In Heart of Darkness Conrad explores the depths of the unconscious. Each and every individual, however civilized he may be, carries within him the primitive, bestial instincts which lie buried in the deepest recesses of his being. Especially, when a man is cut off from his conventional civilized moorings of civilization, he has to contend with the primitive man lurking within him. In state of isolation, an individual is tempted to act out his hidden desire which takes him away from the light of civilization to the darkness of primeval ages.

Kurtz who is central to the structure of the story is sent to Congo, the heart of the dark continent of Africa, to serve as an ivory agent by the Belgian trading company. Though an idealist and possessed of many intellectual gifts (he was a potential journalist and a musician), Kurtz, when isolated from the influences and checks of Western civilization in Europe, falls a prey to the primitive forces of Freudian 'Id' and 'Shadow'. The state of isolation breeds in him all kinds of complexes which lead him - the proclaimed torch-bearer of civilization - to the dark continent, on the path of degradation and self-destruction.
The story of his fall, occasioned by his isolation from the centre of civilization to the primitive land, is narrated to us by Marlow. While he is in the continent to rescue Kurtz, Marlow himself becomes subject to the call of the primitive. The drum and howl of the blacks from the heart of Congo evoke an echo within him, but he saves himself by his steadfast devotion to the work in hand. The point to emphasize here is that isolation exposes even the most experienced and balanced of civilized men to the downward pull of primitive instincts.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad focuses on the conflict in man between admitting his kinship with the savages and the "wild and passionate uproar" and denying it, and the lengths to which each extreme can take one. The question raised by Conrad is how far man, when isolated from civilized existence, can control his primitive impulses without sinking back into a primitive savage state where, "all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs... in the hearts of wild men". Marlow, the narrator, is aware of what he terms "the fascination of the abomination" and of the need for a deliberate belief to counteract this. For him, as for Kurtz, the voyage becomes a voyage into the self, since Marlow learns about his feelings and thoughts through his rescue operation of Kurtz and what he represents.
When in Congo, Kurtz is freed from the restraints of civilization. Described by an employee of the Central Station the brickmaker as "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else", Kurtz employs "unsound method" to collect ivory from the natives and thus becomes the most important agent of the company and is put in charge of Inner Station. Conrad uses demonic references to expose the so-called torch-bearers of civilization (as Kurtz pretended to be), as abstracts of violence, greed and desire. Enlarging upon the theme of colonial scramble for loot, Conrad emphasizes the folly to which the civilized man becomes subject in the dark continent of Africa. As Marlow puts it,

I have seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men - men, I tell you. But as I stood on this 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.

The allegorical imperative works to transform the ideology of colonialism into men who are less than men - flabby, pretentious, myopic, rapacious, pitiless, supernatural beings of the lowest degree. This is indicative, as Conrad sees it, of the fragility and vulnerability of human beings, specially when they are isolated from their conventional civilized surroundings, in the face of primitive, elemental forces which lack any logic in human terms. Marlow
describes the forest as he comes close to the bank below Kurtz's Station:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest... the broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps.... And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect.

This reference has symbolic implications; it means that Kurtz, away from home in Europe, alone, has ventured too far into the unknown areas of the self and experience. In other words, now that Kurtz is free from the restraints of civilization, he is to come to grips with primitive instincts and drives inherent in man's psyche. Howsoever civilized a man may be and whatever his intellectual gifts and attainments, he, when cut off from restraints of civilization, becomes subject to atavistic pulls beyond his control. Only a man like Marlow who is possessed of strong beliefs and moral ideas can come out safe and wholesome.

In fact, Kurtz in a state of total isolation from civilization, gives himself up to the pursuit of Faustian drive for dominance. Intoxicated with his early success
in collecting ivory, he whets his appetite for power over the natives. In his mad pursuit of fulfilling the Faustian dream, Kurtz transgresses human limitations. Marlow's first view of Kurtz is that of opening his mouth wide "as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him". The jungle entices Kurtz to the unknown, to draw Kurtz, in Marlow's words, "to its pitiless breast by the awakening of the forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions", and Marlow adds, "this alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguild his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations". Evidently Kurtz surrenders to the "forgotten and brutal instincts" and in allowing them a free rein is described as having, "kicked himself loose of the earth". He also takes part in the "unspeakable rites" in which he is idolized by the people he is supposed to be reforming in his role as civilizer. He inspires terror in those around him as is suggested by the row of 'heads' (skulls) which confront Marlow near Kurtz's camp. These heads naturally suggest the 'rebels' whom Kurtz must have subdued and conquered during his Faustian excursion. Thus isolation breeds in him all the bestial instincts so that he almost becomes dehumanized. It is clear that he transgresses all moral
codes and human values in a concrete way and his death can be seen as a natural consequence of the crimes he has committed. Separated from his own family, his own people, the civilized world, Kurtz surrenders to the powers of darkness and evil.

Kurtz assumes the role and status of a man-god among the natives. Just as bullets and gunpowder enable the colonialist to dominate the natives, superior 'Weaponary' enables Kurtz to seize his ideological opportunity, because he wields the technology of death, and becomes a god in his own eyes; because he wields, "that gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness". Conrad here tells us that if experience and perception do not imbue words with real meaning, that it language breaks down - taking human decency with it - it is an anathema to make a rhetorical show of moral good upon the rubble. "The only results can be language-induced damnation and the shattering of mankind's family".

Evidently this kind of megalomaniac tendency or the Nietzschean will to power overwhelms Kurtz because he is separated from his own society, with its set of moral codes and social norms. Being alone, he surrenders himself to the lure of primitive existence and to the savage instincts
latent in the deepest layers of his psyche. Like Faust who sells his soul to the devil to gain omnipotent control and power over the elements in the world, Kurtz sells his soul to the devil (the evil within him) for complete self-indulgence leading to his utter degradation. As Marlow puts it, "believe me or not, his (Kurtz's) intelligence was perfectly clear - concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear.... I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself".  

The point is that in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad takes his deepest look into the human condition and enlarges upon the various incompatible pressures that can be imposed on human spirit, specially when one, like Kurtz, is away from the restraining influences operating in the civilized world. In the tropical Congo where Kurtz has come to terms with the savages, he himself becomes a savage. Since he is isolated from his own group and society, he readily gives himself up to the forces of darkness within him which is analogous to the darkness without. In the telling words of R.A. Gekoski:

Whether one wishes to invoke Freud's Id, Jung's Shadow (a term explicitly used to describe Kurtz), or Nietzsche's Will to Power, what must be understood is that the 'darkness' is now both external and potentially internal - and that its full fruition constitutes a danger to the equilibrium of the self. This darkness, in its
symbolic sense is not only overwhelmingly powerful, but virtually unknowable, because it almost never manifests itself in unmediated experience. 17

The symbolic association of ivory with the heads outside Kurtz's house suggest his utter lack of restraint in the gratification of his various lusts; that there was something wanting in him - an absolute failure of inner strength born of a strong belief. Thus guided solely by his primitive instincts and savage drives, Kurtz considering himself a superman 'beyond good and evil' immerses himself in the destructive element. His appetite for more ivory is artistically suggested by Conrad to be associated with the colour of skeleton heads with which Kurtz adorns his house. Whether he knew of this deficiency in himself is left unsaid, the knowledge came to him at last - only at the very last:

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude (emphasis mine) - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core 18

In this, Kurtz becomes a symbol for Europe searching for power, maneuvering for advantage; and he finds the lever in the colonial adventure of ivory. No wonder, his hunger for a position is so overwhelming. "Having
gratified forbidden desires, he is free of civilized taboos. In the Congo, where the white man - the civilized Belgian - ruled, he could do anything. His only prescription: produce results, send back ivory. In fact, Kurtz’s will to power, his heartless brutality make him appear a kind of god - to the natives and other agents who fear him or are jealous of him, to the Russian sailor who has unbounded faith in his lordship. All human barriers are down, only power counts - no matter whether political or economic.

In the jungle enterprise only the strong survive, and Kurtz obviously is one of the strong. “He brings European power - all of Europe - into the jungle; his weapons encompass 2000 years of western civilization. And the consequence: corruption of self and death to ‘inferiors’ on a monumental scale.” This is indicative of Kurtz’s inhumanity, and by implication the inhumanity of all those westerners who profess to be the torch-bearers of civilization to the dark regions of the globe. With remarkable insight, Conrad shows how under the pull of the irrational, Kurtz kicks himself loose of all the moral ideas of bringing about a regenerative change in the Congo. What we see instead is the absence of social morality, the desire to rise at every one’s expense, the obsession with image-making in personal power, the absence of meaningful beliefs, and the drive for advancement and aggrandizement without larger considerations. In his conception of Kurtz, Conrad’s power as an
artist-thinker emerge at its strongest - he is at once caustic, subtle, broad. "His conception of Kurtz, slim on the surface, broadening beneath, is a Cassandra's view of European progress, a view both realistic and ironic".  

What is important to note is that apart from physical isolation, it connotes Kurtz's moral isolation. The will to dominate is not attributable merely to human aberration, nor merely to demonic influence but Kurtz's volte face of his original mission of bringing light to the ignorant millions to 'wean them of their horrid ways'. Instead of engaging himself in the civilizing process, Kurtz gives way to the savage rituals and ceremonies in which he avidly participates. In fact, this is indicative of his regression into a primitive state of existence wherein moral values do not count. This reminds us of Kurtz's painting of a blindfolded woman holding up a torch - all against the sombre background. She emerges from the dark, but only partially, for dark nourishes her, "She is, in fact, a symbolic Kurtz - one contiguous with and defined by blackness". Blackness is the end result of moral isolation, it shuts out all light and only leads to degeneration, perfidy and death. Just before Kurtz dies, he lies in dim light awaiting the end, despair withing on his face, the blackness of the past merging with the mystery of the future. Once dead, Kurtz returns to the black of the Congo, his epitaph spoken by the manager's boy: "Mistah Kurtz - he dead". The
sarcastic understatement of the boy, his cruel indifference to Kurtz's prestige, all stress the contrast between Kurtz's desires and the blackness which receives him. The jungle will conceal him. The dark power within him proves overwhelmingly fateful. This is Conrad's way of showing "man's capacity for evil and the moral abyss which lies under the thin veneer of civilization". Marlow is fully aware of this "enormity of Kurtz's moral transgressions and condemns them accordingly". As in his description of Kurtz as "a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities", whose soul was "satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power", Kurtz has gone further "beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" than he would have dared himself. As he notes of Kurtz: "It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through... he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot".

It is a tribute to Conrad's symbolic manipulation that in the course of the narrative he throws simple yet meaningful suggestions to signify the inherent weaknesses of Kurtz's character. His very name Kurtz which in German language is spelt 'Kurz' (meaning short) is suggestive of Kurtz being a spiritual dwarf. Although he is seven feet tall, yet he is 'short' morally and spiritually - Lilliputian or a Pigmy.
Kurtz - Kurtz - that means snort in German - don't it? Well the name was as true as everything else in his life - and death... I saw him open his mouth wide - it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him... Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms - two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine - the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter.

Conrad shows us how Kurtz falls a victim to his own gifts. In fact, before he penetrates deep into the African jungle, Marlow is attracted towards Kurtz (as against the manager and the brickmaker), because he is reported to be embodying the European cultural values in addition to his personal gifts, signifying a definite achievement over the primitive way of life. A gifted creature, he is made out to be a man of high beliefs and principles - intelligence, wider sympathies and the singleness of purpose. But isolation from civilized existence makes Kurtz subject to the pull of wilderness. He makes a perverse use of his gifts and very soon degenerates, tearing off the veil of civilization showing a primitive barbarism at bottom. The sketch decorating the Central Station serves an ironic purpose in subverting Kurtz's position as a civilizer. "The effect of torch-light on the face (of the woman painted by Kurtz) was sinister" indicating that there is darkness in the heart of an unstained light. This is a masterly stroke of artistic excellence on the part of Conrad to show how Kurtz unconsciously predicts his own degeneration into the
darkness of primitivism. The presentation of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* suggests, as Cedric Watts puts it, "the Freudian conflict-model of the self by indicating that his civilized qualities were 'sublimated' versions of repressed barbaric powers which, in the wilderness, can display their original lustful and murderous nature".32

The narrative suggests, how as a consequence of his isolation and the attendant freedom he enjoys, Kurtz abandons himself to the lure of lustful orgies and brutal inhuman rituals practised by the primitives in Congo. Marlow suggests that in civilized man the monster is not as firmly restrained as he would like to believe: "it is merely hidden, rather than shackled, concealed by the 'cloak of time' he has thrown over it during the course of his long trek from the night of first ages".33 The truly civilized man who has the courage of his convictions can refuse a flabby blindness and look underneath the cloak, to see unabashedly what is there. 'Seeing' in Conradian language, is knowing. The man - the man, as opposed to the gaping and shuddering fool, "knows, and can look on without a wink".34 What in effect shackles the monster that stirs under the cloak is, first of all, the existence of curbs devised by the civilized man, the kind of curbs that are embodied in the form of policeman and the butcher. In *Heart of Darkness* the narrator is concerned with a capacity for restraint in the absence of what he elsewhere
calls "external checks". But mere devotion to work is not enough though, as Marlow avers, it saves him by preventing him from going ashore "for a howl and a dance". However, work and principles are not enough, something more solid than these is required to withstand the thrust of a force that is as imperative as hunger. The resolution for self-control stems from a man's innate capacity to hold himself together, from an innate self-possession. But this can come about only if physical isolation from civilized norms and discipline does not lead to abdication of moral values. A man has to have faith in his moral convictions; only then can he have the requisite inner strength to keep the monster at bay. In other words, the only effective safeguard of civilized behaviour is the innate restraint which Kurtz woefully lacks. "The trial of the jungle, therefore, can be considered as a test of the degree to which civilization, understood as the sublimation of primitive energies". Within advanced communities like Brussels or London one can not tell whether the citizen is really civilized - whether the values he professes are really his - or his merely by virtue of "the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums". Transport him, however, into a region where every external control is abolished - not only the steadying presence of butcher and policeman, but also the regulatory effects of good health and a temperate climate - and he may abandon every
vestige of the restraint on which civilization is founded, and without which it becomes a mere fraud. Kurtz exemplifies a total collapse. The man who had originally thought of turning every station of trade into a beacon of light for educating and reforming the primitives occupies a high seat among the devils of the land. Kurtz strips himself of all cultural values he took so showingly into Africa. He becomes hollow by virtue of his lack of moral identity. As Marlow puts it, "every thing belonged to him - but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own". Kurtz's idealism turns out to be mere self deception.

The essential difference between Kurtz and Marlow is not that Kurtz has been exposed to a different kind of temptation but that, "for all his gifts, he has proved incapable of restraint, and thus of fidelity to the values he has professed. What has finally counted with him is the gratification of his desires". Even his advocacy of civilized values has had no impersonal or objective foundation, but remained a mere self-indulgence, an expression of vanity or conceit. So in going after Kurtz Marlow sets off in pursuit of what presents itself to him as his own antithesis; and the ultimate test of the wilderness comes to him as a confrontation, not directly with savagery, but "indirectly with a ghastly parody of civilization".
Thus Conrad's implicit assumptions that the civilized man is one who can exercise the 'inborn strength' to restrain oneself and the savage is one who can not and does not exercise it, and also he has lost the capacity to do it. Marlow's exposition of the cannibals journeying with him as having restraint and, therefore, affinity with the civilized, exemplifies the point. Left with only "a few lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough" to eat, Marlow wonders why, "in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger", they donot go for the white men who are just five to thirty. Marlow intuitively concludes that it is due to "something restraining, one of those secrets that baffle probability". They might have "no earthly reason for any kind of scruple". And one might just as soon has "expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield". But they do control themselves when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. As Marlow puts it, "it takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly". The cannibals exemplify the innate strength to restrain themselves, which Marlow considers the only effective safeguard of civilized living. Conrad in his short story, "AMY FOSTER", justifies cannibalism at times of extreme necessity, at times when the life-and-death question is related with food. Conrad had an uncle serving in Polish army whose cannibalism - their family, after much grunting, accepted. So cannibalism is excusable.
when it is related to death and survival question. But savagery affecting the lives of others and satisfying one's own lusts without restraint is inexcusable. Kurtz commits the inexcusable and unmitigated savagery; he goes beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations. Because he becomes slowly, but surely, incapable of an impersonal or objective viewing of life. Having lost the capacity to conjure up his inner strength to be impersonal in his treatment of natives, he lets himself go and as a result, becomes a total degenerate. He becomes engulfed in darkness.

The clear implication is that man has in him, embedded deep in his psyche, the opposite forces of good and evil. It is a question of maintaining the balance between the two, if one has to avoid a fall, specially when one is alone, without 'external checks', without the moral support of friends and sympathetic neighbours. It will be a superficial observation to assert that it is the wilderness which casts an evil influence on Kurtz, especially, when he is faced with solitude, separated from the civilized community of man. His fall is, in a manner of speaking attributable to his lack of maintaining a balance between the opposite elements in his nature. That is why, the evil in him gets the better of the erstwhile idealist torch-bearer in Kurtz. A lack of restraint accentuates the process of his degradation. The black mistress who is a part of wilderness suggests harmony and balance between the antithetical elemental forces
within. She seems to be symbolizing what the Hindus call the Shakti principle. She combines in herself both vitality and grace, wilderness and magnificence. She represents the mystery and fecundity of life, "she was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent, there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress." Evidently, Conrad presents this woman who images the "tenebrous and passionate soul" of wilderness as possessing the antithetical qualities in her. Hers is the powerful containment of a force that has been consummate in release. As Daleski graphically puts it,

She compels the beholder to a recognition that the dark savagery of the jungle may have as a concomitant of its frenzy a fine fecundity, an abundant vitality of power for 'mysterious life'. It is a power that is directly imaged in the jungle, a similar reconciliation of opposites being evoked in its embodiment of stationary exuberance, soundless riot, and arrested motion.

The wilderness which Kurtz's native mistress symbolizes is not merely an embodiment of evil, it contains a vitality for mysterious life. It represents a reconciliation of opposites as embodied in the personality of the native woman as her capacity for abandon and restraint.

the great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence.
Like the Hindu Shakti, she is a vital force for destroying the demonic forces within us. As narrated by the Russian in the novel, "she (the proud native woman) got in one day.... She talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I do not understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief".  

Stephen A. Reid asserts that this incident, and from the fact that Kurtz had more than once during his illness threatened to kill the Russian, it seems plausible that the conversation between the woman and the seriously ill Kurtz concerns the Russian as a successor. "The woman is urging Kurtz to sacrifice himself for the good of the tribe". Kurtz would prefer to murder the Russian lest the natives take the things into their own hands. Reid quotes from Frazer to suggest that Kurtz had been able to establish the ritual of sacrificing a young and vigorous man and then consuming a portion of his body in order to emerge from the ritual reinvigorated and revived. Reid suggests that Kurtz:

at the midnight rituals, had been able to have the natives accept the most temporary of man-gods in the form of a young and vigorous man, invest him with all the trappings of his position, worship him, and finally slay him. Kurtz would succeed, once again, to the high position, but having partaken of the body of the newly slain man-god, succeed, reinvigorated and revived.
This ritual has sufficient precedence as Frazer demonstrates, to give it credence. There is first the question of acceptability of death of a proxy:

When the king first succeeded in getting the life of another accepted as a sacrifice instead of his own, he would have to show that the death of that other would serve the purpose quite as well as his own would have done. 54

The native woman probably gets furious at Kurtz for his not agreeing to the Russian succeeding him. The point to register is that Kurtz loses his balance completely so that the destructive element within him crosses all limits. He does not even snirk from sacrificing human beings. What to talk of leaving the vestiges of civilization behind, he becomes dehumanized. Whereas the native woman is for the renewal of life, Kurtz, becomes an agent of mindless egoistic destruction. The anthropological argument, though ingenious, sounds plausible, it helps us understand the nature of 'unspeakable rites'.

What lends credence to the innate darkness of Kurtz is his ability to understand fully the nature of his mission in which moral convictions and considerations of human values must play a vital role. When Kurtz comes to Congo, he is unmindful of the darkness which invades the 'hunters for Gold' or pursuers of fame. Like the frame narrator, he believes that the personal motives of the European 'Civilizers' count for little beside the facts of their
achievement, the establishment of commonwealths and empires. As the frame narrator observes:

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 that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!... The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

And he thinks of them as conquerers in a double sense, men who had not only conquered territories with their souls but darkness with their torches - the darkness of an unknown earth that is like the night of first ages. In other words, colonizers are civilizers, the bearers of light that is kindled by a 'spark from the sacred fire'. It is in such terms indeed that Kurtz initially conceived his venture into Africa, "each station", he is reported to have said, "should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing". However, as the narrative unfolds, we learn how when the so-called civilizers conquer the dark continent, they bring with them their own darkness, the darkness of blindness, the darkness of irrationality. Kurtz, likewise, turns a blind eye to the civilizing mission which he had originally conceived. His notion of transforming every station of trade into a beacon of light turns out to be a sentimental pretence. He gives himself up to the irrational within him. He sets himself up as an idol of a
man-god, to be adored by the natives. He lets himself go at it blindly and as a result, becomes a Faustian figure indulging in self-glorification. And he ends by being a devil of the land presiding over 'the unspeakable rites'.

Solitude can make or mar an individual. In Nostromo it consumes Decoud and in Heart of Darkness it leads to a degenerate end of Kurtz. "But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness (emphasis mine), it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad, I had - for my sins, I suppose - to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself". This is Conrad's way of indicating how a civilized man like Kurtz can discard the virtues that make for self-control and achievement in situation of prolonged distress. "The problem, as Conrad sets it up, is to persuade the reader - by epithets, exclamation, ironies, by every technical obliquity - into an hallucinated awareness of the unplumbable depravity, the primal unanalyzable evil, implicit in Kurtz's reversion to the jungle from the high moral sentiments of his report".

It is a tribute to Conrad's artistic achievement that in his novels like Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, Nostromo, Under Western Eyes, he explores "not the superficial how of characters' actions but the fundamental why, and particularly the why of moral failure". His writing repeatedly deals with the nightmare image of a lone man menaced and
terrified by hostile surroundings. The image is characterized by vividness and clarity which are the hallmark of Conrad's craftsmanship. Isolation is the chief cause of Kurtz's failure because it tempts him to seize successes not sanctioned by moral laws. Jurtz fails his test of the jungle, because of moral isolation. He is not physically alone; with him are other officials of trading company - the manager, the brickmaker, the chief accountant, all white officers, but they are outside his moral sphere. His moral failure makes him vulnerable to the pull of primitive, bestial instincts, mainly because he is an egoist. His loneliness is largely self-imposed. His deepest impulses and longings are directed not toward a dutiful place required by his idealist mission but toward self-aggrandizement. He is alone, chiefly because he has thoughts for no one but for himself. This is one of the central convictions of Conrad the psychologist, that egoism is the motive force of most men's actions. "It is probably no accident that Conrad first began to write because, as he tells us in A Personal Record, he was haunted by recollections of a man who 'governed his conduct by... incredible assumptions, which rendered his logic impenetrable to any reasonable person'.60

The chief protagonists of his novels such as Almayer, Willems, Kurtz, Jim, Nostromo, Gould, Razumov - each one of them is obsessed by the fixed idea of his own greatness, each is a dreamer, and 'dream' with Conrad carries a
pejorative odour about it. Each one of them holds lofty theory with some force of conviction, with an obstinate tenacity. Our first view of Almayer reveals his forgetting the bitter reality of the present 'in the vision of a great and splendid reward'. Willems, in An Outcast of the Islands, though completely destroyed, and on the least provocation loses himself in dreams of glory. And Kurtz, on the point of death in the Congo, expects to return to Europe and be met at railway stations by kings. The artist in Conrad shows us that one of the major causes of the moral failure of the romantic egoist is his tendency to self-delusion, his capacity for clothing his passionate desires with what Decoud calls the 'fair robes of an idea'. Jim rises to power in Patusan under the illusion of doing the people good. Charles Gould idealizes every simple feeling, desire or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them a part of some fairy tale. Likewise Kurtz, once belonged to the 'gang of virtue'. For example, when Marlow counters the manager by asserting that "Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man", the manager started, dropped on Marlow a cold heavy glance; said very quietly, "he was", and turned his back on me. In other words, the erstwhile 'remarkable man', in the eyes of the manager, has taken a high place among 'the devils of the land'. Evidently, the manager's jibe is a pointer to the fact that Kurtz is no longer inspired by his erstwhile idealism, but is indulging
himself in dubious ways. Kurtz can behave as he does, only because his complete isolation gives him the freedom to act as he pleases. Kurtz can behave as he does, only because his complete isolation gives him the freedom to act as he pleases. Kurtz can behave as he does only because he is in the wilderness, in "utter solitude without a policeman", in "utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion."64

Yet the crucial question arises why does Marlow feel so jealous of saving Kurtz's reputation as an 'extraordinary man' as described by the Russian, when he himself has earlier described him as a man 'hollow at the core'? Why does he make his choice of siding with Kurtz and maintaining his fidelity to him to the end and even after? Why does he make as he himself calls it "a choice of nightmares"?65 It is because, when confronted with the Trading Company officials like the manager, the accountant and the brickmaker, who are identified with the 'flabby pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiful folly', Marlow turns to Kurtz for positive relief, "It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief - positively for relief. Nevertheless, I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man, I said with emphasis.... I found myself lumped along-with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but manager epitomizes the
hollowness and moral impotence of 'pilgrims' - the white company agents in Africa. The manager and other officers' conduct suggest the reversal and perversion of European moral and human values. The insensibility of the accountant to the moral and physical degradation of the blackman who lies groaning, close to him betokens the callousness and the white man to the sufferings of the natives. To Marlow, he looks like a stuffed 'hair dresser's dummy'. The brickmaker is an embodiment of hypocrisy and corruption. His facial features, the 'forked little beard and a hooked nose and mica eyes' give him the physical attributes of a devilish figure. As Marlow puts it, he is 'papier mache mephistopheles', - a devil of emptiness. Even when Kurtz leaves the boat to rejoin the savages who have worshipped him as a god, Marlow, although he is morally shocked, does not disown his allegiance to Kurtz. Even when "something all together monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly" he does not betray Kurtz, in that he does not share his concern with anyone of company's agents on the boat. "I did not betray Mr. Kurtz - it was ordered I should never betray him - it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice. I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone, - and to this day I do not know why I was so jealous of sharing with anyone the peculiar blackness of that experience".

67
Marlow may not know why but Conrad makes sure we do. The manager's complacent nihilism so revolts that Marlow's thoughts turn towards Kurtz "positively for relief" - "better moral collapse than sub-moral success." Marlow is under no illusion; he knowingly makes his choice of nightmares, he realizes that Kurtz having fallen under the spell of the wilderness still remains a creature in conflict, torn between his European ambitions and his African lust. That is why Marlow feels obliged to appeal to Kurtz's self-love which might make him recoil from the primitive. He encourages him to indulge the dreams of his "immense plans"; he flatters him with the prospect of his success in Europe. This is a last-ditch effort on the part of Marlow to retrieve whatever little capacity Kurtz may still have for affirming the moral idea which had inspired him to take his voyage to the Congo. Marlow wanted him to regain his old faith in the humanizing values of Western civilization. His last cry: "The horror!" The horror, is the cry of a man who can only learn what his soul is worth, as he discovers that it is irretrievably lost. Lionel Trilling considers Kurtz to be "a hero of the spirit, for he has dared to venture beyond the security of permitted experience and thereby earned the right to pronounce judgement." This cry is an expression of the internal conflict which Kurtz himself experiences. The conflict indicates, that despite the extreme reversal of
an uncommon human potential, a regression, some sense of human values survive in him. Marlow calls the moment of his death, "supreme moment of complete knowledge... the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth". As Marlow sees it, Kurtz's judgement upon himself connotes what Aristotle calls the point of 'recognition'. The cry "had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth.... Better his cry - much better, it was an affirmation, a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions".

To sum up, Kurtz who claimed to epitomize western civilization enters the wilderness with the missionary idea of uplifting the savages. But the isolation from civilization produces for him a strange situation; he is impelled to respond to the primitive assault of the jungle, which is an unsuspected primitivism of his own. Under the stress of loneliness, he is tempted to the lure of his own bestial instincts. As a result, he degenerates so that he becomes almost dehumanized (presides over 'unspeakable rites' of the tribal primitives). It is only at his deathbed that he realizes the significance of his experience and of what he has become. This insight into hellish darkness of his heart, according to Marlow, constitutes his moral victory.
The moment of his death has a meaning that is relevant to all mankind: "Kurtz has achieved self-knowledge; but thereby he has also achieved knowledge of mankind. His verdict against himself is also a verdict against human life". His final appalled stare "was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that 'beat in darkness'. He had summed up - he had judged". Gifted with a poetic sensibility, and a master of phraseology, Conrad makes the last moment of Kurtz suggest that his cry, 'the horror - the horror' implies a sort of ultimate truth about man, and secondly that this truth is morally abhorrent.

In this sense, Marlow's journey to the Inner Station, to the heart of African darkness, is a voyage into his ancestral past. It is here that Marlow discovers through the horrid example of Kurtz that "the heart of European citizen, for all the endeavours of his education, remains an abode of darkness". His journey to the Congo is a spiritual voyage of self-discovery. He remarks casually that he did not know himself before setting out, that he likes work for the chance it provides, to "find yourself... what no other man can ever know". The inner Station "was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience". During this journey Marlow has to undergo the temptation of falling a prey to the 'wild and passionate uproar' of the primitive natives.
who are free of all restraints imposed by civilization. Marlow registers a "trace of response" to it which is natural because as he puts it "the mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future". Marlow's temptation is concretised through his exposure to Kurtz's "a white man and sometime idealist who had fully responded to the wilderness: a potential and fallen self". When Marlow returns to Europe, he is a changed and more knowing man. To him ordinary Europeans appear as "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". Heart of Darkness, as James Guetti remarks, is "apparently an account of one man's moral and psychological degeneration and of another's spatial and intellectual journey to understand the essentials of the matter... Marlow suggests throughout the story that at the center of things there is meaning and that he is pursuing this meaning".

Before we discuss in detail the effect of isolation on Marlow as he journeys up the river to the Congo in search of Kurtz and explore the difference between his outlook on life and that of Kurtz, a word about Marlow's role in the novel is called for. Marlow appearing in Conrad's four novels namely Youth, Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness and Chance poses a distinct problem. Except in Youth, nowhere is he
an independent character as Jim, Kurtz', Flora and Anthony are. In Youth, it is perfectly clear that Marlow has his "first command all to himself" and uses "a chance of independent cruising", which means he assumes responsibility as a member of community of sailors. In Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness and Chance, Marlow is primarily a narrator whose maturity and capacity are taken for granted. Instead of delineating the process of achieving maturity, it is assumed that he possesses maturity and uses it to good purpose. While in Lord Jim he is a rationalist, in Chance he is "a different Marlow, no longer the indefatigably inquisitive scrutineer of the human heart, but a character much more rigid in attitude and sympathy...." It is only in Heart of Darkness that he gains the status of an independent character who attains maturity and knowledge through a harrowing experience of confronting the forces of inner darkness. Apart from his role as a pilgrim in quest of knowing what Kurtz has actually become, Marlow, unlike himself in Lord Jim, has to withstand like Kurts the test and trial of the jungle. Whereas Kurtz responds to the call of wilderness and falls a prey to the evil of darkness within him, "Marlow is able to face and finally to overcome the 'powers of darkness' which have conquered Kurtz, despite the persistence in the latter of some vestiges of his original idealism, expressed on his deathbed". This is possible because Marlow is
able to exercise utmost restraint enabling him to curb the primeval instincts in the deepest recesses of his being. This could not have happened, had he not had a strongly rooted moral point of view which did not permit him to 'step over the edge' into the abyss of darkness where Kurtz has fallen. Because of his firm hold on his beliefs, he was able to "draw back my hesitating foot".  

Marlow's mission - he is commissioned by the Belgian trading company - to rescue Kurtz from the Inner Station in Congo, takes him into a long and arduous journey to the dark continent of Africa. The journey isolates him from civilized existence of Europe and plunges him into an unknown area presaging pre-historic times. Even, while he is aboard the French steamer taking him into the heart of Congo, to the river, in the midst of jungle he feels completely alienated. However, a lonely existence has its own advantages; it engages one in the exploration of his own self, so that one can reach the culminating point of consciousness. But in the beginning, Marlow feels a sense of "vague and oppressive wonder" grew upon him. "It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for night-mares". The surroundings looked like a "sinister back-cloth". And he makes a significant observation: "The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed
to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion". Marlow receives his first smack of surprise when he finds a French warship, anchored off the coast senselessly "firing into a continent", without any target in sight. As he lands at the first station, he is horror struck at the sight of African workers lying confusedly in the greenish gloom - "nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation". He feels he has stepped into the gloomy circle of some inferno.

Marlow's journey up the river in the heart of the Congo is not only a journey into the dark continent, on a "prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet", but it is also in a more meaningful way, a journey deep into the heart of darkness. Marlow feels oppressed by a sense of lonesomeness in the strange surroundings. The dark savagery of the jungle, the frenzied yell and clap of the people, a phenomenon like an outbreak in a madhouse is in sharp contrast with orderly life in the civilized world; it intensifies a feeling of isolation wherein Marlow feels lost:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of
first ages, of those ages that are gone,
leaving hardly a sign - and no memories.

The suggestion evokes not only the infancy of the race, but also, when related to Marlow's earlier sense of a descent into a nightmare, the infancy of the individual psyche with its buried strata. The riotous wilderness of the jungle metaphorically lies in the wanton wild elemental passions which lie buried in the being of every civilized man. Conrad through another image of night adds symbolic meaning to the darkness of the jungle. Marlow feels as if he has been "buried in a vast grave full of unpseakable secrets, I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night".

It is when he meets the manager at the Central Station and also the accountant and the brickmaker that Marlow discovers that the whiteman has been possessed by the 'rapacious flabby devil of greed and folly'. Their lust for ivory and personal aggrandizement has dehumanized them. That is, they have fallen a prey to the dark forces the jungle symbolizes. What Marlow suggests is that the whiteman, when he loses control of his moral and human values and waives off the checks and restraints which civilization imposes, he becomes one with the wanton forces of darkness rampant in the jungle. It connotes regression
from a civilized state into the prehistoric animalistic state. The moral position that Marlow takes in the novel suggests that "it is a lack of restraint, a letting go, that is - pejoratively - the mark of savage, of the uncivilized, and that in itself constitutes a danger". This is a view that emerges explicitly in Marlow's estimate that the savages who have attacked his steam boat are filled with "unrestrained grief", and that the travellers "danger, if any", lies in their "proximity to a great human passion let loose". Similarly, one of the outward signs of the "great demoralization of the land" is the way in which the white traders, seemingly subduing themselves to what they work in, have allowed things to fall apart. At the Company's Station Marlow sees "an undersized railway-truck lying... on its back with its wheels in the air", one of which is off; comes upon "more pieces of decaying machinery"; discovers that "a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in... it was a wanton smash-up". However, Marlow discovers a new dimension to the jungle as a symbol; it is embodied in Kurtz's black woman who is both "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent". She represents the fecund and mysterious life. What Marlow is impressed with is her capacity for both abandon and restraint.

Here is the powerful containment of a force that has been consummated in release. She compels the beholder to a recognition that the dark
savagery of the jungle may have as a concomitant of its frenzy a fine fecundity, and abundant vitality or power for ‘mysterious life’. It is a power that is directly imaged in the jungle, a similar reconciliation of opposites being evoked in its embodiment of stationary exuberance, soundless riot, and arrested motion.

Going up the Congo river is a bewitching experience for Marlow. He feels completely alienated from every thing familiar. He felt like a lonely traveller lost in a desert - “till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps”. He would recall his past but “it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence”. He felt an implacable force of stillness brooding over him, it had a ‘vengeful aspect’. It seemed to Marlow as if he had been lifted out of this earth. He felt often the mysterious stillness of the surrounding wilderness “watching me at my monkey tricks”. As he penetrates deeper into the ‘heart of darkness’ he feels the pull of the prehistoric inheritance, “to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and excessive toil”. To him earth seems unearthly, the Congo jungle does not appear to him in the shackled form of a conquered monster but “a thing monstrous and free”. The surrounding stillness is broken now and then by the howling noise of the native primitives, but Marlow feels a sense of
remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.
And Marlow remarks retrospectively: "If you were man
enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you
just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible
frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a
meaning in it which you - you so remote from the night of
first ages - could comprehend". Since he is cut off
from the civilized world, Marlow does feel a very powerful
lure of the atavistic instinct within him. That is, he
feels a response (and seems to hear an echo) to the howl and
dance of the primitives within his own breast. And if he
does not go for "a howl and a dance" it is because he has
"no time". He has "to mess about with white-lead and strips
of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky
steam-pipes... and get the tin-pot along by hook or by
crook". In other words, what prevents Marlow from going
for a howl and dance is his fidelity to work in hand. He
practises the sea-man's credo. Viewed from the Conradian
angle what differentiates Marlow (when sundered from the
society of civilized West) and Kurtz is the former's
capacity for restraint. In fact, it is Marlow's moral
convictions which enable him to withstand the call of the
atavistic within him. A solitary man, when stranded in the
wilderness is more likely than not, to fall a prey to the
lure of primitive instincts; what saves him from being en-
gulfed by the forces of darkness is his watchful capacity
for restraint. Marlow recognises that the touch of monster
makes the whole world kin. The suggestive implication is that even in the civilized man evil is not restrained as he would like to believe; "it is merely hidden, rather than shackled, concealed by the 'cloak of time' he has thrown over it during the course of his long trek from the night of first ages". It requires all the courage of manhood to look beneath the cloak and see what is there. Seeing, in Conrad's credo, is knowing. It is this act of knowing at the time of his death which enables Kurtz to enter the moral universe - it is a last-ditch affirmation of the reality of civilized against that of primitive. However, many critics have questioned Marlow's loyalty to Kurtz. But Conrad has indirectly justified the nightmare of Marlow's choice. In Under Western Eyes, as Guerard explains, Sophia Antipovna makes a distinction between those who burn and those who rot, and remarks that it is sometimes preferable to burn. "The Kurtz who had made himself literally one of devils of the land, and who in solitude had kicked himself loose of the earth, burns while the others rot. Through violent not flabby evil he exists in the moral universe even before pronouncing judgement on himself with his dying breath". Perhaps Marlow's attraction towards Kurtz can be explained in terms of Marlow's attraction to Jim in Conrad's other novel Lord Jim. May be, it is the butterfly element in the mental make up of Kurtz that has an abiding interest for Marlow. Since in Conrad's philosophy of life ideas are given a
place of pre-eminence, an individual with ideas is preferable to the common run of men who lead an apathetic and uneventful existence. For Marlow, Kurtz remains to the end of his life and even after, a 'gifted man', who had come to the Congo "equipped with moral ideas of some sort". ¹¹¹

Although isolation tends to make a man subject to all sorts of temptations, when faced with wilderness, Marlow is able to maintain his balance, his sanity and more important, his moral stance. When Kurtz sneaks away from his steam boat and crawls on all fours through the grass towards the savages' camp, Marlow acts with great courage by pursuing him into the wilderness. Conrad uses animal imagery to denounce Kurtz's atavistic trait. Like a beast, Kurtz goes crawling to the venue of primitives' meeting when he presides over 'unspeakable rites'. Marlow describes this as his ordeal by darkness. Till now Marlow has been thinking of Kurtz as a potential ally; he now instinctly regards him as a sort of anti-self or inverted double. As C.B. Cox remarks, he feels "it is his duty to bring the devil back, to the security of steamboat, to make the shadow submit to the orderly world of civilization. His success ends with the death of Kurtz, and we sense that Marlow, at least temporarily, has overcome the dragon in the abyss of his own consciousness". ¹¹² However, Marlow acknowledges implacable lure of the wilderness's tempta-
tions, and he momentarily dreams of living alone and unarmed in the forest to an advanced age. What Conrad here seems to suggest is that when man is alone in the wilderness where restraints and checks peculiar to civilized society are absent, it is difficult, even impossible to ward off the temptations of the flesh and egoistic satisfaction. In isolation Marlow has to contend with the reality of the inner jungle, the dark yet vital Dionysiac forces which tempt him to live out his elemental passions. But what saves Marlow from going the way Kurtz has gone are his firmly rooted moral convictions.

This harrowing incident of experiencing the inner darkness of human heart as exemplified in Kurtz's final cry depresses Marlow and makes him feel meditatively alone. This discovery of blackness at the bottom of every human heart seems to shatter his fondly cherished illusions about the progress of civilization. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Marlow returns to the work-a-day world a wiser though a sadder man. After his confrontation with Kurtz's death, his vision comprehends "the disparity between the lies of civilization and the primal realities of Africa". In fact, he has confronted the inner truth of his own self, and of each and every human heart. That is why, Conrad makes him assume the Budha-like pose when he 'talks' to his listeners the tale of his self-exploration. He is haunted by a kind of dream, by an awareness which makes Brussels,
the sepulchral city, a place of folly and pretence. "Like Gulliver, he feels contempt for the inferior humans who hurry through the streets with their insignificant and silly dreams".

However, the last episode of his adventure when he returns some relics of Kurtz to his Intended raises many doubts about his gesture of compassion. In spite of his perception that Kurtz was "a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence", Marlow tells a lie to the Intended so that it could serve as a 'saving illusion'. Even when he knows that the darkness is triumphant and it cannot be banished, Marlow tries to defend her against its conquering onslaught. The only reason why he tells a lie could be that he is deeply moved by an expression of fidelity to suffering borne of an abiding faith in love animating the face of Intended "...with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love". In other words, she represents all that makes human life valuable and worth living, and as some critics suggest, she embodies all those ideals which Kurtz had professed in the beginning but betrayed later when confronted with wilderness in the Congo. Probably this is Conrad's way of suggesting that life is not possible
without the saving illusions. However, "this telling of a white lie runs counter to the thematic preoccupations and to the persistent pattern of imagery that runs through the tale". Earlier in the novel, Marlow debunks the act of lying by asserting "there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget". Even Conrad insists that the whole scene "shall fall into its place - acquire its value and significance". None the same, it is difficult to justify Marlow's defence of telling a lie that "heavens do not fall for such a trifle". Marlow has made truth seem too important through the novel to persuade the reader at the end of story to accept Marlow's lie as salvation. It can be defended only because it is a gesture of human compassion without any moral implications. However, I venture to say that the last scene does not fall into line with the larger perspective of the novel. There is little justification, critically speaking, for this kind of volte-face on the part of Marlow. Marlow's accommodation to the saving illusion to the white lie suggests that Conrad, inspite of his ironic exposure of the civilizers in the Congo remains, at bottom an apologist for the idea of civilization as embodied in the West. He seems to subscribe to the belief that civilization is a continual and unsuccessful journey to conquer wilderness. Despite the darkness which overwhelms the adventurous, idealistic man like Kurtz who becomes absolutely depraved leading
to his debasement, humanity's upward potential for the light of 'visionary purpose' is not wholly extinct. "The criterion for reality is no longer existence, but possibility". The idea of civilization cannot be dismissed as a defective actuality; it should more properly be regarded as a potential to be realized and a destination to be pursued. Kurtz's last cry connoting an inner struggle indicates to Marlow that there is need in the face of darkness hidden in every man for an alternative reality.
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