

# AT THE HEART OF DARKNESS: EICHMANN AND "APOCALYPSE NOW"?

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Towards the end of 1890, in a stern-wheel paddle steamer, Joseph Conrad travelled 1 300 miles up the Congo River ("fascinating, deadly, like a snake ... with its head in the sea and its tail lost in the depth of the land"). From 1876 to 1908, the Congo was the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium; in 1884, the Berlin Conference ratified this extraordinary fiefdom. Under the civilising rule of King Leopold and his agents, administered by the International Association of the Congo in Brussels (the city Marlow calls a "whited sepulchre"), an estimated 15 million blacks perished. Voyaging up the Congo, Conrad witnessed scenes of savagery and brutalisation that were at that time without parallel in the world. But evil wears noble masks. Kimbrough (1971) quotes a passage by Leopold on the Belgian mission in the Congo: "They have to continue the development of civilisation in the centre of Equatorial Africa, receiving their inspiration directly from Berlin and Brussels. Placed face to face with primitive barbarism, grappling with sanguinary customs that date back thousands of years, they are obliged to reduce these gradually. They must accustom the population to general laws, of which the most needful and the most salutary is assuredly that of work."

Heart of Darkness is a symbolic reworking of Conrad's experiences in the Congo, published eight years after his return. It is a story of transcendent evil, and in it the Director-Producer of Apocalypse Now, Francis Coppola, found a vehicle for a cinematic statement about evil, for which he finds an allegory in the Vietnam war. For Coppola, it has been an expensive allegory. The film was five years in the making, much of it on location in the Philippines, from where Coppola returned to his Cmi Zoetrope production facility in Los Angeles with two hundred and fifty hours of footage, finally edited down to 153 minutes (there is also a 70mm version which runs 12 minutes less). Coppola cut and re-cut the film, creating several versions of different length, continually putting back the première date - from December 1977 to Easter 1978 and then to August 1979 (American Film, September 1979). The film cost between \$30 and \$35 million, for \$10 million dollars of which Coppola personally stands surety. To raise this enormous sum he has reportedly mortgaged the unpaid royalties on both his Godfather movies, his San Francisco home and other property: not only his pride but also his future rides on the film, which has been disastrously received by most critics. Time magazine headlined its review "The making of a quagmire" (August 27, 1979). Richard Coombes (Monthly Film Bulletin, December 1979) talks of the film's "fundamental misconception". Veronica Geng in the New Yorker

(September 3, 1979) is one of the few critics to praise the film: it is amazingly successful, she writes, and has coherence, truthfulness and conviction - that is until the entrance of Colonel Walter E Kurtz. It is curiously interesting that the Time reviewer does not appear to have read Heart of Darkness, while Ms Geng knows the story pretty well by heart: although Apocalypse Now can at a push stand on its own, Coppola's film rides on its Conradian vehicle and to see it without Heart of Darkness in one's head is like watching Marcel Camus's 1958 classic, Orfeu Negro, when one is ignorant of the Orpheus legend it echoes. The purely cinematic resonances in which Coppola clothes Conrad's story are certainly one of the film's more considerable triumphs.

What I shall do in this paper is consider the central issue in both Heart of Darkness and Apocalypse Now, the problem of evil. To place this issue in perspective, it is necessary to consider some of the theological and philosophical aspects of evil and relate these to my own generation's touchstone, the Nazi holocaust, and the man who by virtue of his appalling normality is its most powerful symbol, Adolf Eichmann. Finally, I would like to look at the little that science, and especially psychology, discerns of the darkness of human heart and has to say about it.

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The question of why Coppola chose Vietnam as the allegory through which to portray Heart of Darkness is worth looking at, and the answer seems to be that although the problem of evil hasn't changed much since the days of Genesis, its symbols have, and each generation has its own. For Conrad's it was slavery; a generation later it was the trenches of the First World War and for the next the Spanish civil war (its horrors have their visual symbol in Picasso's Guernica). For my generation, the symbol is the gas chambers of Auschwitz and the coarse-screen 1945 newspaper photographs of long rows of corpses like small bundles of striped laundry. Today, the symbol is Vietnam: Ia Drang, Khe Sanh and My Lai are no longer place names: they have the darkness of symbols of evil like Auschwitz, Treblinka and Dachau.

Vietnam is a peculiarly potent symbol for another reason. War reporting has traditionally been subject to a dual censorship: that of military security and that of good taste, which meant that material felt to be demoralising to combatants or the folk back home (blood and gore, atrocities, wounded children) was suppressed. Until Vietnam, journalists and censors shared a set of tacit assumptions about good taste: our side was fighting the good fight, and journalists, like soldiers, wanted to see our war won. These common assumptions crumbled in Vietnam, because, like the grunts, reporters and photographers felt themselves fundamentally out of sympathy with the military machine, and the history of Vietnam reporting, from Harrison Salisbury to Michael Herr, is a history of dissidence. Salisbury's 1967 reports for the New York Times on the bombing of civilian targets in Hanoi created a watershed in American opinion on the war (Gay Talese, 1969, tells how Dean Rusk, after a television appearance at the CBS studio in Washington, became aggressive with a member of the Times Washington Bureau: drinking his third Scotch, Rusk looked hard at the journalist and asked, "Why don't you tell your editors to ask Mr Salisbury to go down and visit the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam?"). Herr's Dispatches (that looks at first to be a flip record of battle slang and anecdote, and turns out to be a marvellously constructed consideration of the terror of war and its beauty) is suffused with distrust: "for years there has been no country here but the war", he writes: the spokesmen spoke in sentences "with no hope of meaning in the sane world ... The press got all the facts, it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death".

The effect of the sheer weight of media coverage, together with the breakdown of voluntary censorship, meant that although sifted through a thousand filters, the horror of war penetrated American homes in unprecedented measure. In The Best of LIFE, an anthology of that magazine's pictures with an eye for the main chance, the Vietnam photographs are a shocking contrast to the heroism of war shown for the two world wars (the flag raising on Iwo Jima) and even Korea, where the call of muted trumpets is never far away. The Vietnam pictures (Scherman, 1973, pp. 44 - 45, 180 - 181) show suffering and brutality that had heretofore not penetrated Life's pages.

The people at home took their war each night live in their livingrooms, mainlined by television directly into the bloodstream. Vietnam was so intimately recorded that it became almost unendurably real ,

writes Lance Morrow in Time (April 23, 1979).

Even in sheer numerical terms, Vietnam was a major American experience: from 1964, US troop strength built up to 543 000 in 1969; 15 000 Americans died in battle in 1968, and close on 50 000 before the last 69 Americans left Saigon on March 29, 1973. So when Coppola looked for a modern allegory for evil that could stand beside Conrad's Congo, Vietnam was a compelling choice.

That soaring ambition attached to Coppola's movie is clear not only from its swollen budget: its title evokes the apocalypse of St John on the Island of Patmos, recorded in the book of Revelation in the first century of the current era. Through this title, Coppola lays claim to a revealed and secret knowledge of future events, and ultimately to an authoritative eschatology. As we shall see, Coppola's failure to clothe Kurtz in any symbolism larger than the rags of insanity renders his account of the end of days ludicrous rather than revelatory.

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To call Heart of Darkness a story of transcendent evil may appear a harsh judgment; in terms of conventional morality and religion, this is indeed a deviant term. It implies that there is no eternal struggle between good and evil because evil has triumphed. Theodicy, the justification of God's ways to man in view of the existence of evil, is philosophy's most ancient and despairing quest; its most radical solution is to postulate a fundamental dualism, and this is the view of the Gnostics of late antiquity, who exercised a powerful influence on Jewish and Christian theodicy. The Gnostics held that through the Fall, man is alienated from God and thrown into this world, which, created from evil matter and possessed by evil demons, cannot be the creation of a good God: it is ruled by the Jewish demiurge, Yahweh (not highly thought of by the Gnostics). These doctrines found issue in the Christian heresy of Manichaeism and in the Jewish Kabbala. Scholem (1954, pp. 238 ff.) argues that in the Kabbala, evil is woven into the existence of God: all that is demonic has its root in God, and especially in the wrath of his left hand, the sitra ahara. This sinister demonic world of evil forms the dark side of everything living and threatens it from within. The Lurianic doctrine (taken over by the later Hasidic movement of the nineteenth century) of the uplifting of the holy sparks, dispersed when the vessels of creation shattered at the outpouring of divine goodness, is a first step for personal and ultimately cosmic redemption: its derivation from the earlier doctrine of evil in the Kabbala and its ultimately Gnostic roots is clear.

It is in this Gnostic sense that Conrad's evil is transcendent (in his Personal Record, 1912, he writes

The ethical view of the universe involves us in so many absurd contra-

dictions ... that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular. )

Throughout Heart of Darkness, there are abundant hints of this fundamental pessimism, this sense of triumphant evil. The narrative frame is aboard a yawl on the Thames at sunset: a luminous sunset with gleams of varnished sprits. Yet the presence of humans causes the light to be swallowed by a darkness: "A haze rested on the low shores ... and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth." This image of the swallowing up of light by the dark is a powerful one that Conrad uses repeatedly: "The sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men."

The image repeats with even greater force in the last pages, when Marlow delivers Kurtz's last slim packet of letters to his Intended in the whitened sepulchre that is Brussels: the room grew darker because "all the sad light had taken refuge on her forehead ... illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love" (pp.90 - 91): hers is a "great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her" (p. 92).

The extraordinary richness of this symbolism derives from its roots in ancient myth. The Manichaean heresy of the 3rd century tells in its creation myth of an incursion into the realm of light by Satan, who emerged from his kingdom of endless darkness so that part of the Kingdom of Light is absorbed in Darkness, smothered by the Matter which engulfs it. As we have seen, this theme repeats in the Kabbalic creation story. The symbolism of light takes on its modern form in the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which has as its symbol the blazing sun as the light of reason under which Man's perfectability is assured in terms of the idea of general progress. From the Enlightenment movement emerged Moses Mendelssohn and the Jewish Haskalah of the eighteenth century; the small light of this Jewish enlightenment was darkened by the emergence of modern anti-Semitism (which blasted Jewish hopes of becoming a nation among nations), culminating in the Holocaust: the ideals of the Haskalah were paradoxically realised by the Zionist movement, which while rejecting the ideals of the Haskalah did in fact make of the Jews a nation among nations and a carrier of universal as well as particularistic culture.

In Apocalypse Now the sense of a brooding darkness, of a light absorbed by Satanism, is stunningly captured in the untitled opening sequence: images of dark green, almost black and impenetrable jungle move slowly across the screen, framed in the sound and absurdly slow movement of helicopter rotor blades, and behind the dark palms sombre fires burn ("deep within the forest, red gleams ... wavered, seemed to sink and rise", says Marlow at the Inner Station), and this visual sense of dark light is preserved throughout Captain Willard's long upriver journey in search of Kurtz.

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Conrad's most powerful symbols of evil are those Marlow encounters at the beginning of his journey upriver, at the company's first station, on which the deadening hand of civilisation lies heaviest. Evidence of pointless waste of material and life is everywhere. A railway truck lies on its back with its wheels in the air "as dead as the carcass of some animal", decaying machinery, rusty rails, a pointless blasting at the face of a cliff which was not in the way of anything. Slavery was against King Leopold's principles, but justice and work were not: Marlow is passed by a group of blacks chained together by iron collars around their necks.

They were called criminals, and the outraged law ... had come to them an insoluble mystery from the sea.

Marlow's description is uncannily evocative of other descriptions of death in life nearer our own time, notably Katzetnik's portrayal of the Musselmen, the living corpses of the death camps:

All their meagre breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily up-hill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete deathlike indifference of unhappy savages.

Behind them strolled their guard, "the product of the new forces at work", a black man carrying a rifle by its middle and dressed in a rudimentary uniform; he grins at Marlow, well pleased with his part in the "great cause of these high and just proceedings". Cooperation by the oppressed in their own oppression is a melancholy theme, examined by Hannah Arendt (1963, pp. 109 ff.) in the context of the Jewish ghetto police and militias of Nazi-occupied Europe.

Marlow then makes his way to the shade of a clump of trees in which he had earlier noticed that "dark things seemed to stir feebly":

My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno ... Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks ... half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair ... They were dying slowly ... brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts ... fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest ... Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped up on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner ... and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.

Driven to reflect on the meaning of these terrible scenes, Marlow suggests that there are two kinds of devil about: the first is the devil of violence, greed and "hot desire ... strong, lusty, red-eyed," but these are not the devils that rule the Congo:

I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land" - and note that we have here another metaphor for darkness - "I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly.

It is folly because from the company's point of view contempt for life is wasteful and economically unproductive. This is the criticism of Kurtz that makes Marlow feel he had "never breathed an atmosphere so vile", namely the implication that his methods were unsound from an economic point of view.

Approaching the station buildings, Marlow meets a man

"in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision." He wears a high collar, broad cuffs, alpaca jacket, a clean necktie and varnished boots: "He was amazing, and had a pen holder behind his ear." This is the company's chief accountant, and amid the general disorder of the station - "heads, things, buildings", his books were in apple-pie order. When an invalid's bed is put in his office, he "exhibited a gentle annoyance. 'The groans of this sick person ... distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.'" Yet to Marlow's amazement he continues "making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death."

This is no homo vulgaris, the common man, that Conrad is describing, but homo normalis, the man who lives by norms: Hannah Arendt (1963) remarks of Eichmann that he was incapable of uttering a single phrase that was not a cliché: it is the happy family life of the prison commander and the care he lavishes on his beautiful garden that may appear to constitute his greatest evil. On the contrary, it is inconceivable that the administrators of death act differently. If the soldiers dicing for Christ's clothes beneath the cross appal us, how much more appalling would it be were they to have started in horror at the crucifixion - and failed to uproot the Cross; if the guards who led the transports to the showers of Auschwitz were brisk and businesslike, how much more terrible would it have been had they wanted to tear out the airtight seals on the doors, and not done so? In Musée des Beaux Arts, W H Auden considers this paradox from a slightly different viewpoint. The Old Masters were never wrong about suffering, he writes; they understood it always takes place "while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along":

They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggie life and the  
torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

I think that Auden has got his indifference wrong in the sense that nothing fascinates us more than suffering, especially getting to watch it: the gladiator's death or the bleeding victims of a traffic accident attract us like magnets (or repel us with all the violence of a good, strong reaction formation). The horses and dogs are doing as they please because their masters are off to watch the fun. It should also be noted that Auden is talking about bystanders, whereas our focus of attention is the torturer himself, whose equanimity arises because he has assumed a socially imposed role from which he can escape only through the disruption of a presumably comfortable and secure life-style.

It is nonetheless imperative that criminality be ascribed to the accountants, the Eichmanns and the camp commanders: Hannah Arendt writes,

This new type of criminal, who is in actual fact hostis generis humani (enemy of the human race) commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong.

In psychological terms, what the accountants do is allow the meaning of their act to be absorbed into the act itself: death is not death if each death is correctly recorded in a ledger.

In Apocalypse Now, the visionary and amazing accountant becomes the equally visionary and amazing Lt-Col Bill Kilgore, played with enormous energy by Robert Duvall. The transfiguration of the accountant as Kilgore is a wonderfully creative piece of scripting and gives the movie two scenes of sustained brilliance and power that are archetypes of the sensuousness of violence: if the rest of the movie is forgotten, the half hour of Kilgore is likely to become a self-contained classic of the cinema.

The translation of the inner meaning of Marlow's arrival at the First Station into purely cinematic terms is brilliantly realised: the "pitiless folly" of the company is expressed here in a huge, toothed bulldozer that emerges from the sea to swallow up village houses. A Catholic priest (played by a real priest) in crazy flip-up sunglasses gives benediction over a battlefied altar while a cow, dangling beneath a helicopter, is lifted high into the air, lowing fearfully: the cow is evidently more valuable than the slaughtered humans. A tank-mounted flame-thrower advances on a shack half its size and burns it to a powder in a single fiery breath, a rather heavy metaphor for American overkill.

Next morning, in order to set Willard's boat down at the mouth of the river, Kilgore annihilates a Viet Cong-held village that commands the beachhead. The attack is the ultimate ballet of beautiful violence, the masks of hate rendered as bloodless and antiseptic as a shootout in a Western. The helicopters of Kilgore's 9th Air Cavalry surge across the screen like winged horses, make magnificent patterns against the deep green of the jungle. A mile out, Kilgore blasts the village with a hugely amplified "Ride of the Valkyries". Strapped above the rockets outside the helicopter - the graffiti on its nose is "Death from the sky" - are two surfboards. Children cross a tranquil flagged temple courtyard, hear the thud of the rotors, and flee in panic. Rockets slam into the flimsy houses. A direct hit sends a car tumbling from a high bridge into the water below, and in mid-air bodies fall gracefully out of it. The helicopters land, the surf boards strapped above the rockets are unlashed and Kilgore, whose pronouncements on the finer points of surfboard design ride the soundtrack above the battle dialogue of targets and coordinates, asks his surfers to get into the water. They refuse, and to silence snipers, he calls in an air strike. Jets scream low above the trees and with pinpoint accuracy, huge flame-flowers erupt along the line of the village. "I love the smell of napalm in the morning", says Kilgore, and the surfers take to the water.

Where Conrad's accountant shelters in the safe place of his ledgers and meticulous dress, Coppola's Kilgore takes refuge in the sheer sensuousness of war. No one has written more compellingly about the beauty of war than Michael Herr, (whom Coppola employed to script the narration, spoken by Martin Sheen who plays Willard). One of Herr's reviewers says he returned from Vietnam "with the worst imaginable news: war thrives because enough men still love it". Herr describes the nights at Khe Sanh:

even the incoming was beautiful at night, beautiful and deeply dreadful. I remembered the way a Phantom pilot had talked about how beautiful the surface-to-air missiles looked as they drifted up towards his plane to kill him, and remembered myself how lovely .50-calibre tracers could be, coming at you as you flew at night in a helicopter, how slow and graceful, arching up easily, a dream, so remote from anything that could harm you.

But the remoteness never lasted very long and fear is very near the surface in Herr's writing.

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Marlow arrives at the Central Station to find that a volunteer skipper had run his steamer onto stones and torn her bottom out: the manager's prediction that there will be a three month delay proves quite precisely accurate, and it is on this point that C T Watts (1975) bases his exploration of the manager's plot to murder Kurtz by compelling him to wait on rescue until illness has carried him off. Watts argues that this covert murder plot must be seen against the fact that Heart of Darkness "has a more richly Darwinian atmosphere than any other major work of fiction". The Origin of Species was published in 1859, and it is a remarkably optimistic document: "As natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection." The doctrine of perfectability is a tenet of the Enlightenment; Conrad's pessimism is essentially modern. The Central Station manager's iron constitution is his only asset, while Kurtz is presented as a person of far greater stature - whether in good or in evil. By having the Central Station manager survive, whose only asset is "triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions", while Kurtz dies, Conrad drives a wedge between biological and moral selection: the fittest are not the best, and dark may therefore triumph over light.

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It is now possible to focus on two further issues: the colonial paradox and the nature of wilderness.

The colonial paradox rests on the fact that the colonisers are ostensibly stronger than the natives, but in fact weaker; they carry the big guns, but the natives are autochthonous; the colonials, like the fox, know many things, but the natives, like the hedgehog, know only one big thing. Marlow's first perception of the natives is as cowed and beaten chain-gangs and enslaved porters: upriver, he returns to his initial perception that the natives had "a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there" (p. 14); and he breaks through to a second insight: the natives "were not inhuman", indeed, "what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar." A suitable evolutionary distance is maintained, but the common humanity is clearly acknowledged. The third stage of Marlow's colonial awakening is at Kurtz's encampment where he sees another apparition, "a wild and gorgeous... woman ... savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent ... ominous and stately". She is Kurtz's woman (p.74), and courageously loyal to him: he for his part looks at her (p.81) with "fiery, longing eyes" and "a smile of indefinable



meaning". At the Inner Station, even the "pilgrims" recognise that the hedgehog is stronger than the fox: how this colonial perception of the paradox of strength becomes transmuted into race hatred is explored with great insight by the French anthropologist Oscar Mannoni in his Prospero and Caliban.

When Michael Cimino says, "Vietnam is very mysterious to us", one of the mysterious things is precisely this paradox, which gives his Deer Hunter its force: the delicate orientals are unquestionably more ferocious, more tenacious, and perhaps even more courageous than the colonials. Apocalypse Now begins by stating the paradox: Willard in his hotel room says that while he is sitting there, getting weaker every day, Charlie's in the bush getting stronger every day; at the Hau Phat supply depot, which echoes the flabby devils of the Central Station (elaborate stage, dancing Bunnygirls), Willard remarks in narration-over that Charlie gets strong on cold rice and dead rat, while the colonials depend on a vast logistic effort to keep themselves fed. An Austrian journalist, Kuno Knoeb! (1967), one of the few westerners to penetrate Viet-Cong ranks, tells how a single guerilla, entirely on his own, terrorised traffic on the Pleiku highway for four months without any expectation of relief, picking up food at villages and replenishing his ammunition and explosive stocks at mountain hideouts.

Ultimately, the natives win because the wilderness is on their side: Conrad's wilderness is not our romantic modern concept, but the howling wilderness of Isaiah, and Samuel Johnson's "tract of solitude and savageness", the antipode of Paradise which is an orderly garden, and early man's greatest evil (Nash, 1967). It is for Conrad primordial, dark and powerful and, as we shall see, allied with Kurtz and Kurtz's evil.

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Marlow and Willard journey together now: both find more frequent signs along the banks that Kurtz's Inner Station is very near, and their thoughts turn increasingly to an examination of who Kurtz is and what his voice will offer them.

Although the object of Marlow's journey is external, its focus remains very deeply an inner one. Coppola has, however, chosen to externalise Willard's voyage: to reach Kurtz, Willard has to pass through an inner circle of the Vietnam purgatory, the Do Lung bridge, "the asshole of the world", where no-one is in command and swarms of tracers arch through the fairyland lights along the bridge. Beyond the bridge, the background music takes on an Eastern eeriness, and the signs that Kurtz is now close multiply. Willard's party, like Marlow's, is attacked from the bank, and his helmsman is impaled on a spear. Finally, Kurtz's encampment comes in view: totem poles, crescent-shaped horns atop tall poles, and drifting white and violet smoke. The boat nears the shore through a dense crowd of canoes with white-painted oarsmen, in soft focus as if Coppola was not sure that he wanted to show them after all. The Montagnards are in smears of warpaint, with blood-stained hands and corpses hanging from trees, lying on the ground, and sprawled atop pillars. Kurtz's Russian acolyte becomes an American photo-journalist (Dennis Hopper), who giddily interprets Kurtz to a round-eyed Willard.

This enormous weight of external trappings has no inner focus. Neither Kurtz's objectives, nor the nature of his insanity, nor the quality of his evil are in any way clarified. The set looks like a cross between Cuckoo's Nest and Lord of the Flies. Kurtz himself, played with marvellous sonority by a rotund Marlon Brando, is located in the depths of a cavernous dwelling and it is a mark of the banality to which the movie has descended in these

sequences that Kurtz is not located in the lighted inner alcove that Willard approaches, but in another to its right, which is in pitch darkness: of course Kurtz does have some marvellous lines (telling of the inoculated children whose arms had been hacked off, he says, "I cried, I wanted to tear my teeth out"), but behind the lines no coherent moral attitude is discernable. It is in fact astounding that given Coppola's level of cinematic sophistication and dedication to this particular film, he found himself unable to make a single emotionally or morally coherent statement about Kurtz. Finally, the ritual slaying of Kurtz by Willard, who is then acclaimed by the Montagnards as their new ruler, makes little sense despite Coppola's best efforts - the ostentatious display of The Golden Bough, and Willard's quite absurd ceremonial seriousness as he beheads his brother officer.

The final stage of Marlow's voyage is the discovery, at the Inner Station, that he has a choice not between good and evil, but between two nightmares: between the company's pitiless folly (the flabby devil) on the one hand and wilderness on the other, because the wilderness had

sealed (Kurtz's) soul to its own ... 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.

It is in the light of this revelation - that Kurtz and the wilderness are one - that one is to understand the scrawled note at the end of the manuscript which Kurtz had composed for the Benevolent Society which had appointed him its agent: at first, Marlow is dazzled by Kurtz's eloquence (among the savages, white men "can assert a power for good practically unbounded") which gives him the notion of "an exotic Immensity ruled over by an august Benevolence" (a peculiarly empty phrase that recalls Marlow's earlier comment on primeval jungle: "an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"). But the eloquence is meaningless, and the depth of its hypocrisy is revealed by the hurriedly-made note at the end, which

blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'

In the film, we see that Kurtz has written on the last page of his manuscript in a thick red felt pen

"Drop the bomb. Exterminate them all!"

Wilderness, the second nightmare, is therefore primordial lawlessness, the abrogation of order and conscience:

"I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr Kurtz," says Marlow: "the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night."

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Conrad's Kurtz attains demonic stature, but Coppola's fails even to hold our interest. There are some cinematic reasons for this failure, and some cultural ones, namely that our western culture by and large denies the reality of evil. Although historically the attempt to come to terms with evil permeates every last corner of myth, religion and literature, the attempts stop short with modern science, which has been preoccupied with more manageable concerns. Since our culture speaks the language of science, we find ourselves mute on the subject of evil, and unable to deal with the fact that given power, all men do evil as easily as they breathe. We distance ourselves from this disruptive truth by pretending that the practice of evil is peculiar to monsters and perverts, and requires special trappings for its execution, and it is into this trap of distantiation and therefore a-realism that Coppola's

Kurtz falls.

This modern denial of the universality of evil, the view that it is only Nazi beasts or terrorist animals who kill women and children or torture prisoners, is at odds with our cultural history. The Old Testament story of the Fall and the Isaiah myth of the suffering servant trace their origins to even more ancient myths, of which Fraser explores some (1922, especially Ch. 58). Growing out of these myths is the death of the Christian God on the Tree of the Cross, expressing an irreducible need in human nature to come to terms with darker forces, to absorb and master evil. Accordingly, the true origins of Auschwitz, of Conrad's Kurtz and Coppola's, are to be sought neither in a mutant atavism nor in a perversion of human nature, but in our humanity itself.

This is precisely the point made by Hannah Arendt in her study of Eichmann: prosecutor and judges, she writes (p. 17), "missed the greatest moral and even legal challenge of the whole case", because they could not believe that Eichmann was neither a liar nor a rabid anti-Semite, but entirely normal ("more normal at any rate, than I am after having examined him", one of the half-dozen consulting psychiatrists is reported to have said). The judges found it impossible to admit that an average normal person "could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong". The core of the problem is that Eichmann and all those like him are

terribly and terrifyingly normal ... this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together :

this kind of *hostis generis humani*, this enemy of the human race, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong. Central to Arendt's argument is the proposition that by dehumanising the perpetrators of atrocities, we rob ourselves of all hope of understanding the motivation that makes it possible to commit them: the acknowledgement of a common humanity (that came to Marlow when he was observing the savages ashore) is a prerequisite for understanding the torturer and his assistants.

\* \* \*

It is by no means clear that evil is a useful category for psychology, but it does seem to be important that whatever fragmentation is undertaken in order to facilitate empirical investigation should not be allowed to hide the possibility that this larger category lies behind the separate studies. Of the multitude of possible points of entry to the study of evil, one that appears especially promising is the study of power - because the ultimate impotence is emptiness: Marlow describes a "papier-maché Mephistopheles" who had nothing inside him "but a little loose dirt"; Kurtz, as we have seen, was hollow at the core; and the talk of the pilgrims and their friends was that of

sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage .

In the psychological literature on power, this kind of talk is characteristic of men who are expected to be powerful and find themselves to be weak; in them a need for power develops that often finds an outlet in heavy drinking, which encourages spurious feelings of power (Nell & Strümpfer, 1978). It is no accident that "Mistah Kurtz - he dead" is the epigraph for one of the most powerful statements on powerlessness in the English language, T S Eliot's *Hollow Men*. Kurtz is the hollow man, impotent, striving for power, and Eliot hints at darker forces through which such power may be attained: "a penny for the old Guy" refers to the ancient sacrificial rite in which effigies or human beings were burnt on fires to ensure continued fertility of men and land (Fraser, 1922, chapter 64).

The emptiness and impotence of the weak is in direct proportion to their need to appear powerful, and to exercise impact and influence; and lamentably, the safest way in our society to gain assurance of one's own power is by oppressing those who are weaker than oneself.

\* \* \*

In the final chapter of The Golden Bough, Fraser rather wistfully asks whether there is not

some lesson, if possible of hope and encouragement, to be drawn from the melancholy record of human error and folly which has engaged our attention to this book.

Marlow has of course struggled with much the same question, and his answer is - horror: the truth, he says

"would have been too dark - too dark altogether ... "

Fraser's answer, in his spirit of true Darwinism, is rather more hopeful:

"The hope of progress - moral and intellectual as well as material - in the future is bound up with the fortunes of science."

He continues:

"The laws of nature are merely hypotheses ... and as science has supplanted its predecessors, so it may hereafter be itself superseded by some more perfect hypothesis, perhaps by some totally new way of looking at the phenomena ... of which we in this generation can form no idea."  
(1922, p.932).

Marlow would shrug his shoulders at such optimism: but those who succeed him in the study of evil may still hope that the dark night give way to light, albeit a dark light.

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