

Unveiling the Narrative Horrors in *Heart of Darkness*



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ABSTRACT: Narrative in fiction is a powerful tool for authors, influencing tone, intent, and reader perception. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is celebrated for its intricate narrative style, yet it harbors a troubling bias, particularly evident in the narration of the central character, Marlow. Marlow's narrative channels the author's prejudices, dehumanizing African people and offering a limited perspective that obscures the broader context and diverse viewpoints. This paper emphasizes the importance of approaching *Heart of Darkness* with a critical understanding of its historical context and its portrayal of race and colonialism. It encourages readers to discern and challenge inherent biases in storytelling and historical accounts, aiming to comprehensively analyze the narrative's perpetuation of racial prejudices and colonial pretense.

KEYWORDS: Narrative, *Heart of Darkness*, Prejudice, Racial bias, Colonialism, Imperialism

INTRODUCTION

Compelling narration is an art requiring skills that appear crucial for fiction as a narrative sets the tone and context of a story, creating a framework through which readers approach the text. The author's intentions and motivations behind telling the story are communicated through narrative structure. The author may aim to entertain, educate, provoke thought, or evoke empathy and emotional response. Whether the purpose is to expose societal issues, explore human psychology, or offer a moral lesson, narrative shapes how the author communicates their message to the readers. By shaping expectations, guiding interpretation, establishing mood, and communicating intentions, narrative can open up new possibilities for readers to explore various themes and meanings within the text. Paul Copley differentiates narrative from plot: "'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that [these] events are somehow linked and are therefore to be depicted about each other. 'Narrative' is the showing or telling of [these] events and the mode selected for that to take place" (5-6). Thus, narrative structure ultimately contributes to the overall effectiveness and impact of the storytelling, making it a compelling and memorable experience for the readers. Therefore, narrative, a powerful tool of an author, can manipulate readers' experiences and perceptions of a story, which can sometimes be misleading and prejudiced.

Joseph Conrad's classic novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is known for its complex narrative style. The story unfolds as a frame narrative, employing multiple layers of storytelling that contribute to its thematic complexity. Through the narration of Marlow, the central character, readers are drawn into a compelling tale of exploration, colonialism, and the dark recesses of the human psyche. The novella employs a unique framing device, where an unnamed traveler aboard the river Thames recounts Marlow's journey into the heart of the African Congo. Marlow, serving as the secondary narrator, shares his experiences as a steamboat captain, providing an intimate insight into his thoughts, emotions, and observations during his time in Africa. As Marlow narrates his tale, he occasionally weaves in accounts relayed by others, further adding to the narrative complexity. This aspect

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introduces an element of ambiguity, compelling readers to question the reliability of the different accounts and emphasizing the theme of subjectivity and the unreliability of human perception. According to Rahel Orgis, “The narrator guides readers through the text, prompting them to adopt an attitude that is at once sympathetic and critical and to abide by a code of discretion, both regarding content matters and the art of narration” (50). Conrad’s impressionistic writing style, characterized by vague and ambiguous language to describe events and landscapes, adds to the unsettling and mysterious nature of the African Congo and the moral ambiguities of the characters’ actions. Conrad’s racial bias and annoyance towards black people are also evident in his writing, and these views are reflected through the narrator Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*.

Consequently, the novella challenges readers to be critical and aware of the biases inherent in storytelling, historical accounts, and colonial issues. It also raises questions about the authenticity and objectivity of narratives, urging readers to approach literature and history with a discerning and empathetic mindset. Therefore, readers must approach the novella with a critical awareness of its historical context and the problematic elements in its portrayal of race and colonialism. Given the complexity and elusiveness of the narrative of *Heart of Darkness*, this paper aims to analyze the disturbing forces underlying the novella’s narration. The paper shows that the intricate narrative style and brooding descriptions manifest the author’s racial prejudice and imperial pride, which directed him to portray a dark picture of the Congo and its people. Thus, the paper examines the racial bias and negativity evident in the narrative of *Heart of Darkness*.

1. Frame narration

Conrad employs frame narrative in *Heart of Darkness* by presenting Marlow’s story within the context of another unnamed narrator aboard the *Nellie*. This framing device allows Conrad to distance himself from Marlow’s perspective and actions, providing him with a degree of separation to escape direct criticism. The outer narrator, who listens to Marlow’s tale, becomes the intermediary through which readers encounter the events, further reducing direct accountability on Conrad’s part. By using this narrative structure, Conrad creates a layer of interpretation between himself and Marlow’s story. This distancing technique enables Conrad to explore complex themes and problematic portrayals without fully endorsing or disavowing them personally. However, Conrad’s experience in Congo as a steamer’s steersman like Marlow, serving for the Belgian trading company in 1890, might have influenced him to write the novella eight years later in 1899. Though Conrad has adopted a different narrative technique to detach him from the events of the novella, his imperialistic worldview heavily influences Marlow’s narration. The first anonymous narrator becomes the listener to Marlow’s story and speaks at intervals when Marlow stops. This layered narration helps Conrad to keep him aloof from the actual events. Marlow is used as a device by Conrad to present his ideology. If we look at Conrad’s real-life story, we find similarities between Marlow and Conrad. Conrad’s experience on the sea journey to Congo can be reflected in Marlow’s trip to Africa. Marlow’s experiences are checked and balanced frequently by Conrad.

It is evident in the narrative that *Heart of Darkness* is a semi-realistic portrayal of the horrors Conrad saw when traveling through Africa for six months while working on an ivory-trading steamboat for a Belgian company. In many of his letters, Conrad contends that writing the book was a challenging process that further compromised his health, which his trip to Africa had already compromised. He writes that “[t]he finishing of *Heart of Darkness* took a lot out of me” in a letter dated March 12th, 1899 (Kimbrough 209). Thus, Conrad is indistinguishable from Marlow, and Marlow’s bias stems from Conrad, consciously or subconsciously (Bloom 51). Before going to Africa, Conrad returned to London after visiting the Indian Sea, the Pacific, and the Chinese Ocean. Conrad got several opportunities to get familiar with different postures and their meaning. He can be identified with Marlow in his Author’s Note, where Conrad said the *Heart of Darkness* is “experience too; but it is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the facts of the case for the legitimate, I believe, purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers” (Watt, Page-141). When we find Marlow’s bias in his narration, Conrad cannot escape his involvement in it. We can visualize Conrad in Marlow’s speech, “just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas- a regular dose of the East- six years or so..”(Conrad 9).

2. Complex sentences and verbose diction

Conrad, a Polish-born writer who learned English later in life, had a complex relationship with the English language. This linguistic background may have influenced the complexity of his narrative language and his tendency to select difficult words. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad’s use of intricate language reflects his desire to craft a dense and symbolic narrative. This complexity enhances the sense of mystery and the themes of ambiguity and darkness that permeate the novella. However, it is also argued that Conrad’s language choice may have alienated and exoticized the African setting and characters, reinforcing the colonial-era stereotypes. The usage of complex syntax and verbose diction contribute to the portrayal of the mysterious nature of colonialism. Conrad’s intricate phrase structures and elaborative language convey the novel’s ambiguous atmosphere, feelings, and ideas, adding to *Heart of Darkness*’s overall effect and profundity.

Conrad’s craftsmanship in using complex sentence structures in native English shows his forced ability to naturalize with the Europeans. His elaborate description with ambiguous expression unfolds his moral and psychological dilemmas as a European narrator. His description of the river Congo and the glorification of the city of London present the opposite thoughts working in his mind. Congo is described as dark, mournful, gloomy, mysterious, unknown, “a mighty big river, that you could see on the map,

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resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land” (Conrad 10). Conrad intentionally used complex diction to indicate his brotherhood with Europeans. Marlow describes his city,

In the offing, the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space, the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked with gleams of A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest and the most significant town on earth. (Conrad 3)

The narrator has used too many adjectives to show his expertise in native English. Moreover, his use of adjectives expresses more of an ambiguous moral stand of the author than of an ornamental style of literary presentation. Achebe accused Conrad’s use of adjectives as a technique of expressing “unspeakable and unfathomable secrets”. F.R. Leavis also explained Conrad’s intentional use of adjectives as “adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery” (Leavis 177). Conrad’s choice of words reveals his Euro-centric stance rather than a display of human empathy. These words serve to intensify the contrast between a white European and a black African, creating a stark portrayal of dehumanization for the readers. For Achebe, the achievement of a writer depends on his moral and artistic ability. He shows this technique as Conrad’s pretension of presenting the Congolese as barbaric, uncivilized savages. This idea is evident in Achebe’s comment, “When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents, and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing and other forms of trickery, much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity” (Achebe 16).

Marlow’s glorification and loyalty to Kurtz have been cleverly dealt with verbose diction,

It was an affirmation, a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, abominable terrors, and satisfactions. However, it was a victory! That is why I had remained loyal to Kurtz to the last and even beyond when, a long time after, I heard once more, not his voice, but the echoes of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal (Conrad 108).

This narrative shows Marlow’s complex feelings of admiration, loyalty, and the enduring power of Kurtz’s charisma. It also emphasizes how Kurtz’s words and actions had a profound and lasting impact on Marlow, even in the face of the challenging and disturbing events he witnessed. Moreover, Marlow’s contrasting descriptions of Kurtz’s fiancée and the native African woman highlight the stark disparity in Conrad’s narrative. In the case of Kurtz’s fiancée, he employs language that exudes a sense of purity and belief, as evident in the phrase, “But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the ... un-extinguishable light of belief and love” (Conrad 114). This diction emphasizes the white character’s beauty and innocence, underscoring the horror in Conrad’s storytelling.

Conversely, when Marlow describes the native African woman, he employs ominous language to convey a sense of foreboding, such as “And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.” His descriptions include terms like ‘barbarous ornaments’, ‘crimson spot on her tawny cheek’, ‘innumerable necklaces’, ‘bizarre things’, ‘charms’, ‘gifts of witch-men’, ‘savage’, ‘superb’, and ‘wild-eyed’ (Conrad 92). These words collectively create a mysterious and exotic atmosphere, adding to the narrative’s sense of contrast between the White Westerners and the African backdrop.

3. Colonial bias

Marlow’s narrative reveals a significant dissonance between outward appearances and the actual reality, akin to the deceptive construction projects pursued under imperial motives. At the outer station, the colonizers endeavor to civilize the Congolese, yet in truth, the colonizers’ disposition, along with Marlow’s narrative, reveals their hypocrisy. Marlow considers the English as messengers of the might, torch-bearers, and bearers of the spark from the sacred fire (Conrad 5). Hence, Conrad is trying to show that the English have undertaken a great duty to civilize distant nations. Their mission is like the sacred mission of the missionaries. Marlow starts his narration by paying tribute to the conquerors, all knights ‘titled and untitled.’ Marlow’s expression about the conquerors’ hunters of gold...bearing the sword and the torch’ is ambiguous (Conrad 5). The sword indicates the mighty reign of terror. Therefore, Marlow does not believe in changing a nation with love and affection. The English needed an iron hand to civilize different races. Reflecting on history, we observe an influx of wealth into England during the Elizabethan era from their colonial endeavors. While their primary motivation was to amass riches, the colonizers sought to rationalize their looting under the guise of a noble mission to civilize the colonies. In his subconscious, Marlow lends support to the colonial agenda.

Despite the avarice and inhumane behavior of Kurtz and Conrad’s pivotal role as the primary narrator, Marlow’s love and loyalty towards Kurtz unquestionably underscore Conrad’s affiliation with imperialism. If Conrad had maintained impartiality, the narrative could have concluded with Kurtz’s demise, potentially portraying an unbiased and unblemished depiction of the relationship between colonizers and the colonized. However, Conrad extends the story to the encounter with Kurtz’s fiancée, illustrating Marlow’s compassion for Kurtz. Marlow’s deception towards Kurtz’s betrothed is his final effort to honor Kurtz and avoid causing pain to a white woman who loves Kurtz. In addition, Conrad’s likening of Marlow to Buddha conveys the notion of an intentional bias for the superior white narrator. Just as Buddha represents a symbol of tranquility and contemplation, Marlow

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embodies peace and reflection. Marlow is described as having “sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol” (Conrad 4). Conrad attempted to imbue the imperialistic agenda with a sense of sacred religious purpose, yet this comparison by Conrad erodes the narrator’s authenticity as a European character.

Furthermore, Conrad concludes by drawing a parallel between Marlow and Buddha, imparting a semblance of sanctity to the imperialist agenda. Marlow is preaching like the Buddha in European clothes (Conrad 8) and without the lotus flower, which convinces the readers to believe his speech is a severe sermon with authenticity. From Buddhism, Conrad drew the enlightenment and passed it to the Christians as an actual sermon that justifies narrating a true story of moral regeneration. The story told by Marlow to the five persons on the ship proves his enlightenment brought in the Congo after deep meditation like Buddha. William Bysshe Stein analyzes his posture by saying, “Marlow’s lotus posture shows he is ready to engage in an exercise of intense introspection; he is ready to contemplate the chaos out of which order or cosmos comes” (Kimbrough 197). Conrad visited Indian countries and gained vast knowledge about colonial settings. Conrad cleverly keeps apart the idea of Christianity and takes the idea of Buddhism to be on the safe side. German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer presented the imperial enterprise as a devilish endeavor of materialistic progress as they deliberately went there. He said, “Behind the veil of Maja (Sanskrit, means delusion and illusion), what we find is not God, but Satan” (Zhaowu309).

R.K Narayan, in his *The Guide*, has used narration within narration. Raju, the protagonist, narrates his history before becoming Swami, and the writer narrates the incidents of his being a real swami under forced circumstances. Raju’s description of his previous life has been depicted in his own way without shouldering the responsibilities that are not impartial. Similarly, the colonial story in *Heart of Darkness* narrated by Marlow to the sailors raises the reader’s suspicion about his colonial biases because he glorifies England and the frequent differentiation between the Europeans and the Congolese. Unlike Raju in *The Guide*, Marlow’s moral regeneration is pretentious. Marlow has gained a specific realization about the imperial enterprise. However, Conrad could not escape the biased position as a European by giving Kurtz the position of a tragic hero and finishing the novella with Marlow’s meditative mood, like Buddha.

4. Racial prejudice

Chinua Achebe harshly criticizes Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in his essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.” According to Achebe, Conrad was a racist, and a novella that dehumanizes a portion of the human race should not be regarded as a masterpiece. The following quotation illustrates Achebe’s opinion:

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. (Achebe 21)

In his essay, Achebe also said, “It is clearly not part of Conrad’s purpose to confer language on the ‘rudimentary souls’ of Africa. In place of speech, they made a ‘violent babble of uncouth sounds’” (19). From Kurtz’s stare, Marlow understands that Kurtz wants “to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness” (Conrad 107). Conrad’s emphasis on language and communication barriers between the Congolese and the Europeans reinforces the idea of ‘otherness.’ In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad is not ready to endow the Congolese with any attribute of language. The Congolese boy says in broken English, “Mistah Kurtz- he dead.” We need help finding Conrad’s attempt to allow Marlow to understand the dialect of Congolese. If a Congolese speaks other than shouting or screaming, Conrad uses English in their voice as if they have no language to give any expression. We get two incidents where the Africans are speaking non-traditional, flawed English. The Russian boy said, “catch ‘im ...eat ‘em.” Marlow, as an imperialistic sharer, understands even from the gaze of a white man, but he does not try to understand the language from the gestures of the Congolese. He describes their sound as ‘screeching,’ ‘screaming,’ ‘shrieking,’ and ‘incomprehensible words.’

Marlow uses all the good words to describe Kurtz, like ‘universal genius’, ‘remarkable man’, and so on. His loyalty to Kurtz persists till he meets Kurtz’s fiancé to hand over the letter. Marlow’s observation of Kurtz’s transformation is expressed in his speech: “I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself” (Conrad 101). Kurtz’s transformation from the state of knowledge into savagery and lack of control reflects the racial and moral prejudices inherent in the colonial endeavor. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Conrad works as a supporter of British imperialism, and his multifaceted narrative technique could not hide his racial prejudice. Marlow frequently used ‘black nigger’, ‘black hen’, and ‘black bone’, ‘faces like grotesque masks’ to highlight the whiteness of the Europeans. While narrating England, Marlow mentions the names of places like Gran’s Bassam Little Popo, but we do not find any named expression of the Congo as if the Congolese are devoid of human entity. He has no attachment to them when he says, “The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion” (Conrad 19). Marlow is trying to exaggerate the blackness of the natives with a contrast of white, glistening eyeballs. He is unable to see the Africans as complete individuals. Conversely, Marlow focuses on the physical features of their bodies, particularly their arms, legs, hands, and faces, as well as certain degrading features like shapes and shadows. Achebe states that,

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[c]ertainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting as when he gives us this brief description: 'A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms. . . .' as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to have white arms! But so unrelentingly is Conrad's obsession. (22)

Marlow, the spokesman of Conrad, is so disturbed by blackness that we cannot advance the narrative without being interrupted by racial discrimination. He pours racial comments like sprinkling ink on a white sheet of paper. The portrayal of the English characters, including Marlow, indicates the narrator's racial bias. Marlow describes the lawyer he met as an embodiment of many virtues. Marlow is glorifying English professionals. He describes the chief accountant as a man in polished dress and good manners. These English characters appear as the epitome of civilization, self-reliance, patience, and sophistication in the eyes of the narrator. Hence, the reader might wonder: How can he be sure of their virtues without having direct contact with them? Marlow narrates the secretarial head as a white-haired 'compassionate'. The elaborate description of the chief accountant shows his ambivalent position. The man has snowy trousers...varnished boots, and a big white hand' (Conrad 25). The man is impressive to him.

On the other hand, he describes the Congolese as 'savages', 'moving like ants', 'criminals', and many more. Marlow describes them as 'nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom' (Conrad 24). While narrating, Marlow consistently differentiates between the White and the Black. His description of the two older women knitting black wool shows Marlow's antipathy towards the Black. He explains her look as indifferent, uncanny, faithful, and eerie (Conrad 15). The majority of Marlow's allusions to black people are dehumanizing; they are reduced to little more than shapes, noises, and grotesque masks. A crucial issue is the absence of African characters with strong voices. Africans are mostly cast aside and used as a backdrop for the experiences of the European characters. The indigenous are compared to prehistoric people.

5. Imperial pride

At the beginning of the narration, Marlow introduces London as the biggest and the most significant town on earth. Conrad parallels London, the most fantastic town on earth, and Africa as places of darkness. Conrad does not name the river on which most of the narrative takes place, whereas he glorifies The Thames with all the possible attributes. He eulogizes the river by saying, "What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!" (Conrad 5). After describing the wilderness of the Congo and comparing it with Inferno, Marlow met a well-groomed man with unexpected elegance. Throughout the novella, Conrad presents Africa as an antithesis of Europe. Marlow's contrast between the Africans and the Europeans reveals his imperial pride when he says, "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . ." (Conrad 9). The best passage to illustrate this view is Marlow's speech about the Roman domination of England:

. . . these chaps [the Romans]. . . were no colonists, their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force - nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it as blind - as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. (Conrad 8)

This speech clarifies Marlow's opening statement, "And this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth" (Conrad 9), which compares Roman England to the Belgian Congo. Both countries have been conquered, not colonized, and their conquerors have not made significant advances in either nation. However, most important is the realization that England was a victim of foreign dominance and a member of an empire that was not hers. Conquerors and colonizers are not the same from Marlow's point of view. The British were oppressed by the Romans when they invaded England and grabbed everything by mass killing. This invasion is the sacred mission of conquering. Marlow is justifying their dehumanized attitude towards the Africans. The whites are the torchbearers and emissaries of religion. Conrad endows the colonial agenda as a religious pilgrimage. Europeans imposed pseudo-civilization upon the Africans as if civilization would be wiped off the face of the globe if they had not been taken care of. This novella shows the colonial mindset by depicting Europeans as the bearers of civilization and suggesting that they must rule and govern the 'barbarous' nations for the greater good. They are pretty comfortable with all the modern amenities in Congo. Consequently, 'ship is home, sea is the country' for them (Conrad 6). Wherever they go, they have a homely mood. They feel at ease outside the country because their imperial pride surrounds them. Their colonial compulsion is shown as their patriotic zeal.

6. Misrepresentation of Culture and Tradition

Africa is a diversified continent with various ethnic groups and people. A vibrant ethnic group known as the Fang people draws in their rich cultural heritage and distinctive traditions in the heart of Central Africa. The Fang has contributed substantially to the rich fabric of Central African societies, with a presence in nations like Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and Congo. As a European narrator, Marlow presents a skewed Eurocentric picture, frequently portraying the African continent and its inhabitants

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through a lens of fear and alienation. The misrepresentation of Africa and Africans in *Heart of Darkness* gave rise to negative prejudices and misunderstandings. Many Westerners' perceptions of Africa and its people have been shaped by it. The novella is set in the Congo region of Africa, home to the Fang ethnic group. This tribal group has its own culture and lifestyle. The Fang nation speaks a dialect named Bantu. These people follow a particular religion and worship many Deities. Fang masks are famous for their aesthetic appeal and spiritual significance. The veneers are used in rituals to represent ancestral spirits. Social cohesion and community solidarity have been vital aspects of their society. Fang people have craftsmanship in making various sculptures and wooden things. They have their ceremonies, celebrations, and cultural events. Joseph Conrad has misrepresented the dances and rituals as chaotic and frenzied. He wanted to present the Congolese as primitive and irrational. Rituals can be arranged for various reasons. Still, Conrad tries to sensationalize and highlight the grotesque nature of the Congolese. Conrad also misrepresents the Fang people's ritual of cannibalism to show the brutality of the Congolese. African tribes more commonly practiced cannibalism as part of a ritual than as a crude display of primitiveness (Hochschild 73). This ritual was typically performed during a battle in which a captive from the opposing tribe was captured. Only the strongest prisoners were consumed during the ritual, which served the dual purposes of gaining the enemy's strength and reinforcing the tribe's superiority. Therefore, it is not implausible that the novel's depiction of cannibalism is based on the imagination of Europeans and that genuine Africans, as opposed to Conrad's fictional Africans, would not think to eat the black attackers on the river's coast.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's authentic portrayal of cultural richness challenges European stereotypes about African societies. He presented an accurate and vibrant picture of Igbo culture that has many similarities to the culture of the Congolese. Nigerian Igbo and African Fang cultures maintain ancestor veneration, oral storytelling, social bonds, and resolving disputes through collective decisions. Achebe also expressed his anxiety over the cultural aggression of the British in Nigeria. He showed the linguistic depth and complexity of Igbo language in his *Things Fall Apart*. He used different Igbo proverbs and idioms to highlight the richness of the language. Achebe's exalted notion of the Igbo language is presented in his expression, "Among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe 6). The proverbs prove their practicality and depth of understanding. For instance, "A Child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm" shows their practical sense learnt through experience (Achebe 61). Both ethnic groups are civilized according to the systems of their culture and social standards. When the Europeans go there in the name of civilization, they disrupt traditional culture by forcing change and creating cultural tension.

The Congolese are deeply connected to the natural world, reflecting their spiritual beliefs and rituals. Conrad tries to portray them as barbaric, savage, and primitive who need to be civilized. Nevertheless, their deep connection to the natural world does not prove them uncivilized. They are naturalized but not urbanized. What the colonizers thought to establish was urbanization and not civilization; instead, they plundered ivory in the name of civilization. They are proving them as dishonest, fake, greedy, and uncivilized. From the fake railway construction in the outer station to the discovery of the horrific Kurtz in the inner station, there is a lack of civility. The darkness is not in the Congo but in the European colonial mind. The Whites have imposed civilization where nature stands.

7. Unreliability of the narrator

Marlow's narration is limited to his own experiences and perceptions. He shares the story from his point of view, and readers only get a glimpse of the events through his eyes. This limitation restricts readers from understanding the broader context and perspectives of other characters and the African people. Marlow's unreliable and prejudiced narrative leaves readers with a distorted view of the events and characters in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's choice to present the story through Marlow's perspective denies readers the freedom to analyze and interpret the novella independently. Instead, they are compelled to grapple with Marlow's biases, which can cloud their judgment and prevent them from forming conclusions.

The way Marlow starts his narration is a clear indication of his Eurocentric superiority over the African people. The description and comparison of the river Thames and Congo exposes the narrator's unreliability. Marlow describes the Congo as a place of Darkness resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, mysterious and horrific (Conrad 10). Marlow further said, "The snake has charmed me," as if Marlow is under a spell. The river Thames is calm, tranquil, and peaceful, with inhabitants on both sides. The river Thames has conquered its primitivism and Darkness through establishing civilization, and the river in Congo is in the process of civilization. This change is a natural process that will happen in due time. As a narrator, Conrad fails to show some impartial details that can help the reader understand the narrator's magnanimity and trustworthiness. Conrad perhaps could not hide his identical role to Marlow, which, to a great extent, reveals his preconceived colonial mindset. The beginning of the narration gives the reader an idea that a superior English narrator will present a bleak, blurry history of civilization. Unlike Forster's Indian characters in *A Passage to India*, Africans have no voice here. Forster has used conversational narration that helps the readers understand both nations' characters.

Even though Forster has an ambiguous presentation of colonialism, we can feel the emotions of Europeans and the Indians, for instance, Dr Aziz, Mr Fielding, Mrs Moore, and Adella Quested. Thus, the history given by Marlow is a kind of official history where Europeans give the history of non-European countries. Moreover, European powers dominate the non-European country, that

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is, the perception of the superiors. Adam Hochschild investigated the period of colonialism in Congo in *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998). His book shows that King Leopold II used the Congo as his possession. Leopold wanted to convince the explorers and geographers to set sail to the heart of Africa. The explorers became the king's direct representative of the Congo. Besides having an interest in the lands of the Congo, he had a particular interest in ivory because ivory was precious in Europe. Consequently, more agents were sent to Belgium to make more profit.

Conrad presented the protagonist, Kurtz through the opinions of the chief accountant, the manager, and the Russian boy. He applied a preconceived mechanism of narration that has control over the main narrator, Marlow. Conrad's primary purpose in *Heart of Darkness* is to represent the principal European character, Kurtz. Despite being the emblem of all evil, inhuman atrocities to local Congolese, Conrad tries to give the reader a good impression of Kurtz. Through his ambiguous 'horror, horror' utterance, Conrad wants to show Kurtz's realization of his moral degeneration. Still, the word horror discloses the horror of Conrad's narrative structure, proving Marlow as a biased narrator. Conrad does not allow him to get the information out of Kurtz directly. If it were so, the readers would be terrified by observing his inhumane torture in the name of civilization. Conrad somehow managed to get the attention of critics by criticizing colonial rule. For, Bernard C. Meyer, M.D. tried in every way to explain Conrad's positive attitude towards the Congolese, ignoring his obsession with blackness. Homi Bhabha shows the result of an ambivalent attitude toward the colonization process in his *Of Mimicry*. The relation of attraction and repulsion between the colonizer and the colonized carries the seed of destruction. The superior attitude of the Europeans to the Africans as inferior makes the possibility of a meaningful relationship futile. Aimé Césaire shows in his essay *Discourse on Colonialism* that there will be no human contact in a colonized nation but relations in 'dominations and submissions' (177). The superiority of the whites over the black Congolese gives rise to colonial otherness in Marlow's narration.

Conrad accentuates the disparities between the natives of Africa and the people of Europe and asserts a sense of superiority by portraying their behavior as primitive and savage. Conrad wrote, "They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (Conrad 54). He also wrote, "They were nothing earthly now nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (Conrad 24), and he described the position of the Europeans as superior enlightened. Kurtz dominated the Africans through force and horror. He did not allow the Russian boy to possess a small amount of ivory (Conrad 74). He hung the skulls to terrorize the Africans. The Congolese also started to submit to him, and they even arranged the attack against Marlow and others under Kurtz's command. Kurtz becomes the 'master,' and the Congolese have become mere props in the hand of Kurtz. They have no human contact or communication with the whites. They are voiceless, screaming, shouting in the narration of Marlow. Marlow's portrayal of Kurtz and related incidents describe him as emotional and nationalistic. Ignoring the atrocity of Kurtz, Marlow is presenting him as an apostle to humanity. In the name of civilization, this marginalized relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is the barrier to building a meaningful relationship.

CONCLUSION

Conrad's portrayal of Africans and their culture reflects the prevalent racist attitudes underlying the narration. Hence, Marlow's narrative serves as a conduit for conveying Conrad's prejudices, as the character is presented as the mouthpiece of the author's perspective. *Heart of Darkness* reflects the racial biases and prejudices of its time through Conrad's perspective as the author and Marlow's narration as the protagonist. Conrad narrates, as a white master, a story of an encounter with black, inferior, and uncivilized Africans. He is not successful in hiding his European brotherhood from many critics.

Similarly, Marlow's biased views and descriptions perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to a dehumanizing portrayal of the African people. Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism* about the colonized who "arise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then sink back into the nameless moulds of the graveyard, and nobody notices that they are gone [and] even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soil" (254). It shows the consequences of the dehumanizing attitude of the Westerners towards the blacks.

Therefore, Kurtz's last words, 'Horror, Horror', are significant to show the moral degeneration of the narrator. As Marlow finds similarities with Kurtz in his knowledge and materialistic goal, he cannot deny his transformation throughout his journey to Congo. Moreover, Conrad cannot deny his attachment to Marlow as he is the mouthpiece of the narrator. The frame narration helps the author to veil the narrative horror. However, this research attempts to discover the horror of the colonial enterprise by unveiling the horror of the narrative. Conrad's colonial mindset is exposed in his ambiguous presentation of the story. Furthermore, this narrative choice intensifies the impact of the biases and prejudices embedded in the storytelling, underscoring the importance of critically engaging with narratives that shape our understanding of historical events and cultural perspectives.

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