

Novel review: the heart of darkness by joseph conrad

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



Conrad's first two works were based on his experiences of Malaya, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). His best work came in 1897, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, a moving story of life on board ship. He followed it with his many remarkable works in the following years. *Heart of darkness* in the former collection is remarkable for an overwhelming sense of evil and corruption and for its excellent tropical backgrounds. It is simply a piece of art very impressive and fascinating. The art lies in the depiction of imperialistic approach i. e., unsympathetic and inhuman relationship of the natives of central Africa and European colonizers who became an embodiment of evil due to his prolonged stay in the dark continent of Congo. It contains many autobiographical elements and its narrator Marlow is regarded as the mouthpiece of Joseph Conrad: but in spite of their much resemblance they also differ a little.

The first chapter of the novel is an excellent synthesis of various themes. All the themes are related to two major characters- Charles Marlow and Mr. Kurtz. The themes used in the novel are: theme of evil, theme of imperialism, theme of lack of self-restraint, theme of isolation, theme of the exploration of darkness and theme of reality and appearance. All the themes are skillfully interwoven that they produce an artistic beauty, unified pattern or design; and overall cast spell-bound effect over the reader's mind.

Lights of ships moved in the fairway — a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars." And this also" said Marlow suddenly,

“ has been one of the dark places of the earth.” (Part 1 Heart of Darkness)
When a truckle-bed with a sick man (some invalid agent from up-country) was put in there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. “ The groans of this sick person” he said” Distract my attention, and without that, it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.” (Part 1 Heart of Darkness).

The white men have always treated the Blacks as the ‘ other’ and have always portrayed a theory of civilizing the uncivilized. Under this rhetorical theory of civilization they have always manipulated the sources of the colonized for the lust of wealth and power. Their inhuman behavior for the colonized always depicted their evil deeds. The hypocrisy of ‘ civilized’ Europeans is clear from their acts of torture, cruelty, and near-slavery inflicted upon the natives in the name of enlightening them. In truth, the Africans were just objects to be used by Europeans in their request for booty. This is act of Hypocritical imperialism is still in work in the contemporary world under the banner of globalization. The west is still colonizing our thoughts, culture, economy etc, if not directly but indirectly. ‘ Imperialism’ as defined by the Dictionary of Human Geography, is “ an unequal human and territorial relationship, usually in the form of an empire, based on ideas of superiority and practices of dominance, and involving the extension of authority and control of one state or people over another.” It is often considered in a negative light, as merely the exploitation of native people in order to enrich a small handful.

The Heart of Darkness is a distinguished masterpiece of Joseph Conrad dealing with the major issues of world. All the experiences of Marlow were Conrad's reactions to what he had observed during his travel to the Congo. White imperialism has been presented through the various characteristics with whom the novelist came into contact. The Company of the white man was ruling the Congo. Savages and wild men were the victims of them." I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here nineteen hundred years ago.... Lights came out of this river since.... [I]t is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday." (4) Marlow, the narrator gives the keynote of the theme of imperialism. This idea narrated by Marlow at the very outset of the novel. Marlow spoke about the ancient Roman conquerors of Britain.

In history it is mentioned that the ancient Romans were very brute and inflicted many cruelties on the Englishmen. The ancient Romans looted what they could get in Britain. As Marlow remarks the conquest of Britain was 'robbery with violence'. Marlow didn't felt the conquest as a sentimental pretense but an idea which was unselfish. All the conquerors could be pardoned! A conqueror could be excused if he performed some construct work in the uncivilized country which he has forcibly captured.

Marlow didn't use the phrase White Man's Burden but he expressed this idea very implicitly and was not obtruding and moralizing in the novel. The white man had certain obligations and responsibilities towards uncivilized people whom he subdued physically and mentally. He came with various strategies

to govern the country. But his motive should not be humanitarian but helped the savages on moral grounds“ Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth”!(Conrad1. 6).

Marlow’s experience in the Congo indicates that the white man was not performing his duty attentively. The white man was brute and wild in order to extract the ivory from them. Congo which was full of mine resources was exploited and misused by the explorers in order to become wealthy and imperialist. All the characters of the novel were mentioning ivory again and again and the natives of Congo were exploited by indulging them into the trade. Mr. Kurtz one of the protagonist of the novel was so obsessed with the every that he once threatened to kill the Russian man just for a small quantity of ivory. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages-precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore.” (5)“ They were men enough to face the darkness.” (5) “ They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, and they were nothing earthly now-nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation....” (18) The white-men were selfish and hypocrite.

They were simply wasting time and effort to show they were rendering constructive works. They started project aimlessly. For example, they had planned to build a railway project in Congo and the natives were forced to

work like animals. The people were moving like ants. The men were chained in each other and were made work without any rest or food offered to them as a source of punishment. The people were suffering from diseases, starvation and death. The white man in order to impose their superiority and fear on the natives were firing aimlessly into the bushes. The whole scenario narrated by Marlow depicts the cruelty of white man over their subjects for the lust of wealth and power. On the other side portrays the sufferings and the miseries faced by the natives under imperialistic rule. Imperialism had its ill effects over the colonized countries of Africa.

The Europeans came from distant places and conquered the natives of the continent. Firstly they fooled the people of the colonized countries in the name of 'civilizing' them. And later exploited them mentally and physically and took control over the natural resources. The Europeans conquered almost the whole world for their lust and greed of immense wealth and power. They dominated the culture, the education, ideology, and the political system of the colonialized countries. They took the theory of White Man's Burden across the globe for civilizing the uncivilized and exploited the natives. Their culture, language, education, political set up, are still imperializing that of the colonized. Even after decades of the end of the colonization, the seeds which they have sown during the colonized period are still sprouting out.

The Intentions of Europeans have always been to exploit the countries they conquer both economically and socially. They always strengthen their capital and spread their culture and ideology throughout the whole world which is

still prevailing in our whole society. They deal with evil inhuman brutality with their subjects if they ever opposed their authority. The foreign policy of the western countries aims at enhancing domination over the other states of world in a diplomatic manner. Conrad has not only exposed share futility of the Belgian imperialist but simultaneously reminds us about the British imperialist of his time. At that time all the African countries were not completely explored and most of the countries of Asia were governed by Chiefly the British men. Conrad's condemnation of imperialism has it is great value for both who were exploited and who were the exploiters.