

Colonialism and the heart of darkness



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Heart of Darkness, by Joseph Conrad, is a work that strongly attacks colonialism and its affects not only upon the native population but also upon the colonizers invading the land. Conrad experienced being colonized as a young boy in a Poland under Russian occupation. He also witnessed the affects of colonialism upon a colonizer while he commanded a river steamer in the Dutch Congo. He relays these experiences through the eyes of his character Marlow who is a riverboat captain as well. The attacks upon colonialism come in three classes: directly, ironically, and metaphorically.

Conrad attacks colonialism directly throughout the book. Obvious and scathing statements are made telling of the horrors of colonialism. One example is Marlow and his description of the Roman colonization of ancient Britain:

They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind.... The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much (Conrad 140).

Through this statement Conrad attacks the vicious and selfish nature that colonialism infests upon colonizers.

Another direct attack is Marlow's description of the natives. They faced hardships and atrocities, many of which they could not physically or mentally endure. Here Marlow gives a dark picture of their plight.

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest (Conrad 156).

This sears a terrible and inhuman picture that colonialism brings to reality. The utter incompassion and brutal nature of colonizers are the results of a horrible practice that brought men to their most basic and lowly state.

Conrad uses irony to attack colonialism in many instances. One example of this is Marlow's description of the Eldorado exploring expedition.

This devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk however was the talk of sordid buccaneers. It was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage. There was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don't know....(Conrad 177).

Using phrases such as noble enterprise shows a serendipitous view of these men and their motives.

Conrad metaphorically attacks colonialism in many instances throughout the work. Suggestive references and allusions are made throughout *Heart of Darkness*. The title itself, *Heart of Darkness*, is a metaphor that can be analyzed on numerous levels. It can be looked at as the mere geographic location of the Belgian Congo and the color of its inhabitants. It can also be related to the evil practices of the Congo colonizers and their exploitation of the natives. This suggests that the real darkness be not in Africa but from Europe. The heart is not of black Africans but in all whites who engage in colonialist enterprises.

Conrad used metaphoric words such as shapes, shadows, and bundles of acute angles show the dehumanizing affect of colonialist rule upon the ruled. Conrad also used metaphors that were psychological in meaning. One instance is when Marlow introduces the story of his experiences in Africa by referring to the life of Roman soldiers and the difficulties they faced.

Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed rXJB

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