



Mistah Kurtz; A Champagne Socialist: A Marxist Study to Joseph Conrad's Novella, *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract: Joseph Conrad's most enticing work "Heart of Darkness (1899) has been regarded as a consequential novella in the canon of English literature and has been praised as a marvellous literary creation of all times. It's about a voyage, a journey, an expedition up the Congo River into "one of the dark places on the earth"(Conrad, 7), that is the cold wild Congo, situated in the heart of Africa, by the story-teller Marlow, a psychologist cum philosopher who watches there, the marry dance of death-cold, fog, tempests, disease, and death"- "death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bushes"...(Conrad, 18,9), and finds a sophisticated civilized European Kurtz, transformed into the Supremo of the savages, and an incarnation of evil. A remarkable socialist, genius, "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress (Conrad, 20), who wanted to bring the light to the darkness in the best tradition of white Man's burden, Kurtz now dogging after the greed of ivory, money and power.

This paper will illustrate how Mistah Kurtz, a champion socialist turns into a champagne socialist and lives a luxurious life subjugating the savages of Africa.

Key words: Kurtz, evil, champagne, socialist, bourgeois, subjugate

I. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad (1857-1927), is an ever glowing literary star in the cosmos of modern English novel. He is a consummate artist, a man of adjectives, a maker of alliteration a master of suspense and irony, and above all a careful and conscious literary genius. Through entertainment and moralising in his novels, he records the complex pattern of human existence. He had a penetrating insight into the human situation and human mind. Every aspect of his novels- the language, the setting, the characters, and the mode of narration, altogether form a single organic whole and contribute to the total effect.

Heart of Darkness (1899) is simply a piece of art very impressive and fascinating. Conrad's art lies in the depiction of white men's hostile, unsympathetic, and inhuman relationship with the background black natives of dark Africa and the story of an European, Mr. Kurtz who becomes an embodiment of evil due to

his greed for ivory and his prolonged stay in the dark continent Africa. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a big irony on white man's deeds and responsibility. For white men colonialism is a necessity, a social need, "a moral imperative as well as a political and economic one (Spurr, 29) and a white-man's burden "for humanizing, improving and instructing (Conrad, 19)" the illiterate, under developed dark world. They see Africa as a dark continent physically as well as morally. Kurtz, as a white angel holding a lighted torch, comes Africa to destroy the darkness, the darkness of the centre of Africa (Congo). But the biggest irony is that, he himself becomes the centre of the darkness. Kurtz, a white man, in the name of false social responsibility becomes "an impenetrable darkness" (Conrad, 70). He becomes so dark that even the candle, which burns while he was dying, cannot spread any light into that darkness. It is a saddest tragedy that a man, who belongs to a nation which went to bring light into a dark continent, ends his life in ultimate darkness.

II. A MARXIST GLANCE TO *HEART OF DARKNESS*

A major part of the Marxist approach also concerns itself with class division, most notably the rich 'capitalist' class and the poor exploited 'proletariat' class, creating a common ground of the rich to easily exploit the poor. Marxist writers therefore frown upon this treatment of the proletariat exploitation and instead aim to create an equal society.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad illustrates how the imperialistic powers of Europe exploit the Africans to increase their own wealth; creating a visibly apparent class division between the Europeans and the Africans. Marxism is clearly demonstrated within the novel as we, the readers are narrated the story of the exploitation of the natives by the European, eliciting the theme of man's inhumanity to man. Marlow's repetition of the greed of the bourgeoisie pilgrims as 'despicable' is attest to this theme. For example, Marlow questions the presence of the fat man who is portrayed to be unfit to survive in Congo: "I couldn't help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. 'To make money, of course. What do you think?' he said scornfully" (Conrad, 25).

In addition to this, we find out that there is no even distribution of wealth within the society of *Heart of Darkness*, as even some white-Europeans are described to be poor. We are narrated that Kurtz's engagement with his lover had been disapproved by her family as Kurtz "wasn't rich enough", denoting that Kurtz was not able to afford to marry above his class and therefore left for Congo in order for what we may assume, to obtain this level of wealth.

III. KURTZ: IN EUROPEAN EYES

It is Marlow, the story-teller, from whom we gather all information about Kurtz. In the course of his visit to the dark continent Africa, Marlow discovers how a well sophisticated, socialist, civilized, Mr. Kurtz, turns into a devil, a blood sucking capitalist. Kurtz's primary life was glorious and happy. His biography says that Kurtz was born in England (heaven), and a product of a half –English mother and half-French father. "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad, 61). He had a good education

partly in England. Born in a well to do family Kurtz was very successful in bringing out his talents to public eyes. He was a handsome man with a slim figure, seven feet tall and strong body. He had a deep eyes and vibrating voice almost causes veneration among his listeners.

Kurtz was a multi-talented man, a painter, a musician, a writer, an orator, and a promising politician. The oil –sketch that Marlow sees at the inner station clearly proves that he had a good hand and a genius mind. In England he had good reputation. He was greatly loved by his nears and dears. To his fiancé, he was a handsome, genius, and a great humanitarian; to the journalist a brilliant politician and leader of men; and to his cousin, he was essentially a great musician. He was making immense success in England.

For his fiancé, Kurtz was a noble person having ‘noble heart’ (Conrad, 93). She was “very happy - very fortunate – very proud” (Conrad, 93) to be the fiancé of Kurtz. She had known him at her best, “better than anyone on earth” (Conrad, 92). After the death of his mother she was the only hope for his life. She “believed in him more than any-one on earth-more than his own mother-more than –himself” (Conrad, 94). He was a great humanitarian. He wanted to bring light to the dark world.

Kurtz was a remarkable writer. The International Society for the Suppression of Savages (ISSS) requested him to write a treatise on savages. “It was a beautiful piece of writing (Conrad, 61). This was the unbounded power of eloquence –of-words-of burning noble words (Conrad, 61, 62). It was a very well – written document mentioning the white people’s endeavours to develop the backward countries. He had an ardent desire to improve the lot. From these points we can say that Kurtz was an angel of Karl Marx, who wanted bring light to the dark.

IV. KURTZ: IN REALITY

Kurtz in reality was not like that at all. He is genius; he is glorious; but at the same time he is evil-minded, he is a hard-core capitalist. We consider him a prolific writer for him pamphlet on savages; we praise his hand and mind for his wonderful paintings; we call him a gifted orator and musician for his commanding, vibrating and sensational voice; we think him a leader of leaders for his art of winning heart of people; we laud him as a great humanitarian, a noble soul, for his noble steps to bring light in to the savage and dark world. But if we consciously and critically examine his works, we can find they are nothing but the products of an evil body, evil mind, and an evil soul, because he was an inborn capitalist.

In the pamphlet, at the end, Kurtz has used very symbolic metaphor “Exterminate all the Brutes” (Conrad, 62). It is a very contradictory and a burning example of his evil mind. He wants progress by “destroying the savages”. It clearly proves that Kurtz is not at all a socialist. His mind was full of evils so he is an English capitalistic evil.

Kurtz is a wonderful painter. His oil painting, representing a woman, draped and blind folded, carrying a lighted torch, whose background was “somber-almost black and the movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister” (Conrad, 31) clearly unfolds the

motive, the characteristics and the way through which he wants progress in the dark world. In the name of civilization, bearing a fake socialistic torch, he only wanted “to make money” (Conrad, 25), to tear the treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire with no moral purpose” (Conrad, 38). Kurtz has used his vibrant voice and leadership quality just to make himself the king of the savages. He has used all his skills in an “unsound method” (Conrad, 76). He let his soul to be guided by “brutal instincts” (Conrad, 81) and “monstrous passions” (Conrad, 81). “He feared neither God nor devil” (Conrad, 35).

So, the greed of power and money, like other European, Kurtz had evolved in his motherland. He is evil biologically as well as environmentally. He always wants to have what-ever he longs for, by hook or by crook. But in England it is impossible on his part to become powerful or to be a king, because it is land of super intellectuals. He searches a place where he can translate his dream into reality. Everywhere he sees, there is white supremacy, where he will be counted as a mere white agent. But he wants to be a king of a land, and that is his ultimate goal.

Kurtz was a “greedy phantom” (Conrad, 84). He wanted to destroy who were not like him who were not like him who were not obeying him. He had used all his superb intellect to achieve his goal. But his superb intellect, his brilliant brain was misguided, as he has lacked restraint, as he feared neither God nor devils. A critic said, “when there is no moral stress to call forth the fibre of the deeper man, to bring out latent powers of mind, the tragedy is supreme” (Bancroft, 46).

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolutely” says Lord Acton. And it the right phrase to describe the tragedy of Kurtz. Kurtz was sent in to the jungle to rape the land, and its people, of its natural resources. It is only the greed of power which kept Kurtz in the jungle for such long period of time. Determined to not to be a mere agent or servant of England he became allies with the natives and became the supremo of the savage country that is Congo. He was a betrayal of England as Satan was betrayal of Lord or Heaven. A critic has rightly said, “Heart of darkness offers an analysis of the deterioration of white men’s morale, when he is let loose from European Restraint, and to make trade profits out of the subject races” (Garnett, 99).

V. CONCLUSION

One of the most enigmatic characters in twentieth century literature, Mr. Kurtz is a petty tyrant, a hollow man, a dying god, an image of evil, an embodiment of Europe, and an assault on European values. He had travelled to Africa to complete the great acts of “humanizing improving, instructing” (Conrad, 40), in the best tradition of white Man’s burden. Once he tested the power that could be his in the jungle, however, Kurtz abandoned his philanthropic ideals and set himself as a god to the natives, the king of Congo. For a critic “Kurtz is a thief, murderer, raider, persecutor, and above all, he allows himself to be worshipped as a god.... Kurtz seemed a universal genius, lacking basic integrity or a sense of responsibility” (Roberts, 43).

So, Kurtz is an inborn evil. He has those evil traits in his mind, in his heart, in his flesh, in his bones and in the every drops of blood of his body. He is an embodiment of evil. He cannot do good, he cannot

think of good as to do bad is his religion. It is a mere foolishness to think that the dark Congo has changed a modest Kurtz to an evil Kurtz. The jungle has only provided a conducive atmosphere for the budding/unfolding of those evils to which he had as his personality. As critic has rightly observed; “Kurtz possesses the evil forces already as a part of his personality but ignorant of their existence until the wilderness enlightens him and exhibits those forces publicly”, (McClure, 140).

So Kurtz for me resembles the archetypal evil – genius; the highly gifted but ultimately degenerative individual whose fall is the stuff of legend. For critics Kurtz may be an evil-god, for readers he may be Faustus or Heathcliff, even for Conrad Kurtz may be a greedy phantom, but for me he is blood-sucking capitalist, **Mistah Kurtz: A Champagne Socialist.**

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