

The Fogginess of *Heart of Darkness*

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Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow—only the string of platitudes seems to have no end.

Conrad, letter to Cunninghame Graham, December 1897¹

Imagery of fog and mist is pervasive in Conrad's stories and in his thinking about the nature of "art", described in his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) as "like life itself . . . inspiring, difficult—obscured by mists".² The Preface contrasts the artist's "truth", his attempt to do justice to the visible universe, with that of the thinker or the scientist. The artist, confronted by the enigmatic spectacle of life, "descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife" finds sensory impressions, aspiring to "the colour of painting" and to the magic suggestiveness of music, seeking to revivify "the commonplace surface of words" in fragments that "shall awaken in the hearts of all beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity: of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world".³

These formulations in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* anticipate *Heart of Darkness*, which was to follow in the next year, underlining the ways in which not only Marlow and the tale's narrator, but the writer of the tale himself, are alike protagonists in its particular descent into, and attempted conquest of, darkness. Conrad was aware of obscurities in this novel, and grateful to his friend Edward Garnett for his "brave attempt to grapple with the fogginess of *Heart of Darkness*, to explain what I myself tried to shape blindfold".⁴ He began the story not with "an abstract notion", but with "definite images", relying on their "truth" to convey the novel's "idea".⁵ Interpretation of these images has produced wide disagreement about the novel's "idea" however, and varying views of its achievement.

1 Quoted in Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, London 1979, p. 400.

2 Reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, New York 1971 (from which all subsequent page-references will be taken), pp. 145-9.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Quoted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, p. 163.

5 Letter to Graham, quoted *ibid.*, p. 163.

The debate has in fact centred on the novel's fogginess: on the question of whether it is primarily "literal, typal or symbolic"⁶ (it has been variously read as a Freudian or Jungian journey into the unconscious, or a retracing of the epic voyage of biblical or classical heroes into the lower world); of whether the story is the refutation or the discovery of "meaning". In particular, F. R. Leavis has claimed that "the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery is applied to the evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors . . . The actual effect is not to magnify but to muffle".⁷ A. C. Guerard finds a central contradiction: "that it suggests and dramatizes evil as active energy (Kurtz and his unspeakable lusts) but defines evil as vacancy".⁸ And Michael Wilding has argued, in the last number of this journal, that Conrad "turns from the materials of political analysis, to cosmic despair . . . He doesn't relate the horrors of imperialism back to the nature of capitalism, but to 'human nature'. He takes refuge in a *fin de siècle* despair that abandons all hope of improvement, of change . . . We have moved from a concrete exposé of imperialism to a despairing view of all human endeavour."⁹

While not wanting to deny the cogency of the novel's analysis of European imperialist expansiveness, I would see it as part of a larger vision, one that is not evasive, contradictory, conservative or despairing, but "tragic". This is not a new idea, of course; the parallels between Kurtz and Faust, or Kurtz and Macbeth, have often been noted. But more precisely, *Heart of Darkness* seems to me to offer an explanation of the human condition that recalls Nietzsche's analysis of tragic myth in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). And it is with Nietzsche's terms in mind that the novel's apparent obscurities and contradictions are most usefully resolved. Although Conrad's biographers have found no evidence linking Conrad directly with Nietzsche (there is a famous aside in which he attacks his contemporary's "mad individualism"), traces of his thought have been found throughout Conrad's works.¹⁰ Most striking, however, are the persistent echoes, in *Heart of Darkness*, of Nietzsche's view of tragedy.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

7 *The Great Tradition*, London 1960, p. 177.

8 Norton edn, p. 168.

9 *Sydney Studies in English*, 10 (1984-5), 101-2.

10 This aside is quoted in Karl, *op. cit.*, p. 486. Since I wrote this article, I have noticed that Lionel Trilling, in "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" (*Beyond Culture*, London 1966) outlines a connection

It is clear from the outset that Conrad embraces, in this story, as in his view of art generally, that "solidarity in mysterious origin . . . which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world". The narrative begins in the Thames estuary, where the *Nellie* lies at anchor at the beginning of the interminable waterway beyond, at the start, too, of Marlow's recollected journey into the darkness, the tale which is to bind his listeners to the "kind of light" he has to offer them as the darkness closes them in. The representative nature of Marlow's story, or mythos, of civilization's journey into "the dark places of the earth" is already foreshadowed as the narrator ponders the "hunters for gold or pursuers of fame" who have gone out on that stream "bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire". Marlow's thoughts, too, sweep across time and space to take up the external, recurrent conflict between civilization and savagery, the barbarity at the heart of the Roman conquest of Britain as it is at the heart of nineteenth-century European imperialist expansion:

think of a decent citizen in a toga . . . land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland port feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him,—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He had to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work on him. The fascination of the abomination—you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate. (p. 6)

This is the beginning of Marlow's endless "string of platitudes"; already his equivocations, his inability to specify the "mysteries" he is about to unfold, are subject to ironic scrutiny. From advancing the piety of the invading Romans, "men enough to face the darkness", Marlow moves rapidly into a view of them as mere exploiters, contrasted with "us", redeemed by our devotion to efficiency. For Marlow is no more at ease with the civilizing mission than his young Roman prototype:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much.

between *The Birth of Tragedy* and a number of modern works, including *Heart of Darkness*. But neither he, nor any later critic, so far as I am aware, has pursued the implications of the connection for a critical reading and evaluation of Conrad's novel.

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What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . . (p. 7)

For all his contempt for exploitation, Marlow, too, has gone out on his African adventure in the name of “a glorious idea”, at once unselfish and enslaving, something to set up and bow down before. To get to the heart of Africa, Marlow sacrifices his independence and his pride, getting “the women” to work for him, conquering his unease, “going at it blind”, driven by compulsion and fascination. To the end of the tale, Marlow remains unable to articulate the idea that drives men to test themselves against the heart of darkness. For his is only one of the voices struggling to sum up the novel’s tragic vision, and not, as Leavis’s response to the certainly pervasive medium of his platitudes suggests, the whole of that vision. In Marlow, Conrad dramatizes the failure of “ideas”, rationality, “the commonplace surface of words” adequately to grasp the deeper experiences the tale itself explores.

It is, in Nietzsche’s analysis, at the high moments of civilization “arising from a plethora of health, plenitude of being”, that the “strong pessimism” of tragedy is discovered:

Could it be, perhaps, that the very feeling of superabundance created its own kind of suffering: a temerity of penetration, hankering for the enemy (the worth-while enemy) so as to prove its strength, to experience at last what it means to fear something . . .¹¹

It is in such a spirit that Marlow, Kurtz, the civilizations of Rome and Europe carry their superabundance into a hankering for the enemy. The interplay between light and dark in Conrad’s tale, between Marlow and Kurtz, Europe and Africa, recalls the dialectic Nietzsche finds inherent in the tragedies of the Greeks. The Apollonian protagonist, “strong in the belief that nature can be fathomed”, with a confidence in science and rationality, taking “a deep look into the horror of nature”, discovers the demonic chant of the Dionysian chorus, the “elements of barbarism” to be indispensable, a clamour expressing “the whole outrageous gamut of nature—delight, grief, knowledge”. “The individual, with his limits and moderations, forgot himself in the Dionysian vortex and became oblivious to the laws of Apollo”. It is in this contrast between “the truth of nature and the pretentious lie of civilization”, this casting off of “the trumpery garments worn by the

11 *The Birth of Tragedy*, New York 1956, p. 4.

supposed reality of civilized man" that Nietzsche locates the tragic conflict of the Greeks. But he finds in it a myth no longer readily accessible to modern man.

Nietzsche was not the only late nineteenth-century writer seeking to make his contemporaries aware of man's primitive origins and drives: thinkers as various as Darwin, Freud, Jung, and Frazer also explore what Conrad describes as "the duality of man's nature". The ceaseless competition of individuals is for Conrad a warfare larger than European and Roman conquest: it is inherent in that very nature. "The life history of the earth must in the last instance be a history of really very relentless warfare."¹² But in contemplating that warfare as it is specified in modern capitalism and colonial exploitation, Conrad creates the mythic action and process of *Heart of Darkness*, a succession of images, a pulsation of energy and affirmation, an ebb and flow of voices that builds towards the final serenity Nietzsche found in the tragic myth of the Greeks. At the heart of the civilizing enterprise Conrad discovers the tragic paradoxes: the inevitability with which exploration becomes exploitative, the paradox of self-discovery at the moment when life itself is found to signify nothing. Here is Nietzsche's "strong pessimism". The answer to the charge that the novel's view of human life is pessimistic and unable to envisage social change must lie in its tone, in its sense of that "unavoidable solidarity" "in toil, in joy, in hope" that binds man to man and "all mankind to the visible world", in the strong rhythms of its prose. Set against Kurtz's despairing nihilism and Marlow's string of platitudes is the metaphysical solace Nietzsche found in all true tragedy, that "despite every phenomenological change, life is at bottom indestructively joyful and powerful".

Marlow begins his narrative as he has begun his adventure, like Nietzsche's Apollonian "theoretical optimist", who "considers knowledge to be the true panacea and error to be radical evil". He goes to Africa wanting to know and to discover; he reiterates his adventure in a further attempt to articulate that knowledge. In this way, he dramatizes an aspect of Conrad's own uneasy relationship with the Congo, and "the spoil I brought out from the centre of Africa, where really I had no sort of business".¹³ The coast of Africa beckons Marlow "like an enigma. There it is before you . . . always mute with an air of whispering, Come and

12 Essay on Henry James, 1905.

13 Norton edn, p. 160.

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find out" (p. 13). And always, his sense of "the truth of things" is challenged by a truth he can only specify as image, sound, rhythm, the bodies steaming with perspiration, the faces like "grotesque masks", the voice of the surf and the shouting and singing, each with its own "reason" and "meaning":

a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast . . . For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away.

(p. 14)

Marlow's voice can only respond to what has compelled him by catching something of its pulsating rhythm. His colourless abstractions, "wild vitality", "intense energy", simply sharpen the disparity between the truth he confronts and the truth he can define.

The same point is made as he comes face to face with the stark images of European exploitation at the Company's station: the three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope, and the two pits, the first full of wantonly smashed drainage pipes, the second full of shapes scarcely more animate, the native labourers abandoned to their dying, horribly frozen in their attitudes of anguish. And moving between them, the chain-gang, shackled together by their iron collars like beasts, building the white man's railway. In this vivid contrast between the civilizing, conquering, building mission and the horrifying outrage to humanity that sustains it, Marlow has his premonition of the devil that he will meet at the centre of the darkness, the "flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (p. 17). The adjectives and the metaphor register impotent protest. And this is underlined in Marlow's turning away from the premonition of darkness to the whiteness of the company's immaculately starched accountant, who had "verily accomplished something", "devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order" and who sings the praises of Mr Kurtz.

In his two hundred mile tramp inland to the Central Station, in the rescue of his steamer from the river, in his inexorable penetration to the furthest navigable point of the globe and the meeting with Kurtz, Marlow enacts what Nietzsche would describe as the Apollonian protagonist's "slow unravellings" of "the ghastly premises of the plot". He takes refuge in work as a way of keeping this hold on "the redeeming facts of life", of finding the self, "your own reality" (p. 29), the Apollonian "panacea of

knowledge". In his bewilderment at "what it all meant", the evidence on all sides of intrigue and corruption in the manager, the pilgrims, the "papier maché Mephistopheles", the pillaging Eldorado expedition, Marlow turns increasingly towards the figure of Kurtz, that "prodigy . . . an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else", in the manager's words (p. 25). Yet the enigmatic painting Kurtz has left the manager is far from reassuring: "a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch light on the face was sinister" (p. 25). Like so many of the novel's most potent images, this one is left without analysis, simply to reverberate. It is only as Marlow journeys deeper into the darkness himself that the painting develops its complex suggestiveness, becoming Marlow's insight as it has been Kurtz's. In refracting something of Kurtz's personality and "discourse", it prompts questions that focus Marlow's bewilderment. Does the figure represent the idealism of civilization's light, blinded to its own corruption and assimilating the blackness in which it finds itself? Does it represent the stately spirit of the plundered continent, asserting itself against the shackles it has been made to bear? Does the figure anticipate the stately erotic appeal of Kurtz's native consort, "savage and superb", or the black-draped figure of his fiancée, blinded by her illusions? Does Conrad adequately distinguish, in the end, between the different aspects of darkness his tale explores, or does he confuse them in the general gloom, as Terry Eagleton suggests: "the 'message' of *Heart of Darkness* is that Western civilization is at base as barbarous as African society—a viewpoint that disturbs imperialist assumptions to the precise degree that it reinforces them".¹⁴

It is at this point that Marlow breaks his narrative to harangue his listeners about his own hatred of the lie. What has come together in his mind, clearly, is his own self-loathing at the recollection of how inevitably his saving lie about Kurtz to the fiancée has expressed the lies of civilization, and the impossibility of conveying the truth of individual experience anyway:

No, it is impossible: it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone . . . (p. 28)

There's an echo here, of Conrad's own despairing pronounce-

14 *Criticism and Ideology*, London 1976, p. 135.

ment on the evanescence of thoughts and “truths”, his modernist sense of art as a “raid on the inarticulate”. And yet, of course, we have the narrative to show us that the reverse is true: the story continues, and it binds its listeners in its communal activity and its offered meaning. Marlow offers his own real presence as some guarantee of “truth”: “you see me, whom you know”, just as Kurtz, as presence and discoursing voice is to be for Marlow himself, and as both protagonists, in their duality, are to be for Conrad’s tale. What Marlow, and the tale, struggle to articulate is the communal and social meaning, the complex “truth” that comes out of the lonely experience of darkness.

In his journey upriver the darkness takes on shape and voices as streams of human figures bring the landscape to life, erupting out of primeval silence in a Dionysian chorus: the prehistoric man “cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell?” The “tumultuous uproar”, the almost intolerable, excessive shrieking emerging from the fog like “a great human passion let loose”, the stream of muffled drums behind the curtain of leaves, the “satanic litany” of mourning for the dying Kurtz:

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 the wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. 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, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as those on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won’t do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row—is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who’s that grunting? You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no—I didn’t . . . I had no time. (p. 37)

Responding to Marlow’s discourse, with its embarrassed rhetoric and defensive declamation, we know very well why Marlow does not go ashore for a howl and a dance. There is an irreconcilable conflict between Marlow’s notion of “being a man” and the frank

and vigorous manhood that calls to him from the river's banks. Against those voices, Marlow insists on his own, silencing within himself the appeal of its unrestrained chorus. His bluster, purporting to measure himself in relationship, "truth" against "truth", is only another imposition of civilization's lie.

The importance of Kurtz, for Marlow and for the tale, is that he allows himself to be measured and in that process, destroyed: "the wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation". Marlow's increasing recourse to words like "inconceivable", "unspeakable", "impenetrable" signals his inability to comprehend the transactions by which Kurtz has made his compact with the darkness. But he does offer a series of impressions: the human heads impaled on Kurtz's fence posts bear a grotesque resemblance to the shrunken ivory ball Kurtz's own head has become, vividly implicating him in the savagery he has embraced as exploiter and as god. There is the evocative scene in which the dying Kurtz crawls on all fours towards "the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations" (p. 80). And in the exhilaration of the hunt, Marlow finds his own heartbeats echoing to the primitive beat of the drums:

As soon as I got on the track I saw a trail—a broad trail through the grass. I remember the exaltation with which I said to myself, 'He can't walk—he is crawling on all fours—I've got him.' The grass was wet with dew. I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing . . . I was strangely cocksure . . . I actually left the track and ran in a wide semi-circle (I verily believe chuckling to myself) so as to get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen—if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.

I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming, I would have fallen over him too, but he got up in time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest. I had cut him off cleverly; but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses . . . (p. 66)

There are images and actions more powerful here than any summary Marlow's rhetoric can manage, of the intoxications of conquest and pursuit. The primitive ceremony draws Kurtz, reducing him from "being a man", an "emissary of light", to the

level of animal and primitive man. Imposing himself on the land ("my ivory, my station, my river"), Kurtz has been possessed by it, by "the many powers of darkness that claim him for their own". And through him, Marlow has been drawn into the most direct experience of his kinship of which he is capable: it is his white man's pleasure in the hunt that involves him in this deadly game that reveals to him, on his own pulses, those instinctive responses that have flickered into life as the primitive chorus calls to him from the river banks. For Marlow as for Kurtz, "the wilderness had whispered things about himself that he did not know".

Behind the idea of tragedy lie some of mankind's most ancient myths: rituals that make a king by burying and disinterring him, in which the sacrifice of the protagonist purges and replenishes his kingdom, resurrecting from the journey into the underworld a wisdom that brings hope and fertility to the lives of his people. Indeed, it is apparent from Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1840) that such rituals and beliefs were still widespread in Africa at the time Conrad is writing. Kurtz has come to his tribe "with thunder and lightning" "very terrible", "they adored him", the young Russian had told Marlow (p. 57), and the shrunken heads bear witness to the fact that human sacrifice is among the "unspeakable rites" Marlow cannot bring himself to name. And as Kurtz rises up out of the mist here, like the black figure who emerges a moment later, materializing out of the gloom, wearing his fiend-like antelope horns, the ancient tragic process, celebrating the powers of darkness, is recalled and set against Marlow's British common-sense. As Kurtz's life ebbs away from them down the river, his people set up for him their "satanic litany", swaying their scarlet bodies and shouting "strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language" (p. 68).

If Conrad sees Kurtz as the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, the hero who embraces his own darkest impulses, giving himself to the Dionysian vortex, and if, as I am arguing, the most compelling moments of his tale give us the images, the choric music, the acting out of that tragic process, he nevertheless wants to offer a meaning in terms of "human language" and the moral judgements prompted by the varying ideas of darkness explored.

Marlow asserts to the end that Kurtz was "a remarkable man", and his reason for this is characteristic of his own Apollonian respect for "truth": that in his dying pronouncement ("The horror! The horror"), Kurtz is able to give voice to his vision of

the darkness, to seize out of it a "knowledge" that Marlow, in his own struggle with darkness, feels quite incapable of:

I have wrestled with death . . . I was within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up—he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth—the strange comingling of desire and hate. (p. 85)

In contrast with Marlow's rhetoric ("vibrating" "appalling", "strange comingling", "candour . . . conviction"), in contrast with the grandiloquence of Kurtz's own "Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" and his endless discourse to Marlow, his dying words have a stark simplicity. But they summarize for the tale, as for Marlow, Kurtz's heroic stature. It is Kurtz's immersion in the most barbaric potentialities of human experience that entitles him, like Macbeth, to "embrace the whole universe". His assertion carries an energy that is not crushed by what it has taken on, a "revolt", a hatred of self and the beguilements of self that is also, to the end, a "desire", giving the darkness individual meaning and voice.

It is both possible and necessary to distinguish the "energy" and the "vacancy" A. C. Guerard finds an unresolved paradox in the tale, the African and European barbarity Eagleton finds interchangeable. The primitive rhythms of the jungle, the anarchic worship of unrestrained impulse that beats so steadily and compellingly through the prose, even as it is filtered through Marlow's rhetoric, expresses the darkness which is Africa, the "truth" of close kinship with the natural world and its often cruel anarchy. The barbarity of European conquest is a corrupt and manipulative energy, taking its rhythm from what is indigenous. The measure of Kurtz's descent from civilization to barbarity is, and must be, the human ideals and sanctities he has violated, in his unique demonstration of the corruption inherent in contemporary imperialist idealism. There is energy in Kurtz's assertion, but it is the energy of Dionysus exulting in its own destructiveness. In living out civilization's "lie", in discovering it for the lie it is, Kurtz experiences the kind of communal and social meaning, the saving

myth Nietzsche found at the heart of Greek tragedy, and which Dorothy Van Ghent, in an interesting discussion of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, finds inaccessible to modern man because of his spiritual isolation from his fellows.¹⁵ Marlow's return to civilization reaffirms that lie, in his glossing of the truth about Kurtz's life and death to appease his fiancée. And yet even Marlow's lie partakes of the paradox at the heart of Kurtz's tragic experience. Kurtz's words and his example, different though they are from the truth his fiancée wants to hear, do remain to convince even the truthful and sensible Marlow of his heroic stature.

As Marlow's narrative ceases, *Heart of Darkness* comes to a close in that mood of "serenity" Nietzsche found at the conclusion of the Greek tragic dialectic between "the truth of nature" and "the pretentious lie of civilization". Fog and mist threaten to descend, for as in all tragedy, the darkness is never far away, but continues to beckon the listener out of quietude and plenitude, with its challenge of otherness and its promise of knowledge, "into the heart of an immense darkness" (p. 79). I read the tone not as "cosmic despair", but as "strong pessimism" carrying in it the note of eternally hopeful voyaging.

15 *The English Novel: Form and Function*, New York 1953, pp. 229-44.