

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF HEART OF DARKNESS

by

VALERIE ROME INNES

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a religious interpretation of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Martin Buber's understanding of religion as described in I and Thou and Eclipse of God is the basis for this interpretation. In what follows it becomes a critical tool for clarifying this short story. From the amount and diversity of the criticism on Heart of Darkness, it is quite evident that the tale has in it deep insight into the nature of man and his world; therefore it seems appropriate to embark upon such an interpretation. Religion, as Paul Tillich points out, "in the largest and most basic sense of the word is ultimate concern"<sup>1</sup> and ultimate concern is, I feel, exactly what Heart of Darkness deals with. In this thesis, then, the insight and vision available in Martin Buber's religious viewpoint is brought to bear upon the theme of the darkness and Marlow's fight against it.

Buber's theology has several basic elements and these are discussed at length in the thesis. The first basic element is to have experienced and to believe in, with one's whole being, the reality of standing over against something uncontrollable and unknowable, which is absolutely independent of oneself, without making any attempt to make it a part of oneself. The second important element is, within the limits of human possibility, to stand in relation to other beings--

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 7-8.

to meet people in genuine contact. To enter into this kind of stance means meeting and entering religious reality and this is usually a shattering experience, shaking the whole foundation of one's existence. Today, Buber comments, this stance occurs in a world where man has generally given in to his urge to possess all rather than stand in relation to it. In such a world, then, the man who has entered into the religious stance that Buber calls the I-Thou relation can be a sorely needed man, fighting the evil of a corrupt world as best he can.

It is the contention of this thesis that Marlow becomes such a man in such an age. In Heart of Darkness we encounter a very dark world as Marlow travels from innocence into knowledge of himself and his world--into his religious reality. Marlow meets the darkness of the urge in man to control, to possess, and, in the ultimate expression of possession, to destroy other men--the I-It relation, as Buber calls it, carried to its conclusion. Marlow encounters darkness in all forms--the corrupt hypocrisy of the manager and the pilgrims, the rapacity of the Expedition, the frightening folly of the Russian who is fascinated, in his innocence, by the darkness, and the horror that Kurtz struggles against in himself. He sees the triumph of man's inner lust for possession of other life, the triumph of the darkness; moreover, he sees his own connection with it. Marlow also comes to realize that life, and the darkness, exist in the face of a mysterious, still immensity that he cannot know, much less control or possess. The reality that he encounters, then, is not pleasant but he enters into real relationship with it finally; he accepts the truth of his reality, the darkness in man, including himself, within a possibly dumb and deaf fate.

In accepting this Marlow moves from innocence into knowledge and grows from an inflexible, enthusiastic, and naive youth into a man capable of meeting the darkness with his own strength. With his lie to Kurtz's Intended, complex as it is, Marlow enters the world of responsibility; he responds to the love and the faith he sees in her which defends her from the darkness where he cannot. Marlow emerges from his experience a changed man; he becomes a man who acknowledges the reality of death and evil, of darkness and his own kinship to it. He decides to join Kurtz in his final revolt against that darkness. His fight, we are to assume, I think, is to be fought in more or less perpetual defeat; the main point, however, is his strength and commitment in the fight and his concern for other beings. This is Marlow's stance of rebellion in acceptance, the religious stance that Buber delineates in his theology. What saves Marlow from the I-It relationship with the world around him is his strength and singleness of purpose directed towards "the salvation of another soul,"<sup>1</sup> his devotion to keeping the light flickering in the face of darkness. This thesis, therefore, interprets Marlow's stance in the Heart of Darkness as a religious one.

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer (New York: The New American Library, 1950), p. 152.

To my parents with love  
and to Carl Ridd

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
II MARTIN BUBER'S DEFINITION OF RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS STANCE .....	17
III <u>HEART OF DARKNESS</u> .....	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	108

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Heart of Darkness is perhaps one of the richest works of Joseph Conrad. In less than a hundred pages Conrad has created a profound, complex and brilliant insight into life. It is, indeed, so rich that each reading brings to light new discoveries and theories, none of which can, in such a work, be the complete or ultimate interpretation. Heart of Darkness has, as a matter of fact, been the subject for many different interpretations, some totally opposed to others. The critics range from those who have, to quote Albert Guerard, misread Conrad's short stories as "travelogues or adventure yarns,"<sup>1</sup> through to the later, more sophisticated critics such as Guerard, Meyer, Hewitt, Said and others. The diversity alone of this criticism proves, I believe, the profound and complex nature of the work. Lawrence Graver comments at some length on the diversity and the amount of criticism on Heart of Darkness:

Most literate people know that by probing into the heart of the jungle Conrad was trying to convey an impression about the heart of man, and his tale is universally read as one of the first symbolic masterpieces of English prose. Psychologists, Marxists, and midwestern Buddhists have provided readings of "Heart of Darkness" as an adventure story, a black travelogue, a political expose, a descent into Hades (with or without return), a quest for the grail, Conrad's search for his father and a prototype night journey or exploration of the hidden

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 14.

self. Along with these general interpretive pieces, there have been a large number of essays, singling out persistent clusters of imagery--images of brightness, gloom, isolation, madness, disease, sterility, physical decomposition, diabolism, and violent death. After sixty-five years, Conrad's story is at last being read attentively. . . . Yet despite all this attention "Heart of Darkness" remains, like one of its characters, an enchanted princess in a fabulous castle: seen, admired but even now still just beyond reach.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not Graver's final statement is completely true, it is true that Heart of Darkness has given rise to diverse interpretation. It has been both praised and disparaged (in retaliation to praise, one might add). It has been seen as a positive work by some, a negative work by others. Marlow's growth, throughout the novel, is a matter of doubt for some, an established fact for others. Among those who take the negative view, Edward W. Said in Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography, sees "the whole experience" as "intelligible and untrue" since Marlow "cannot bear looking at reality for very long" and, therefore, can only "apprehend truth . . . through Kurtz's dramatic plight; and this, as Marlow tells it, is only a dramatic image of Kurtz's predicament."<sup>2</sup> Likewise James Guetti, in The Limits of Metaphor, comments that

the intensity of Marlow's inquiries serves only to emphasize the inconclusiveness of his findings. Again and again he seems about to declare the truth about Kurtz and the darkness, but his utterances most often take form in either a thunderous contradiction in terms or a hushed and introspective bemusement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Shorter Fiction (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Edward W. Said, Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 148.

<sup>3</sup>James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 46.



Guetti feels that what "Kurtz actually sees, of course, cannot be known,"<sup>1</sup> that darkness "is no more defined [at the end] than at the beginning of the journey,"<sup>2</sup> that Marlow's conception of reality remains bemused and, finally, that Marlow has had no saving idea; his ideal "is only a practical concern; it is founded upon keeping oneself busy, upon tending to matters on the surface."<sup>3</sup> Frederick R. Karl, in his Reader's Guide believes that Marlow lies ultimately, "to protect his . . . own illusions. . . . Needing to believe, he lies to maintain that belief."<sup>4</sup> Karl also maintains that Marlow reads Kurtz's final cry as a cry of "victory of moral sensibility over a life of brutality and prostituted ideals"<sup>5</sup> because this is what "Marlow himself wishes to hear."<sup>6</sup> Karl comments that "more ambiguously and ironically, Kurtz's cry might be a shriek of despair that after having accomplished so little he must now perish."<sup>7</sup> Osborne Andreas, in Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-Conformity, discusses Marlow in terms of his having fallen "in love with savagery but [having] remained defeated and stricken by reason of his inability to embrace and accept the object of his love."<sup>8</sup> Andreas, in what seems to me to be the most shallow interpretation of Marlow's lie, comments of the Intended that "she seemed so unreal too, and her sorrow so

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1969), p. 139.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 144d.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Osborne Andreas, Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-Conformity (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 47.

irrelevant that Marlowe [sic] had no compunction about telling her a lie."<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Ryf, in his Joseph Conrad, while he sees Marlow's journey as his initiation into the complex pattern of darkness and light which is representative of the human situation,"<sup>2</sup> and acknowledges that Marlow decides to preserve the light "even if by a lie."<sup>3</sup> feels that he only dimly grasps the full significance of his experience. Ryf comments that Marlow's 'story would have to be inconclusive, for, we are told, he sees significance flickering here and there on the surface of experience, rather than discerning any single kernel of truth within."<sup>4</sup>

Douglas Hewitt, in his sensitive interpretation in Conrad: A Reassessment, sees Heart of Darkness as both a voyage into "the impenetrable darkness of Africa and into the darkness of Marlow's thoughts."<sup>5</sup> He finds, however, that while Marlow's "faith in fidelity and courage is enough to defend him against the pilgrims and their imbecile rapacity" it is "powerless when confronted by the darkness of Mr. Kurtz."<sup>6</sup> Thus, Hewitt feels, by the end of the story "the darkness which exists in the breast of Kurtz . . . seems to cover the whole world."<sup>7</sup>

There is a considerable body of criticism, however, that would disagree with these rather negative conclusions. John Palmer, in his

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Ryf, Joseph Conrad (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (London: Bowes & Bowes 1969), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Joseph Conrad's Fiction, setting aside "psychological, philosophical and symbolic subtleties" as "secondary to [Conrad's] central moral interest and largely derivative from it,"<sup>1</sup> concludes that Heart of Darkness sustains "a core of affirmative meaning and provides the philosophical and moral base from which the rest of his work must be viewed."<sup>2</sup> Guerard, in his 1950 introduction to the story, sees in it

the theme of initiation and moral education, the theme of progress through temporary reversion and achieved self-knowledge, the theme of man's exploratory descent into the primitive sources of being. Conrad believes, with the greatest moralists, that we must know evil--our own capacities for evil--before we can be capable of good.<sup>3</sup>

In his Conrad the Novelist, Guerard finds the theme of Marlow's temptation towards primitivism exists in the story at "rather a superficial level."<sup>4</sup> He says "the personal narrative is unmistakably authentic, which means that it explores something truer, more fundamental, and distinctly less material: the night journey into the unconscious and confrontation of an entity within the self."<sup>5</sup> Thus Guerard feels that "it is from the state of entranced languor rather than from the monstrous desires that the double Kurtz, this shadow, must be saved."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. x.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.3.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Guerard, "Introduction," Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer, Joseph Conrad (New York: The New American Library, 1950), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

Leo Gurko, in his Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile, comments that "out of evil comes good" and "Marlow's contact with Kurtz in Heart of Darkness leads him to light, and the lie that he deliberately and finally utters is a complex kind of truth."<sup>1</sup> Adam Gillon, in The Eternal Solitary, comments that "Marlow's ordeal of looking into the mad soul of Kurtz is like that latter's blind and helpless struggle with himself. Both are subject to the same temptation but only Kurtz has reached the state of incredible degradation."<sup>2</sup> However, Gillon believes the story is to be read positively. Marlow's strength, Gillon feels, lies in his ability to sense the danger in time and draw back. Similarly Bernard Meyer comments, in his Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytical Biography, that "in Heart of Darkness the device of the secret sharer permits the 'good' protagonist to maintain his integrity after he has succeeded in recognizing potential identity with his evil double."<sup>3</sup> Marlow is, therefore, able to "emerge from the Congo with his ideals and his civilized character intact, albeit somewhat less sure of himself."<sup>4</sup> Meyer feels that what "distinguishes Kurtz from Marlow . . . is not a difference in their basic primitive impulses, but in their ability or willingness to resist them."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leo Gurko, Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1965), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Gillon, The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1960), p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard C. Meyer, Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytical Biography (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 159.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 158.

It is evident from even this very brief look at some of the criticism on Heart of Darkness that the story contains the depth and complexity to bring forth many vastly different interpretations. Earlier Lawrence Graver was quoted to point out the numerous different types of approaches which have been taken in the effort to reach the core of Heart of Darkness or explain a facet of it. I have also attempted to point out the diversity of some few of these approaches. Heart of Darkness obviously has the capability of being many things to many people. Paul L. Wiley, in Conrad's Measure of Man, comments that "it is quite evident that there is a quality in [Conrad's] vision of life which continues to excite the modern mind."<sup>1</sup> He adds that "what the reader does find in Conrad, not in occasional passages but in the entire fabric of each of his books, is something more extensive than a personal philosophy, a profound insight into the nature of man in his relation to the world and to society."<sup>2</sup>

Now all this criticism was in a way anticipated by Conrad himself when he said of his art that

my task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see. That--and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there, according to your deserts, encouragement, consolation, fear, charm, all you demand--and perhaps also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Paul L. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, "Preface (1897) The Nigger of the Narcissus," reprinted in Heart of Darkness (New York: Norton Critical Edition, revised, 1971), p. 147.

Thus the important thing in Heart of Darkness is to hear, to feel, and, most of all to see, that glimpse of truth. And that glimpse of truth is, as Wiley says, an insight into the nature of man. This is the quality in the work that "continues to excite the modern mind"<sup>1</sup> into repeated efforts to reach the core of Heart of Darkness. Palmer comments that "so much has been written on Conrad's early Marlow tales that it is probably impossible now to say anything really new about them. But it may be possible to gain some fresh insight at least."<sup>2</sup>

Each new effort to reach the core of the tale, which Graver feels is still just beyond reach, is made in this spirit of sincere effort to see and feel the vision of truth. As Wiley comments, the effort calls for a "critical impatience with stock generalities" and "a desire for the closest acquaintance with the work itself."<sup>3</sup> It is therefore appropriate, I feel, to the spirit of the search for fresh insight to attempt a broadly religious approach to Heart of Darkness.

Since it is my intention in this thesis to attempt such a religious approach to Heart of Darkness, it is appropriate in this introductory chapter to enter into a discussion of the nature and the validity of such an approach. Perhaps the main thing to remember when thinking of a religious approach to a work of literature is that, in the contemporary sense, it does not necessarily mean "univocal formulations of

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<sup>1</sup>Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction, p.2.

<sup>3</sup>Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 6.

particular historical doctrines."<sup>1</sup> That is to say that a religious interpretation of a work of art need not be a forceful effort to make it conform to a given institutional or historical branch of religion. That is using the word "religion" in the narrower sense of the word. It is important to keep in mind that the search for religious elements in literature more often refers to the vision and the belief to be found in works of art rather than to any explicit theological doctrines. That is, to quote R.W.B. Lewis, in such a search one does not hold on to the "particular historical doctrines one cherishes." One should, rather, "submit for awhile to the actual ingredients and the inner movements and growth of a work to see what attitude and insight, including religious attitude and insight, the work brings into being."<sup>2</sup> When such a critical approach is entered into in this flexible and open way, Lewis feels that "there is a deep priority in searching for religious elements in works of literature, since that is where they often appear with greatest urgency in the modern epoch."<sup>3</sup> Theology, in this context, becomes very much a tool of criticism, a tool which can very often throw considerable light upon given literary works.

There is a growing tendency today for this search for the religious dimension in literature to be taken more and more seriously. As Lewis says

the search for religious elements in literature, especially in American literature, has become a phenomenon in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup>R.W.B. Lewis, Trials of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

. . . An increasing number of books address themselves to the subject, courses and symposia are given over to it, and, I believe a university department or two have been established to make the undertaking permanent.<sup>1</sup>

Viewed from a theological point of view, this phenomenon can be seen as indicative of the lack of relevance to be found in orthodox churches and, indeed, in the whole modern concept of religious belief. Amos Wilder comments that the subject matter of modern art is, as Cocteau called it, "lay mystery," that is, "secular experience understood religiously."<sup>2</sup> The reason for this, he adds, is that "we live in an age when any other kind of transcendence or mystery has lost its meaning."<sup>3</sup> And, in a world which has dismissed God and is reluctant to allude to Him, man still needs and searches for meaning and insight and looks for it in literature. Wilder continued:

If we are to have any transcendence today, even Christian, it must be in and through the secular. If we are to have any mystery it must be the lay mystery. If we are to find Grace it is to be found in the world and not overhead. The sublime firmament of overhead reality that provided a spiritual home for the souls of men until the eighteenth century has collapsed. . . . all this means that the artists and the poets are more important to us than ever before. . . . because the artist properly deals with the givens, the primordial givens . . . the artist must deal at first hand with life, beyond the fences of social or religious propriety.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Amos N. Wilder, "Art and Theological Meaning," The New Orpheus, ed. Nathan A. Scott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 407.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 407.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 408.



This is not very different--if at all--from Conrad's insistence that

art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colors, in its lights, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each one is fundamental, what is enduring and essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence.<sup>1</sup>

In our "desacralized," demythologized world, "what was once the religious dimension is opened up for many by artistic experience alone."<sup>2</sup> The artist, in embodying his experience, vision, and insight into a work of art, calls his audience to recognize their own fundamental experiences in his and to meditate upon their nature, order and destiny. His vision and beliefs, his "glimpse of truth,"<sup>3</sup> constitute that aspect of imaginative literature called, by Nathan A. Scott, "the religious dimension."<sup>4</sup> The religious dimension is inherent and intrinsic to the work itself, Scott argues, and is not a dimension of "special iconical materials stemming from a tradition of orthodoxy which may or may not appear in a given work."<sup>5</sup> If it were that, it would be, indeed, peripheral to the study of literature. As it is, the religious dimension is "something intrinsic to and constitutive of the nature of literature as such."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Conrad, "Preface, The Nigger of Narcissus," pp. 145-146.

<sup>2</sup>Amos Wilder, "Art and Theological Meaning," p. 416.

<sup>3</sup>Conrad, "Preface, The Nigger of Narcissus," p. 147.

<sup>4</sup>Nathan A. Scott, "The Collaboration of Vision in the Poetic Act: The Religious Dimension," Literature and Belief, ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

In tracing the relationship between the two, Scott is "guided in [his] understanding of what is religious in the orders of cultural expression by the conception of the matter that has been so ably advanced by the distinguished Protestant theologian Paul Tillich."<sup>1</sup> Tillich, notes Scott, has over the years insisted on "what might be called the co-inherence of religion and culture."<sup>2</sup> Tillich states of religion, in Theology of Culture, that the

religious aspect points to that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man's spiritual life. Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word is ultimate concern. And ultimate concern is manifest in all creative functions of the human spirit. . . . You cannot reject religion with ultimate seriousness because ultimate seriousness, or the state of being ultimately concerned is itself religion. Religion is the substance, the ground and the depth of man's spiritual life.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore art becomes religious when it "evokes questioning as to the Absolute or the limits of human existence," for "wherever human existence in thought or action becomes a subject of doubts and questions, wherever unconditional meaning becomes visible in works which only have conditioned meaning in themselves, there culture is religious."<sup>4</sup>

Religion, in "the narrower and customary sense of the word, be it institutional religion or the religion of personal piety" is, Tillich believes, separated off into a "special sphere" because of "the tragic estrangement of man's spiritual life from its own ground and depth."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture, p. 8.

Religion is, properly, however, "present in all functions of spiritual life."<sup>1</sup> It is, then, this ground and depth of ultimate concern that forms the religious dimension of literature--and not a special sphere set aside from the rest of life including literature. Where literature is examined according to these canons, the

task of criticism, in whatever medium it may be conducted, is, at bottom, that of deciphering the given work at hand in such a way as to reveal the ultimate concern which it implies. For, as [Tillich] says, in the depth of every cultural creation "there is an ultimate . . . and [an] all-determining concern, something absolutely serious,"<sup>42</sup> even if it is expressed in what are conventionally regarded as secular terms.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon of the search for religious elements in literature is, then, important from the critical point of view. Theology can be useful as a tool to help decipher the underlying ultimate concern. The use of theology can add to the critics insight into a work and the more informed and penetrating the insight that the critic brings to bear upon the work of art, the more likely he is to help the vision of the reader.

Heart of Darkness is, as has already been mentioned, an extremely complex and rich work of literature. Its vision is capable of being taken both negatively and positively--that is obvious from the nature of the criticism of the story. It is equally obvious, I think, that Heart of Darkness does deal with "ultimate concern,"<sup>3</sup> as Tillich defines

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Nathan A. Scott, "Vision in the Poetic Act," p. 132. Scott is quoting from Paul Tillich's The Protestant Era.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture, pp. 7-8.

it, and is an effort to "express ultimate meaning."<sup>1</sup> I think it is valid, therefore, to use theology in the search for fresh insight into Heart of Darkness, valid to attempt a broadly religious approach as it has been discussed in this chapter. In my critical approach to Heart of Darkness I propose, therefore, to bring to bear the insight and vision of Martin Buber's religious viewpoint upon the theme of the darkness itself and Marlow's fight against it. This will be done in an attempt to establish that Marlow, through his experience, comes to a religious stance of acceptance of the given through rebellion against the darkness. This should prove both interesting and, I hope, enlightening and is appropriate to the spirit of the sincere effort to see, hear, and feel Conrad's "moment of vision."

In this first chapter of the thesis, the Introduction, I have attempted, with a brief look at some of the criticism of Heart of Darkness, to point out the diversity of the different interpretations. In it there is also a discussion of the nature of the religious interpretation of a work of art and of the religious dimension in literature as a whole; it then enters into the justifiability of proceeding, in these terms, with a religious interpretation of Heart of Darkness. Chapter II, "Martin Buber's Definition of Religion and the Religious Stance," presents Buber's religious viewpoint and its relevance to Heart of Darkness. It is a specific theological viewpoint appropriate to Heart of Darkness in ways that will be made apparent. Chapter III,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

"Heart of Darkness," will present a close study of the story using Buber's theology, as given in Chapter II, to help reveal the ultimate concerns or religious dimension of the tale. The chapter will concentrate primarily on one theme of the Heart of Darkness, the theme of the darkness and Marlow's fight against it.

## CHAPTER II

### MARTIN BUBER'S DEFINITION OF RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS STANCE

The happenings and movements of a literary work bring into being certain attitudes and insights into life--a vision. The primary purpose of using theology as a tool of criticism is to enrich the reader's appreciation of the work by helping to reveal to him its underlying ultimate concerns, its vision. Heart of Darkness is a novel which particularly lends itself to this critical approach since it is fundamentally and explicitly concerned with human existence and its limits; therefore its vision is religious.

In order to be of use as a critical tool in establishing religious insight, the theological viewpoint chosen must be one which will enable the reader to enter more fully into the underlying concerns of the work. It must be one, then, that will help open the work and clarify it to the reader. In a work like Heart of Darkness one must not attempt to impose a theory derived from a particular historical doctrine, a narrow branch of religion, upon any of the characters. Rather one must let the characters unfold themselves and use as an aid only those theological elements that correspond to, or are actually the substance of, the characters own world-views. The definition of religion which would provide such theological elements or style of criticism, then, must be sufficiently broad and pertinent. I believe

that Martin Buber's religious viewpoint, as expressed in I and Thou and Eclipse of God, is admirably suited to fulfil this purpose. While it is true that Buber writes between thirty to fifty years after Conrad, I think it is also true that both men are dealing with the same situation--that is, how men must live in the modern world, specifically the post Victorian world, where every higher authority is questioned if not denied. Joseph Conrad wrote Heart of Darkness at the end of the last century, a pessimistic and questioning period following the sureness and optimism of the high Victorian era. In the eighties and nineties religion lost its influence, faith was lacking, materialism was rampant and the vitality of the period was destructive of orthodox ideas and conventions. The confidence of the mid eighteenth century was gone and the struggles and despairs of the late Victorians foreshadowed the coming century, an age of struggle with scarcely a trace of complacency. Buber, in this age, faces essentially the same kind of world characterized by a loss of faith, criticism of ideas and conventions, despair and materialism. God is eclipsed, indeed, in both periods, authority is questioned, the meaning of life is sought; both Conrad and Buber in their separate ways deal with this situation. Therefore, it is justifiable and helpful, I think, to use Buber's theology as a critical tool in interpreting Heart of Darkness. I intend, therefore, to use Buber's theology as a specific instance of the broadest sense of religion: a vision of the nature of modern man and his world and the position of the individual within it. This description of Buber will be the immediate task of the present chapter, but it will already begin to throw a "kind of light" upon Heart of Darkness and give a preliminary indication of

whether his theology can be of use in helping us to interpret the story.

At this point, a brief summary of Buber's position in his own vocabulary is necessary before going into detail. Religion is, in essence, for Buber, the give and take of a continuing dialogue with real existence. The first basic element in such a religious stance is to have experienced and to believe in, with one's whole being, the reality of standing over against something uncontrollable and unknowable, which is absolutely independent of oneself, without making any attempt to incorporate it into oneself. The second basic element is, within the limits of human possibility, to stand in relation to other beings--to meet them in genuine contact. Buber believes that this religious stance occurs today in a world where man has generally given in to his urge to possess all rather than stand in relation to it. Thus it is a world given over to man's subjectivity, corrupt in its selfishness and without an unconditional "way" of life set by a supreme God. Finally, the religious individual, who faces and does not try to possess the reality over against which he lives and the other beings whom he meets, can be a sorely needed man in this age, a healer fighting the evil of a corrupt world as best he can.

Conrad, in Heart of Darkness, explores this situation of man alone in a seemingly Godforsaken and evil world. He is aware of the unknowable reality of the "immensity" over against which man lives. He is very much aware of the evil in the world and the potential for evil in man. In Marlow, I think, he presents us with a man who develops into one of the religious individuals in this world; a man who tries to



the best of his ability within his given situation to live up to a genuine ethic based on his recognition of reality. Let us, therefore, explore Buber's thought further on this question.

In order to explore Buber's thought in more detail, it is important to establish his basic concepts of the I-Thou and the I-It relationships. In his book I and Thou, Buber states that "the attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks."<sup>1</sup> Those primary words consist of the combination I-Thou and the combination I-It. "Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations. . . . The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being."(Thou: 3) The primary word I-It speaks of man's activities, thoughts, and feelings "which have some thing for their object."(Thou: 4) It speaks of "the surface of things. . . . Inner things or outer things,"(Thou: 5) experienced and possessed by man. "The man who has become conscious of I, that is, the man who says I-It, stands before things, but not over against them in a flow of mutual action."(Thou: 29) But when "Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. . . . When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation."(Thou: 4) The soul, in an I-Thou stance, must not try to possess or incorporate

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 3. All subsequent quotations from I and Thou are from this edition, and will be indicated in the text, thus: (Thou: 3).

other beings into itself. It must see itself as a subject relating with a subject, not as possessing it; this is the way to face other beings and face the other being of existence.

Buber goes on to declare that, in the nature of man, the I-Thou stance of standing in relation, of meeting other beings, cannot be perfect and permanent. That is to say that "the exalted melancholy of our fate" is "that every Thou in our world must become an It."

(Thou: 16) This is natural, albeit regrettable, but man still operates as a whole being as long as both primary words are balanced in his nature.

Man's will to profit and be powerful have their [sic] natural and proper effect so long as they are linked with, and upheld by, his will to enter into relation. There is no evil impulse till the impulse has been separated from the being; the impulse which is bound up with, and defined by, the being is the living stuff of communal life, that which is detached is its disintegration. (Thou: 48)

Man is healthy as long as he is not limited solely "to the world of It but can continually leave it for the world of relation." (Thou: 51)

However, the primary word I-It is evil when and if "a man lets it have the mastery"; then "the continually growing world of It overruns him and robs him of the reality of his own I, till the incubus over him and ghost within him whisper to one another the confession of their non-salvation." (Thou: 46) "All real living is meeting," (Thou: 11) Buber says, and once the I-It gains ascendancy meeting ceases to happen. In the balance of the I-It and the I-Thou in man, the I-Thou must be continually renewed or it will soon be stifled by the I-It. As Buber says, "in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without It man cannot live. But he who lives with It alone is not a man." (Thou: 34) Anticipating

the discussion in the next chapter, we can see that Conrad's Marlow in his full growth can be said to be healthy, a whole being, only as long as his will to enter into relation controls his will to profit and be powerful. At the same time it must be recognized that for Buber since human nature is fallible this Thou relationship can never be perfect-- it can only be a predominant characteristic which directs his life. This is true for Conrad too.

Our age, Buber believes, is no longer healthy since it is permeated with the I-It relation. "The sickness of our age is like that of no other age," but Buber believes that though it may be worse than other ages', "it belongs together with them all" (Thou: 55): "in times of sickness it comes about that the world of It, no longer penetrated and fructified by the inflowing world of Thou as by living streams but separated and stagnant, a gigantic ghost of the fens, overpowers man." (Thou: 53-54) In Eclipse of God, Buber further delineates this "sickness":

In our age the I-It relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested, the mastery and the rule. The I of this relation, an I that possesses all, makes all, succeeds with all, this is I that is unable to say Thou, unable to meet a being essentially, is the lord of the hour. This selfhood that has become omnipotent, with all the It around it, can naturally acknowledge neither God nor any genuine absolute which manifests itself to men as of non-human origin. It steps in between and shuts off from us the light of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Buber, Eclipse of God (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), p. 129. All subsequent quotations from Eclipse of God are from this edition, and will be indicated in the text, thus: (Eclipse: 129).

Modern man, Buber holds, has "learned to concern [himself] wholly with his own feelings" (Thou: 45) and as such "does not believe and does not meet." (Thou: 60) Since he does not meet other beings in an I-Thou stance, his "culture ceases to be centred in the living and continually renewed relational event" and "hardens into the world of It, which the glowing deeds of solitary spirits only spasmodically break through." (Thou: 54) Since he concerns himself with his own feelings, his own thoughts, ideas and concepts, he, in general, is seemingly unable to enter into the religious stance "of apprehending a reality absolutely independent of himself and of having a relation with it," (Eclipse: 14) as well as being unable to enter into genuine relationship with other beings, genuine I-Thou relationship of subject to subject. Indicative of this state of our age is the relationship between religion and reality; Buber describes the attitudes towards both in a healthy and in a sick society:

The relationship between religion and reality prevailing in a given epoch is the most accurate index of its true character. In some periods, that which men "believe in" as something absolutely independent of themselves is a reality with which they are in living relation, although they well know that they can form only a most inadequate representation of it. In other periods, this reality is replaced by a varying representation that men "have" and therefore can handle, or by only a residue of the representation, a concept which bears only faint traces of the original image.

Men who are still "religious" in such times usually fail to realize that the relation conceived of as religious no longer exists between them and a reality independent of them, but has existence only within the mind. (Eclipse: 13)

The first basis, then, of a religious stance, is to have entered, in one's own concrete situation with one's whole being, into relation with "reality absolutely independent of himself and of having a relation

with it."(Eclipse: 14) However, as Buber points out, "Man desires to possess God"(Thou: 113) both in an attempt to insure continuity of "the inexpressible confirmation of meaning"(Thou: 113) and, in an extension of that attempt, in order to own and use "the power yonder."

(Eclipse: 123) Buber comments:

From the earliest times the reality of the relation of faith, man's standing before the face of God, world-happening as dialogue, has been threatened by the impulse to control the power yonder. Instead of understanding events as calls which make demands on one, one wishes oneself to demand without having to hearken. (Eclipse: 125)

This attempt to possess God is merely to make an object, an It, of a reality that cannot be possessed, that man can only stand in relation to. Faith, Buber says, "is not a feeling in the soul of man but an entrance into reality. An entrance into the whole reality without reduction and curtailment."(Eclipse: 3) It must also be stressed that this entrance must take place in the concrete situation in which a man finds himself. That is, faith must exist in the day to day give and take of real experience and be based on living in real relationship to the absolute reality over against man which cannot be confined to man's subjectivity. To confine this absolute and unknowable reality to a concept or idea is to reduce man's relationship to it to the realm of the I-It. When religion is so conceptualized its validity depends utterly on "the extent to which this concept of God can do justice to the reality which it denotes, do justice to it as reality. The more abstract the concept, the more does it need to be balanced by the evidence of living experience."(Eclipse: 14) In Chapter III, then, we will see that Marlow must allow himself to let go the urge to control

or possess the infinite unknowable; rather he must live in relation to it. He must live his faith in the concrete situation, not in high sounding speeches with no action like Kurtz, before his stance can be considered truly religious. Otherwise he, too, must be ranked with those of the I-It age.

Any attempt, Buber attests, to conceptualize the absolute reality is, in fact, a descent into the I-It relationship on the part of man since this is the effort to make "the eternal Thou into It" (Thou: 112) in spite of the fact that, by its nature, it cannot be measured or limited. As a corollary of this, because of the fact that even the word "God" is merely a metaphor, it is not necessary to use the word "God" to be religious. "Even when the 'Unoriginated' is not addressed with voice or soul, religion is still founded on the duality of I and Thou." (Eclipse: 31) Furthermore, a man cannot posit any such duality without experiencing religious reality. He experiences this religious reality in concrete situations:

It is in the encounter itself that we are confronted with something compellingly anthropomorphic, something demanding reciprocity, a primary Thou. This is true of those moments of our daily life in which we become aware of the reality that is absolutely independent of us, whether it be as power or as glory, no less than of the hours of great revelation of which only a halting record has been handed down to us. (Eclipse: 15)

Buber is quite explicit about his religious reality in both I and Thou and Eclipse of God: it is the attitude and the stance that are important, that are religious, not the name or the concept, although for himself the name and concept "God" are the vocabulary of his own faith. For example, in his discussion of Buddha and religion he states:

Buddha knows a genuinely divine, and "Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated." He knows it only in this wholly negative designation, and he refuses to make any assertions about it. Yet he stands related to it with his whole being. Here is neither proclamation nor worship of a deity, yet unmistakable religious reality. . . . Thus the personal manifestation of the divine is not decisive for the genuineness of religion. What is decisive is that I relate myself to the divine as to Being which is over against me, though not over against me alone. (Eclipse: 28)

Therefore, we see that when we come to examine Marlow's stance in life, that it will not be necessary, or perhaps even desirable, to show him proclaiming or worshipping a deity. What he must do is to relate himself, even although he sees it "in this wholly negative designation," to Being which is over against him. Taking this one step further in I and Thou, Buber states that "when he too, who abhors the name, and believes himself to be godless, gives his whole being to addressing the Thou of his life, as a Thou that cannot be limited by another, he addresses God." (Thou: 76) The basic theme of all religions is, then, "the dramatic conflict between limited and unlimited being"; (Eclipse: 20) however, Buber believes, the thinking of our time does not have this theme. "It seeks, on the one hand, to preserve the idea of the divine as the true concern of religion, and, on the other, to destroy the reality of the idea of God and thereby also the reality of our relation to him." (Eclipse: 17) It does this to the point that Buber feels compelled to point out that "what is here and now called God can no longer be for man that God which he encounters both deeply mysterious and manifest, in his despairs and his rapture." (Eclipse: 20) He adds, later on,

In my definition of the religious "the Absolute" does not mean something that the human person holds it to be, without any-

thing being said about its existence, but the absolute reality itself, whatever the form in which it presents itself to the human person at this moment. (Eclipse: 96)

Existence, then, means "standing over against the x--not an x for which a certain quantity could be substituted, but rather the X itself, the undefinable and unfathomable." (Eclipse: 67)

The reality, then, that Marlow, if his stance is a religious one, must accept, is absolute reality itself--that reality which is unknowable and uncontrollable. This is religious reality which "comes when our existence between birth and death becomes incomprehensible and uncanny, when all security is shattered through the mystery. . . . Through this dark gate . . . the believing man steps forth into the every day which is henceforth hallowed and the place in which he has to live with the mystery." (Eclipse: 36) To those who rest secure in their concept of religion, Buber declares that

The prophets of Israel have never announced a God upon whom their hearer's striving for security reckoned. They have always aimed to shatter all security and to proclaim in the opened abyss of the final insecurity of the unwished-for God who demands that his human creatures become real, they become human, and confounds all who imagine that they can take refuge in the certainty that the temple of God is in their midst. (Eclipse: 73)

Buber says that it is not the mystery of that which is theoretically discoverable, given time and effort on the part of humanity, which shatters security finally; it "is the essential mystery, the inscrutableness of which belongs to its very nature; it is the unknowable."

(Eclipse: 36) From this earth-shattering experience of standing in relation to mystery, to the absolute, man "steps forth directed and assigned to the concrete, contextual situations of his existence."

(Eclipse: 36) Thus the meaning of a man's life comes to him through



the actual, lived, concrete moment of standing over against unbounded, security-shattering mystery. "Meaning is to be experienced in living action and suffering itself, in the unreduced immediacy of the moment. . . . Only he reaches the meaning who stands firm, without holding back or reservation, before the whole might of reality and answers it in a living way. He is ready to confirm with his life the meaning which he has attained."(Eclipse: 35) This, Buber feels is the absolute essential to any religious stance: a man cannot posit the duality of I and Thou without experiencing such religious reality. And again, such reality cannot be experienced except in the "lived concrete," the "meeting place between the human and the divine."(Eclipse: 35)

The actually lived concrete is the "moment" in its unforeseeableness and its irrecoverableness, in its undivertible character of happening but once, in its decisiveness, in its secret dialogue between that which happens and that which is willed, between fate and action, address and answer. This lived concreteness is threatened by the invasion of the extra-religious elements, and it is protected on all fronts by the religious in its unavoidable aloneness. (Eclipse: 35)

Once a man has experienced this standing over against the absolute, the mystery, with his whole unreserved being he has experienced the I and Thou relationship with the absolute. He has accepted it into his being and he accepts the concrete given moment as his to live. In this acceptance of the inescapable otherness of reality and of other beings as Thous to his I, man reaches his religious reality:

All beings existing over against me who become "included" in my self are possessed by it in this inclusion as an It. Only then when, having become aware of the uncludable otherness of a being, I renounce all claim to incorporating it in any way within me or making it a part of my soul, does it truly become Thou for me. This holds true for God as for man. . . . It simply leads to a genuine contact with the existing being

who meets me, to full and direct reciprocity with him. It leads from the soul which places reality in itself to the soul which enters reality. (Eclipse: 89)

This is an intensity of response to life which demands the whole of a man's being in his response to every situation, every confrontation. It demands acceptance of the concrete situation given to him. In Heart of Darkness, then, Marlow, if we see him as learning to have a religious stance, must respond to the otherness of reality with his whole being and must meet other beings in relationship. He must, at least, do this sufficiently to inform and renew the rest of his being so that he can live in depth. He must fight the urge to possess and incorporate reality and other beings into his own subjectivity. That a man must accept the given situation does not necessarily entail a placid acceptance. The living way can, and often does, consist of a fight against the darker aspects of the reality of the given situation.

That one accepts the concrete situation as given to him does not, in any way, mean that he must be ready to accept that which meets him as "God-given" in its purest factuality. He may, rather, declare the extremest enmity towards this happening and treat its "givenness" as only intended to draw forth his own opposing force. But he will not remove himself from the concrete situation as it actually is; he will, instead, enter into it, even if in the form of fighting against it. (Eclipse: 37-38)

It is clear that, to Buber, without the personal experience of standing over against the unknowable mystery, the experience of having one's security finally shattered, a man cannot attain a solid I-Thou stance. He states categorically that "even when the individual calls an absolute criterion handed down by religious tradition his own, it must be reforged in the fire of the truth of his personal relation to the Absolute if it is to win true validity." (Eclipse: 98) Further, he says:

The soul . . . can never legitimately make an assertion, even a metaphysical one, out of its own creative power. It can make an assertion only out of a binding real relationship to a truth which it articulates. The insight into this truth cogitatively grows in this soul out of what happens to it and what is given it to experience. Anything other than this is no real assertion but merely literary phraseology or questionable combination. (Eclipse: 82)

Any assertion made without this solid base in a full experience of reality will falter soon enough when it is tested. That is to say that the ethical code of a man who has not explored the depths of reality, has not faced the truth of life, is not sound. For example, if we look at Heart of Darkness from Buber's point of view, we can see that Marlow's ethic must become "reforged in the fire of the truth" of his experience in the immensity of the darkness. If not, his ethic is prey to the facets of the world that he has not faced. His ethic, in that case, would be as prey to his fallible view of reality, his own fallibility, and the darker aspects of reality itself, as Kurtz's high morality is, with possibly like results. If his ethic is forged in the religious experience of reality his is a real assertion.

"We find the ethical in its purity," Buber states, "only there where the human person confronts himself with his own potentiality and distinguishes and decides in this confrontation without asking other than what is right and what is wrong in this his own situation." (Eclipse: 95) This is the achievement of the "eternal Ethos itself, the ground of being of that universal function that sets the yes against the no and pushes to a decision . . . the highest 'form' of the Absolute." (Eclipse: 102)

The achievement of the "highest form of the Absolute," is the

achievement of the I-Thou relationship of responsible love for other beings, the meeting of other beings in "genuine contact" and "full reciprocity."(Eclipse: 89) Buber discusses the difference between this informed, responsible love and man's feelings:

Feelings dwell in a man; but man dwells in his love. That is no metaphor, but the actual truth. Love does not cling to the I in such a way as to have the Thou only for its "content," its object; but love is between I and Thou. The man who does not know this, with his very being know this, does not know love.  
(Thou: 15)

A man who takes his stand in love, in the I and Thou stance, takes his stance in reality and is indeed a man. The I-Thou stance of standing in relation cannot ever be perfect or permanent, and, indeed, in an age in which the I-It relationship has supremacy, this stance is difficult. In the next chapter we will see that this is the situation Marlow must face, the situation in which we must examine his stance. It is a situation in which only individuals, not communities, face reality and choose--step into direct relation with the Thou which meets them and return "to the world of It bearing this spark. In times of healthy life trust streams from men of the spirit to all people."(Thou: 53) In times of sickness there are no streams of trust but there are still individuals who can leave the world of It for the world of relation, who have faced reality in all its incomprehensible mystery and who will to love, responsibly, the Thou standing over against their I. The culture of the age may have hardened into the world of It, in general terms, but "the glowing deeds of solitary spirits . . . spasmodically break through."(Thou: 54) For such a solitary spirit, in "a wonderful way, from time to time, exclusiveness arises--and so he can be effective,

helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving. Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou."(Thou: 15) Buber holds that "each man in some measure has been called to something, which, to be sure, he in general successfully avoids."(Eclipse: 87) This "something" must be performed in a "sphere in which evil and good, despair and hope, the power of destruction and the power of rebirth, dwell side by side."(Eclipse: 21) It must be performed in a world where the I-Thou relationship between men, though "familiar to everyone with a candid heart and the courage to pledge it,"(Thou: 130) is "delivered up to limitation by our insufficiency."(Thou: 131) Buber goes on to say of that insufficiency that "full mutuality is not inherent in man's life together. It is a grace, for which one must always be ready and which one never gains as an assured possession."(Thou: 131) Nevertheless, it is present in individuals in every age; it is the controlling factor in some individuals of every epoch. There are individuals who, upon being called to something by their religious reality, decide with their whole being to become that which they are meant to be. (Eclipse: 103) These are the individuals who will to live with "essential relationship."(Eclipse: 57) They face the reality, the security-shattering mystery, find their meaning over against the undefinable and unfathomable, and "make an assertion . . . out of binding real relationship to a truth which [they] articulate. . . . The insight into this truth grows in [their souls] out of what happens to [them] and what is given [them] to experience." (Eclipse: 82)

These are the individuals, found even in an age where "the I-It relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested

the mastery and the rule,"(Eclipse: 129) who meet existing being in "full and direct reciprocity," who enter reality instead of placing reality in themselves.(Eclipse: 129) These individuals are the truly religious. They are the true healers of man and they are needed sorely. Their attitude is one of acceptance of the given, albeit that acceptance may find its expression in the extremest enmity against the factuality of the given situation in the name of human justice and love. Their "religion is . . . founded on the duality of I and Thou."(Eclipse: 31) It is based on "mutual contact . . . the genuinely reciprocal meeting in the fullness of life between one active existence and another."  
(Eclipse: 33) In Heart of Darkness we will find, I believe, that Marlow, to the best of his ability, is such a man in such a situation.

### CHAPTER III

#### HEART OF DARKNESS

As the first two chapters of this thesis have pointed out, this chapter will present a close study of Heart of Darkness using Martin Buber's theology as a tool to help reveal the ultimate concerns of the story. I intend in this thesis to concentrate primarily on one theme of Heart of Darkness, the theme of the darkness itself and Marlow's fight against it, not in the hope that this will definitively interpret the story but rather in the hope that it will prove interesting and perhaps throw some new light. A story of the stature of this one resists definitive interpretation and it is well that it does; if it were possible to give a complete discursive paraphrase it would not be the major work it is. Morton Zabel comments of Conrad and his writing that

he himself became involved in his story. So do we. The action, the emotion, the state of mind of the characters, enclose and surround us. We enter a reality of three dimensions. We begin, as Conrad intended, to hear, to feel, to see.<sup>1</sup>

This reality of three dimensions the critic cannot accomplish (without first writing his own story), for this kind of reality belongs to literature not criticism.

In Heart of Darkness Conrad has created a microcosm of society

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Editor's Introduction," The Portable Conrad (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 13.

set in the wild freedom of a tropical wilderness. Marlow, a seaman, tells his companions of his journey into a country in which "anything-- anything can be done,"<sup>1</sup> to meet a man who did, indeed, do everything. In doing so Marlow sets up a picture of mankind--both in the "sepulchral city"(149) and in the "God-forsaken wilderness"(77)--based essentially on the darkness in man's soul. The darkness he sees is the desire, deep within man, to possess, to control and, in the ultimate expression of possession, to destroy other life. Further, the darkness consists also of the attempt to hide this inner desire of man. There are many shades of this hypocrisy from the attempt to hide it from one's fellow man through to the attempt to hide it from oneself. The darkness is analogous to the hidden or unnoticed I-It relation and what that relation allows man to do. And the irony is that nothing can be done to introduce light (the Thou relationship) if the darkness is unacknowledged. The darkness is a devouring, consuming part of man; it wants, like Kurtz, "to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him."(135) Once a man has given in to this deep inner urge, his attempt is to consume all that is around him and the end result is that everything worthwhile in him is consumed by it.

Marlow sees a world in which most men surrender in one way or another to this inner consuming appetite. In society, where man must live in some harmony with other man, the surrender is hidden behind

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer (New York: The New American Library, 1950), p. 101. All subsequent quotations from Heart of Darkness are from this edition, and will be indicated in the text, thus: (101). The entirety of the story told by Marlow is in quotation marks. For simplicity's sake, when quoting, I will eliminate this one set.



the need for respectability. In the city a man cannot openly acknowledge the guilt of his inner desires; his tendency is to gratify them covertly. This hypocrisy is the most common and unwholesome sort of surrender; it makes no real attempt to fight but rather perpetuates the darkness under the guise of fighting it. The urge to possess becomes translated into the quest for money--"people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other"(149)--and murder, legal or illegal, of those who become obstacles. Money and murder are both manifestations of the same deep inner darkness which man would ignore and hide if he could. In civilized society, as Marlow points out, where nature is seemingly "a conquered monster,"(105) and a man has "solid pavement" under his feet, he is "surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer . . . or to fall on [him]".(122) He walks a tightrope of respectability, "stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums." (122) Society forces a certain apparent restraint on the darkness within man and it is possible for him to ignore and hide his surrender to it. This forced restraint is not a sure restraint though; it is superficial and extends no further than the surface of things. The restraint of respectability perpetuates the darkness in fact, because, under the cover of fighting it, of conforming to society's spoken ideals, the surrender is hidden from sight and therefore the darkness becomes that much more powerful.

In the "sepulchral city," then, the need for respectability superficially hides the darkness as best it can. In the "God-forsaken

wilderness," away from the need for respectability, a man no longer can hide his basic desires. He gives way as Kurtz gives way, for "there was nothing on earth to prevent him from killing whom he jolly well pleased"(131) once he had given up his "less material aspirations." (132) The mass of men belong to the city, to society, and their darkness is necessarily covert, hidden behind appearances. Once man is away from society the restraint imposed by the need for respectability is weak and he tends to give free play to the dark urge to possess. In both city and wilderness the urge is generally indulged.

Man is basically a dark creature in Marlow's eyes. He is controlled not only by "the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire" but, worse yet, by "a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of rapacious and pitiless folly."(81) And the resulting "merry dance of death and trade"(79) goes on in "the midst of the incomprehensible,"(69) the mystery that one can never fathom. Marlow's view of this incomprehensible "immensity" is perhaps best expressed in his own words:

I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we two who had strayed in here. Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us. I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well.(94)

There is, then, an overall view of darkness in the face of incomprehensible, and perhaps hostile, mystery. Are we, then, to take Conrad's story as a work of pessimism? Is man "God-forsaken," left to his own resources and totally alone, "lost . . . utterly lost?"(143) Is the picture totally dark? Looking at the different people Marlow encounters--

the manager, the Russian, the clerk, the people of the city, the Eldorado expedition, the girl--to name a few--it would seem to be that way. But if we do merely that we leave out the major character of the story--Marlow.

It is Marlow who alleviates the total blackness of his own story. His reactions to the darkness, to the people of the darkness, his development during the dream-sensation,"(95) and his attitude in recounting the tale for his friends all lead me to believe that his stance, shaped by his experience, becomes essentially the religious stance delineated in the second chapter of this thesis. It is a stance that he is almost literally forced into as he is torn from his innocence and driven into knowledge of himself and the world around him. Marlow goes through to the heart of the darkness to meet Kurtz, a man whose elevated principles broke down to leave him "haunted by shadowy images . . . of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression."(146) And so, there in the centre of primitivism, Marlow sees a man given over to the satiation of his own self, the most degenerate brute of all, yet somehow still struggling. Repelled, even as he is fascinated, by Kurtz's stance of objectifying the world into his possessions, Marlow moves through his own agonizing experience to identify himself with Kurtz's struggle. His stance is to acknowledge the existence of the darkness in himself and the world, and to fight it--to know the I-It yet to posit the I-Thou stance of subject to subject. This stance is based on facing his reality as he sees it, on accepting it and working with it in concrete situations.

The reality, the given situation, that Marlow must face, accept and fight is, as he points out himself with great distaste, a reality of darkness. It is, in Buberian terms, a reality of pervasive I-It relationship ranging from the conquering of people through the acquisition of money to the conquering of other life itself. It is a reality in which the immense mystery of life over against him is harsh, uncaring, indiscriminating, "monstrous and free." (105) That is, not only does the world Marlow discovers in his journey from innocence to knowledge, contain the I-It relationship inevitable to man, but it also contains freedom discovered in the wilderness. In a world seemingly without overlying rules, everything becomes permitted; every man is free to express what he is, what he will be. In such a world, the man who is given over to the I-It relationship with the world, is free to consider no one but himself and his own wishes. It is a paradoxical freedom, though, because to be totally free of restraint and control is to become impotent, bound by the idea of freedom and the egotism it allows, and therefore to destroy oneself. Thus while freedom of thought and action does not destroy the man capable of his own self-restraint, it is fearful and destructive to the man who does not have this capacity. Freedom, then, contains the possibilities of salvation or destruction depending on the individual reaction. Marlow must meet that freedom of choice and of action and must decide his way in meeting with reality. He must do so in the face of the I-It relationship inherent in the world and himself.

The people Marlow meets are almost all given over to the darkness of the I-It relation in one way or another and action itself seems,

in this context, almost "mere futility." (109) His world is one in which the restraint and control which is capable of withstanding temptation is so scarce as to be a "fact, dazzling to be seen . . . like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery." (113) In such a world the kind of restraint and control which is entered into responsibly for the sake of others is a rarity. Or, as Buber would put it, it is a world in which "the glowing deeds of solitary spirits . . . spasmodically break through" (Thou: 54) as an exception rather than the rule. Marlow becomes himself one of these exceptions. He faces the mystery and the darkness, of the world and of man, and accepts the truth of it in fighting it with his whole being. He makes his "assertion . . . out of binding real relationship to a truth which [he] articulates. The insight into this truth cognitively grows in [his] soul out of what happens to it and what is given it to experience." (Eclipse: 82) He apprehends the reality, independent of himself, of the "immensity" (94) which he cannot control or predict and accepts this. In doing this he enters into reality itself with his whole being, rather than placing reality within himself. This reality, or as Buber calls it, the "Absolute," (Eclipse: 96) comes into direct relation to him during the trip into the heart of darkness when his existence becomes "incomprehensible and uncanny" and "all security is shattered through the mystery." (Eclipse: 36) Then it is that the Marlow who, in the present, tells the story, is formed, "ready to confirm with his life the meaning which he has attained." (Eclipse: 35) He matures on this trip into the depths of life--matures from an untested youth seeking adventure and sustained by untested and self-flattering illusions.

Through his trip into the heart of darkness in himself and his world, Marlow attains the values based solidly in his recognition of reality which are henceforth to be his ethic. His rejection of killing, his disgust at the money-madness (ivory seeking) he sees, and most of all his reacting as subject to subject with such people as will accept this are his achievement of the "eternal Ethos itself . . . the highest form of the Absolute."(Eclipse: 102) This I-Thou stance, in its full and mature growth, is the eternal ethos that Marlow develops. He achieves it during the experience which puts him in real relationship with the truth of his reality, the darkness of man, himself included, within a blind and deaf fate. His journey into realization of the darkness of man and the superficiality of civilization, in "a place of darkness"(71)--his fascination with the "abomination,"(69) the "snake" which "charmed" him(71)--is, as he says, the "culminating point of his experience."(70) His experience is not pleasant; it is illusion-shattering. The picture of reality that it paints is grim, but out of it emerges his "life-sensation," the "meaning," and the "subtle and penetrating essence" of his existence.(95)

From the very start of the novel Heart of Darkness, Conrad creates an atmosphere of brooding "mournful gloom"(65) over the group of friends in their yawl at anchor on the Thames beside London, "the biggest, and the greatest town on earth."(65) It is in this atmosphere that Marlow begins and ends his story and it is this atmosphere which prevails throughout the story itself. One of his listeners, the narrator of Heart of Darkness, describes him as a man with an "ascetic aspect"(66) who, although a sailor, was not typical of his breed. His mind,

the listener points out, is inquiring, aware of the "immutability of [his] surroundings, the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life." (67) He is possessed of a "sense of mystery." (67) That Marlow is not the typical sailor becomes increasingly obvious throughout his story. At the start of it he sets his companions to reflecting by commenting on the river they are on, their peaceful Thames, and its fine city London. "And this also," he says, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." (67) His remark does not surprise his friends--it was, after all, "just like Marlow" (68)--and it takes him back to the time when the Thames was an unnamed river winding through a wilderness. Then, a Roman--"a decent young citizen in a toga" (69)--would have felt the savagery, "the mysterious life of the wilderness," the "fascination" (69) just as, in a later century and many miles away Marlow did in his turn. Thus Marlow establishes the connection of the latent wilderness in civilization with his trip to Africa for, after all, "darkness was here yesterday" (68) too. At the same time the remark allows him the entry into the attempt to recall, to break through the barrier between himself and his past, into the experience that molded his life. It allows and reminds him to reflect upon, to attempt to understand and to elucidate, both for himself and his friends, this major experience. He comments that

to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the furthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me--and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough, too--and pitiful--not extraordinary in any way--not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light. (70)

The effect of his story on his listeners is profound; to the main listener he becomes an educator "a Buddha preaching in European clothes." (69) He is, I think, preaching to his listeners, the director, the lawyer, and the others. He is preaching in the sense that he is reaching out and sharing a profound, and to him life-shaking, experience. He does this in an attempt to educate, to help make clearer for them, as well as for himself, his conception of life and the world around him and the way to best deal with both. It is an attempt at honest communication, at truth-telling. His journey into the heart of the darkness was a difficult and shattering experience, one that challenged his whole way of thinking and changed it. It brought to light the unflattering truth about himself and his fellow men. It was an experience which moved him from innocence to knowledge and his recounting the story is an attempt, I think, to open his friends' eyes to reality and perhaps to open his own a little further. He feels frustration at his difficulty in breaking through their surface lives down to their core, to make them understand his experience. His frustration is expressed in his attempt to make clear to them his overwhelming sorrow at the point where he feels he has missed Kurtz:

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal--you hear--normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, absurd! Absurd be--exploded! Absurd!" (120)

The effect on his companions, or at least on the narrator, of his "sombre enough . . . not very clear" vision which yet throws "a kind of light" (70) is such that, by the end of Heart of Darkness,



Marlow's vision of reality, his initial image of Britain's original darkness, has conveyed itself to them and the "tranquil waterway" itself "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness." (158)

Of the listeners Marlow reaches the narrator most of all. He, I think, in a rare moment of communication, enters into Marlow's experience and becomes aware, as he did, of the darkness, the pervasive I-It relation and what it allows man to do, and of the brooding immensity. Marlow, in reaching out with the truth as he sees it, has gripped this listener's whole attention and conveyed much of his experience; he has touched him with the mood and feeling of it. The listener shares with Marlow his declaration of fighting the darkness and the wisdom his experience teaches him. It is, I think, a moment of real contact, this sharing of a friend's experience and the emotion it conjures up. And Marlow's exposure of himself to his friends is a full expression of "his will to enter into relation," (Thou: 48) to meet other beings in an I-Thou relationship. It is also an expression of the kind of "exclusiveness" that Buber talks of in I and Thou. That is, the "exclusiveness" that arises "in a wonderful way, from time to time" so that an individual "can be effective, helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving." (Thou: 15)

In this case, Marlow is educating.

The Marlow that existed before his encounter with darkness was a young and inexperienced Marlow: a man who had never searched the blank places of himself--had never entered his own core. His beliefs were unquestioned and therefore only skin-deep. The Marlow that emerges from the shattering experience of having the basic tenets of his life questioned, is a far wiser and more sombre man. This theme is not an

uncommon one for Conrad--"the theme of initiation and moral education"<sup>1</sup>--and it would be well, perhaps, to examine it. Morton Zabel's discussion of this is, I think, very pertinent at this point. He comments that, for Conrad,

men who show any fundamental vitality of nature, will, or imagination are not initially men of caution, tact, or prudence, "polis et raisonnables." They are possessed by an enthusiasm that makes them approach life as an adventure. They attack the struggle with all the impulsive force of their illusion, their pride, their idealism, their desire for fame and power, their confidence that Chance is a friend and Fortune a guide who will lead them to a promised goal of happiness or success, wealth or authority. Chance, under this aspect of youthful illusion, is the ideal of expectation and generosity. She takes the color of her benevolence from youth's impetuosity and ardor before these qualities have revealed their full cost in experience and disillusionment.<sup>2</sup>

The illusion, the fatal "presumption on the conditions of responsible life"<sup>3</sup>--whether enthusiastic, as Kurtz's and Marlow's, or pessimistic and cynical--renders a man prey to the truth of life. If the truth is not squarely faced it can then strike like an enemy from "the unfathomed depths of our secret natures, our ignorance, our unconscious and untested selves."<sup>4</sup> When this happens

there is no escape for the man who meets it unprepared. The terms of life are reversed by it. It is the stroke by which fate compels recognition--of one's self, of reality, of error or mistaken expectation or defeat. At that moment, if he can measure up to it, a man's conscious moral existence begins: "We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy." Such living may destroy, but it is a certainty that only such living can save.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Albert J. Guerard, "Introduction," Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer, Joseph Conrad (New York: The New American Library, 1950), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

There are men who are never tested, who remain ignorant of life. Zabel comments that Conrad's opinion of them was low and his judgement severe. He thought of them as part of a world "evasive of personal responsibility and so committed to a morality of casuistry and opportunism."<sup>1</sup> What Conrad was mainly concerned with, and therefore what we are concerned with, was the man who was tested. As Zabel puts it, "the plight of the man on whom life closes down inexorably, divesting him of the supports and illusory protection of friendship, social privilege, or love, now emerged as the characteristic theme of his books."<sup>2</sup> That man undergoes, in Conrad, moral isolation, the terror of aloneness, and, inescapably, a journey into self-discovery. Zabel comments that

the man who is alone in the world can never escape, for he is always with himself. Unless he is morally abandoned beyond the point of significance, he lives in the company of a ruthless inquisitor, a watcher who never sleeps, an eternally vigilant judge. . . . These people are really carrying out the drama of their divided natures, objectifying under a compulsion which psychologists accept as a therapeutic necessity their soul's dilemmas, and thus saving themselves from the madness or violence that afflict men when they refuse to face such recognition.<sup>3</sup>

This is to enter into the I-It relation of objectivity. In it a man can only be partial, never whole, since while he is constantly watching himself, he is preoccupied with self. He cannot reach out to other being and stand in relation to it while he is constantly examining himself, his reactions, and the reactions of other life. But it is possible to move through this state of objectified consciousness to the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

realization that "one can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse." (112) The I-It relation can lead to death, but, once really seen for what it is, it is possible to move from it. In the state of "pulse watching" a man is vulnerable, terribly so, but he may be called back finally from his isolation, his self-judgement, to the world, to the I-Thou of healthy life.

Thus love, or the sense of honour, or the obligation of duty, or the social instinct itself, enters the novels as a means whereby the individual is forced out of his isolation and morbid surrender. The inward-driving, center-fathoming obsession of the tale becomes reversed toward external standards of value. It is finally the world that saves us--the world of human necessities and duty.<sup>1</sup>

For Marlow, in just this way, this experience is a forming one. Until he starts his journey and moves mentally and physically toward recognition of the darkness, Marlow has never found reason to question his values of honesty, courage, pity and fidelity to an unquestioning ideal of conduct. He has never found reason to face up to his mortality, his darkness and the reality outside him. Life, and the projected trip into the "place of darkness" (71) is still an adventure. Therefore his code of ethics has no firm base in the reality of his experience; no matter how morally good that code may be it is superficial to him. "It must be reforged in the fire of the truth of his personal relation to the Absolute if it is to win true validity." (Eclipse: 98) This is what his experience does to him--it refines and purifies his ethics and makes them more flexible to the given situation, more accepting of the fact of death, the "flavour of mortality" (94) in life. The I-It perceived leads

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

to life and Marlow, through his experience, becomes able to see the I-It in himself and in the world around him. His initial decision that he must "by hook or by crook"(71) get to the "place of darkness"(71) begins to lead him away from his erstwhile sheltered illusory life into reality. This overwhelming desire leads him to part with his normal code of behaviour and ask for help, the use of influence, in reaching his goal instead of going his "own road," on his "own legs."(71) From then on through the moment that, with Kurtz, he is cast "loose of the earth" with "nothing either above or below"(143) to which to appeal, Marlow grows closer to self knowledge. With this knowledge comes acceptance of its reality and his final ethical decision to fight the darkness he has met with. And finally, Marlow with his lie to Kurtz's Intended, is forced back into "the world of human necessities and duty"<sup>1</sup> out of his isolation. This is something Kurtz himself cannot accomplish.

The realization of the darkness rocks and questions the supposedly secure, although formerly undebated, foundations of Marlow's ideals, and demands from him an ethic that will include his realization of the darkness. Since the experience seemed to him like a terrible dream-sensation, the voyage to his "choice of nightmares"(146) is depicted by him as a nightmare. Charmed by the "snake" of the river leading to the "place of darkness" in his own soul and in his fellow man, "fascinated" by the "snake" as a "silly little bird"(71) would be, he is forced to follow the nightmare to its end. His "hankering after" the "place of darkness," the "biggest, the most blank" place on an orderly map, no longer "a white patch for a boy"(71) but a dark place for a man, is his

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

hankering to leave his life of orderly routines, unquestioned routines, and to explore the primal truth, in himself and in the wilderness. It contains the desire to get to the heart of the darkness in the light of civilization, and the human light in the darkness. It is at the same time a boyish, enthusiastic search for adventure, for the new and different, on the part of a youth who does not yet know the difference between that innocent "white patch for a boy" and the "place of darkness." (71) It is a hankering that only the experienced Marlow, but not the inexperienced Marlow, can put into words. At that point of his inexperience and impetuosity, at the start of his trip, Marlow could only feel that "somehow I must get there by hook or by crook." (71) And, somehow, he does.

The mood of sombre darkness that Conrad creates on the yawl at the beginning of the story, tightens and deepens as Marlow recounts his experience. During that experience he becomes initiated into the darkness in life. He becomes more and more aware of the senseless and pitiless killing he witnesses, the cruelty and killing caused by an unexamined acceptance of the trade and market ethic of most people which treats men as commodities, objects of profit or loss. He becomes aware of the absurdity of life and of people, and the huge, unfathomable, unknowable immensity over against which he must live his life. The killing and its utter absurdity is one of the main pictures depicted by Conrad through Marlow. Conrad's depiction of the imperialism, the colonization that Marlow sees, shows the destruction of the individuality of the human being when he is seen as an object to be used and discarded when useless. It further shows the destruction of the life of human

beings by their "conquerors"(69) whose strength is mere "brute force . . . just an accident arising from the weakness of others."(69) Marlow comments bitterly on this way of living: "it was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind."

(69) It is an example of what Buber would call the result of the "continually growing world of It"(Thou: 46) overrunning man until his "will to profit and be powerful" overcomes his will to enter into relation with other life.(Thou: 48)

The danger of the same thing happening to Marlow, since he has, after all, joined this illustrious Company, is made apparent in the "glorious affair" of his predecessor, Fresleven, since it was through that affair Marlow "got his appointment."(73) Fresleven, obviously originally a very civilized man, had given in to the darkness after two years away from civilization. Described as "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs,"(72) Fresleven had finally given in to his need to assert himself, to exert control over others; therefore "he whacked the old nigger mercilessly"(72) over "two black hens." (72) As gentle and quiet as Fresleven might have been within the restrictions of civilization, in the freedom of the wilderness a far different man emerged. Obviously beneath the quiet exterior, and almost certainly without his conscious knowledge of the fact, Fresleven had been suppressing the will to control and to possess. His restraint had been uncertain, a product of ignorance of himself and of the restrictions of civilization. His gentleness had not been permanent, then, for his restraint was not self control and it was not strong enough to overcome his inner needs. Given the free life that his name

suggests (*frei leben*), Fresleven lacked the self restraint to check his will to control and possess. In him the I-It relation had taken over with his need to assert "his self-respect in some way." (72) It is ironic and symbolic that the incident destroys him. For his efforts he is killed by "a tentative jab" from the chief's son's spear and his death frightens the whole community away. It is a thoroughly inglorious and typically absurd incident; it illustrates the power of darkness over a normally civilized man who is far from the restraints of civilization and is not strong enough to provide his own restraints. Marlow opens himself to this same danger by deciding to enter the wilderness and also by entering into the "conspiracy . . . something not quite right," (74) as he senses, of the Company running "an overseas empire" and making "no end of coin by trade" (73) from the natives it exploits.

Marlow expresses the sense of danger, the uneasiness he felt at the time, when he talks of the women knitters ruling the waiting room of the Company:

An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned eyes. Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant. Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again--not half, by a long way. (74)

The two knitters "guarding the door of Darkness" introduce the enthusiastic, idealistic and confident applicants, with their "cheery and foolish faces" to two kinds of death. The first, obviously, is the physical death waiting for them in a climate in which not many survive disease and violent death. The second, the more important, death they



introduce them to is the death of their innocence as they enter the "door of Darkness" into disillusionment, recognition of self and of reality.

Marlow, warned that "the changes take place inside, you know" (75) when you are exposed to the wilderness, is aware that he has already taken the first step in allowing himself to be set up as an "imposter"(77) by his aunt. This he accepts in order to get what he wants. He has a moment "of startled pause,"(77) feeling as though "instead of going to the centre of a continent" he was "about to set off for the centre of the earth."(77) This reaction, he comments, was unusual for him because he was used to setting out for "any part of the world at twenty-four hours notice with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street."(77) Nevertheless he continues on, beckoned by the "enigma" before him "smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, 'Come and find out.'"(77)

He goes to find out, on a trip that seems to him like "a solid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth"(78) inside the "God-forsaken wilderness."(77) And the experience of senseless, pitiless killing begins, like a "mournful and senseless delusion" in which he has only "momentary contact with reality."(78) This momentary contact is exemplified by the comfort he gets from the straight-forward natives in their boats, "natural and true . . . a great comfort to look at." (78) But though he would feel as if he still belonged to "a world of straight-forward facts . . . the feeling would not last long"(78) and he is catapulted back into absurdity. Typical of this absurdity is the

man of war firing blindly at the coastline supposedly at a camp of natives. Marlow comments, "there was a touch of insanity in the proceeding." (78) "In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent." (78) It is Marlow's first sight of this legal murder, albeit this time, in the absurdity of the situation, "nothing happened" because "nothing could happen." (78) And meanwhile Marlow himself feels adrift in what is, seemingly, a "senseless delusion," idle, and isolated amongst men with whom he feels he has no point of contact. (78) The sight of the "criminals" later on in his trip, brings the ship of war back to him, but as he says, "these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea." (80) White men had chained them, enslaved them, creating "that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages." (80) It is another example of "what some people will do for a few francs a day" (79) and how they use and abuse people in the process.

Worse yet are the "helpers . . . withdrawn to die. They were dying slowly--it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation." (82) The men dealing with these slaves are so completely taken over by the will to profit and be powerful that they have lost the ability to see these unfortunate beings as humans. It is their darkened vision that causes them to exploit these people and finally to see them as nothing but useless "shadows of disease," instead of seeing them as human beings to be cared for in their pain and misery.

Brought in as legal slaves "in all the legality of time contracts,"(82) used as anonymous labour machines, ill-fed, lost, "they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest."(82) That "rest" is their death-rest, as moribund and hopeless, they lie "scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence."(83) And they are, indeed, victims of a "pestilence"--the sickness of the pervasive I-It relation, the sickness of the darkness and greed in men's hearts. Their deaths are caused by the white man's use of legality in the service of his lust for ivory, for power, for possession. The natives become as objects for these men--slaves to their desires--to be discarded when no longer useful. The "indefatigable man with the moustaches" sums up the attitude: "transgression--punishment--bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way."(93) To people who are only concerned with possessing all, not meeting all, that is the only way. And that is precisely what Marlow encounters as he goes deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness: men interested in possessing all--their imagination possessed by the "gigantically swollen"(Eclipse: 129) I-It relation. As the mind becomes possessed by the I-It relation, and its freedom from responsibility for others, a man becomes increasingly incapable of pity, concern and human feeling and becomes more and more trapped into a life of trying to satisfy his own insatiable cravings. As he goes further into satisfying these desires at the expense of others, he goes further into the I-It relation, losing touch with any kind of genuine community or responsibility. And the circle continues, growing more vicious for the man trapped in it as well as for the people around him whom he is free to

exploit.

Included by the guard of the criminals, in "partnership in his exalted trust," Marlow is forced to recognize his responsibility. In a sense, as he comments sarcastically, bitterly, after all he "also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings." (81) Marlow turns away, "to let the chain-gang get out of sight," (81) appalled by the warning of what can happen when all things are possible and there are no restraints--appalled by what can happen to him and within him. His horror is as yet still only a kind of foresight--a knowledge that he "would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" far different and very much more "insidious" than the "strong, lusty, red-eyed devils" of violence, greed and desire. (81)

And in the meantime the world around him slips further and further into what he sees as delusion, further and further away from what still seems to him to be a reality. To Marlow the "world of straightforward facts" (78) still seems to be the real world, while the chaotic, cruel and absurd world he has been catapulted into seems the delusion. In fact, his easy comfortable straightforward world is the delusion, and the absurd dark world the reality. To stay in the former is to be comfortable but unknowing, deluded and therefore prey to the darkness of reality. To break out of illusory safety and to face the truth, unpleasant as it may be, is to face and know reality. Darkness and danger perceived and faced are a less effective threat; therefore the true reality is a better and safer one. As Marlow experiences more of reality, less of illusion, life becomes less orderly. It becomes

chaotic and absurd. At the same time, paradoxically, it becomes more authentic and livable.

The difficulty of obtaining the rivets Marlow needs for his boat is typical of the absurdity he is experiencing and his reaction to it. The rivets, found in abundance, in useless overabundance in the other station, are nowhere to be found where they are needed: "there were cases of them down at the coast--cases--piled up--burst--split!" (95) Rivets--"to get on with the work--to stop the hole"(95)--were needed, and there was no reason why they should not get the rivets;(98) they should come, the boiler-maker says reasonably enough. "But, they didn't."(98) Marlow's desperate need for his rivets to stop the hole parallels his need to have a world of straightforward fact to lean on, his need to avoid looking at the reality of a world of absurdity, death and mortality. The boat is his security in a seemingly upside-down world; "there was nothing [behind him] but the wretched, old, mangled steamboat [he] was leaning against."(95) It is his protection in a corrupt world and his need is to fasten up the hole and keep the corruption out of his own world, out of his sight. The need is the more pressing since Marlow realizes how insidious that corruption is in his "letting the young fool," the agent, "believe anything he liked to imagine as to [his] influence in Europe." Marlow, the narrator, wiser after his experience, comments "I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims."(94) Marlow the youth, attempts to avoid this knowledge, to avoid the fact that reality contains "all the possibilities from idiocy and brutality to heroism,

fidelity and love."<sup>1</sup>

The final touch put on the picture of wanton killing is seen in the row of "heads of rebels" outside Kurtz's house. They were "symbolic . . . expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing--food for thought" and their faces were "turned to the house" in a final act of obedience, of worship, except for one who was "smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream." (132-133) This final act of obedience in turning to Kurtz is symbolic of their idolatry. These people have made Kurtz a god and they worship him to the point of human sacrifice. This is total idolatry. One face smiles, perhaps because of the jest the wilderness is bound to play on Kurtz for his presumption. For Kurtz is no god and is as mortal and answerable to the wilderness as any man. The "jocose dream" is, then, perhaps of the retribution Kurtz will suffer for his supreme egotism and the smile is not, therefore, worshipful. These faces belonged to men killed by another man in acts completely divorced from the will to enter into relation with life. They were killed by a man who was free to kill as he pleased since there was nothing and no one to stop him and because he "lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts." (133) Marlow's understanding of the phenomenon of murder is quite clear, as is his rejection of it: "Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers--and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks." (34)

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Edwards, "Clothes for the Pilgrimage: A Recurrent Image in Heart of Darkness," Mosaic, IV/3 (1971), p. 71.

Man will always find excuses, some better than others, to justify his need to murder, his need to conquer other life. This need is most apparent in Kurtz's "ceremonies"(133) which are obviously rites of human sacrifice to Kurtz as a god. This is the I-It relation carried to the extreme, the ultimate in murder, to feed an ego overwhelmed with possession and yet more possession. Entering the darkness with the highest of ideals himself, enthusiastic, confident "that Chance is a friend and Fortune a guide," Kurtz fell prey to the reality he met and the "terms of life" were indeed "reversed" for him.<sup>1</sup> Unable to "measure up to it,"<sup>2</sup> yet still "struggling blindly,"(144) he allowed "the continually growing world of It" to overrun him.(Thou: 46) People become objects; the natives become brutes; and they are sacrificed to his need for "lying fame, . . . sham distinction, . . . all the appearances of success and power."(146) Marlow's reaction to such murder and idolatry is to reject them; they are "more intolerable" to him than "pure, uncomplicated savagery."(133) The "heads" are symbols of Kurtz's control over the natives, of his godhead, so to speak; they suggest the crawling of the natives, the "details" of the "ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz"(133) that seem to transport Marlow "into some lightless region of subtle horrors."(133)

Marlow becomes increasingly aware of the darkness, the evil of man's will to possess cut off from his will to enter into relation, aware of the immensity within which this is carried out, and aware of

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<sup>1</sup>Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

his own mortality, his own "partnership" with this darkness inherent in all men. His reaction is more and more one of invariably wry and contemptuous disgust. His comments depict the senselessness and the evil inherent in such murder. He progresses from observing the criminals and helpers with disgust and horror at their fate, to stopping, whenever he can, such killing. At the same time, though, there is a selfish element involved in his attitude toward such "pure, uncomplicated savagery." (133) Marlow does react with disgust and horror, but he also has a distinct tendency to avoid facing "intolerable details." (133) And these intolerable details, so foreign to his lifelong attitudes and idealistic beliefs, are a part of reality and as such must be faced, must be accepted before Marlow can truly enter into a Thou relationship with real life. Turning his back to the darkness, in order to "keep [his] hold on the redeeming facts of life" (89) is no great way to deal with it. And Marlow does this again and again. He turns away from the misery of the chain gang and descends the hill to get them out of his sight; he turns his back on the station, run by "the flabby devil" (86) and buries himself in his work. He turns away from the "papier-maché Mephistopheles," (96) more than glad to return to his boat. Marlow turns from the primitive attraction of the natives on the shore; he even turns away from his own "creepy thoughts" (107) and, much later, from the Russian's talk of the intolerable details of Kurtz's ceremonies.

Nevertheless, his attitude does change, I believe, as he is forced closer and closer to the moment when he has nothing to fall back upon but himself, when he can no longer avoid facing reality. For example, after turning away from "the chain-gang" (81) to let it get out



of his sight, Marlow, faced with the dying helpers, gives his gift of ship's biscuit to one of them. Another example is his stopping the pilgrim's "little fun"(145) with the boat whistle. While they look upon murdering helpless savages as a "jolly lark,"(145) he is repelled by it. He never fails to point out to his listeners on the yawl that such action is criminal no matter how "legal" or usual it may be. His comments are bitter as his feelings are; often they spark forth a moment of insight as he travels his journey away from innocence:

It occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mind, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.(109)

It is but one insight, one step, in his journey. And it is an understandable reaction on the part of a man whose attitudes of tolerance and goodwill are beginning to become seemingly irrelevant in the midst of the horrors and irrationalities of his experience. Usually, though, Marlow does act, whether it be futile or not. And, in depicting the legalized killing of war and law as murder, in adding his bitter comments to the picture, and in refusing to participate in the slaughter, Marlow posits the humane way. He does not see the natives as mere "brutes" as everyone else seems to do. He finds the natural truth, vitality, and intense energy of the natives in their boats, "a great comfort";(78) they connect him with what he thinks of still, at that point, as reality: "a world of straightforward facts."(78) It is not reality, but the point is that Marlow is seeing people here, not slaves, workers, or brutes, but people. He also recognizes the "subtle bond"

between himself and his helmsman, the "kind of partnership," the "distant kinship" between the two of them, and he misses this bond when it is gone.(124) And this emotion occurs in a far more realistic situation since Marlow is aware of the imperfections existing in the reality of it. He is aware that the man "had no restraint, no restraint--just like Kurtz--a tree swayed by the wind"(124) and yet he looked after him. He was aware that the helmsman was "the most unstable kind of a fool" (116) yet there was this "kind of a partnership"(124) they had shared and he missed him.

Marlow sees the "enemies," the "criminals," the "rebels" and the "workers" as people--people unjustly dealt with--not as objects. Even so, he is aware of the savagery of the natives, the "terrible frankness" of their "wild and passionate uproar," untrammelled as they are by any bonds of civilization. He is also aware of his connection with this frankness and that there is "meaning in it" which he could "comprehend."(106) Yet he recognizes that the way to deal with such unrestrained primitiveness is not the way that the Europeans have dealt with these enemies, rebels and workers. The "outraged law" of Europe is "an insoluble mystery"(80) to the natives; along with that law comes the cruel indifference of the Europeans to these men. Marlow is not indifferent; however, he is aware of the hypocrisy and indifference involved just as he is aware of his kinship, which is not as remote as it might appear at first glance, with the natives in their free state. As long as he runs to the boat, to his work, for shelter--as long as he attempts to attend "to the mere incidents of the surface" and allows the "inner truth," the "reality" to remain hidden from him(103)--his

stance is still wrapped in darkness. But his reaction to suffering, injustice, is the I-Thou reaction--pity, anger at injustice, and horror. His attempt to communicate that reaction and horror to his companions is, in its turn, a reaching out, a sharing, an I-Thou stance. It is perhaps even more so, since by that time he is possessed of a more complete knowledge--he has seen and accepted the "taint" of mortality, his kinship with the "terrible frankness" of the natives, death, and darkness as part of reality.

Marlow's description of the people involved in his journey points out to us both the darkness in their souls and his dislike for it. One of his main targets is the manager, for in this man we see all the worst manifestations of the I-It relation in society. The man is still bound to the social contract by appearances--and by those alone. Inside his superficial respect for appearances the man is fundamentally rotten: "he was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness." (87) A hollow man, like Kurtz, but with no genius, the manager does not struggle at all, unlike Kurtz who comes to recognize his descent into darkness. He is concerned with "externals only. . . . It was impossible to tell what could control such a man. . . . Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause--for out there were no external checks." (88) He is a man totally concerned with himself. "Where he sat was the first place--the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction." (88) He has objectified "the rest" until they are no longer living human beings for him. They are merely tools, obstacles or victims in his own drive for power and possession. Marlow sums him up: "He was just the kind of

man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint."

(113)

It is the appearance and the timing of Kurtz's methods of raiding, killing, stealing, setting himself up as god to the natives and other such "enlightened" practices, that the manager objects to, not the tactics themselves. The "time was not ripe"; therefore "the method is unsound." (138) He has no understanding of the fact that there was "no method at all," that killing and stealing never can be a "method," and so Marlow's reaction is extreme: "It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile." (138) Even Kurtz, who at least had ideals enough to try to leave the darkness once and who was aware of the horror that he had given in to, was vastly better than this man who would indulge himself as long as appearances were kept up. The restraint of appearance is worse than the acknowledged lack of restraint. Both are bad; the deceitful and hidden indulgence under the name of respectability is the more contemptible of the two. It is the more common surrender to the darkness within man; it makes no attempt to fight it. To give in to the darkness and to indulge the desire to possess under the cover of respectability is to trap oneself and the people around one in the I-It relationship of money, cruelty and murder. Restraint of this kind does not hold back the darkness; rather it serves it. This kind of restraint, then, is false unless it is the restraint of a being out of concern for other beings and that concern can come fully only from recognizing the darkness within and fighting it. Marlow turns to Kurtz "positively for relief" from the man whose only concern is that "upon the whole, the trade will suffer." (138) Given the "choice

of nightmares"(146) Marlow must follow Kurtz's path to the grave and back again because only in following the "inner truth"(103) to the end can Marlow hope to find out what he is made of, what he has to say, and whether he has the strength, the inner strength, to posit his own restraints on his own darkness. To follow the manager would be to give in; to avoid both the manager and Kurtz would be to avoid reality, to avoid the final Thou. As it is, Marlow turns to Kurtz and chooses his nightmare.

Marlow's opinion of the pilgrims is enlightening also. These are the men who seem to spend most of their time waiting, aimlessly, "for something"--in the meantime getting only disease--while praying, "like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence," to the "word 'ivory.'"(89) Inside the fence, "the first glance . . . was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show."(86) They are pilgrims of the darkness, slaves of their own urges, "back-biting and intriguing against each other" under a "philanthropic pretence" and a "show of work."(91) "The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account--but as to effectually lifting a little finger--oh no."(91) Underneath their pretence is their hate and their "imbecile rapacity"(89)--their darkness. Their main concern is to serve their urges while preserving their philanthropic pretence. The pilgrims need their illusion of maintaining a "right" way of life, hence "the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, . . . their talk, . . . their government, . . . their show of work."(91) But there is nothing

behind this but their fruitless, idle waiting. Even their plotting is "as unreal as everything else"(91) in the station because of their small souls, their inability to face the darkness either in themselves or in their world. You cannot fight the darkness by ignoring it, refusing to face it; you must learn to "breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated,"(122) not throw it overboard because you feel that you "can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence."(111-112) That is the wrong sort of fighting--as Marlow, when he first enters that station is not mature enough to understand. His way, at this point, also, is to turn away from reality, in order to "keep [his] hold on the redeeming facts of life."(89) Still, he is learning, for even at the start he recognizes that "one must look about sometimes" and ask "what it all meant."(89) And he is contemptuous of and disgusted at the "faithless pilgrims"(89) and their unwholesome surrender to their urges without attempting to face them for what they are. Their hypocrisy is as useful in fighting the darkness as it is to attempt to put out a hopeless fire with "about a quart of water" in a pail with "a hole in the bottom" of it(90) while being sure that "everybody was 'behaving splendidly, splendidly.' "(90)

Refusing to face reality, tied up in a life of pretence and avoidance, these men are held tight in the grip of their inner darkness. They have lost the power to enter the world of Thou, to see people as people, not objects; they have little relation with reality. Such men, observes Marlow, make one feel that "there is a way of looking at a halter that would provoke the most charitable of saints into a kick."(91)

He would prefer that a man "steal a horse straight out. . . . Perhaps he can ride,"(91) for a man is more capable of dealing with the full and acknowledged powers of darkness than he is if they are ignored. But then, as Marlow comments, "there is something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter."(91) It depends on your inner strength, your ability to ride the horse once stolen. If a man faces the power of darkness, there is at least the chance that he will find the strength in himself to resist, to be one of the individuals who stand out so glowingly in comparison to a world given over to It. If he faces reality he will have a firmer foundation for his way of life. If he does not, as the pilgrims do not, then he is merely living his life to the tune of the rest of his community, pettily, prey to the powers of darkness, or as is most common, part of the darkness. The pilgrims are, like the rest of the It world, "unreal,"(89) a "fantastic invasion" in the "silent wilderness,"(89) like the manager and his uncle, the leader of the Eldorado Expedition. All are after what they can possess and nothing is sacred to them in their scramble for material possessions. And all, like the manager's spy, the "Papier-maché Mephistopheles," are hollow at the core. Marlow comments of the spy: "It seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my fore-finger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe."(93)

One of the most direct targets of Marlow's criticism is the Eldorado Expedition--"an invasion, an infliction, a visitation."(98)

The men of the expedition were

reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe.(99)

They were men who covet possessions and thereby make of them an evil.

They collected "an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made them look like the spoils of thieving."

(98) The expedition is a caricature of the modern I-It society--corrupting, materialistic, faithless, and exploiting--invading nature. With no restraint, no check upon its activities, it enters the wilderness where anything can be done, and disintegrates. It "went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterward came the news that all the donkeys were dead."(102) As Marlow says of the men, themselves, "I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved."(102)

The remark is a fitting final statement for such a gang. It also indicates Marlow's opinion of those who are like them. His opinion of people who deal merely in terms of objects and possession, and who continually gratify their lusts through these objects with literally no effort to fight this, is a very low one. The expedition, the manager and the pilgrims serve to point out to Marlow the unwholesomeness of the various surrenders to darkness. There is the hypocrisy of giving in to the inner urges. If this is done from fear of admitting the guilt of this action, it is an avoidance of reality; that is both foolish and



dangerous. If it is done purposely, in order to gratify urges and at the same time observe the social code, it is a knowledgeable descent into depravity. To give in is bad enough; to give in covertly is evil. The pilgrims, under the guise of conforming to society's spoken ideals, perpetuate the darkness by allowing their surrender to remain hidden. They perpetuate it by ignoring it, refusing to face it. The manager accepts the darkness and the surrender as his way of life--he is concerned only with himself, trade, and keeping up superficial appearances. The expedition, seemingly, having given in to darkness, to total lack of moral purpose, cares for nothing but profit. None of these measure up to the "conditions of responsible life,"<sup>1</sup> and they are therefore condemned with contempt.

In comparison to this kind of surrender, to give in while still striving to do otherwise, to finally steal the horse without being able to stop oneself, but against one's own conscience, is at least to face and try to fight the darkness. The man who faces reality and at least tries to fight it is more of a victim than an accomplice of his urges. He is to be pitied as well as condemned--and his fight is to be admired. Kurtz, then, is to be condemned for his fall, but with pity and with understanding for his inability to live up to his initial high moral standards, for his disillusionment, and, finally, with admiration for his struggle with himself--his attempt to ride the horse he stole.

To return to Marlow's attitude to the men of the expedition we find that it is revealed further by the contrast between his reaction to

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 19.

the expedition and his reaction to the book he finds.

Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with other than a professional light. The simple old sailor with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sense of having come upon something unmistakably real.(108)

The book was addressed, and therefore later cared for, with "singleness of intention." The expedition, which had finally got what it deserved--an anonymous and obscure death--had no "serious intention."(90) The book had "honest concern for the right way of going to work"; the expedition, with its I-It attitude to things and people, soiled decent things with its "human folly."(98) The difference is that the "simple old sailor"(108) addressed his work with honest love and care, with attention and with concern for the readers and for his craft. His book, his subject, and his audience were not merely objects to him; we do not feel that his motive for writing it was his profit, but rather his love of his trade and his desire to inform and help others. Thus the book is "lovingly cared for" and the Russian greets it ecstatically";(128) Marlow handles it "with the greatest possible tenderness" and greets it as an expression of the sailor's I-Thou attitude; leaving it to return to the manager and the pilgrims is to him "like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship."(108) The Expedition, on the other hand, is totally devoted to Mammon and self-worship. There is no love or honest concern there. Marlow, then, supports the sailor who achieves genuine contact with his readers through his honest relationship with them. However, the book is an escape for Marlow; it allows

him to "forget the jungle and the pilgrims" who are just as "unmistakably real" as the book, although distinctly less pleasant. Like his "influential friend"(97) the boat, the book is a shelter from an unpleasant reality which he must necessarily eventually face.

The point of the book is dual, I think; first, to serve as a contrast to people Marlow has been forced to associate with, and secondly to show Marlow's tendency to slip back to the old and familiar, the "world of straightforward facts,"(78) rather than face reality. This second point is reinforced by Conrad in making the book belong to the Russian, the adventuring "silly little bird," who feels that with it in one of his pockets he is "excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness."(140) The final point is, of course, that the book is no equipment at all for the wilderness; "the world of straightforward facts" where people behave according to a certain accepted code is a myth, a hypocrisy, covering the real world. It is a perpetuation of an idea, a human self-image elevated to the status of truth from idealism and the constant wish for protection against the chaos and confusions of the world. Since the straightforward world is a man-made structure and in that sense imposed on reality and not real, anything that allows one to shelter within the depths of such a colossal hypocrisy is dangerous in that it renders one more liable to the dangers of that real and surrounding wilderness. To try to shelter from reality in the myth of a straightforward uncomplicated world is to stay in darkness, unable to see. To enter the wilderness with this myth and feel prepared to meet it on its terms is both blind and foolhardy--and this is exactly what the Russian is.

It is ironical, of course, that it is a book, in itself "dreary reading enough"(108) to which these two men cling, "brother" seamen (139) as they are. And it is also ironical that it is a book which achieves this contact where people do not. So that the book is and is not a Thou to Marlow, is and is not an It. It is a Thou in its honesty, its intrinsic concern and humility which promotes an affection and tenderness for it. It is an It in that it is a shelter from reality for both Marlow and the Russian--both falling back on its simplicity, its concern with a straightforward "way of going to work." (108) Conrad further uses the book to point out the sickness of an I-It world--a world where a book can evoke more emotion, provide more security, than people can. Marlow is moved, almost forced, at that point in his growth, to the "shelter" of the "friendship" provided by that book because he is surrounded by people, pilgrims and manager, given over to the darkness, the I-It relation. Later, he becomes able to "breathe dead hippo . . . and not be contaminated"(122) because of his own strength; at this point he feels the need for help in keeping his "precarious grip on existence." (112)

The Russian "harlequin"(126) himself, a disciple of Kurtz, brings an even more intense awareness of the danger of the darkness to Marlow for he is typical of the human fool. The fool (and most men are such) is the man who hides from an awareness of the power of darkness. He has nothing to sustain him, no inner strength; he is the "silly little bird." (71) The harlequin's countenance is described as being open to the "smiles and frowns chasing each other over [it] like sunshine and shadow on a wind-swept plain." (126) The land too is open to both yet "the

sunlit face of the land" conceals "the lurking death, . . . the hidden evil, . . . the profound darkness of its heart." (102) Sunshine has the appearance of truth; it is pleasant, warm and good. But it is also dark in that it hides the cold gloom of an unpleasant reality behind its healthy facade. There is the possibility of darkness in the sunshine just as there is the possibility of light in the darkness. The Russian is open to both with no more control or understanding of the depths of either in his mind than in that "wind-swept plain." (126) His mind being open and without control, he is very impressionable.

Wandering in the wilderness, "cut off from everybody and everything," "with no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby," (128) he had, he said, gone "a little farther . . . then still a little farther--till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back." (129) Seeking for experiences, for things to "enlarge the mind," (128) he has the misfortune to become the disciple of Mr. Kurtz. Setting Kurtz up as an idol, a god, the Russian had "crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all" (134) before him; "the man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions." (131) He had not "meditated over" his devotion to Kurtz; "it came to him and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism" even though "it appeared to be about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far." (129) Within his "destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings," (129) the Russian is yet kept from the darkness of self assertion by his total loss of self into the "absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure." (129) But this is not inner strength and holds no guarantee of safety. The spirit of adventure,

naive, enthusiastic, and unpractical, is not rooted in truth. There is no guarantee of safety in this world to anyone, anywhere, but the man who knows reality, can face it and "meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn strength"(106) has the most safety there is. The Russian, held up by something as fragile as the spirit of adventure, is constantly in danger of plunging into the depths of disillusionment. Confident, in his enthusiasm, "that Chance is a friend and Fortune a guide"<sup>1</sup> as Zabel puts it, the Russian is labouring under an illusion, sustained by idealism. He is thus prey to the truth, meeting it unprepared with real knowledge of himself or his world. The recognition of this truth, therefore, has the potential ability to reverse the terms of his whole life and destroy him if he cannot measure up to it.

Marlow's experience of this man and his weakness drives him to feel that "never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear . . . so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness."(130) The effect of coming into contact with a man whose will is concentrated in on himself to the point that he acknowledges no human responsibility or restraint, combined with the Russian's unhealthy worship of that man, has distorted the judgement of the Russian, a fairly good man albeit not a very wise or strong man. He is, therefore, prepared to defend Kurtz even to the point of excusing his attempt on his life; he will not "judge him."(131) He will not judge his coming to the natives "with

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<sup>1</sup>Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 19.

thunder and lightning,"(131) his unspeakable ceremonies of human sacrifice to himself, his murder of the "rebels" and the fact that "the appetite for ivory" having got the better of his "less material aspirations,"(132) Kurtz raided the country for it. He has devoted his life to Kurtz for the time he has been with him and "couldn't leave him."

(131)

The Russian is kept from actual participation in the darkness by the fact that the uncalculating spirit of adventure, the very thing that led him to his uneasy position in the first place, had "consumed all thought of self so completely"(129) that he "wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in"(129) for himself. That is, his darkness consists of avoiding knowledge of the darkness in life, and in that he deceives himself--but the fact that he is not a self-seeking individual holds him above actual participation in the ritual of darkness. He is hollow, yet he is not evil, although in his blindness he holds the potential for evil, and does not fight evil when faced with it. In that sense he perpetuates the darkness. He points out to Marlow the effect and charm of the snake--the ability it has to fascinate the "silly little bird." And the Russian remains, I think, a silly little bird who cannot understand, who has no inner strength and who evades his personal responsibility for the world and therefore allows the darkness of exploitation, opportunism and money-madness to continue unchecked. This is what horrifies Marlow. At the same time, the Russian exudes a sense of youthful celebration of innocence and courage understandable in untested, immature man. Again this is part of the Russian's own darkness for it is a celebration of courage based on

ignorance; it is not the courage of strength. The Russian's is a hollow and meaningless kind of courage for he has no real idea of what he must face, what he must fight. Marlow recognizes that the Russian's position is a dangerous one; he is prey to the darkness in a wilderness "pitiless to human weakness." (130) Connected by their common calling, these seamen Marlow and the Russian are also initially somewhat connected by nature. Both are adventurous, both are fascinated by Kurtz, and by the freedom of the wilderness. Within that freedom lies the possibility of the darkness and it can fascinate men; it fascinates Kurtz and it fascinates the Russian and Marlow; it can also trap men. It can trap men like Kurtz and just so much more easily can it charm a "silly little bird."

On his journey up the river--travelling into the heart of darkness, "cut off for ever from everything you had known once" (103)--Marlow experiences the intensity of the "implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention" (103) more and more. He meets, as we have seen, men of the darkness and recognizes their evil--the evil of the I-It relation not renewed by the Thou. He sees the behaviour the It relation allows. It is the evil of behaviour untempered by experience of dialogue with reality and unmitigated by concern for others. Marlow becomes acquainted with the almost incredible self-centred cruelty that man is capable of when he ceases to care about anything but his own desires and needs. Marlow also begins to face the darkness in himself which is twofold. It is the potential evil in himself, the behaviour his need for self assertion could allow if not controlled--he, too, is capable of anything. The darkness in him is also his struggle to avoid



facing the darker facts of life, such as his own potential evil, and the taint of death in life. This struggle is part of the darkness because it hides the truth; it is living a lie and allowing the evil of the I-It relation to perpetuate itself. When Marlow begins to face the inadequacy of his view of life and begins to see life whole, he sees the darkness in himself and recognizes his connection with humanity in it. Marlow, too, with his instinctive, untested beliefs, his youthful enthusiasm and initial zest for adventure, is a "silly little bird" capable of being fascinated by the snake, capable of being caught up in the self-centred partnership of the Company. He must, and does, realize this potential in himself as part of his given situation, part of his reality. He must break away from clinging to his illusion of life as a "world of straightforward facts"(78) and realign himself with what actually exists--including absurdity, death and evil--before his "conscious moral existence begins."<sup>1</sup> There are several instances where this tainted potential in himself becomes clear, although Marlow's own recognition, I think, does not follow immediately upon the experiences, but grows and emerges later on, after the rest of the experience of Kurtz's darkness, the crisis of his trip into darkness, and even after, in later reflection. Then Marlow recognizes his departure from his normal behaviour when he used influence to get himself his position. In a more solid way he recognizes it later when he is dealing with the manager's spy and allows him to believe that he is of the "new gang--the gang of virtue . . . especially recommended."(92) Without, at the

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 20.

time, being fully aware of who Kurtz is--"an angel or a fiend"(94)-- Marlow allows his enthusiasm for the idea of the man and what he stands for to overcome his natural distaste for lying. He does not see Kurtz, the man; it is an idea that carries him away--an unexamined ideal, unclear, unseen and untested. His naive enthusiasm takes hold of him to the extent that his desired end--helping Kurtz--becomes more important to him than the means of obtaining it. Marlow does not, I think, fully recognize that at the time; he says of his near lie, to his listeners aboard the Nellie, "of course, in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me whom you know . . ."(95) But he recognizes his own potential evil and his own attempts to avoid reality:

You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies--which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world--what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims.(94)

Thus, unlike the Russian who cannot understand what is going on around him and refuses to judge the darkness, and unlike the pilgrims, the manager and the expedition who will not see it, Marlow is able to grow into a recognition of it. Marlow may very well want to forget the "taint of death" and the "flavour of mortality" in himself--but he does not in the long run. While Marlow may hate a lie because of its taint of death, his very attempt to forget that flavour of mortality is itself a lie. Forced to wrestle with his own death and to go through the ordeal of witnessing Kurtz's death, Marlow no longer lives in ignor-

ance of that lie. He is aware. He can, later, "convey the dream-sensation--that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt"(95)--of his experience, to his listeners only because he himself can see it and face it. And, his experience with Kurtz, where he must leave behind him every shelter and fight with only the nakedness of his self to fall back on, brings the full potential of the darkness, the horror, into terrible clarity for him.

In the meantime Marlow is still journeying to the culminating point of his experience, learning more and more that "no man here bears a charmed life,"(96) not even himself. And until his experience with Kurtz he has yet things to which to cling to bolster his own strength to repulse the darkness. He has first his moments of contact with the natives who pass the boat in their boats. He has his friendships with the "few mechanics" despised by the pilgrims,(97) honest, working men. There is his friendship with the boiler-maker who shares Marlow's desire for rivets to repair the boat. With the mistaken thought that the rivets are finally coming, Marlow and this man drive the silence of the wilderness back for a moment and disturb the pilgrims, as they dance a jig like lunatics together on the iron deck in a moment of carefree if deluded delight. He has his work on the hulk which enables him to turn "his back on that station,"(89) which one could see at the "first glance" was run by the "flabby devil,"(86) and thereby keep his hold "on the redeeming facts of life."(89)

The boat, and the work Marlow does on her, are perhaps his main crutch and shelter from reality. In being that for him they are, of

course, lies in that they enable him to avoid confronting reality. As lies, as hypocritical as the world he detests, they are part of Marlow's own darkness. The boat is his "influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat,"(96) and this he clings to until he meets Kurtz and leaves all familiar things behind in the onslaught of darkness. He comments, of his attempts to bandage the "leaky steam-pipes," and "watch the steering,"(106) that there "was surface truth enough in these things to save a wiser man."(106) Restrained from fully acknowledging his response to the "terrible frankness" of the primitive, Marlow is saved from possibly completely giving in to his own "wild and passionate uproar."(105) In this way the restraint of surface truth is saving but it is not enough, finally, because it can be removed, stripped away, as it is for Marlow when he encounters Kurtz. Marlow comes to know that you need to go below the surface truth; you need to know the depths underneath you in order to keep from hitting a snag. Patching and bandaging are only temporary and will "fly off at the first good shake"(106) and a man will be left face to face with his naked self and his own strength or lack of it.

Nevertheless the boat, and Marlow's work on it, serve a positive function as well as a negative one. While the boat, it is true, serves as a shelter from the hard facts of reality, it also serves as a testing ground for Marlow's ability to perform a task well and with care and honest concern. He comments of his boat,

I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend could have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit--to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all

the fine things that can be done. I don't like work--no man does--but I like what there is in the work--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and can never tell what it really means.(97)

Instead of thinking of all the fine things that can be done, as Kurtz does, and not doing them, Marlow, with the help of his mechanic friends, perseveres against the absurdity, inefficiency, and rottenness of the station, and repairs the boat successfully. It is part of the process, I think, of his education from an enthusiastic youth, approaching life as an adventure, confident of fortune's generosity, to a mature man, capable of recognizing the depths, able to do a difficult and demanding job.

One of the more important incidents, enlightening to Marlow, that he experiences on his trip into the heart of darkness, is his recognition of the restraint of the hungry cannibals. Their restraint is a dazzling fact of human responsibility to others (albeit a most unexpected one!) and stands before him as an example of the fact that such restraint does exist. Brought up the river with only stinking "dead hippo" to eat, with no one bothering "to trouble how they would eat" since "there was a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other made down the river,"(111) they are paid in useless strips of brass wire and left to half-starve. In the face of their hunger Marlow wonders at the restraint they display since they "were thirty to five" and could have had "a good tuck-in for once." (112) "It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly" and "principles . . . are less than chaff in a breeze."(113) "It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's

soul--than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad but true."(113) Furthermore, "these chaps had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple."(113) Marlow would, he says, "just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield."(113)

This is real restraint--"one of those human secrets that baffle probability"(112)--of men subjugating a basic need, a "physical necessity,"(113) with no earthly reasoned scruple on their part. It is a "fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma."(113) The pilgrims are so corrupt, so hypocritical, that they are completely unwholesome--yet as Marlow points out "disgust simply does not exist where hunger is."(113) No matter how unwholesome the pilgrims are, they are food and it is the cannibals' restraint that stops them, not simply disgust--an unearthly restraint and a mysterious one. It hits Marlow with a wave of consciousness--"new light, as it were"(112)--as he realizes the dual possibilities: the unwholesome hypocritical life of the pilgrims and, in comparison, the restraint of the cannibals. The lesson is the more pointed in that it turns Marlow's presuppositions upside down. The white "pilgrims," products of civilization, are unwholesome, without restraint; the natives, products of primitivism, have it. The immensity, the enigma, carries the possibilities within it for "heroism, fidelity and love" and for absurdity, "idiocy and brutality."<sup>1</sup> They are not necessarily to be found where you expect them. The fact of the cannibals' restraint is as real as the facts of darkness. It is a greater mystery than the darkness;

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Edwards, "Clothes for a Pilgrimage," p. 71.

it is not simple but dazzling, not earthly and reasoned but unearthly, intuitive and unfathomable, but it is there. This kind of restraint is a real possibility in the world for, as Marlow says, "there was the fact facing me." (113) And there is present the comparison of the other possibility--that of the darkness. The pilgrims, compared with the natives they despise, are found wanting. Marlow comments, "just then I perceived--in a new light, as it were--how wholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so--what shall I say?--so--unappetizing." (112) And so Marlow chooses positively, rejecting identification with the unwholesome pilgrims, for the "something restraining," the dazzling fact of the cannibals. (112)

Marlow's meeting with Kurtz is, of course, the culminating point of his whole experience. Up to this point he has had help in keeping "his precarious grip on existence"; (112) he has not "let go" his "hold of the bottom" and wound up "absolutely in the air" (113) dependent on his own inborn strength. Up to this point he has gone through, bad as they are, only "the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught which came in due course." (112) Marlow can still stand back in the security of having both feet firmly planted on the surface-truth of his boat, and he can judge; he has yet to come to grips with the nightmare.

As Marlow journeys away from his previous ordered existence, his world changes in his sight from an ordered to a disordered, absurd universe where reason and humanity seem to have little place. Action seems as futile as the stout man's attempt to put out a fire "hopeless from the very first" with a "quart of water" in a "tin pail" with "a

hole in the bottom."(90) His world will never be the same again to him and the crisis of this change takes place when he meets Kurtz and is forced out of his erstwhile security into all the starkness of a dark reality and made to come to grips with it.

Kurtz, the "chief of the Inner Station,"(92) is first described to Marlow as a "prodigy."(92) He is, says the manager's spy to him, "an emissary of pity and science and progress" dedicated to "the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose . . . a special being."(92) Thus he is represented to him as a man who feels that every station should be a beacon of enlightenment as well as being run for profit: "a beacon on the road to better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing."(101) And somehow this man who stands for everything moral in the way of principles has degenerated to the level of murder, of self-worship, of total surrender to the inner darkness with, and yet almost against, the consent of his will. What is left of him is his voice--still mouthing eloquent "splendid monologues on . . . love, justice, conduct of life."(134) It is a voice capable of inspiring devotion, with "the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls," "fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings" and conquer "one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking."(124)

Kurtz entered the wilderness unequipped to face its onslaught since his ideas, principles and beliefs were only his because they were his society's and "he could get himself to believe anything--anything."(151) Without knowledge of the depths of himself, his weaknesses and



his basic desires, Kurtz was an unprepared, hollow man. His enthusiasm and his faith, his confidence in himself and his European beliefs, were naive, untested. They had not become his with religious reality--he had not gained them through experience. Therefore, once out of the security of Europe, once into the freedom of the wilderness, they are prey to reality. Kurtz, then, is prey to the truth of life, leaping on him like an enemy from "the unfathomed depths of our secret natures, our ignorance, our unconscious and untested selves."<sup>1</sup> For Kurtz is a man who meets the truth "unprepared" and finds there is "no escape" from it--the "terms of life are reversed" for him; "fate compels recognition--of one's self, of reality, of error or mistaken expectation or defeat" and he cannot "measure up" to the "conscious moral existence" that such recognition calls for.<sup>2</sup> The point is made clearly enough by Conrad in his treatment of Kurtz's paper.

He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings--we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.' . . . This was the unbounded power of eloquence--of words--of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' (123)

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

What Kurtz failed to recognize at the time he wrote the enthusiastic, liberal, benevolent paper, is that by the simple exercise of the will in such a place, a man who sees himself as alone and responsible to nobody and nothing can exert a power for evil practically unbounded. This simple exercise of the will, without the saving grace of the Thou attitude of responsibility, is evil, divorced from community, from concern. Kurtz had little experience of freedom outside the European community which accepts, on the surface, his code of conduct, when he wrote his paper. He had, therefore, little experience of his own nature and less of the nature of the people he intended to help. His paper, then, was written blindly--his altruism was not based on a thorough knowledge of life but on abstract concepts. He was untested, and when tested finally proves hollow; therefore his reaction is complete disillusionment, anger with himself for his former idealism, and so his practical hint becomes "Exterminate all the brutes!" Never really real to him, the natives have become completely objects--not humans, but brutes. Separated, in his complete freedom, from the Thou, he no longer stands in relation to life but before it in an attitude of possession and destruction. He has ceased to stand in relation to life since "the continually growing world of It" has overrun him, robbing him even of his own reality."(Thou: 46) An "animated image of death" Kurtz has become all devouring mouth "as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him."(135) By this time, "his--let us say--nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which . . . were offered up to him . . . to Mr. Kurtz himself."(123) That he still

voices his moral ethics despite his totally immoral behaviour is revolting. It is a kind of hypocrisy--not, I think, directed at others because he is beyond that, but to try and pacify that part of him that is still judging himself. Kurtz is not "abandoned beyond the point of insignificance"--he dies struggling--hence "he lives in the company of a ruthless inquisitor,"<sup>1</sup> his conscience. Therefore, with all his ability to get himself to believe anything, he attempts--for the most part unsuccessfully--to hide his darkness from himself hence, of course, perpetuating it. Buber comments on such men: "the mankind of mere It that is imagined, postulated, and propagated by such a man has nothing in common with a living mankind where Thou may truly be spoken. The noblest fiction is fetish, the loftiest sentiment is depraved."(Thou: 13-14)

Until his final pronouncement, Kurtz, exposed to the darkness, has not the strength to save his principles in anything but words and defeated struggle.

Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts . . . there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. . . . But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion.(133)

He has not the inner strength, with all his principles and morals, to withstand the lure of the darkness, the gratification of his corrupt will, the I-It relationship with the world. The wilderness

whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel

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<sup>1</sup>Zabel. Ibid., p. 28.

with this great solitude--and the whisper proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.(133)

Kurtz did make one attempt to leave the wilderness which he knew he had not the inner strength to handle, "but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back."(100) He turned "his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home--perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness."(100-101) He turned back perhaps because he could not face the possible loss of his power, his gratification--perhaps because he had insight to know that if he did not go back, if he depended on headquarters, home, relief, he would never measure up; he would become as dependent and as hypocritical as the pilgrims and their kind. So he turned back and having met himself in the "utter solitude without a policeman . . . utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion,"(122) he finds that his "own innate strength," his "own capacity for faithfulness" to his ideal (122) is too weak to withstand the pressure. Kurtz has become a man "lost . . . utterly lost"(143) into a life given over to the gratification of his desires whatever the cost to others. He has objectified the world and everything in it into his own possessions and no longer stands in relation to it. He stands within an I-It relationship to the world which has stifled his ability to meet other people in a true Thou relationship with "no thing for his object."(Thou: 4) Everything has become his in his mind. Marlow comments, and his attitude is perfectly clear:

You should have heard him say, 'My ivory,' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him--but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. (121)

Kurtz lacked the extra something, the restraint, the faith, the belief, the strength, to save him even while he fights to save himself. He left behind him the seeming security of the surface-truth, the hypocrisy of Europe with its false restraints. In the wilderness, in its freedom, faced with the dual possibilities, Kurtz fails to choose the self-imposed restraint of the I-Thou relationship to life. Instead he becomes freedom incarnate, falling further and further into the I-It world away from responsibility and concern. Possessing freedom, Kurtz becomes possessed by it, possessed by the idea and trapped in a ritual of constant self-gratification, combined with constant self-hate. Trapped as he is in his hell, he still struggles--still loses. As the Russian says, "this man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away." (131) Each time the Russian persuades him to leave "he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt . . . forget himself amongst these people." (131) Despite the fact that Kurtz is "a gifted creature" (119) and that he arrived with high ideals, all his action winds back to one thing: "he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together." (119)

Faced with this man, the long sought end to his journey, Marlow finds him complicated: a disillusioned idealist, a mad soul, lost, depraved yet--somehow--still struggling. Marlow is confused, frustrated

and deflated. Kurtz, as an ideal in an accepted code of behaviour, collapses like a pricked balloon and Marlow, before he is forced to confront him finally, is shocked at the total lack of restraint and moral purpose that characterizes him.

Marlow's confrontation with Kurtz is the crisis of his change and it starts with his discovery of Kurtz's absence from the boat, his attempted return to the wild. It is here that Marlow experiences the "moral shock . . . as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon [him] unexpectedly." (141) It is here that Marlow kicks completely free of habit, security, and surface truth and enters, momentarily, the realm of complete freedom. Here, with the disappearance of Kurtz from his room, the whole of Marlow's reality is questioned, suspended, and he moves right out of it. He literally does not believe his eyes and with that disbelief comes sheer terror. Given the remarkable Mr. Kurtz, nothing is impossible, and his disappearance raises for Marlow the whole question of Kurtz's very existence, and, therefore, the credibility of Marlow's reality. At this point Marlow slips into a kind of mad game far removed from his normal behaviour, trailing Kurtz with exultation and the vague notion of "giving him a drubbing." (142) He is, at this point, in tune with the beat of the wilderness; no longer is there only the "faintest trace of response to the terrible frankness" of the "monstrous and free" (106) nature of man. Marlow is in tune with it, "strangely cocksure of everything" as if it were only "a boyish game." (142) Reality has become a game and Marlow's whole engagement with it has changed--until, confronting Kurtz, he enters again. Then and only

then, Marlow, forced, without a surface to stand on, has to deal with a being who knows no god but himself. Marlow is left with no defense but himself, no protection but his own strength. As he says,

the mind of man is capable of anything--because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage--who can tell?--but truth--stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder--the man knows and can look on without a wink. . . . He must meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his inborn strength. Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags--rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row--is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the voice that cannot be silenced.(106)

Kurtz has heard, admitted, has had a voice, and he let it speak for evil. "There was nothing either above him or below him"; Marlow "could not appeal in the name of anything high or low [but had], even like the niggers, to invoke him--himself--his own incredible degradation. . . . He had kicked himself loose of the earth. . . . He had kicked the very earth to pieces."(143) This is an example of the sickness that Buber finds in the modern age. The I of the I-It relation, "an I that possesses all, makes all, succeeds with all, this is I that is unable to say Thou, unable to meet a being essentially."(Eclipse: 129) Further, "this selfhood that has become omnipotent, with all the It around it, can naturally acknowledge neither God nor any genuine absolute which manifests itself to men as of non-human origin."(Eclipse: 129) Buber might well be commenting on Kurtz himself, so apt is the description; the parallel is clear, I think.

In the end Marlow watches "both the diabolic love and the un-earthly hate of the mysteries" Kurtz had penetrated fight "for posses-

sion of that soul satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power."(146) Kurtz's mind never ceases to function clearly but it does so with a horrible perversion that drives his soul mad.(144) Having cut himself off from earth and community his intelligence then becomes "concentrated . . . upon himself with horrible intensity"(144) justifying, judging, condemning--"the ghost within him" whispering the confession of his "non-salvation."(Thou: 46) Having launched himself out into the void without support, alone, Kurtz cannot escape himself. Divided, he undergoes the torments of the damned for his mind and will carry him to the limits of freedom. His "soul was mad," Marlow comments:

being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had--for my sins--I suppose--to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind 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 struggling blindly with itself.(144)

Marlow struggled with Kurtz's soul and in doing so "the foundations of [their] intimacy were being laid--to endure--to endure--even to the end--even beyond."(143) For this is where Marlow finally leaves his innocence behind and enters into full knowledge. Marlow "tried to break the spell--the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness--that seemed to draw [Kurtz] to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions."(143) Marlow is alone, cut off from all security and dealing with the "incredible degradation,"(143) the total darkness of a man on his way to a ceremony of natives about to offer up to him the "unspeakable



rites"(123) of human sacrifice that were due to a white god who had come to them "with thunder and lightning" and whom "they adored."(130-131) This is the ultimate expression of the It relationship for in allowing sacrifice to himself, human sacrifice, Kurtz has become a god in his world, acknowledging no higher authority. His whim has become law and in it there is no concern for other humans, no responsibility. Kurtz has, in effect, by adopting an I-It stance to the world, closed the lines of communication with that world. Hence he has completely lowered himself by any moral gauge--the acceptance of the sacrifice of life to him is the ultimate egotism.

Marlow, alone, confronting Kurtz says, and does, "the right thing."(143) Facing the utmost degradation and unable to appeal to "anything high or low,"(143) not knowing whether he stands "on the ground or . . . in the air,"(143) Marlow falls back on his own inner strength and it is enough. Kurtz, having allowed "his unlawful soul" to be "beguiled . . . beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations,"(143) at the end, "struggled with himself."(144) "The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham"(146) and he judged himself. He cannot, however, return to the world; "he had stepped over the edge."(149) Marlow witnesses the "inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself."(144) Kurtz dies crying out, "during that supreme moment of complete knowledge . . . 'The horror! The horror!'"(147) This is a moment of complete knowledge; Kurtz sees and judges his own life "in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment"(147) in "intense and hopeless despair." It is a moment that

Buber would call "Thou" because it is recognition of reality. It is a judgement of previous almost "impenetrable darkness." (147) When a man wrestles with himself he stops evading the truth of himself and faces it. This is dialogue; it is real and it is good even if, and because, the self-expressed verdict is condemnation. Yet until this final moment when Kurtz's stare becomes "wide enough to embrace the whole universe," (149) his soul is captured within a "perfectly clear" intelligence totally "concentrated . . . upon himself with horrible intensity." (144) One wonders whether Kurtz actually does, in his moment of complete knowledge, get beyond himself "enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness" (149) or whether his own heart is all that he is concerned with. Nevertheless, one cannot doubt that Kurtz does get beyond himself enough to judge and condemn that complete and horrible egotism and the behaviour to which it has led him. Therefore, while one can doubt the wideness of his vision, one can certainly not doubt the reality of it and, in this sense, it is a Thou, an encounter with truth. For once Kurtz is all in his moment of knowledge. Without objectifying, without standing back and justifying, explaining, moralizing, Kurtz stands over against the truth of his life and plunges his whole being into his verdict. Kurtz, fallen, is still a "remarkable man." (149)

Marlow does not join Kurtz in stepping "over the edge"; (149) he "had been permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot," (149) and re-enter the world. He had no mind for a "smash-up." (113) Kurtz struggled and Marlow "wrestled with death" (148) having struggled with Kurtz's soul, accepting "this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares

forced upon him."(146) Having stepped into the void and been forced, because of his "sins"--his previous reliance on illusory protections from the darkness--to look upon a man lost in it, Marlow "remained to dream the nightmare out to the end."(148) Thereafter he lives, even to the end, with his experience of intimacy with the darkness. Having "wrestled with death"(148) he understands

better the meaning of [Kurtz's] stare, that could not see the flame of the candle but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up; he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrant note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth--the strange commingling of desire and hate.(149)

Kurtz has seen the truth--that man has the darkness there within him; there is always the potential to give in to one's inner desire for self-assertion, at the expense of others. He has also seen the hate he has for that surrender. Both the desire and the hate are his. Marlow sees Kurtz's final cry, in its despair and recognition, as a judgement of the darkness, and a revolt against it. He is forced, by the fact that he is lying there "waiting for death,"(147) into recognition of the darkness of his life, the potential tragedy of it. His cry judges his surrender and is, I feel, a revolt against it--and an affirmation of that revolt. Better his cry, Marlow comments, than one of "careless contempt."(149) In his moment of supreme knowledge Kurtz faces and acknowledges the horror in a "final burst of sincerity."(144) He has seen the darkness, and as Marlow says, it is "withering to one's belief in mankind." Zabel comments that when life is conceived of as tragedy, we begin to live. "Such living may destroy, but it is a cer-

tainty that only such living can save."<sup>1</sup> Once reality is faced, it can be dealt with by those with the strength to do so. Kurtz can see the darkness but he cannot see the light--the light of fighting it in life; the wilderness destroys him. Nevertheless his acknowledgement was "an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why," adds Marlow, "I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last and even beyond." (149) It was a moral victory because it was a recognition of his defeat and the horror of his surrender to his egotism. Kurtz can see the darkness and see the way, the revolt--even if he cannot follow it alive. Therefore he is more worthy of Marlow's understanding and loyalty than any pilgrim or manager who would not acknowledge the darkness as such nor affirm revolt in any way as an answer to it. By seeing the darkness as a horror and not as normal, Kurtz goes one step beyond the pilgrims. Recognition of his defeat in the face of the horror and including that in the horror itself, is an affirmation of the fact that there is a better way.

Marlow had started his loyalty to Kurtz with a near lie, moving beyond the dictates of his code of ethics and his fear of the taint of death inherent in a lie, to the dictates of the "yes" against the "no" from his soul, including himself, even so, in the fallibility of the human race. "There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies--which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world," (94) he says.

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 20.

Now he lays the ghost of Kurtz with one more lie. This time, instead of leading him into loss of innocence which he has already accomplished, this lie leads him back into life. And this despite the complex nature of the lie. He acknowledges the reality of death and evil in his lie to Kurtz's Intended, meeting her need with the responsibility of an I to a Thou. Kurtz's Intended (obviously an object, not a subject, to Kurtz) is a girl with "a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering,"(153) "guileless, profound, confident, and trustful."(153) She is guileless in that she is not knowingly deceitful. She is profound in that Marlow finds in her complexities of love and sorrow interwoven with pride, of fidelity and belief mingled with a need for reassurance, of egotism, and, over all this, a saving faith. She is not profound, in the sense that she has limited knowledge of these complexities within her. It is Marlow who sees these fully.

She is obviously devoted to Kurtz and her memory of him; "for her he had died only yesterday."(153) She has been presented only with the untested Kurtz, the unfallen Kurtz, the man not exposed to the darkness and therefore still in possession of his high moral principles. She has, therefore, faith in him, his moral stature, and the depths of his feelings for her. This faith is an unreal one, as Marlow knows, based on unreal premises. While Marlow can agree that Kurtz's "words will remain,"(156) he is aware of the irony in her belief in Kurtz's example. Certainly his example will remain, but not because "his goodness shone in every act!"(156) Nevertheless, Marlow's anger subsides in him "before a feeling of infinite pity"(156) for the girl. It is true that "with every word spoken the room was growing darker";(154)

but it is also true that she "remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love."(154)

In his lie, his lie for her to live with, Marlow denies her the truth; he gives her what she wants, her illusions. He, "bowing his head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which[ he ] could not have defended her,"(155) lays Kurtz's ghost with a lie, changing the illusion-shattering "horror" to the illusion-saving "your name."(157) Thus the lie is something he should and should not have done--it is finally something he must do to ease "her pain" with his "sympathy."(155) It is her need of him in her pain, and her faith and love, that causes him finally to utter the lie. In this he meets her as a human being in need of help and, I think, in Buber's terms, shows love--the "responsibility of an I for a Thou."(Thou: 15) With the decision to lie comes the knowledge that nothing is absolutely true in the world he meets; there is no one code of ethics, no monopoly on truth to guide him. It is, then, truer to lie and meet her need than it is to tell the truth and destroy her. Along with his recognition of her pride and her egotism there is his recognition of the "saving illusion" and the need for that. His recognition of the necessity of illusions is a recognition of truth in some circumstances and this is one of them. She believes in the best in Kurtz--and that illusion is a saving one; it is a loving one; its unearthly glow illuminates her in the otherwise triumphant darkness. With the action of his lie Marlow is forced out of his isolation from the world of "commonplace individuals going about their business in the

assurance of perfect safety."(150) Zabel comments that "it is finally the world that saves us--the world of human necessities and duty."<sup>1</sup> And that world includes responsibility and love; it is to these that Marlow responds.

The fact that Marlow could not have defended her from the darkness does not matter to his revolt; after all, he himself has acknowledged that the revolt was a "moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats."(149) What is important is that he "could not tell her" because it "would have been too dark--too dark altogether"(157) to extinguish the "light of belief and love."(154) What does matter is Marlow's desire to "keep back alone for the salvation of another soul" a "moment of triumph for the wilderness."(152) It is not enough in the quest for restraint to be the kind of man the clerk was, "bent over his books . . . making perfectly correct transactions" while fifty feet away is "a grove of death."(85) This is the restraint of a man with backbone, yes, but also of a man cut off from humanity and human feelings. Backbone of this sort can be broken; fighting the darkness is, after all, a "back-breaking business."(122) Backbone alone is not enough unless it is flexible. The clerk patches over the wilderness and darkness with surface and rigid conformity to standards alien to the wilderness. This is backbone that can snap; to bend is to survive and to bend is to first recognize the darkness that has been there all the time. Thus the restraint of the clerk is not the real restraint of a man who has the concern and courage to revolt against the death in

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Zabel, The Portable Conrad, p. 29.

the darkness. It is the kind of restraint that leads the clerk to confess that "when one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages--hate them to the death." (84-85) It is the restraint of a man who had achieved character but not an I-Thou relationship with other being. This, Marlow, at the time, was not sufficiently mature or experienced enough to recognize. Refraining from actual participation in the I-It murder and exploitation, the clerk does nothing to stop them, to alleviate suffering. He is sufficiently caught in the I-It world for the "groans of a [sick] person" to be merely a distraction to his work. (84)

Marlow's restraint is not of this order--and through his experience he has become able to differentiate. He is not able to ignore the needs of others the way the clerk can, but instead meets them, in as much as he can; he cannot avoid his personal responsibility toward other beings. He has met the darkness, the horror that Kurtz fought in himself. He has recognized his own illusions for what they were and has been forced to face reality. Seeing life as what he would like it to be, Marlow has been forced, then, to see it as it actually is. He has been forced to face the depths in himself and life, and the darkness in the world. He has met with the subtle, more corrupt darkness of the pilgrims and manager. He has met with the silly little birds, and recognized his own kinship with these people who are fascinated, in their own weakness, with the darkness. He has met the people of the "sepulchral city" and their darkness of living to "filch a little money from each other," (149) "going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety . . . folly in the face of a danger." (149-150) He has



seen the triumph of man's inner lust for possession of other life, the triumph of the darkness. He knows that he is only preserving an illusion, not presenting the truth, the reality in its darkness. But the illusion is a great and saving one because it is a loving one; for Marlow to have destroyed that illusion would have been to destroy a "light of belief and love." It would have been too dark indeed to have done that. In a dark, very imperfect world, the "light of belief and love" is the only truth we have--the only belief to follow. Therefore, Marlow has to accept the responsibility of his lie and what it hides. Marlow accepts his knowledge of the darkness in himself and in others and at the same time declares his role--to fight the darkness in full knowledge of its power. His fight, we are to assume, I think, is to be fought in more or less perpetual defeat; however, the main point is his strength in the fight and his genuine concern for other beings. In an age which has hardened into the world of I-It in general terms, individuals who stand in relation to other people in genuine, caring contact are scarce--but their "glowing deeds" do "spasmodically break through" (Thou: 54) and they are badly needed. These deeds are not glorious or heroic in the traditionally accepted sense of those words; they are everyday, unspectacular deeds coming from a commitment to the deliberate belief of keeping open the lines of communication between people, of operating within a context of concern for others. In this sense they are "glowing"--radiating meaning like Marlow's tales, (68) hazy, complicated yet glowing. Marlow accepts finally his given situation and fights the factuality of it--the horror. "I've had to resist and to attack sometimes--that's only one way of resisting--without counting the exact

cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into." (81) This is Marlow's eventual stance of rebellion in acceptance. He resists the "strong lusty devils" of violence, greed, and hot desire; more than that, he resists the "flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of rapacious and pitiless folly" no matter how "insidious" it may be. (81) Necessarily, in order to resist them, Marlow accepts them as further facts of life, not straightforward facts this time, but indisputably real.

Marlow posits his beliefs clearly to his companions and in doing so, underlines his acceptance of an unpleasant reality and his attitude towards it. Like the Ancient Mariner, he must carry his message, reach out to people as best he can:

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!--breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in--your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure back-breaking business. (122)

What saves Marlow from the I-It relationship, then, is his strength and singleness of purpose directed toward the "salvation of another soul," (152) his devotion to keeping the light flickering in the face of the darkness, "one of those human secrets that baffle probability." (112) This is the "fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery." (113) For Marlow has also made the discovery, along with the discovery of the darkness, that the "enigma," the mysterious immensity contains the possibility for responsible love, human restraint, occurring for no earthly reason, but part of the Thou relationship between

man and reality. Life, much like the conquest of the earth, "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind--as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness,"(69) is re-deemed by a true and deliberate belief--"an idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up, and bow down before."(69-70) It is a belief entered into in liberty and complete knowledge of reality. The deliberate belief must move past the irony of idealism you can "sacrifice to," as Marlow has had to learn from his experience with Kurtz. It still has to be something you can set up and bow down before, but not sacrifice to--as Marlow bows before the faith and love of the girl. If the unselfish deliberate belief in an idea becomes the unquestioning worship of that idea to the exclusion of concern for people, then it is no redemption at all. It must, then, be a responsible, informed belief--not like Kurtz's idealism, stemming from the man's ability to "get himself to believe anything--anything."(151) The idea, then, the eternal ethos, is not the conquest of the earth nor the possession of other men. It is not the idea of the I-It relationship of man objectifying and possessing. It is the I-Thou of meeting and touching other life. Man is healthy, redeemed, as long as he is not limited solely "to the world of It but can continually leave it for the world of relation."(Thou:51) Then his will to be powerful is under control, albeit never perfectly or permanently. Thus it is that Marlow's true idea is the fight against darkness in the face of its power in man, the fight to retain the light of the human soul in the face of the dark. And, seemingly, this idea stems from the strength in a man, from the some-

thing unearthly, the "something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter." (91)

Throughout this interpretation of Heart of Darkness, I have attempted to use Buber's theology, where appropriate, to dig, to describe, to draw parallels. It is appropriate now, I think, to state those parallels and to sum up, using Buber's vocabulary to do so. Marlow has grown into his deliberate belief throughout his long, painful, difficult journey into experience. He has grown from an impetuous, adventure seeking youth, confident of the benevolent nature of the world, through disillusionment, when everything seemed futile, including his action or non-action, to a mature, experienced man positing his own life-stance based on the actuality of life. Marlow entered the wilderness as unprepared by knowledge of himself as Kurtz did. He entered it with the same kind of naive uninformed enthusiasm and idealism as Kurtz had. It is only slowly and when forced that Marlow comes to realize his own relationship with the darkness of egotism thriving in freedom. Again it is only slowly that Marlow realizes the intrinsic hypocrisy of the civilization of which he is a part. In his journey Marlow faces the void freedom creates where everything is permitted and comprehends a world where, seemingly, no intrinsic enduring values exist. He himself steps into freedom to the point where reality is questioned and finally slips for him before he re-enters the world, changed. He is forced to see that, since nothing is absolute and everything is fluid, he himself must posit his own way. He can no longer, in the harsh light of his recognition of reality, afford to be unquestioningly loyal to his civilization's code. He has seen the

hypocrisy of that civilization exemplified by the pilgrims, the manager, the Company, the people of the city--and he has seen the darkness underlying it, the will to possess, control, even destroy. He has also seen the unexplainable, mysterious restraint of the cannibals operating outside of hypocrisy or civilization. He has experienced the Thou of dialogue, struggle, revolt, and, finally, of a complex sort of concern for others in his lie. After this experience Marlow will never again be able to see anything as simple, clear-cut and definite. Everything is hazy, complicated and not quite clear, hence a man must just do the best he can in these circumstances. There are limitations to living in actuality; Marlow cannot, for example, tell the truth to the Intended but must resort to a lie for the truth would destroy her while her love saves her. He cannot give Kurtz the "justice which was his due,"(157) the truth, for justice must, he finds, be tempered with mercy. Marlow realizes that what he has learned must be used flexibly, in the context of the given social situation. Entering into this mature and real stance, Marlow has one belief--not even a principle, but a firmly chosen belief--to guide him. That belief is that no code is as important as people; no truth as important as love and faith, the "great and saving illusion."(155) Beyond that he knows that a man's effort must be bent towards fighting the darkness if he is truly to be a man. And beyond that there is only the knowledge that his true allegiance must lie beyond principles no matter how wise they may seem. It must lie with a knowledge of the constant darkness in man's nature and with an acceptance of change, of new knowledge, of the fact that neither he nor his society will ever have a monopoly on truth or wisdom. Meaning will always grow

out from a core; it will never be contained in a kernel. Compromise, qualification, adjustment and a constant struggle are always necessary.

With this knowledge and acceptance Marlow posits his stance inside the incomprehensible mystery of life. His religious reality, his recognition of the reality of darkness present in the enigma of life, gives him his everyday context of rebellion against this darkness with his "unselfish belief in the idea" to support him in his fight. With this inner strength of knowledge and decision he finally, after a long struggle against it, "stands firm, without holding back or reservation before the whole might of reality and answers it in a living way."

(Eclipse: 35) That he does not call the immensity over against which he stands "God" is, as Buber point out, immaterial to his belief and his relation to it; Marlow apprehends, most intensely, "a reality absolutely independent of himself" and has "a relation with it."

(Eclipse: 14) His way of answering the reality of the darkness of the I-It within the immensity, is rebellion; he declares "extremest enmity towards" the darkness and enters his "concrete situation as it actually is . . . in the form of fighting against it"(Eclipse: 37-38) in himself and his world. He enters the religious stance "founded on the duality of I and Thou."(Eclipse: 31) He rejects the I-It stance of Kurtz alive; he accepts the I-Thou stance of revolt as he interprets it from the dying Kurtz. He makes his "assertion . . . out of binding real relationship"(Eclipse: 82) to the truth he has learned from his journey, from his loss of innocence. In doing this he sets his ethos firmly on the ground of solid reality--growing, therefore, out of the naive innocent that he had been.

Having been forced by his experience to test himself and his beliefs, forced to face reality without recourse to any kind of shelter other than his own inner strength, Marlow emerges a changed man. He is forced to recognize the taint of mortality in himself and in the world; he is forced to expose his beliefs of honesty, courage, pity, and a great reliance on the saving nature of work, to his mortality, to the darkness and the reality outside him. And his ethic broadens, becomes more human and more real as he recognizes that the surface-truth of work, good as it may be, is not sufficient, is a shelter from reality. Surface-truth is good, basically, when it is supported by the background knowledge of reality. It is also good in that as a crutch it helps prevent man from descending into darkness if he is unable to save himself any other way. But it is important that Marlow learn, as he does, that for the real man, it is not enough; there must be his own strength behind it. And he learns that honesty, courage and pity must work for humanity and therefore must be tolerant and flexible. The heavens, after all, will not fall on him, if a man lies, if it is done out of concern and is, above all, recognized--the horror acknowledged with fright. Marlow's ethic, also, broadens as he recognizes his own weaknesses, own potential towards serving his own desires. Finally, it broadens as Marlow makes his commitment to humanity in the form of his lie to the girl, in all its implications, and in the form of his attempt to communicate his experience and the darkness to his friends aboard the yawl. Marlow establishes contact with a number of people during his trip; further, he learns from them and what he learns he uses in forming his ethic. What he learns he is also willing, per-

haps even forced, to share, and the contact he achieves with his companions awakens their reaction to his experience, as like a seated Buddha, he shares his wisdom. Particularly he reaches the narrator who listens on the watch for "the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired" (95) by Marlow's sombre tale, to whom he reached out and communicated the feeling and the knowledge of his experience. In other words, he establishes contact with "existing being." (Eclipse: 89) Marlow is not perfect; no one is, but he has learned, is yet willing to learn, and he is a concerned human being. In Heart of Darkness, his realistic, open stance makes him the point of hope for the story. In his recognition of the egotism, the I-It, in life and in himself he moves beyond the unwholesome corruption of the manager and the pilgrims; he is, even as he hoped, less unwholesome than they. He moves beyond the losing fight of Kurtz, and the unrecognized hypocrisy of the city-dwellers. Marlow matures considerably; in facing the darkness he becomes prepared, armed, as it were, for the ongoing fight with himself as well as the rest of the world. He makes a step up, an important one, when he decides to fight the darkness, knowing and accepting its powers.

In establishing his belief and his revolt and his contact with other being, Marlow is able to achieve the "eternal Ethos," the "highest form of the Absolute." (Eclipse: 102) He becomes the human person who "confronts himself with his own potentiality and decides in this confrontation without asking other than what is right and what is wrong in this his own situation," (Eclipse: 95) and this he does in the face of the darkness inherent in mankind and himself. Therefore, Marlow, through



his experience, the culminating point of his existence, achieves the truth of his own life in a religious stance of acceptance of the given through rebellion against the darkness. In his acceptance of the darkness and the fluidity of life, and in his stance of rebellion, Marlow, in comparison to the rest of his world, becomes one of the rare individuals whose "will to profit and be powerful," acknowledged by him, has its "natural and proper effect" because it is upheld by "his will to enter into relation." (Thou: 48) Marlow tries--and this is a strength; he tries to see and learn and he tries to do the right thing. He is not perfect but he has learned and therefore matured from his experience. Above all, when the cards are down, it is "too dark altogether," in spite of himself, to extinguish the "light of belief and love." (154) Rather he would "keep back alone for the salvation of another soul" a "moment of triumph for the wilderness." (152) Thus Marlow experiences the Thou. This Thou relation is never perfect, never permanent since it is man's fate to live in a world where "every Thou . . . must become an It." (Thou: 16) However, within the bounds of his imperfections, Marlow becomes an individual capable of making the attempt at "helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving." (Thou: 15) In his ongoing struggle, in the midst of innumerable defeats, one can hope that Marlow now and then will "be effective" (Thou: 15) in the I-Thou stance of fighting the darkness.

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