CHAPTER - III

"AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS"

HEART OF DARKNESS
CHAPTER - III

"AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS"

**HEART OF DARKNESS**

*Heart of Darkness* (1899), Conrad's novella on the Belgian Congo, succeeded "An Outpost of Progress" (1898), his short story on the same subject. Both of them have the autobiographical basis of Conrad's journey to the Congo in 1890. As the captain of a boat of a European trading company, Conrad went to the Congo, then a Belgian colony in Africa under the direct rule of King Leopold II. In the Congo, Conrad witnessed, he says in "Geography and Explorers", "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration" (*Last Essays*, p. 25). He was shocked to see the ruthless exploitation which went on there in the name of progress and spread of civilization. It took nearly a decade for Conrad to overcome the shock of this exposure to the brutal scene of exploitation by the agents of Belgian colonialism.

Conrad records his experience with a purpose of condemning the "criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness" of the people who were supposed to be doing "the civilizing work in Africa", Conrad said this in a letter to William Blackwood on 31 December, 1898. This letter is helpful in understanding
Conrad's intention in writing *Heart of Darkness*. He says, "It is a story as much as my "Outpost of Progress" was but, so to speak 'takes in' more - is a little wider -- is less concentrated upon individuals". It seems that Conrad did not intend it to be only a moral tale - he wanted to show the background of the colonial situation. Though the central focus is on characters, yet the object of analysis seems to be a situation which set in disarray all human attributes of these characters.

In "An Outpost of Progress" the motivation was linked to the panic caused by an unfamiliar surrounding in the colonies and an impact of this obscure fear on human mind; but in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad draws attention to a wider organization and makes a more comprehensive study of what John A. McClure calls a "psychological maelstrom of imperialism". The story of Congo caused great sensation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Edmund Morel, the charismatic leader of the Congo Reform Association, said, "From 1890 onwards the records of the Congo State have been literally blood-soaked. Even at that early date, the real complexion of Congo State philanthropy was beginning to appear, but public opinion in Europe was then in its hoodwinked stage." Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* written during this early stage was hailed by Morel as the "most powerful thing ever written on the subject."

In 1885, fourteen Western powers including England assembled
in Berlin to guarantee free trade in the Congo region in Africa and to respect each other's commercial spheres among the main European contenders for trade in Africa. But the soaring ambitions of King Leopold II proved fatal for the Congo. Leopold did not find much support at home as the Belgians were too self-satisfied to risk anything in adventure. But Leopold took up the whole enterprise in his own hands. When the Congo was opened up by trade agreements to fourteen European nations, Leopold noticed that large portions of the Congo were still unexplored. So Leopold hired an English explorer, Stanley, to make treaties with the chiefs and to earn recognition from outside powers. In July 1885 his representative in the Congo declared Leopold to be the sovereign of the Independent State of the Congo and the king held the monopoly in all business. It was in 1888 that the Belgian company for trade was formed. Leopold started with some civilizing work such as abolishing the remnants of the slave trade and converting the Congolese to Christianity and pretended to pursue other worthy objects as long as these did not interfere with his profit on investments. But as King Leopold had neither the capital nor the inclination to develop his territory to a higher economic level, he exploited it with singular brutality and ran the administration with gross inefficiency.

From his early youth, Conrad was keen on visiting Africa.
The unexplored regions of Africa had a fascination for him: Conrad related it himself when he viewed his early life in retrospect. He said, "One day, putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there" ("Geography and Explorers" in *Last Essays* p. 24). When he entered into his maritime career, he was looking for an opportunity to fulfil his childhood dream. He got an assignment in the Continental Trading Company in 1890 through the influence of his aunt Marguerite Poradowska who had contact with some directors. The company had just heard at that moment that one of the captains of their trading fleet had been killed by the Africans and was looking for someone in his place and Conrad got the offer. Before leaving for his new appointment Conrad could not fully understand the dangers and difficulties he was likely to encounter on a journey that was to take him by ship from Bordeaux to Matadi and overland from Matadi to Kinchassa and then by river-steamer from Kinchassa to Stanley Falls - "the heart of darkness". More than the dangers he had faced during the journey, what horrified Conrad most was the sight of ruthless exploitation of the native communities in the Congo everywhere. Conrad conveyed some of his early reactions in the Congo in letters to his uncle Bobrowski who advised him pragmatically not to be upset:
I see from your last letter that you are sorely aggrieved with the Belgians for their ruthless exploitation.... But, this time, admit that nothing impelled you to put yourself into the hands of the Belgians.... In any case... I earnestly ask you to calm yourself... (9 November, 1890) 6.

The advice was that he should insulate himself against the shock as he is not a part of the Belgian exploitation machinery.

That Conrad was greatly disturbed by what he had seen in Africa was evident in the fact that he made two successive attempts at expressing his distress: the short story, "An Outpost of Progress" and the novella, Heart of Darkness. "An Outpost of Progress" is a sort of rehearsal for the evocation of the grim landscape of human retrogression. In the story we have a fore-shadowing of the predicament of Kurtz, the principal character of Heart of Darkness. At the same time, we can also see that what Conrad describes, in Heart of Darkness, as the conversation which took place between the doctor and Marlow when he went for medical examination is almost enacted in the story of "An Outpost of Progress." According to the doctor, it would be "interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot," meaning the mental changes of the colonial agents when transplanted to the
regions of Africa (HD, p. 69). In the tropics, one should avoid, as the doctor says, "irritation more than exposure to the sun.... In the tropics one must before everything keep calm" (HD, p.70). The truth of this is enacted in the events of "An Outpost of Progress".

Initially the story was called more literally "A Victim of Progress". Conrad claimed in his "Preface" to Tales of Unrest (1898) that this story was true enough in its essentials (p. 10)*. Indeed it is based firmly on Conrad’s experiences in the Congo and the setting is realistic. The story and its details are Conrad’s own to transmute the documentary quality of the theme to a universal message. But here one can see that Conrad kept his distance from getting emotionally too involved in his depiction of the characters. As Eloise Knapp Hay has rightly noticed, the characters in "An Outpost of Progress" are more wittily and trenchantly portrayed than Kurtz in Heart of Darkness.

The names of the short story’s two main characters certainly derive from those days. As M.M. Mahood has pointed out, "A Keyerts was one of the 'pilgrims’ of the upstream voyage Conrad made to Stanley Falls, and a Carlier got the command of the Katanga Expedition steamboat which had been promised to Conrad". So the names of Carlier and Kayerts are drawn from

memory. But in this fictional presentation they are described as two non-entities who joined as two idle and unsuccessful traders on a lonely trading post in Africa. Before joining the trading company Kayerts was a government clerk in the department of the Telegraphs and Carlier worked in the army. Kayerts left the job and sought an appointment in the company to earn a dowry for his daughter. Carlier had already left his assignment in the army. His brother-in-law, to whom he was a source of anxiety because of his idleness and incompetence, procured for him the appointment of an agent in the trading company. So, for both Kayerts and Carlier, the offer in the company outpost was an exclusively money-oriented project. That they were totally misplaced for a colonial establishment is clear. The vital test came when a band of marauders from a coastal tribe arrived at the station, and raided the district for food and slaves. The station's African clerk Makela quietly sold the labourers of the station in exchange for a load of tusks. The disappearance of the labourers shocked the two white men as it was like the removal of buffers. It exposed to them the precarious nature of their existence in the colony. They considered themselves too insufficient and too weak a force to combat the enemies embodied in the alien environment in the tropics. Fear gripped them and because of this fear, they could not openly admonish and punish Makela for the atrocious slave-trade. (But they were interested in the ivory collected through
this). Gradually and inevitably they lost their mental balance. Because of the recurring feelings of insecurity and suspicion, Kayerts shot his one and only colleague during a quarrel over a trifle (some sugar). Then when he heard the much-awaited steamer's whistle that had brought the supply of food and security, it aroused in him the threat of society's judgement on his act and Kayerts hanged himself.

Towards the beginning of the story, Conrad equated the status of the colony with that of a dumping ground. Kayerts and Carlier are two good-for-nothing fellows who have forsaken their previous jobs in search of fortunes in the colonies. The Director of the company realized their uselessness. As he was "ruthless and efficient" (p. 84), he put them in some unimportant and desolate trading-post up the river which is visited by officers only at six months intervals. The Director's words bore testimony to his plan of getting rid of Kayerts and Carlier:

"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!... At any rate, I am rid of them for six months", (p. 85).
Conrad draws attention to the types of people who came to the colonies and the impudence with which the colonial regimes publicize the civilizing mission of the colonial enterprise through the activities of such men. With full cognizance of their worthlessness, the Director sent the two men to the colony. Patrick Brantlinger is right when he says that the colonies were often used to siphon off the unemployed and the unemployable section of the people of the mother country. He says that the colonies, even when populated by "natives", were often perceived as virtually empty - "waste places", (so) "if not exactly profitable areas for investing surplus capital then an almost infinite dumping ground for the increasingly dangerous army of the poor and unemployed at home". Conrad seems to have demonstrated the truth of this in "An Outpost of Progress". The colony harbours such characters as Kayerts and Carlier, whom Conrad ironically called "the two pioneers of trade and progress" (p 89). The hollowness of the claim to be pioneers of trade and progress is quite apparent as the men were, as the story puts it, "perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals" (p. 85).

The first white chief of the station as well as the new incumbents - Kayerts and Carlier, as Conrad relates, came to the colony with the sole purpose of making some quick money.
Being “weary of pursuing fame on an empty stomach” (p. 84), the first chief, a painter at home, came to try his luck in the colony. Kayerts and Carlier also came to this distant place “to distinguish themselves and to earn percentages on the trade” (p.84). They had a desire for distinction and money but none of the benevolent sentiments advertised by the colonialists. Collectively the story projects the colonial agents as failures at home but set on earning a fortune abroad. Kayerts says he came there “to earn a dowry for his girl” (p. 87). Carlier left his mother country as “there was nothing more to squeeze out of his relations” (p. 88).

Reading a treatise called “Our Colonial Expansion”, Kayerts and Carlier got the first idea of the noble and sacred mission of the colonialist : “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” (p. 90). But this high-flown picture of colonialism strikes as a crude contrast with the ambitions set by Kayerts and Carlier for themselves. In the light of the treatise, Carlier and Kayerts sought to bask in the halo of colonial glory and began to think that they would be remembered as the first two civilized men in this colony after 100 years. But how unprepared were these two men for any civilizing task was the focus of Conrad’s irony.
They had no notions of their duties as members of the civilized white community. The rhetorical flourish of the treatise lent some glamour to their jobs and helped them to console themselves in their loneliness and emptiness.

When Makola disclosed his diabolical trade-transaction, exchanging human beings for elephant tusks - they were shocked because their relationship with the labourers was somewhat human in an alien society. Kayerts expressed it, "We took care of them as if they had been our children" (p. 97); it was said probably more in the light of the colonial copybook advertisements. But when they saw the empty sheds of the labourers, fear gripped them and they were greatly annoyed. Now they had only Makola to protect them. Their sense of security was totally gone. Makola they did not understand and always suspected him of devious twists. Kayerts burst out at Makola in nervous anger, "I dismiss you! I will report you -- I won't look at the tusk. I forbid you to touch them. I order you to throw them into the river. You - you" (p. 98). But they were afraid to dismiss Makola actually and hence, as the story puts it, "Whenever they mentioned Makola's name they always added to it an opprobrious epithet. It eased their conscience" (p. 100). As it appeared, the two white men gradually settled down and took a nervous interest in the weighing of the ivory procured at the price of the native workers sold as slaves and it brought an ominous
Kayerts trembled in every limb. He muttered, 'I say! O! I say!' and putting his hand in his pocket found there a dirty bit of paper and the stump of a pencil. He turned his back on the others, as if about to do something tricky, and noted stealthily the weights which Carlier shouted out to him with unnecessary loudness. (p 100).

Obviously the two white men have started to look at the business aspect of the deal. But they realized that they were implicating themselves also in the slave-trade willingly. Makela knew that Kayerts and Carlier were paper tigers and that is why he had acted with his own understanding of the purpose of the station, that is to collect as much ivory as they could.

Makela is undoubtedly a quizzical figure in the colonial scenario: as an African, he is engaged in slave-deal, he is also controlling the two white agents. His devilish competence is most evident in the scene when Kayerts shot Carlier dead. The narrative says:

After meditating for a while, Makela said softly, pointing at the dead man who lay there with his right eye blown out—'He died of fever'. Kayerts looked at him with a stony stare. 'Yes', repeated Makola, thoughtfully, stepping over the corpse, 'I think he died
Commenting on this scene Jeremy Hawthorn observes: "instead of white men creating convincing lies to obscure the truth about the murder of Africans, here we have an African inventing such a lie to obscure the truth behind the death of a white man." In fact this episode shows how perfectly Makola moulded himself to be the white men's accomplice in a colonial situation, how he learnt the strategies of colonial lies. It is through persons like Makola of perverse intelligence that colonialism can hope to thrive.

Another character of the story, Gobila, was of some significance. Gobila was a native who had imbibed the colonial impact and had a respectful love for the white men. In his view, all white men share some common gifts, immortality being one of them. Makola's callous transaction disposed of some of Gobila's men too. And this disappearance of the labourers was interpreted by Gobila's community as the result of some "witchcraft of white men, who had brought wicked people into their country" (p. 101). So to propitiate the evil spirits raging in the whites, Gobila decided to offer human sacrifices. But he was reluctant to rail against or to take action against the whites as they were a source of supernatural fear to him: "Who could foresee the woe those mysterious creatures, if irri-
tated, might bring?" (p. 101). So Conrad is having an ironic look at the achievement of the civilizing effects of colonialism. This crippling fear towards the whites, this obsequious submission towards the whites were the major plague spots of colonialism. What Conrad was trying to show is that when conversion to civilized behaviour comes out of supernatural fear as in the case of Gobila, this cannot be called an impact of the civilizing effect of a higher culture. Hence regression comes immediately and they revert to their own superstitious security system.

Makela and Gobila combine to give a cohesive view of the native attitudes to the white-colonial presence. On the one hand, there is Makela's mischievousness and audacity due to his understanding of the incompetence of the colonial agents. On the other, there is the irrational fear of Gobila in his relation to the white masters. None of them presents a favourable picture of the colonial contact or its civilizing influence.

The title of the story is ironically called "An Outpost of Progress". There are no infrastructural facilities to bring about any material progress in this god-forsaken trading post. The Director is apathetic to the continuation of this useless station and is quite cynical about the wants of the agents. So, as the narrative affirms, "They had heard nothing from home for
eight months" (p. 103). The two helpless agents were short of provisions and were totally alone and were growing desperate in anxieties. There was no effort at any development of the environment and gradually the environment was overpowering them. Under anxiety and a feeling of insecurity, the mental stability of the agents started disintegrating. Here Conrad describes how the colonialists themselves are exposed to the fear psychosis in the tropics. The colonial platitude - "civilization follows trade" is being put to mocking scrutiny in this story. The two trading agents are Conrad’s ironic icons of this hollow notion. For a simple lump of sugar one day a violent quarrel arose between the two and ultimately one of them shot the other dead. And then the other hanged himself - turning the trading post to an inevitable pit of death.

When the steamer, the link between this outpost with its head office, finally arrived in the station after eight months, carrying with it not only provisions - but also reminders of society and civilization and the call of progress, Kayerts could not be prompted to welcome it. He hanged himself when it dawned on him that he had shot his only companion out of a sense of imaginary danger to his own life and that he had shot an unarmed man. Referring to the whistle of the steamer as "A shriek inhuman" Conrad renders the tragedy to an ironic assessment -- "Progress was calling..." (p. 108). Conrad went on in
his authorial comments:

Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done. (pp. 108-9).

So we return to the roots of the contrast: civilization versus savagery and the story mockingly concludes that civilization does not necessarily follow trade. It also shows that civilization itself is only a veneer and rubs off noticeably when one is confronted with fear. What remains of civilization is a fear of condemnation, not love or any other virtue. So going back is but returning to that rubbish heap to which only scavenging animals should return with delight. The "accomplished" sons of civilization have proved the futility of their inheritance.

As it appears, the environment of loneliness and fear had unnerved the white men who behaved bestially to each other. The distance from the mother country, lack of contact, dearth of provisions, and above all the absence of the restraining authority of a human society are as fatal to the natives as to the white men. In his death, Kayerts perhaps learnt to articulate his grievance and indignation against the principal civilizing
agent, the managing Director of the company, when his hanging corpse was "irreverently... putting out a swollen tongue" (p. 110). This last sentence of the story sums up Conrad's mockery of the slogan that "Civilization follows trade."

Thus "An Outpost of Progress" inaugurates the critique of "Progress and civilization and all the virtues" (p. 108) branded by colonialism. Like Heart of Darkness this short-story focusses attention on the white man's transformation in the unfamiliar surroundings of Africa. The short story makes the preliminary reflection on the very same elements which Heart of Darkness would place more comprehensively. The iconoclastic attitude to the claims of civilization made by the colonialists was seen in its embryonic form in "An Outpost of Progress". Both pieces bring to prominent focus the point that fear, whether it is supernatural or due to the mistrust of humanity generated by the colonial civilization, leads to worship of strange gods when savagery and civilization become indistinguishable.

In comparison with "An Outpost of Progress," Heart of Darkness offers a more critical reading of the same theme - "a thoroughgoing critique of the idea of civilization", as Brian W. Shaffer has put it. In Heart of Darkness the style of presentation is different. In the story we have only one re-
flector, the voice of the author-narrator with a clear-cut anti-imperialistic bias. In the novella we have many parallel reflectors and the principal narrator Marlow's tone is ambiguous and more involved. He seems to be trying to understand all as if to forgive all rather than to condemn outright. He expresses disgust as well as fascination. But the central focus remains the same in both the pieces: the civilizing mission of the colonial enterprise is actually a misnomer. Both "An Outpost of Progress" and Heart of Darkness confront the readers with this discomforting vision.

A great amount of critical writings on the background of Heart of Darkness have appeared beginning with Stanley's discovery of the Congo river in 1875 down to how the Belgian King Leopold II proceeded to turn this African country into a vast slave plantation for extracting ivory and raw rubber until the European powers forced Belgian government to take Leopold's private kingdom under its care in 1908. But all this historical background has of course no obvious connection with Conrad's novella as this is more a synchronic study at a particular moment and imagined around the activities of one man - Kurtz. The novella presents the harrowing journey up the river Congo undertaken by Marlow to rescue Kurtz, the dying agent and the principal character in the events of the Congo station. The entire presentation is replete with Conrad's ironical reflec-
tion on "progress" and "civilization" which are the ideas sought to be affirmed through colonial expeditions. To achieve this desired effect Conrad has had to be highly selective of his materials. As David H. Stewart has commented: "... there is no doubt that Conrad suppressed unserviceable experiences that he had in the Congo.... These omissions are, of course, perfectly legitimate as part of Conrad's calculated effect." Stewart's emphasis is directed to Conrad's ideologically controlled intense narrative. It is of course quite clear that Marlow's getting a job in the European company is a double of Conrad's own experiences in job hunting. From Conrad's biographical records it is clear that Conrad wrote Heart of Darkness with a definite motive of unmasking Belgian colonialism. Stressing the documentary veracity, M.M. Mahood has shown in The Colonial Encounter that Heart of Darkness exhibited Conrad's wide repertoire of knowledge about Africa and the Congo: "the savage and uncontrolled penal measures; the rapacity of the traders, symbolized by Kurtz's 'unsound methods'; ... and much else beside". But we feel that Conrad transmuted the local details in such a way as to give things the appearance of a universality of retrogression.

In the story of Heart of Darkness, we meet four friends on a cruising yawl waiting in the mouth of the Thames for the turn of the tide, when Marlow tells of his appointment in a conti-
nental trading company to succeed one of their river-steamer captains who has been killed by natives in Central Africa. He goes out on a French ship to the mouth of the Congo, then upriver in a steamer captained by a Swede. On reaching the Company's station thirty miles up-river he finds some "objectless blasting" work going on in the name of constructing a Railway. There he is horrified by what he sees — which he calls "a grove of death", in which diseased and starving outcast native workers of the company are slowly dying. For the first time, he hears the name of Kurtz there. The next stage of Marlow's journey is a two-hundred mile tramp to the central station on a backwater of the big river. On reaching the central station he finds that the steamer he was appointed to command to bring Kurtz, the ivory agent, back to the city for treatment, has been sunk. Marlow has to stay there for a considerable period of time as raising and repairing the vessel take months. During his stay Marlow gathers more information about Kurtz, particularly from a young agent, apparently with high connections, engaged as brickmaker but remaining idle as there were no materials essential for brick-making. He refers to Kurtz as a 'universal genius'. When at length Marlow succeeds in getting the repaired steamer ready for sail and almost reaches the destination, a rain of arrows greets them from the dense jungle, killing the native helmsman of the boat. When the white passengers (the so-called pilgrims) fire from the steamer,
the attackers retreat, and could be seen moving under tall grasses on the banks. At last Kurtz appears, a mortally sick man borne on a stretcher. Marlow has been given to understand that the years of solitude had left him demented and his devilish method of acquiring ivory had made him an incarnation of evil, had made him 'hollow at the core'. But Marlow's direct acquaintance with Kurtz opens before him a new vision of this unusual character. Though ill, he is reluctant to go back to the white world; the savage world has a fascination for him. Kurtz dies in the steamer but Marlow cannot dismiss him simply as a corrupt colonial agent. Kurtz, to him, has attained 'a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions'. So when Marlow meets Kurtz's Intended, he keeps up his charismatic image through prevarication and plain lies.

The "Author's Note" to Youth emphasizes the autobiographical basis of Heart of Darkness when Conrad says that this novella "is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case..." (p. xii)*. The Congo experience was a perennial sore point in his memory. Though by writing Heart of Darkness, he had been able to express his thoughts on colonial cruelties in general, he could not properly recover from the traumatic shock of his first encounter. In his letter to Roger Casement on 21 December, 1903, Conrad says that in the

Congo state, "the moral clock had been put back many hours".\textsuperscript{14} He noticed a great regression of civilization from all its moral values in the Congo. The letter also shows that in his view the whole of Europe should be responsible for this as the state had been "created by the act of European Powers where ruthless, systematic cruelty towards the blacks" was the basis of administration.\textsuperscript{15} It is evident that Conrad's focus was on the moral degeneration of the colonial administration. In another letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham written on 26 December 1903 he compared the achievement of colonial adventurers with "that of a gigantic and obscene beast".\textsuperscript{16} Conrad's own statements thus set our minds on an anti-colonial perspective.

Several studies on \textit{Heart of Darkness} have also strengthened this aspect of Conrad's intention. Norman Sherry thinks that Conrad transformed, altered and recreated the details of his experience to bring home his points to a focus. He says that Mr Klein, the reputed source for Kurtz, had as little of the devil in him as could be possible and that even other speculated probable sources for Kurtz were also not quite the same as was imagined in Kurtz. So the character of Kurtz was his own creation. Sherry says:

There would seem to be nothing in the situation at the Falls Station, therefore, to give Conrad the inspiration for Kurtz's desolate and isolated Inner Station with the
conditions necessary for his temptation and fall. Nothing brings out more clearly Conrad's imaginative leap between his experience and his story than a comparison of the climaxes of the two journeys -- Marlow's and Conrad's -- the one at the Inner station, and the other at Stanley Falls.  

A close examination of the details of Conrad's experiences in the light of the novella shows the extent of Conrad's assimilation and re-creation of his materials through exaggeration and at times suppression. Ian Watt also confirms this:

Some of the main differences between Heart of Darkness and Conrad's actual experience on the Congo serve both political and literary purposes. For instance, to emphasise the inefficiency of Belgian colonisation and increase the isolation of Marlow and Kurtz, the story gives no idea of how far colonisation had proceeded. Thus, at what Marlow calls the Company Station, Matadi, there were actually some 170 Europeans present, and much commercial activity in which German, Dutch, French, and English concerns were involved; and contrary to the impression given by Marlow, the railway to Kinshasa was in fact being built.

These are the omissions Conrad purposely made to intensify his vision of the evil that he perceived in the Congo which could not have been condoned by a few acts of material developments. Obviously he wanted to focus attention on the vacuum that existed between colonial ideals and colonial practice. Hence the inefficient and half hearted efforts for
colonial development received detailed description. The hypocrisy of the colonialists' civilizing slogans was sought to be bolstered up by the details of the narration. Conrad was able to create, with his masterly command over language, "a sinister resonance" ("Author's Note", p. xii) of irony and condemnation by the profusion of his "adjectival insistence." 19

Conrad does not tell the story of *Heart of Darkness* directly, it is narrated by a character called Marlow. The narrative of Marlow appears in many of Conrad’s novels. He first appeared in the short story "Youth" (1898). In his "Author's Note" to the Youth volume, Conrad disclaimed that he was the product of any meditated plan. Marlow seems a character by his own right and is imagined as a most discreet and understanding man. A worthy sea-man, he was the type of Englishmen Conrad most wished he had been. Just as Conrad assimilated and reorganized the materials of his experiences, so also, it appears, he reconstructed his psyche to produce Marlow as his mask despite his disclaimer. The presence of Marlow as a reflector lends a distinction to *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow helps to distance the narrative and somewhat dilute the vehemence of Conrad's attack on colonialism and saves the novella from becoming a mere tirade against colonialism. Because Marlow has been imagined as a more involved person in the colonial enterprise, he is not necessarily anti-imperialist like the narra-
tor of "An Outpost of Progress". Marlow does interrogate the experiences but more as an insider, almost as a participant and not as the witty observer as we have noticed in "An Outpost of Progress."

The first narrator who introduces Marlow to the readers, and who faithfully presents Marlow's story almost in toto, mentions the special feature of Marlow's tale:

... 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 ...(p. 57).

This means that meaning is not enclosed but embodied in the narrative. Not the content but the approach to the heart of the matter will be revealing the truth of the matter. The reader should search for the writer's message in the way the story is delivered: through multiple reflectors, through images and symbolism, conscious as well as unconscious, through cross references and repetitions of words and phrases rather than in the events of the story alone. Heart of Darkness contains the writer's message as inscriptions on every detail and the turn of phrases and episodes of the story. In Heart of Darkness Conrad's critique of imperialism is not free from ambiguity. In fact there are some reasons to believe that he was himself in some way a participator both as a Merchant
Marine seaman and also as a writer. He has recorded in one of the essays that a novelist has something of an imperialist adventurer in him. So the adventure in itself cannot be impi-ous. In "A Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record Conrad says that in the interior world when the novelist's thoughts and emotions are seeking for imagined adventures - there are "no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstance or dread of opinion to keep him within bounds" (p. 17). It seems that Conrad makes the novelist a compeer of the imperialist, and hence his critique of imperialism demands critical discernment from his readers.

Conrad begins Heart of Darkness with a reflection on the Roman conquest of Britain. While the ship was waiting for the tide in the mouth of the Thames to sail for Africa, the so-called continent of darkness, Marlow reflects that England was also an area of darkness once:

I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago - the other day... darkness was here yesterday ... They were men enough to face the darkness (pp. 58-59).

The Romans came when England was an uncivilized territory but they were not overpowered by that darkness - "they were men enough to face the darkness." But as colonialists,
the position of the Romans was different. They did not brandish any ideals. Marlow says:

They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, ... They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force... 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,... 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. What redeems it is the idea only (p. 60).

This is the line of separation between conquest by force and expansion as we know of the imperial adventures. Conquest by force is of course "not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." So in this view, what could redeem the present-day colonialism is "the idea" behind it, by which Marlow means the much advertised motto of white man's burden to civilize the blacks. To be sure, there is much irony in it, because what seems to be under attack in Conrad's novella is the falsification of this idea in real practice. But his listeners in the cruising yawl the Nellie were colonial participants of a kind and expected that Marlow's tale would obviously be a figural representation of the theoretical assumption on colonialism.
Marlow's listeners may be viewed as the projections of Conrad's readers whom he takes step by step into the depth of his indictment of European colonialism. In this context, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan drew special attention to the narrator's use of the anonymous professional types to represent his companions. At the very beginning of the novella, an unnamed narrator recalls how Marlow delivered the story of the Congo in the presence of the Director of companies, the Accountant, the Lawyer. As the critic viewed it, these characters are anticipations of the hollow characters - the functionaries in the colonial establishment of the story: the chief accountant (p. 81), the manager (p. 88) and the workless brickmaker (pp. 93-94). She considers the group on the yawl to be the prototypes of the functionaries who nurse within the seeds of corruption:

Marlow's listeners, who are initially perceived as an intimate group of the pillars of society in a traditional setting of male camaraderie and well-being, are implicitly indicted, by this labelling procedure, as passive accomplices in the atrocities at the heart of darkness. They are implicated by the very fact of their respectability and status as representatives of the European community.  

The image is also self-reflective, as Marlow is also one
of them. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan interprets the respectability and the status of Europeans to implicate the civilized middle-class as also 'passive accomplices' of the spectacle of the Congo. Almost in line with Ms Erdinast-Vulcan, Edward Said has found in Marlow's white listeners on the yawl Conrad's suggestion of the crude materialism of the colonial administrators. Said observes:

That this group of people is drawn largely from the business world is Conrad's way of emphasizing the fact that during the 1890s the business of empire, once an adventurous and often individualistic enterprise, had become the empire of business.²¹

Said is right that Conrad has traced the development of colonial enterprise from the early times and has found the present state a degeneration with no heroism of any kind to uphold it. It has merely become a trading enterprise for grab and loot.

In the presence of these white listeners, Marlow tries to remove the stigma associated with colonialism partially by his reference to the 'idea' behind it. Marlow says that genuine colonialism, and hence its concomitant oppressions spring from a noble and humanitarian idea. But Ruth L. Nadelhaft argues that an idea does not live in a vacuum. To destroy or extermi-
nate human beings in the name of a doctrine does not absolve the fact that the destruction was committed. She quotes Sebastian Castellio to the effect that "‘to burn a man is not to defend a doctrine, it is to burn a man.’" Similarly atrocities on natives cannot be condoned even to pursue the advancement of an idea.

At the beginning of his narrative concerning his Congo experience Marlow advises his listeners not to bother much as to what happened to him personally but to "understand the effect of it" on him (p. 61). He thought it would throw much light on the colonial experience as a whole, specially colonialism in the Congo. Hence the descriptive passages in the tale are not merely to be seen as relating to individual experiences but the colonial experience as a whole. The narrative assumes the body of the interpretation.

The account of the death of Fresleven, Marlow's predecessor in the tale, is an instance worth recounting. As Marlow was going to take up the job fallen vacant after Fresleven's death - it was of interest to him to reflect on his death. Fresleven died due to a quarrel with a few Africans over buying of two hens. In order to assert his arrogant power he whacked an "old nigger mercilessly" (p. 64). But his son could not stand it and had enough courage and self-respect to throw a spear at the
white man and killed him and bolted off as otherwise the whole village would have been punished by the whites. Marlow cites the instances to warn that even the most gentle among the whites could turn cruel in the colonial background. This transformation of "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs" (P. 64) which Marlow saw turning into a heartless person is not a personal aberration but a paradigmatic pattern of the colonial environment. That is what Marlow wanted to emphasize when he asked not to take the personal facts as important. It is the general nature of the happening that is important. It gives us a general warning regarding transformation to be expected in the colonial environment and Kurtz's doings in the Congo need to be understood in this perspective. Conrad's narrative is cumulative in nature. Hence Fresleven foreshadowed Kurtz as he (Fresleven) was equally certified by all as a noble person and was committed to the noble cause of colonial uplift: Marlow says, "...he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause..." (p. 64).

Marlow's presentation of the scene when he was inducted to the service of the trading company of Congo is ironical. The clerk who was ready to help Marlow to get over the formalities for appointment, glorified the company's business. When Marlow asked him if the jobs in Africa were so lucrative, then why he did not seek a position for himself in the trading posts of the
company. He immediately replied that “I am not such a fool as I look...” (p.69). This meant that he would be the last person to make a trip to the colonial settlements. This conscious detachment from participating in the activities in Africa was also manifest in the words of the doctor who examined Marlow to certify him worthy of the job. Both the clerk and the doctor were good-humouredly aware of the danger that the young man would face in Africa. The doctor and the clerk were in fact behaving as subordinate priests whose duty was to push the sacrificial goats to the altar and they did it with strict indifference to the pain and anguish that the incumbent was likely to face. The doctor takes a scientific interest in studying these people regarding their pre and post mental physical health after a stint in African colonies. He himself was not ready to acquire the necessary information through direct experience of service in the colonies. He would never attempt that when guinea pigs were available to probe the changes that “take place inside” the psyche of those who serve in the colonies (p.69).

Before leaving for his new assignment, Marlow goes to take leave of the aunt who was instrumental in securing the job for him. She was quite exuberant about the noble missions of the company. She praised the company’s endeavour for “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (p. 71). Evidently
she was referring to the civilizing mission of the colonists. When Marlow tried to attract her attention to the profiteering drives of the company she brought a Biblical reference saying the labourer deserves his rightful wage. Thus the hypocrisy of the whole colonial venture is evident from the very beginning. So we have two frames for the story: the vision of the company-doctor and that of the aunt of Marlow. Search for truth will be within those parameters. Conrad apparently could have something to admire when he thought of colonial enterprise as one of adventure and conquest. But when it has degenerated to a trade with all the commercial meanness and hypocrisy coming with that, the heroic and ennobling aspect of empire-building had disappeared.

A train of successive examples of insensitivity and apathy of colonial masters irked Marlow en route. The steamer which carried him on his first journey also carried some clerks and soldiers to be dropped at different outposts. Marlow noticed that they were mostly dumped on some abandoned settlements:

Settlements some centuries old.... We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness. ... Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there ... (pp. 72-73).
It was apparent that they would surely face difficulty from dearth of food and deprivation of human contact there. But the company officials showed least concern for their well-being. The unfeeling behaviour of the company towards its own workers clearly predicted the company’s attitude towards those who came under their control in the colonies.

At one site Marlow saw a French gun-boat shelling the bushes aimlessly to strike terror among the natives and this targetless show of gunpower appalled Marlow. To him it was nothing but “insanity” (p. 74). The gunmen supposed that the natives were nearby and therefore were firing on them energetically at the command from the masters. In the same steamer some men were dying out of fever one by one to which the masters were totally indifferent. In this context of the French gun-boat we would like to mention that Conrad was not distinguishing the French as an exception. He had no prejudice against the French. Conrad mentions in one of his letters to Kazimierz Waliszewski that whenever he referred to any particular group or race, it was based on historical authenticity and not on any bias: “It is the difference between races that I wished to point out. If I say that the ship which bombarded the coast was French, it is simply because she was French (16 December, 1903).” Conrad was keen on identifying almost each and every detail of the colo-
nial massacres committed by different nations to point out the basic identity in the colonial practice. The macabre affairs on the trading posts he had seen sent tremors down his spine, with "the merry dance of death and trade" everywhere (p. 74). The happenings on his way to the Stanley Falls station prepared him for "a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (p. 75). There is a withering irony in the use of the word pilgrimage here. And in fact 'pilgrims', 'nightmares' are going to recur through his narrative in both the ironical and horrifying connotations. The sporadic references to oppressions and senseless brutalities pave the path of the journey toward the "heart of darkness."

Circumstantial evidence made it evident that the Congo became the acid test for human sensibilities. Marlow's second journey introduced him to the suicide of a Swede. The information which Marlow could gather about the factors leading to the suicide suggests that the Swede would have offered an interesting case-study for the company-doctor. Another Swede, the captain of the steamer of Marlow's second journey, explained it while answering Marlow's query: "The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps" (p. 76). There is a hint that for newcomers, the Congo is veritably a deadly place. A little before, the same Swede captain lamented the fact that the salaried government officials who lead their lives with apparent pla-
cidity, undergo vital transformation upcountry. For the highly sensitive, this exposure to the tropical extremities and total isolation bring in psychological aberration. So the Congo appeared to Marlow as the picture of "inhabited devastation" (p. 76).

Coming to the central station Marlow sees "decaying machinery" and hears a "heavy and dull detonation" (p. 76) going on which indicated a plan for building of a railway. But there was no intention of laying rail lines there as it was "objectless blasting" (p. 77) as a part of the terror mechanism of the colonies. Marlow also saw a group of chained native workers. This cruel treatment meted out to the natives reminded Marlow of the French warship which was shelling over the bush taking it as a camp of enemies. The natives as a group were unable to grasp the white laws which were enforced to tyrannize over them: "... the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea" (p. 77). Hence the sight of a steamer and its whistle came to be associated with objects of terror and brought out the "prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth" (p. 137). The criminality of Belgian exploitation of the Congo was discussed in most European countries in the 1890s. Sir Charles Dilke, a former Foreign Secretary of England, wrote bitterly that "the vis-
ible form of the declarations made at Brussels and Berlin is to be discovered in the ivory-stealing, the village-burning, the flogging, and the shooting, which are going on in the heart of Africa ...’ 24 Conrad’s account in Heart of Darkness illustrates the validity of such remarks.

Entering the interior of the station Marlow meets a native supervisor who gives a hearty welcome to Marlow, knowing nothing of his identity. But since he is white, he is accepted as a member of the ruling class. So Marlow feels immediately that he is also “a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings” (p. 78). The barrier between the white and the black - the white feared and worshipped almost as supernatural being, and the black, treated as savage and despised, is a part of the colonial frame. Inhuman treatment to the labourers is the rule; Marlow sees its indication everywhere:

Black shapes crouched, lay, ... in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair.... lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. (pp. 79-80)

These are the contract labourers of the railway project who crawl towards their rest in graves. Contract labourers are brought from outside as the native Congolese flee from Belgian
agents. Conrad’s observations are based on historical facts as Hunt Hawkins relates:

Outside research shows that because the population of the lower Congo was sparse and because native Congolese avoided Belgian agents, Leopold resorted to importing labor, mainly from British colonies. These laborers, who were crowded onto recruiting ships, probably had little idea where they were. Over a third died after arriving in the Congo.

So Marlow’s details of inhumanities in the Congo have a documentary importance to confirm how the civilizing mission of the colonialists was a sham. It was in fact a ruthless machinery for squeezing profit and draining the life blood of the native communities.

Having said it of course, one must remember that Heart of Darkness is a novel and not history. And in this novel, Conrad’s fictional focus is on the character of Kurtz on whom step by step Marlow is closing in. Kurtz is being talked about by various reflectors and the situation in the inner centres of the Congo is being approached from threshold to threshold for the sight of the remotest of sanctum where the icon of darkness is placed. So the desolation and the way need not be all historically accurate. Conrad is not concerned with facts but with the atmosphere created by the perverted proceedings of
the Belgian colonial centres. Ian Watt is historically cor-
rect when he says that Matadi was not so desolate as Conrad 
portrays it and that a railway was in fact being built at that 
time. To repeat what Ian Watt says: "... to emphasise the 
inefficiency of Belgian colonisation and increase the isola­
tion of Marlow and Kurtz, the story gives no idea of how far 
colonisation has proceeded." 26 Conrad deliberately darkens the 
portrayal of the grim landscape in the Congo in order to 
envisage what went to the making of Kurtz of whose existence 
Conrad had several models. Conrad's object was not to give a 
description of Matadi as it was at that moment in history but 
to see through it and envisage what went before in making what 
it was.

Conrad was concerned chiefly with the impact of the colo­
nial set-up on the mental attitude of its agents and officers. 
The psychological aberration which results from such an envi­
ronment was Conrad's focus. He saw crude calculation, counting 
of everything in terms of profit which gave a lie to the so­
called colonial mission - the 'idea' which, he thought at the 
beginning, is the salient feature of the present day colonial­
ism. In terms of integrity of character, Marlow saw only one, 
the chief accountant of the station, who, he thought, was not 
corrupt. But he could not protect himself from the infection of 
the environment: he is indifferent to the human impact of his
work. This is apparent in his loss of all human sentiments. A comment he makes on this matter is revealing: "When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages -- hate them to the death" (p. 84). He remains apathetic to the appalling consequences of exploitation that are being enacted outside his door or through him. Jacques Berthoud has rightly pointed out that along with other issues, *Heart of Darkness* has touched one vital point about the working of colonial establishments. He asks, "can labour in the service of a vicious end retain its redemptive character?". Since the accountant is an employee of the cruelly apathetic colonial masters, his humanity is sacrificed in the bargain, and whatever contribution he makes, helps to strengthen the evil system.

Conrad shows that idleness and isolation are the two overpowering factors which cause decay to the colonial incumbents. The young man in the station who was appointed for brick-making had no infrastructure for it - there was no work for him: "... but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, ...", Marlow affirms (p. 94). So his mind was engaged constantly on thoughts of gratification and promotion and was consequently agitated by suspicion and envy of everyone else. He was actually the manager's spy. A whole network of meanness and intrigue was woven in the station by the manager whose strong point was his health - his physical surviving power in
the tropics and in the nightmarish environment of competition, false reporting and character assassination. The uncle assures him "... you (will) outlast them all". (p. 110).

The whole colonial establishment in the Congo is centred around collection of ivory. Ivory is the word which rings everywhere. Everyone's overweening concern was for ivory and to beat one another in piling up ivory and for this reason, as the narrative affirms, "There was an air of plotting about that station,..." (p. 94). This craze superseded all 'philanthropic pretence'. The officers' only ambition was "to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages" (p. 94) and get commended by the metropolitan superiors. Kurtz was envied by all as he was considered to be the greatest collector of ivory. The manager of the station feared him as Kurtz was likely to be favoured by the authorities in Brussels for his success and this meant that he would supersede all. Conrad seems to be laying bare the naked truth about colonial administration here: they had hardly time to think of anything else but pursuit of self-seeking. So all pretence of bringing enlightenment or civilization to a backward region was moonshine. Marlow saw only "A taint of imbecile rapacity" (p.92) blowing through the activities of agents in all stations, and "a whiff from some corpse" (p. 92) seemed to hang heavy around the centres of activities. To Marlow every
figure in the island seems dead, lifeless except in his concern for ivory and corresponding anxiety. They have stopped all other work except securing the interest of ivory. This greed and obsessive hunt created a nightmarish situation in the stations.

Conrad replicated the ivory hunt with another greedy enterprise described as the Eldorado expedition for mining copper and other minerals. Ivory is acquired from the people who store them as their resources for life at home, for barter-trade. They even bury them to protect them from theft or other eventualities of loss. The colonial traders do not hunt wild elephants. They simply rob the ivory from the people. At one stage it is said that most of the ivory to be had in the villages are "fossil" (p. 142). So digging of copper and looting and robbing of ivory from villages have some similarities. Looting is the easier of the two. The custom is buying ivory by exchanging them with trinkets stored up in the station, but on many occasions ivory was taken by force without anything given in exchange. Hence loot and plunder are the most appropriate words and Heart of Darkness is full of them. Describing the Eldorado group Marlow says that their principal objective was to rob the land of all its riches. These Eldorado expedition-members are "sordid bucanneers" (p. 106), with none of the usual heroism that we associate with any new expedition.
As we have said earlier, *Heart of Darkness* is not simply a tirade against colonialism. The whole story is a kind of journey to the dark interior, both of physical location and of human psyche, to the discovery of Kurtz. As the story progresses, we hear of loot and plunder and violence of the colonial surface and we also hear of Kurtz being talked about, admired and envied. And for Marlow gradually it appears that meeting Kurtz and seeing him would be like acquiring the wisdom of the spirit. The second half of *Heart of Darkness* is devoted mainly to Kurtz. To search for him or to rescue him from the heart of darkness is the target set for Marlow's journey up the river.

Conrad presents Kurtz through multiple reflectors. Initially Kurtz appeared to be an engaging personality, a genius of some sort and of noble origin. Kurtz has been reputed as a gifted artist, an intellectual and an idealist. Apparently he joined the services in the Belgian trading company for the Congo with high ambitions. It is said Kurtz was "equipped with moral ideas of some sort" (p. 107) and was commissioned by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to write a report on the conditions among the natives and presumably to offer advice on how to change life in that region (p. 144). But between this noble anticipation and the evidence of the text falls the shadow of Kurtz's actual performances in the
Kurtz had immersed himself body and soul in the destructive element in search of ivory. Marlow comments that "To speak plainly, he raided the country", for ivory (p. 156). The savagery he had perpetrated in extracting ivory had linked him mentally to the rites and rituals of the savage tribes and his mode of going native was complete. He earned great reputation among the tribal people and they followed him as their god. Marlow referred to the fencing of his station with bamboo-posts ornamented with human skulls as knobs. The pull of the life there was evident as he once returned all alone - after coming up three hundred miles towards the central station:

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 his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. (p. 109)

Marlow's approach to Kurtz has been gradual: hearing of him, listening to report about him through various people and through Marlow the reader's curiosity of the man increases. One
who turns his back to the headquarters, the prospect of returning home to Europe, and, returns to the desolate centre of trade "setting his face towards his empty and desolate station", what kind of a person could he be? Was he "just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake" as Marlow felt it? The manager of the central station referred to his "humanising, improving, instructing" motives (p. 110), though he branded Kurtz as an "ass" (p. 111) for his missionary impulses. So the reflections continue and the fog around the character thickens.

Marlow mentions that Kurtz's noble ideals were confirmed by all reports and that he had been educated partly in England, so he had a cosmopolitan European upbringing:

The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and - as he was good enough to say himself - his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz;... (p. 144).

So Kurtz apparently came of noble stock, a cultured man, the cream and not a scum of European culture. Hence it was expected of him not to lose his grip on himself in an alien environment. He was surely not one whom Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston (1858-1927) could have imagined as a degenerate slave
driver. Himself an explorer and an artist, Johnston made extensive tours within interiors of Africa. During his tours, he poignantly recorded, he had been shocked "with the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are not of the best class, can throw over the restraints of civilization and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty" (italics mine). Kurtz apparently did not belong to this class and yet he lost his 'restraints', a word Conrad repeats several times in the text and wonders at seeing restraints even among the cannibals: "And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there" (p. 128). Thus Conrad shows as a supplement to Johnston that the lines of separation between savagery and civilization are thin. Conrad plays on the word 'restraint' which is said to be an abiding feature of civilization obviously remembering Johnston's classifying distinction. Restraint is used ironically in terms of the attitude of the manager, when the authorial narrative says that the manager "would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint" (p. 129). That comment was made when he expressed anxiety about Kurtz's health, though at heart he would like to see him dead.

Conrad obviously knew Johnston's work and he goes on mocking the word. When his helmsman was killed by an arrow from the
bush, Marlow exclaims "Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint -- just like Kurtz - a tree swayed by the wind" (p. 147). In the case of the helmsman who opened the shutter of his cabin and remained exposed to be shot at by an arrow, had he shown some anticipation of danger - some 'restraint' usual among civilized people, he could have saved himself. In this sense restraint could mean cowardice. Thus Conrad's play upon the word continues. Finally, absence of "restraint" in Kurtz completes Conrad's crescendo of meanings highlighting the challenging situation: the white man in the unfamiliar surroundings of tropical Africa beyond the restraining force of his own culture.

Conrad's impressionist technique is at its best in presenting or rather unfolding the character of Kurtz step by step. He was talked of as a genuine and devout propagator of noble ideals. He was a fanatic in his idealism, an "extremist" (p. 189), but his humanitarian desire were vouched as genuine. Then what happened to this man as we eventually find him in the heart of darkness as an embodiment of evil? Was Africa, the dark Africa, responsible for his decay and degeneration? Was Conrad biased against Africa and the Africans or did he try to show the evil that is inherent in the colonial situation? In this context, the most vehement criticism comes from Chinua Achebe, the great Nigerian writer, who commented that Conrad
was a bloody racist since he intended to show that Kurtz’s transformations had been brought about by his exposure to the savage races of Africa. But if we remember Conrad’s presentation of such degeneration of man in his Malayan stories, we will be less drastic in our conclusion. Kurtz is guilty of losing his integrity not only because he has gone native in the tropics of Africa, but more because he has allowed native savagery to gain ascendancy over him thereby falsifying the vaunted claim of colonialism. As Patrick Brantlinger has observed, Kurtz

... betrays the ideals of the civilization he is supposedly importing from Europe. Conrad does not debunk the myth of the Dark Continent: Africa is the location of his hell on earth. But at the centre of that hell is Kurtz, the would-be civilizer, the embodiment of Europe’s highest and noblest values, radiating darkness.

So in this view Kurtz is neither a victim nor an adversary to the darkness in Africa, rather he is complementary to it.

We have noted that at the beginning of the story in Heart of Darkness Conrad has speculated on his theme. England was a dark place when the Romans came there but they “were men enough to face the darkness” (p.59). There are two things which are involved here. The present colonial framework is a degenerate
one: the Romans were conquerors whereas the present-day colonial masters are traders who could be saved only by an "idea at the back of it" (p. 60). But when the idea is a sentimental pretence, and you convert trade into a mode of fetishism, when your looted wealth is identified as an embodiment of the 'idea', the colonial encounter degenerates as it degenerated in Belgian Congo and Kurtz was an epitome of it. The second point which Conrad seems to be focussing on is that black Africa with all its savagery provides a "fascination of the abomination" (p. 59), to the unconscious mind of the white colonialists. And when the unconscious impulses get the better of the man, he sinks into the abyss of himself. Marlow suggests this when he observes "His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines" (p. 182). So primitive Africa and its savage surroundings were instrumental only in bringing out the 'darkness' of Kurtz's heart, the darkness which was hidden within the enlightened psyche to the making of which "all Europe contributed".

Conrad was sceptical of Kurtz's noble eloquence when he says that "The man presented himself as a voice" (p. 139). This was a hint of the man's loquacity - an empty vessel sounds most and Kurtz is "hollow at the core" (p. 160). The voice was the instrument of his power - whoever had listened to him fell
under his influence. By emphasizing on the quality of his voice, Marlow seems to be drawing our attention away from the physical atrocities perpetrated by him. He sought power using all his means and established himself as an object of terror. But yet he had a great following among the African tribes who worshipped him as a demi-god. He was maniacally possessive about his ivory and could kill his most devout follower if he had not surrendered them to his stock (p.157). Marlow tries to represent the extent of Kurtz's obsession to the following effect:

"My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--" everything belonged to him.... The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own .... He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land - I mean literally.... how can you 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... (pp. 142-143).

This is an archetypal situation of the colonial frame where a colonial agent finds himself with insatiable greed and limitless freedom and untrammelled power of exploitation without any moral or civil policeman to restrain him to realize this. The solitude reverberates with his own voice of power and the protagonist gets deeper and deeper into the hell created by
himself. And retrogression is inevitable. Some critics have opined that Conrad occasionally thought that an Englishman or a man from higher class perhaps did not degenerate so irretrievably. But Kurtz has proved that such anticipation of civilized behaviour need not be assumed too easily. In presenting Kurtz, Conrad is showing the difference between what people thought of him - prior to his Congo experience and his retrogression in the Congo due to the colonial environment as well as the gravitational pull of the perverted psyche.

So in a way Kurtz is both a picture of what type of mental infliction colonial environment could bring to one and also a case-study of an individual - representing the European psyche itself ("All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz"), vis-a-vis its dangerous attraction for black Africa's mysterious psycho-sexual power. The second aspect is suggested by reference to Kurtz's gratification of "monstrous passions" (p. 176) through the presentation of the dark African woman who came to the shore to call him back. The "barbarous and superb woman", as Marlow calls her, "stretched tragically her bare arms" (p. 179), and this description carries a suggestion of her sexual attractiveness. Marlow asked the dying Kurtz, "Do you understand this? ", meaning the words the woman shouted. Kurtz's reply was, "Do I not? ", and the narrative affirms that it seems "the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power"
(p. 179). It is evident that Kurtz was sexually intimate with this woman who was earlier described as "a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" (p. 165). There was also something more to be added: "she was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress." (p. 166) Marlow presents here a full measure of her diabolic attractiveness as if feeling himself equally moved by the spectre.

The surface story tells us how Kurtz began as an emissary of science and progress (p. 96). But he proved to be a weaker vessel in the throes of dark powers if we look into the situation morally. Imbued with the ideals of love and philanthropy, he came to Africa as many others have done before him and wanted to campaign to make his ideals prevail. But when he reached Africa and found himself in the colonial frame in a state of absolute freedom, something went wrong with him. Into his noble idealistic soul disintegration set in. Jeffrey Meyers has observed that Conrad has reversed the eighteenth century myth of isolated man's conquest of wild nature, as is established by Robinson Crusoe. He, Meyers feels, has emphasized instead the power of the wilderness to liberate man's evil instincts. Conrad puts Kurtz's aberration as the result of wilderness' whispering truth about himself (p. 160). And being hollow at the core, this self-knowledge resounded within him in
solitude, in terrible intensity.

This is one side of the story of the 'unsound method' as the company manager puts it from the business point of view. But Marlow seems to be suggesting that Kurtz's adventures had another thrust as he himself said "I was on the threshold of great things," (p. 176), which probably could not be measured by success in collecting ivory and commendation received in the 'sepulchral city'. This comes out from the reporting of the Russian seaman, Kurtz's last disciple (p. 161). Marlow says that he classed Kurtz as "one of the immortals" (p. 169). This reflector used by Marlow need to be taken with some seriousness as he has been presented as a brother sailor and as a man without any selfish desire (p. 154). Marlow was thus confronted with two visions which he calls 'nightmares'. One is that of the company manager who represents those in the city "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." (p. 186). Compared to that, Kurtz's dream was a heroic nightmare, "a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!" (p. 186). It would be of interest to refer to Lionel Trillilng's
view in this context:

For Marlow, Kurtz is a hero of the spirit... By his regression to savagery Kurtz has reached as far down beneath the constructs of civilization as it was possible to go, to the irreducible truth of man, the innermost core of his nature, his heart of darkness. From that Stygian authenticity comes illumination.\(^3^2\)

So Trilling seems to suggest that Kurtz has reached the intimation of immortality only after crossing the barrier of civilization. This adventure introduces him to the hitherto unexplored and dark recesses of his human soul in its encounter with savagery. Awakening to this darkness enlightens him. Brantlinger partially opposes Trilling’s view by mentioning his violation of the norms of civilization: Kurtz is also a murderer, perhaps a cannibal. But he agrees that Conrad, “too, sees him as a hero of the spirit... For Conrad, Kurtz’s heroism consists in staring into an abyss of nihilism so total that the issues of imperialism and racism pale into insignificance”\(^3^3\). So Brantlinger thinks that in presenting Kurtz, Conrad has gone beyond the issues of imperialism and racism and has, rather, concentrated on the existential theme of nihilism. Kurtz presents an interesting case study of human response to such nihilism and it is in this sense, for Brantlinger, he is a hero of the spirit. But I feel, one cannot ignore that imperialism
and racism are the abiding frames of Kurtz's Africa. Kurtz is a transgressor as a colonial agent, so the "wisdom of the spirit" or the vision of the "region of the first ages" won at the expense of human atrocities cannot be condoned. Marlow however tries to conceal his guilt from those who cherished the sentimental illusions living in the "sepulchral city" which sprang from the colonial exploitation. He must speak to them in their own language, so he lied to Kurtz's Intended. By closing the narrative of Kurtz with this lie Conrad reveals that he was not unmoved by the fact that Kurtz had violated the tenets of civilization cruelly, and that only a lie could protect the illusion. Yet Kurtz is not another Gentleman Brown. He is not a villain, but a spirit manqué produced and nurtured by colonialism.

So there are two strands in the narrative of Heart of Darkness. The one is the story of the man who came with high ideals and immense potentialities but also to earn enough to enable him to marry his Intended as her people thought he was not rich enough to marry her (p. 195). So the hunt for ivory was essential to get sufficient commission to have an independent fortune. This of course led him to all those barbarous methods of exaction and cruelties. He went native in all possible ways and involved himself in the rites and rituals of the savage tribes. With ruthlessness he became a terrible god to them: The
Russian seaman said that "They adored him" (p. 156), and that he could "forget himself amongst these people" (p. 157). So Kurtz found himself in a great moral or psychological impasse. The essay he was commissioned to write by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs remained incomplete and ended with a post-script: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (p. 145). This was unlike the way other pamphleteers worked at that time, they usually prescribed conversion into Christianity as the panacea. Kurtz had peeped deep into the springs of evil to have such a simple answer to the problem of savage customs. As the narrative affirms, "... the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion" (p. 160). This intrusion into the wilderness of the tropics brought him face to face with a fierce reality and he exclaimed, "The horror! The horror!" (p. 183). The horror that he saw was within himself as well as in the society created by his participation in the colonial exploitation. And this realization constitutes the second strand in the narrative.

While discussing the character of Kurtz, we have to keep in mind this colonial framework on which the doctor set our mind at the beginning of the story. Kurtz is not a fictitious individual but an epitomic construct based on historical authenticity. According to Ian Watt Conrad had more than one
historical persons in his mind when he drew Kurtz's character. Hunt Hawkins also draws our attention to the point. He warns us against ignoring the historical context. The horrors of imperialism cannot be explained away in terms of the crack-up of isolated individuals. Writing to Elsie Hueffer, Conrad admitted that it was a fault to have made Kurtz too symbolic or rather symbolic at all. If the character of Kurtz is abstracted as a symbol of diabolic evil, then the background of Belgian colonialism becomes unnecessary. Such an attempt will blur the principal focus of the story - the devastating irony of illusion and reality, the professed idealism and the resultant practice in the colonial world epitomized through the character of Kurtz. The choice for Kurtz was to stay in Africa with the savage tribes where he said he was on the threshold of great things or to return from there escorted by the so-called 'pilgrims', insensitive brutes of the civilized world sponsored by colonial powers. Ultimately, after Kurtz's death, they buried Kurtz in a muddy hole and Marlow says they would have liked to bury him as well (p. 184). So Kurtz's perverted idealism could not be properly appreciated without an awareness of his difference from this crude commercial background of Belgian colonial outposts. The remarks of the Belgian manager of the central station defines the parameter of colonial imagination which Kurtz in a perverted way transgressed:
"Mr Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously -- that's my principle.... (His) method is unsound". (p.168)

To loot cautiously was his principle but Kurtz knew no restraint. And he had the daring. In spite of his reported "unsound method", he won a great following among the tribes: "His ascendancy was extraordinary", according to the Russian sailor who was with Kurtz in his last days (p. 161). Kurtz did not want to return to the white world, he had "immense plans" (p.176) and had to be forcefully taken back by Marlow to the boat. When he tried to escape, Marlow tried to pacify him by saying that his success in Europe was assured, but to no effect. Marlow realized it but he wanted to break the spell - "... the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness - that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (p.176). Marlow could not resist his admiration for this man whose soul, he thought, had gone mad but his intelligence was perfectly clear and admired him for "his final burst of sincerity" (p. 177). This description is relevant to contrast the vile atmosphere of calculation and conspiracy that prevailed in the colonial stations where they worked with right methods. This violent burst of sincerity is also appropriate as a foil to the closing scene of the narrative when Marlow
meets Kurtz's Intended. With this we return to the illusion of the colonial idealism and sentimental adoration of a past which had to be propped up by lies. The interview with Kurtz's Intended revives our memory of that wild sorrow and dumb pain of that gorgeous apparition - the dark woman who wanted Kurtz to remain with them.

The meeting between Marlow and Kurtz's Intended is not just an innocuous formal meeting between Marlow and the bereaved lady. Conrad as usual intended to convey a deeper implication through the meeting. As it appears, the interview was carefully designed to bring out the hoax of an idealism both of Kurtz and colonialism. Marlow promised to be loyal to the memory of Kurtz - his 'nightmare of choice' and for that he suppressed the truth as he knew of Kurtz - to pamper the sentiments of a woman who was not prepared to see life face to face. Significantly the meeting took place in the dusk - the room was not lighted - as if to present symbolically a moral darkness of the civilized world. In this situation both Kurtz and the lady shook off their local identities and became transfigured as the far-away colonialist and his metropolitan accomplice. With "dull anger stirring" (p. 197), Marlow spoke highly of Kurtz to the lady. Though at times he was deliberately ambiguous, as when he says - "His end... was in every way worthy of his life" (p. 197), he, on the whole, decided not to
hurt the soft feelings of the lady. But perhaps Conrad had a more subtle motive than this. When he made Marlow shower praises on Kurtz such as "He was a remarkable man" (p. 193), and "We shall always remember him" (p. 196), it is not simply to please the Intended by giving a fair version of her lover's life as a missionary of civilization. It also works as a paradigm of disinformation that used to be furnished by the agents of colonization to get support for their work from the people at home. But this gap between what is reported and what actually takes place cannot be understood from either side. The colonial administration is ever so careful that the gap between the perspective of the metropolis and that of the colony exists all the time. The hoax of colonial pretensions survives in this gap between illusion and reality. Marlow's interview with the Intended projects not just Marlow's humanity and courtesy but also his duty as a participant in colonialism: to dramatize this fundamental untruth on which colonialism thrives. The pathetic illusion of the Intended and the easy assurance with which she gulped the untruth relayed by Marlow makes Kurtz's last utterances "The horror! The horror!" seem innocuous. This distance from the truth of real experiences is the illusion of reality wrapped up with fine sentiments. It makes colonialism bearable and we can feel secure saying, "The heavens do not fall for such a trifle" (p. 198). Reality like personal names seems non-connotative. The name Kurtz which in
German means 'short' (p.163) could be given to a man seven feet high. We can "dream--alone" (p. 100) about reality from safe distances. So unconsciously Marlow is doing a service to colonialism by keeping its illusions alive and by giving a rosier version of reality, though he tells that telling lies brings "a taint of death", it is "like biting something rotten" (pp.99-100). In Heart of Darkness Conrad has confronted us with such a paradox.

Hence, in Heart of Darkness, the pictures of Belgian atrocities and Kurtz's degeneration are stereoscopically blended to give a fuller vision of colonialism. The attacks on colonialism in the earlier part of the story reached their epitome in the character of Kurtz, both as an agent of colonialism and its victim. In his usual way Conrad indicated the absence of the connecting link between the theory and the practice in colonialism. What was missing in the colonial outpost as well as in Kurtz's character were 'rivets' to "get on with the work -- to stop the hole" (p. 101). Conrad perhaps has played on the word 'rivet' purposefully. Rivets are used for fastening two metal plates together. In Heart of Darkness these rivets were wanted to mend the sunken boat - but it began to assume a role of a metaphor. Perhaps Conrad intended to highlight the unriveted gap which existed between the two, the colonial theory and the colonial practice. The connecting rivets between idealism and
practice, between the colonizer and the colonized and also between truth and illusion were missing. So in the colonial environment the crack predominates -- foregrounding of it seems to be Conrad's abiding achievement.
NOTES AND REFERENCES
CHAPTER III


4. Quoted by Brantlinger, Rule of Darkness p.258.


32. For this idea and the quotation I am indebted to Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 269.

33. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 270

34. Mentioned in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 267-268
