

# International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

## *Golden Research Thoughts*

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### THEME OF RACISM, CIVILIZATION IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S 'HEART OF DARKNESS'

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#### ABSTRACT

Joseph Conrad is one of the foremost novelists in twentieth century in English literature. *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is a novella by Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad, about a voyage up the Congo River into the Congo Free State, in the heart of Africa, by the story's narrator



Marlow. Marlow tells his story to friends aboard a boat anchored on the River Thames, London, England. This setting provides the frame for Marlow's story of his obsession with the ivory trader Kurtz, which enables Conrad to create a parallel between London and Africa as places of darkness.

The present paper focuses on

the themes of racism and civilization. The theme of racism deals with racial discrimination which is the stigma of humanity and the theme of civilization deals with the process of transforming of human society. As far as the modern post-modern study of literature is concerned, the colonialism and the post-colonialism, imperialism which are the major factors represented in the novels of Joseph Conrad.

**KEYWORDS** :racism, civilization, discrimination and post colonialism .

#### INTRODUCTION:

Joseph Conrad born **Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski** was a Polish-British writer regarded as one of the greatest novelists to write early modernist in the English language. He joined the British merchant marine in 1878, and was granted British nationality in 1886. Though he did not speak English fluently until he was in his twenties, he was a master prose stylist who brought a non-English sensibility into English literature. He wrote stories and novels, many with a nautical setting, that depict trials of

the human spirit in the midst of an impassive, inscrutable universe. Joseph Conrad is considered an, though his works still contain elements of 19th-century realism.

*Heart of Darkness* centres around Marlow, an introspective sailor, and his journey up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, reputed to be an idealistic man of great abilities. Marlow takes a job as a riverboat captain with the Company, a Belgian concern organized to trade in the Congo. As he travels to Africa and then up the Congo, Marlow encounters widespread inefficiency and brutality in the Company's stations. The native inhabitants of the region have been forced into the Company's service, and they suffer terribly from overwork and ill treatment at the hands of the Company's agents.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad manifests his belief in the strength of Western value systems through the character of Marlow. Faced with the horror of his own brutal origins, Marlow keeps a perspective that returns him, secure in his identity, to London. This image is a contrast to Conrad's Kurtz, whose divergence from the path of civilized reason is attributed to emotional weakness and insanity; Marlow reports, "his soul was mad". On the other hand, Coppola illustrates the fundamental need for Willard to return to jungle savagery in *Apocalypse Now*; his survival in the "heart of darkness" is contingent upon the shedding of constructs of both civilization and the military. In the novel, Conrad expects his readers to relate to Marlow as a narrator and similarly arrive at the same conclusions by the story's end. By drawing his viewers into Willard's mind with the immediacy of the action, Coppola connects them fundamentally to the "heart of darkness" and to Willard's transformation and reassessment of values. As Kurtz enters into the heart of Africa with intension to spread light of civilization in the dark region, but his dream of civilizing the dark continents or barbarians end into nightmare. A figure of Kurtz is created as a multi-talented man, painter, writer and politician. As a writer he had published pamphlets regarding the civilization of natives.

British and European culture was undoubtedly far more virulently racist than it is today, and to expect a white writer educated in that culture to fail to hold some type of racial bias. *Heart of Darkness* is a fictionalized chronicle of what the protagonist (and author) recognized as a horrific time in human history and is a vivid critique of it. However, Conrad's narrator relates the atrocities committed against the people of Africa without ever fully conveying the ultimate bitter truth of colonialism: that those inhuman horrors were made possible because even people who did not directly profit from Africa's exploitation and who otherwise might have protested or worked against it bought into racist political and nationalist narratives.

Can a book portray racism through the eyes of a racist character without itself being racist? That question concerns me as a reader; I have read enough other white writers attempt to handle race and handle it badly to know that it's a subject I need to explore and remain mindful of. So I started reading *Heart of Darkness* looking for signs that the novel is inherently racist. And what I found was a narrative in which practically nobody (African or European) is portrayed in a positive light. Marlow objectifies the few female European characters, and through that objectification, Joseph Conrad uses them mostly as symbols instead of portraying them as real people.

## CONCLUSION:

*Heart of Darkness* is a novella in which racism and civilization present itself so deliberately that, for many, the dilemma of race must be tackled before anything else in the book may be dealt with. Joseph Conrad used derogatory, outdated and offensive terminology for devaluation of people's colour as savages. This use of language disturbs many readers who read this book. *Heart of Darkness* is a story full of irony and deception. At one point, Joseph Conrad made a very interesting point. He suggested that the light is used to indicate deceit in the *Heart of Darkness*.

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