

The Horror Is Us: Western Religious Memory and the Colonialist God in *Heart of Darkness*

"Well, I really don't see any Biblical material operating in this story, so I wouldn't encourage you to go in that direction." My paper proposal fell unceremoniously to the side.

I had only just sat down in my professor's office.

"If you're determined to go that way, however, you'll have to prove it to me, and I've got to tell you, I don't think you can do it. It's not that I'm saying you're not smart—I just don't think you're on the right track here. Conrad is a high modernist, and I just don't see the Bible being a big influence on him."

I was stunned. I was no Conrad expert, but I had just read *Heart of Darkness*, annotating and highlighting like a man possessed, and the Biblical influence had seemed anything but subtle. Reading Conrad's novella had actually felt rather like being beaten over the head with Biblical allusions. A sophomore undergraduate in my first literature class as a newly declared English major, I was hesitant about challenging my Duke-educated professor, but I *knew* that he was wrong. With a nervous swallow, I asked him to please explain what he meant.

"Conrad's concerns are wrapped up in issues of race and colonialist political, military, and economic expansion and exploitation. Conrad really is little more than a racist pretending to decry racism." His words descended as if from on high, in measured stentorian tones normally reserved for mountain tops and burning bushes. I hadn't the vaguest idea why what seemed so obvious to me seemed so totally out of the question to him, and though I was still determined to follow up on this topic for my paper, I did not, sitting on the supplicant's side of his

impressive desk in his impressive office lined with impressively filled bookshelves, feel secure enough to question him further. It was only a few days later that I decided that I would stick to my topic and face whatever consequences might come my way.

While attempting to prove my case to my sceptical reader, I discovered that Conrad's use of Biblical allusion has been the subject of a series of publications. Two of the more outstanding—and interestingly written and argued—examples come from Joan E. Steiner and Dwight Purdy. In "Modern Pharisees and False Apostles: Ironic New Testament Parallels in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," Steiner provides an overview of previous critical discussions of the use of Christian scripture in Conrad's novella. Steiner's work characterizes Kurtz as a "devil," a "false apostle," and a "modern Pharisee," while concurrently suggesting that "Conrad has established an intricate system of parallels based both on Christ's numerous indictments of the Pharisees and on His injunctions to His disciples" (78). By way of contrast to Steiner's focus on New Testament parallels in Conrad's novella, Purdy focuses on Conrad's use of the Old Testament. In *Joseph Conrad's Bible*, Purdy argues that "the prose of King James's scholars is Marlow's, incessantly intimating that his tale is to the Old Testament as the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave are to reality" (67). Purdy notes numerous parallels between Marlow's narrative and the Exodus narrative of the Hebrew scriptures, certain of which I shall revisit in the pursuit of my own argument.

Purdy is, of course, correct to note that Marlow's story is steeped in the rhythms and images of the King James Bible, and Steiner is right to characterize Kurtz as a "devil." Neither writer, however, has taken the implications of these keenly argued insights down the path I would like to follow. Marlow's tale is not quite "to the Old Testament as the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave are to reality." Marlow's tale is not merely a shadow; rather, it is a fire, burning away the shadowy gloom obscuring the connections between the colonialist invasion, murder, and genocide described in Biblical narratives of the Israelite conquest of Canaan and the invasion, murder, and genocide of the "civilizing" mission of European colonialism—a mission Marlow's aunt describes

as "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (10). Steiner, likewise, is right to recognize the evil represented by Kurtz, but she stops short of identifying Kurtz with anything other than a dark side, or a perversion, of Western religious traditions.

Conrad's work leaves little room for neat and comfortable distinctions between an omnipotent yet reassuringly benevolent God and the brutality of colonialism. I argue that Kurtz is nei ther a "false prophet," nor a "modern Pharisee," but rather the "spoiled and pampered favorite" (Conrad 44) of Western religious memory. Kurtz, in his terrifying call to "[e]xterminate all the brutes" (46), embodies both that Biblical exterminator of "brutes," *Yahweh tseva'ohth* Jehovah of Armies) and that aspect of the Son of Man himself who came "not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Just as Kurtz is the (in)human face behind the rent veil of European colonial conquest, so too is the brute force inherent in Western religious memory the face behind the European who appears to Marlow's aunt as "[s]omething like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (10).

In order to see how Kurtz functions in this way, we must explore two questions. How does Western religious memory work, and how do an ancient warrior god and a wandering desert preacher fit into the workings of that memory? Memory (cultural, racial, familial) serves to create and define both individuals and nations. Richard Terdman, author of *Present Past. Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, defines memory as both "the modality of our relation to the past" (7) and "the faculty that sustains continuity in collective and in individual experience" (8). Similarly, for William James the role of memory in constructing identities is one of creating a "community of self" (155), a constructed awareness of "resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings [. . . that] constitutes the real and verifiable 'personal identity' which we feel" (216). This identity "can only be a relative identity, that of a slow shifting in which there is always some common ingredient retained. The commonest element of all, the most uniform, is the possession of the same memories" (240). At the collective level, memory both "sustains hegemony [. . . and] subverts it through its capacity to recollect

and to restore the alternative discourses the dominant would simply bleach out and forget. Memory," writes Terdiman, "is inherently contestatory" (20).

The hegemony that collective memory sustains is often a political hegemony sustained by a religious ideology. Frantz Fanon, in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, changes "often" to "always": All forms of exploitation resemble one another. They all seek the source of their necessity in some edict of a Biblical nature" (88). The roles played by such edicts are similar to that played by memory: they facilitate the construction of identity. The Biblical-and in the wider sense, religious-edict that enables the racist to "create his own inferior" (Fanon 93) is part and parcel of a religious system that Freud describes as contributing to "the idea of life having a purpose" (76), and that Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, describes as constituting the character of a nation: "The conception of God [. . .] constitutes the general basis of a people's character" (176).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad plays like a virtuoso on this hegemonic-yet-contestatory quality of memory. Marlow, who unfolds the primary tale, is framed within the sceptical prose of the unnamed narrator of the novella's beginning and end. The narrator quickly assumes the character of "spokesman" for the colonialist attitudes of Conrad's day. This narrator makes a point of telling us that Marlow "did not represent his class" (3), that he is "sitting apart" (24) while telling his tale, and that he "sat apart" (72) at the end of his story. Marlow is also rather curiously described as telling his tale while sitting in the pose of a Buddha. This description is first given in general terms, then twice reiterated in specific terms:

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzenmast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. (1)

[L]ifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand

outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower. (4)

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. (72)

In this way, Marlow is presented as somehow alien to and/or alienated from the Western culture to which the *Nellie* and its crew belong; he is pictured as the "Eastern" teller of a story of Western folly by a narrator who has just finished celebrating the exploits of Western (British) adventurers like Sir Francis Drake, Sir James Ross Clark, and Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker. In contrast to Marlow, the narrator names these explorers "messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. [. . . carrying] the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires" (2).

The narrator's repeated presentation of Marlow in alien terms suggests not simply that Marlow's tale is to be distrusted, but that it is specifically to be distrusted from a colonialist and Judeo-Christian perspective. This "contestatory" presentation of Marlow—as sitting apart from (even challenging) the dominant expansionist, imperialist, colonialist attitudes of his day—serves to highlight the radical nature of the socio-religious critique that lies just beneath the surface of Marlow's story.

The narrator, while clearly positioning Marlow as "set apart," gives the reader an important clue as to how Marlow's narrative might be interpreted. The "meaning" of Marlow's stories is said to exist not as a nut in a shell, but as a glow that illuminates a haze, as a halo. The meaning, insists the narrator, is to be found in what is only referred to, in what seems peripheral. Marlow's story ostensibly recounts one effect of the economically-driven "weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (13). What ultimately surrounds Marlow's narrative like a halo, however, is something quite different. Significantly, Marlow uses Biblical narratives and religious memory to frame his tale. What seems a narrative of simple economic exploitation is actually an allegory

of the religious roots of Western colonialism. In offering his tale, Marlow uses Western religious memory (Fanon's "edict of a Biblical nature") to subject Western identity—specifically colonial identity—to a harsher and more profound criticism than even his most astute listeners (and readers) may have yet realized.

Marlow begins his tale with the unmistakably familiar imagery found in the opening of the Western world's most familiar book:

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." (3)

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. (Genesis 1.2)

Marlow's use of Western religious memory (in the form of scriptural text and long-standing cultural tradition) thus begins with his first words, but his is not to be a direct tale or an easily cracked nutshell. After falling silent for a moment, he resumes his tale with a rumination on the Roman experience in classical-era Britain. "Nineteen hundred years ago—the other day" the Romans brought the "flash of lightning" that is civilization to what was then thought the extreme edge of the world. But, "these chaps," according to Marlow, "were not much account" (4). This is the first clue given by Marlow himself that the surface and the substance of his tale are not one and the same, that his tale will not be like the "cracked nut" of the "typical" seaman. The Romans "were no colonists," and they displayed a strength that was "just an accident arising from the weakness of others" (4). The Roman conquest was "just" robbery, "just" aggravated murder, and they used "only" brute force. The Romans were missing something, then, in their "conquest of the earth," missing something that Marlow suggests European colonizers are not missing.

What is the missing element? Marlow initially gives a curious answer: "What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency" (4). But this notion of "efficiency" is soon shown to be a euphemistic bit of Marlovian misdirection. "What redeems it

conquest of the earth] is the idea only [...] Something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (4). An idea, in short, of God: the God that Regina Schwartz describes as an owner and giver of land, a God who will "bequeath the land as a gift to the people if they are faithful to him, and [. . .] will revoke it if they are not" (54).¹

The European parallel Marlow draws is to two ancient conquering enterprises: on the surface, Marlow uses the Roman Republic (and the later Roman Empire), but beneath that surface, he alludes to the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites at the end of the exodus from Egypt. This parallel suggests the religious aspect of colonialism, a theme that Marlow continues to develop throughout the novella. Marlow deals explicitly with the Romans (who eventually established Christianity, including its Judaic heritage, as their official state religion), but the parallel with the Israelites is implicit, to be discovered only with reference to the many other Biblical allusions in Marlow's tale.

Why, a reasonable reader might ask, would Marlow restrict himself to oblique references to the conquest of Canaan when he is perfectly open about his references to Roman conquest? In the context of the narrative, the answer is obvious: Marlow wants to be listened to without raising the hackles of his audience. To state openly that the ancient Israelites, their God, and the great religious and cultural traditions that have sprung therefrom were and are murderous is to imply rather too directly that his audience is itself murderous. No one wants to listen while being accused of murder; thus the oblique and contestatory quality of memory to which Terdiman refers is the quality upon which Marlow's narrative relies in its use of Biblical allusion. Marlow's tale "subverts it [here, Western, Biblically-informed memory] through its capacity to recollect and to restore the alternative discourses [i.e., the perspective of the Canaanite, the African, the Colonized] the dominant would simply bleach out and forget" (Terdiman 20).

Marlow overtly satirizes the racialist basis of colonialism: "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 into it too much" (4). He continues, however, "What redeems it is the idea only [...] *something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to*" (4; emphasis added). This exposes the colonialists' "good cause" or "greater good" rationalizations as self serving superstitions, gods made in the images of the colonialists' own ambitions. The kind of God described here is one who divides the world into two camps:

They therefore that believe there is a God that governeth the world, and hath given Precepts, and propounded Rewards, and Punishments to Mankind, are Gods Subjects; all the rest, are to be understood as Enemies.

(Hobbes 396)

The justification for "taking it away" has roots in the idea that this God of Subjects and Enemies intends "his" Subjects to have "it"—whether that "it" be land, goods, or other human beings. The promise of Yahweh to Abram in Genesis, "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever [...] Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (13.14-17), seems harmless enough until it becomes obvious that the land spoken of is already inhabited. Abram resides "by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite" (14.13); he is not alone in the land Yahweh has just promised to his descendants. What then, of the descendants of Mamre the Amorite?

And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land [. . .] So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land. (Numbers 21.24-35)

The "conquest of the earth," the "taking it away," is achieved, not as robbery or as aggravated murder, nor managed only through brute force, but by the "edict of a Biblical nature" that is the promise of God Himself. The idea of the earth as a possession taken

away from those "Enemies" who are *not* the people of God, given to those "Subjects" who are, is made explicit in Biblical descriptions of land as divinely bestowed booty. This can be seen in passages arranged chronologically in the larger Biblical narrative; coming before, *during*, and *after* the conquest of Canaan, they take on (respectively) the characters of justification before the fact, description of the action, and justification after the fact:

thy God shall [...] give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not. (Deuteronomy 6.10-11)

And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe. Joshua 11.14)

I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

Joshua 24.11 -14)

The European colonialism in which Marlow is involved is somewhere in transition between stages two and three: the action itself, and the post-mortem justification of the action. Seen in this way, the entire tradition upon which Marlow rests the patterns and images of his tale of "rapacious and pitiless folly" (13) serves as stage one—the justification before the fact—wrapped up in the idea that colonized lands, full as they are of "great and goodly" things that the colonists have not built or planted, are somehow "promised" to the (Western) people of (a Western) God. The idea of this very kind of conqueror God using humans as His agents is raised (at once seriously and satirically) by Marlow in what seems at first a throwaway line: "I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and *invading your*

homes, just as though I had got a *heavenly mission* to civilize you" (5; emphasis added). Marlow's line describes the "civilizing" mission of the Europeans as both "heavenly" and invasive, and this description is an allusive thread running through the rest of his tale. This thread, spun of religious faith and religious hypocrisy, weaves prominently through Marlow's story, intertwined with, and inextricable from, Western religious memory and the particular conception of God as a divider of the world into Subjects and Enemies, a conqueror, and a giver of land that constitutes the general basis of the Western Colonial character.

In a particularly effective scene illustrating this combination of faith and hypocrisy, Marlow's aunt describes him (in his newly bestowed Colonial function) as "[s]omething like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (10). The project is, according to her, one of "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways"—a clearly religious, evangelical sentiment seemingly (but not necessarily) at odds with the economic motive that Marlow immediately proposes as the "real" mission: "I ventured to hint that the company was run for profit" (10). The response invokes Western religious memory: "You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy of his hire" (10). This direct quotation from the King James Version of Luke 10.7 refers to the seventy disciples Jesus sent out to preach, and describes their work as that of laborers in a harvest. What fate awaits those who resist the religious colonization and conscription of these disciples of Jesus?

But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. (Luke 10.14-16)

The hypocrisy inherent in wrapping European conquest in the mantle of Greek scriptural narratives of the evangelical conquest of the earth is captured by Marlow's reference to "a city [deliber-

ately unnamed so that all of Europe might be painted with the same brush] that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre" (Conrad 7). His description is a paraphrase of Matthew 23.27:

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Here, Marlow implicitly compares the colonialism of Europe to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. To suggest this much is to follow Steiner in her argument for the indictment of Kurtz as a "false prophet" and a "modern Pharisee" based on "Christ's numerous indictments of the Pharisees" (78). The real power of Marlow's comparison, however, lies in its quiet suggestion that the originator of the "whited sepulchres" accusation— Jesus—is merely replacing one form of world conquest (military and economic) with an even more pernicious form (evangelical and ideological). The first form of conquest is open about its aims and direct about its means. The second form, though seemingly based on persuasion, conversion, and a desire for "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways," relies, in the final analysis, just as much on brute force as does the first, serving, in fact, as a cover and justification for such force: "But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell" (Luke 10.14-16). There is just as much Jesus of Nazareth in Kurtz as there is *Yahweh tseva'ohth*.

Just as the Pharisees already were, and just as their Christian opponents would soon be, Europe itself is "full of dead men's bones." The European colonialism of military and economic conquest, covered under the evangelical and ideological blanket of "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways," makes both Africa and Europe into a "whited sepulchre," and references to these bones are plentiful in *Heart of Darkness*. The man whom Marlow was sent to replace, Fresleven, lies dead, and according to Marlow, "the grass growing through [Fresleven's]

enough to hide his bones" (7). Marlow also speaks of "places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthly atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb" (11). In yet another passage, Marlow, upon reaching the company's station, describes a group of men as "black shapes," helpers who had "withdrawn to die," remembering one man as "black bones reclined at full length [. . . with] a bit of white worsted round his neck" (14). Later, Marlow describes Kurtz this way:

I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd. (55)

What this ideology of world conquest and religious justification brings is death. Death, however, is no respecter of racist rationalizations or of evangelical urges to enlighten the "ignorant millions" (Conrad 10) of whom Marlow's aunt speaks. Inside the "whited sepulcher," the bones are black *and* white. Colonialism is degenerative, and ultimately fatal both to its victims and its perpetrators; Marlow drives home this point with his descriptions of Kurtz's degeneration.

Marlow uses scriptural metaphor frequently in his portrayal of Kurtz, who is presented variously to the listener/reader (through the perspectives of company officials, the Russian, and Marlow himself) as a missionary for capitalism, a messianic redeemer, and a devil. Much of the Biblical imagery Marlow uses revolves around Kurtz's contradictory nature. He is first presented as an idealist, though he has, even at this early point, a tendency to self-deification. In a report for The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, Kurtz writes that Europeans:

necessarily appear to [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity [...] By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded. (45)

The Central Station manager also speaks of him in messianic terms:

He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress [...] We want [...] for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, [. . .] and so he comes here, a special being. (22)

Kurtz originally comes as a deliverer, sent to guide and further the cause, to spread the "good news" of colonialism. Purdy quite aptly refers to Kurtz as an "evangelical capitalist" (90) and characterizes Kurtz's project as "evangelical capitalism" (93)—a mission to civilize (westernize, Christianize) the natives and make a healthy profit for his company. Kurtz is later quoted (by a manager who is bitterly opposed to his policies) as having once said: "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things [...] humanising, improving, instructing" (29). Not only do the functions of "each station" sound like the function of scripture as described in 2 Timothy 3.16 (reproof, correction, instruction), but Kurtz is also one who prepares the way for those to come after, like John the Baptist:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. (Isaiah 40.3-5)

Kurtz at this stage apparently acts, or wants to act, as a voice crying in the wilderness. Kurtz is to make every crooked place straight, every low place high, and every backward, non-western place western for the glory of the colonialist cause. But this is the early Kurtz, the one we know only through descriptions by others. The Kurtz whom we first meet in the text through Marlow's eyes is a far different character. He has taken on a demonic aspect:

The wilderness had patted him on the head [. . .] 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 imagination. He was its spoiled and pampered favorite [...] Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own [...] He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land. (44)

Later, even Kurtz's death has an element of twisted Biblical metaphor. When he is dying, Kurtz says to Marlow, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death" (64). Marlow, on observing the change that came over Kurtz's features at that moment, thinks, "It was as though a veil had been rent" (64). This is almost a direct citation of the King James rendering of Matthew 27.51: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."

The character of Kurtz is the ultimate embodiment of Western religious memory. He is the Western man become God, what Freud refers to as "a kind of prosthetic God" (91-92). In this character, Marlow illustrates the true nature of Western Colonialism: evangelism is merely a cover for *extermination*. The "civilizing" mission is murder, but it is not "just" murder; it is murder justified by the Western idea that "you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to."

Kurtz's final *written* statement is key: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (46). This is the paradigmatic expression of the goals of Western Colonial (religious and economic) expansion. Extermination lies at the very heart of Western religious memory. The first mention of writing in the Bible—specifically *writing as an aid to memory*—occurs in the context of planning the extermination of an entire people:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will

utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.
(Exodus 17.14)

As Jeffery Meyer points out, this same sentiment can be found in the Western Colonialism of the generations preceding Marlow's own:

William Cornwallis Harris' *Wild Sports of Southern Africa* (1838), the first popular African hunting book, provided, in the name of enlightenment, a brutal justification for Kurtz's injunction to "Exterminate all the brutes!": "There is an imperious necessity, dictated alike by reason, justice, and humanity, of exterminating from off the face of the earth, a race of [African] monsters, who, being the unprovoked destroyers, and implacable foes of Her Majesty's Christian subjects, have forfeited every claim to mercy or consideration."

(192)

The similarity between these two expressions of the "necessity" of extermination is found in the idea of resistance. The "monsters" of Harris' call for extermination are "unprovoked destroyers," and "implacable foes" of a people with a specifically Western religious (and political) identity: "Her Majesty's Christian subjects." The Amalekites also resisted, and for that resistance Yahweh mandated their extermination:

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt [...] Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it. (Deuteronomy 25.17-19)

Now go and smite Amalek, and [...] slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. (1 Samuel 15.3)

The "brutes" are defined as those who resist. It is important to remember ("*Remember* what Amalek did [...] thou shalt not *forget*") that those who resist must be exterminated: "it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you."

The Western civilization that produced Kurtz is presented in *Heart of Darkness* as the logical fulfillment of Western religious memory. Marlow describes civilization as the result of "a flash of lightning in the clouds," saying "we live in the flicker" (3). Kurtz's exclamation, "Exterminate all the brutes," as the paradigmatic statement of Western religious memory, "blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky" (46). Western civilization can thus be seen, through the filter of Marlow's tale of "a rapacious and pitiless folly," as the end product of a process of memory forming identity that justifies "the conquest of the earth." Western Colonial expansion can be similarly seen as the giving of that earth by God (or Cornwallis Harris' "Her Majesty") as a gift to those faithful who possess a land on which they had not labored, and towns that they had not built, and the fruit of vineyards that they did not plant. This is the idea that "redeems" the conquest of the earth—the idea that the earth is the gift of a specific God to a specific people, and the concomitant idea that those who resist the specific people of that specific God must be exterminated. Perhaps, finally, "efficiency" is a more accurate euphemism for the "idea" than it first appears.

Seeing Western civilization in this way allows us to see how Kurtz functions as the embodiment of Western religious memory. Kurtz will be "utterly lost" (60), not because he has strayed too far from certain Biblical ideas of God, but because he has come too close to embodying those ideas. Marlow reports that his statement is made in "a flash of inspiration" (60), and inspiration is hardly necessary to come to the commonplace conclusion that Kurtz has strayed too far from "permitted aspirations" (61) by straying from Western ideas; rather, "inspiration" is what is needed to see, as Marlow obliquely suggests that he does, that Kurtz will be lost if he takes that final step in following the Western path to its logical conclusion—the step of self-deification, of becoming oneself the deity that gives the earth as a gift. Ian Watt, in his

RELIGIOUS MEMORY IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, puts Kurtz's aspiration in the context of what he terms an "evolutionary optimism" in support of the idea that "the world's salvation could be expected from a boundless increase in individual development [...] The ultimate logic of these expectations was the assumption that progress would eventually lead to man's self-deification" (163-4). Marlow describes the process of Kurtz's being led to exceed the boundaries of "permitted aspirations" as one of remembrance:

I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. (61)

This process of awakening and remembering is the process of becoming oneself the deity who can order the extermination of all the brutes who resist. The levels of remove in the statement "whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" are eliminated, and the "civilizing" work is no longer done in the name of a God, but in the name of oneself as God.

Marlow underscores this process by characterizing Kurtz in terms of divinity throughout his narrative. He imagines Kurtz as a "voice" (43), and later describes him as "A voice! A voice!" (63). Finally Kurtz is reduced to "a cry that was no more than a breath" (64). Significantly, Elijah meets God in the form of a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19.12). When Kurtz is described by his Russian "disciple" (54) as being above human judgment—"You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man" (51)—he is again compared to God: Kurtz's ways are "higher than your ways," and his "thoughts [higher] than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55.9), or so the Russian seems to suggest. In yet another parallel, Marlow must "invoke" Kurtz, like a demon or a god: "I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above him or below him, and I knew it" (61).

Marlow even obliquely implies that in seeing Kurtz's last

moments, he has seen God: "It was though a veil had been rent." This phrase, borrowed from the descriptions of the death of Christ given in the King James Bible, makes reference to the veil of the temple that separated the Holy from the Holy of Holies or Most Holy. Even by the comparatively late time of Christ, this veil separated the realm in which the priests were permitted to perform their ceremonial duties from that realm that might be entered by the high priest only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. In pre-exilic Israel, this was the area in which the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing the presence of Yahweh, was located. What Marlow sees—"the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror" (64)—he sees through the rent veil. What he sees is precisely what neither he, nor anyone else, is supposed to see.

Kurtz finally embodies both the totalizing terror and the emptiness of the Western "idea," the Western God. Robert Wilson, in his book *Conrad's Mythology*, even suggests that Kurtz's cry "Exterminate all the brutes!" is a "summary of the book of Revelation" (45). This insight captures the essence, not merely of Kurtz, but of the "horror" Marlow is trying to convey in his portrait of Western religious memory and its brutally colonialist manifestations. The horror-show God of Revelation makes *Yahweh tseva'ohth* look like an innocent child at play, because the God of Revelation has moved from Yahweh's claim of being the "true" God (in the sense of belonging covenantally to Israel) among many "false" Gods (in the sense of being alien or inferior in power) to the entirely different claim of being the *only* God. This is a crucial step. The movement from henotheism (the preference for one god among many other gods) to monotheism (the assertion that only one god is real with the concomitant claim that all other gods are necessarily unreal) involves a corresponding movement away from a position that merely expresses a *preference* for one's own way of life toward a position of *intolerance* of others' right to exist as anything beyond more or less useful appliances dedicated to one's own needs. To move from "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20.3) to "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 21.6)

encapsulates a dramatic shift in worldviews from one in which difference—while not necessarily *celebrated*—is at least recognized, to one in which difference is a standing outside of totality. To stand apart from the Yahweh of Exodus is to be no part of the emerging people of Israel. To stand apart from the Alpha and Omega is to be no part of existence itself. This shift is both an analogy for Kurtz's self-deification in *Heart of Darkness*, and the essence of Western religious memory. Kurtz, in coming to embody Alpha and Omega, has lived the Western ideal to its fullest. In a line from the original manuscript that Conrad cut from the published editions of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz cries out "I have lived-supremely!" But Kurtz is also supremely empty: "he was hollow at the core" (Conrad 53). Just as he is "hollow at the core," so is the "idea" that redeems Colonialism; Western civilization and Western religious memory are themselves "hollow at the core."

Kurtz's last written statement, "Exterminate all the brutes!" and Kurtz's last spoken words, "The horror! The horror!" are intimately related. The first is an encapsulation of the aims of the Western "civilizing" and colonizing project; the second is a recognition of the moral emptiness—the brutal horror-of the colonial project, and a recognition of the collapse of the power of Western religious memory to redeem that horror. "The horror" is the very Western Colonial identity that is constructed out of a Western conception of a Colonialist God, a God who is an owner and giver of land, a God who will "bequeath the land as a gift to the people if they are faithful to him, and [...] will revoke it if they are not" (Schwartz 54), a God who divides the world into Subjects and Enemies. Kurtz has seen "the horror," implies Marlow, and "the horror" is us.

NOTES

' It Should be noted that Marlow's narrative not only makes use of actual scriptural texts in its tendentious play with Western religious memory, but also relies on a long-established Enlightenment tradition of characterizing civilization as a process of a God-favored people bringing light and progress into a

God-forsaken and backward darkness. This can be Seen in numerous examples: In John Davis's *The World's Hydrographical description* (1595), the English are "by the eternal and infallible presence of the Lord predestined to be sent unto all these Gentiles [...] to give light to all the rest of the world" (Hughes 743, n. 236). In Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal! Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1st ed. 1589, 2nd ed. 1599), Queen Elizabeth "Shall by God's assistance, in Short space, work many great and unlooked for effects, increase her dominions, enrich her coffers, and reduce many pagans to the faith of Christ" (Hakluyt 37). In John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), England is a "nation chosen before any other [. . .] a nation of prophets, of Sages, and of worthies" (Hughes 743).

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