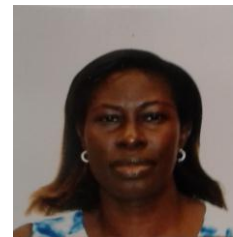




MARLOW'S DILEMMA AND OURS; CONRAD AND AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: A READING OF HEART OF DARKNESS



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ABSTRACT

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Consciously or unconsciously Heart of Darkness is a statement on the (our) difficulty of negotiating development and moral sanity. Marlow's quest to understand Kurtz's ventures and remedy him lead rather to the blank realization that the man torn apart by violent verbiage is himself a victim of the quest for development in an environment that seemingly needed domestication. More than a hundred years after its publication, the ripple effect of Heart of Darkness are insistent, the more so because its producer's virile imagination finds adequate space in our modern political and economic consciousness. In spite of the numerous criticisms levelled against Kurtz, he remains the quintessence of a legitimate capitalist search for self-aggrandizement. In this regard, the paper questions and investigates the impact of the exploitation of Africa's natural resources on the physical and social environment. Additionally, it attempts to understand the extent to which this may exacerbate our moral outrage. In the light of this, the paper locates Kurtz's, Marlow's and the reader's anguish in their difficulty to resolve both the cultural and economical moral stigmas that come with progress. Therefore, this paper argues that Kurtz, Marlow and the reader are all drawn into a moral battle with themselves because of their inability to reconcile the necessity for development and the urgency of preserving the physical and moral environment that makes this possible.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and especially on the symbolic relevance of Kurtz and Marlow and the readers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heart of Darkness is arguably the most read short story in the world, for the simple reason that its theme and the aesthetics of its form appeal to our consciousness in and out of time and space, but perhaps because of the controversy surrounding his portrayal of the African other. Narrated from multiple points of views, Conrad sought to represent his truth of the reality he saw as faithful as possible. This avid search for the real or rather the desire to write back to Europe and perhaps to meet the demands of an enthusiastic Victorian period in quest for an image to feed its imagination rather met and continues to meet with resistance. This attempt to portray the truth brought with it a plethora of thematic concerns that drive the text comfortably across cultures, space and time. Earlier critics of the text

were concerned with the form and the psychological introspection into the characters; this reading eventually changed drastically with Chinua Achebe's accusation of racism¹. Today there are still critics who continue to read him in that regard, mindful of recent developments in world history. This paper however investigates the moral dilemma that confronts Marlow, the omniscient narrator, the writer and the reader because of their inability to reconcile the boundary lines between the necessities of economic development and the moral infelicities that come with that.

In very convincing ways, Conrad succeeds to engage our sympathy in Marlow's process of self-interrogation and by implication, in the West's attempts to justify actions of plunder and war around the world. The desire for development no doubt is genuine and even Conrad would want us to understand, sympathise and come to terms with this fact. A hundred years after the publication of this story, the facts that gave it global currency still persist even though they do take different forms. The demand for oil and gas, wood, uranium and other raw materials continue to portray Africa as a theatre for mortal confrontation. The Chinese incursion into Africa, the growing in strength of the BRICS² block, the growing boldness of some African states, have all fashioned a new political picture and idiom for Africa. The tensions that characterised Conrad's Europe vis-a-vis Africa still persist and justify in many ways why *Heart of Darkness* continues to be read in the perspective of international economics and politics.

Generally, critics have not been sympathetic to Kurtz and Marlow. These two characters have received varied attention as far as their relationship to each other and as far as their role in the debacle of the people they colonised is concerned. Read against the background of present world crisis and the role we are all called to play, Kurtz and Marlow still represent the Dr Jerkyl's and Mr. Hyde puzzle. Put differently, both Kurtz and Marlow pose the difficulty of representation and that of shared guilt. Marlow like us is faced with the dilemma of affirming the evil of the economic exploitation of the de-centred people and at the same time subtly recognizing its necessity. It is his and by implications our inability to act accordingly in the face of this dilemma, that is the major aesthetic interest in the text. As it shall be demonstrated, *Heart of Darkness*' greatness lies in its inability to resolve this difficulty; to make a clear statement on the right and wrong of the matter. The novella resists that moment of epiphany when the writer, the reader, Kurtz and Marlow and the omniscient narrator would have made defining statements about their views on how the necessity for development obligatorily engages our moral sense; but also whether or not it is possible to engage the one without the other.

The ensuing discussion can be understood in perspective against the background of the new historical reading practice. Put in context, that one of the major issues in reading a text against this theoretical background is how the events of the moment gave birth to the text and how in turn the text influences the development of the society that gives birth to it. Additionally, new historicism holds that the text is a summation of the history of the people, arguing that history itself is some kind of text. Put differently, new historicist reading attempts to establish a relation between text and context, without one blurring the other. In his discussion of the possibility of teaching *Heart of Darkness* from a new historicist perspective, Mark A. Eaton talks of the "ways in which Conrad mediates history in writing a fictionalized account of his experiences in Africa" (Ed. Hunt Hawkins and Brian Shaffer 55). This thought is built on the heels of Stephen Greenblatt's argument that "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of a society" (Qtd in Eaton.55). *Heart of Darkness* can be conveniently read within this perspective because it is a product of both exogenous and endogenous forces. In 1876, King Leopold II of Belgium organised a meeting in Brussels in which he indicated his plans for the Congo as consisting in going "to open to civilization the only part of our globe where Christianity has not yet penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population" (Murfin 5)³. The scramble for Africa begun in 1884, climaxed at the beginning of the 20th century, opened the way

¹For more on this see his article "Achebe (2000).

² Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and China

³ Quoted by Maurice (1961).

for an unprecedented exploitation and distortion of Africa and African history. The story of this macabre and shameful dispossession of the continent enacts itself again today⁴ in even more tragic ways, especially as it has expanded its scope to include the Asian dragons that did not take part in the original struggle. More than at any time before had this text been so relevant since its publication, where the violation of Africa in the name of development of infrastructure is more present and urgent; but also where the outcry for sustainability has reached its apogee. The urgency of the rereading of this context can be understood against the background of what David Adams believes is the artist's purpose which is "to make you hear, o make you feel-it is before all, to make you see" (qtd in Adams 118). It is in this context that this paper attempts to understand the moral outrage resulting from our inability to engage in a sustained humane development agenda.

1.1. Kurtz and the Enchanted Groove: Ivory as Metaphor for Natural and Human Resources

The beginning of the novella sets the stage for the material enchantment for which Kurtz and later Marlow get entrapped into. The description of the air as "condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless" (17) over what is supposed to be London, the capital of business at the time is not simply a linguistic lapses, but a genuine expression of a feeling of mistrust that characterizes the merchandise activities of London and the team that is waiting to be dispatched to the continent. The narrator attempts a characterization of the paradoxical atmosphere of gloom and beauty that define the world he is trying to describe, and which Marlow will get into, but of which Kurtz is already a prisoner. The London of the narrator's description was the greatest city on the earth, a symbol of unparalleled prosperity from where some of the greatest people left for other parts of the world. The narrator confesses that from the port of London all categories of people have set sail to or from in the quest for wellbeing. When the narrator talks of the "interlopers" of the Eastern trade, and "Hunters for gold" he foreshadows his ultimate question-to wit, "What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth?" (19), he somehow prepares the stage for our understanding of the business world with all its unexplained and inexplicable mysteries and complexities. To Yael Levin, the introductory words of the text show that

it is not only the narrator and the subject of the story but also the tale itself that is enveloped in a hazy screen, a narrative obstruction that limits the reader's comprehension and knowledge...Marlow's elusive representations are not merely a consequence of his sceptical outlook and the accumulation of his subject conjecture-the turn to the otherwise present follows Marlow's artist and ethical stance as a story teller, an aesthetic that is not motivated by a narrative endeavour to provide an unequivocal affirmation. (51)

Levin's affirmation justifies the omniscient narrator's stand. He sets himself apart from the rest to give us a position he considers is as true as he saw. Wittingly or unwittingly he actually prepares the grounds for us to judge both Kurtz and Marlow on the terms we decide to. He tells his tale in a way that it eventually and subtly works Marlow or rather disgusts him to the point that he simply cannot bear his interlocutor anymore. His response is indicative: "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth" (19). His insistence on the fact of London having had its own days of darkness when he states: "But darkness was here yesterday" (20), seems to subtly justify his own story, but more perhaps make it look genuine by his seeming impartiality.

In his tale, Marlow vacillates between truth and the exigencies of morality. The question earlier raised in the introduction to this paper, as to whether it is possible to occasion development without compromising one's moral integrity surfaces in Marlow's ruminations about the nature of the business world: "The conquest of the earth, which must mean the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only" (21). In essence, Marlow from the onset does not disparage attempts at economic exchanges, but recognizes that it is always the law of the strong that determines where economic power should till to. He seems to be a man disgusted at inequality, but at the same

⁴ The conflicts in the Central African Republic, Niger and Libya among others are due generally to issues of mineral resource exploitation.

time supportive of economic exchange that inexorably involves malpractices. Marlow's subtle satire should not in any way undermine the overwhelming truth about big businesses and the inherent sincerity of his statement, but perhaps also of the moral difficulty involved. David Adams has argued that "Kurtz is the character whose attempts to perform rescue work land him in the most dire need of rescue himself" (143). This is the same position in which Marlow finds himself. His apparent moral purity will later on be corrupted by an overwhelming emotional involvement in Kurtz's own debacle.

Marlow paints a bleak picture of the atrocities committed by the person or the idea he is in search of. From his standpoint, or rather from the angle from which this is shot, the person is evil personified. The evidence is overwhelming as the facts are incontestably real. Conrad at this point prepares the narrative both to shock us later by Marlow's attitude and perhaps also to make a statement on the paradox of a world where economic challenges require an amoral business ethic. Here and there, the author litters the text with images of violence, the result of an unrestrained ego destroying a harmless people subjected to silence. The people whom Marlow describes as having a "wild vitality" and an "intense energy of movement" and who are "a great comfort to look at" (28) are completely disregarded. This picture contrasts sharply with what happens to them as they are termed "criminals", described as "moribund shapes" (31). He sees figures that are in an "intolerable and appalling manner" who were "scattered in every pose of contorted collapse" leaving Marlow "horror-struck" (32). It is at this stage that Kurtz is described as the "best agent", an "exceptional man" (37) considered to be of the "greatest importance" to the business of ivory.

The metaphoric representation of ivory as the totality of Western search for resources "rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it" (37) shows the extent to which it had enchanted everybody. All the agents sent to the trading post, only wished that they could be sent to the places where they could earn percentages from the ivory business. The manager's discussion with Marlow does not and cannot center on the cruelty of Kurtz, it is not even a subject for discussion. That Mr. Kurtz should be treated as a "universal genius" even when it is common knowledge that he is responsible for the atrocities committed on blacks is scandalous in itself. It betrays however the inhumanity with which the exploitation of Africa's resources is carried out. And Kurtz appropriately represents that voice.

Mr. Kurtz is the real spectre of untruth; he is the uncanny expression of the wicked soul of capitalism, heard but not seen. The whole text is about his devilish mercantile attitude towards material possession, but only sparsely do we see and hear him in person. He is simply a voice off-camera but whose impact is as present on the scene as Marlow's physical presence. His shadow is cast all around the world of the novella to the extent that he dwarfs the totality of characters whose physical presence we feel. He is simply synonymous to the ivory for which he builds his reputation, perhaps because to Conrad and all the narrators, this is what counts.

Marlow himself is stunned by the hollowness and overbearing emptiness from "Nowhere" (65) who swears only by material interests. Mr. Kurtz's possessiveness is satirized in his emphatic "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my----." reported with such mocking sarcasm, reveals the vanity of his actions and undertakings even though this does not remove in any way the truth of the exactions and the reality of the trauma caused on the resources and the ignorant people to whom he has brought to bear his calamitous search for material resources. The source of his origins, attributed to the whole of Europe defines and justifies the global character of his actions and the totality of European involvement in the capitalist deluge in Africa. Perhaps the narrator's refusal to name Kurtz and to give him a fixed identity is an artistic and aesthetic ploy to paint him not as an individual, but the collective conscience of the whole Western developed world. The impersonal "it" (65) that Marlow describes and characterizes Kurtz reinforces the fact of his simply being the soul of Europe.

The soul of Europe is in conflict with itself. The Russian Harlequin's story of Kurtz's attempts to kill him for ivory could have been taken as a simple anodyne fact; rather it reveals the morbidity of his avid quest for Ivory. The coldness with which the Russian renders the account of Kurtz's attempted murder of him suggests his own resignation and by implication the resignation of the Africans. He too like the Africans is at the mercy of this deluge

that has come to drown the hopes of a hitherto peaceful people. In narrating the Russian's story, Marlow hopes to give evidence to Kurtz's megalomania, to Europe's indiscriminate battle for resources still present in our own times. The search for material resources in Africa today is not simply the panache of any one European country, but involves all the powers that could flex their financial muscles. The dragons of the East, Brazil, India and the old continent and the United States of America have all joined in the battle for resources in Africa. And in all of these, Africa remains the silent patient torn apart by the emotionless cruelty of the rich. Marlow compares the Africa of today to a carcass torn into shreds by violent and hungry dogs determined to see the last of their prey. And in his usual satirical and ironic tone, the narrator makes a silent statement on the silence of the Africans, which silence could be read as Africa's complicity in her own destruction. The civil strife in the Central African Republic, the Republic of Niger, the republic of Libya, Nigeria are all torn apart by gangs whose major concern are the natural resources of these countries. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan has argued that precisely because it is written at the turn of the century, *Heart of Darkness* is "...uncannily prophetic in its view of a civilisation that has ostensibly gone through a process of secularization and the death of the absolute, but that- true to the Freudian paradox that Lacan notes-has amplified the desire for the Absolute and turned it into a monstrous force" (64). Erdinast-Vulcan pushes the argument further by connecting the oedipal paradigm in the text to the absoluteness represented in the law, or rather the desire for the law. This translated, into ideological terms, she argues, becomes the "desire for totalizing ideological systems, religious or political, or for the leader figure, that has discharged the most destructive energies in the history of humanity" (64). Her insight into the meaning of the text in our times squares in directly into the politico-economic struggles of big and even some emerging powers to have a hold on the resources of vulnerable states. The greater part of civil strives in the continent can be understood against this background, but more importantly Conrad's millennial importance and timelessness can be grasped within this context.

Marlow reveals that even at his dying bed, Kurtz is still revered and respected by those he has brutalized. Their readiness to defend and protect him is shocking. Not only has Kurtz possessed their ivory, but he has also succeeded in possessing their soul. The readiness with which they come out when Marlow and his entourage arrive betrays the grandeur of his nature, but the extent to which he has a hold on them and by implication their resources. He is in many ways a symbol of those multinationals that have a hold on their impoverished workers. His words as the Russian reports still have meaning even in his death bed. The very Ivory for which Kurtz is ready to massacre the Africans has become his source of power, to the point that he uses it to overwhelm those who have legitimate authority over it. Kurtz could be such a remarkable man to succeed in keeping the Africans under his control even after he has excavated from the entrails of the earth, their cherished resources. They continue to obey him with Christian patience and obedience. This is the paradox of the whole enterprise of truth; the truth of the powers of those who own capital, who can still succeed to keep their captives in total obedience while giving the impression that they have allowed them the freedom they so much desire. This is what Mark Wollaeger calls the "elusiveness of truth" (74).

Marlow portrays the stunning picture of a man abandoned by his wealth, made ridiculous by a wild dream whose roots are in the illusion he creates of himself, but who recognizes in the abyss of his mind that all is not and cannot be well. His position on the stretcher replicates that of the great Alexander the Great whose last days make nonsense of his immense glory. Kurtz is a man destroyed by his own very capitalist tendencies. He is overwhelmed by the quest for material possession and in Conrad's moral theology; this is the thing that eventually has to destroy him. Marlow's description of him is inimical of the state of the West decayed inside by the very material values for which they spend their time in search of. He describes Kurtz's face as an "ivory face" which has the look of "somber pride", expressive of "ruthless power" and of "craven terror", but perhaps more especially of "an intense and hopeless despair", which culminates in his famous denunciation of the whole act as "'The horror! The horror!'" (85). Kurtz lives in the ivory tower. He has, during all his life in the jungle, been blinded by the illusion of material possession. His self-realisation, dramatic and tragic as it may appear, is an affirmation of the worthlessness of European enterprise in Africa and a

revelation of the deception that the African continent has been subjected to, replete with the kind of horror represented by Adam Hochschild.

The horror announced or rather recognized in the heart of economic exploitation of the continent is a some sort of self-confession that recognizes that the true essence of Western or capitalist incursion into the continent is basically self-aggrandizement that has nothing to do with the progress of Africa, or even if it has, that impact is minimal. The reader's inability to put a finger on Kurtz's own words or statements in the novella, that fact of his being simply a voice echoes the material nothingness of his actions on the growth of the continent to which he claims to be an emissary of light.

Marlow's narrative and Conrad's omniscient presence show the extent to which his aura attempts to cover the macabre brutality of the search for ivory. The omniscient narrator and Marlow recount a story where capitalist interests have surpassed any philanthropic gestures or economic assistance to a dispossessed people. Line by line, the narrators make the reader to understand that they are both revolted by the events, but at the same time sympathetic of the pure lack of understanding that Kurtz showed and that the people back in Europe have of the truth surrounding this famous colonizing mission. Marlow is angered by this lack of understanding because he thought that Europeans back at home were "intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating presence" because he is convinced that "they could not possibly know the things I knew" (87). Yet even with this knowledge, he fails to testify to this major truth when the time came simply because as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan in her article "*Heart of Darkness* and the Ends of Man" has attested, he refuses to take his responsibilities. Erdinast-Vulcan even compares this scenario to that of those who during the holocaust failed to act or acted with impunity because they claimed that "I was doing my job" (20).

The material world of the novella is characterized by terror, horror, abominable acts and oppression. The quest for ivory perverts the text and its world. It is a world where economic interests override any moral considerations. This is precisely where Marlow's difficulty and the reader's lies. Marlow like his creator, the novelist and in some significant way the reader is caught in the throes of an urgent need for the economic development of the continent, wherefore the justification of the exploitation of ivory, but at the same time, aware of the brutality of these exactions. The narrators, Marlow and Conrad all make frantic attempts to draw us into the discussions, but especially to engage our moral sense into the paradox of development and the pains that come with it. The essence as we shall see below is to engage our sympathy and in that way, find ways of justifying or at least understanding this great enterprise and by that accepting to heal the wounds of moral lies.

1.2. Conrad, Marlow, the Reader and the Wounds of Conscience

Heart of Darkness is built on one truth, the establishment of the fact that the mission to Africa is worthwhile. The necessity to civilize the blacks is of prime importance, and the need to domesticate and extract natural resources is of immense and valuable necessity to the growth of the continent, at least in principle. This is the essence of the enterprise entrusted to Kurtz. However, this enterprise is wrecked and the novelist and Marlow, his alter ego, see the necessity to justify because they think that Kurtz could be like any one of us and the situation in which he finds himself is so difficult that his actions, brutal as they are, should be understood against this background. There can be no other way than to get the reader involved in this justification. Conrad and Marlow are caught in the throes of their own malpractices and from the beginning of the text, Conrad, and later the first narrator and finally Marlow are bent on justifying Kurtz's actions.

The convoluted nature of the narrative itself signals a frantic attempt at self-effacement by the novelist, but at the same time a pushing away of responsibilities to other agencies. The first narrator's narrative is snappy and glides suddenly and soon into Marlow's whose first interjection is about Britain having also been one of the dark places on the earth. The narrator seems to be shifting blame, and in a way saying that this story should be heard from the real source, even though we can question the authenticity of his rendition. In asserting emphatically that Britain had also

been a place of darkness, Marlow sets the stage for justifying, albeit subtly, why the mission to Africa is noble. Even when he will later on in the narrative recognize that this mission failed, yet he puts it in perspective and context.

Marlow's narrative is riddled with paradoxes, uncertainties and most of all ambiguities. He is torn between these blacks who have a "wild vitality, an intense energy of movement" (28), who have been rendered "moribund" (31) by sickness and brutality. Marlow is ill at ease with the Europeans' attitudes and their treatment of blacks; he is revolted by their lack of sense and their ruthless quest for material gains. His aversion towards the insidious brutality of the enterprise of civilization is unambiguous. Strange enough, the more Marlow gets closer to Kurtz, the more he begins to see the necessity to be sympathetic towards him. His conversation with the manager (40) probably is a moment of epiphany that reveals to him that sooner or later, he too could or will become like Kurtz, contaminated by the evil of the interior. Whether or not he wanted it, Marlow's discussions with other agents of the station or enterprise impose on him against his voluntary will to contemplate Kurtz's actions and his personality, reason why "now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz", that even though he acknowledges that he was not very interested in him, yet he was "curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there" (46). His attitude towards Kurtz is ambiguous even at this stage, because he is struggling to distance himself from the truth that he will eventually face.

More than anyone else, Marlow understands the underpinnings of this enterprise and having gone through the forest himself to meet Kurtz, he begins to feel for this "remarkable man". But Marlow's story is difficult to tell even when he seems to do it with some efficiency. The entire crew as the omniscient narrator reports is apparently asleep and by implication, one can think that the story is boring or is simply considered another European lie to her people. The deeper Marlow and his crew penetrated into the *Heart of Darkness*, the greater insight he seems to have of Kurtz's difficulty-the impenetrability- and the more sympathy he begins to develop in relation to him. By narrating to us the ambiguous story of the blacks, Marlow wittingly pulls a mirror towards us so that we can see and pass our own judgement in line with his on Kurtz's tribulations. The rotten hippo meat, the old dirty dough the blacks eat and Marlow's reporting of their possibility of wanting to eat humans because of hunger are all preparatory scenes aimed at justifying the difficult task Kurtz is subject to accomplishing.

Marlow literarily renders him formless and perhaps in this raising him to the statue of a God; in affirming whether satirically or not that he feared losing the "estimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz" (63), Marlow pushes us into our unconscious to reveal the extent to which this phenomenon had an impact on him. The sentences that follow are littered with dashes which I consider to be the expression of his amazement, but also his inability to grasp the essence of this material madness. The narrator Marlow in presenting the picture of Kurtz in the way he does increases our suspense with the ultimate aim of defending his association with Kurtz. The silence that follows this is protracted and concludes with "I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie" (63), contradicting his former aversion for lies. Like Kurtz, Marlow looks into himself and comes to the conclusion that "nevertheless, I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man" (78). Even if the narrator plays with both words and emotions, he nonetheless in so doing aims at making an objective statement on the difficult choices Kurtz was faced with in the name of empire. Arguably, Achebe in his famous article "An Image of Africa" attributes this failure to pass judgement to Europe's refusal to recognize her persistent misconception of the other or her betrayal of her own ignorance.

The quest for material possessions does not come alone. Kurtz representing the whole of the Western world has metaphorically looked into her actions and come to the conclusion that her actions are atrocious. The moments of solitude in the forest have given Kurtz time to have "looked within" (82) and seen his and Europe's own madness. This is some kind of confession reported by Marlow who uses this opportunity to make a subtle case in favour of Kurtz, whose memory Marlow believes should be treated with the caution that it deserves because he is simply a victim of circumstances beyond his human control. This explains why he considers his association to Kurtz as "strange" and the relationship with Kurtz as an "unforeseen partnership" which constitutes a "choice of nightmares" which is forced upon him by "these mean and greedy phantoms" (84). Marlow's opinion vacillates between

revulsion and sympathy and he tries to drag the reader into this by the intermittent interspersing of the actual harshness of the forest environment and Kurtz's gratuitous brutality. The aim for Conrad is to objectify the situation so that the reader can generously concur with Marlow's representation of the dilemma in which the protagonist finds himself.

In effect, Marlow is a spokesperson for a very difficult cause, one for which he is sympathetic with the criminal, a criminal whose crimes he acknowledges are inhuman. To win the case, the narrator must make his readers feel the same and the major method he uses are a narrative that blends objective truth and subjective self-questioning. He suggests that the foundations of his story are built on first hand information precisely because he was "... within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement," and probably discovered that he could not have the courage to make any meaningful statements. Marlow's own inability to act justifies his belief that Kurtz must have been "a remarkable man" because he has the courage to act. The staggering reality of Kurtz's courage is his ability to characterise his judgement as 'The horror!' and to define it as having "...the appalling face of a glimpsed truth-the strange commingling of desire and hate" (86).

In comparing Kurtz to himself Marlow intends by that to insist on the truth of his story, to involve our conscience in the difficulty Kurtz finds himself in, to justify his actions, and to avoid condemnation of the protagonist's acts. To Marlow, Kurtz's act of self-realization is an act of triumph. His cry of the horror, whatever that means or rather whatever he looked and saw is an act of courage which he who equally goes there and who is supposed to be sane could not have had the courage to. Reading the protagonist's perception as an act of awareness of the nothingness of materialism, Marlow is perhaps saying he has the courage to reject what is apparently the reason for them being in Africa. It is no longer the material aspect of the tale with which Marlow is concerned, but the immaterial part or put differently, the spiritual part.

In consenting that Kurtz's cry is an affirmation of a "moral victory" reason why he has "remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond," (87), describing him as a remarkable man, Marlow insists on justifying and making us justify Kurtz's actions. Every evidence points to the fact that Marlow and the omniscient narrator and by implication the writer takes sides with Kurtz. In allowing Marlow to tell a story that the Omniscient narrator himself or the writer would have told, the narrator escapes inadvertently from accusations of subjectivity and in that way ascertains the objectivity of his narrative. More than simply wanting to objectify his story, the writer equally intends to draw our sympathy to it, or rather to force us to accept Marlow's verdict as real. It is only in involving all the readers in this story and its acceptance that the novella has its essence and Marlow and Kurtz too. The decision to keep Kurtz's memory alive even if it is through lying is appended to Marlow's feeling that we could all be in his situation and therefore in that context need to show understanding. Inevitably, Marlow, the omniscient narrator and Conrad the writer all drag us into sympathy and guilt.

The writer's struggle to get everybody involved is indexed in his conviction that Kurtz is simply a sacrificial lamb. The economic necessities that push Kurtz to behave the way he does are sacrosanct to our/humanity's existence. When Marlow acknowledges that "It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phantoms." (84), he is pushing forward the argument that consciously or unconsciously, we are all inevitable partners in the enterprise of exploitation that continues to undermine the development of Africa. In recognizing the unavailability of his attachment to Kurtz, Marlow reveals the difficulty of denying our and Europe's general attachment. The dividing line between what is generally morally correct and acceptable and what is economically essential and by implication correct but not acceptable is difficult to assess. Conrad recognized this difficulty and his multiple narrative points of view attempt to blur these moral lines or at the least to create ambiguity and leave the question to be answered in any way that the reader deems necessary. Put differently, the writer's style indulges our collective responsibility explained by the understanding that we are caught between our own survival and that of our national civilizations, resulting in difficult

moral implications, which result in that moment when as Johnathan Dollimore contends “our humanity is thrown into crisis” (80).

2. CONCLUSION

In writing this tale, Conrad intended both to shock the readers on the attitudes and state of being of the other and at the same time to raise awareness on the evils of capitalism. In his struggle to get his message through, Conrad probably thought of the moral implications of an emphatic accusation against his host Britain, but at the same time worried over the necessity of a viable economic sustainability dependent on the force of character of the exploiters. The novella details with conviction Kurtz’s difficulty in executing the job for which Europe sends him to Africa. Through Marlow’s narration, the reader is given to understand the *raison d’être* of Kurtz’ attitude even if the narrator does not openly justify it. It is precisely this apparently objective picture that renders condemnation of Kurtz’s acts near impossible, but most especially that imputes our collective responsibility. The narrative from all the perspectives or points of view does not give room for the reader to capture at what point if such a moment existed where the writer clearly defines his position concerning Kurtz’s attitude. In leaving the issue to our personal judgement, the writer refuses to take responsibility for his narrative precisely because the issue at stake is beyond his own personal judgement. His lack of judgement is the result of his affirmation of sympathy and an unconscious desire that we all get involved in that sympathy and guilt, because to the narrator and by implication the writer, it is only in doing so that we will understand the extent of Kurtz’s difficulty. The narrative is jostled with ambiguity and doubt. Marlow drags the writer and the reader into the complicity of Kurtz’s criminal act because the necessity for economic survival has relevance in the general survival instinct of the European society that he represents and about which he thinks everyone of them is directly involved. This is the source of the writer’s, narrators’ and the reader’s moral dilemma. The story like many of his works as John Peters has indicated in his *Joseph Conrad’s Critical reception* has room for limitless interpretations, especially with the development of many new critical paradigms, some of which relate directly to the economic, social, cultural and political pressures of our times. In a recent study dealing with Conrad’s moral paradoxes, Athanasius A. Ayuk concludes that “The moral and social tensions in his fiction are occasioned by the lack of compassion in society’s moral and ethical constructs, but especially in the blind materialism of his and our times” (222). On the heels of this, this study sees these tensions rather in terms of the author/reader inability to draw the line between economic necessity and the demands of economic morality. Conrad drags the reader deep into the controversy of the unethical economic world and somehow succeeds to make him doubt his own stance vis-a-vis the open and brutal exploitation of Africa’s human and natural resources.

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