***Heart of Darkness*: Marlow’s Buddha-like posture**

In the Heart of Darkness, Conrad twice makes comparison between Marlow and the Buddha- once in the novella’s opening pages, and again in its closing paragraph. Interspersed throughout the story, we find references to meditation and reincarnation as well. The narrator gives an exegetical clue that the meaning of Marlow’s story “was not inside like a kernel, but outside enveloping the tale which brought it out”. Since the primary reference to Buddhism in the novella are to be found on the outside- i.e.., in the frame story- I argue that *Heart of Darkness* challenges the value of Marlow’s European Buddhism as a response to the horrors of colonialism that we find in the kernel of the story. What the novella offers is not the standard critique of Buddhist Enlightenment as quietist in the face of European aggression, but rather the surprising claim that it shares too much with the ideology of the European Enlightenment, since both presume the inner horror of the world.

Marlow is carefully and specifically described as distinct from the Buddha himself. Consider the first two Buddha comparisons. First: “Marlow sat cross legged right aft… He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect and with his arms dropped, the palms of hand outwards, resembled an idol”. Then: “he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus- flower”. The narrator is careful to the point of excess to separate out his Buddha from the historical Buddha. Marlow has an ‘aspect’; he ‘resembled’; he is in a ‘pose’; he is ‘European’; he lacks the symbolic “lotus-flower”. It is a European Buddha inspired by Conrad’s reading of Arthur Schopenhauer. It is left to Marlow to take on Schopenhauer’s role, and to develop a philosophy of pity and compassion in the face of his knowledge of the horror of the natural and human worlds. By the end of the story, right after calling Marlow a Buddha, the narrator appears to agree with his vision of the world: “the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky- seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness”. The waterway in itself is ‘tranquil’. The only thing that makes it seem ‘somber’ is the overcast sky which makes one wonder if this is not an imposition onto an indifferent material reality. Thus, the waterway does not lead to the darkness, it only ‘seemed’ to. Marlow’s vision of the world is an idea and not a reality. It is, in other words, only because he believes in the inner depravity of the world that he believes that self- sacrificing pity is a necessary response.

***Heart of Darkness* -Significance of Death**

The colonized space in Congo where Kurtz’s inner station is situated is like an inferno symbolized by darkness and death. When looked at closely, this city does indeed contain “dead men’s bones” as well as other grisly symbols of the Whites’ voracious exploitation of the Blacks and their land. One of the most revealing of these symbols is the “Black wool” being knitted by the two women in the company’s office. Because these women guard “the door of darkness” and Marlow bids them farewell with a Virgilian tag, it has long been recognized that they are guarding the portals of some sort of Inferno. The Inferno, however, might well be on their side of the door, within the city, rather than on the other side of it, out in the jungle. The other thing that strikes Marlow most is their “black wool”. Marlow was struck by their wool and its colour because he mentions it three times. There are general reasons why the wool should be black- it is connected with death, hell, and darkness. Referring to his black fireman Marlow notes that he had “the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns”. After Marlow steps into the grove of dying Black men, one of them went off on all -fours towards the river to drink. This description which makes the Black man move and drink like a sheep suggests that the black wool knitted by the two women represents the hair of Blacks who have been consumed by the Whites. The Whites are wolves who devour the Blacks like sheep and then use their “Black wool” for a “warm pall” to cover up the terrible realities of the wool’s acquisition. The women knit ‘feverishly’ because a very large pall is needed to hang over the “door of Darkness” and cover up the White’s savage black deeds.

***Heart of Darkness*-Marlow and Kurtz’s characters**

Kurtz’s immersion in the “peculiar blackness” of his surrounding is shown to be an inevitable result of his status within the imperial institutional structures of European modernity. The climactic scene in which Marlow discovers Kurtz’s disappearance and follows his trail into the forest contains the most radical representation of Kurtz’s identity because it establishes a determined relationship between Kurtz as claimant to the throne of darkness in the Congo and his indisputable status as a subject of European modernity: “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.” By this point, Marlow’s narrative has also asserted Kurtz’s renunciation of his Western self and a connection between him and Marlow’s deceased African helmsman: “He had no restraint, no restraint- just like Kurtz – a tree swayed by the wind”. The rife psycho-symbolic overtones in Marlow’s description of his battle with Kurtz’s “wandering, tormented Shadow” in the dark forest establish the contrast between Marlow’s heroic resistance to the “terrible vengeance” of the wilderness and Kurtz’s irrevocable damnation. It also renders Kurtz’s Otherness, the formal product of the predatory ambitions of an imperial culture. The most striking dialectic in the passage is of course the interplay of Kurtz’s profound estrangement from forms of Western identity and civilization and his continued invocation of Western culture’s parameters of personal glory and success. “I had immense plans”, he muttered irresolutely… ‘I was on the threshold of great things’, he pleaded in a voice of longing with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold”, said Marlow. Conrad’s imputation that the greed and ambitions fostered by capitalist modernity offers a natural pathway to the primitive *Heart of Darkness* is also vividly captured earlier in the novel when Marlow reports over hearing a conversation between the corrupt manager and his relative at the ivory outpost. The identity established between the profound darkness of the other and the violent greed of instrumentalist imperialism also institutes a radical difference between late 19th-century western culture as exemplified by Kurtz and Marlow’s idealized Western civilization. The opposition between late- 19th-century imperial subjectivity and the humanist -European subjectivity of Marlow “who had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes” is negotiated through a representation of the Congo. The critical assumptions in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* are not challenged by the Conradian scene of the disorientation of the Western mind upon its encounter with the other.

Kurtz is both the arch-representative of a capitalist empire as well as its antithesis “who has taken a high seat among the devils of the land”. Voicing yet once again a fastidious reluctance to record a reality that would be appalling to a fine conscience, Marlow angrily interrupts the Russian’s account of Kurtz’s veneration by the Congolese: “I don’t want to know anything about the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz”. But in yet another instance of disorienting irony, Conrad carries through the echoes of Kurtz’s adoration by the natives of the Congo when Marlow tells us that the latter’s reputation also acquires cultic and fetishistic dimensions amongst Europeans and fellow imperialists in Brussels and Congo. Kurtz at the end of his Satanic career seems to confront “the horror! the horror!” by his regression to savagery, Kurtz had reached as far down beneath the constructs of civilization as it was possible to go, to the irreducible truth of man, the inner most core of his nature, his heart of darkness. Marlow does paradoxically come to admire Kurtz because he has judged in his final moments “he was a remarkable man”. Kurtz might think death “the horror” or Kurtz thinks African savagery “the horror”. There is another possibility that Marlow understood Kurtz’s dying word as an outcry against himself- against his betrayal of civilization and his intended and against the bloody damnation of the people he has been lording it over.

***Heart of Darkness*: Significance of Kurtz’s intended**

The final scene of *Heart of Darkness* appears not to fit into the rest of the narrative. After Kurtz dies, Marlow’s interview with the Intended seems rather tagged on and anticlimactic. Many critics simply took it at face value as Marlow presents it to us- as a dutiful visit to an innocent grief-stricken girl to whom Marlow tells a lie that is dismissed as a ‘trifle’. Conrad, however, did not see it this way when he wrote William Blackwood that “the interview of the man and the girl locks in- as it were- the whole 30000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life…” This private view is a suggestive indicator of the final scene’s importance to the structure and meaning of the novella. It is possible to compare the colonized space of Congo to an Inferno. Kurtz was the most diabolic of the demons in the Inferno because he had “taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land” and was the most aggressive of the White devils. The peculiar intensity of Kurtz’s exploitation is suggested in Marlow’s very first description of him. As Kurtz sat up on his stretcher, Marlow says “I saw him open his mouth wide- it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him”. This cannibalistic image is strongly emphasized by the fact that it returned to Marlow as he stood before the Intended’s door and had a vision of him on the stretcher. So Kurtz becomes the central figure for White Inferno and his station. Taken by itself the Intended’s house is an extremely spooky and ominous place. It is within a city called ‘Sepulchral’; it is on a street that looks like a boulevard in a cemetery; its front door resembles the entrance to a Mausoleum; its cold fire place looks like a monument; and its piano shines like a sarcophagus. We should not be surprised to find it linked to Kurtz’s station and filled with bones.

The Intended was a mature woman whose eyes had the glitter of a snake charming its prey. Her forceful eloquence completely dominated the whole interview, and her words and gestures were subtly calculated to win for herself a token of the illusion that she embodied- the sentimental belief that Kurtz had died as first narrator would have had him die, as one of the bearers of a spark from the sacred fire”, fighting heroically for the glory of his nation’s empire in some exotic foreign land with the name of his beloved on his dying lips. But as Marlow well knew, the grotesque reality behind this illusion was that Kurtz died of fever in a barren- pilot house after having watched the Whites slaughter his followers and his native mistress. But all of this, as well as Kurtz’s true last words, Marlow covered over with his own black pall- the lie that sustained and perpetuated the Intended in her illusions. Marlow sustained her illusion by feeding it with a lie.