

Symbolism in Heart of Darkness

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Abstract: Symbolism is the use of an object, person, situation or a word symbolically to represent something else in literature. Simply, it is the symbolic use of objects and things. Recently, it is very rare to find a significant work in literature without using symbolism as a basic feature of that literary work. This due to poetry, drama, fiction, novels, etc. This study consists of three chapters. Chapter one is an abstract which deals with symbolism in literature. Chapter two presents Conrad's life and works. Finally, chapter three deals with symbolism in Heart of Darkness. However, in Conrad's novel "Heart of Darkness" symbolism was a basic and very important issue that cannot be ignored. The reason for this is Conrad's belief that a good literary work should be written symbolically. The entire novel was written symbolically. He makes use of every single detail in a symbolic way.

Keywords: Symbolism in Heart of Darkness, Conrad's life and works.

I. SYMBOLISM IN LITERATURE

Symbolism means representing thing by symbols. It admits an internal psychological world having precedence over the material and can be expressed through symbols or linguistic analogies(1).

Arp and Johnson define symbolism as "The symbolic use of objects and actions. A literary 'symbol' is something that means more than what suggests on the surface. It may be an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other element that has a literal meaning in the story but that suggests or represents other meaning as well"(2). Symbolism is also defined as the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. It can take different forms. Generally, it is an object representing another to give it an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant. Sometimes, however, an object, an event, or even a word spoken by someone may have a symbolic value. Similarly, symbols shift their meanings depending on the context they are used in "A chain", for instance, may stand for a "union" as well as "imprisonment". Thus, the symbolic meaning of an object or an action is understood by when, where and how it is used. It may also depend on who reads them(3). Most successful stories are characterized by compression. The writer's aim is to say as much as possible as briefly as possible. Such aim is achieved by three resources which are symbolism, allegory and fantasy(4). Symbolism initially developed as a French literary movement in the 1880s, gaining popular credence with the publication in 1886 of Jean Morris manifesto in Le Figaro. Reacting against the rationalism and materialism that had to dominate Western European culture, Morris proclaimed the validity of pure subjectivity and the expression of an idea over a realistic description of the natural world(5).

Towards the end of the 19th century, the conflicting beliefs in science and culture had brought about the loss of unity of purpose and direction in European society, rationality had had taken a way faith and the new ironic view of man and civilization (materialistic determinism) had often caused a neurotic paralysis of well writer became fascinated seemed abnormal(6). They criticized the materialism of the society. They tend to prefer their symbolical expressions of reality, their dreams, vision, and poetry to a direct confrontation with the material world. They sought many and various ways to develop their works and to contemplate the physical, psychological, and philosophical manifestations of their inner world(7). Symbolism falls into two major types: traditional (or primary) symbolism and logic-mathematical or secondary symbolism. Secondary symbolism is a form of writing or pronunciation of characters which presuppose before them the

usage of discourse. Traditional symbolism, on the other hand, refers to the productive source of the possibilities of all convention, and of all formative liaison of properly human societies. Origues divides traditional symbolism into three types: symbolism of image, symbolism of rule and the third type is found midway between these two types. Symbolism of image is the view of visual configurations such as emblems or fetishes. Symbolism of rule usually takes a social form, institution and the like(8). There are various reasons why writers choose to use symbolism in their writing. Symbolism is used sometimes to add more depth or values to what the writers want to say(9). Another function of symbolism is to hide the true meaning for a certain purpose that the writers want to hide(10). Symbolism is also used to say things that otherwise could not be said or would be highly criticized if they were said(11). Another recognizable function of symbolism is to continue where conventional accounts leave off, and supply those cultural and symbolic dimensions they tend to overlook(12). Everyday life symbolism is used and understood easily. A paper bill is a symbol of something else, the government's guarantee of its value. Symbols in literature work similarly. Authors and writers use symbols to refer to more than a simple direct and literal meaning. Well known examples of symbolism in literature include: Moby dick, the white wale of Herman Melville's novel, and the scarlet A Hester wears in Nathaniel Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter (1850). These examples show the use of symbolism. Hester's puritan community clearly intend the letter A that she wears as a symbol of her adultery. The letter A is not only a symbol of her adultery (sin), but also a symbol of "able", "angel" and some other meanings(13). Another example of symbolism in literature in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arm (1929). He uses a symbolic meaning for rain and the following lines from the novel suggest what this symbol represents:

"It's raining hard" (Frederic says) (Catherine replies) "yes""And the rain won't make any difference"

"No" "That's good: because I'm afraid of the rain" "why?... Tell me" " All right. I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it" "No" Throughout the novel, Hemingway's repeated association of rain with destruction of all kinds broadens its significance from just a metaphor for death to other and more general qualities such as war, fate, a lientation, forboding, doom and reality(14).

II. CONRAD'S LIFE AND WORKS

Conrad's Life: Joseph Teodor Conrad Koreniowski is polish-born English novelist and short-story writer, a dreamer, adventurer and gentleman. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) was born in Berdichev, Ukraine, on December 3rd, 1857. He was born polish but he would became renowned for his English short stories and novels. His father worked as a translator of English and French literature, so Joseph had a significant exposure to literature while he was a boy (1). By 1869 Conrad's both parents had died of tuberculosis, and he was sent to Switzerland to his uncle. On his uncle's death in 1894, he left his nephew a sizable sum of money. In 1870s, he joined the French merchant Marine as he made three voyages to the west Indies. Then, he continued his career at the seas in the British merchant navy for sixteen years. In 1886, he was given British citizenship and he changed officially his name to Joseph Conrad to avoid returning to Poland and serving in Russian military. Conrad spent the next part of his life sailing all over the world and this experience provided him with material on the locations of many of his novels. He visited many places like Australia, various islands in the Indian Ocean and the south Pacific, south America and sailed up the Congo River in Africa (2).

At the age of 36, Conrad finally left the sea behind him and settled down in England. Two years later he married an English woman, Jessie George, and it was with her that he had two sons. Even though he was settled down and had a family, Conrad still occasionally traveled, but for the most part he just wrote his novels. The first of which is Almayer's Folly in 1895. That novel would be followed by many others including The Heart of Darkness in 1902 and Nostromo in 1904. He continued to write until the year he died, publishing his last novel The Nature of Crime in 1924. He died on August 3rd, 1924 of a heart attack (3).

Conrad's Works: Conrad wrote many novels and stories and he tried his hand also as a playwriting. His first novel, Almayer's Folly (1895) was about a derelict Dutchman, who trades on a jungle river of Borneo (4). The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897) was a complex story a storm off the Cape of Good Hope and of an enigmatic black sailor. Lord Jim, narrated by Charlie Marlow, told about the fall of a young sailor and his redemption. Lord Jim was originally intended as a short story, but was then enlarged into a novel. Heart of the Darkness, written in 1899, was partly based on Conrad's four-month command of a Congo River. Nostromo (1904) was an imaginative novel which explored man's vulnerability and corruptibility. The Secret Agent (1907) took a bleak view of prophets of destruction and utopians, but Conrad once confessed that " there had been moments during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist ". Basically,

Conrad was not sympathetic with revolutionaries (5). Several of Conrad's stories have been filmed. The most famous adaptation, for instance, include Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) based on *Heart of Darkness* (6). "A Set of Six" will not count among Conrad's major works, but in mere use of English, this work shows an advance upon all his previous books. In some of his finest chapters, there is scarcely a page without a phrase that no English man would have written, and in nearly every one of his book slight positive errors in the use of English are fairly common. In this work, the influence of Conrad's deep acquaintance, with French is shown in the position of the adverb in :

" I saw again somebody in the porch" (7).

III. FEATURES OF CONRAD'S WORKS

Conrad was fascinated by situations that tested men's strength and was attracted by physical reality. His realities are, however, clothed in romantic charm and ' adventurous exaltation'. Fidelity in human relation preoccupies him under "Western Eye" and " Lord Jim" focusing on the moral values rather metrical ones (8). When Conrad's life ended on August 3, 1924, his individual energies had by then been effectively directed into passionate European; if his art, on the other hand, had failed in its search for comparable goal, then had been Conrad's sacrifice for the new Europe. Still, there had been a rescue (9). Conrad's first two novels, "Almayer's Folly" (1895) and "An Outcast of the Islands" (1896) reflect his state of mind and his values. In these early novels, Conrad tests and refines themes and techniques that he will use in his subsequent fiction. In a way that will become characteristic of Conrad's early works, he uses fictional material from his own adventures as his source material. So, the use of fictional material from his own is a feature of Conrad's works (10). One of the most significant features of Conrad's works is their often unrelenting emphasis on "conceptual question about a truth". In Conrad's works surface and depth inextricable. The discoveries he makes concerning objects of consciousness lead directly to questions concerning the certainty Western civilization's foundational assumptions and even concerning the nature of the universe and of human existence itself (11). Conrad is modern and therefore one of the essential characteristics of his thinking is the tendency towards paradox and ambiguity. Conrad's thinking and writing is informed by paradox and ambiguity which should not be interpreted as uncertainly or "ideological force-sitting". It should rather be seen as "an uncompromising commitment to the actual complexities of human experience (12).

IV. SYMBOLISM IN HEART OF DARKNESS

Joseph Conrad believed that all great art is essentially symbolic. He said: 'a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion'. *Heart of Darkness* is a work full of symbols. The journey itself is symbolic. Marlow's journey up to the Congo symbolically stands for a journey to hell and a journey to the inner most recesses of Marlow's mind (1). Conrad's most powerful use of symbols consists in his presentation of certain characters in a way that they go beyond themselves and become symbols. Kurtz, as a character, represents the dark side of mankind and what transforms you into if it cases you completely. His constant and prolonged exposures to the untamed regions of Congo cause him to lose grip with civilization and the moral associated with it. His complete decline is finalized through his last words, "the horror the horror!". So, it could be said that Kurtz is a symbol of the dark side of mankind (2). The other characters which are used symbolically through the novel are the two women both Kurtz's Intended and his African mistress. They function as blank states upon which the values and the wealth of their respective societies can be displayed. Marlow frequently claims that women are the keeper of native illusions. Kurtz's Intended becomes a symbol of the creatures of illusion as the native girl represents or symbolizes reality (3). In *Heart of Darkness*, the 'darkness' symbolizes and represents various parts of reality, human nature, and the corruption of decency when faced with insurmountable obstacles. Marlow uses 'darkness' regularly both in a literal sense "the starred darkness" and in a symbolic sense to show how the Congo affects people morally and ethically. He uses it most effectively in regard to Kurtz, who, in Marlow's view has had his moral soul completely destroyed by some event, or perhaps a succession of events in the jungle (4). Kurtz's painting is perhaps the most extensive symbol in *Heart of darkness*. Kurtz's painting is a symbol of the whole prevented enterprise (5). His painting that Marlow notices succinctly sums up the darkness of blindness in the visual form. In the painting, the woman who is bearing the torch is blind fold (6). The torch in Kurtz's painting is also used symbolically. The torch is clearly a symbol of European enlightenment, civilization, representing all that good, proper and necessary. As a torch casts light into darkness, the European have come to Africa to bring enlightenment, civilization, savagery and ignorance. This torch is not only a symbol of European enlightenment but also a symbol of justification behind imperial enterprise (7). The Congo river is also a very important symbol in *Heart of*

Darkness. This river resembles a snake, and the snake symbolizes the idea of temptation and evil. The river leads Marlow and the other Europeans into the heart of the continent where the temptation proved to be too much for many of them (8). The ivory in Heart of Darkness symbolizes greed and destructive nature of man. The managers and agents of the company are so obsessed with obtaining ivory that they forget about their morals. So, the ivory is a clear symbol of greed in this novel (9). Beside these symbols, there are other symbols like fog and smoke. Fog and smoke are used as symbols of confusion and mystery in the novel. The continuous fog that follows Marlow's ship on his journey get thicker as he progresses toward the inner station where Kurtz is. This fog represents lack of the company hold. As the ship gets closer into the heart of the indigenous country, moral, ethics and humanity dissolves into this fog and the person is left consumed by the greedy nature to their task. The nature of war and authority clouded their minds of their goal and brought about this darkness and haze (10). The other symbol is Eldorado Exploring Expedition, run by the manager's uncle. This group is a symbol of the whites, search for something that cannot be attained. This fictional expedition is based on an actual one: The Katango Expedition. The fact that the manager's uncle leads the expedition suggests that it is another example of white trades scrambling for riches in Congo. Marlow dismisses them as "buccaneers" who do not even make pretense of coming to Africa for anything other than treasure (11). The "whited sepulchre" is another symbol used in Heart of Darkness. A sepulcher implies death and confinement and indeed Europe is the origin of the colonial enterprise that bring death to white men and to their colonial subjects. It is also governed by a set of reified social principles that both enable the cruelty, dehumanization, and evil and prohibit change. The phrase "White sepulchre" comes from biblical book of Mathew. In the passage Mathew describes "whited sepulchre" as something beautiful on the outside but containing horrors within (the bodies of the dead), thus the image is appropriate for Brussels, and given the hypocritical Belgian rhetoric about imperialism's civilizing mission (12). The rivets in Heart of Darkness symbolizes lack of progress on the company's part. Marlow has a difficult time acquiring them from the company in order to repair his steamer and advance in his journey to find Kurtz. The company seems lack to provide them despite the fact that Marlow requires them in order to pursue the company's interest. The rivets, along with other machinery, symbolize deterioration and lack of efficiency (13). The recurring, symbols in Conrad's work show Jung's influence. Many things represent not only their actual meaning but a symbolic one as well. The jungle, Marlow's journey and even Kurtz himself suggest other ideas and meanings beside their literal ones (14).

V. CONCLUSIONS

This research arrives at the following conclusions:

- 1- A good literary work is essentially symbolic. Heart of Darkness is a literary work full of symbols.
- 2- Everything in Heart of Darkness is used symbolically. Marlow's journey itself is symbolic. This journey to the Congo river stands symbolically for a journey to hell and a journey to the inner most recesses of Marlow's mind.
- 3- The most powerful use of symbols in Heart of Darkness consists in the presentation of certain characters in a way that they go beyond themselves and become symbols like Kurtz's Intended and his African mistress.
- 4- The 'Darkness' in the title of the novel symbolizes various parts of reality, human nature and the corruption of decency when faced with insurmountable obstacles.
- 5- There are many other objects that are used symbolically in this novel like Kurtz's painting, the torch in Kurtz's painting, the Congo River, the ivory, the fog, Eldorado Exploring Expedition, the whited sepulcher and the rivets.

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