

Good example of heart of darkness book review

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Plot summary

Heart of Darkness is set in colonial Africa and revolves around Marlow, a meditative sailor, and his expedition through the Congo River to meet Kurtz, an optimist with myriad abilities. While working as a riverboat captain for a Belgian company trading in Africa, Marlow meets face to face with high handedness and cruelty meted against the natives in the Company's stations. They are forced into hard labor, and are heavily overworked and mistreated by the Company's agents. Marlow turns up at the central station under the care of general manager and discovers that his steamship had been grounded and he endures numerous months waiting for parts so that he could repair it. The manager and the brickmaker view Kurtz as a real threat to their survival in the company hence the delay in the ship's repair. The ship is repaired and Marlow, the general manager, and the pilgrims set on a voyage up the river. Along the way, the ship is ambushed by natives firing arrows from the cover of the forest. Marlow and his crew then dock at Kurtz's Inner station hoping to find Kurtz dead (Conrad 91). However, they are informed by a Russian trader that everything was fine. Kurtz is brought aboard the steamer by the manager and the Russian whispers to Marlow that the attack on the ship was organized by Kurtz himself to deceive them onto believing that he was dead so that they could turn back and let him pursue his plans. Fearing the backlash of the manager, the Russian escapes using the canoe. Kurtz attempts to escape in the night prompting Marlow to conduct a search finding him and convincing him to return to the ship. During this time, his health was worsening rapidly (Conrad 34). Kurtz hands over a packet of his personal documents, among them an articulate

pamphlet on “civilizing the savages” with the words “Exterminate all the brutes!” Kurtz passes on saying his final words – “The horror! The horror!” Marlow returns to Europe and meets Kurtz’s fiancée and cheats her that his last words were her name (Conrad 27).

Imperial Authority

Almost all the characters contend that the conditions in Africa are far much different from the ones in Europe. The issue of imperialism is depicted in various ways in the text. During his voyage up the river, Marlow encounters incidents of torture, brutality, and slavery meted on the native population. These incidents depict the ruthless perspective of the colonial enterprise. The company’s employees explain what they do as “trade” and the cruelty and brutality the native Africans are subjected to forms part of a generous project of “civilization” (Conrad 54). Despite his weak nature, Kurtz is able to command and sway the natives, taking ivory by force, and suppressing the natives by use of excessive violence and intimidation (Conrad 101). Africans in this book are treated by the Europeans as objects: to Marlow, his African helmsman is machinery; Kurtz’s African girlfriend is statuary. The level of dehumanization to which Africans are subjected to in this book is appalling and hard to contend with.

Power

Everybody is yearning to be powerful. The characters in Heart of Darkness are willing and ready to commit a lot of bad things to have their way: kill Africans, sink steamships, and wish terminally and obnoxious diseases on their coworkers. To the Europeans, Africans are people to be dominated-

though in the end, we get to understand the fact that the actual power still exists in the African territory (Conrad 34).

Colonialism in the Novel

Throughout the novel, the Africans are colonized and brutally mistreated by the Europeans. The main reason for presence of the colonialists in the African soil is to plunder the ivory. Colonization is depicted throughout the novel as being destructive instead of being constructive. Kurtz's earlier explanation of colonization is incredibly philanthropic; he is of the view that every company station ought to be like an inspiration on the path towards good things. The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs also holds the view that the Inhabitants of Congo ought to be civilized. While assisting him secure the job as a captain, Marlow's aunt is happy that her nephew will play a vital role in "weaning the ignorant Africans from the disgusting ways" (Conrad 49).

The veracity of colonization seems miserable. Marlow contends that the domination over others and mistreatment because of different skin complexion or nose size isn't pleasant when looked from a deeper perspective. He comes face to face with the reality of colonization: brutally overworked laborers working in very harsh conditions, backstabbing among co-workers with a view of gaining recognition, and a colonized population literally being chained up (Conrad 79). The company operates as a steamroller tilling through the forest, destroying anything in its path, all these in the name of profit. To the colonizers, what mattered most was the profit and the minerals they had come to trade, it did not matter how these were achieved. They are ready to do anything to get the maximum possible

profits.

Kurtz is castigated by the manager for crude methods, though he has attained the definitive form of colonization: the African natives regard him high and even worship him as their god. Due to this, he collects the most ivory. The greatest and most atrocious act of savagery is portrayed at the Kurtz's station through the placement of beheaded heads of "rebels" on top of the poles around the station. In the end, Kurtz feels that all the brutes ought to be "Exterminated" (Conrad 127).

Suppression

The writer demonstrates that one of the main aims of colonialism is the total suppression of the traditional beliefs and practices of the natives. Conrad starts with a focus on what the company blatantly declared to the public: They were moving into Congo to civilize the locals. Marlow's aunt believes the European ways is superior to the African ways (Conrad 89). She is happy that her nephew would participate in weaning the Africans of their weird ways (Conrad 87). Apparently, the natives have abandoned their homes and ways of living and seized the opportunity to work for the Europeans in search of Ivory in the process changing their lives. In his journey through the Congo River, Marlow declares that he passed through several abandoned villages (Conrad 98). Marlow's foreman was a former boiler-maker signifying that the natives have literally ran away from their traditional way of life to embrace the European life that they deemed better. Kurtz, like many other Europeans believe that the natives need to be humanized and cultured into the European way of life. The natives are only valuable in the face of the Europeans when they are productive, supplying ivory and other goods

(Conrad 101). The colonizers care less about the health and working environment of the natives as long as they are able to deliver ivory. Those who are unable to work are starved, and abandoned to slowly waste away. Those who go against the grain and subjected to cruel punishment, severely beaten and hanged to act as an example to others. The Europeans are only interested in collecting as much ivory as possible, and making the most profits. They are not bothered about the harsh and cruel conditions under which the Africans are subjected.

Reflections on the book

There has been a lot of debate on whether Heart of Darkness is itself a racist book. The writer's effort to write about Africans is depicted as a presumption to racism. The writer uses harsh words to describe Africans in the novel. Conrad's allure with the group movement of the African natives depicts these people as others (Conrad 67). The novel is written with a presumed black irony in which those who seem civilized are essentially not civilized in any way. There seems to be a lot of correlation between Marlow's story and Conrad's biography hence the assumption that Marlow may harbor Conrad's personal viewpoint, including racism, and colonialism. What the writer has simply done is to satirically represent the imperialists and the natives.

Works Cited

Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness. London: Penguin Publishers, 2007. Print