

Lumination: the conquest of mankind's darkness

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When freed from the moral manacles of society, humans must embrace moderate, disciplined lifestyles in order to avoid a fatal plunge into barbarism. In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, marooned schoolboys exchange the confines of civility for an unrestrained, iniquitous lifestyle. Joseph Conrad depicts a steamboat captain's voyage down the Congo River and realization of mankind's intrinsic evils in *Heart of Darkness*. Both Golding and Conrad construct microcosms to chronicle the dangers induced by both engaging in a decadent existence and denying mankind's capacity for evil. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* exemplifies mankind's descent into transgression with the isolation of schoolboys on an island paradise. The boys survive an attack that cripples their transport aircraft and initially become acquainted when the pragmatic Ralph sounds a conch shell's "strident blare" (Golding 16). The assembled, albeit disoriented, youth hold a parliamentary session and elect Ralph as chief. Ralph adamantly insists upon both the maintenance of a signal fire and the construction of shelters. However, the other boys, led by the seditious Jack Merridew, prioritize fun over practicality. Jack transforms his "warily obedient" regiment of choirboys into an avid band of hunters, sacrificing the signal fire for the prospect of meat as a ship passes by the isle (20). A deceased parachutist becomes "tangle[d] and festoon[ed]" in the island's jagged cliffs, its undistinguishable presence confirming the boys' notions that a beast inhabits the island (96). When the acutely perceptive Simon suffers an epileptic seizure, the grotesque head of a pig enlightens the boy to the beast's intangible presence in all humanity. Simon scrambles from the forest in an attempt to inform his peers of their misunderstanding; however, the

masqueraded islanders murder the “vivid little boy” in a profound statement of truculence (24). Jack instigates the formation of a separate, uncouth tribe. Piggy, an intellectual belittled by his “ludicrous body,” implores Jack’s tribe to return his stolen glasses, the invaluable tool for generating fire, but suffers a fatal blow from a boulder during his last plea for civility (78). Jack’s tribe declares Ralph an outcast, forms a manhunt, and ignites the island in a mass effort to extinguish all objection to their savage behavior. During the hunt, the “burning wreckage of the island” signals a nearby naval ship and prompts the boys’ rescue (202). *The Lord of the Flies* warns against overindulgence and meaningless work. Ralph gives meaning to his existence on the island by persistently working toward survival and rescue. Jack engages in amusing, purposeless activities. For instance, Jack need not consume all of his energy hunting to supply the islanders with ample meat. In another example of indulgence, the boys light an excessive amount of fires, which claim the life of a young boy with a “mulberry-colored birthmark” (Golding 86). The pragmatic Ralph insists upon parliamentary order, democracy, and prioritizes rescue over selfish pleasures. For example, Ralph does not argue whether a beast exists or not but instead asks for a consensus to enable a solution and thus focus attention on rescue. Ralph treats his comrades with dignity and enforces rules to enable justice. By contrast, Jack manipulates rules for control and punishment. Piggy views regulations as tools for survival. Jack, the antithesis of Ralph, overindulges in the “brilliant world of hunting,” ignoring the signal fire and the construction of shelters (71). Jack fervently despises Ralph’s ordered meetings and uses “bitter mimicry (91)” to belittle both the chief’s statements and Piggy’s “ill-

omened talk (15).” Dominating and loud, Jack’s discard of morals and work ethic provides an example for the other youths. Golding suggests that moral restraints spawn from society’s influence instead of personal values. The island’s “ whelming sea and sweet air” removes the boys from societal restraints and tests self-morals and ethics (Golding 58). Roger wishes to assault the younger children with rocks, but the “ taboo of the old life” stays his arm (62). Jack, constrained by societal rules, cannot bring himself to execute his first captured pig. Jack’s authoritarian attitude, however, aids him in abandoning the lessons of civilization. The boys, alike to civilization, attempt to suffocate all suggestions of their imperfections. For example, Roger murders Piggy after he condemns his schoolmates for their savage behavior. By having children commit horrific acts of violence, Golding suggests that amoral behavior develops from uncontrolled instincts, as opposed to negative experiences. Simon’s interrogation by the Lord of the Flies functions as the novel’s chief example of mankind’s capacity for evil. Translated from Bezelebut, the Lord of the Flies represents the devil within all humanity. The “ pig’s head on a stick” speaks to the innocent, philosophical Simon and mocks the islanders’ trivial pursuit of a tangible beast (143). The beast exists as part of each boy on the island as well as every human on earth. As evidenced by Jack, avoiding the beast allows a dark side to emerge without restraint. For example, Simon makes an “ effort to express mankind’s essential illness” to the assembly. However, his attempt crumbles under Jack’s scathing commentary (89). Jack, having ignored the “ furtive boy[’ s]” insights, becomes progressively barbarous (22). Jack, as well as the other hunters, masks his face in paint, making him

indistinguishable from animals. Blood lust seduces the hunters with each kill and the boys relish the means by which they mutilate the pigs. The boys prefer to hunt a single, physical beast instead of acknowledging their own dangerous facets. Therefore, the islanders extinguish the threat of the beast's intangibility with the murder of Simon. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a traveler aboard an English "cruising yawl" recounts his voyage through the menacing African Congo, and shares his traumatic, firsthand account of colonization (Conrad 135). Charlie Marlow, a passionate sailor and map enthusiast, recalls his "appoint[ment] [as] skipper of a river steamboat" (143). After arriving at the company office, Marlow travels for a fortnight to reach the concern's station, observing the "moribund shapes" of starving slaves (156). Marlow befriends the company's Chief Accountant and afterwards commences a "two-hundred mile tramp" through the Congo's ominous interior in search of Kurtz, an infamous ivory trader (160). Marlow reaches a second outpost only to find his awaiting steamboat lacking essential rivets. Eventually, Marlow again departs for Kurtz's station, sporting a crew of cannibals, Pilgrims, pole-wielding white men, and the station's Manager. Marlow encounters unexpected hardships when natives ambush the anchored steamboat and murder the helmsman. The Company approaches the post and encounters a Russian "harlequin," who informs Marlow of Kurtz's debilitated state (212). Marlow meets Kurtz and attempts to persuade him to seek medical assistance; however, the verbose trader wishes against abandoning his unfulfilled ambitions. Kurtz entrusts Marlow with vital documents and a photograph of his fiancée, reluctantly boards the steamboat, and passes away shortly afterwards. Following the death of the "

eloquent phantom," Marlow falls ill and returns to England (250). Marlow, once healed, consoles Kurtz's mourning "Intended" with fables of the trader's virtues, concealing the truth of Kurtz's impropriety (242). Heart of Darkness displays the perils of succumbing to an indulgent lifestyle. Kurtz, having intended to educate and aid the indigenous population, eventually abandons his goal for the prospect of manipulating the natives' respect and gaining "abominable satisfactions" (Conrad 241). Lacking restraint in the "gratification of his various lusts," Kurtz's need to consume preoccupies his mind and spirit (221). Kurtz loses himself over time and detaches from everything earthly, hence, his isolation slowly drives him insane. The trader's existence proves painful because he cannot complete his obsessive goal of "accomplishing great things" (238). Kurtz "open[s] his mouth voraciously" on his deathbed, suggesting that he wishes to consume the world about him (245). "The horror" Kurtz exclaims represents his reflection upon life (239). Marlow becomes ill and passes within an inch of his life, suggesting that he might have shared Kurtz's demise if he had not left the temptations of the Congo. The enigmatic, addicting environment profoundly affects Marlow. For example, Marlow perceives his heartbeat and a drum beat as undistinguishable as his instincts resonate with the "conquering darkness" (246). Conrad also criticizes the ritual of meaningless work. When approaching the Company station, Marlow witnesses a grove filled with shackled slaves, enduring lifetimes of hardship and worthless labor. As he grimly notes, the slaves find no apparent worth in life and feel apathetic towards death. Marlow, contrarily, engages in work of his choice and personal interest. The sailor takes offense at the "flabby, pretending, weak-

eyed devil” of colonization because it lacks organization, exemplified by the decaying machinery and scrambled administration of the Company (155). Marlow considers such disorganization to imply a poor work ethic. However, Marlow finds solace in observing the vociferous accountant because his devotion to work contrasts with the surrounding idleness. Kurtz extinguishes meaning from his life by indulging in a self-centered lifestyle. Upon his final days, Kurtz regrets his decisions and realizes the ineffectuality of his existence. Through *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad comments on mankind’s primitive, natural instincts, that, if left undeveloped, result in savagery. In an example of abandoned morals, the Manager and his uncle feel Kurtz “ ought to be hanged” for the purpose of increasing revenues (Conrad 229). Essentially, the two Europeans propose an uncivil, odious solution to a problem of economics. The cannibals of Marlow’s crew ironically convey far more principles and civility than the “ white men with long staves” (162). Kurtz, removed from the moral standards of society, becomes the sole governor of his own actions and thus deteriorates to “ utter savagery” (140). For instance, Marlow discovers a note authored by Kurtz which encourages the “ exterminat[ion] [of] all the brutes” (208). Kurtz’ grandiose style masks the reality of being “ hollow at the core;” in fact, Kurtz’ charismatic persona largely consists of an infamy projected by his corrupt surroundings (221). Through his experiences with Kurtz, Marlow fully recognizes the evils embedded within all of humanity. Marlow identifies his own capacity for malevolence and therefore survives, whereas Kurtz’s evils, hidden under a hypnotic mystique, eventually claim his life. The confrontation with the darkness of humanity profoundly “ contaminates” Marlow and therefore

inspires him to share his experiences while traversing through an equally sinister environment. The suppression of aspects of human instinct results in relinquished self-control. Mankind possesses the capacity for both good and evil; therefore, by ignoring the negative potential of the personality, the positive aspects cannot be developed. With the acknowledgement of personal and societal evils, the virtuous half of mankind's potential may be realized and utilized for the benefit of the self, community, and world. Mankind creates embodiments, such as the Beast or the illusions of Kurtz, to contrast and exaggerate humanity's good. Golding and Conrad construct scenarios that encapsulate dynamics of the real world. In *Lord of the Flies*, the island serves as a scaled down version of reality's tragic savagery. The naval sailors rescue Ralph from a manhunt and then hypocritically assume the roles of predators in a manhunt of global scale. The boys' murderous presence on the island corresponds with the savagery and futility of warfare, simply removing heroic stories, propaganda and desensitization. Analogous to the negative effects of imperialism, the journey to the heart of the African darkness allows a disturbing glimpse of humanity's historical manipulation. For example, Marlow enlightens his listeners with the Roman's corrupt occupation of Europe. In modern times, humans rationalize warfare with external reasons to avoid the acceptance of fighting for primitive, instinctive reasons. Both Golding and Conrad condense reality to illustrate the dangers of overindulgence and eschewing mankind's internal darkness.