Taming of the Monster: Marlow's Shadow in *Heart of Darkness*[*]

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Abstract

Marlow and Kurtz, the two lead characters in Conrad's The Heart of Darkness, are alike and at the same time dissimilar in quite a few respects. They symbolize what Jung would call the Persona and the Shadow respectively: the former enables one to align and realign themselves with the changes in the environment to make themselves socially acceptable. The latter, on the other hand, is the dark and unwanted aspect of one's personality that one wants to suppress. Marlow's voyage from Europe to Africa is a journey into the unconscious. The unconscious according to Jung is where the Shadow resides. Interaction with the Shadow starts the process of individuation which essentially is the integration of the Shadow into the conscious. Instead of turning our back on the Shadow, we accept it as part of our personality.

Keywords: Heart of Darkness, Marlow, Kurtz, Jung, Shadow

Introduction

For Marlow, as for many Europeans, Africa is a land from where he can garner a lot of wealth; a reservoir, which offers wonderful opportunities and riches. Compared to Europe, which is Marlow's home, Africa is a distant, unfamiliar, unknown, infinite, unchartered territory. Europe, on the other hand, is known, familiar, finite space. Marlow's travel from Europe to Africa is essentially an interaction of sorts between the familiar and the unfamiliar; between the conscious and the unconscious. The former is limited; the latter vast and unlimited. As such, Europe and Africa symbolize the conscious and the unconscious, and Marlow's travel to Africa symbolizes the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious. That is to say, the voyage reestablishes Marlow's connection with his unconscious and sets him on the course of self-discovery. This paper is an attempt to show that the journey from Europe to Africa symbolizes Marlow's interaction with the unconscious and his meeting with Kurtz the integration of his Shadow in his conscious. Marlow's travel to Africa and his stay there changes him for better. Prior to his visit, the Africans are more of wild and barbaric people for him. The post-voyage Marlow begins to see the same people as victims of the

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excesses of the white Europeans. That is to say, he become more sympathetic understanding towards the Africans than he ever was before. In Jungian terms Marlow comes to terms with what Europe has done to Africa and the people there. And in meeting Kurtz, Marlow comes to terms with his personal Shadow as well or he too would have continued to think of Africa and Africans what Kurtz thinks of them.

The Monster and the Taming of the Monster

For Kurtz Africa is a brute place where he goes to get ivory. He has no regard or respect for the Africans, their land, or culture. For him the Africans are subhuman whom he treats as commodities and objects to gratify his needs. He not only hates them, he wants to "exterminate all the brutes" (Conrad, 50). They are a means to his end, which is to accumulate as much wealth from there as he can. And in the process he ends up dehumanizing them. He sets himself up on a higher social and cultural pedestals, and believes that he and his are better than they and theirs. No wonder in his relationship with his Black Mistress, Kurtz hardly ever has any conversation with her. He can speak the local language, but he does not communicate with her. That means she is good enough to satisfy his physical needs but otherwise she is too below him to speak to or even be called by her name. Kurtz treats her more as a toy, an object to satisfy his physical needs. Her wellbeing or the wellbeing of the land is not a priority for him. No wonder Marlow describes him as a person who "lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (Conrad, 57).

Kurtz has all the qualities and habits which are undesirable: he is greedy, cruel, and inhuman towards the local people. We see the darkest side of his personality in his dealing with the local people. In the words of Edward C. Whitmont, "we encounter shadow" in a person's view of 'the other fellow'" (160). For Kurtz, the locals are mere brutes whom, first, he wants to enlighten, and later, as his Shadow continues to dominate him, he wants to exterminate them. Kurtz is the epitome of almost all the attributes that Jungians attribute to the Shadow: "power, greed, cruel and murderous thoughts, unacceptable impulses, morally and ethically wrong actions," as Harry A. Wilmer describes the Shadow, are the salient features of Kurtz' personality (96). This is why with the passage of time, Kurtz becomes more and more cruel towards the locals.

All who know Kurtz do not have anything good to say about him, especially those who work with him. It is indeed interesting to note that the manner in which they describe him and his deeds bring to mind negative and destructive properties—things for which the shadow is

known. "Power, greed, cruel and murderous thoughts, unacceptable impulses, morally and ethically wrong actions," (Wilmer 96) are some of the common symptoms of the Shadow. Kurtz is the epitome of these traits. The Russian likens him to "thunder and lightning" (Conrad, 56), which hardly have anything good or productive about them. Like lightning and thunder, he is ruthless; like them, there is "nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well" pleases (Conrad, 56). He does not even wink while taking human lives if they happen to thwart his plan of getting what he wants. Killing a human for "small lot of ivory" (Conrad, 54) is not an issue at all. In the guise of "immense plans," (Conrad, 65), as Kurtz says, he inflicts pain and suffering on the locals, which is yet another salient features of the shadow: it justifies the horror it wreaks on people in the name of "cause, belief, and right" (Wilmer, 97).

Interestingly, Marlow's description of Kurtz' character is loaded with a language and imagery which Jung uses for the shadow. Apparently charming, the shadow is essentially primitive and "negative side of the personality, the sum of all unpleasant qualities one wants to hide, the inferior, worthless and primitive side of man's nature" (Jung, *Collected Works*, 470). Due to the lack of facilities in Africa, some of the popular notions we have of Africa are those of wilderness, bushes, desert, woods etc. These are the characteristics of which the shadow is a content. No wonder, Kurtz feels comfortable there to the extent that he has turned his back on his Intended. In the words of Marlow, the wilderness seems to draw Kurtz to its "pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (Conrad, 65).

Like most Europeans in the novel, Marlow likes Kurtz which points to his shadow and to the collective norm of the Europeans. He sees Kurtz from the point of view of Europe believing that the latter is there for the good of Africa. That is to say he otherizes them in seeing himself as a messiah of sorts willing to rescue the Africans. And Kurtz might well have been a harbinger of a positive change based on a synthesis of the best of the European and the African worlds. His overwhelming greed for the ivory blinds him to the humanity of the locals and to the extent that working for them is no more part of his plan. He would rather use all kind of violence against them to get ivory and satisfy his greed.

Marlow also displays the same properties before he reaches Africa and interacts with Kurtz and the locals. He is rigid, stiff, and inflexible in his dealing with people, particularly Africans with whom he interacts. Instead of negotiating a middle ground with his rivals or adversaries, he

would rather deal with them with force and violence. This dark side of Marlow is indicative of his unacknowledged shadow. And like Kurtz, if he does not come to terms with the dark side of his personality, he will become Kurtz if not worse than he. This is why on his way to Africa, he is willing to resort to violence and guns at the first sight of a remote threat from humans or animals. The Pilgrims and Marlow would willingly "empty every rifle they could lay their hands on" into the bodies of their enemy (Conrad, 28). That is to say, Marlow too has a Kurtz in him.

Marlow's initial opinion about Kurtz is very positive, which is also indicative of the collective European view of African and the people there. For him Kurtz is a "very remarkable person" (Conrad, 19) who possesses an "unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression" (Conrad, 68), and who has the "unbounded power of eloquence" (Conrad, 50). No wonder he is impressed with Kurtz' report for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (Conrad, 49). The Marlow in Europe and the Kurtz in Africa are alike in their notion of Africa and the Africans.

However, as Marlow's journey into Africa continues that things begin to change. His notion of Africans and what the Europeans do there begin to undergo a significant change. The reality of what the locals go through at the hands of the Europeans hit him like a brick in the Company's Station. It may not be inappropriate to say that for the first time he sees the locals there as humans; he feels for them. The passage is indeed very moving. Marlow tells us:

> "A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope, each had an iron collar on his neck and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking…but 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 (Conrad, 15-16)".

This is the moment which begins the movement for Marlow. All that he had learnt about Kurtz from the Manager and the Accountant undergoes a shift. While previously he admired him now, he sees him as a perpetrator of violence against the locals.

Marlow's success in his dealing with others, particularly Kurtz, which symbolizes his shadow, is in accepting and integrating into his conscious all that Kurtz stands for. He does not see Africa and Africans from the point of view of a typical European. "By no stretch of imagination" does he see them as "enemies" anymore. They are an end, not as a means to it anymore. This enables him to resist the temptation of caving in to the fluid and lawless society in the Congo. This is why Marlow in a way negotiates with Kurtz even though the latter is as rigid as anything. He is willing to go to any extent to interact with Kurtz even though he "had to deal with a being to whom" he could not "appeal in the name of anything high or low" (Conrad, 66). That is how the shadow is: rigid, inflexible, hard to negotiate with, and difficult to confront. In utter disregard of any law or belief system a person possessed by the shadow, like Kurtz is, commits crimes against humanity. Such people do not pay heed to any law or scruples, no matter how high or low.

Interestingly, Marlow points to his confrontation with Kurtz in a loaded manner. He says, "But when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses; I saw the danger in its right proportion" (Conrad, 65). His coming to senses, we might say, points to how Marlow comes to terms with the shadow and accepts it as part of his being. The process of the taming of the monster begins for Marlow. He can now successfully resist to what Kurtz easily falls prey. The lawless and fluid setting of the Congo drew Kurtz in due to his greed. Marlow, on the other hand, "tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw [Kurtz] to its pitiless breast" (Conrad, 65). Confronting his shadow and integrating it into his conscious requires moral courage; facing one's dark and undesirable side requires a lot of courage and strength. Now wonder meeting Kurtz for Marlow is looking deep down into himself. He says, "I had—for my sins, I suppose—to go through the ordeal of looking into myself" (Conrad 66).

The fact that Marlow appeals to Kurtz shows that he is now flexible. He is willing to accommodate what he otherwise hates. That does not mean he condones the wrongs Kurtz commits, but he accepts him as a reality that he has to deal with. That helps him see himself, life, and people around him humanely than he did before. He begins to see himself "as a common man," as Samuels et al (76) will describe him. The Marlow who was previously "cocksure of everything" (Conrad, 64) looks for a middle ground now where he can come to terms with his shadow. Upon his arrival at the Inner Station, he detests Kurtz and the way he deals with the locals there. Now he is willing to talk to him in a language and manner suitable

for the occasion and in accordance with the issues they deal with. That is to say Marlow is a changed person now; he is not what he used to be. The inflexible Marlow now looks for a middle ground, and is more "diplomatic" than how he was, as Jung describes one's coming to terms with the shadow (Jung, *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 234).

It is indeed very interesting to see what he tells the crew and passengers on board the ship about how he feels about lies. He says:

> "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….It make me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do (Conrad, 27)".

In his interaction with Kurtz' Intended we see a totally different Marlow than how he describes his feelings about lies in the passage above. He is mindful of how telling the Intended the truth about Kurtz will damage the small little beautiful world she has created for herself and Kurtz. The Intended asks Marlow about the last moments of Kurtz. Though the latter never speaks of the Intended nor does he utter her name, Marlow makes up a lie, and tells her that her name was the last word Kurtz uttered before he died. He lies to her to save her from embarrassment as "she carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves" (Conrad 74). In the words of Marlow "could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether" (77).

Not that Marlow accepts or condones telling lies now. For him the human feelings of the Intended are more important than what Kurtz actually says or does not say at the time of his death. Sometimes, however, we have to save others from a bigger hurt even though we might have to do what we otherwise hate or detest. That is the middle ground that Marlow finds in his taming of the monster. His voyage to the Congo is a voyage of his self-discovery too. He comes to terms with his shadow, and Marlow is a mellower and better person than how he is at the time of the start of his journey. In Marlow's voyage, we also come to realize that while it is good to be socially desirable, but we have to be conscious of how we are essentially weak humans. Understanding this makes us realize that while we are unique in our own ways, we should never lose sight of humanity.

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