



## Journey from the Heart of Darkness to the Heart of Sadness: Fiction v/s Reality

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to perceive the give – and – take between art and real life conditions. It presents information on the writing of the novel Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad whose continental experience and familiarity with the imperial milieu in the east and Africa rendered him capable of bringing much greater knowledge of real politic into literary work more than any one else.

It seems fruitful to see how the authors deal with the gap between how things could or should be in a given society, and how they really are. International politics is devoid of moral values as can be seen in the case of Congo in Heart of Darkness (a fictional situation) and in the present Iraqi situation (a real- life situation).

In Heart of Darkness there is a suggestion that the exploited will some day, sooner or later, rise in revolt against the exploitation of the foreign rule. Can oppressed nations like Congo and Iraq hope to conclude this tiresome journey in the near future and set out a fresh on new journey, perhaps one into the Heart of Happiness? The answer to this question remains unknown at the present time. In spite of this, people of these nations should be optimize, keeping in mind that it is always darkest before the dawn, and that Stars shine out the most brilliantly through dark clouds.

**Keywords:** Thinking styles, Literature

### 1. Introduction

It is a privilege for the researchers to co-author a paper on Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness, as it illuminates the "heart of sadness" in their own lives. Their experience in Asia leads them to respond to such literary settings – to the give-and-take between art and real-life conditions – differently than would a Western observer. Asian and African countries share many similarities, including their subjection to British imperialism. Generally speaking, the novel is a genre which concentrates on social life, in particular on the lives of individuals within a complex society. Here, again, it seems fruitful to see how the authors deal with the gap between how things could or should be in a given society, and how they really are.

International politics is devoid of moral values, as can be seen in the case of Congo in Heart of Darkness (a fictional situation) and in the present situation in Iraq (a real-life situation). The same weaknesses that paralyze Iraq arguably are present in Congo. Resource-rich countries often fall prey to the lusts of more powerful nations. For instance, Congo (in Heart of Darkness) is exploited for its ivory, and Iraq (in real life) is exploited for oil and other natural resources. The powerful, exploitive countries are motivated by a self-righteous idealism and treat the natives inhumanely; in the process, they themselves become dehumanized. They judge developing or long-established cultures according to their own norms of measurement which, unfortunately, they believe to be absolute. These nations do so for their commercial gains and individual wealth. When financially and politically sound countries strive to subjugate weaker nations to their version of "order", instead of order, chaos sets in. These exploiters fail to perceive that such selfish actions do not lead towards a progressive social order but rather give rise to bloodshed and contempt.

Like the authors of this present research, Joseph Conrad was fortunate enough to have a range of experience usually available only second-hand to most other novelists, as he was exposed to an adventurous life, first as the orphaned child of a Polish revolutionary, then as a British seaman. He strongly believed that it was not the experience which made a difference, but the experience as comprehended by the mind, then made valuable by art . It must be realized that an existence like Conrad's captured the attention, generally at the expense of the novels themselves, of people belonging to an era still inspired by the imperial adventure. His Continental experience and familiarity with the imperial milieu in the

East and in Africa rendered him capable of bringing a much greater knowledge of realpolitik into literary works more than anyone else.

## 2. Body

Heart of Darkness portrays the fateful Congo expedition of 1890 and is a continuation of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. As a character, Marlow appears in many of Conrad's works, but in all of them he is not, as Virginia Woolf states, "a subtle, refined, and fastidious analyst" (Woolf, 1966). In *Heart of Darkness*, he is unique in his faculties of observation, not in his attempts at analysis. Conrad is dealing with imperial realities which he found both seriously disturbing and enlightening at the same time.

As Marlow's companions muse about the waterway "leading to the uttermost ends of the earth", they see analogous characteristics in England's imperial past (Conrad, 1996). Marlow's first response to this grandiose prospect is seriously puzzling: "Light came out of this river since – you say knights? . . . But darkness was here yesterday"(Conrad, 1996). For the vision of a heroic England carrying the "sacred fire" into strange lands, he replaces another and earlier picture – England, herself a strange land, gaining the attentions of a Roman invader. In this context, English civilization seems like the "flicker" of "a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning", according to him, and imperialism, which is the extension of this civilization, starts appearing not so attractive (Conrad, 1996). Encompassing all, "the conquest of the earth which mostly means the taking away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than us is not a pretty thing when you look into it much" (Conrad, 1996). But what justification can be offered? Marlow suggests that "... what redeems it is the idea only ... An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence, but an idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (Conrad, 1996).

Jacques Berthoud (Berthoud, 1993) comments: "The darkness into which Marlow ventures has a heart which can be found within his own breast." 2 Yet there is definitely a basic difference between Marlow, who has cleared the test of the sea (and hence can differentiate between practice and preach, professions and performances) and the agents of the exploitative company he comes across in the Congo. But this Marlow, the captain of the river-steamer, has still not witnessed the trial of the jungle – and in having yet to do so, he is as aloof as everyone else.

The novel makes an effort to perceive how strong the hold of civilization is on its members. One of the main characteristics of Marlow's narrative is his stress upon the "unreality" of his experience. The first significant thing that his voyage shows him is that what was meaningful in Europe is not meaningful in Africa any more. For example, he sees that a railway is apparently being constructed, but it does not make much sense to him. Most baffling of all, death itself becomes a common place triviality.

The first piece of information about Africa imparted by Marlow is related to the fate of his predecessor who loses his life over a misunderstanding about two black hens. The insignificance of the cause is in accordance to only the casualness of the event itself: "Some man ... made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man – and of course it went quite easily between the shoulder blades" (Conrad, 1996). This horrifying disorientation becomes a well-known aspect of his African experience. Definitely it is significant, as it shows that the sense of reality is not completely founded but rather the product of a long process of cultural collection.

One of the basic differences between Marlow and his European companions in Africa is that he can see the unreality of the concepts that have been arbitrarily brought into the country, whereas they either cannot or will not. He can recognize the humanity of the people of a "primitive" culture due to his firm understanding of the standards and conventions of his own society. Realizing his own identity, he can correctly measure the gap that separates the Europeans is their steamer from the black men in their vessel. He does not show that the latter are anything but unfamiliar to him: for instance, their faces appear to him to be "grotesque masks". Yet this very recognition of dissimilarity is an acknowledgement of otherness and hence affirms a common humanity. Aware of the fact of cultural relativity, he can perceive the liveliness of the black men with the flabbiness of the invaders. The blacks are real and they do not need an excuse for being there. They and their environment are in accordance with each other.

The failure on the part of the European colonizers to comprehend the values which they are supposed to represent bends them towards considering foreign manners as lawless, a break away from their own. Berthoud (Berthoud, 1993) believes that "...the society that sustains them is not merely different from, but also stronger than, the tribal communities they encounter." This, therefore, "...abolishes every external check and makes it possible for them to treat the populations they deal with as if they were exploitable raw material, though of considerably less intrinsic value than the ivory they seek" (Berthoud, 1993). Likewise, Marlow believes that the whites have abdicated control and become possessed by a devil of a merciless folly. As Berthoud (Berthoud, 1993) explains: "Thus considered, the trial of the jungle is like the trial of the sea, distinguishing Marlow from his demoralized colleagues very much as service at sea is distinguished from self-seeking on land."3

According to V.S. Naipaul (Goonetilleke, 1991), Conrad is himself a contradiction comprised of both the real and the imagined: "to understand Conrad... it [is] necessary to lose one's preconceptions of what the novel should do.... When art copies life, and life in its turn mimics art, a writer's originality can often be obscured."<sup>4</sup>

Selfish economic objectives constitute the number one factor in imperialism, whereas selfish political considerations are the number two factor: For instance, Britain gained considerable revenue from cotton and jute in India and copper in the Congo (Goonetilleke, 1991). As Goonetilleke (Goonetilleke, 1991) explains:

India was the 'brightest jewel in the imperial crown' and the core of British global strategic thinking precisely because of her very real importance to the British economy. This was never greater than at this time (1875 – 1914), when... up to 60 per cent of British cotton exports went to India and the Far East... and when the international balance of payments of Britain hinged on the payments surplus which India provided.

Even after the colonies gained independence, Britain profited substantially from her investment. Development tended to be restricted to the sectors which met the requirements of the imperialists.

If Conrad was motivated by the East, he was taken aback by Africa. He said to Edward Garnett: "Before the Congo I was only a simple animal" (Aubry, 1926).<sup>6</sup> Congo had a great influence on his imagination, which can be seen in *Heart of Darkness*, and has become "the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination" (Clark, 1986).<sup>7</sup> The Africa in *Heart of Darkness* is the continent as seen through European eyes. We have to view it, not from the standpoint of Africa today, but as the continent it was a century ago. David Carroll (Carroll, 1980) states: "Conrad's Africa is "the dark continent" of the European imagination, an extreme stereotype. Conrad exploits the stereotype to the full. He uses Africa as a symbol, a black cloth onto which his characters can project their inner doubts and their sense of alienation."<sup>8</sup>

The jungle is symbolic of dark urges. Marlow senses that "instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth" (Conrad, 1996). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow recounts his personal experiences. On one level, the novel is a serious commentary on imperialism, what Conrad termed as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration" (Conrad, 1928).<sup>9</sup> As Marlow ruminates on his experiences at the Central Station in the Congo he comments:

You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies – which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world – what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. (Conrad, 1996)

Marlow's acceptance of his uprightness and his justification for it rings true; his tone always sounds honest. At the same time, in spite of having strong feelings of shock or of disapproval concerning a lie, as he says, it is a fact that Marlow sometimes lies. He intimidates the brick-maker by letting him fantasize that he is powerful enough to harm his career through influence in Europe and thereby gains the rivets he required to repair his steamboat in order to get to Kurtz. Marlow appeases Kurtz's follower though he is not in accordance with his opinions concerning Kurtz and hence the follower re-enters the wilderness without harming his warm temperament. He lies to Kurtz, who is on his deathbed, that his "success in Europe is assured" to motivate him to go back to the steamer. On Marlow's return to Europe, he lies to Kurtz's Intended in order not to distort her view of Kurtz. In all these cases, Marlow is forced to compromise truth for a valuable purpose. The readers feel that this imperfection of his character is an acceptable trade-off in an imperfect world.

Temperament is that part of one's character that affects one's moods and the way one behave. Informally, the term "temperamental" describes a machine that sometimes works and sometimes does not. Marlow can be considered temperamental, as his mood tends to change very suddenly. The word "temper" means to make something less strong or extreme, as seen in the case of the local people who suffer extremely at the hands of white men and as a result become less strong. "Temper" also means to heat and then cool a metal in order to make it hard, as in "tempered" steel. The blacks also become hard or tough and can adapt themselves, even in the worst situations.

Conrad states: "As for the story itself, it is true enough in its essentials. The sustained invention of a really telling a lie demands a talent which I do not possess" (Conrad, 1923).<sup>10</sup> When Albert J. Guerard (Conrad, 1958) introduced the story to one of Roger Casement's consular successors in the Congo in 1957, he commented at once that Conrad definitely had "a feel for the country."<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Benita Parry (Parry, 1983) suggests that the "landscape is mythic, the scenery surreal, the circumstances grotesque."

In telling his tale, Marlow remembers his impressions while in the waiting-room of the Belgian imperial Company, prior to his journey:

On one end, a large shining map, marked with all the colors of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink, the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. (Conrad, 1996)

Here, Marlow is viewing all the colonial countries on the map. Different colors represent different countries. The red represents the British. Marlow responds in a cordial and sunny way just to the Empire of his own nation and he states a particular reason for it. But is he an imperial-minded Englishman in a conventional way? Earlier, he had meditated upon imperialism in general:

I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago.... They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze.... 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.... 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 pretence 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, 1996)

Marlow places the imperialism of the British in line with that of the Romans. Though condemning “the conquest of the earth”, he justifies British imperialism for its “idea”. Marlow's language has implications of which he is not conscious. Words like “saves” and “redeems” suggest a discomfiting awareness in him of unsatisfactory characteristics even in British imperialism and an unconscious hypocrisy in the efforts to vindicate them. This is one of the national characteristics which is so deeply ingrained that it stays in spite of his otherwise rich Congo experience. There is a kind of inner contradiction in Marlow's personality. At the same time, he is both in favor of and against imperial policies. The outcome of this split personality is that, at times, there is an imbalance between what he practices and what he preaches. In real life, the same contradiction can be found in speeches delivered by American politicians, and leads to similar imbalances in practice and experience.

With deep insight, the author, through the ritual implications of Marlow's concluding speech, indicates that glorification of imperialism is an effort to justify an element of inhumanity which is shared by both civilized and primitive societies. As Marlow probes deeper into the Congo, he observes more aspects of imperial entanglements. The external realities are more significant than Marlow's inner condition. He is an extrovert middle-class Englishman who explores the self. He encounters the disorder and horror. His frankness and humaneness are the qualities which make him an apt narrator. He could perceive clearly the imperial involvements of a foreign nation whose empire was comparatively new and whose excesses were not amended. All the imperial powers are guilty of committing atrocities. America has the same attitude from a practical point of view. Other than for destruction, nothing deserves to be mentioned in the case of Iraq. Maybe mass killing is a glorious achievement in the eyes of the exploiters and they desire the world community to perceive it as such, but as a poet once said, “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”.

Conrad, ironically, indicates that white men have made Africa a Dark Continent, in contrast to their general image of representatives of light. They are white, but their deeds are black. Apart from fiction, this reality can be perceived in the present day situation in Iraq. In *Heart of Darkness*, symbols of light and darkness represent the same thing – evil. Marlow is able to differentiate between the exaggerated conception of his job and its actual triviality, between the emotional idealism rotating around imperialism and its economic basis. The entire city looks like “a whited sepulcher” to Marlow. Its deathlike attributes relate to the inhumanity in the Empire. In biblical terms, a “whited sepulcher” is employed as a figure for some person or some place whose external righteousness and charm cover an internal corruption; hence, it implies aspects of the character of the colonial nations, and this is absolutely true in practice. Conrad does not probe into the lives of the Congolese and, from the external viewpoint of a visitor, portrays them as victims of imperialism who remain anonymous to him.

Ivory, both as a color and a valued commodity, becomes a leitmotif in the narrative. Ivory is to the Congo what silver is to Costaguana in *Nostromo*. It is actual raw wealth like petrol and other gifts bestowed upon by Nature, as seen in the case of Iraq in a real-life situation, and as such becomes the target of individuals and colonial companies. Glossy and white on the outside, it is actually dead matter and thereby stands as the paradox at the core of Western civilization.

Marlow's reference to a decaying corpse is both literal and figurative: elephants and native Africans both die as a result of the white man's pursuit of ivory, and the entire enterprise is rotten at the core. Power, particularly power over other human beings, inevitably corrupts. The words “ivory” and “oil” have taken on a life of their own for the exploiters in both art and situation. To them, they are far more than the tusk of an elephant or a simple fluid. They represent economic freedom and social advancement. The words have lost all connection to any physical reality and have themselves become objects of worship.

As mentioned previously, the novel is a genre which concentrates on the social life of individuals in a society. According to Goonetilleke (Goonetilleke, 1991), “*Heart of Darkness* is more symbolic than realistic, whereas in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, the real and the symbolic are equally important.”<sup>13</sup> As Marlow's journey in the Congo is along a river, he does not probe into less-accessible regions. But V.S. Naipaul (Naipaul, 1975) thinks that “the river remains not merely the great highway of the country, but at the heart of its culture.”<sup>14</sup> It is a local proverb that: “It is

only the river which works in Zaire" (Wood, 1984). 15 It should be remembered here that great civilizations flourished along the Tigris-Euphrates once upon a time, in the same places as present-day Iraq. Countries may be built and demolished, but civilizations die hard.

Marlow is not a hero like Fielding in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. He acts chiefly as an instrument through which the author conveys the entanglements of Western civilization and primitive culture. Conrad meditates upon the imperial entanglements of Belgium and the Congo in a global light. Kurtz stands for European civilization as a whole as his mother was half-English and his father was half-French. Towards the novel's climax, the symbolic level of the journey into the Congo becomes a journey into the depths of man's unconscious, exposed in all its darkness.

Kurtz came to the Congo "equipped with moral ideas" and because of this, rather than for his outmatched success in accumulating ivory (which is what is of significance to the other colonial employees), Marlow is curious about him even before he encounters him. Marlow senses this very intensely by contrast with the common Europeans to whom applies his statement on the Eldorado Exploring Expedition: "To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (Conrad, 1996). This comment is applicable to Iraq's situation in the present time, as America is not able to provide any moral justification regarding its intention behind the Iraqi invasion. It is no nobler than violence and thievery.

Marlow thinks that Kurtz's problems are "solitude" and "silence". He concludes: "The wilderness echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core" (Conrad, 1996). The hollowness applies to both Kurtz and his ideals. He cannot keep in check his lust not only for authority and greed but also for women. Marlow talks of "gratified and monstrous passions". Kurtz's high ideals are just theoretical, as even are Marlow's to some extent. He makes use of African villagers to fight their own people simply for his own profit, so that he can collect as much ivory as possible. This is in accordance to the British policy of Divide and Rule, which led to the formation of Pakistan and the division of some Arab countries. It is also in accordance with the present day American policy in Iraq, as a result of which everyday there are communal riots. Post-colonial literature stresses the idea of a mythic search for a new order that is distinctive and different from that of imperial British colonizers.

In Marlow's eyes, Kurtz is a genuine devil who can inspire horror. On the other hand, the Manager "was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness" (Conrad, 1996). Kurtz selected evil, but at least he made a selection and abided by it. It is to this human trait and honesty in Kurtz that Marlow turns "for relief". That is why the nightmare of Kurtz is given an upper hand by Marlow over the nightmare of other colonial employees. Here the author's view is in accordance with T.S. Eliot's (Eliot, 1951):

So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. 16

It is true that Kurtz was damned but he could encounter the darkness in contrast to the other colonial workers who could neither be damned nor saved. It is Kurtz's soul that becomes insane, whereas the others were deprived of souls and could not become insane in this manner. According to Marlow: "You may be too much of a fool to go wrong and too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil" (Conrad, 1996). Kurtz's ultimate cry: "The horror! The horror!" is perceived by Marlow as "complete knowledge" and "a moral victory", on one level, a rejection of "going native". Hence, Kurtz's ultimate illumination exposes the darkest depths of a human soul. The heart of darkness is the centre of Africa, the undiscovered, the unexposed self and, on top of that, the evil in man in Conrad's fiction. Similarly, the heart of sadness is the center of Iraq.

Conrad portrays Marlow as a complex personality. Soon after his coming to the Central Station, he remarks: "I went to work the next day, turning so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seems to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life" (Conrad, 1996). This type of action and attitude are his salient features. He cannot help but be vexed and affected by what he observes. After the Congo journey, he states: "It was not my strength that wanted nursing; it was my imagination that wanted soothing" (Conrad, 1996). He is sensitive towards what Kurtz was as well as what became of him. Marlow does not experience what Kurtz experiences: "He had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot" (Conrad, 1996). Marlow is able to maintain sanity and control in spite of imperial realities and the wilderness due to his "sense of immediate duty". Illumination can come to Marlow, as he is able to perceive moral matters.

Marlow is surprised by the control demonstrated by his African crew. On the contrary, the white crew was absolutely prepared to make "a glorious slaughter" of the Africans in the bush. Marlow's humanity surpasses racial considerations: "I can't forget him (Kurtz), though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost (the African helmsman) in getting to him" (Conrad, 1996). Goonetilleke (Goonetilleke, 1991) contends that, with regard to Kurtz,

"Marlow does not quite understand him, but Conrad does and the reader is meant to. Marlow's experiences themselves have to be satisfactorily defined for us or suggested to us by Conrad."<sup>17</sup>

Marlow's African journey comes around a full circle at the very place from where he set out – the headquarters of the Congo Empire, Brussels. He comments:

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of common-place individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flaunting of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. (Conrad, 1996)

Marlow thought that the Kurtz episode, the most vexing experience, was "the culminating point" of his experience. But in Goonetilleke opinion, Marlow's "culminating point" is different from Marlow's own view of the matter; it occurs not during the Kurtz phase, which was the climax of Conrad's entire tale, but in this final scene with Kurtz's Intended. During the Congo journey, Marlow becomes more aware of things but he now sees that illusions are necessary for survival. Of course, the last words Kurtz pronounced, contrary to what Marlow tells the Intended, were not her name but "The horror! The horror!"<sup>18</sup> Presently, "[t]he horror! The horror!" is echoing everywhere in Iraq, and it seems that illusions are necessary for survival of the invaders there as well.

Similar to the hero of ancient epics, Marlow explores the internal world, and, in doing so, "probes the depths of his own and his nation's conscience."<sup>19</sup> He has to clear his way through the bloodshed and cruelty in the wilderness of the Congo to achieve enlightenment. The same notion which controls and explains attitude and behavior is being implemented in the modern day Iraq invasion. Marlow is not a common sailor: He is a spy of the human soul. His encounter with the Dark Continent has a symbolic meaning. It is an encounter with the forces of darkness as embodied in the primitive people of Congo. This darkness is associated with "Marlow's earlier sense of a descent into nightmare, the infancy of the individual psyche with its buried strata."<sup>20</sup>

Later, Marlow experiences yet another facet of darkness. When he turns to the wilderness, he states: "I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night" (Conrad, 1996). Marlow makes use of imagery of hell to give a detailed account of the Congo: "I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain..." (Conrad, 1996). The blacks are in a painful and miserable situation. In Marlow's opinion, they are nothing "but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (Conrad, 1996). Is it not similar to the situation we witness daily in Abu-Ghareeb prison in reality in Iraq?

Marlow is horrified to see these people moving slowly towards their end. He feels miserable to know how the well-attired agents of the Belgian Company inflict inhuman cruelty upon the local people whom they employ on the time-contract basis. The simple innocent natives are termed as "criminals" and "enemies". The irony is that it is not only the black people but the whites as well who can be the victims of this inhuman savagery.

In the novel, the word "ivory" (like the word "oil" nowadays in Iraq), "rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse" (Conrad, 1996). That is how the Manager and his gang appear to Marlow's sensitive intelligence. He will arrive at self-knowledge only when he is forced to confront evil both in the person of the Manager (and his like) and Kurtz. Marlow does give the natives their due and is not as biased as he seems to be. The cannibal crew exemplifies the innate control that Marlow regards as the only effective safeguard of civilized behavior. In this, he experiences human mystery that surpasses black and white categorizations. From the time, his journey seems fated. He is destined, as Lillian Feder (Feder, 1955) points out, "by the needs of his own spirit."<sup>21</sup>

Actually, it is through his fated meeting with Kurtz that he goes down into the heart of darkness and encounters evil in its human embodiment. He realizes that each of us carries his potential hell within him. Marlow's responses and reactions are conditioned by his racial and national heritage to a large extent. It raises the question whether it is possible to call an individual wrong when he is a unit of a system that is so thoroughly corrupted and corrupting. At its most abstract level, Heart of Darkness can be perceived as a tale about the complexity of comprehending the world beyond the self, about the competence of an individual to judge another.

David M. Martin (Martin, 1974) points out that "without doubt, Marlow is reliving his journey to Kurtz during his visit to Kurtz's Intended."<sup>22</sup> Marlow's narrative, as Ian Watt describes it, is essentially:

A self-examining meditation. Heart of Darkness is not... the act of a raconteur; it is the act, rather, of a man who stumbled into the underworld many years ago, and lived to tell its secrets.... Then mysteriously, the right occasion presented itself: a time and a place that supply both the evocative atmosphere, and the stimulus of an audience with whom Marlow has enough identity of language and experience to encourage him to try to come to terms at last with

some of his most urgent and unappealed moral perplexities through the act of sharing them. (Watt, 1979)<sup>23</sup>. The researchers too consider Marlow's narrative as essentially a self – examine meditation. At the same hour they feel that its high time for Iraqis too to make a self-examination to step out of the deep pitch in which they stumbled years ago.

Throughout the novel, Marlow displays a dual personality. In his observation of the conflict between the manager of the ivory company and Kurtz, the ivory merchant, Marlow is disgusted at the company's brutality and Kurtz's degeneration, though he claims that any thinking man would be tempted into similar behavior. He believes the mind of man is capable of anything. According to George Cheatham (Cheatham,1986), "an important point in Heart of Darkness is not just what Marlow sees at Kurtz's death – evil – but also what he does not see during his interview with the Intended – God, or at least some real and transcendent good to counterbalance the evil."<sup>24</sup>

The orthodox view is that the plot of Heart of Darkness is "a journey, a death, and a return, with Marlow sharing Kurtz's climacteric vision and returning to civilization with the knowledge gained from the experience" (Watt,1979). <sup>25</sup> To George Cheatham (Cheatham, 1986), however, the orthodox view seems wrong in at least two respects:

First, Marlow makes more than one journey, and, second, the knowledge he gains in the jungle is not final.... On the first journey, in the Congo, Marlow, along with Kurtz, descends into an abyss and sees the evil at the heart of darkness. On the second journey, in the sepulchered city, Marlow again recognizes evil – this time – though, it is the evil at the heart of light.<sup>26</sup>

The researchers recognize the same evil in the name of inner and outer formation in Iraq, not in fiction, but in fact.

From the way Marlow tells his story, it is obvious that he is extremely critical of imperialism, but his reasons clearly have less to do with what imperialism does to colonized people than with what it does to Europeans. He suggests that the mission of "civilizing" and "enlightening" native people is misguided, not because he believes that they have a viable civilization and culture already, but because they are so savage that the project is overwhelming and hopeless. Marlow expresses horror when he witnesses the violent maltreatment of the natives, and he argues that a kinship exists between black Africans and Europeans, but in the same breath he states that this kinship is extremely distant. Nevertheless, it is not easy to evaluate whether Marlow's attitudes are conservative or progressive, racist or "enlightened."

Curiosity that leads to exploration can also lead, tragically, to a loss of self. Herein lies a socio-political message, a caution against trying to control something that is not originally a part of you, lest it controls you. Expressing oneself in a new environment can mean the loss of one's earlier self. In Cheatham's (Cheatham, 1986) opinion,

[f]aith, belief, love, moral ideas, civilization, even God – all of those things traditionally symbolized by light and upward movement – Marlow finds to be merely illusions, like the 'great and saving illusion' of the Intended's faith. Such illusions are, of course, beautiful. They do veil the darkness. But, like Kurtz, they are hollow; they are lies. And each lie Marlow strips away renders him more conscious of the horror at the heart of human existence – the terrible hollowness which somehow must be filled.<sup>27</sup>

### **3. Conclusion**

In Heart of Darkness there is a suggestion that the exploited will some day, sooner or later, rise in revolt against the exploitation of the foreign rule.

Long-suffering Iraqis and Congolese are waiting to start a new chapter of stability and peace that will permit the development of their nation's abundant resources. The war is driven by greed, not ideology. The exploitative nations justify their grab for a nation's natural resources by giving their own reasons, which are not convincing. For people who are sensitive towards human rights, Congo and Iraq present a new type of challenge. If an end to the war is not put into effect, these countries will have a terrifying heritage of violence and plunder. Peace will not be their cultural heritage. Still, there are ways the outside world can assist. Karen O' Toole (O'Toole, 2006) believes that "if only the Iraqis would allow themselves to be liberated, then the U.S. and British troops could get on with the urgent (and profitable) task of 'rebuilding' the country."<sup>28</sup> Further, she states, "[w]hilst the eyes of the world's press have been fixed on the latest imperial excursion into the Middle East, Africa remains the forgotten continent" (O'Toole,2006).<sup>29</sup> Catsam and Ruscino (Catsam and Ruscino,2006) contend "no-one's looking, because no one's inclined to look in such an unlikely place. But it turns out that there's much to learn about how to handle the Iraqi quagmire by looking to Africa – and, of all places, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo."<sup>30</sup> Further, they state:

Unlike the Congolese, who lived under a system that had already seen liberation go away, the people of Iraq have an opportunity to develop a society with liberal institutions, where the rule of law governs, and where with democracy will come responsibility for the political classes and masses alike .... The people of Iraq and the Congo both face a historic opportunity, and one that the rest of the world should welcome. People who have their own property have a vested interest in their economy. People who have political rights have a vested interest in their political system. Having such interests means people have the motivation to maintain the institutions that protect that property and the freedom to run

that economy. Success in Iraq and Congo will come when the new leaders of those countries understand that their service in government is not simply an opportunity to enrich and entrench themselves. Success will come when instead of simply expecting some sort of government assistance; the people develop their own power and their own rights protected by leaders who respect the rule of law. The Congolese have been waiting for nearly half a century; the Iraqis are just beginning. They need patience. So do we. (Catsam and Ruscino, 2006, 31)

War is expensive, both in terms of suffering and of dollars. There is no benefit to ordinary people in prolonging it. The problem is, the longer the war drags on, the deeper both parties entrench themselves, and the harder it will be to terminate the exchange. Even if the Iraq war (or let us assume any war) ends, the defense industry will arrange for substitute wars to take over the task of fleecing the tax-payer, like the many-headed Hydra of the mythology. In the name of pride, invaders refuse to acknowledge that war, in general, is an idiotic concept and they are happy to throw more corpses on the fire to procrastinate acknowledging those who died before, died in vain.

Can oppressed nations like Congo and Iraq hope to conclude this tiresome journey in the near future and set out afresh on a new journey, perhaps one into the Heart of Happiness? The answer to this question remains unknown at the present time. In spite of this, the people of these nations should demand solutions from their leaders and be optimistic, keeping in mind that it is always darkest before the dawn, and that the stars shine out the most brilliantly through dark clouds.

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