

**الوحشية والوحشية المضادة: دراسة التوحش، البدائية، والشر المتأصل في
النفس البشرية في رواية جوزيف كونراد (قلب الظلام) مع الإشارة إلى
الاستعمار الأوروبي**

*A Savage Dehumanizing a Fellow Savage: A Study of
Innate Savagery, Primitiveness, and Evil in Man with
Reference to European Colonialism in Joseph Conrad's
Heart of Darkness*

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الملخص

تعد رواية جوزيف كونراد (قلب الظلام) من روايات القرن العشرين كونها كتبت في عام ١٨٩٩، وكذلك لأنها احتوت على عناصر ومواضيع رواية القرن العشرين كلها وقدمتها. وبالتالي عند قراءة رواية القرن العشرين فإنها تتطلب سرعة بديهة وعقلية متنبهة لإيجاد العوامل المشتركة بين الارتباطات المختلفة وكذا من أجل فهم المتناقضات والفوضوية وكذا تعقيدات العلاقات والتجارب الانسانية. ولذا يبدو جلياً أن رواية كونراد (قلب الظلام) كما في رواية وليام فولدنق (أمير الذباب) فإن الاهتمام الرئيس للسردية في هذه الروايات يتركز حول غرابة التجارب الانسانية وتعقيداتها، فهذه الروايات وغيرها من روايات القرن العشرين تؤمن بالفرضية القائلة أن التوحش والبدائية وكذا الميول للشر طبائع انسانية متجذرة واصيلة وفطرية بغض النظر عن كون الانسان صغيراً او كبيراً، ابيضاً او اسوداً، متحضراً او غير متحضر، وذلك لأن الانسان ذو فطرة تميل الى الشر ولديه القدرة على ممارسة هذا الشر ضد الآخرين كلما سنحت الفرصة. وفي ضوء ذلك فإن الورقة البحثية الحالية تنوي تسليط الضوء على ودراسة كيف ولماذا تميل النفس البشرية بشكل عام نحو الشر من واقع رواية كونراد (قلب الظلام)، ومن أجل ذلك ستقوم الورقة البحثية هذه في تحليلها بتعقب رحلة السيد كيرتز في افريقيا وتقصي طبيعة واسباب انحدره من انسان متحضر الى انسان بدائي شرير ومتوحش وكذا دراسة الاعمال البدائية والشريرة التي يقوم بها ضد السكان السود هناك، وستعرض الدراسة اسباب تحول السيد كيرتز من انسان اوروبي ابيض ومتحضر (او عودته) الى انسان بدائي ومتوحش، وذلك بمناقشة وتوضيح هل كان هذا التحول

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متجذرا في طبيعة كبشر ام ان السكان المحليين وبعده عن موطن الحضارة المفترض (اوروبا) كانا السبب في انحداره نحو البدائية والتوحش، كما ستربط الدراسة كل ما سبق بالاشارة الى الاستعمار الأوروبي في افريقيا وطبيعة الادوار التي لعبها والاثار التي تركها.

Abstract

Written in 1899, *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad would be assumed to be a twentieth century novel. It is true that the novel falls one year short of the precise date of twentieth century, yet the novel could be deemed to establish the range of ideas popular in twentieth century fiction. In reading twentieth century novel, we would require a rapid association of thought and a sort of agility to understand contrasting associations, paradox, chaos, the complexity of human experiences, and the change of people's consciousness. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, just like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the main interest of the narrative lies in the weirdness and complexity of the human experiences. They hold a common assumption that human beings whether old or young, white or black, civilized or uncivilized all possess and exhibit primitiveness, savagery, and cruelty as innately instinctual qualities. Man, by nature and by instinct, is accordingly regarded to have innately intuitive evilness, and has the capacity to exercise it whenever time allows. In view of that, the current research paper is going to examine and explore how man, in his totality, can be innately savage and evil in *Heart of Darkness*. The study will trace the journey of Kurtz and investigate the reasons why Kurtz has changed, or rather regressed into a savage and primitive human being. As a white European, the current research paper will additionally shed light on the brutal and dehumanizing practices European colonialism has inflicted on the native Africans.

Keywords: Innate Savagery, Primitiveness, Evil, Black, White European, Dehumanization, European Colonization.

Introduction

Joseph Conrad through writing his novel *Heart of Darkness* would be supposed to have held the age-old traditional belief that the creation of the whole world was associated from its beginnings with darkness. As the center of this universe, man throughout the history of his race has as well manifested variant sides of darkness. The history of man has frequently consistently been observed to be obscure and amoral at times, and to be irrational and unjust at some other times. However, man throughout his history has also proved to be a source of light, illumination, and welfare. Through brave and universal efforts, man could disperse such clouds of darkness by bringing about civilization to this world, with some of its manifestations still standing today. Yet, man's perilous

battle against darkness seems to have sporadically been triumphant and glorious because the majority of the human race in their totality, on the individual as well as community basis, are assumed to be more inclined to adopt darkness and practice its norms.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has assumingly thus been written as a detection expedition to shed more light on such proposition. In the novel, Conrad attempts to fathom deeply into the factors standing behind, and reasons for such darkness in man. The novel raises implicitly unspoken questions on such an issue and invites its readers to critically inspect whether this darkness is a principally innate truth of man, or it is a necessary ingredient of this wild, harsh world in which we live, or a combination of both. Nevertheless, Conrad in such novel is seen to be more conclusive, more resolute, and more clear-minded to point to what and even who possibly stands behind and causes such darkness in man.

In his narrative expedition, Conrad infiltrates deep down into the incomprehensible and murky zones of man's heart and soul. He concludes that darkness is an inherently innate quality of man and urges us to "search the darkest corners of [our] heart,' and the most remote recesses of [our] brain," (Jelinek 65). Therefore, even at the times of light and prosperity, all human civilization has succeeded in doing is that it could merely mask man's darkness and his inhumanly human brutality.

On a contrasting point, there have been some writings on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that assume that once man is cut from civilization and its aspects, they are not supposed to maintain their civility, and are by the contrary urged to resort to their innate qualities and individual philosophy to survive. The hypothesis for such writings lies in the assumption that if man does not adopt and exercise such policy, they would be both subjected as well as susceptible to turning into savage beings. The rationale of such writings, the argument goes on, is built on the supposition that once man is denied the privileges of civilization and the social moral recognition and support, they are more likely to be shattered as a civilized being and then get regressed or degenerated into a contrastingly savage being.

In that respect, such postulations seem to be producing plausibly conceivable, yet deplorable, rationalizations for the brutality of man against his fellow men. In their defense for Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—which is a blatantly unashamed and barefaced critique of the European white man's brutality and savageness—they presume that Conrad's idea in his novel is that the white civilized man should at such circumstances abandon the norms of civilization, or else he will get into a clash with his internally instinctive forces

and compulsions. Not only that, according to such hypothesis, a civilized man in an uncivilized milieu would both be susceptible to losing his civility, and prone to turn into an utterly savage being. In a normal setting, it is supposed, a civilized man living amidst civilization is capable of controlling and subduing such inborn impulses. While living in the midst of a civilization, the argument asserts, the possibility of a rising conflict with those instincts is slim, for civilization is expected to have the potential and capability to repress and contain them.

Nonetheless, man's distinctively native qualities are widely perceived to be both the true core of man's factual self, and to be intrinsically evil—which is presumably Conrad's position in *Heart of Darkness*. It can perceptibly be observed in *Heart of Darkness* that Conrad stands with the view that man is essentially evil. According to this conviction, man is more controlled by his inner urges which are intrinsically primitive and tend to be savage. Civilization is just a veneer of norms and ethics that seemingly work well for the greater good of society. With relevance to man's inner forces, civilization succeeds in masking them, or at its best temporarily curb them. In addition, authority, law, and punishment play a key role in a civil society as they help restrain, control, and curtail such primitive inclinations of man. A man living in a civilized community knows for a fact that doing anything against the norms would not go unnoticed and therefore unpunished. Besides, society represents an extra tool of monitoring. The individual would have to pay heed to society and its reaction to deeds that are deemed socially unacceptable.

Moreover, the other institutions of community such as family, school, religious institutions, government institutions, and the like, provide more power, more control, and thus more warning. Those who think of doing something evil, socially unacceptable, or contradict the terms and principles of such civilization would have to think more than twice before doing that. They will have to think of all the preventive and disciplinary measures that might be inflicted on them for doing evil. And this procedure is supposed to thwart them from doing the same. Hence, they refrain from committing evil, not because they are naturally and characteristically good and civilized, but because they are afraid of being reprimanded, disciplined, and eventually punished.

Accordingly, once man is cut from civilization or cannot be reached by its laws, he regresses back to his instinctively primitive true self. *Heart of Darkness*, as the intention of this research paper, clearly demonstrates this theme of man's primitiveness and savagery—more particularly the European white man—against the claims of civilization. Such dark quintessence is assumed, according to the current study, to be the core of the human self and soul. Once man is unreachable by civilization, its laws, and other monitoring powers and

institutions of the society, he unleashes his innate uncontrollable evil forces, and exercises, perhaps with joy and satisfaction, his unnaturally natural, primitive, and savage rituals and rules of life.

Heart of Darkness: the Innate Savagery and Primitiveness of Man, and the Dehumanization process of European Colonialism

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the current study proposes, is an audacious revelation of man's innately distinctive evil and primitiveness. It is assumed to address the category of man in his totality; however, the novel models a white European man, Mr. Kurtz, as its example. Therefore, the novel, the current research paper suggests, is also an internally courageous attempt to expose the dark side of western civilization, and the barbarity and savageness of the white European man. It is a harshly severe critique of colonialism and its prejudices, discriminations, and wrongs. Writers in postcolonial period have written extensively on the unpleasant consequences of colonization; however, Conrad's novel is singled out among its comparably analogous works of literature for some distinctive reasons. For one thing, *Heart of Darkness* has been written and published at a time colonialism was looked at and perceived not only positively, but also as the natural course of history, development, and civilization. More importantly, the disparagement and criticism of colonialism and the condemnation of its outcomes in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has uniquely and unprecedentedly come from the inside, from a white European man, from one of its members.

Heart of darkness not only denounces colonialism's malicious, unkind, and callous practices on the native peoples, but also attempts to reveal to us that this is the true nature of man in his collectivity, more particularly of the white European man, despite the claims of progress, cultivation, and civility. Colonialism has always claimed to be a power of salvation to redeem people from ignorance and tyranny; and a power of enlightenment to educate people and civilize them. In addition, it has routinely and consistently endeavored to indoctrinate the idea that it is unmatched, superior, and has the right to do whatever it sees fit with those colonized nations. Nonetheless, Conrad in his novel debunks those deceitfully false claims of colonialism. He also asserts that colonialism is actually an oppressive power of manipulation, of corruption, and of dehumanization. In his journey to the Congo he has witnessed firsthand the heartlessly vicious practices of his fellow white men on the helpless black natives. He has been deeply touched, and was reported to state that what colonialism has done on the Congo is "the vilest scramble loot that ever

disfigured the history of human conscience," (Jelinek 33). Out of such traumatizing observations, Conrad has produced his novel *Heart of Darkness* in which he reproduced in fictional narrative most of what he has seen and experienced.

Therefore, in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad demystifies the untrue claims of white civilization. He demonstrates how greed, meanness, savagery, and demonization are what symptomatically characterize white colonization, and what drive the white man. Such practices and qualities, Conrad ascertains, represent truly and instinctively the intrinsically evil nature of man in general, and of the white European man in particular. In Conrad's opinion, the white European colonization has always treated the black natives in a ferociously barbaric manner. Besides, such forces of colonialism have brought about "the destruction of ancient civilization by arrogant men bringing not light but destruction, not progress but moral decline," (Tucker 36).

In that respect, Conrad in his novel debates the proposition that assumes that man can turn into a savage being only when he is away from the restraints of civilization. He puts such an assumption to a strict test, and thus contradicts it by affirming through his novel that man is innately and instinctively evil. Civilization can barely suppress such evilness in man. Man is innately savage and primitive. Civilization is just a defenseless veneering mask of humanity; it is not the norm. Therefore, the white man's primitiveness and savagery that is exercised on the natives is not to be perceived as a sign of degeneration caused by the primitiveness of the natives; rather, it is an unnaturally natural regression of the white man to his instinctively native state of self and of being.

Consequently, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* reaffirms his conviction of the characteristically inborn primitiveness and savagery of man whether black or white European, primitive or civilized. According to Conrad, the white European man is most categorically a primitive and a savage being in heart and soul, but one who is camouflaged with "pretty rags..., that would fly off at the first good shape," (Conrad 59). Thus, the savagery and evilness practiced on the black natives as shown in the novel is an authentic indication of the essence of the white European man; rather of the category of man in his entirety. Hence, such dark façade of humanity the novel reveals, with particular reference to the white man, should not be enigmatic and unfathomable to us for it "is not something so utterly alien" to the category of man in his totality, and to the white man in his particularity, (Fothergill 84).

In the novel, Mr. Kurtz serves as the representative example of such white primitiveness and savagery that has eventually led to the dehumanization of the native blacks, be them equally savage, as it were. Mr. Kurtz has actually been

dispatched to Africa as an ambassador and an agent of light and illumination. Instead, Mr. Kurtz takes off his mask of civility and goes back to his inner intuitive savage and primitive self as soon as he arrives in Africa. However, he becomes a savage who is entrusted with the tools and potential of power that would qualify him to inflict maximum harm and damage upon the black natives, his fellow savages though. Kurtz unbridles his savage and primitive instincts turning into a humanly inhumane monster, and even finds in that a source of "a powerful temptation," (McClure 132).

Therefore, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* does disapprove of the European colonization in Africa, and provides us with a vivid account of the influence and power of man's innately evil forces on him and his surroundings as well. Through the journey that the novel takes us in, we come to realize that evil is within the heart and soul of each and every one of us. Moreover, *Heart of Darkness* enlightens us into knowing that neither civilization nor authority can indeed and incessantly cultivate us into bridling and curbing this dark and evil side within us; and thus only self-refinement and true individual awareness can help us do that.

For Conrad, to enforce civilization on an uncivilized nation, or to invade under the pretext of expelling darkness as the European powers claim without the targeted people's wish and consent is in itself an act of corruption. That act is deemed to breed abuse, exploitation, manipulation, and brutality, which according to Conrad, is a manifestation of "the criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness," (Benson 212).

For that reason, Conrad deplores civilization as a veneer attitude and a set of peripheral and traditional practices. Civilization is valid as long as it is both accompanied and protected by laws, restrains, and authority. Thus, Conrad accepts as true such yokes to maintain civilization in the face of primitiveness, anarchy, and savagery. However, the real civilized man, Conrad assumes, is someone who has self-discipline, individual commitment, and a stable and consistent kind of persona that would act accordingly either in the presence or absence of such shackles.

The main narrator of his novel *Heart of Darkness* Marlowe would represent this model of civility. In the novel, Marlowe seems to be the only European agent in the Congo who has maintained his commitment to his civility. He goes to Africa with no intents and plans of controlling its people or abusing their riches. Marlowe demonstrates inner goodness in treating the African natives as he shows "a minimum of prejudice," (McClure 135). Consequently, Marlowe thinks of his tour to Africa as a privilege and a treat to broaden his understanding,

discover new worlds, and cultivate his self-knowledge. The opposite model of Marlowe would be Mr. Kurtz who would be the savage of the narrative.

Despite the fact that Conrad is an English man, it could be assumed that he has written his novel *Heart of Darkness* with a strong awareness of belonging to the race of humanity as a whole, and of being a universal citizen. He could transcend beyond his national prejudices and affiliations. In his novel, he obviously decries the colonial practices of the European powers in colonized Africa, and does not spare his home country, Britain, of his deprecation. Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* obviously disapproves of the European mistreatment, exploitation, and abuse of the native blacks. He in this novel expresses a strong disapproval for black slavery as well.

In this respect, the current research paper explores how Conrad deplores such colonial deeds in Africa by exposing them to the world through Mr. Kurtz. Conrad touches upon certain sensitive issues at the time and makes them known to the world audience and whosoever is concerned. The novel deliberates on, and invites our attention to issues that were considered taboo subjects at the time "such as imperialism, capitalism, race, and gender," (Booker 217). The fact that an English writer has written a critique of his country's colonial atrocities on the native Africans is outstandingly rare, impressive, and a cause for celebration as well as admiration.

In this vein, Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* disillusion his readers of the commonly popular postulation at the time that black people are characteristically savage and primitive, and thus white Europeans are unavoidably different, civilized and superior. Black Africans were long assumed to be and regarded as "the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality," (Achebe 338). Nevertheless, in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad challenges such hypothesis by providing an intensely vivid portrayal of how Kurtz, a white European, can be savage, primitive, and ruthlessly uncivilized. Thus, the novel affirms the proposition that savagery, primitiveness, and cruelty should not be perceived as something peculiarly germane to a particular race, color, or region. Such demonstrations of primitiveness should instead be deemed as instinctively innate qualities of man in his totality, regardless of race, color, or any other affiliation or adjective. Hence, the novel exposes colonialism, and proves the inaccuracy and deviousness of its claims of civility and superiority.

In that order, white European colonial powers have always held and swayed the flag of superiority in the face of black nations and almost all other races, more particularly non-Europeans. That philosophy of superiority has long been backed by "the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority, which they

contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples," (Tyson 419). *Heart of Darkness* does, however, uncover and lay bare this colonial flag of superiority and furls it down by showing how inferior in humanity, savage, and uncivilized a white European could possibly be; Kurtz in this case.

In the novel, as an officer of the highest rank, Kurtz is a symbolic representative of European colonialism. He is in charge of the ivory trade, and he is expected to maintain order in his colony. However, the novel exposes his pretentious and hollow civility, and thus the bogus civilization of European colonialism. The novel shows the way Kurtz runs the trade of ivory as savage, and ruthless. Instead of acting out the European civility, Kurtz turns into a merciless savage himself, and by his own will and choice. He treats the native Africans with viciousness and violent aggression.

Even more, Kurtz further promotes in self-hostility and primitiveness from a savage into a cold-blooded murderer. Taking savagery to its highest and most forbidden form, Kurtz constructs a fence around his lodge out of his victims' skulls, black Africans. The factual reason behind Kurtz's barbarous killings of Africans is nothing more than an accurate demonstration of his instinctively innate savagery and primitiveness. This proposition is consolidated by Kurtz himself in a report he advances for prospect strategies towards the native blacks as he stresses the need "to exterminate all the brutes," (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: A Novel* 60). Thus those innocent victims have paid a heavy price with their lives for committing no crime except for being black and Africans. Kurtz, on the other hand, would not achieve any tangible gain except saturating his sick thirst for blood.

By the beginning of the novel, Kurtz is introduced with a positive atmosphere. He himself announces his intention to go to Africa in order to keep order and discipline, and to impart knowledge to ignorant Africans. Kurtz is quoted in the novel saying that in Africa, which is his destination, "each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, (and) instructing," (40). Such announcements by Kurtz would very much correspond with the pretexts that European colonialism propagates. Hence, the novel suggests that European colonialism turns into brutality, corruption, and exploitation with the native blacks just as Kurtz turns into a savage despite his auspicious pledges. In the novel, Kurtz fails to keep his promises and to hold the pledges he has made. What is more, even committing awful deeds against black Africans, the novel shows throughout its events that Kurtz has skipped responsibility, evaded blame, and has escaped the hold of accountability, too. Accordingly, Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* does not celebrate the colonial practices on the colonized people as some claim, but

rather exposes such deeds, disapproves of them, and even condemns them. The novel plausibly hints at the savagery and primitiveness of black people, but it explicitly depicts through Kurtz the opposite savagery of European colonialism that is even accompanied by other aspects such as exploitation, corruption, and even death.

All through *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz—the symbol of European colonialism in Africa—has consistently perpetrated all sorts of crimes against black Africans. They have been dehumanized, abused, vandalized, and even killed by Kurtz. Moreover, Kurtz, as a representation of a true savage, extends his brutality and dehumanization to his fellow Europeans like Marlowe. The novel demonstrates how Kurtz has humiliated Marlowe and dealt cruelly with him just as he has done with black Africans. Marlowe has many times pointed to Kurtz to be "even like the niggers, to invoke himself – his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man," (85).

Mr. Marlowe, who is European too, is intended in the novel to present the humanity model. He is shown to be the type of person who possesses cultivated self-knowledge, and someone who enjoys a high form of discipline and humanity that does not discriminate between people on the basis of color or race. Marlowe contrasts Kurtz in the novel and disapproves of his savagery and barbarism with Africans. He describes Kurtz's ravenousness and abuse with the words: "opening his mouth voraciously," and labels him as someone who could "devour all the earth with all its mankind," (95). Such statements by Marlowe could safely be assumed to communicate the novelist's opinion of colonialism as well.

Consequently, the novel reveals that Kurtz fails to keep his promises or maintain his civility, and thus has gone astray in humanity terms. Besides turning into a brutal savage, Kurtz has centered his interest and passion on ivory and how much wealth he can accumulate out of it. For him, he believes that he has the right to pile up wealth whatever the means might be because "Africa is more productive than any other region," (Branningan 137). More appropriate to his true savage identity, Kurtz is also shown in the novel that he mostly passes his time in the jungle; the world of savages and brutes. There in the jungle; his savage habitat, Kurtz could manifest and live his savagery to its zenith as he has no one and nothing to commit to, or to be held accountable by. There, however, arises a suggestion that Kurtz has regressed into a savage because he has arrived to a world of savages; and that he wishes for "a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same," (Bhabha 122). Accordingly, the novel suggests that even if the plausible

assumption of Africans' savagery and primitiveness is bought, Kurtz has turned into a more violent, more brutal, and more primitive savage.

Respectively, the novel stresses its proposition that European colonialism is very likely assumed to be corrupt, exploiting, savage, and primitive. Whether or not Africans are savages as assumed, the novel is more concerned with exposing the savagery, primitiveness, and even brutality of Kurtz; a white European man, and thus of the European civilization. Therefore, absorbing the assumption of African savagery does not spare Kurtz—the white European, and thus European colonialism (civilization)—of the blame and accountability for his vicious deeds against native Africans. He is shown to be a more evil, and more ruthless savage who has committed unspeakably appalling atrocities against his fellow savages, to say the least.

Accordingly, Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* consolidates, enforces, and fully explicates his belief, or rather conviction, in the instinctive, innate, and intrinsically savage, primitive, and evil nature of man regardless. Civilization, according to Conrad, controls man through curbs, restrains, and eventually accountability, for even men living in the midst of civilization could easily and promptly "change to savagery when there is no restriction," (Moore 127). In view of that, the novel concludes that what is innately and instinctively constant for man is his savagery, primitiveness, and even evilness; but not civility. Civilization is a peripheral human quality that could possibly succeed at times in truly cultivating people, through restrains and monitoring though; but it fails at many more times to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Conrad settles in the novel that Kurtz has fully succeeded in acting out savage, primitive, and evil; and not the Africans. As a representative symbol of the white European man, and thus of the European colonialism, Kurtz has thus fully demonstrated how savage, primitive, corrupt, and evil European colonialism (and civilization) could possibly be. Despite the fact that Kurtz has come from Europe, and thus could be deemed as "corruption brought to Africa from Europe" (Booker 223); through his savagery and evil deeds against Africans, he has further buttressed and deepened the conviction or hypothesis of the novel in the innate savagery and evilness of man in his totality.

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