

Exploring Insanity and Savagery in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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In the modern era, Joseph Conrad is mostly remembered as a writer of nautical stories. He was raised by Polish parents. He moved to France at the age of sixteen to pursue his long-held desire to travel. Despite missing six months of his career in Africa due to illness, he assumed the role of 'captain' on a 'Congo Riversteamer' in 1890. He was inspired by this tragedy to write his greatest narrative, *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness* traces out the evil that is inherent in man. The novella deals with the life and the actions of its protagonist, named Kurtz. He is an ambitious and greedy ivory trader in the Congo. Marlow is the observer-narrator and unfolds the physically, morally, and spiritually degenerated phases of Kurtz's life, revealing his brutality, cruelty, and an awareness of the 'other' side of Imperialism. Marlow intends to trace out the truth about the protagonist and finally succeeds in it. The protagonist's atrocities, cruelties, and unending lust for power transform him into a ruthless dictator. In the end of the novella, the novelist is successful in presenting that the protagonist becomes aware of the horror he relentlessly pursued. The work is frequently interpreted as a critique of European imperialism and colonialism, as well as a psychiatric exploration of the human mind and the essence of evil. *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates how colonialism, despite the deaths and devastation it causes to the local native population, is a brutal quest for dominance over other people's psyche and territory.

Colonizers in *Heart of Darkness*

A colonizer is anyone who gains control over a foreign area or population, usually for monetary, political, or social gain. By imposing their own cultural, social, and political norms on the colonial people, colonizers

have historically maintained power over them. The process of colonization has greatly influenced the history of many parts of the world, including Oceania, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Like the majority of Europeans, those who colonized Africa believed in a superior race. They present themselves as individuals who arrived in Africa with the intention of transforming it into a more civilized society, and for that time, Europeans used to present the motive of colonization as their objective. This viewpoint opposes human freedom and equality regardless of colour. "They believed that African people needed to be liberated from their archaic ways and brought up in a civilized, educated manner" (Conrad 6). The novella has intentionally shown us that the world is divided into two different groups; one is the civilized world, and the other is the uncivilized savages. This might be because of Europe's predefined thinking for a less coherent culture.

Savagery of Imperialism

Marlow begins his voyage from the river Thames and pursues a long way to reach the inner station of the trading company. His progress at every stage reveals to him a new facet of Kurtz. Deeply involved in immoral activities, Kurtz appears to be a shocking personality for Marlow. Kurtz was an uncommon and dynamic man. Despite all his power, an unknown fear and anxiety gripped him. Marlow witnesses manipulation and fraud as he travels from the external terminal to the core one. He started his journey as an expert in the ivory trade and supported the mechanism of imperialistic company. However, he quickly came to understand the destructive nature of imperialism and the false claims made about the development and civilization of the native people. He feels disheartened and becomes misfit to the 'European society'. His inner turmoil reveals the state of his tormented heart in the words, "Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man" (Conrad 98).

Marlow, the narrator of the story, is overwhelmed by a sense fear to look at the house of Kurtz, surrounded by severed heads mounted on the posts of the fencing. He learns from his companion that those heads are of rebels. He feels stunned for a while because he knows that

people are “nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (26). Marlow realizes that the people who are like ‘black-shadows’ will not rebel against the protagonist. He himself begins to realize that he is in the inferno. He also perceives a significant disparity between the perspectives of the oppressed and those of the oppressors. Marlow knows that the whites assume that it is their prerogative to rule the natives, and they treat them sobrutally. Suppressed by tyranny, the natives become fearful and hunt ceaselessly for ivory.

Conrad ironically represents the white people of Europe as “civilized” and the black people of Africa as “savage” or “uncivilized”. The way imperialists exploited the natives under the guise of civilization and illumination, hiding behind the domain of colonization, reveals the true nature of imperialists, i.e., a dark heart masked under the white skin. The novella exposes the hidden motives of the exploiters, who are willing to go to any extent for the sake of power and the greed for ivory.

Insanity of Imperialism

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a true picture of the human psyche. Marlow is the narrator of the story and wraps up the psychological stage of the protagonist, Kurtz. Marlow delineates that Kurtz has reached the ‘farthest stage of insanity’ due to his unlimited greed and egotism. His ability to accumulate a large amount of ivory has made him the centre of attraction and the supreme creature among the local folks of Congo. It is certain that his limitless lust for ivory is more aligned with absurdity than a money-making tendency. His intrinsic goodness vanishes when he is driven by a monstrous megalomania.

Kurtz’s life is steeped in penetrating brutality, intensified cruelty, limitless greed, and unending ambition. He symbolizes modern Faust. Faust was a very brilliant and intelligent man. He knows a number of languages and the themes of many subjects. Unfortunately, he becomes a victim of lust for knowledge, wanting to know even the secrets of nature and God. Therefore, he leaves the sublime literatures and adopts the Necromancy. He sells his soul to the devil for worldly pleasure for twenty-four years, but in the end, he has repented for his evil designs

and is driven by a craze for his salvation. Joseph Conrad portrays Kurtz as a protagonist who, despite his intelligence and charming physical appearance, unfortunately succumbs to penetrating brutality, intensified cruelty, limitless greed, unending ambition, and sexual perversion. The hero is the “pitiful Jupiter” and his relations with a woman are one of the reasons for his moral degradation. He becomes mad when he sees the beauty:

Her wild beauty . . . draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments . . . brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck . . . charms and tempts him to destruction.” (103)

Discussion

The entire story serves as a symbolic representation of darkness; “Ivory” stands for the lust and greed of man. “Kurtz” is its agency, as truthful and unreliable as the name itself. The story is not individual but universal. It reflects the exploitation of Africans by “All Europe” rather than merely traders. Conrad makes it clear that the real heart of darkness lies beneath our own “hearts,” where evil lurks. The last days of the protagonist are full of tensions, measures, and internal pains. He meets an end in a very measurable condition. Through the story of this man, the novelist is successful in showing his readers that evil designs of mind always drink the pitiable end of the evil doer.

Physically, morally, and spiritually, Kurtz has suffered several degradations. He grows more inward, and his ivory face reveals his inner self:

It reveals . . . the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair. His inwardness opens a new understanding for him. Now waiting for death, Kurtz has become too helpless, morally and spiritually, to tolerate the light of truth and says. . . . Close the shutter, . . . I can't bear to look at this. . . . His innocence comes to an end and reality leads him to utter the prophetic words. . . . The horror. (116-18)

He is conscious of his death; he falls victim to fits of delirium, and his conscience deceives him. His last utterance explicitly illustrates his awareness, and “his evil has really dropped from his eyes; it is to see the terrible nature of what he has pursued, the horror . . . ” (275). He himself becomes a judge, giving the verdict on his relentless pursuit. He declares his judgment in a word, “The horror”.

Conclusion

Heart of Darkness was regarded as a classic of modernist fiction for a number of decades, and it was much praised for its technical finesse in narration and its experimental richness. *Heart of Darkness* uses the ‘Stream of Conscious’ technique to represent the theme of insanity, savagery, and alienation. Joseph Conrad in the title of the novella has indicated the theme of evil. The heart of the protagonist is full of darkness. Through the geographical darkness, the novelist presents a journey into the hero’s inner darkness; it is the evil that lurks in his heart. The novelist has a very good personal experience of his own journey into the dark interior of Central Africa, where the white people were governing the innocent people; they were cruel and exploited them. The novella explores the maddening horrors, savagery, insanity, sensations, and experiences of those out to face the loneliness and darkness of the wilds of Africa. This paper emphasized the multi-layered meanings of this multifunctional novella.

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