



**COLONIALISM AND RESISTANCE IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*:
AN EVALUATION**

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Abstract

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad is a seminal text that interrogates the moral, psychological, and political dimensions of European colonialism in Africa. This paper examines how Conrad exposes the exploitative structures of imperialism while simultaneously portraying subtle forms of resistance. Through the journey of Charles Marlow and the character of Kurtz, the novella reveals the corrupting influence of power and the fragility of moral integrity. While African resistance is largely implicit, it persists through cultural continuity and resilience. The study argues that Conrad critiques colonial ideology by revealing its inherent contradictions and its capacity to dehumanize both colonizer and colonized.

Keywords: Colonialism, Resistance, Imperialism, Moral Corruption, African Identity, Power



1. Introduction

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) occupies a central position in modern English literature due to his exploration of moral ambiguity and psychological depth. Born in Eastern Europe under imperial domination, Conrad developed a critical perspective on power and authority. His maritime experiences, particularly in Africa, informed the setting and themes of *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899.

The novella is widely regarded as a critique of European imperialism. At the same time, it raises complex questions about race, representation, and narrative authority. This paper examines how Conrad portrays colonialism as a destructive force while also exploring the nuanced and often limited forms of resistance embedded within the text.

2.Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the representation of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*
- To examine the forms and limitations of resistance
- To explore psychological and moral consequences of imperialism
- To evaluate the symbolic role of Kurtz



3. Historical and Literary Context

The late nineteenth century marked the height of European imperial expansion, particularly in Africa. Colonial powers justified their actions through the rhetoric of civilization while pursuing economic exploitation.

The Congo setting reflects colonial brutality under King Leopold II. The novella also reflects modernist concerns such as fragmentation, subjectivity, and ambiguity.

4. Colonialism as Exploitation and Domination

Colonialism is depicted as a system driven by greed and violence. Africans are reduced to tools of profit, and ivory symbolizes material obsession. Conrad exposes the hypocrisy of the “civilizing mission” by revealing its brutality.

5. Representation of Africa and Africans

Africa is portrayed as mysterious, reflecting European bias. However, Conrad also exposes colonial hypocrisy.

Chinua Achebe criticizes the novella for racism (Achebe), while others interpret it as a critique of imperial ideology. This duality defines the text’s complexity.



6. Resistance: Subtlety and Limitations

Resistance appears in subtle forms—cultural survival and endurance. Marlow’s skepticism also represents limited resistance, though he cannot fully escape the system.

7. Kurtz as a Symbol of Power and Corruption

Kurtz represents both the ideals and failures of colonialism. His descent into tyranny shows how absolute power corrupts moral values.

8. Psychological and Symbolic Dimensions

Marlow’s journey symbolizes a descent into the human psyche. Darkness represents moral and psychological collapse rather than geography.

9. Ambiguity and Moral Complexity

The novella avoids clear moral divisions. It shows how civilization is fragile and individuals can descend into moral chaos under certain conditions.

10. Critical Perspectives

Achebe condemns the text as racist (Achebe), while postcolonial critics see it as anti-imperialist (Loomba). This debate keeps the text relevant.



11. Conclusion

Heart of Darkness critiques colonialism by revealing its moral and psychological consequences. Resistance exists but remains limited. The text ultimately reflects the complexity of human nature and imperial power.

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