Heart of Darkness and the Imperial Psyche

Key Words: Conrad; colonialism; morality; religion; Nietzsche; colonizers; imperial psyche

Abstract: Post-colonial scholarship tends to focus the adverse effects of colonization, such dehumanization and cultural destruction, on the colonized society. However, despite their personal complicity in colonial brutality, many colonizers are brutalized, enslaved, and dehumanized by a set of ideology and an imperial machinery. This paper seeks to argue that the "civilizing mission" as an attempt to bring morality brutalizes its evangelists and receivers alike due to its essential hypocrisy. This paper argues that the "civilizing mission" is a literary counterpart to Frederich Nietzsche's philosophical thoughts on the artificial construction of morality due to social need. It applies Nietzsche's idea to investigate the complex predicament of colonizers are both perpetrators and victims.
In the late Nineteenth Century, a historical phenomenon dubbed “Scramble for Africa” occasioned the invasion and occupation of the African continent by various European powers with different motives and styles of governance. It also inadvertently heralded the unmediated encounter between societies of immense cultural and social disparities in an unprecedented scale. Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* and his short story *An Outpost of Progress* capture the moral and psychological breakdown of Belgian colonial officers in a state of cultural dislocation. African is perceived by its haughty colonizers as a land uncharted by morality and a world awaiting its genesis. The idea that individuals from advanced civilization are thrown into a world of perceived barren morality recalls the philosophical ideas of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In his seminal work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche suggests that the desire for order creates morality from savagery in a brutal process dictated by the strong. While Nietzsche argues that the rulers’ pursuit of morality ironically and inevitably gives rise to evil and cruelty, Conrad, his literary counterpart, depicts that very process with the plight of his numerous colonial characters. As such, Nietzsche’s ideas on the origins of morality shed light on the unpopular and less discussed aspect of colonial victimhood, that of the colonizers.

This paper primarily focuses on Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and *An Outpost for Progress*, and dissects the colonial psyche with several major imageries. First, the paper examines the idea of the hollow men and suggests that colonizers of all ranks and ideologies inevitably become hollow due to the inherent hypocrisy of the “civilizing mission”. Moreover, the paper examines the religious motif in both works, particularly in relation to Nietzsche’s idea of priesthood in constructing morality. Finally, this paper
argues that the moral brutality of colonization is inevitable as Marlow, the most compassionate and conscientious of Conrad’s colonizers, become cognitively and psychologically disfigured due to his experience with colonialism.

I.

Both a perpetrator of inhumanity and a victim of colonial dislocation, Kurtz’s psychological and moral deterioration is particularly difficult to trace as he is alienated by the multiple layers of narrative. As Kurtz’s story is told through the brick maker to Marlow, who relates the story to his friends on Thames, one of whom narrates the story in the form of the novella, his character is enshrouded in a greater sense of mystery. Kurtz reacts to the psychological toils of the “absolute nothingness” that plagues the colonial administration by a complete rejection of the moral premises of civilization. Subsequently he establishes a new cult of personality and of ivory, with both entities diffusing into one inanimate existence in his death.

Kurtz’ first expression is his report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. The last line, “exterminate the brutes”, stands out for its tonal deviation and extreme emotion. This document is also Kurtz’s last written words in *Heart of Darkness*, thus symbolizing his exile from the civilized world represented by writing language and literacy, which the native African culture, at that point in time in the novel, does not seem to possess.

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1. *An Outpost of Progress*, 129.
…we approach them with the might as of a deity…by the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power of good practically unbounded…³

Kurtz starts off with a largely benign ambition to achieve “good practically unbounded” although he already exhibits a dangerous inclination to place himself on the pedestal for being worshipped. Kurtz’s suggestion to “approach them with the might as of a deity” is similar to King Leopold’s idea of appearing as “the all-powerful protectors of their lives and their property, benevolent teachers of whom they have so great a need.”⁴ The philanthropic self-image of King Leopold sees its literary translation in Kurtz’s report through the idea of a benevolent Almighty. Conrad sets Kurtz up as the embodiment of the values of Belgian imperialism. Marlow introduces the fact that Kurtz has a half-English mother and half-French father and remarks that “all of Europe contribute[s] to the making of Kurtz.”⁵ The deliberate remark on Kurtz’ lineage suggests that even though Kurtz appears to embody certain national values, his crisis is representative of a problem pertaining “all of Europe” because in Kurtz’s blood there is a confluence of the multiple European identities. The use of words like “deity” foreshadows Kurtz’s reinvention of himself as a god among the natives by highlighting his proclivity for elevated ambition.

Even though Kurtz’s understanding of “good” is never specified in the text because Marlow does not recite the report in its entirety, Marlow later comments that Kurtz’s tone is like that of “an august Benevolence”. The capitalization of “Benevolence” and “Immensity” indicates the augmented respect that Kurtz’s writing inspires in Marlow

³Ibid.
⁵Heart of Darkness, 50.
as a reader of the report and suggests a faith by which Kurtz commands his Station.

Norman Sherry suggests in his work *Conrad’s Western World* that Kurtz’ report is based on the report Arthur Hodister, whom he argues to be Kurtz’ archetype, wrote for a similar organization called the Societe Antiesclavagiste de Belgique. Sherry argues that Kurtz sees himself “as having a missing above that of mere commercial enterprise, with a suggestion of the more important influence of the benevolent white man over the natives”\(^6\). Kurtz’s ambition quickly deteriorates into a self-serving pursuit of power and status, which soon descends into madness and idolatry. The word idolatry usually refers to an inappropriate attachment to or veneration for, any person or thing. In Kurtz’s case, he becomes both a human object of worship which is made in the shape of his own god--the ivory.

Besides being described as inanimate and ivory-like, Kurtz’s body is also described as “hollow at the core” in *Heart of Darkness*:

> But the wilderness found him out early, and had taken 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 his great solitude----and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly with him because he was hollow at the core.\(^7\)

Kurtz’s hollowness is caused by his “great solitude”, which alienates him from the world of civilization that gives him an identity. The wilderness echoing in the body of a hollow man is a similar image to the darkness encroaching upon a heart, as the struggle between

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\(^7\) *Heart of Darkness*, 70.
civilization and savagery is embodied in the human physique. “Darkness”, referring to a state of primitiveness and pre-enlightenment, is similar in meaning with “wilderness”, which describes a state of nature unaltered by the human society. In T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men”, which draws on the figure of Kurtz, the poet also evokes a series of inanimate images to accentuate the sense of hollowness:

Leaning together/ headpiece filled with straw. Alas!/ Our dried voices, when/ we whisper together...

here the stone images/are raised, here they receive/ the supplication of a dead man’s hand/under the twinkle of a fading star

The inanimate head and hand are severed from the rest of the body, echoing a psychologically discontinuous state of existence. In The Severed Head: Capital Visions, Julia Kristeva suggests that severed body parts seem horrifying to people due to our ability to infer the brutality of disfiguration. Conrad’s focus on the description of Kurtz’s head produces the similar effect of fascination and disturbance. The irony is in the fact that to non-believers in Kurtz’s creed, the worship of a hollow statue of ivory is meaningless, as is his life. Not only does Kurtz fail to become a god, he becomes the object of his own fetish and obsession, which becomes irrational when his purpose is no longer only to earn more money but to possess ivory which is of some intrinsic value to him. The fervent and ruthless pursuit of ivory has drained his humanity and grandiose ideals, leaving him an abandoned pawn in the larger picture of the imperial endeavor, in which he is nothing more than a pawn of other people’s profiteering schemes. His own

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hollow and objectified body, carried by the steamboat along with the rest of the ivories, becomes indistinguishable from his material acquisitions. Sherry aptly summarizes Kurtz’s tragedy as symbolic of “the destruction of the white man through his very aspirations which led him, tainted by the greed for profit, too close to the primitive and barbarous which released those same suppressed instincts in himself.”

II.

The notion of the hollow man also finds its expression in T. S. Eliot’s poem that alludes to *Heart of Darkness*:

> Between the idea/ And the reality/ Between the motion/ And the action/ Falls the shadow/ For Thine is the Kingdom…

The hypocrisy of King Leopold’s colonial mission creates a disjunction between the grandiose civilizing idea and the bleak reality of economic exploitation, which precipitates the falling of the “shadow”. The word “shadow” often connotes the gloom and horror of impending dissolution in the Christian Bible, signaling a state of brooding despair for those trapped between “the idea” and “the reality”. A lifeless existence, the shadow resembles the colonial “hollow men” as they both take the form of something without having its essence. For instance, Carlier and Kayerts in *An Outpost of Progress* experience the discrepancy between the grandiose ideas and the emptiness of the reality as they read the only accessible literary publication, which is an old yellow newspaper:

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9 *Conrad’s Western World*, 118.
10 Ibid, 69.
They believe their words. Everybody shows a respectful deference to certain sounds that he and his fellow can make. But about feelings people really know nothing.\textsuperscript{11}

In thinking about the words in the papers, the duo realizes the emptiness of meaning outside of the society that creates them for self-glorification. The comprehension of meaning is limited to “he and his fellow” who can make these sounds. Conrad suggests that the civilizing message of the colonial rhetoric is a self-serving message created by the elite colonizers, whilst the menial colonial officers do not feel any affinity with the ideas and thus become hollow in the disconnection between their actions and ideas.

Kurtz’s gradual moral decline is parallel to his physical decline, which, like Carlier and Kayerts’ predecessor’s dubious case of fever, is narrated in nebulous medical terms. He is at first described as being ill and then as “very ill and recovered imperfectly”.\textsuperscript{12} In both cases, the report immediately praises Kurtz’s “great importance to the Company” and affirms that he is “an exceptional man”, in a suspicious manner that appears to be overcompensation and covering up for something that has gone wrong.\textsuperscript{13} His ultimate moral collapse is driven by an insatiable desire for ivory such that he becomes the “ivory face” in his dying moments:

\textsuperscript{11} An Outpost of Progres, 130.
\textsuperscript{12} Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 25.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Oh, I wasn’t touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair.¹⁴

“Ivory” is the description of the extremely white color of Kurtz’s illness-stricken face. It is also a physical reminder of his radical creed of racial differentiation between the Africans who are primarily defined by their “black shapes”¹⁵ and Kurtz himself the specimen and representative of Caucasian whiteness. Both accounts of color are exaggerated to the point of being inhuman, which illustrates the dehumanizing consequences of seeing people as objects only in categories of shapes and colors that obliterate more meaningful aspects of humanity. The description of the African natives as “black shapes” evokes a Dantesque association with the bodiless souls trapped between Heaven and Hell, which suggests a perceived state of spiritual depravation that Marlow sees them in and registers the impression of despair and suffering in the place of an inferno. In comparison, the image of Kurtz’s face as carved out from ivory, lifeless and solemn, is similar to the face of a hand-made statue of a deity. The inanimate head of Kurtz marks his self-inflicted dehumanization as a result of forfeiting the substances that connect him to civilization, such as “the images of home” and “the memory of people like them, of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel”, as Conrad diagnoses for Carlier and Kayerts in An Outpost of Progress.¹⁶ Whereas Conrad describes the important substances of life primarily through subjective and emotional experiences, Kurtz is only able to experience life in a sequence of possessives, such as

¹⁴ Ibid, 68.
¹⁵ Ibid, 19.
¹⁶ An Outpost of Progress, 132.
“my Intended”, “my ivory”, “my station”, and “my career”, without suggestion of any emotional attachment\textsuperscript{17}. The impotence of emotional recollection and association signifies a severing of Kurtz’s tie with the foundation of civilization which is based on memory and a sense of morality. Additionally, Kurtz’s self-expression undergoes a process of degeneration in the novella as the rhetorical eloquence of his report is replaced by first his verbal exchange with Marlow in confused sentences, which is then broken into non-sensical phrases like his dying words “the horror”. Kurtz’s syntactical breakdown mirrors the gradual moral breakdown as his matter shifts from Benevolence to “the horror”.

III.

Marlow is the raconteur whose emotional involvement in the story adds an essential theatricality to the narrative, such that his feelings at the present moment of recollection are crucial parts of the story. Similar to Kurtz, Marlow is also frustrated by the hypocrisy and inefficiency of the colonial operation. While Kurtz rebels against the bureaucracy by establishing himself as a god of ivory, Marlow is also described in the likeliness of a deity by the primary narrator in \textit{Heart of Darkness}:

\begin{quote}
Mind,” he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that with his legs folded before him he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

This metaphor explicitly associates Marlow with the religion of Buddhism, which is characterized by a non-violent, humanist, and introspective bent. Yet the Buddha is

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Heart of Darkness}, 49.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Heart of Darkness}, 10.
strangely in European clothes and without a lotus flower, which in traditional Buddhist thoughts refers to the concept of rising and blooming despite the murky environment it originates from. Allegorically, the figure of the lotus flower represents people who can achieve a purity and clarity of thought despite the morally corrupt world they inhibit. The fact that Marlow is without a lotus flower suggests that his worldviews have been destabilized by his experiences in the Congo. As his beliefs in the civilizing mission are shattered, he finds no way of reconciling the multiple and often mutually incompatible ways of rationalization. Unlike the Buddha with the lotus seat, Marlow does not have a purity of thought and is contaminated by his environment. The European clothes in the Buddha metaphor suggest a sense of exile by both the Western and Eastern culture and that there is an intermediate place of nowhere that he belongs to.

Furthermore, Marlow initially describes the African natives as “not inhuman”\(^\text{19}\) as he encounters several dehumanized slaves for the first time. His double negative sentence underscores an ingrained reluctance to accept their humanity. But his worldviews first changes as he registers a feeling of “remote kinship” with the “black shapes”.

\[\ldots\] but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours---the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of the

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 37.
noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.\(^{20}\)

The excerpt captures the complex process of Marlow’s reconciliation with the idea of a shared humanity which is encoded in the “wild and passionate uproar” of the Africans. The “terrible frankness of the noise” does not explicate any message yet it evokes a collection of human emotions and memories that Marlow reluctantly admits to recognize. His evocation of a self “so remote from the night of first ages” has a genesiac tone that connects a Belgian colonial officer to the origin of mankind, such that he can decipher the ancient meanings of expression. Marlow is shocked by the restraints which the cannibals exercise in not eating the pilgrims despite prolonged starvation, which unsettles Marlow’s view that civilized people are superior in terms of taming harmful desires. Notably, Marlow considers his London friends “so removed from the night of first ages”, which suggests that African natives and modern Europeans are separated by not only space but in fact by a time as long as the night of first ages.

Marlow repeatedly deploys the word “prehistoric” in the description of both the African land and people. Marlow uses the term in ways that are similar to Nietzsche’s usage of the same term in *On the Genealogy Morals*:

\[\ldots\text{the morality of mores—the labor performed by man upon himself during...his entire prehistoric labor, finds in this its meaning, its great justification, notwithstanding the severity, tyranny, stupidity, and idiocy.}\]\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 59.
We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and excessive toil...\textsuperscript{22}

Marlow immediately registers the visual unfamiliarity of the land as he compares its geographical aspects to the familiar Continental features that he has known. But the word “prehistoric” implies an absence of human history as well as a brooding prediction of “history” coming to the land. He capitalizes on the latter idea as he describes a process of taming the land as he foresees it in a moment of fantasy. Similarly, Nietzsche’s notion of the “prehistoric” does not simply mean before history but rather out of history. Conrad’s idea of history being “profound anguish and excessive toil” is also similar to Nietzsche’s idea of history being “blood-soaked”. The brutality of history lies with the necessity of a civilization to subdue the inherent immorality of the land, a mission that the Company claims as its own. Marlow uses the term “pre-historic” not only for the land, but also for its inhabitants:

“The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us---who could tell?”\textsuperscript{23}

The word “prehistoric” is underscored by the Euro-centric perception of the past and present as measured against the history and civilization of Europe. Thus it has a double-meaning, referring to both the state of nature before a recorded history of human activities has happened and a state of anticipating history to happen soon. The word

\textsuperscript{22} Heart of Darkness, 37.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
“prehistoric” places Marlow in a bizarre position in the continuum of time which allows him to predict what is to happen in Africa. Marlow’s idea of history is not a study of the past because the certainty of his anticipation suggests a singular vision of what is to become the history of Africa in the future. The idea of history is equivalent with that of European civilization, in particular the idea of linear progress and evolution that set up a universal standard for all other cultures to follow. The arrogance of Marlow’s prediction of history contributes to his self-image as a semi-divine figure that has prescient knowledge about the future of a community that its members do not know of. The conspicuously awkward meaning of the word “prehistoric” also serves to expose the subconsciously biased quality of Marlow’s narration despite his best effort at equivocation.

IV.

The recurring religious figures in both of Conrad’s stories hint at a moral parallel between the colonial and religious ideas. The philosophical aspect of Kurtz’s crisis is similar to Nietzsche’s exposition on the political nature of good and evil in a civilized society:

It was in this sphere then, the sphere of legal obligations, that the moral conceptual world of guilt, conscience, duty, sacredness of duty had its origin: its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time.24

Nietzsche believes that the stress of maintaining civilization and social orders bind mankind to a practical and contractual consensus on what is good and evil, and a common knowledge of morality definitively determined by the powerful class in the social hierarchy. The system of morality alienates people from their instincts and desires and leads to a state of depravity which becomes the birth bed of evil whenever social structures are weakened. He argues that the pursuits of moral duties by the ruling class, also known as the priesthood, make them the most cruel and evil, which manifests in both a psychological repression of selfhood and in social cruelty against the moral delinquents.

The literary counterparts of Nietzsche’s brutal priesthood in Heart of Darkness are the European emissaries who likewise preach the ideology of the civilizing mission while economically exploiting the colonial subjects. The language in Heart of Darkness has a religious tone that represents the metaphorical priesthood of the colonial officers. For instance, they are dubbed “pilgrims” throughout the text and particularly described as “faithless pilgrims” who whisper the word “ivory” as though they are “praying to it”.25 The peculiar oxymoronic phrase “faithless pilgrims” portrays a state of practicing a religion without any spiritual devotion to its tenets, which puts into question the alternate motivations and utilitarian agendas of the priests. Pilgrims are usually people who travel to a sacred place out of religious devotion. But the term is ironically used to describe the unmotivated colonial officers who journey just as hard and long for non-spiritual reasons.

The ridicule of religious image is similarly represented in An Outpost of Progress. Kayerts’ dead body is associated with the Christ figure in a perverted manner:

His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder…he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director.  

The Christ’s image often depicts Jesus’ head leaning on the shoulder in agony as a symbol of self-sacrifice. Kayert’s body mimics the Christ gesture in a playful manner while his purple cheek evokes the image of a circus clown. Whilst the image of the Christ is hemorrhagic due to his human flesh, the Conrad’s religious trope again is rendered inanimate by the absence of blood, just like Kurtz’ ivory face. The lack of faith in all of the religious figures highlights the moral hypocrisy that is similarly found in Nietzsche’s characterization of the “priestly caste.”

Additionally, Conrad’s colonial officers have in common with Nietzsche’s priestly caste “the hatred of impotence”, which Nietzsche believes to be “the most abysmal hatred” that turns the priestly caste into violent oppressors. The “hatred of impotence” suggests that the priestly caste lacks the strength and capacity to achieve power and dominance without the moral tools they have crafted and that the emasculated priesthood turns to loathe their more capable counterparts, which in Conrad’s case, are the African natives. In An Outpost of Progress, Kayerts and Carlier who are thoroughly impotent in dealing with the more knowledgeable and cunning Makola. The conversation regarding the purchase of more ivory is dominated by Makola tricks the duo to give their implicit consent to sell the station workers into slavery. When Kayerts and Carlier

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26 An Outpost of Progress, 145
28 On the Genealogy of Morals, 32.
perceive a threat in Makola’s warning of fever and death which have inflicted the previous station master, they revert to moral criticism and intense hatred by calling Makola “a fiend”\textsuperscript{29}. The word “fiend” suggests an accumulation of human vice in a way that resembles the devil himself. Similarly, Kurtz’s last message in \textit{Heart of Darkness} is a warning to “exterminate all the brutes!”\textsuperscript{30}. The message is written with intense hatred before Kurtz himself becomes distinctively different from the other European colonial officers whose priesthood is marked by impotence. Thus, Kurtz also embodies the hatred of impotence at the early phase of his personal development. The pattern of hatred is exhibited by one of the officers that Marlow talks to in the first section of the chapter, who deviates from his bureaucratic civility when the topic of the Africans is mentioned. He claims in an impassioned tone of voice that “one comes to hate those savages---hate them to death.” The wish to hate someone to death contains a logical incoherence indicative of the hatred of the priestly caste towards its subject.

Marlow describes his final impression of Kurtz as in a state of “destitution”, “loneliness” and “essential desolation”. The last phrase indicates an inevitability of the experience and the absoluteness of his isolation. Kurtz’s death is described as such:

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Kurtz’s final abyss is one of “impenetrable darkness” where “the sun never shines”. Not only is the darkness more essential and powerful than the previous descriptions but it also seems to be permanent as opposed to the transitory fluidity between the two states of light

\textsuperscript{29} An Outpost of Progress, 128.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Heart of Darkness}, 68.
and darkness. It is the darkness of “desolation” and “loneliness” of the deepest part of the imperial psyche. The permanent perpetuation of darkness is also shown in Marlow’s use of tense in his description. The present tense of the sentence suggests that the action is permanent and that he will for all eternity peer down at Kurtz. The psyche of desolation is therefore rendered ever-lasting. The literary narration of Marlow’s looking down at Kurtz in a moment of crisis produces a visual image that is similar to Nietzsche’s famous aphorism in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back at you.\(^{31}\)

As Marlow gazes into the horror of Kurtz’s “essential desolation”, he is psychologically confronted by a state of darkness as if Kurtz’s feelings are perfectly communicated to him by the gaze. The permanent nature of the gaze is translated into the perpetual state of horror that Marlow now understands. Thus when Marlow is placed in the darkest moment of being together with the dying Kurtz, the usually diligent storyteller refrains from describing it and digresses quickly into some explanation about the mechanics of the steam boat and other chores in the rest of the passage, as a way to distance himself from the emotional horror of the gaze from the abyss. Meanwhile, Kurtz is also frightened by

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macabre visions of “desire, temptation, and surrender” during his final breath and the confluence of his emotion is expressed through the phrase “the horror! The horror!”

By the time Marlow ends his tale, silence and darkness have overtaken their boat on the Thames as his audiences are enthralled in a moment of contemplation. Marlow’s narration is both a story of a distant continent and of the Roman colonial past which river Thames has witnessed. The brutalizing and dehumanizing forces inherent in the structure of imperialism, which perpetrates the oppression of one group by another, distort the psyche of both Marlow and Kurtz. The internal structure of the imperial bureaucracy is economically motivated whilst the external rhetoric emphasizes the benevolent mission of civilization. The contrast between the idea and reality of Belgian imperialism, as Conrad depicts it, is underscored by an impotency to deal with the African natives and a fear of living outside of civilization. Dislocated colonial individuals are emasculated without the infrastructures of civilization and thus undergo the psyche of resentment that Nietzsche attributes to the priesthood. Marlow and Kurtz are similarly in their disgust of the system but different in their reactions. Kurtz’s courage to experiment his ideas is ultimately betrayed by both his profiteering peers and his own submission to temptation, leading to a most symbolic breakdown of an imperial psyche. While Marlow avoids the destiny of immediate demise suffered by Kurtz, he undergoes a physical and moral decline upon returning to Europe and becomes an exile in spirit.

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32 Heart of Darkness, 68.
Bibliography:


