

Psychological Approach To Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*

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Heart of Darkness can be studied as a journey which is like travelling into the Freudian "Id" or the Jungian "shadow". The two psychologists have given their theories about the complexity and working of the human mind. Normal behaviour of human being is guided only by the conscious mind which is just the surface layer of the mind.

There is a lot below the surface of which man is normally not aware. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow's journey to Congo, the dark "centre of the earth" seems to be a journey from the surface layer of the mind into the deeper layers, the dark recesses of the mind. Marlow himself says at one stage during his journey, "The mind of man is capable of anything- because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future."

According to Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, the individual's behaviour is assumed to result from the interaction of three key sub-systems within the personality: the Id, ego and super-ego. The id is the source of instinctual drives which are considered to be of two types: (a) constructive drives, primarily of a sexual nature, (b) destructive drives which tend towards aggression, destruction, and eventual death. Thus life, or constructive instincts are opposed by death, or destructive instincts. Freud, however, used the term sex in a broad sense to refer to almost everything pleasurable; from eating to creativity. The id is completely selfish, concerned only with the immediate gratification of instinctual needs without reference to reality or moral considerations. Hence it is said to operate in terms of the pleasure principle. (Coleman 55)

Ego is the second key sub-system which mediates between the demands of id and the realities of the external world. The basic purpose of the ego is to meet id demands, but in such a way as to ensure the well-being and survival of the individual. This requires the use of reason and other intellectual resources in dealing with the external world. This ego is said to operate in terms of the "reality-principle". For Freud, id demands, especially sexual and aggressive strivings, are "inherently in conflict with rules and prohibitions imposed by society" (Coleman 55)

The third key sub-system introduced by Freud is the "Superego", "which is the outgrowth of learning the taboos and moral values of society." (Coleman 55) It is the "conscience" and is concerned with right and wrong. The super-ego provides an additional inner control system which comes into operation to cope with the uninhibited desire of the id.

In order to give a structural view to id, ego and superego, Freud gave topography of the mind in terms of conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The unconscious corresponds to id and it consists merely of "isolated experiences and emotions which had been repressed because of the moral and ethical pressures of society." The preconscious corresponds to ego and the conscious to superego. "The preconscious system is much broader than the conscious part of the psyche because it contains all the perceptual and motor experience we have at our command to summon into consciousness." (Woodworth 264) The material of the preconscious, however, is freely accessible to the conscious. The topography of the human mind as given by Freud goes well with the geography and the structure of *Heart of Darkness* to the discussion of which I shall come later.

C.G.Jung explains the human psyche as having a number of differentiated but interacting systems. The principal ones (with which we are concerned here) are the “ego”, the “personal unconsciousness” and the “shadow”. The ego is the “conscious mind.” “It is made up of conscious perceptions, memories, thoughts and feelings.”(Hall 82) The personal unconscious is “a region adjoining the ego. It consists of experiences that were once conscious but which have been repressed, suppressed, forgotten, or ignored and of experiences that were too weak in the first place to make a conscious impression upon the person.”(Hall 82) The contents of the personal unconscious, like those of Freud’s preconscious are accessible to consciousness and there is quite a two-way traffic between the personal unconscious and the ego. The concept given by Jung which corresponds to Freudian id is “the shadow.” The shadow archetype consists of “the animal instincts which man inherited in his evolution from lower forms of life.”(Hall 87) It, thus, typifies the animal side of man’s nature. As an archetype the “shadow is responsible for man’s conception of original sin; when it is projected outward it becomes the devil or an enemy.”(Hall 87) The shadow is also “responsible for the appearance in consciousness and the behaviour of unpleasant and socially, reprehensible thoughts, feelings and actions.” (Hall 87) Further, “the shadow with its vital and passionate animal instincts gives a full bodied or three dimensional quality to the personality. It helps to round out the whole person.”(Hall 87)

Heart of darkness can be studied within the framework of the analysis of psyche as given by Freud and Jung. The study can be conducted at least at two levels: first; at the level of the places and second, at the level of characters. At the physical level, the novel is in the form of a journey that Marlow, the narrator, undertakes from Europe to the inner station of his company, which is in Congo. This journey can be looked at as a journey from the conscious mind into the unconscious mind. The stream that leads to the inner station is the human mind itself. The place from where the journey begins is Europe, the civilized world. Here the behaviour of human beings is guided by superego and is a result of “learning the taboos and moral values of society.”(Guerard 110-118)

This world can be considered as the conscious mind. The central station can be looked upon as the preconscious mind as this is the place upto which Kurtz once comes. The inner station is suggestive of the abyss of mind i.e. the unconscious. It is this part of the mind into which those experience and emotions of human beings are pushed which are not allowed expression in the conscious mind. This part, however, remains totally cut off from the conscious mind. Marlow also feels cut off from the world of civilization when he approaches the Inner Station.

“..... you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once somewhere – faraway – in another existence perhaps”

He finds this place “the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience”. He also feels that going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world”. This is a place where one doesn’t find the restraints of ego but “a human passion let loose.” Marlow also tells that “we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories”. The comments suggest that Marlow finds himself in a world which is contrasted with the world he has come from. He is unable to comprehend it as it is truth stripped of its cloak of time or, in other words it is the world of id, the unconscious mind stripped of the restrictions and curbs of ego and is characterized with “a human passion let loose.” The journey, thus, is a journey into the abyss of mind, from the conscious level to the unconscious, from ego to id.

The same pattern of Freudian superego, ego and id or Jungian ego, personal unconscious and shadow can be traced in the behaviour of the characters in the novel.

To take Marlow first, he is the projection of ego and the journey he undertakes is a journey from ego to id through which he achieves the knowledge: "Substantially and in its central emphasis *Heart of Darkness* concerns Marlow and his journey towardself. Through the journey Marlow finds himself. He calls the whole affair "one of my inconclusive experiences", but we see that he undergoes a change towards the end. By change, I do not mean he ceases to be a projection of ego; that he remains throughout but as he goes down the river (or into the depth of human mind), towards Congo (which is the unconscious mind) he gets a glimpse of id epitomized in Kurtz and for a moment comprehends the mind in its totality i.e. the conscious as well as the unconscious part of it. With a glimpse of "the shadow" he tends to become a three dimensional personality as Jung says that the shadow gives a three dimensional or full bodied quality to the personality. He, however, unlike Kurtz, keeps the inner strength of character (the demands of ego) intact and only gets a glimpse of the id, only looks over the "precipice where the Sun never shines" thereby attaining a knowledge which others do not have or which the superego does not permit human beings to have.

He says :

"They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew."

The "irritating pretence" here is the superego, the knowledge that Marlow has had in the glimpse of the shadow or of id, without which the life really is incomplete. Marlow, after having had the glimpse, becomes the mediator between the id and the superego just as Freudian ego or Jungian preconscious are mediators. As stated earlier 'ego' is the sub-system which mediates between the demands of the id and the realities of the external world. The basic purpose of ego is to meet id demands, but in such a way as to ensure the well being and survival of the individual. Ego makes use of reason and other intellectual sources and operates on the reality principle. Here Marlow too behaves on the "reality principles" and tells the "saving lie" to the Intended, the "saving illusion" so that ego and superego keep working in the civilized world of Europe. If Marlow had failed to perform this role of mediator, in other words, if ego had been weak, id or shadow would have come on the surface, intruded into the civilized world and would have compelled it to behave on the pleasure principle and brought destruction. Marlow, however, saves the situation by performing the role of ego so that the civilized world keeps moving on the reality principle.

Let us come to Kurtz now. He is a character behaving on the pleasure principle. When he first comes to Congo, he comes "with moral ideas of some sort", is an idealist, a generous man full of promise and nobility. Once in Congo (it has already been established that Congo represents the unconscious mind, the home of id or shadow) Kurtz loses grip on his ideals. The superego is gone at the first shake. "Rivets" and "restraint" are words belonging to superego; they are "the outgrowth of learning the taboos and moral values of society." It is this part of the human mind which is referred to when Marlow reflects:

"Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags-rags that would fly off at the first good shake" and they do fly off and Id comes on the surface. Let us see how it operates. The Russian tells that Kurtz came to the natives "with thunder and lightening", and that he was "very terrible" to them, to the extent of killing whom he jolly well pleased "because he could do so, he had a fancy for it". we see that Kurtz is not as much interested in the ivory as in the "killing" that is involved in collecting the ivory because he had a "fancy for killing." The fancy is affirmed as we come to know that when no ivory is left to trade with, the Russian tells, "There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet", and the cartridges are used for killing the people because he has a "fancy for" it. This fancy for killing suggests the working of id under the pleasure principles. As already stated in the beginning, id is the source of instinctual drives which are considered to be of two types; (a) constructive drives, primarily of a sexual nature, and (b) destructive drives which tend towards aggression, destruction and eventual death. We see in the novel that the constructive drives i.e. those of sexual nature are dominant in Kurtz in the beginning. He marries one of the native women and

satiates these drives. But soon the destructive drives overpower him; he develops a “fancy for killing” and having gone through the stages of aggression and destruction, finally dies.

Kurtz’s behaviour can also be analysed in terms of Jungian shadow. “Shadow” consists of the animal instinct which man inherited in his evolution from lower forms of life. It is the animal side of man’s nature; when projected outward becomes the devil or an enemy. We see that Kurtz virtually becomes a devil of the land:

“He had taken a high seat among the devils of the land – I mean literally”, says Marlow. All the “socially reprehensible thoughts, feelings and actions” come on the surface and Kurtz exercises them. This free behaviour, however, expresses his personality in totality. Under the effect of ego or superego, he is able only to express his curbed self. Once the restrictions of the ego are lifted Kurtz expresses himself fully, with all his genuine and natural impulses. This is quite in accord with Jung’s view that the shadow with its vital and passionate animal instincts gives a full bodied or three dimensional quality to the personality. In that sense all other characters in the novel, including of course Marlow remain two dimensional.

Kurtz’s Intended too is a two dimensional character, she rather remains a symbol and doesn’t grow beyond that. In Freudian sense she is the projection of superego and is the starting point of the journey. She is two dimensional because she doesn’t undergo any experience as Marlow does that of going from ego to id. She is aware only of the surface layer of mind i.e. the conscious. And the Kurtz she so much loved is also the one who belongs to the conscious mind. But she does not know and is never allowed to know that her Kurtz has gone down the abyss of human mind and has died embracing the “horror” within. Marlow tells the saving lie to the Intended because he knows that the horrors of the id are not to be brought into the conscious mind that the intended represents. Ego and id are two parts of mind which are to remain separated from each other. It is the ego by which man’s behaviour is to be guided and not the id. Marlow holds the impulses of id rising within and tells the lie; “I pulled myself together”.

The Journey, thus, is a journey into the abyss of human mind; it starts from Intended and ends at Intended suggesting the behaviour guided by ego and that is the behaviour permissible in the civilized world of Europe or the conscious mind. Marlow, the narrator, works as a mediator between Europe and Congo just as ego is between superego and id. We see that the structure of the novel both thematic as well as geographical goes well with the psychological framework.

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