



HEART OF DARKNES : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.47211/idcij.2024.v11i04.009>

ABSTRACT:

In 1857, Joseph Conrad was born as Josef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in the Ukraine, a region of Poland under Russian administration. Despite coming from an affluent household, he experienced sorrow in his early years. Joseph Conrad, a Polish novelist, wrote "Heart of Darkness" (1899), a story told by the protagonist Marlow about a journey up to the Congo River into the Congo Free State, deep in Africa. Blackwood's Magazine published Heart of Darkness as a novella in the nineteenth century. It was finally published in 1942 in the book form as the third work in a compilation by Conrad. Since its publication in Youth, the novel has piqued the interest of a wide range of readers and reviewers, as they find it unique when Conrad describes the horror of Marlow that he witnesses during his journey in the past. As a result, the heart of Darkness has been hailed by critics as a masterpiece that defied numerous narrative rules and propelled the English novel into the twenty-first century.

Key Words: Heart of Darkens, English Novel, English literature.

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INTRODUCTION:

"Heart of Darkness," written by Joseph Conrad, is a novella that delves into the complexities of imperialism, colonialism, and the human psyche. Set against the backdrop of European colonial expansion in Africa, the story follows Charles Marlow, a sailor who embarks on a journey up the Congo River to find Kurtz, an ivory trader who has become a figure of both reverence and horror. This critical analysis will explore the themes, characters, and narrative techniques employed by Conrad, highlighting the novella's enduring relevance and its commentary on the darkness within humanity.

One of the central themes of "Heart of Darkness" is imperialism and its moral implications. Conrad critiques the European colonial enterprise, exposing the brutality and exploitation that underlie the so-called civilizing mission. Through Marlow's journey, the reader witnesses the stark contrast between the romanticized ideals of imperialism and the harsh realities faced by both colonizers and the colonized. The novella illustrates how imperialism dehumanizes individuals, reducing them to mere commodities in the pursuit of wealth. The African landscape, once vibrant and alive, becomes a symbol of the darkness that imperialism brings, as it is ravaged by the insatiable greed of European powers. One of the earliest obviously modernist pieces of English fiction, "Heart of Darkness" was initially published in 1899 and served as the inspiration for the Vietnam War movie "Apocalypse Now", which was released in 1979. In order to portray Charlie Marlow, the protagonist of Conrad's book "Heart of Darkness", and his struggles, the book draws on the historical context of empire. While Marlow travels to the Congo for his catharsis in the book, it is based on how he visualizes exploitation. Our primary focus is Marlow's "change," which he experienced as a result of being exposed to the imperialistic aspects of the historical era in which he lived. Since the evil created by man—who is thought of as the result of society—is revealed in Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad explores themes of social justice, human power, and individual accountability in his work.

Marlow's character serves as a lens through which the reader explores the moral ambiguities of colonialism. Initially, Marlow is intrigued by the idea of exploring the "heart" of Africa, viewing it as an adventure filled with potential discovery. However, as he journeys deeper into the Congo, he confronts the horrifying realities of exploitation, violence, and madness. His encounter with the native people, who are often portrayed as mere shadows or faceless entities, raises questions about the ethics of colonialism and the perception of "the other." Marlow's disillusionment reflects Conrad's critique of the romanticized notions of imperialism, revealing the psychological toll it takes on both the colonizers and the colonized.

The character of Kurtz is pivotal to the narrative, embodying the duality of civilization and savagery. Initially presented as an idealistic figure who seeks to bring enlightenment to the dark continent, Kurtz ultimately descends into madness and brutality. His infamous proclamation, "The horror! The horror!" encapsulates the existential despair that arises from his experiences in the Congo. Kurtz's transformation serves as a warning about the corrupting influence of power and the fragility of human morality. Through Kurtz, Conrad illustrates how the veneer of civilization can easily dissolve, revealing the primal instincts that lie beneath.

Conrad's narrative technique further enhances the novella's exploration of darkness and ambiguity. The use of frame narration, with Marlow recounting his story to listeners aboard a boat on the Thames, creates a sense of distance and reflection. This structure allows for multiple layers of interpretation, as Marlow's account is coloured by his own experiences and biases. The interplay between light and darkness is also significant, as Conrad employs imagery to convey the moral complexities of the narrative. The journey up the Congo River becomes a metaphorical descent into the depths of human nature, where the boundaries between civilization and savagery blur.

The novella's language and style contribute to its haunting atmosphere. Conrad's use of vivid descriptions and symbolic imagery immerses the reader in the oppressive environment of the Congo. The river, often described as a "serpent," represents both the physical journey and the psychological descent into darkness. The contrast between light and dark is pervasive, with light symbolizing knowledge and civilization, while darkness represents ignorance and savagery. This duality reinforces the central theme of the novella, highlighting the complexities of human nature and the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in a colonial context.

"Heart of Darkness" also engages with the theme of alienation and isolation. Marlow's journey is not only a physical one but also an introspective exploration of his own identity. As he navigates the treacherous waters of the Congo, he grapples with feelings of disconnection from both the colonizers and the colonized. This sense of



alienation is further exacerbated by the language barrier and cultural differences, leading Marlow to question his own values and beliefs. The novella suggests that the darkness of the human soul is exacerbated by isolation, as individuals become estranged from their own humanity in the pursuit of power and control.

While on a boat anchored on the River Thames in London, England, Marlow shares his story with his pals. Charles Marlow is the protagonist and narrator of "Heart of ". His persona personifies the conflict between the allure of adventure and the moral dilemmas brought out by colonialism. As Marlow delves further into the African continent, he struggles with his own part in the colonial endeavour. He explores the nature of darkness, both internal and external, and gives the reader a critical framework to evaluate the novella's main ideas. Conrad draws a comparison between London and Africa as gloomy places by setting the scene for Marlow's tale of his fixation on the ivory trader Kurtz. Important questions about racism and imperialism are raised in Heart of Darkness. The premise that there is little difference between those who are labelled as savages and those who are considered civilized is central to Conrad's writing. The Nellie, a tiny boat moored on London's Thames River, is where the tale of Heart of Darkness begins. The unnamed narrator describes the river and its slow-moving traffic before providing his friends—who are also casually relaxing on the deck—with titbits of historical information about London as they wait for the tide to turn.

There are two narrators in "Heart of Darkness"; the first is anonymous but sets the scene and introduces us to Marlow, who is telling his own story. This suggests that Marlow's thoughts and observations will be reflected in nearly every aspect of the book, which brings us to our first topic of discussion identity. "Heart of Darkness", is enriched by the identity theme that runs through Marlow's entire adventure. It is possible to argue that "Heart of Darkness" is about discovering one's identity. These issues are handled in a somewhat convoluted manner in the narrative. Both men are attempting to determine where their involvement ends and starts from their respective places within the imperial framework. Between sharply criticizing the imperial system and fully cooperating with it, Marlow seems to waver. He witnesses acts of cruelty, torture, and enslavement along his river trek. Black people are beaten, imprisoned, and forced to work by Europeans; this is completely unilateral. Marlow's dream as a young man was to travel to Africa and operate a steamboat on the Congo River. Marlow requests and is granted a position with the Company, a huge ivory-trading enterprise based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, after learning about it. He leaves Europe in a French steamer. At the Company's Outer Station in the Congo, Marlow witnesses scenes of brutality, chaos, and waste. Marlow speaks with an Accountant, whose spotless dress and uptight demeanour fascinate him. Marlow first learns from the Accountant of Kurtz — a "remarkable" agent working in the interior. Marlow leaves the Outer Station on a 200-mile trek across Africa, and eventually reaches the Company's Central Station, where he learns that the steamboat he is supposed to pilot up the Congo was wrecked at the bottom of the river. Marlow becomes irate at discovering that he has wait for his boat's repair at Central Station. The crew from the Eldorado Exploring Expedition arrives at Central Station. He overhears the General Manager and the Expedition leader talking about how one evening Kurtz was going to deliver the ivory himself but finally decided to have his assistant do it instead. After a few weeks, Marlow repairs his boat and they set out to travel the treacherous waters of the river for two months in order to reach the Inner Station. Marlow fights a troop of cannibals beside the European pilgrims in order to help navigate the river and liberate the ship when it gets near shallow waters.

Marlow finds himself fifty miles from the Inner Station in an abandoned campground with an enigmatic message instructing him to proceed swiftly but cautiously. Eight miles from the Inner Station, the crew of the riverboat waits in a dense fog while they hear cries coming from the neighbouring bush. Marlow discovers the reason behind the natives' cries when they are shot with poisoned arrows by the African inhabitants, and the steamboat is able to move again when the fog finally lifts. Marlow manoeuvre's the ship to safety after killing the helmsman. The Indians flee when he sounds the steamboat whistle.

Upon arriving at the station with Marlow and his team, the Russian informs them that the natives attacked because they did not want Kurtz to leave. Kurtz was able to obtain more ivory, according to him, by raiding other tribes and exchanging non-ivory commodities for more ivory. He speaks of Kurtz with a great deal of reverence and wonder.

Kurtz has become ill at least twice, the Russian informs Marlow, and by the time the riverboat comes, Kurtz has become sick once more. Using the heads of "rebels," Kurtz adorned the fence posts. Upon seeing the Chief Accountant, Marlow is taken aback by his impeccable appearance. It is the Chief Accountant who tells Marlow



about a man named Kurtz. A decade of days later, Marlow walks to the Central Station with a bunch of African labourer's and a white guy. After learning that his steamboat sank and needs to be fixed and pulled out of the river, he arrives at the Central Station. Marlow predicts that the ship's repairs will take several months. As he works on the steamboat, the bricklayer tries to make a friend by telling him that Marlow was recommended by the same people who nominated Kurtz.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, "Heart of Darkness" serves as a profound exploration of imperialism, human nature, and the moral complexities of civilization. Through Marlow's journey and the character of Kurtz, Conrad critiques the brutal realities of colonialism while illuminating the darkness that resides within individuals. The novella is a scathing indictment of European imperialism, particularly the bloody colonization of Africa in the 19th century for economic advantage. It portrays imperialism as a destructive and terrible system that dehumanizes both the colonized and the colonizers.

"Heart of Darkness" addresses a variety of themes, including the impact of imperialism on both White and non-White people, the search for one's own identity, the balance of order and chaos, deceit, the false pretenses of colonialism, the absence of truth, and the pointlessness of evil. The novella's rich symbolism, narrative structure, and evocative language contribute to its enduring significance in literary and cultural discourse. As readers engage with the text, they are compelled to confront the uncomfortable truths about the human condition and the shadows that linger in the heart of darkness. Conrad's work remains a powerful reminder of the consequences of unchecked ambition and the moral dilemmas that arise in the pursuit of power, making it a timeless piece of literature that continues to resonate with contemporary audiences.

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