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KURTZ AS MAMMON: AN ARCHETYPAL ANALYSIS OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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Abstract:

Though the archetypal analysis of a given text was a popular tool available with the scholars during the decades around 1930s and 1940s, its utility as a scholastic method could be rediscovered even to this day as we have a plethora of other critical theories. The present study intends to examine Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness in the light of this observation with a view to juxtaposing eco-criticism, environmental studies and mythical methods-all in one. In the paper, the Biblical character of Mammon, appropriated via Milton, offers a critical space for inquiring into the projection of Conrad's Kurtz with the possibilities for a discourse on environmental destruction. The recurrence of themes and concurrent metaphorical similarities of the characters Kurtz in Heart of Darkness and Mammon, a character in the Bible as one among the fallen angels shares the similar archetypal patterns.

Key Words: *Archetypal, Eco-criticism, mythical methods, environmental destruction.*

Joseph Conrad has been condemned by many critics for his support of imperialism through his writing. Heart of Darkness displays the image of Africa as antithesis of the first world in contrast with its civilization. Inception of the book, in the River of Thames leading the journey to a place in the River Congo hints high imperialist ideology as it is mentioned that “going up that river was travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world” (60). It is basically a fable on the cruelty of human beings. In this case, Mr. Kurtz, though a normal character like other characters is a psychopathic killer. So, analyzing the character through the archetypal method will bring the westerner's desire to light.

Though the *archetypal analysis* of a given text was a popular tool available with the scholars during the decades around 1930s and 1940s, its utility as a scholastic method could be rediscovered even to this day as we have a plethora of other critical theories. The present study intends to examine Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* in the light of this observation with a view to juxtaposing eco-criticism, environmental studies and mythical methods all in one. In the paper, the Biblical character of Mammon, appropriated *via* Milton, offers a critical space for inquiring into the projection of Conrad's Kurtz with the possibilities for a discourse on environmental destruction. The recurrence of themes and concurrent metaphorical similarities of the characters Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and Mammon, a character in the Bible as one among the fallen angels shares the similar archetypal patterns.

Much of research studies are focused on exegesis of literature through archetypal criticism in modern age. Maud Bodkin who could be called as a pioneer of modern archetypal criticism has pleaded it into two different patterns: “we may study the themes that show this persistence within the life a community or race, and may compare the different forms which they assume; also we may study analytically in different individuals the inner experience of responding to such themes” (2). These are the two such differences an archetypal critic must be aware of as its basic limitations. In such case, Kurtz plays a crucial role of an explorer and also an exploiter an embodiment of European travelers or explorers which

Bill Ashcroft et al mentions in *Post-Colonial Studies The Key Concepts* “Of course, the idea of exploration and discovery in such travelling is profoundly Eurocentric, since what explorers purportedly discovered was invariably already known to local indigenous peoples, many of whom led white explorers to local land-marks, rivers and sources of food that enabled them to survive. Yet these discoveries were credited to the European explorers as though such places had not existed beforehand. Renaissance sea voyages led to the widespread seizure of the goods of indigenous peoples as loot. Travel and exploration in the period was seen as strictly and unashamedly commercial and exploitative in purpose” (89). *Heart of Darkness* is a novella on environmental natural resources of Africa as its settings that are related in a place and time of environmental disasters. It sensitively connects the imperialism with environmental exploitation which Conrad mentions “to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe” (35). Kurtz is depicted as the embodiment of European masters who are concerned with the developments camouflaged forgetting wealth by exploiting the nature for more ivory: that Mammon does in *Paradise Lost*. This European attitude has heavily influenced Conrad whose Kurtz represents similar attitudes to Africa and its natural resources in search of what Europeans travelers undertook expedition what Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* states that “I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas- a regular dose of the East- six years or so, and I was loafing about” (7). It is a typical Victorian view on the world with development of industrialization in its preceded century that stresses “so far from being the eternal setting created by God for his favor, man, the natural world was merely the temporary and accidental result of purposeless physical processes” (Aubry 215).

As usually archetypal criticism deals with the recurrence of the themes, it also concentrates on individualistic psychology of an artist to the themes that are handled by him. In this case Mammon as a character in fact, a fallen angel in *the Bible*, has occupied a place in Milton's *Paradise Lost, Book II* as an exploiter of nature, raping the mother earth in search of invaluable minerals of coal and gold, so as the case with Kurtz, a character from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, one who has involved in ivory trade exploiting the nature as well as the natives which Ford Madox Ford foretells “it 'gained when it was written a certain vividness from its fierce lashings at the unspeakable crew that exploited the natives in the Congo” (82), like Mammon the exploiter of earth. This manifestation of concurrence theme is significant in this paper. This is again in Carl Jung's understanding a psychic nature that provides the possibility of repetitions of themes based on the individual's aesthetic empiricism because what has been conjured in the unconscious mind of the artist appeals the unconsciousness of audience which in Jung's view: “the artist speaks in primordial images . . . with a thousand voices; he enthralls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is trying to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realms of the ever-enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, thereby evoking in us all those beneficent forces that have always enabled mankind to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night. That is the secret of effective art”. This kind of writing lasts longer as a great art. Jung is specific not only in explaining artist's knowledge as well as the artist's expression of the knowledge, he has acquired that he conveys to his audience. Furthermore, the writer “speaks in primordial images . . . with a thousand voices” Jung identifies it “collective unconscious” that is “the deep, dark centre of our unconscious, which can never be made wholly conscious, which bursts forth with elemental force like foreign bodies, eternally incomprehensible and never wholly assimilable by the ego” (33). This unconsciousness “bursts forth” through archetypal guise. Thus, the writer, by delving very deep into his own psyche gains more and more knowledge of his own being.

Mammon, who is well known for his greedy nature on wealth in money and materials is a character from *New Testament in the Bible* because of whom the sayings got into practice “You cannot serve both God and mammon” (wealth) but the colonizers could serve both well under their mask of religion, exploiting the natives of the colonized countries in every walks of lives. For instance, the nature of Kurtz

like that of Mammon is sneaky and hidden demon yet worshipped by the natives as their master.

Personification of wealth with Mammon is evident in middle ages and even before that as it is mentioned by Peter Lombard, a scholastic theologian of early 11th century in the 4th century Cyprian and Jerome relate Mammon to greed and greed as an evil master that enslaves, and John Chrysostom even personifies Mammon as greed. Recurrence of Mammon throughout in the annals of literature presents himself as a metaphor of wealth- Piers Plowman considers Mammon as a deity. Albert Barnes gives references on Mammon, who is worshipped in the context of wealth as a god in his work *Notes on the Testament*. Edmund Spenser's Mammon in his *Faerie Queene* is a founder of a cave full of wealth. John Milton presents Mammon, an explorer of wealth in his *Paradise Lost* Book 2 as follows:

There stood a Hill... As when bands
Of Pioners with Spade and Pickaxe arm'd
Forerun the Royal Camp, to trench a Field,
Or cast a Rampart. MAMMON led them on,
MAMMON, the least erected Spirit that fell
From heav'n, for ev'n in heav'n his looks & thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of Heav'n's pavement, with impious hands
Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth
For Treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Op'nd into the Hill a spacious wound
And dig'd out ribs of Gold. (Lines 670-690)

Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, a digger of wealth in Africa by travelling deeper in to its land can be considered a real Mammon with his motivation that is only to explore and exploit on profits over ivory trade as it is stated in the novel "in the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech and nothing happened" (Conrad 15). Mammon and Kurtz are such unconscious embodiments. Kurtz, like Mammon fixes very well in the frame work of larger tradition of European embodiment as for Carl Jung, (1968) the unconscious mind "contains the hidden, repressed, and unfavorable or (nefarious) aspects of human personality" (110). His resemblance is an archetypal ill brainiac of a fallen angel, highly blessed at the same time ultimately degenerated one. He secures his place in the list of legendary characters known for their eloquence, grandiose and malicious minded from Christopher Marlow's Faustus, Milton's Satan and Emily Bronte's Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* in literary annals.

Both Kurtz and Mammon are exploiters of environment and embodiment of European traveler or colonizer for the material resources by which they can become wealthy. In, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) Cheryll Glotfelty explains the approaches in ecocriticism. She states that ecocriticism questions with an insistence: "All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the artifacts of language and literature" (xix). In addition to it, "human responses to nonhuman nature are often negatively inscribed inversely articulated in culture" (Feder 57). So, Kurtz, like Mammon represents the embodiment of European colonizers who work through their cultural discourse of humanity on environment and nature "finally pushing beyond the boundaries his anthropocentric community has established to define itself in opposition to nature" (McCarthy 643).

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