



Chapter II

Journey to the Darkness of Imperialism

Now when I [Marlow] was a little chap I had a passion for maps At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there' But there was in it one river especially a mighty big river that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled . . . , it fascinated me as a snake would a bird--a silly little bird.¹

Like Marlow in Heart of Darkness, Conrad, before going to the Congo River, was aroused by the charm of the river. During his boyhood Conrad loved to study maps with close attention and always put his finger on the white space at the center of the map of Africa and said, "When I grow up I shall go there."² Conrad recalled his glorious dream in Heart of Darkness in the scene in which Marlow was charmed by the Congo River. In the novella, Conrad

¹Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York: New American Libaray, 1983), pp. 70-71. All future references to the work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1967), p. 13.

used the image of a bird fascinated by a snake to depict Marlow's fascination with the river. However, once explored, Africa was no longer a blank space on a map that promised adventure. "It had become a place of darkness" (Heart of Darkness, p. 71).

Before the exploration of Africa, it was seen as the dark continent in the eyes of the white race. The "dark" continent here could be interpreted in many ways. It could have been "dark" because the continent was unknown to the world or because it was full of deadly diseases which often killed the whites who came. Another interpretation of "dark" is that the African continent was largely inhabited by dark-skinned people, more commonly known as "darkies" during Conrad's time. Despite Africa's harshness, however, Europeans poured into the continent, lured by prospects of wealth. Hence, in the early Nineteenth Century, the continent attracted those captivated by the vision of colossal riches who were determined to "make their packet and then get out before the climate killed them."³ They were outcasts like Jim in Lord Jim, misfits like Calier in "An Outpost of Progress," adventurers like Marlow in many of Conrad's stories, and missionaries who were drawn by the African wilderness.

³Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co. Inc., 1960), p. 113.

Though there had been numerous daring explorations and intense colonial competition between the powerful European nations for several decades, the enslavement at the Belgian-Congo territories of Leopold II was dramatically interesting. Leopold II instigated the establishment of the Association International pour l'Exploration et la Civilisation en Afrique behind the mask of noble intention and international good will. Leopold II, as well as his men, later dropped his philanthropic mask revealing his real intention to rape the continent of its seemingly inexhaustible resources. Leopold II and his followers remorselessly exploited the land to fulfill their greed for wealth and power. Conrad, himself, witnessed such greed at the Congo River when he applied for a job with the Société Anonyme pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo. Four months in the Belgian Congo made a deep impression on Conrad. It was an experience that rudely awakened him to the depth of human baseness and degradation, to the pretensions and inhumane practices of men who regarded themselves as civilized. His confrontation with the dark side of the human spirit cast Conrad into a state of gloom and despair. His remark to a friend that "before the Congo I was a mere animal,"⁴ reveals the depth to which he

⁴Edward Garnett, Joseph Conrad in the Congo, as quoted in Albert J. Guerard's Conrad: The Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 33.

felt his own kind had sunk in their despoilation of the people and land of Africa. Thus, Conrad was disillusioned by and disgusted with imperial enterprise in the Congo. The cruel exploitation of the Africans at the hands of Europeans was to him "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploitation."⁵

As a result of Conrad's unwilling exploration into the darkest depths of the human soul while in Africa, the Congo terrain become important for Conrad as the place where his longest journey into "self" occurred, and he used it as a chief setting in his African tales such as "An Outpost of Progress" and Heart of Darkness.

In these two stories Conrad attempts to illustrate the meaning and the significance of civilization in the colonial world. Civilization to Conrad is not innate. In fact, it belongs to the "crowd" or society: "the courage, the composure, the confidence, the emotions and principles, every great and every insignificant thought

⁵Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1912), p. 17.

belongs not to the individual but to the crowd."⁶ The crowd believes blindly in the irresistibility of institutions and in morality which are, in fact, just illusions. Civilization, as Conrad portrays it in "An Outpost of Progress" and Heart of Darkness, is the source of the weakness in men. Without the trappings of civilization, men are rendered impotent in the wilderness, and many meet their downfall as Conrad reveals through the characters of Kayerts, Calier and Kurtz.

In "An Outpost of Progrss," Kayerts and Calier, who come to Africa as representatives of a European company, stand for the average products of the machine of civilization. Both are proud of their own superiority in spite of the fact that they are but two idle and stupid traders who are incapable of performing their work when they are left in a remote, backward community where they are free from social restraints. They have neither the intellect nor the moral equipment to deal with the destructive power of the solitude and the exotic new environments that often challenge them there. Instead of making progress at the station, "[t]ogether they did nothing, absolutely nothing, and enjoyed the sense of

⁶Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," in Tales of Unrest (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1961), p. 89. All future references to the work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

idleness for which they were paid" ("An Outpost," p. 92). Consequently, their outpost of progress quickly changes into an outpost of savagery at the end when the two white men fight against each other like two fierce animals. It is ironic that the two white men, who are the agents of change, are themselves changed from civilized men to barbarians. Their change starts after Makola, the station secretary, quietly sells all the trading-post slaves to a band of Marauders for ivory. Makola explains his reasons for selling the station labourers to the two white men by saying: "[t]hose workmen of ours are no good at all, . . . Station in very bad order, sir. Director will growl. Better get a fine lot of ivory, then he says nothing" ("An Outpost," p. 101). Unfortunately, some of Gobila's men are also boozed and sold to the marauders. This enrages Gobila, the chief of the neighboring villages, and his people. Although this event arouses fury in Kayerts and Calier when they first hear of it, they eventually accede to this slavery trade with the conviction that the European director of their company has often "seen worse things done on the quiet" ("An Outpost," p. 109). The accession reveals one step in the decline of these two white men. After the slavery trade, the white men have to live in isolation in the wilderness. Gobila and his villagers stop contacting them; they cease to offer food to the white men at the trading post because they tend to believe that an evil spirit has possessed the minds of the white men due to their slavery trading. Furthermore, no

steamer comes to supply provisions for them. The men's lack of provisions and of contact with the civilized world aggravates their growing frustration, and, therefore, far from the civilizing mandates of society at large, their complete savagery is revealed.

Sick and demoralized, these white men begin to quarrel ferociously like beasts, a quarrel which ends in death. The source of their quarrel, Kayerts's refusal to allow Calier a bit of sugar for his coffee, is the absurd catalyst for the overwhelming emotions pent-up in the two men. Kayerts kills Calier for fear that if he lets Calier live, Calier will slay him. After the critical moment, Kayerts has time to contemplate the event and his deeds. Then, like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, Kayerts gains "the highest wisdom" ("An Outpost," p. 115) in life before he dies. He can see the hidden weakness in man, the weakness which results from the conformity to social law and to civilization. What man is taught in the civilized world cannot help him in the deep jungle. Civilization, therefore, seems meaningless to him when confronted with the temptations of the wilderness. This enlightenment arouses horror and despair in Kayerts's mind:

The violence of the emotion he had passed through produced a feeling of exhausted serenity. He has plumbed in one short afternoon the depths of horror and despair, and now found repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him: neither had death! He sat by the corpse thinking; . . . His old

thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred, appeared in their true light at last!

("An Outpost," p. 114)

As the steamship comes and its whistle calls Kayerts back to the protection of society, Kayerts understands the extent of his wrongdoing. Kayerts hears and understands that "[p]rogress was calling to [him] from the river. Progress and civilization and all virtues" ("An Outpost," p. 116). Society was calling him back so that "justice could be done" ("An Outpost," p. 116). However, Kayerts does not heed the call of civilization. He walks to the grave and hangs himself upon the cross in fear and remorse. When the Managing Director arrives at the grave, he found Kayerts' body "putting out a swollen tongue at ~~him~~" ("An Outpost," p. 117). There is a sarcastic remark in the end. In depicting Kayerts' body in this way, Conrad seems to make a satirical image on mercenary imperialism which never brings the real light to the darkness. On the other hand, it turns to blind and destroy its own agents. Kayerts, for example, knows the real face of imperialism after having been involved in the imperialist enterprise. The sticking out of his swollen tongue at the Director seems to be a rebuke against the hypocrisy and delusion of all imperialism.

Like many other tales of Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress" investigates delusion and reality. Such a theme enables Conrad to reveal his cynicism about the colonized

system. Conrad makes use of irony even in the title of this short story. Progress means development, but in the story nothing is developed. On the contrary, Kayerts and Calier regress. The station is also neglected and becomes more disorderly than it was when these white men first came. This reveals the hypocrisy of the white men in their assumed burden. As Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress" depicts, the concept of the white man's burden does not have any significance to Kayerts and Calier. The book entitled "Our Colonial Expansion," which the two white men discover in the store house, nourishes their self-delusion, for it spoke "much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth" ("An Outpost," p. 94). The content of the book also enhances the two men's self-importance despite the fact that they are good for nothing. Both are hypocritical, as Calier himself admits in an explosive quarrel with Kayerts:

I am hungry--I am sick--I don't joke. I hate hypocrites. You are a hypocrite. You are a slave-dealer. I am a slave-dealer. There is nothing but slave-dealers in this cursed country.

("An Outpost," P. 110)

The hypocrisy of the assumed superiority of the whites is also demonstrated in the director's speech given to Kayerts and Calier when they are first appointed to the

trading post. The director praises the two men and tells them that they are the hope of the station, but later, when he talks with an old servant on his steamer, he denigrates them:

Look at those two imbeciles. They must be mad at home to send me such specimens. I told those fellows to plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouses and fences, and construct a landing-stage. I bet nothing will be done! They won't know how to begin. I always thought the station on this river useless, and they just fit the station!

("An Outpost," p. 88)

The company in this short story is like that in Heart of Darkness. The men who run it are obsessed with profit. They can neglect the stations which seem less important or give less profit to them like Kayerts's outpost. Thus, "an outpost of progress," under the hand of Kayerts and Calier is deserted by the Director. There is no contact from the company and the two white men are left alone to face various grave problems. It is obvious that the company never care about the well-being of their own men. They are just concerned about money and profit. Thus, finally the outpost turns to be anarchic physically and psychologically. Such a portrait of this commercial or economic imperialism is often delineated in Conrad's works.

"An Outpost of Progress" won Conrad a high reputation as a literary man. Conrad later refined this best developed short story into a novella, entitled Heart of Darkness. At one level the novella can be studied as an attack on aggressive imperialism and Marlow's journey will then be regarded as a journey into the heart of a dark imperial domain where the European ivory traders are mainly concerned with making money, although they are expected to bring light into the darkness. Since the term imperialism denotes especially the relationship between a ruling or controlling power and the controlled, the confrontation of two or more cultures in the colonies is predictable. Heart of Darkness is one of Conrad's stories that best portrays the vivid images of this confrontation through the introduction of the parallel pattern of the black-white and dark-light antitheses into the novella. These antitheses effectively draw "the incongruity rather than the affinity of the two worlds"⁷ in the minds of the readers.

Marlow has seen the cultural incongruity of the two hemispheres during his trip to the Congo River. The whites Marlow meets are proud of their own culture while they consider the natives savage, primitive and barbaric.

⁷Benita Parry, Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), p. 5.

This jingoism can be seen in the names which the whites use for the Africans. These names are "enemies," "criminals," "the outraged law" and "rebels." Marlow is amazed and amused when he hears these words because he does not know by what criterion the whites introduce the names to the natives. To him, these African natives appear innocent and real because they belong to the place; whereas, the Europeans here are sham because they are invading a land which does not belong to them. Marlow seems to sympathize with the natives rather than hate them. In the eyes of Marlow, whites and blacks are kin; moreover, the blacks' minds are like those of the Europeans. Believing in this idea, Marlow rejects the Victorian notion that blacks are a subhuman species, as revealed in his description of the natives' jumping and howling to greet the arrival of the white men's steamboat:

They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were men enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, . . .

(Heart of Darkness, pp. 105-106)

In fact, it is the Europeans themselves who are the enemies and the outraged law. This notion is fortified when Marlow comes across a French man-of-war shelling a bush where there is nobody firing back. It

fires to the continent for fear that there are enemies hiding on the coast, but Marlow sees no enemies there. Even if there were any natives there, they would have fled for fear of the shelling. Thus, in Marlow's eyes, the French are the invaders. The portrayal of imperialism here indicates the perversion of its ideal ideology. These European invaders do not themselves understand the values which they are supposed to bring to the undeveloped countries. The imperialists, like the French on the man-of-war, arbitrarily exert their power and treat the natives as if they were sub-human. The Europeans' treatment of the African natives and their corrupt values infuriate Marlow. He perceives that the natives suffer a great deal as a result of the Europeans' brutality and inhumanity. The difference in degree of their malignant cruelties marks each phase of Marlow's journey up the Congo River, reaching the depths of human depravity at the Inner Station, run by Kurtz.

Marlow first learns about imperialist exploitation and greed at the Outer Station. However, before arriving at the station, he has heard tales of both from a Swede who is a captain of a little sea-going steamer. He tells Marlow about labor exploitation at the station, adding that a Swedish laborer hanged himself partly because of the unjust payment he received from the company. As Marlow disembarks at the first station, he is shocked by man's exploitation there. Before coming to the place,

Marlow fully understands that the company he works with is run for profit, as he ventured to hint to his aunt when she kept talking about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (Heart of Darkness, p. 76). But when Marlow reaches his destination, he learns one more thing: "the company is not only run for profit but it is also run for profit without limit."⁸ The men who run the company do not look like plain businessmen but like "sordid buccaneers" because all of them plunder everything from the land as well as from the natives in the same manner as pirates steal property from their victims.

As Marlow arrives at the first station, the company is building a railway to transport ivory from various parts of the continent more conveniently and efficiently. The Europeans exploit native labor for the railway construction. Many natives have been rounded up from various parts of Africa, taken away from their homes and families, and put in new surroundings. They work hard in chain gangs in exchange for a small amount of unfamiliar food, resulting in large numbers of sick and dead. Still, these Europeans call them "enemies" or "criminals." It seems to Marlow that the real enemies and criminals are the Europeans themselves who exploit the

⁸Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 83.

natives and let them die daily like flies when they are sick and unable to work:

They were dying slowly--it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient and were then allowed to crawl away and rest Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me The man seemed young--almost a boy--but I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held--there was no other movement and no other glance.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 82)

This scene reminds Marlow of the French man-of-war which fired onto the shore. Both are portraits of the kind of aggressive imperialism that cause Marlow pain. The misery of the blacks and the horribly unjust treatment meted out by the whites that Marlow witnesses in Africa shape terrifying memories. And it is this point that Conrad attacks the White Man's Burden.

Conrad believed that as long as the white men betrayed their intention to bring the light of civilization to dark places, benevolent imperialism would not be able to achieve its ideal. As Conrad depicts in

Heart of Darkness, most of the whites live in pure greed. They pour into the dark continent because of one motivation: greed--a greed for power and wealth. They come to plunder the land instead of improve it. Even at the Outer Station, Marlow feels the evil spirit of greed drifting around him:

I've 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--men, I tell you. But as I stood on the hillside I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 81)

In fact, the Congo terrain is perilous and difficult to penetrate. Dangerous surf that ward off intruders coming in or out the river, dangerous streams with muddy banks, and contorted mangroves able to writhe at one at any time are all natural hazards and difficulties of the place. However, these hazards and difficulties cannot keep the greedy white men away. As the story reveals, men from such various countries as France, Sweden, Belgium and Holland flood into Africa with only one main purpose: to get ivory.

At the Central Station, Marlow meets another group of officials who are even greedier than those at the Outer Station. The manager, the leader of exploiters, is like

one of the pilgrims of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition who are supposed to christianize the natives in the Congo but, in fact, merely loiter about the station. They all surrender themselves to their greed and are merely concerned with ivory. They use rubbishy cotton, beads and brass-wire to barter for precious ivory with the natives. During his stay there, Marlow learns more about the exploitation of the African natives by the whites and he further learns that his steamer has been sunk by the manager to insure that Marlow will not be able to rescue Kurtz in time, who is rumored to be severely sick in the deep jungle. The manager and his uncle, the leader of the pilgrims, are conspiring to eliminate Kurtz. From the chief accountant, Marlow learns that Kurtz is the most successful ivory trader: He "sends in as much as ivory as all the others put together . . ." (Heart of Darkness, p. 84). His success in trading gives him the company's admiration. However, it also arouses jealousy in other officials, and the manager of the Central Station is one of them. The fact that the manager and his uncle plot to kill Kurtz reflects the demoralization of Europeans whose greed could not be suppressed. The uncle wants to clear Kurtz "out of the country" (Heart of Darkness, p. 100) so that he can hold all the ivory that Kurtz has in his possession. The cruelty and savagery of the uncle is further revealed in his inciting the manager to kill one of Kurtz's competent disciples--the adventurous Russian who stays at the Inner Station. The uncle says that "[we

will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example, . . ." (Heart of Darkness, p. 101). He urges the manager to do it without reluctance or fear because "[a]nything--anything can be done in this country" (Heart of Darkness, p. 101). At the Inner Station, where the power of greed reaches its zenith, the devil of greed leads to genocide, of which the heads on the posts around Kurtz's lodging stand as evidence. Ivory has become a god to these men who fear neither law nor civilization and who sacrifice all morality in its name. All of them let the devil of greed completely dominate their minds because they lack inner strength to withstand it. They are all hollow.

The hollowness of man, in Heart of Darkness, is typified by the would-be assistant manager, "this papier-maché Mephistopheles," who makes Marlow think that "[i]f I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing but a loose dirt, . . ." (Heart of Darkness, p. 93). Along his way to the first station, Marlow sees many unpleasant pictures. He comes upon "a boiler wallowing in the grass," "an undersized railway-truck lying on its back with its wheels in the air," "pieces of decaying machinery," and "a stack of rusty rails." All of these images reflect not only a lack of progress but the hollowness of the place. Things are brought here and dumped without any consideration of their real value. The only thing that is in progress here is the plan to explode

a cliff, the destruction of which is carried out for no apparent reason. All things civilized and ethical are abandoned in Africa. Rather than "enlightening" the dark continent with these supposed virtues of the white man's world, the representatives of that world leave their civility and ethics behind and bring only waste and destruction to Africa. Ironically, the hearts of these men are far darker than the continent to which they claim to be bringing the light of civilization.

At the first station, Marlow has the chance to meet the chief accountant of the company, who always keeps his appearance neat in his "starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots" (Heart of Darkness, p. 83), despite the very hot weather in Africa. The neat appearance of the chief accountant marks an abrupt change from the miserable life of the blacks that Marlow has thus far encountered. It is a juxtaposition that starkly reveals not only the inequality between blacks and whites but also the hollowness of these white men. The chief accountant, who keeps his appearance and his work right at all times, indifferently watches a nigger die in front of him.

Marlow hates all the Europeans he meets at the Outer and Central stations. He hates their pure lust and corrupt values. These Europeans, especially the pilgrims of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, were supposed to

come to Africa to humanize, improve and instruct the ignorant millions, but when they are alone in the Belgian Congo, they do nothing to deserve their salaries and percentages. Instead, they behave as burglars breaking into a safe, stealing treasure from the land. All are inept, like the manager who is but a mediocre man with no learning and no intelligence. Even worse than this the manager is no better than the blacks in his station. The only virtue he possesses is his sturdy health which enables him to endure the threatening surroundings of Africa. He holds his position merely because he has outlasted his rivals. Like other white men in this area, the manager lacks the capacity to handle his duties at the station:

[h]e was a common trader, from his youth up employed in these parts--nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust--just uneasiness--nothing more He had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even. . . . He had no learning and no intelligence. His position had come to him--why? Perhaps because he was never ill.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 87-88)

The ineptitude of the mercenary white men under the imperialist system is also portrayed in the character of the chief accountant. He is the only white man who appears faithful to his mission, but his achievement, to

borrow Jacques Berthoud's words, is "at the cost of an inhuman detachment."⁹ He does not care about the exploitation or its appalling consequences on the natives. Like that of all of the others, the chief accountant's role as "savior" to the heathens is but a farce. His seeming maintenance of European civilities is superficial--beneath the outward appearance of "rightness" there is nothing. However, the chief accountant's indifference to his surroundings pales in comparison to the atrocities committed by Kurtz.

Marlow first hears of Kurtz from the chief accountant at the Outer Station. Here, Marlow learns that Kurtz is the most promising trader of the company, which is why other officials of the company come to envy him. Marlow's hearing of Kurtz at various stations enhances his interest in Kurtz. At the Central Station, Marlow learns from the brickmaker that Kurtz is "a prodigy, . . . an emissary of pity and science and progress" (Heart of Darkness, p. 92). He came to Africa with noble intentions and high morality. Marlow once overheard the manager tell the leader of the band of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition that Kurtz came there to make each station like a beacon, to humanize, to improve and to instruct uncivilized natives. The more Marlow hears and learns about Kurtz, the more he desires to meet Kurtz. Actually,

⁹Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 50.

Marlow is curious to see "whether this man [Kurtz], 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" (Heart of Darkness, p. 99).

Although Marlow also learns about some negative traits of Kurtz from the manager and the young Russian, Kurtz's disciple, Marlow still holds firmly to his faith in Kurtz. Marlow tends to sympathize with Kurtz when he realizes that Kurtz lacks the self-restraint needed to fight against the temptation of "the dark power." In fact, Kurtz was once a universal genius: a successful ivory collector, an artist, an orator, a musician, and a journalist. All these are civilized virtues that instill in Marlow the conviction that Kurtz is the only man who can shed light on the enigma of "darkness" which Marlow has confronted since he landed ashore. But, when Marlow meets Kurtz at the Inner Station, Marlow is quite frightened by the degradation of the man. He sympathizes with Kurtz rather than hates him since he realizes Kurtz's fall is the result of a single fatal flaw--the lack of self-restraint. Thus, despite the black picture painted by the manager, Marlow steadfastly affirms, "[n]evertheless I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man" (Heart of Darkness, p. 138). Marlow understands that Kurtz risks himself in a probe into the darkest side of himself, where he loses himself to greed, but he later dares to admit to his degradation and his misdeeds. Thus,

Kurtz is more worthy of admiration than the other white men here who are cowards and pretenders.

In Heart of Darkness, Kurtz plays a double role-- that of degenerate and of exploiter. Depicting Kurtz in this way, Conrad is able to explore his question of imperialist motives. First he portrays Kurtz as the embodiment of the highest ideal or the imperialist mission, a lightbearer, with the good intention to humanize, to educate, and to improve the African natives. He is a universal genius, an emissary of pity and science and progress. Kurtz's early intention is clearly revealed in his statement that "[e]ach station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (Heart of Darkness, p. 101).

Robert F. Lee has said in Conrad's Colonialism that Conrad relates Kurtz's good qualities as a result of some influences from the Anglo-Saxon heritage¹⁰ since the novella reveals that he is the son of a half-English mother, a half-French father, and had been educated partly in England. Thus, it can be argued that Conrad does not merely intend to make Kurtz representative of Britishers alone, but of western men in general, for as Marlow, the

¹⁰Robert F. Lee, Conrad's Colonialism (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1969), p. 43.

narrator, explains in the novella, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (pp. 122-123). However, despite his good intentions, Kurtz, like the other Europeans, goes blind to the colonial world, a fact starkly revealed by a painting Kurtz has on his wall of "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 torchlight on the face was sinister" (Heart of Darkness, p. 92).

The woman painting depicted in the picture represents imperialism. Her lighted torch is a symbol of knowledge or civilization and the sombre background stands for the dark place she intends to illuminate. However, her eyes are covered with a blindfold; therefore, she cannot see anything around her. Though blind, she moves with a stately manner, reflecting her pride, but the torchlight reveals her ugly face that she herself cannot see. The woman symbolizes those imperialist agents who go to the colonies proudly on their pretended missions, but who are blind to the ugliness of their actions. They are not merely blind to the world outside themselves; they are blind to themselves--to the inner workings of their own hearts. It is a portrait of imperialism, as consciously or sub-consciously perceived by Kurtz when he drew it. However, the picture also ironically foreshadows the fate of Kurtz, its creator, as well as the fate of other white men who come to this dark place.

After living alone in the jungle, Kurtz becomes intrigued by its wilderness. Because he lacks a strong inner strength to resist it, Kurtz abandons his moral idealism to embrace moral barbarism and forsakes his self-sufficiency to aggrandize his ego. Worse than the other Europeans in this place, he does not merely lust for ivory like those at the Outer and Central stations; he lusts for power. He forms his own army, and he orders it to raid all neighboring villages in order to take more of what he wants while the officials at the stations pretend to make loyal trade. Kurtz longs to become a god or an idol among his tribesmen while these white officials compete for the greatest position at the Central station. Greed, both for power and for wealth, has seized his heart, and the wilderness takes revenge on him, as the narrator relates:

But the wilderness has found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it has 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 irresistably fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core

(Heart of Darkness, p. 133)

Kurtz exposes himself to the wilderness. That is why he is quickly caught by it. The primitive power comes to rest in his hollow core and he has no moral power of his own with which to resist it. He has severed the organic ties of his own social community; therefore, there

is no help for him. The strong inborn evil within him is released and joined to the wilderness of the jungle. His lusts for greed and power envelope him and turn him into a monster-like animal that opens its mouth to swallow everything in the earth, as the narrator reveals: "I saw him open his mouth wide--it gave him a wierdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (Heart of Darkness, p. 135).

Kurtz pursues wealth and power with great effort. The more he tries to pursue such things, the less faithful he is to his original mission until he finally reaches the point of no return. He makes the fatal transformation from good to evil and becomes both a degenerate and an exploiter.

Kurtz's degradation reaches its final point when he allows the natives to deify him. Jacque Berthoud, a Conradian critic, states that this deification deludes Kurtz into thinking that he is actually a God among the tribes. Accordingly, he performs the role of God, killing the natives whom he charges with rebellion.¹¹ Actually, the natives have bestowed upon him an awesome gift that can be used for either good or evil. Kurtz abuses his gift of power through an act of genocide. His depravity

¹¹Berthoud, p. 54.

reaches its nadir when he presides over "certain midnight dances" that end with "unspeakable rites."

The critics react to Kurtz's degradation in different ways. Most seem to believe that the self-degradation stems from Kurtz's lack of restraints or inner strength, and the absence of external checks. But there are some critics who disagree on that point. Jonah Raskin, for example, believes that the white men's depravity in Africa derives from the evil contamination of the natives. Raskin implies that Kurtz's regression to barbarism is inevitable, because any European who ventures into Africa's dark heart, no matter how good he may be, will be contaminated by the crude and brutal natives he has come to save. Raskin states that Kurtz's degradation is caused by the blacks because "Blacks are evil."¹² At this point, Raskin reveals his racial prejudice. He denies the existence of humanity in the natives, equating them with beasts. Believing in this notion, he seems to exonerate the Europeans and their civilization from the crimes of the native people and reject all blame that will fall on the Europeans by throwing all things on the Blacks. Thus, the only feasible solution lies in Kurtz's

¹²Jonah Raskin, The Mythology of Imperialism (New York: Random House Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 160. Raskin also reinforces the evil of the blacks by saying that "[Kurtz] is corrupted by the Blacks."

terrifying words at the end of his pamphlet, "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Heart of Darkness, p. 123). Eventually, genocide is legitimized by an irrational excuse of self-defense. But in the novella Marlow never assumes that Kurtz's degradation is the result of contact with the blacks. To Marlow the natives are innocent, and he is quite surprised when he witnesses the mysterious inner strength of the cannibals on his ship who are starving to death. Even in such wretched circumstances the cannibals restrained themselves. They did not attempt to attack the white men they outnumbered to save themselves. In other words, the cannibals had far better control of themselves than did the Europeans who came to Africa. It seems to Marlow, then, that the white men's depravity is not caused by the Blacks as Raskin argues. Rather, this depravity stems from the self-deception, egotism, and inner weakness of the whites.

What happens to Kurtz can also happen to any imperialist. Whenever these imperialists are disloyal to their burden, to the people and to the place in which they live, they will meet their nemesis. Kurtz's decivilization demonstrates the moral impact of imperialist ventures on the Europeans. It is implied quite clearly that, after participating in imperialist enterprise, most Europeans become decivilized and dehumanized and are at last destroyed completely as in the case of Kurtz.

Like "An Outpost of Progress," Heart of Darkness questions the nature of civilization. In both works Conrad explores the meaning of civilization and its importance. Like his portrayals of Kayerts and Calier, the two cowardly traders, Conrad portrays Kurtz as a white trader who is helpless in the deep jungle of Africa. The civilization of his society cannot protect him since he breaks all ties with civilization and allows himself to become far more brutal and primitive than the natives around him. He is so much hypnotized by greed that he does not want to leave the place. Unlike Kayerts, who hangs himself when the sign of civilization reaches him, Kurtz reacts against the approaching civilization by ordering his tribesmen to attack Marlow and his white men. He knows that these men will take him away from his place to the protection of civilization, but he does not want its protection. Therefore, Kurtz escapes from Marlow's steamboat at night. It is Marlow who has to bring him back. The confrontation between Marlow and Kurtz in the jungle at night may be perceived as a confrontation between civilization and barbarism. Marlow endeavours hard to "break the spell--the heavy mute spell of the wilderness--that seemed to draw him [Kurtz] to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts" (Heart of Darkness, p. 143). Marlow has to assure Kurtz of his success in Europe by showing him how enormous his fame has grown in Europe. Kurtz, however, sways in his conflicts. He wants to be the idol among the

tribes and he wants to possess the considerable ivory to be found in this place. Meanwhile, he also realizes that he has lost himself in the jungle. Although he is not irretrievably lost at this point, he knows that he "will be lost . . . utterly lost" (Heart of Darkness, p. 143). Finally, he yields to Marlow, allowing Marlow to take him back to his steamboat again. When the steamboat leaves, Kurtz is lying in it, contemplating all of his experiences in the Belgian Congo. Before he dies, he utters his last ambiguous outcry: "The horror! The horror!" (Heart of Darkness, p. 147). Many critics interpret this final phrase of Kurtz in various ways.

Some believe that Kurtz's final cry should be understood as his horror of civilization or of his being taken away from the heart of Africa. This, however, seems improbable since if Kurtz had not wanted to return to civilization, he could have simply called for his tribesmen to help him when Marlow came after him during Kurtz's escape, but he did not do that.

Politically speaking, some believe "the horror" here may have been the condition of social anarchy that Kurtz has aggravated at his station. Although the native community was primitive when the white men from Europe poured in, it had its own order. The arrival of Kurtz and the other whites accelerated the destruction of the organic community of the natives. Avrom Fleishman in his book, entitled Conrad's Politics, states:

If we were to give a name to Kurtz's vision of the horror, it might appropriately be anarchy: the state of social discomposition at the opposite pole from organic community . . . and in the absence of an ordering community it springs into action as terrorism.¹³

In this same book Fleishman elaborates this point by showing how the contact of Europeans and natives brings about the retrogression in the native social communities. He exclaims that the arrival of the whites makes the natives' lives worse and the whites themselves plunge into barbarism, becoming more savage than the natives. This effect is opposite to the ideal ideology of imperialism. Conrad also points out in Heart of Darkness that this idealism is rarely achieved because most of the Europeans or whites like Kurtz do not remain faithful to the burden imposed on them. Thus, their intention becomes only a pretense. These Europeans come to drain the land rather than to improve it. They have changed the natives' way of life making the natives so alienated from their old tribal life that they cannot turn back to it. Kurtz, for example, disrupts the social order of the natives by provoking atrocities and warfare in communities. He establishes himself as a deity ruling

¹³Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 92.

his natives by love and fear. The natives must obey and act according to his orders; otherwise, they will be punished severely, as the heads impaled on the posts indicate. It can be seen how disorderly the village is after Kurtz is taken away. These natives, since Kurtz came in, have become accustomed to a way of life with Kurtz at the center. Accordingly, the natives run wildly along the coast when their deity is taken away by the whites as Marlow remarks:

We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 145)

Harold R. Collins has studied the process of the natives' "detrribalization"¹⁴ in Heart of Darkness and wrote an article, entitled "Kurtz, the Cannibals and the Second-Rate Helmsman," pointing out that there are

¹⁴According to sociological and anthropological theory, "detrribalization means "the process of uprooting of the natives of a community from their tribal pattern of life and fitting them into the pattern of white society, though awkwardly and unsuccessfully. The natives who are made to be alienated to their old tribal way of life are called "detrribalized natives."

numerous characters in the novella who might be classified as what the anthropologists now call "detrribalized natives." These characters are "such reclaimed Africans as the prisoners' guard who have the unmilitary bearing and the rascally grin; the manager's boy who announces Kurtz's death with scathing contempt; the unstable helmsman who conducts himself so imprudently during the attack from Kurtz's "adorers."¹⁵ In Conrad's Politics, Avrom Fleishman has included the fireman on Marlow's steamboat in this type. He thinks that this fireman ought to have been clapping his hands, stamping his feet on the bank rather than working hard on the steamer.¹⁶ Collins sees that "these natives are alienated from their old tribal life because they are fitted into the patterns of white society."¹⁷ "The mixture of primitive life and modern technical ability"¹⁸, as shown in the fireman on Marlow's steamer, seems to be absurd and incongruous to Marlow:

¹⁵Harold R. Collins, "Kurtz, the Cannibals, the Second-Rate Helmsman," as quoted in Avrom Fleishman's Conrad's Politics, p. 91.

¹⁶Fleishman, Conrad's Politics, P. 91.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

He [the fireman] was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this--that should the water in the transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watch the glass carefully (with an impromptu, charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch, struck flatways through his lower lip)...

(Heart of Darkness, pp. 106-107)

Marlow, however, regards Kurtz's final phrase as Kurtz's moral victory:

It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, . . .

(Heart of Darkness, p. 149)

It seems to Marlow that before Kurtz died, he had made a judgment on his own deeds and attempted to purify himself. Kurtz saw the darkness in his soul and realized its horrible power. In fact, he not only gained self-knowledge from his contemplation, but he gained knowledge of mankind as well--a knowledge of the horror in man's nature. Unlike the other Europeans at the stations, Kurtz dared to face the darkness within himself and achieved moral nobility in doing so. In judging so, Marlow seems to sympathize with Kurtz rather than condemn him.

After the long voyage ends, Marlow reaches his maturity through disillusionment. He goes back to Europe full of harsh experiences that most people in the city do not undergo. This voyage has caused Marlow to become disillusioned with the European imperialist mission. He has discovered the selfishness and ruthlessness of the whites, and he realizes that the civilized people, as they assume themselves to be, pour into the land because they want to gain economic wealth as well as the domination over others under the masquerade of the imperialist mission. Therefore, the Congo is more important than a setting or a symbol of European corruption. It is the place where Marlow first experiences the horror behind the mask of imperialism and becomes enlightened about human nature as his pose of a meditating Buddha signifies. He cannot stand the anonymous narrator's praise for the greatness of the British empire at the very beginning of the story. To the anonymous narrator, imperialists are conquerors in a double sense; the conquerors with their swords and the conquerors with their torches:

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

(Heart of Darkness, p. 67)

In this sense, the unnamed narrator tends to regard the colonizers as civilizers, the bearers of a light that is kindled by "a spark from the sacred fire." Kurtz initially conceives such a notion when he goes to Africa.

But Marlow, who also underwent the Congo experience, deflates this extollment to a mere "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale" (Heart of Darkness, p. 69) by comparing Roman imperialism with British and Belgian imperialism. To Marlow, all imperialism is "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" (Heart of Darkness, p. 69). Marlow believes that this aggressive imperialism can be solved by the "unselfish idea." Conrad, here, wants to show that the "real idea" without pretense is an elevated thing that deserves respect from people. Of all the Europeans in the Congo, Kurtz is the one who can redeem his guilt by the idea of fidelity but his fidelity to the burden does not last long because he goes wrong after he isolates himself from his fellow men. Because of no public comment, no neighbors and no policemen, he can behave as freely as he wants. That is why he surrenders himself to the temptations. It is Marlow who comes to Africa with a strong sense of morality, and it is only he who can maintain his fidelity to his moral idea throughout his journey. Marlow,

perhaps, represents the British conscience that Kurtz has thrown away in the jungle. Thus, Marlow turns out to be more an apostle of light than the other Europeans in the novella.

When Marlow goes back to Brussels, the city seems strange to him. He is alienated from both the city and its people. Their empty daily lives irritate Marlow, who dislikes their pretense and false knowledge:

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 149-150)

The Congo experience not only affected Marlow's mentality, it also had an effect on his physical strength. After recovering from his illness, Marlow has to manage Kurtz's affairs which he promised Kurtz he would do before Kurtz died. He has to bring the news of Kurtz's death to his fiancée. Although Marlow once said that he hated telling lies, he cannot avoid doing so at Kurtz's fiancée's house. When asked what is the last words of

Kurtz, Marlow tells her instead that it is her name that Kurtz spoke out before he died. Conrad's contemporary critics, who are skeptical about whether Conrad is a proponent or an opponent of imperialism, tend to interpret Marlow's lie as evidence of Conrad's defence of European imperialism.¹⁹ This is wrong; the fact that Marlow has to tell a lie has nothing to do with a political matter. Rather, it is a personal dilemma that he has to resolve, and he chooses to tell a lie because he does not want to destroy Kurtz's fiancée. He believes he must maintain the illusion upon which she has built her life. Marlow perceives that the woman would not be able to live in this ferocious world if her romantic dreams were shattered. In addition, Marlow, himself, after the Congo experience, becomes resentful of the society of the whites in Europe. Therefore, it is impossible that he means to defend European imperialism.

Heart of Darkness is one of Conrad's best stories and is one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature. The image of imperialism portrayed in this book is striking for its brutality and its ruthlessness. Although it may be said that the image of benevolent imperialism is also depicted in the novella through a

¹⁹Benita Parry, pp. 35-36.

benign character like Marlow who is the embodiment of the English mind--the mind that clings to the ideal of fidelity making real work well done--it is the destructive image of aggressive imperialism that Conrad gives the spotlight to. He also shows the bad effects of imperialism on the Europeans who venture into imperialist entanglements. The novella is a voyage into the darkness of imperialism where the white men perform their greediness without limit. From this dark journey, the reader, together with Marlow, learns about the pretense of philanthropic imperialism in the heart of Africa. As Raskin has said, "behind the door of civilization is European barbarism; behind the door of the empire is exploitation, death, disease, exile."²⁰ In his next novel, Conrad also made another journey to the dark world of imperialism.

²⁰Raskin, p. 153.