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[Literature](#)



Nature-Nurture Debate in “ The Heart of Darkness” The Nature-Nurture debate has aroused a great number of theorists to form their own perceptions of the human mind and personality. Likewise, it has given shape to a great sum of literary works. In Joseph Conrad’s “ Heart of Darkness,” the author presents his position in the nature-nurture debate as he traces the root of evil in human existence. The novel circles around the idea of darkness in the human soul, represented by the dark forests of Africa. Conrad uses both metonymy and symbolism in his title. The narrator, Marlow, travels to the very depths of the African jungle, which are pictured as dark, deep and mysterious. Hence, the heart in the title is another term for the innermost part of Africa. As a symbol, the heart is central to the human physique as it is in charge of pumping blood to support life. As it is in history, the story shows that the jungle is the main attraction in Africa. In the story, the country’s ivory reserves prove to be the reason for exploration by Western colonizers.

Darkness in the title is a metonymy for evil as the novel presents the observation of the narrator of the evilness that lurks in Africa. Kurtz, the main character who is supposed to rule over the natives as the chief of the station in Congo has undergone change after living in with the natives. Instead of taking lead among the natives and converting them to civilization, Kurtz has ruled over the people with worse savagery, the result of which haunts him in the end, signified by “ the horror” (--) he pronounces and the terror in his eyes. The collection of heads that adorn the fence signify his evilness, which is unexpected of Kurtz as he is described by others as talented and genius. Therefore, Kurtz’s behavior implies the truth about the

nature of man, which is susceptible to evil. Kurtz's disposition regarding colonization, as expressed in the notes he handed over to Marlow, is to "exterminate all the brutes" (--). The term "exterminate" connotes Kurtz's lack of morals and his inability to view the Africans as human beings. In sum, humans are easily prompted to do evil because he is born with it.

Nevertheless, Conrad also makes it clear that as far as the idea of human nature is true, the nurture is also possible. Conrad establishes this with the character of Marlow who is similarly exposed to the truth about colonization and yet forces himself to get out of the darkness. Marlow is victorious in the end because even though the force is too strong, making him and Kurtz fall ill, a person's fortitude and rationality can save him from defeat. The two characters are compared as the two are portrayed to be similarly talented in words and skill yet Marlow is more privileged to see the mistakes of Kurtz before he gets corrupted and falls into the same pit. Seeing Kurtz's misfortune leads him to decide to leave at once before it is too late.

Therefore, it is possible to overcome darkness but the only way to do so is to avoid it, as Marlow and the Russian trader does.

The setting of the story reveals to the readers a significant relation of the events in history. Written in the 1890s, the story mirrors Western colonialism especially in Africa. By portraying the moral corruption even of the most civilized or talented men from the West, the author reveals that the intent of the colonizers to overpower the natives and conquer a land could lead them to dissipate moral values learned from tradition and religion. As depicted in the story, colonizers will do everything, including savagery just to rule over the people. In this regard, the ill fate that Kurtz faces in the story illustrates

Conrad's strong opposition to colonialization.

Work Cited

Conrad, Joseph. "The Heart of Darkness." Norton Anthology of Literature. Ed.

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