



# Heart of Darkness: The Fictive Bridge from Durkheim's *Homo Duplex* to Freud's Civilization's Discontents

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**ABSTRACT**

This essay undertakes an analysis of the underlying causes behind Kurtz's difficulties in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, primarily drawing upon the scholarly works of Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud regarding civilization and its discontents. Drawing from sociological and psychological concepts of the late nineteenth century and examining instances of alienation within industrialized society, the paper approaches Kurtz's issues of corruption through Durkheim's *homo duplex* and Freud's theory of psychological conflicts among the id, ego, and superego. Kurtz emerges as a construct and casualty of European society, burdened by its imposition of strict rules and regulations aimed at subduing primal desires and interests in favor of collective security, peace, and social order. Therefore, his liberation from the oppressive structures of European society in the Congo grants him the opportunity to expose his primal self, characterized by inclinations towards violence, debauchery, and transgressive behavior. The responsibility for transforming Mr. Kurtz into the ruler of the jungle cannot be placed solely on the natives, as the central culprit, as elucidated by Conrad's interventions in the text, is the European civilization that curtails and suppresses individual identities and desires. The essay portrays the prevalent discontentment and restlessness inherent in the early stages of industrial society through a combination of sociological and psychological elements and fictive characters.

**Keywords:** *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad, *Homo Duplex*, Civilization, Primal instinct



*Mistah Kurtz – he dead*

*A penny for the old Guy*

(From T. S. Eliot's epigraph to *Hollow Men*)

## Introduction

Conrad's problematic character "Mistah" Kurtz's adventures in the Congo have frequently been a subject of scrutiny in literary history. Although the uncanny habitat with its natives far from his civilized homeland, completely different from the men surrounding Kurtz's former life could easily be blamed for inflicting malice on him, it does not change the fact that he is a fabrication of the civilization from which he has descended. Therefore, this article argues that the discontent, which Freud and Durkheim associate with the concept of Western civilization, is the malignant force behind Kurtz's horror and terror. Kurtz represents the *homo duplex*, which indicates the dual combination of primitive and civil values within an individual; he is weary of his civilized part and enjoys his times in his *homo simplex*, which is dominated by his primordial self. The civilization that Kurtz comes from has repressed his primitive feelings and all these primal instincts have found a haven where social rules do not have the authority to restrict desires and temptations hidden in the sphere of the unconscious. In Freudian terms, Kurtz's liberation from the shackles of the superego has enabled him to let his id and ego run free in the wilderness of the Congo. His primitive form and actions can easily be a target for criticism and punishment under the norms of Western laws and regulations, but his real self, which has not grown authentic reactions hitherto due to the constraining filter of society, has revealed itself as a man of debauchery and extreme passions. In general, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Kurtz constitute a significant shift between Durkheim's positivist social facts and Freud's unconscious psychological sphere. Thus, this article scrutinizes the character of Kurtz through Durkheim's and Freud's studies and highlights the oppressive corpus of Western civilization, whose members have found it moderately preferable to release their primitive instincts in relatively undeveloped lands with a different culture in hostile and unbridled conditions. The focus of this study is on certain parts of Conrad's life, its impact on authoring his worldwide famous novel, *Heart of Darkness*, its significance within the philosophy and culture of modernism, Conrad's motives for creating his characters in the novel and its association with the philosophy and teachings of Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud.

## Joseph Conrad

Having a variety of adventurous experiences in several countries, Conrad wrote plenty of stories about different figures and cultures. Born into a family of Polish gentry members in 1857, Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski grew up without his parents after his mother and father died of tuberculosis in 1865 and 1869, respectively. His father Apollo Korzeniowski was a national hero who influenced his son through his affection for revolutionary politics, literature, and adventures. Being exposed to the malignancy of Russian imperialism at an early age, Conrad left Poland at the age of 17 to pursue his maritime adventures rather than serve the Russian army. Conrad aspired to find an alternative country to continue his maritime training because France required him to obtain a passport from Russia, which refused to issue one because of his father's schismatic activities. Conrad's next destination was the British Merchant Marine Service where he passed the officer exam in 1880 (Peters, 2006, p. 26).

If we borrow theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski's terms, Conrad's journey on a boat as an assistant captain to the Belgian Congo in May 1890 can be called the source for his emotional memory to pen certain books and short stories. For example, George Antoine Klein, who was an agent with a terminal disease, died on Conrad's boat, and he is often considered an inspiration for Kurtz (Peters, 2006, p. 28). Another living example for Kurtz was a British explorer, Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904), who worked as an agent for King Leopold II to explore the rich materials of the region. He was successful in his mission because "he was an impatient, choleric egotist who bullwhipped his own men and shot hundreds of native Africans who stood in his way" (Bemrose, 1990). In contrast to Stanley's experiences, "Conrad found a great deal of greed, waste and chaos" during his experience in Africa" (Peters 2006, p. 4). At the end of 1894, Conrad ended his maritime career. He married Jessie George in 1896 and worked as a writer in England for the rest of his life. He completed seventeen novels, two memoirs, three plays, along with plenty of short stories and letters.

Although he was personally victimized by the aggressive policies of big empires, Conrad was never a "political" writer (Peters, 2006, pp. 1-2). Hence, rather than a didactic political style in his novels, he employed both an ironic tone and various combinations of narratives. Despite his respect for England and his fellow English writers, Conrad was always different as his international background, feeling of displacement and his 20 years of experience as a sailor overseas gained him a more cosmopolitan character than his peers. For example, his incomplete novel *Suspense and Rover* as well as short

stories "The Warrior's Soul" (1917) and "The Duel" (1908) have a lot of reflections from Napoleonic France. One of Conrad's other novels, *Under Western Eyes* (1911), takes Russia and revolutionary politics as the basis of its plot. His other works such as *The Secret Agent* (1907), *The Informer* (1906) and *The Anarchist* (1906) also involve revolutionary figures and politics of his period.

## ***Heart of Darkness***

The peculiar combination of *Heart of Darkness* and Conrad's journey from oblivion to a success throughout the last century is quite remarkable in several aspects. After Conrad's death in 1924, for a long time, he was solely admired for being a writer of naval tales of adventure. Written in 1899 and well received by the public, *Heart of Darkness* had been classified among travel books until 1947 when M. D. Zabel made a critical study of Conrad's novels in his book *Portable Conrad* (Gorra, 2007, p. 550). Since then, Conrad's books, particularly *Heart of Darkness*, have become an indispensable part of most academic curricula. Its popularity and the special attention it has received have stemmed from the obscurity it formed by the darkness as the title suggests, and Conrad's never-ageing Shakespeare-like approach towards permanent human emotions on certain topics such as inflicting violence through various means, creating others and interacting with foreign cultures. Just like other masterpieces of twentieth-century literature, it is also well praised for the use of symbols and motifs. These elements have created a close language, which entitles the text to become responsive to all kinds of reading.

Conrad's approach in *Heart of Darkness* has garnered praise for a significant reason: the timing and circumstances under which it was written. It was the early 1900s, a time filled with chaos, largely influenced by the rise of heavy industry and the resulting societal changes. As industries grew and became more mechanized, people started questioning traditional beliefs. Ideas like women's rights, universal suffrage, democracy, and social justice began to challenge the status quo, leading to a shift in the intellectual and political landscape. *Heart of Darkness* can be seen as a product of this transformative period, tapping into a strong current of criticism and support for European practices. Advances in science and exposure to different cultures also played a part in undermining the certainties and absolute truths provided by the Christian Western world. Thus, civilization for Conrad is "both a hypocritical veneer and a valuable achievement to be vigilantly guarded" (Conrad, 1988, p. 68).

Some scholars like Harold Bloom attach the success of *Heart of Darkness* to “its own hopeless obscurantism” and they are right to point to the parts where Marlow has no idea about his murmurings. These parts are out of Conrad’s control so they might be signs of weakness in terms of the novel’s plot construction (Bloom, 2008, p. 12). Cedric Watts describes *Heart of Darkness* as “a mixture of oblique autobiography, traveller’s yarn, adventure story, psychological odyssey, political satire, symbolic prose-poem, black comedy, spiritual melodrama and skeptical meditation” (Watts, 2012, p. 45). Furthermore, *Heart of Darkness* still “addresses problems that continue to make the headlines of our contemporary world, such as racial and gendered oppression, colonial and imperial power, material exploitations and genocidal horrors” (Lawtoo, 2012, p. 4). In essence, the novel continues to retain its appeal among scholars, garnering increasing attention and recognition. However, as its prophetic commentary has confounded many through its historical accuracy and cultural rectitude, others have acknowledged its quality in various themes and topics.<sup>1</sup>

One of the significant reasons for the evolution of Conrad and his works in the twentieth century is due to Chinua Achebe’s notorious article “An Image of Africa” (1975) which turned the scale to the “imperialistic,” “colonial” and “a bloody racist” (Achebe, 1978, p. 9) Conrad. Achebe criticizes Conrad for dismissing Africa as a place whose history and culture are deemed unworthy of mentioning. Instead of blaming the savages for Kurtz’s deeds, Achebe’s article seeks the origins for Kurtz’s brutality within the flaws of imperial desires. Achebe later revised his harsh approach towards *Heart of Darkness* in his preface to the book and appreciated that “Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth” (Achebe in Conrad, 1988, p. 262). Despite the allegations, the novel has manifested itself in different forms of culture. For example, F.F. Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is loosely attached to Conrad’s novel, and the fact that he chose *Heart of Darkness* as a metaphorical source to describe the horrors of the Vietnam War can easily relate to the fearful atmosphere and the indirect war as well as colonial criticism both the novel and the book share.

*Heart of Darkness* encompasses a plethora of intricacies pertaining to aspects both in support of and against colonialism. However, its essence primarily resides in the

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1 The characteristic of *Heart of Darkness* can be ascribed to its status as a modernist novel. It exhibits an inherent openness to multiple interpretations, necessitating the reader’s active engagement with the text to extract its intended significance. Put differently, the novel offers a plethora of possible meanings that are contingent upon the reader’s interaction, thus exemplifying a crucial attribute of modernist literature.

depiction of oppressive mechanisms employed by civilization and the ensuing conflict between the civilized realm and alternative cultures. Conrad's conception of popular consent depends on popular methods of convincing people to be ruled, so he is aware of the social mechanism that oppresses people within the guise of behaviorism. For example, Conrad criticizes Russia for not having a monarchy that "has never been sanctioned by popular tradition, by ideas of loyalty, of devotion, of political necessity, of simple expediency, or even by the power of the sword" (Conrad, 1905, p. 47). In Conrad's view, a country must have certain methods such as "law, order, justice, right, truth about itself or the rest of the world" so that it can be capable of organizing the whole society. As an avid traveler, Conrad witnessed how "Europe, having gone a step or two further" (Conrad, 1905, p. 48) created a system that did not require coercive methods to produce public consent, manipulate people's lifestyles, and restrict unwanted activities. Conrad displays the risks of running such a system and country through a product of that society, Kurtz, and explains how so-called modern civilization can abuse the nature of humankind:

The trouble of the civilized world is the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action tending towards the restraint of particular ambitions. (Conrad, 1905, p. 54)

Restraining particular ambitions and oppressing certain feelings can create monsters when they are not controlled. In the beginning, the civilized world had difficulties in adapting social, cultural, and financial issues according to people's demands. If we look at the evolution of modern society, there are tracks of blood, revolution, violence and negotiations everywhere. Laws and regulations have been passed to fulfil people's expectations and adjust the definitions and limits of crime and punishment. Today, there are many venues or services in which an individual can release their adverse energies. In the realm of political history, the consequences of uncontrolled restraint of ambitions can be observed in instances of authoritarian regimes. When leaders suppress the ambitions and aspirations of their citizens, denying them the freedom to pursue their goals and dreams, it can breed resentment, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness among the population. Over time, these suppressed ambitions can fuel social unrest, protests, or even violent uprisings, as witnessed in various historical contexts, such as the Arab Spring movements in the early 2010s.

However, during the post-industrial era of the late nineteenth century, there was a preoccupation with establishing societal order, resulting in the neglect of individual losses. The capitalist system, as a sophisticated manifestation of industrialism, exhibits adaptability and self-improvement by addressing inherent flaws. Given its dynamic nature, a definitive form of oppression and relief for individuals does not persist. Consequently, individuals facing challenges abroad, such as soldiers returning from duty, now engage in treatment and rehabilitation programs. This is due to the recognition that involuntary or uncontrollable exposure to diverse cultures and countries can be detrimental to reintegrating into their previous domestic lives. This process requires a significant adjustment period to regain familiarity with their former routines.

## Enlightenment and Society

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed profound transformations across the realms of individuality, society, and social institutions. Esteemed figures, through their notable literary works and associated social movements, exerted a substantial influence on the course of civilization during this pivotal era. Noteworthy examples abound, as a multitude of eminent thinkers challenged longstanding beliefs and conventional wisdom. Charles Lyell's groundbreaking publication *Principles of Geology* in the 1820s, for instance, scrutinized conventional notions of the earth's age, while Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 contested the biblical narrative of human creation. Additionally, the writings of Karl Marx (*Das Kapital*, 1867), Emile Durkheim (*The Division of Labor in Society* and *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 1895), and Sigmund Freud (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899) held pivotal significance, profoundly influencing religious, financial, ideological, social, and psychological perspectives. These works, rooted in the principles of the Enlightenment, which espoused notions of liberty and independent thinking, were shaped by the transformative impact of the Industrial Revolution on society and modern life. As the individual increasingly disassociated from the lifestyle prevailing in tribal, pre-modern, rural, and pre-industrial settings, they embarked on a journey toward self-identity within a society being molded to conform to the burgeoning industrial way of life. While the aforementioned writers primarily conveyed their insights through non-fictional works, Joseph Conrad, in contrast, vividly portrayed the experiences of individuals navigating the complexities of this era of societal reform.

By incorporating Conrad into the discourse surrounding Western enlightenment, we encounter a writer who critically examines the practices of enlightened Europe

within foreign territories, exposing how self-centered individualism, disguised as malevolence, inflicted terror and harm upon cultures and individuals. Conrad's evocative depictions challenge the principles of positivism, presenting a mysterious realm that defies complete rational explanation. Within the depths of the dark jungle, not everything can be elucidated through reason alone; it thrives on a complex interplay of desires, fears, and primal instincts. Conrad's skepticism regarding the efficacy of positivist science finds resonance throughout his literary works:

In *Victory*, Heyst comes to realize that human relationships, not facts, provide fulfillment in life. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow feels that only through understanding a fact's subjective context is knowledge perhaps possible. Conrad's questioning of Scientific Positivism is even more clear in "Heart of Darkness" and *The Secret Agent*. In "Heart of Darkness," Marlow presents the Belgian doctor who measures the heads of his patients as a fool, and in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad ridicules Positivism when Comrade Ossipon draws conclusions about Winnie Verloc's psychology based upon her facial features. (Peters, 2006, p. 30)

Conrad does not openly oppose positivism, but he highlights the subjectivity of knowledge to show the improbability of certainty on specific things. Conrad's frame narrative technique recounts Marlow's story, which is presented within a ship setting on the River Thames. Marlow, the protagonist, narrates his journey up the Congo River. This layered structure offers multiple perspectives, explores themes of exploration and imperialism, and delves into the darkness of human nature. The framing device adds ambiguity and subjectivity, engaging readers in a complex exploration of moral and psychological dilemmas. The multi-narrative technique that starts with Marlow and continues with his listeners creates a deliberate confusion about events and individual differences on narrative sequences. This is a significant theme that appears in some of his works as "a recognition of the illusory nature of Western ideals and the absolutes upon which it is based" (Peters, 2006, p. 69). The failure of an enlightened individual outside his habitat is a formulation in which Conrad expresses and reinforces the concept of the primitive self against the illusory nature of Western ideals.

## **Durkheim and *Homo Duplex***

In the late nineteenth century, most countries experienced a collective need for change across various domains, including production, government, social relations,

and cultural affairs, albeit with local variations. However, the integration into the new social regulations and principles posed significant challenges for many individuals (Berger, 2006, pp. 58-72). Émile Durkheim, in his 1897 book *Suicides*, conducted a methodical analysis of suicides as social phenomena. He associated the rise in suicide rates with heightened levels of anomie, resulting from the clash between the individual and society. Durkheim employed the concept of *homo duplex* to characterize the dual nature of individuals, consisting of instinctive drives and the moral and cultural elements instilled by society. Durkheim elucidates that “The entirety of the social environment appears to us as if inhabited by forces that, in reality, exist only within our consciousness” (Durkheim, 1912, p. 325). When the social environment fails to exert influence on an individual’s consciousness, their primal instincts assume control, leading to a state of anomie characterized by weakened social ties within familial, religious, professional, and communal groups. Thus, in order to safeguard an individual’s well-being, it is crucial to strike a balance in social regulations.

It is almost at the same period that Durkheim’s nephew and student Marcel Mauss associated the concept of gift with its symbolic meaning in primitive societies as he displayed how modern society, despite its new institutions and methods, contains a perdurable connection to ancient and pre-modern societies. Durkheim analyzes the rising number of suicides to analyze the restless and unhappy state that European nations experience. The connection between Conrad and Durkheim originates from the mental alienation they both detect in certain individuals. Although Durkheim’s analysis is mostly on the continent, Conrad expresses the situation of Europeans in Africa where their delirious actions are exempt from grave consequences like suicides. The implication for both suicides and extreme displays of hidden desires points to the social conditions that exceed an explanation of mental problems. In his letter to his friend Kazimierz Waliszewski, Conrad states, “In my case *homo duplex* has more than one meaning” (Najder, 1964, p. 240). Although Conrad’s emphasis is on his state of duality, it is clear that he interpreted the term to illustrate the polyphony of identity as a “a Polish gentleman-student; a sea-faring adventurer on French ships out of Marseilles; a British sailor who, by dint of his labors, attained the rank of captain in the Merchant Navy; a Congo River boatman caught in the sordid history of Belgian cupidity; and a lyrical master of English prose, the novelist Joseph Conrad” (Hampson, 2000, p. 188).

Durkheim employs the term *monomaniac*, coined by other scholars, to describe how people with certain obsessions can be disguised within society if that obsession

does not find any venues to reveal itself. When someone is inflicted with mental diseases, "its essential character is excessive exaltation or deep depression or general perversion" (Durkheim, 1897, p. 7). Since Durkheim points out that mental flaws cannot be localized, he associates suicides not with a distinct form of insanity but with the state of society; thus, Durkheim's theory, in a way, instructs readers that Kurtz's problems are not really related to his mental state, his melancholy, his maniacal or obsessive behaviors, but to an impulse growing gradually. Insanity might be the case for some, but the proportion of mental alienation from society requires an analysis of deterioration and degeneration that lead people to show signs of remoteness and desire to commit violence towards others or themselves.

## **Conrad's Response to the Transformation of Society**

In addition to economic factors like wealth and velocity, the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of numerous hardships. These included inadequate infrastructure, substandard living conditions, poor hygiene, significant environmental challenges, and widespread pollution. The industrialized society also grappled with unfavorable working conditions, meager wages, and excessively long working hours. As a result, many individuals, driven by aspirations for a better life and easy prosperity, sought refuge in colonies where promises of affluence and ultimate freedom were enticingly presented (Berger, 2006, pp. 89-97). Kurtz, among the Westerners, chose to venture to the colonies due to the limited opportunities available to him in his homeland, despite possessing exceptional talents. Consequently, Conrad portrays Kurtz as harboring a profound sense of frustration, as he possesses a keen awareness of the advancements, atrocities, and events transpiring in his surroundings. After all, Conrad is a keen observer of "this age of knowledge" (Conrad, 1905, p. 34) that points out how "the psychology of individuals, even in the most extreme instances, reflects the general effect of the fears and hopes of the time" (Conrad, 1905, p. 34). While Conrad may be primarily recognized as a fiction writer, he has demonstrated his ability to critically examine the events and historical context of his time, setting him apart from the philosophers and positivist writers mentioned earlier:

The end of the eighteenth century was, too, a time of optimism and of desperate mediocrity, in which the French Revolution exploded like a bombshell. In its lurid blaze the insufficiency of Europe, the inferiority of minds, of military and administrative systems stood exposed with pitiless vividness.

And there is but little courage in saying at this time of the day that the glorified French Revolution itself, except for its destructive force, was in essentials a mediocre phenomenon. [...] The degradation of the ideas of freedom and justice at the root of the French Revolution is made manifest in the person of its heir; a personality without law or faith, whom it has been the fashion to represent as an eagle, but who was in truth much more like a sort of vulture preying upon the body of a Europe which did indeed for some dozens of years resemble very much a corpse. The subtle and manifold influence for evil of the Napoleonic episode, as a school of violence, as a sower of national hatreds, as the direct provoker of obscurantism and reaction, of political tyranny and injustice, cannot well be exaggerated. (Conrad, 1905, p. 35)

Conrad's writings bear the imprint of his diverse multinational background and are uniquely influenced by the moral dilemmas prevalent in the nineteenth century. Through his works, he exposes the grim realities of the Manchurian War, employing vivid descriptions of brutality and murder to convey his profound disgust with the armies and nations that prioritize their interests at the expense of immense human suffering and financial resources (Conrad, 1905, p. 36). Conrad further highlights the pervasiveness of violence by discussing oriental despotism, which he perceives as distinctly non-European (1905, p. 43). He asserts that the remnants of despotism are evident in various aspects, such as the expressions of human needs, the tools of racial temperament, conquest, faith, and fanaticism (Conrad, 1905, p. 44). Through his critique of Russian expansionist policies, Conrad exposes the inhumane methods employed by powerful countries. Moreover, his trust in Western ideals and European countries is profoundly shaken as he confronts the harsh realities and moral failures in the African jungles. Overall, Conrad's writings offer a penetrating exploration of the moral quandaries and geopolitical dynamics of his time, revealing his deep-seated skepticism towards the actions and ideologies of both Eastern and Western powers.

Conrad holds the belief that any form of legal framework is destined to deteriorate into a state of oppression. He argues that systems designed to unify and consolidate individual ambitions and interests in service of a broader concept of the state ultimately lag behind the progress of ideas they themselves have set in motion. These systems fail to comprehend or endorse the direction in which these ideas are moving (Conrad, 1905, p. 46). Conrad's statement aligns with the theories of oppression and power put forth by scholars like Althusser and Foucault, who also emphasize the detrimental

impact of social order on individual agency. Incorporating Conrad's ideas into the works of these theorists would not seem out of place. Morgan Meis further highlights Conrad's focus on the experience of alienation amidst crowds, emphasizing the theme of individuals feeling disconnected and estranged from their social environments. This notion resonates with Conrad's exploration of the human condition in his writings:

Conrad firmly believed that the more you peel away layers of civilization, the closer you come to the heart of the mystery. At the heart of the mystery is a truth, a truth of who we are, of the inner nature of human existence. But the darkness at the heart of that truth means that the closer you get the less you can see. The deepest truths are necessarily obscure. Conrad felt drawn to that mystery, to that truth, and to that darkness even as he was terrified and repelled. As a writer, he explored the push and pull of this compulsion over and over again. (Meis, 2013)

When Kurtz and other European individuals embark on a journey to the heart of darkness, they tap into their primal instincts, experiencing a profound connection with their id. This connection grants them an unrestrained freedom to indulge in primal emotions such as fear, violence, pleasure, and other raw sensations. In these moments, human instincts triumph over reason and civilized behavior, unhindered by societal observation. Paradoxically, while individuals may appreciate the freedom to unleash their primal forces and conform to societal norms, there is also a fascination with those who rebel against these norms. Sigmund Freud describes this process as the "unbridled gratification of all desires," which emerges as the most enticing guiding principle in life (1961, p. 22). However, Freud notes that this pursuit of unbridled enjoyment ultimately leads to self-punishment after only a brief indulgence (1961, p. 23).

In a Freudian interpretation, Conrad's journey to Africa can be seen as a metaphorical exploration of the unconscious mind, where unregulated and suppressed emotions are free from the constraints of Western civilization. Marlow's descent into the obscure depths of the unconscious triggers the awakening of repressed feelings and desires when he encounters the African natives, who simultaneously curse, pray, and welcome European visitors (Conrad, 1988, p. 78).

Furthermore, Freud's concept of the divided self, with its emphasis on the instinctual and anarchic id seeking gratification despite the opposing forces of the ego and superego,

finds resonance in the portrayal of Kurtz's savage indulgences in the Congo (Bloom, 2008, p. 25). Conrad delves into the psychological conflicts of the id, which encompasses libidinal and other desires, and the superego, representing internalized moral and societal standards (Abrams, 1993, p. 234). The colonial setting provides a conducive environment for colonizers to unleash their suppressed instincts through ruthless acts. In Freudian terms, he discusses various psychological mechanisms that individuals employ to avoid suffering due to their internal conflicts. He highlights the use of wit, slips of the tongue, sarcasm, and humor in Western civilization as daily tools of criticism and rhetoric, with roots dating back to Ancient Greece. However, in a land where communication barriers hinder the use of irony or sarcasm, violence becomes an inevitable means of expressing opinions and persuading others. Sublimation of impulses and instincts becomes possible only when external forces compel such restraint. Overall, Conrad's depiction of the African colony serves as a backdrop for the release of oppressed inner instincts and sheds light on the psychological dynamics explored by Freud, particularly the interplay between repressed desires and societal constraints.

What constitutes a point of difference between this essay's treatment of the subject and most other critiques, is the notion that Kurtz had been contaminated by the brutal nature of the "savages" whom he had intended to save. Conversely, Kurtz is a progeny of the capitalist society where he was educated to seek wealth, fame, and power through civil orders. The reason for Kurtz's journey is in a way to extend the area of European authority but also to escape from it. Sponsored by European colonial powers, Kurtz establishes his private power dominion where he is free to act as he wishes. The realm of the colony becomes an unrestricted paradise for the colonizer to be free of their unconscious. Again, in psychological terms, the unconscious, chained and blocked by the superego ever since it encountered the "social world," is released among colonized savages, as the rules of the civilized world do not permeate there. The authority that limits the actions and freedom of people's savage component has insistently been outlawed through the whole education system and other ideological state apparatuses in Althusserian terminology. The reason for and fear of obeying the whole network of rules is legitimized through the existence of another person from a similar background, or, similarly, a source of authority, whereas in colonies, or in the case of Kurtz, there is no one either to condemn or to stop his misdeeds. In a colony, the judicial and social authority is discursively transferred to the master and from that moment on, the master is identified as the source of authority.

Scholars have raised the question of whether the locals can be held solely responsible for the carnage and chaos that leads civilized individuals to devolve into unrecognizable beings. While the locals may bear some responsibility for the transformation, it is not in terms of individually embodying violence and extreme behavior. Rather, blame can be placed on the civilization itself, which failed to establish effective rules and regulations, or on the state of colonialism that bestowed certain privileged rights upon Westerners that the locals did not possess in their own countries. If a society lacks a foundation of moral codes and ethical principles, fear and discipline alone cannot maintain a standard where members respect each other's freedom and rights. Therefore, the absence of a properly structured and morally grounded society can be seen as the underlying cause of the breakdown of civility and the descent into barbarism. However, as Freud points out,

To the Europeans, who failed to observe them carefully and misunderstood what they saw, these people [Africans] seemed to lead simple, happy lives, wanting for nothing such as the travellers who visited them, with all their superior culture, were unable to achieve. Later experience has corrected this opinion on many points; in several instances, the ease of life was due to bounty of nature and the possibilities of ready satisfaction for the great human needs, but it was erroneously attributed to the absence of the complicated conditions of civilization. (1961, p. 78)

Kurtz was one of those traders/colonizers who felt happy due "the absence of the complicated conditions of civilization," felt superior to the natives, and had great plans for happiness and humanity. Colonizers have always disguised their roles in occupied countries as liberators, altruists or missionaries who are there to bring peace, democracy or the true of message of the creator. However, through their methods, as seen in Conrad's representation of Africa and the white men, a darkness has prevailed over everyone, and primitive sides of individuals have taken over their journey. The continent where Marlow travels to find Kurtz symbolizes a passage to the dark sides of our consciousness where our primal feelings, fears and malicious desires are suppressed. What Marlow and Kurtz have discovered can also be easily called "horror" for many civilized members of society. Africa is after all a product of our civilization. If it lacks resources for its people, it is because of the slave trading, blood diamonds, child soldiers, colonialism and all the other unlawful actions of supreme countries. What Western countries have committed in all their colonies are still being experienced due to their atrocious results.

## Kurtz: The King of Jungle

*Heart of Darkness* commences within the confines of England, where Marlow secures a position within one of the trading enterprises established in the colonial territories. During the medical assessment conducted by the doctor, in preparation for Marlow's forthcoming expedition to the Congo, a rather peculiar inquiry is made: "Ever any madness in your family?" (Conrad, 1988, p. 25) Marlow finds himself affronted by this line of questioning. It appears that the doctor's motive behind this rather unconventional query is rooted in a scientific pursuit, namely, the desire to conduct psychological research that unravels the driving forces behind one's inclination to undertake such an exceedingly perilous endeavor, ultimately leading to a transformative metamorphosis of their very being. However, this inquiry inadvertently serves as an additional means of scrutinizing those who engage in colonial activities, both departing for and returning from the colonies. Consequently, it becomes evident that even a seemingly innocuous voyage motivated solely by commercial interests possesses the potential to profoundly impact a civilized Western individual. This type of examination serves as a testament to the heightened likelihood of a consequential alteration in one's character. The prevailing circumstances serve to underscore the precarious disposition of Western individuals upon their encounter with societies perceived as more primitive in nature. As John A. McClure points out, "When Marlow interprets Kurtz's fall [...] he implicitly exonerates the African "savages" from primary responsibility. Instead, the responsibility falls primarily on European society, which legitimates avarice and domination, instead of instilling in men a clear conviction that these are dangerous appetites in need of constant surveillance" (1981, p. 136). Kurtz has been changed by his passions from an "emissary of pity, science, and progress," to someone who "lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (McClure, 1981, p. 139).

The previous captain, whom Marlow replaces, also had a similar attitude while he was in the Congo. Although he is "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs" (Conrad, 1988, p. 96), he beats a village chief to death in an argument over two chickens and is killed in return for his violent act. The colonizer, who is motivated by the pursuit of power and wealth, goes through a diabolic change. The savage component contained within every individual takes the opportunity of the absence of barriers for such an exhibition of power. Even a gentleman will have the drive to use violence in a momentary dispute within a colony's borders.

Kurtz is a perfect model of a nineteenth-century individual with highly respected aspirations in the beginning: he is an artist, a liberal, a social careerist, and he has the Victorian notion of bringing light to the undeveloped parts of the world (McClure, 1981, p. 136). However, the jungle whispers, "to [Kurtz] things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude" (Conrad, 1988, p. 177). The path that takes Kurtz to his destruction emanates from the suppressive system, which pushes him to go to the Congo despite his talents. Marlow also reasserts that the failures in the industrial world drove Kurtz to the colonies: "he wasn't rich enough or something... it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there" (Conrad, 1988, p. 185). Unfortunately, his efforts to be a better person have failed on the encounter of the so-long suppressed id.

Kurtz's id and his unity with his tribe, therefore, can be considered as a rejection of Western materialism for a natural and uncomplicated life. Kurtz was not a native but an individual who lost his innocence in terms of nativity: "But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and by heavens! I tell you; it had gone mad" (Conrad, 1988, p. 169). Despite living with natives, Kurtz did not accept the rules of the tribe. On the contrary, he perverted the customs of the tribe, made the ivory trade and colonialism flow, did not care about the natives, and simply, never adopted the positive virtues of the tribe. The things the wilderness whispered to him "echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core" (Conrad, 1988, p. 153).

Conrad also epitomizes Kurtz as a reflection of European society because "his mother was half-English; his father was half-French" and "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad, 1988, p. 98). The report that Kurtz wrote for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs was "eloquent, vibrating with eloquence" (Conrad, 1988, p. 102). Everything seemed normal until Kurtz's nerves "went wrong" and he started dancing through unspeakable rites with the savages. His famous statement "Exterminate all the brutes" is also mentioned at the end of his report. However, having lived among the natives for a long time, Kurtz has clearly changed his side and joined the brutes. The transformation of a gentleman like Kurtz also manifests how he was inclined to change his nature. "The hollow at his core" was finally filled with his primordial self. In this respect, what Kurtz developed in the jungle is not an "unlawful soul" (Conrad, 1988, p. 144) but historical prudence (Singh, 1978, p. 52).

Kurtz developed other features, which are not deemed positive by Western society. As Marlow reports Kurtz's last moments, he realizes that the basic conflict of Kurtz is within himself: "No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in humankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it, I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggled blindly with itself" (Conrad, 1988, p. 179). Kurtz employed violence to be a part of the native life and mirrored the pressure he had learned. He took the model of the system he knew best; he made sure that his subjects, ignorant of monarchies and imperialism, obeyed his orders. Both parties had a lot to learn from each other and the things that they learned changed everyone's perceptions. That might be the reason Kurtz did not hurry to return to Europe. Knowing the plight of daily life and its restraints, he felt happier and unrestricted in the Congo even though it eventually led to his destruction due to his inner conflicts. If he happened to return, he wished "to have kings meet him at railway stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things" (Conrad, 1988, p. 135). However, when the Russian offers Kurtz to go back, he accepts, but "then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people – forget himself" (Conrad, 1988, p. 151). In the heart of African darkness, Kurtz has discovered the hidden component of his being, no longer belonging to his former artificial and feigned world. Despite all the difficulties he encounters in the jungle, he prefers it to the comfort of England because he is happy. Freud associates this sense of happiness with the "indulgence of a wild untamed craving" and points out how "the irresistibility of perverted impulses, perhaps the charm of forbidden things generally" (Freud, 1961, p. 86) is related to the gratification of such desires in places without control and restriction.

Kurtz finds a gap within his order and evolves into a man well-respected by natives and Westerners alike. The Russian adores Kurtz, even beyond his fear of him, and praises his virtues. He "indignantly" protests to Marlow: "Mr. Kurtz couldn't be mad" (Conrad, 1988, p. 151). The jungle has a classless system, which forbids any inequality between the members. Enjoying the qualities of being a master, Kurtz realizes the discontented and unfair structure of the Western world. Marlow reasserts the fair pyramid of the jungle: "What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager?" (Conrad, 1988, p. 118) The Western qualities, which built a world of social strata, did not work in the jungle, stripping any person to the core of their own distinctive nature. Kurtz had different abilities, "he electrified large meetings. He had faith – don't you see? – he had faith. He could get himself to believe anything – anything. He would

have been a splendid leader of an extreme party" (Conrad, 1988, p. 119). Indeed, he was a man of extremes whose qualifications did not fit into the established system and was silenced and oppressed. Kurtz was defeated in England despite his talents and at last, he found a society where his virtues might be appreciated.

## Conclusion

Despite the manifold negative attributes accompanying his expedition, Marlow rectifies the egocentric and primitive disposition of Kurtz when he discloses to Kurtz's Intended that his final utterance was her own appellation. Furthermore, Kurtz entrusts his written works to Marlow, tasking him with their conveyance to the Intended. Firmly resisting the constraints imposed by his organization's censorship, Marlow adamantly "refused to give up the smallest scrap out of that package," opting to personally deliver them to the Intended (Conrad, 1988, p. 146). In this manner, "Marlow becomes the keeper of the faith for civilization" (Golanka, 1985, p. 198). Upon his return to England, Marlow's objective is to reinstate the fabric of civilized society. Hence, he deliberately omits any mention of Kurtz's transformation, recollecting him as he was prior to his expedition, thereby subduing the illustrious instincts of the wilderness with the moral conscience of the urban environment. Kurtz's deviation from accepted social norms ought to be remembered in the context of his former conformity, while the remainder must be expunged from the collective memory of all.

Terry Eagleton points out that "Conrad neither believes in the cultural superiority of the colonialist nations nor rejects colonialism outright" and adds that "The message of *Heart of Darkness* is that Western Civilization is at base as barbarous as African society—a viewpoint which disturbs imperialist assumptions to the precise degree that it reinforces them" (Eagleton, 1976, p. 135). Conrad manifests this idea throughout the whole novel, but at the end, he directs his attention away from Western Civilization to Eastern meditative methods: "Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha" (Conrad, 1988, p. 185). Marlow's complete apprehension of his African encounter eluded him. Consequently, Conrad assumes control of the narrative's conclusion, effectively muting Marlow. According to Conrad, Marlow's enlightenment lies not in Western Enlightenment principles, but rather in the realm of meditation, as verbal expression fails to encapsulate the horrors he has borne witness to. Consequently, in order to fully grasp the magnitude of his expedition, an explanation rooted in meditation and humanism, such as Buddhism, proves more valuable than a

scientific or logical exposition. In conjunction with Conrad's solution, Freud also endorses such an ending in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) through his Yogi friend's "practices of withdrawal from the world, concentrating attention on bodily functions, peculiar methods of breathing," which enabled him "to produce new sensations and diffused feelings in themselves which he regards as regressions to primordial, deeply buried mental states" (Freud, 1961, p. 5). The wisdom of mysticism trumps scientific advances in both writers' universes, but as Freud points out, the message is an "annihilation of instincts, as taught by the wisdom of the East and practised by the Yogi" (Freud, 1961, p. 6). The mastery over our instincts, often characterized by impulsive and reactive behaviors, lies within the realm of a meditative approach. This process, as both writers point out, can enable individuals to develop a deep understanding of their instincts, recognize their transient nature, and ultimately choose responses that align with their higher values and intentions.

Conrad's elucidation of instinctive desires, fears, and emotions in his text allows for contemporary relevance, resonating with our present era marked by numerous instances of supposedly civilized crews from Western nations who have failed to uphold their cultivated principles beyond their own domains. Kurtz's predicament can be traced back to the complexities of modern society, wherein the Congo serves as a sanctuary for an oppressed individual ensnared within the societal constructs built to ensure peace and security. Accounts from other travellers further unveil a blend of egoism and altruism tainted by acts of brutality and exposed desires. These instances vividly illustrate how the id and ego often surpass the superego, which fails to effectively disseminate beyond its familiar confines. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism aptly describes this experience, portraying the privileged Westerner in comparison to the oriental individual. Figures like Kurtz take this privilege and superiority to extreme lengths, subjecting the "other" to physical torture and abuse. While such acts may appear sporadic, they serve as fissures within the façade of Western civilization, which positions itself as superior to other cultures. Consequently, in the absence of the superego's influence, primal instincts prevail, resulting in a regression to basic human impulses.

In summary, Kurtz emerges as both a creation and casualty of European society and its prevailing structures. While ostensibly assigned with the colonial purpose of enlightening underdeveloped regions, his interactions with the indigenous inhabitants lead him to disengage from the values emblematic of Western civilization. Years of

indoctrination through formal Western education and immersion within the social framework have resulted in his subjugation, wherein his inherent instincts and motivations are forced to recede into the depths of his subconscious, mirroring the experiences of other members of civilized society. Through his encounters with the native population, Kurtz unveils the concealed facet of his dual nature, known as *homo duplex*, while concurrently experiencing liberation from authoritative constraints, thereby enabling the emergence of his primitive self. Consequently, Kurtz grapples with an internal conflict that ultimately precipitates his own demise. As such, attributing Kurtz's so-called madness solely to the actions of the natives would be misguided. Rather, the imperialistic Western civilization, characterized by its classist, racial, and other differentiating systems, bears the responsibility for dismantling the innate innocence of individuals. Conrad's portrayal effectively portrays the destructive underbelly of civilization, with Kurtz's downfall being a direct consequence of the darkness ingrained within him through Western indoctrination.

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