

Critique of Masculinity in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

This research examines the masculinity that embodies in Kurtz who has both positive and negative attributes. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the masculinity of Kurtz is incredibly fragile following his exposure to the wilderness and exoticism of Congo. He declines to keep promise to his European intended and plays with the sentiments of his African mistress. In the name of clinging to the African community, Kurtz goes to the extent of putting his health in hazard. His rejection of Marlowe's help and aggressive activities show that the integrity of his masculinity is on the verge of breaking apart. He affirms loyalty to his European intended on the one hand and freely enjoys with African mistress on the other. He talks about civilizing the barbaric citizens of Congo on the one hand and goes on exploiting and dominating them on the other. His civilized self gets fractured due to his exposure to the wilderness of Congo.

Masculinity is also called boyhood, manliness, or manhood which is a set of attributes, behaviors and roles generally associated with boys and men. Masculinity is made up of both socially-defined and biologically-created factors, distinct from the definition of the male biological sex. Both males and females can exhibit masculine traits and behavior. Those exhibiting both masculine and feminine characteristics are considered androgynous, and feminist philosophers have argued that gender ambiguity may blur gender classification. Masculine traits include courage, independence and assertiveness. These traits vary by location and context, and are influenced by social and cultural factors. An overemphasis on masculinity and power, often associated with a disregard for consequences and responsibility, is known as machismo.

Marlow refers to Kurtz as hollow more than once. This could be taken

negatively, to mean that Kurtz is not worthy of contemplation. However, it also points to Kurtz's ability to function as a choice of nightmares for Marlow. In his essential emptiness, he becomes a cipher, a site upon which other things can be projected. This emptiness should not be read as benign. Instead, Kurtz provides Marlow with a set of paradoxes that Marlow can use to evaluate himself and the Company's men.

In modern democracy, Warrior Masculinity can sometimes be found in the grey economy of contraband, stolen goods, loan sharks, protection rackets and organized crime. Warrior Masculinity is also present in white collar boxing, cage fighting, hedonistic celebrities from the world of music and show business, rebellious teenagers and tantrum-prone toddlers. While many of the examples are negative, Warrior Masculinity can be heroic, protective, and a powerful force for self-preservation and personal advancement.

The theory is that all men experience some or all of these stages of masculinity at various times in their life, but will generally be most comfortable with one particular stage. Indeed, Kurtz is not so much a fully realized individual as a series of images constructed by others for their own use. As Marlow's visits with Kurtz's cousin, the Belgian journalist, and Kurtz's fiancée demonstrate, there seems to be no true Kurtz. To his cousin, he was a great musician; to the journalist, a brilliant politician and leader of men; to his fiancée, a great humanitarian and genius. All of these contrast with Marlow's version of the man. And he is left doubting the validity of his memories.

Departing away from the goal of civilizing mission, he turns out to be a man too fragile to fall apart from the center of his European masculinity. He acts rationally as a man dedicated to mission. Kurtz represents as the noble and intelligent man of

Europe and how he declines tragically to maintain the integrity of his masculine self and subjectivity. This idea is exclusively checked and then critically probed in this research. Kurtz's masculinity embodies both possessiveness and fragility. The protagonist is subjected to the corroding wilderness of Congo. His reckless and haphazard actions lead to the disintegration of masculinity which he embodies.

R. W. Connell advocates for the existence of multiple masculinity. He always asserts and advises the readers to reject the notion of hegemonic masculinity. To him, singular masculinity no longer exists. On the contrary, masculinity is always plural or multiple. Connell maintains that "Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioral average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives" (36). Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations. It consists of the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender. And the effects of these practices put under its grip bodily experience, personality, and culture.

Masculinity is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced. If people broaden the angle of vision, they can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure. This demands an account of the larger structure and how masculinities are located in it. Joseph Gelfer is another supporter of multiple masculinities. He, like Connell offers the following stand on the crucial role of alternative masculinity. In the age of shifting social harmony and gender role, the definition of masculinity should be transformed.

Gelfer says "Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioral average, a norm), the critical mass need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives" (71). Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations. Men and

women engage that place in gender through the practices. It makes room for the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture. Masculinity can be seen as an enactment for one simple reason - masculinity is relational. It requires the other by which to define it. Masculinity of any kind does not exist without femininity. Masculinity arises out of its reciprocal relation with femininity.

Men are really searching for a role in modern society. Others see the changing labor market as a source of the alleged crisis. Deindustrialization and the replacement of old smokestack industries with new technologies have allowed more women to enter the labor force. This trend has reduced the demand for great physical strength. The supposed crisis has also been frequently attributed to feminism.

John MacInnes argued that masculinity has always been in one crisis. He suggested that “the crises arise from the fundamental incompatibility between the core principles of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal” (76). He probed the discourse surrounding the notion of masculinity in crisis. He found that masculinity and men are often confused. He further argues that “the alleged crisis is not a recent phenomenon. He points out several periods of masculine crisis throughout history.

Many of which predate the women's movement and postindustrial societies. He suggests that masculinity is always changing and redefined” (87). Gender roles restrict what both males and females can do. In effect, these sex roles confine people, forcing us to be what others want us to be. Gendered norms and behaviors are assimilated rather than being natural or genetic. While mass culture likes to assume that there is a fixed, true masculinity. In fact, each societal construct of masculinity varies over time and according to culture, age and position within society. All men, though, while unique individuals, share one thing in common gender privilege.

The socialization can lead boys and men to feeling justified in subordinating women and girls. Exclusive role that women play in this socialization process itself is confining. The privileging of boys begins early with differential child-rearing strategies and parental expectations. Such strategies are usually reinforced by the more-present mother. Women, therefore, also contribute to the perpetuation of male behavior and males' sense of superiority.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has invited a body of criticism of great complexity. Many of the critics of this have presented valuable and incisive analyses of the novella. In his famous critique, "An Image of Africa", Chinua Achebe takes a strong stand against Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. He claims that Conrad was a racist and that a novella which so depersonalizes a portion of the human race should not be considered a great work of art. The following quote from Achebe is a good demonstration of his opinion:

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. (176)

According to Achebe, Conrad has an obsession with skin color. He describes a man as being black, having long black legs and long black arms. Achebe mentions a scene in the novella where after Kurtz' death, the manager's boy is described as putting his insolent black head in the doorway.

Said further mentions how the imperial attitude is captured in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's

existence. It makes its truth, its meaning-its subtle and penetrating essence. In this regard Said makes the following arguments:

Conrad wants to demonstrate that Marlow is limited to his situation. At the time Conrad would probably not be able to have presented anything other than an imperialistic world-view. We live, as we dream alone. He further comments on how the narrative gives us a sense that there is no way out of the historical force of imperialism. (23).

Said explains how Marlow wants us to understand that Kurt's looting adventure, Marlow's journey and the narrative are linked and how they all work as a demonstration of the Europeans acts of imperial mastery.

Patrick Brantlinger is a noted critic of Joseph Conrad. He is keenly interested in the representation of Africa in the novel, *The Heart of Darkness*. In the following extract, Brantlinger gives expression to his view:

Conrad describes Africa as a very mean rough, underdeveloped and dangerous place. However there are also times where Conrad describes Africa as a beautiful place, how the land is glistening and the sea is glittering. But even in these descriptions there are usually traces of evil or danger lurking such as a creeping mist and the jungle being so dark green it is almost black. (6)

However, it should be noted that even the stereotypes of Africa as a paradise belong to the same discourse of exoticism. In the beginning they are indeed described as faceless brutes but as the quote demonstrates he does realize their humanity.

Paul Armstrong is fond of exploring Marlow's view on the African continent. To him, Africa is the continent that is mechanically closed. It is far from being

penetrated by the light of enlightenment and modernity. Armstrong makes the following observation:

Marlow considers the Africans a part of the machinery just as much as the boiler is. However Marlow does show some affection for his late helmsmen, Marlow states the reader might find this as rather odd because after all he was just “a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara but because he had steered for him and been at his back for so long he had formed a kind bond with him like a claim of distant kinship. The key here is the kinship. (54)

Conrad does see a connection to Africa. These ties back to the discussion about how Conrad seems to suggest that the origins of man are in Africa. He does not distance himself from them. This kinship is something that scares Conrad.

Although critics have examined the novel *Heart of Darkness* from different perspectives and arrive at different findings, none of them deal with the portrayal of masculinity. The masculinity of Kurtz is entirely problematical. He forgets his European intended and freely establishes sexual relation with his African mistress. He is assertive and aggressive to the extent of extremity. His sovereign power is reflected in his success in the campaign to make Africans obey him absolutely. In his success of ivory trade, his masculinity is reflected. In converting the African wilderness, he is far more brave and decisive. But this brand of masculinity is fragile as it confronts the exotic aura and destructive wilderness of Congo.

The researcher makes use of the theory of multiple masculinities. Different notions of masculinity given by Andrew Connell and Gelfer will be cited. The researcher shows how the hegemonic masculinity is unstable and fragile, as it has to face the new fresh challenges. In addition, hegemonic masculinity is shallow and

artificial. It is oppressive in orientation. Through the analysis of the novel *Heart of Darkness*, it will be an integral part of this research project.

Andrew Connel traces the close causal connection between socialization and masculinity. Connel makes the following observation about the close connection between these two things:

The male socialization process and social expectations can thus lead to personal insecurities conferred by a failure to make the masculine grade. Even the threat of such failure is enough to generate emotional tension and internal conflict expressed through fear, isolation, anger, self-punishment, self-hatred, and aggression in many men. Young males' self-doubts about their masculine credentials negatively influence their self-esteem. (71)

Subsequent feelings of rejection and failure can lead to an unhealthy self-image and result in anti-social behaviors. Additionally, with so much of the masculine role defined by economic success in lieu of other traits, changing roles and the loss of breadwinner status can have very damaging effects on the male ego.

Marlow represents different type of masculinity. To some extent he is brave and audacious. The other side of his masculinity betrays that he is inwardly a confused man. He himself is unknown about the purpose of initiating the journey. His sympathy for the Africans in Congo reveals altruistic side of his masculinity whereas his unconscious attraction with Kurtz shows different side. Whatever brand of masculinity Conrad represents is the product of the nineteenth century Europe's colonial mission and rush for imperial glory.

Marlow is a complicated man. He expects different types of manners from males of her time and society. There are certain traces of heroism in Marlow. Marlow

is in many ways a traditional hero. He is tough, honest, an independent thinker. He is a capable man. Affected by the severity of journey, he is also broken or damaged. In his own style of encounter the world, he is defeated. His masculinity is weary, skeptical, and cynical. Marlow's masculinity moves between the figure of the intellectual and that of the working tough.

As a robust male of late nineteenth century Europe, he is clearly intelligent, and eloquent. He is highly skilled at what he does. He repairs and pilots his own ship. He is no mere manual laborer. Work is a distraction. Out of the pressure of his mistaken ideals, he sometimes takes idle purposeless life as unique ideals. Marlow can also be read as "an intermediary between the two extremes of Kurtz and the Company. He is moderate enough to allow the reader to identify with him. He is fairly open-minded enough to identify at least partially with either extreme" (13). Marlow's intermediary position is manifested in his simultaneous happening of illness and recovery.

Marlow is different from others. Unlike those who "truly confront or at least acknowledge Africa and the darkness within themselves, Marlow does not die, but unlike the Company men, who focus only on money and advancement, Marlow suffers horribly' (14). He is thus "contaminated by his experiences and memories. It can be argued that style does not just override substance but actually masks the fact that Kurtz is utterly lacking in substance. Marlow refers to Kurtz as hollow more than once" (14). This could be taken negatively. It is used to mean that Kurtz is not worthy of contemplation. However, it also points to Kurtz's ability to function as a "choice of nightmares" for Marlow. Marlow becomes a cipher. He is a site upon which other things can be projected. This emptiness should not be read as benign. Kurtz's eloquence should not be "allowed to overshadow the malice of his actions. Instead,

Kurtz provides Marlow with a set of paradoxes that Marlow can use to evaluate himself and the Company's men" (16).

Kurtz does not appear to be a fully realized individual. He is presented as a series of images constructed by others for their own use. As Marlow's visits with Kurtz's cousin, the Belgian journalist, and Kurtz's fiancée demonstrate, there seems "to be no true Kurtz. To his cousin, he was a great musician; to the journalist, a brilliant politician and leader of men; to his fiancée, a great humanitarian and genius" (17). All of these contrast with Marlow's version of the man. He calls into question the validity of his memories. The following extract is illustrative of his enfeebled masculinity:

Marlow was fascinated by maps and yearned to become a seaman or explorer who could visit the most remote parts of the earth. As a young man, Marlow spent approximately six years sailing in the Pacific before returning to London — where he then saw, in a shop window, a map of Africa and the Congo River. Recalling the news of a Continental trading Company operating in the Congo, Marlow became determined to pilot a steamboat to find adventure in Africa. He asked his aunt, who knew the wife of a Company official to assist him in getting a job as a pilot; she happily complied. (17)

Marlow is venturesome. He runs a risk. He loves adventure. But this track and his involvement in such a track make his masculinity weakened. Marlow hurried across "the English Channel to sign his contracts at the Company's headquarters in Brussels. Passing through an office with two women who are knitting, Marlow spoke with the Company's director for less than a minute" (18). After being dismissed, he was asked to sign a number of papers in which he promised not to divulge any trade secrets.

Masculinity is a set of qualities, characteristics, or roles generally considered typical or appropriate top of a man. The opposite can be expressed by terms such as unmanly. A near-synonym of masculinity is virility. Constructs of masculinity vary across historical and cultural contexts. Others have suggested that while masculinity may be influenced by biological factors. It is also culturally constructed. As such, masculinity is not restricted to men. It can also relate to females when women display modes of behavior, traits, and physical attributes that are considered masculine in a given historical and social context.

The readers can see the huge gap between the grim realities of colonialism as presented in the novel and the false, idealized views of the aunt and the Intended about colonial activities. Marlow's impression about his 'excellent aunt' after he meets her before going to Africa beautifully sums up the actual scene:

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over. (33-34)

Conrad's presentation of the two European women as 'out of touch with truth' is brief but realistic. The aunt and the Intended, the old and the young, give us a perfect glimpse at the condition of the women in the late Victorian England. They were 'blessed' with the joy of ignorance and were confined in the artificial world of their false ideas and ideals, without any knowledge of the realities of colonialism and rapid industrialization of the time. The two women in the novel may thus be studied as representing the Victorian world of women as a foil to the world of men, that is the

world of trade and commerce, of deception, hypocrisy and exploitation. One may wonder how Conrad allows only a little space to the women in the actual text, but leaves a huge space to derive meaning from.

Proponents of this view argue that women can become men hormonally and physically. Many aspects that are assumed to be natural are linguistically and therefore culturally driven. On the other side of the debate, it is argued that masculinity does not have a single source of origin. Subordinate masculinity is the cultural authority of heterosexual men and subordination of homosexual men. Homosexuality is viewed as the polar opposite of what masculinity entitles a man to be; therefore, it is associated with femininity and is politically, economically, and culturally attacked.

Heterosexual men may view gay men in the same light that they view women, meaning that there is an innate need for dominance. This leads to the subordination of gay men because they are seen as having a failed hegemonic masculinity. Complicit masculinity is the categorization of men who connect with hegemony but do not fully represent hegemonic masculinity. A great many men draw the patriarchal dividend. They respect their wives and mothers. They are never violent towards women. They do their accustomed share of the housework. They bring home the family wage. They can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists. Men that fall into this category do not receive the same benefits and privileges as those who are seen as purely hegemonic.

Marginalized masculinity is the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity. Men who fall into this category benefit less from the hegemonic ideal because of traits other than their gender behavior. Race relations may also become integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. The hegemonic masculinity among whites maintains

the oppression against the masculinity among blacks. Masculinity is incomplete without femininity. It exists in relation to the other. It exists due to reciprocal condition of relationship. Hence, it has no exclusive prerogative to assert its supremacy.

Marlow is exploratory. His masculine nature differs from other fearful agents of Belgium. He speaks with its Swedish captain about the Company. The Swede then informs Marlow a short yet ominous story. He tells about a man he took upriver who hanged himself on the road. "Shocked, Marlow asked why, only to be told that perhaps the sun or the country were too much for him. Eventually, they reached the Company's Outer Station, which amounted to three wooden buildings on the side of a rocky slope" (19). Out of this station is shipped the Company's most important and lucrative commodity.

Marlow bears a great of hardships. He displays patience. He does not get fidgeted by the need to wait for a long time. Marlow would sit in his office. He does his best to avoid the giant stabbing flies. He is fed up with the sulking manners of other boys. The following extract is clearly illustrative of the case in point:

When a stretcher with a sick European was put in the office temporarily, the Accountant became annoyed with his groans, complaining that they distracted him and increased the chances for clerical errors. Noting Marlow's ultimate destination in the interior region of the Congo, the Accountant hinted that Marlow would "no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz," a Company agent in charge of an incredibly lucrative ivory-post deep in the interior. (21)

Believing in the account of others, Marlow decides to proceed forward. Marlow is gullible. He is credulous. He does not bother to exercise a grain of skepticism. The

Accountant described Kurtz as a first class agent. He asks Marlow to tell Kurtz that everything at the Outer Station is up to the mark.

Traditional avenues for men to gain honor are that of providing adequately for their families and exercising leadership. Connell has labeled the traditional male roles and privileges “hegemonic masculinity”(78). This term implies that men are expected to be dominant whereas women are discouraged from adopting aggressive nature and are expected to be subordinate. According to Connell:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. The military, top levels of businesses and government agencies provide leading examples of this facet of masculinity within society. (37)

Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity is often seen in adult males. In addition, it is also seen clearly among young children in schools as well. This concept invokes a leading way of doing gender relations that implements the gender order status quo. It ensures the integrity of gender status quo by raising the general status of masculine qualities over feminine qualities. It is an expectation of what a real man should act and look like. But in reality, no one can successfully achieve hegemony. The idea of hegemonic masculinity in the context of young boys is used to re-create gender order.

The day after this conversation, Marlow leaves the Outer Station. He goes with "a caravan of sixty men for a two hundred-mile tramp to the Central Station. Marlow saw innumerable paths cut through the jungle and a number of abandoned villages along the way" (24). On the way, he sees a drunken White man. This drunken white man is who claims that "the upkeep of a road, and the body of a native

who was shot in the head. Marlow's one White companion was an overweight man who kept fainting due to the heat" (27). Confused by his response, Marlow does nothing except go onward until they reach the Central Station. Sort of rational and precautionary measures are applied by Marlow. Since he is a European man, it is customary for him to take all the precautionary measures. The following extract presents the concrete case:

Marlow was fascinated by maps and yearned to become a seaman or explorer who could visit the most remote parts of the earth. As a young man, Marlow spent approximately six years sailing in the Pacific before returning to London — where he then saw, in a shop window, a map of Africa and the Congo River. Recalling the news of a Continental trading Company operating in the Congo, Marlow became determined to pilot a steamboat to find adventure in Africa. He asked his aunt, who knew the wife of a Company official to assist him in getting a job as a pilot; she happily complied. (29)

Marlow is in a rush towards the English Channel. He intends to sign his contracts at the Company's headquarters in Brussels. In this office, he is scheduled to encounter docile and domestic femininity. In the office, two women knit. Marlow speaks with the Company's director. He is told to sign a number of papers. The purpose of signing is to tell him not to pass any secret information to other people.

The integration of masculinity into the study of development is equally important. Social changes in the broader level reconfigure and reshape the arena in which traditional masculinities are articulated. It transforms the shape of domestic and public patriarchies. Massive social change disrupts and reconfigures traditional, neocolonial, political and cultural arrangements. In so doing, currents of changing

gender relations in broader level transform local articulations of both domestic and public patriarchy. According to Roberta Johnson:

Local small craft producers, small farmers, and independent peasants traditionally stake their notions of masculinity in ownership of land and economic autonomy in their work. These are increasingly transferred upwards in the class hierarchy and outwards to transnational corporations. Proletarianization also leads to massive labor migrations – typically migrations of male workers - that leave their homes and populate migrant enclaves, squatter camps, and labor camps. (89)

Aggressive and conquering attitudes give rise to hegemonic and local masculinities. Roberta maintains that development and underdevelopment were not simply stages through which all countries pass. There was no single continuum along which individual nations might be positioned.

After a long arduous journey, Marlow finally reaches the mouth of the Congo. There, Marlow speaks with a Swedish captain about the Company. The Swedish captain describes the effects of the jungle on Europeans. Thereafter, the Swede then tells Marlow "a short yet ominous story about a man he took upriver who hanged himself on the road. Shocked, Marlow asked why, only to be told that perhaps the sun or the country were too much for him" (18). This story of suicide upsets Marlow very much. With much difficulty, Marlow and the Swedish captain reach the Company's Outer Station.

Marlow spends the next ten days for the caravan to conduct him to the Central Station. He demonstrates much chagrin and irritation. On the way he maintains his integrity. A great deal of toleration and rational tranquility are shown by Marlow.

The accountant sees Marlow's last destination in the interior region of the Congo. The Accountant hints that Marlow would no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz, who is a Company "agent in charge of an incredibly lucrative ivory-post deep in the interior. The Accountant described Kurtz as a first class agent who is a remarkable person. His station brings in more ivory than all the other stations combined" (34). He asks Marlow to tell Kurtz that everything at the Outer Station is up to the mark.

Marlow happens to see innumerable paths. He cuts through the jungle. He passes through several abandoned villages along the way. He sees a drunken White man. He claims to be looking after the upkeep of a road. The pervasive fear and the reminder of death and decay weaken Marlow's masculinity. Despite his objection to the scenario around the outpost of progress, Marlow thinks about accepting the fate that awaits those who are in colonial mission.

Masculinity affects everyone. Both men and women can benefit from or be oppressed by the expectations of masculinity. They created the idea of masculine stress. They found three mechanisms of masculinity that accompany masculine gender role often result in emotional stress. They include the emphasis on prevailing in situations requiring body and fitness. The need to feel adequate concerning sexual matters and financial status drives them. Cohen further elaborates dynamics of masculinity:

Because of social norms and pressures associated with masculinity, Men with spinal cord injuries have to adapt their self-identity to the losses associated with the feelings of decreased physical and sexual prowess with lowered self-esteem and a loss of male identity. Feelings of guilt and overall loss of control are also experienced. Masculinity is something that some fear is becoming increasingly challenged with the

emergence of women's rights and the development of the role of women in society. (57)

Feminine men endorsed traditional masculine models. The authors suggested this result reflected the social pressure on men to endorse traditional masculine norms.

Research also suggests that men feel social pressure to endorse traditional masculine male models in advertising.

The lady has been portrayed as one who is weak, mournful, and almost fragile in her grief for Kurtz. Marlow meets her after more than one year of Kurtz's death, but Kurtz's memory is still fresh in her mind. Marlow informs us that "she seemed as though she would remember and mourn forever"(Conrad 101). Marlow's presentation of the Intended only confirms what Nina Straus calls her 'psychic penury':

She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. 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. (101).

Her knowledge, the reader knows, is far from being true knowledge. Marlow's speech becomes ironic, for she has no knowledge of what Kurtz really deserves. This ignorance is her 'psychic penury' and it, Nina Straus rightly suggests, keeps up 'male heroism'. The heroic image of Kurtz in the heart of the Intended remains unaltered because of her lack of true knowledge. Marlow, who may be described

as the un-illusioned (or 'disillusioned') man of the colonial realities, only helps to maintain or rather 'strengthen' this 'penury' or ignorance of the Intended. The false glory of colonialism is allowed to be retained in the minds of those who are away from its realities. How can Marlow being a part of and also a party to that dark reality punctures the balloon of colonial idealism by revealing the truth? Hence he had to lie to the Intended and say, "The last word he (Kurtz) pronounced was-your name". (104)

Maleness and masculinity are highlighted to understand characters in the novel. The narrator's occasional interruptions ensure that certain motif occurs in the novel questioning the manhood of many white characters. Male bonding is strongly emphasized but soon it is belied by the hidden search and motives of characters. Moreover, there is no question of man being the sort of man who accepts contradictions calmly. Throughout the novel, women are seen as "utterly removed from this world, utterly elsewhere its queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it" (39). In the narrator's own words, "they the women I mean are out of it in that beautiful world of their own Women are 'they', as opposed to 'we men' (39). Male selfhood is central in most of the decisive moments of the encounter between civilization and savagery.

Marlow claims initially that he does not want to bother much with what happened to me personally. The personal does not matter. Ironically, his intensely personal story contradicts his own assertion. His immediate comment "yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went" (32) - completely weakens it. He desires to reach Kurtz 'for the sole purpose of talking with him' (83). Kurtz's importance is repeatedly stressed specifically as "a voice! A voice!" (110). Marlow's narrative account is a clarification

of his twisted track where mission is elusive. The following extract tells important thing about it:

Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream - making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream- sensation it is impossible to convey the life- sensation of any given epoch of one's existence.

Seeing the hidden is thrilling and thunderous. (57)

There is a triangular relationship amidst Manhood, selfhood and telling or speaking in the novel. A man is isolated. That is why; it is very hard to know anything about any other man. This fact is repeated throughout the novel. Only incomprehension between men of different races and traditions give rise to conflicts of various sorts. Marlow's struggle with the mystery of the cannibals' behavior is a case in point.

John Beynon examined the discourse surrounding the notion of masculinity in crisis. He found that masculinity and men are often confused. Beynon reveals some of the interesting ideas about the issue in the following ways:

They are conflated so that it remains unclear whether masculinity, men, or both are supposed to be in crisis. He further argues that the alleged crisis is not a recent phenomenon. He points out several periods of masculine crisis throughout history. Many of which predate the women's movement and postindustrial societies. He suggests that masculinity is always changing and redefined. (87)

Gender roles limit what both males and females can do. In effect, these sex roles enslave us, forcing us to be what others want us to be. Gendered norms and behaviors are taught and learned rather than being natural or genetic. While mass culture likes to assume that there is a fixed, true masculinity. In fact, each societal construct of

masculinity varies over time and according to culture, age and position within society. All men, though, while unique individuals, share one thing in common gender privilege.

As a man alien to new surroundings, Marlow's manhood faces crisis on several occasions. He is at pains to know men. His attempts to reach the interiority of men fail on several decisive occasions. It is manners of the civilized people that fall short of the calmness of cannibals. Cannibals could easily overwhelm colonizers. In such confused circumstances, defining male status becomes impossible. In Marlow's own words, "these men could by no stretch of the imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals" (43). Marlow stresses that "this is just calling a man something, not any true definition of the man's place. Similarly, Kurtz and the cannibals are both referred to as fine fellows"(64). They really that disparate after all. Marlow refers to this situation in the following way:

The steersman as a really fine chap, yet only a few lines earlier, he has also looked at him as a dog and a specimen. Soon Marlow is driven to using inverted commas to indicate the callousness. The meaningless labeling, that is involved in the use of any general term for men. The scoundrel had reported that the man had been very ill. (64)

Marlow is at pains to comprehend other men or their status. He is alone for the most part. His manhood is not something acquired simply by virtue of being born male. Marlow's narrative is filled with phrases about being "man enough and being as much of a man" (69) as others. Manhood is something measured in degrees. It is evaluated partially.

The difference between the real man and the ideal man makes Marlow ponder upon things. Marlow wrestles with the problem of actual man and man of soft heart.

Marlow talks of the horror created by natives. In the moment of awe and confusion, he makes the following utterance:

It was unearthly, and the men were No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it - this suspicion of their not being inhuman. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity like yours the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise. (69)

Unlike Kurtz, Marlow is not able to face the horrible truth. But his direct experience of facing the tragedy of Kurtz enables him to perceive reality. He is of the opinion that a man must meet that truth of his kinship with these natives with his own true stuff.

As boys grow up, they often have priority access to higher education, especially if the family can afford to send only one child to school or college. They generally receive better jobs, or the same jobs at better pay. As adults, men are taught to define themselves by their career success. About the close proximity between career consciousness and masculinity, Lorrain Bersani says:

Men and boys are, in most cultures, socialized to be competitive, aggressive, and dominant. Political and economic power are valued and rewarded. Other men view physically and financially powerful men as desirable by women and enviable. Men are also, at times, socialized to be sexually promiscuous, even sexually irresponsible.

Amongst themselves, men often brag about their sexual prowess—long a means of establishing status between men. (117)

Men are urged to excel. They are supposed to grow up to be powerful and not to show weakness. They are preferred, valued, and encouraged more and prepared better for forthcoming challenges. The role of stud has often been coveted and valued in many societies, by both men and women. Men are socialized into their gender roles and pressured to follow rules about how a man should think, feel, and act. In recent times, sport has come to be a leading definer of masculinity in mass culture. Moreover, the institutional organization of sport reinforces definite social relations.

Marlow's masculinity maintains its integrity by acting in a responsible way. He ends up with nothing separate with which to meet the horrible truth. His disturbed mentality lacks on many occasions the possibility of ever actually being man enough in his world of circularities. It is never possible to be man enough. If manhood is probably unattainable, there is little chance of male heroism. The following extract dramatizes the cause of Marlow's disillusionment with heroism:

When I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration but as such exploration has turned out to be mere 'robbery with violence', the heroic glory has gone: 'the glamour's off. (33)

Even the boyhood dreams of heroism are wrong. In a sense, it can be said that Marlow's masculinity is not shaped by greed for material wealth. He is partly exempt from colonial idea of plundering the resources of Congo. The search for a male self and destruction of manhood lie at the center of the novel. Marlow's choice of the

phrase lose myself to describe his boyish aspirations to heroism is a fine example of how self tries to be proactive and how it reacts when it is doomed to languish.

Marlow thinks on the notion of heroism. He asks himself if his journey is going to add heroic dimension to his journey. His expectations of what the reality of heroism is doomed to fall apart. The following extract is indicative of this fact:

The red (of the British Empire) on the map is good to see because one knows that some real work is done in there' (36). Yet when he gets to one of these places, what does he find? I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had distaste for the work.' Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order. (46)

The real work loses reality. The impression of accomplishing the great feat is no longer tenable. His realization that something remarkable is achieved turns out to be a rather sordid fantasy. Things are not as they appear to be. The commitment remains passive. Will to action is sluggish. Motives lack strength.

Marlow's masculinity is associated with laconic posture. He never takes proactive measure. Only the prudence, patience and sagacity guide him. His self is under his control. Any external thing that tempts his self seldom exerts pressures in his awakening.

Marlow's laconicism of tone suggests that he seldom nurtures expectation. His disillusionment with the world of the male hero centered itself on the colonization of the Congo. The following extract is a projection of disillusionment his part:

The vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration is indescribable. It is very difficult to realize the crudity of situation. No matter how decent and idealized a person seems to be, he or she is bound to fall victims to the barbarity. What an end to the idealized realities of a boy's daydreams.

(25)

In the novel, the term 'great man' serves only the ironical purpose. It is a joke. The Station Manager is of middle size and of ordinary build. He is a common trader and nothing more. He inspires neither love nor fear nor even respect. He has no genius for organizing chaotic order. He has no learning. He is devoid of intelligence.

Men believe that they have little reason to relinquish their authority or share their position. Men believe gender equality means losing some of their advantage. It is seen as a win-lose situation. It is a finite pie being more equally divided with a resulting smaller piece for them. They rarely see how they suffer as a consequence of their privileged status nor do they see benefits for themselves in a more equitable world. Boys and men do, however, suffer as a result of current male gender roles and gender inequality.

Men and boys are under considerable pressure to stick to their gender roles and norms of masculinity, which make it difficult to be different. Robert Bly traces the close causal connection between socialization and masculinity. Bly makes the following observation about the close connection between these two things:

The male socialization process and social expectations can thus lead to personal insecurities conferred by a failure to make the masculine grade. Even the threat of such failure is enough to generate emotional

tension and internal conflict expressed through fear, isolation, anger, self-punishment, self-hatred, and aggression in many men. (71)

Subsequent feelings of rejection and failure can lead to an unhealthy self-image and result in anti-social behaviors. Additionally, with so much of the masculine role defined by economic success in lieu of other traits, changing roles and “the loss of breadwinner status can have very damaging effects on the male ego”(87). Large numbers of youth are now growing up without any expectation of stable employment. These marginalized, disaffected youth are resorting to violence, vandalism, terrorism, and drugs. They turn to addiction to lash out or cope with this loss of male role status. Even the more developed world is impact by these economic changes. Young males’ self-doubts about their masculine credentials negatively influence their self-esteem. They may feel that they do not live up to the societal construct of masculine.

In the novel, even Marlow is puzzled about the mysterious behavior of the station manager. The station manager represents different type of manhood which is a product of deviant and divergent forces. The following extract makes a clean breast of all the preconceptions associated with his treacherous masculinity:

He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Secrecy and emptiness are not usually considered attributes of male greatness, of male heroism; this is not Boy's Own stuff. Again, the passage's horror is in its matter-of-fact tone: perhaps in the world Marlow is trying to show us, such unpleasant attributes are all that is needed to become a great man. (11)

In the then society, heroes were those who were successful in making a conquest of nonwhite and their culture. Of Kurtz and Marlow, the former is far more ahead in

accomplishing this mission. The latter is just the site or witness to the villainous activities of the former. There is no realer heroism for a man than this. General ideas of superlative manhood, which was very much valorized by European westerners, became just the source of perpetual terror.

Even the most positive of Marlow's comments on man's potential heroism fall to pieces. The Boy's Own audience are probably still innocent enough to lean "forward in eager anticipation of a suitably rousing conclusion to Marlow's otherwise rather unsuitably anti-heroic comments on (the Roman) colonization as robbery with violence, when he begins to talk about 'what redeems' all this" (54). As Marlow goes on without a pause, it is as if the veneer of his hopes suddenly cracks. Such a rupture reveals the horrid truth of what his experience of heroes has actually been.

Marlow's attempt at restoring the forcible victory to heroism falls flat. Those who say that they deserve proper treatment in European order are subject to denunciation from the perspective of the humanistic tradition of liberalism. To cut the whole matter short, disillusionment continues as plunders are shown the best of men. Their outer façade indicates that they are good. They spend three quarter of their talent in hoarding heroic material. Despite their heroic posture, they are not heroic in the real sense of the word. The positioning of Fresleven would be a dramatic example of hypocritical posture of manhood:

Fresleven apparently the 'gentlest, quietest creature' (34) and a good man - meets his death while inflicting a merciless beating on a native in a row over a few hens. Fresleven himself is only a prelude to the bigger picture of this process we see in Kurtz, the ideal man cultured, intelligent, a painter, writer, musician, political orator, an idealist and

one who is nevertheless practically successful. Marlow's experiences are actually even more subversive of the concept of heroism. (33)

Marlow's revelation of absences exemplifies plenty of profound truths about what it is to be man in the context of the nineteenth century Europe. Silence in the heart of man is indicative of weakness to impose order as a civilized man on the savage surrounding.

Kurtz's masculinity represents different brand of masculinity. It is a product of insensitivity towards his European intended. It is an offshoot of his failure to maintain the integrity of his civilized personality. In the same way, it is also the product of his moral failings. But the case of Marlow is somewhat different. He wants to rejoice in the impressions which occur to him on the journey. No fixed purpose or goal is set before him. He is driven by impact of surrounding.

Kurtz's intelligence is fully focused, though he is full of himself. He is maddened by his own ambition. Such masculinity is not welcomed in rational and harmonious society. But his soul is "mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself" (108). The essence of his manhood is impenetrable. He is unconsciously aware of the wrong and deviant path treaded by him. But the sluggish rational self is under the grip of insanity. So he suffers. The entire spectrum of his activities poses metonymically a threat to cultural icons of civilization. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

I had to deal with a being to which I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him himself his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose

of the earth. Confound the man! He had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone. (107)

Anti-humanitarian approach which Kurtz advances turns out to be self-destructive. The whole surrounding in Congo is made ruthless, ghostly and formidable by Kurtz. Having been a man of power, he is not responsible to others. This is his chief mistake. Kurtz has not only done something to himself, but has also destroyed the earth for Marlow. Marlow knows that what happened to Kurtz could happen to any man. It happened to Kurtz because he was alone being alone in the wilderness.

Marlow's fondness for the male-heroic values arise from a desire to flee from something degraded and debased at the heart of man in particular. His devotion to practical work is worthwhile. His fellowship of other men is noticeable. Marlow becomes uneasy as soon as he cannot work. He wants to define himself through work ethics. When the fog "descends and forces a stop, he is annoyed beyond expression, even while recognizing that he feels this distress 'most unreasonably' (73). He puts both the theoretical and the practical on the balance of judgment and finds the former lacking. Only the practical can serve as a shelter and refuge to the deviant search. Hence, the masculinity of Marlow is rooted in the realization of the value of the practicality in the moment of dire crisis.

The practical is for him a refuge from the doubts and confusion surrounding his journey. In his own words, "what I really wanted was rivets and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it" (58). Work is something solid. It is practical. It will hold things together. Work and its role in determining the role of masculinity is highlighted in the following extract:

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 is in

the work, the chance to find you. Your own reality is for yourself, not for others. The course of actions has to be chosen by oneself. One's own choice determines destiny one surmise. (59)

Male fellowship is equally flimsy. Marlow may refer to 'the black fellows of our crew. But he knows that this fellowship is no more than a figure of speech. One of the cannibals suggests his men be allowed to eat the jungle natives. Marlow makes a meaningless noise in response to a request that is patently utterly alien to him. He later indicates the real reason for the necessity of fellowship and it is far less glamorous and more specious than heroic tradition would suggest.

Kurtz belongs to aggressive brand of masculinity which tends to establish domination and achieve conquest over the vulnerable and the powerless. Despite his involvement in the process of bringing Kurtz back to the world of civilization, Marlow fails utterly in the end. Despite the moral integrity of Marlow, it is Kurtz who dominates the forefront of the entire narrative.

To, conclude, masculinity serves as the standard upon which the real man is defined. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is built on two legs, domination of women and a hierarchy of inter-male dominance. It is also shaped to a significant extent by the stigmatization of homosexuality. Masculinity of Kurtz is the stereotypic notion of masculinity that shapes the socialization and aspirations of young males. It includes a high degree of ruthless competition. The brand of masculinity embodied in Kurtz is prone to inability to express emotions other than anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency and devaluation of women.

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