

Heart of darkness essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The author of the novella, Joseph Conrad, based the story on a trip that he took through Congo during his years as a sailor. The story revolves around the life of a seaman, Marlow, who fresh from Europe goes on a journey up the Congo River to relieve Kurtz who is the most successful ivory trader working for the Belgian government.

Prior to his personal encounter with Kurtz, Marlow admires Kurtz due to his writings about the civilization of the African continent. The sole reason that drove Marlow to visit Africa was his quest to meet Kurtz face to face. He gets a job as a riverboat captain with a Belgian company that deals with the trade of ivory in the African region. During his trip, he encounters the widespread brutality of the whites to the Africans.

His experience in Africa inspires revulsion as well as the dehumanizing effect of colonialism a disgust that culminates after he discovers that Kurtz had degenerated from an enlightened white into a vicious, power-hungry subjugator of the African natives. When he finally meets Kurtz, he is near death ravaged by not only disease but also dissipation.

After Kurtz's death, Marlow goes back to England. On meeting Marlow's fiancée, he lies about Kurtz's activities and falsely claims that he called her name before he died. An unnamed narrator introduces the story as he tells us about the evening spent aboard the *Nellie*. He later introduces Marlow who narrates the story from his point of view.

In bringing out the clear picture of his experience in a society consisting of whites and blacks, Conrad uses some significant characters in the story. Throughout the novella, the author addresses only two characters by their

names-Charlie Marrow and Kurtz. Marlow is the main character of the story who is very determined in achieving his main goal-meeting Kurtz.

He brings out the picture of the colonial era in Africa since he is neither an African nor a colonialist. He experiences all that happens regarding colonialism during his trip to Africa thus best placed to give a detailed account of the experiences of both the colonialists and the native Africans. On the other hand, Kurtz is the chief of one of the European stations in Congo.

His genius and superiority makes him a legendary icon in Europe. However, he turns into a hypocrite as he uses every opportunity to exploit the native Africans other than civilizing them amassing a lot of wealth as Conrad says, “He sends in as much ivory as all the others put together ..” (84).

The narrator does not address the other characters in the story with their real names but they all play a pivotal role in the development of the story’s theme. They include the Russian trader, cannibals, Chief accountant, General Manager, pilgrims, Brick maker, Helmsman and ‘ the intended’.

The main theme of the story is colonialism and its effects not only to the Africans but also to the whites/colonizers. The Europeans were not only supposed to bring wealth to their nations but also to educate and civilize the Africans. However, the wealth of the African continent overcame their desire to civilize the African continent.

The white’s utilized high ideals of colonization as a cover to allow them rip any form of wealth that they came across. Due to the greed of the

colonialists, enmity developed between the colonialists as they sought to get a bigger share of the African wealth. In the process, they ended up killing each other. On the other hand, the Africans did not only lose their wealth to the Europeans but also lost their lives as they worked for the white men.

The other theme that the author develops is the journey to one's self.

Marlow's mission in finding Kurtz is to find his self. Just like Kurtz, he had good intentions upon entering the African continent. As the story unfolds, Conrad points out that Marlow is what Kurtz had been, at the start of his journey to Africa, and through his encounter with the hardships of the jungle, he would become like Kurtz.

Conrad employs symbolism to bring out his themes. Moral uncertainty was a major characteristic of the blacks and whites during the colonial period. In demonstrating this, Conrad consistently alters common symbolic conceptions of light and dark. The black is not synonymous with evil or the white with good but rather both symbols are interchangeable depending on the circumstance(s) in question.

Throughout the novella, white and black parties are alternately examples of acute suffering, civilized dignity, violent savagery as well as moral refinement. This demonstrates that no race is wholly good or evil and that all human beings are a confusing mixture of propensities for almost all types of behavior. Another form of symbolism is the use of flies. Flies appear in Chapter one when a slave dies and in Chapter three when Kurtz dies thus symbolizing death.

The author also symbolically uses some characters. For instance, the Accountant shows how the company wanted to be seen-elegant despite the many poor Africans within the region. According to Conrad, the accountant was “ a white man, in such an unexpected elegance” (83). He describes the Africans as “ black shadows of disease and starvation” (Conrad 82).

The Congo River forms the setting of the story. Generally, this culminates into the African continent since we get the picture from the author’s description-the trees, the jungle, the fog as well as the scary darkness. Conrad uses a poetic as well as introspective style in writing the novella. The story establishes a strangely enchanting rhythm that not only haunts but also echoes the reader’s mind.

The rhythm created in the reader’s mind make the story so deeply affecting. In conclusion, Heart of the Darkness is a rich story that takes the reader through the mind of someone who experienced the realities of the colonial period in Africa.