it to the Belgian Congo.

1890 Back in Brussels in April. Learns that , thanks to the influence of Marguerite Poradowska, his three-year appointment in the Congo has been confirmed. On 10 May sails from Bordeaux for the Congo on the *Ville de Macerio*, 'the most traumatic journey of his life' The ship stops at many ports before it reaches Boma, from where he goes to

Matadi by a steamer, then trekking 230 miles reaches Kinshasa, .finds, that the steamer he is on command is badly damaged. Later he sets off on *Roi de Belges* for Stanley Falls. Suffers from dysentery and malaria. In October he starts his return journey for England.

1891 Offered the position of the Chief Officer on the *Torrens*. Sets sail for Australia.

1892 Returns to England and again sets out on a second voyage to Australia.

1893 Remains unemployed for some time. Continues to work on *Almayer's Folly*. In November sails from London to Rouen.

1894 *Almayer's Folly* completed. Begins *An Outcast of the Islands*

1895 Writes the preface to *Almayer's Folly*. The novel is published under the name of Joseph Conrad.

1896 *An Outcast of the Islands* is published. Marries Jessie George. Begins writing *The Rescue* and also begins work on *The Nigger of the'Narcissus'.*

1897 *The Nigger of the'Narcissus'* is serialized in the *New Review*."The Lagoon" and 'An Outpost of Progress" are also published. Meets Henry James, Stephen Crane and R.B.Cunninghame Graham.

1898 "Youth" is published Begins work on *Heart of Darkness.*

1899 *Heart of Darkness* is serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* (February-April) Serialization of *Lord Jim* begins.

1900 *Lord Jim* is published in book form.

1901 *The Inheritors* is published.

1902 *Youth:A Narrative & Two Other Stories* is published.

1903 Begins *Nostromo*. *Typhoon & Other Stories* and *Romance* are published.

1904 *Nostromo* is published.

1905 Receives a grant of 500 pounds from the Royal Bounty fund.

1906 *The Mirror of the Sea* is published. Serialization of *The Secret Agent* begins.

1907 *The Secret Agent* is published in book form.

1908 *A Set of Six* is published. Serialization of *A Personal Record* under the title *Some Reminiscences* begins.

1909 Writes "The Secret Sharer". Continues work on *Under western Eyes.*

1910 Serialization of *Under Western Eyes* begins.

1911 Works on *Chance*. *Under Western Eyes* is published in book form.

1912 *Some Reminiscences*, later retitled *A Personal Record* is published.

1913 *Chance* appears in book form. Becomes a best seller.

1914 The Conrads visit Poland.

1915 Begins *The Shadow-Line*. *Within the Tides* and *Victory* in book form are published.

1916 Serialization of *The Shadow-Line* begins.

1917 *The Shadow-Line* appears in book form.

1918 . The serialization of *The Arrow of Gold* begins.

1919 *The Arrow of Gold* is published in book form. Dramatized version of *Victory* is performed at the Globe Theatre

1920 Writes the Author's Notes for a collected edition of his work. *The Rescue* is published in book form.

1921 *Notes on Life and Letters* is published. Begins a novella that develops into *The Rover*.

1922 The dramatic version of *The Secret Agent* is presented at the Ambassador's Theatre, London.

1923 Goes to New York for a month. *The Rover* is published.

1924 Sits for a portrait by Walter Tittle. Declines a knighthood. Had already declined honorary degrees from five universities. Dies of a heart attack on 3rd August. Buried in Canterbury cemetery.

1925 The serialization of *Suspense* begins. Later published in book form *The Congo Diary* is published.

1926 *Last Essays* is published 1928 Conrad's unfinished novel, *The Sisters* is published.

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