



AMBIVALENCE AND HYBRIDITY IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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Abstract

The paper intends to explore and examine the ambivalence demonstrated in colonial discourse used in *Heart of Darkness* through discourse analysis with the help of critical tools provided by Homi Bhabha. The dilemma we come across in the colonial enterprise is a philosophical dilemma, inbuilt, inextricably linked to colonial discourse. In order to examine this point, the novella must be read "as an act of narration even more than as a narrative or a story". The ambivalence in the narration suggests how Marlow is engaged in a struggle within himself to come to an understanding of colonial representations of 'otherness'. It enables the work to reflect as well as to question contrasting cultural preoccupations. The liminality of Marlow Harlequin and Kurtz and their inner struggles give rise to a third space, interstitial, in-between space which open up possibilities of cultural dialogue. Thus, a certain postcolonial reading of the novella hints at an awareness of hybridization as a result of colonialism. Conrad's strength as a writer especially in this work lies in the ambivalence portrayed in its narration, making way to third space of cultural dialogue. However, it would be fair to say that the work, with all its complexities, is the product of the time and space in which it is written.

Keywords: colonial ambivalence, liminality, third space, hybridity,

Introduction

Researchers have explored various perspectives in the novella *Heart of Darkness* and come up with several different interpretations. Some have seen it as a critique of imperialism while others have interpreted it as a work examining the theme of power dynamics and morality. "It is discussed whether its main intention is to portray an image of Africa (as envisioned in Europe), the decay of European imperialism or - on a more individual level - the development and inner conflict of a subject, namely Marlow, the latter leading to the novella even being viewed as a *Bildungsroman*"

(Gert). One cannot reject the accusations of Chinua Achebe that the text of the novel sounds racist. Being a European, Conrad seems to have subscribed to colonial hegemonic ideology to an extent. At the same time, one cannot think either that the critique of imperialism, colonial brutality and hypocrisy in the novella is just a pretension. One thing found by all the scholars as a common characteristic in the novella is ambivalence in the narration. The paper intends to explore and examine the colonial ambivalence demonstrated in its discourse and elements of cultural hybridity through discourse analysis with the help of critical tools provided by Homi Bhabha. The paper intends to explore the work

with a special focus on the analysis of narrative discourse rather than the story. Therefore, it would be fair to say that the work, with all its complexities, is the product of the time and space in which it is written.

Ambivalence in the colonial discourse of the novella

The dilemma we come across in the colonial enterprise is a philosophical dilemma, inbuilt, inextricably linked to colonial discourse. This is what the paper is interested in probing. Many critics have seen the characters and the background of the novelist as a basis to determine the work's attitude towards imperialism. Nonetheless, one can see the image of imperialism depicted in the novella as ambivalent through the narrative form and the symbolism it contains. The ambiguity in acts and words of the main narrator Marlow also help us understand how he stands as an 'unreliable narrator. This ambivalence of imperialism and the uncertainty of its aftermath are reflected in the narrative style of the work. The novella must be read "as act of narration even more than as narrative or a story" (Brooks in Gert's). These words aptly identify the significance of the structure in the novella.

Marlow neither wants to be identified completely with imperialism/colonialism nor exactly does he sound fully anti-colonial in his ideas and thoughts. Now, he finds Africans savage and barbaric and he finds the whole company system exploitative and horrible very next moment. Many a times in the work Marlow tempers certain overtly racist observations and assertions with qualifying words like "but". This technique used by the author directs the reader's attention to the fact that Marlow is conflicted. It suggests that Marlow is engaged in a struggle within himself to come to an understanding of colonial representations of 'otherness'. Marlow's interruption in anonymous narrator's narrative is not simply an interruption but also looks like a semantic break. The act of interrupting this imperialistic view of the unnamed narrator on the level of discourse as well as story seems to debunk the justification of imperialism.

"The intertwining of narratives, the fractured image Marlow's account therefore gains and the

resulting absence of absolute coherence and conclusion are in stark contrast to the forceful, well-structured and organized acts of imperialism and are therefore all the more salient. It can be interpreted as a hint for the system dissolving itself from the inside and hence poses the question of what will follow after colonialism" (Gert). The frequent interruptions by use of dashes, fractured and elliptic syntax, many pauses- this stylistics suggests the dilemma, hesitation, self-restraint of Marlow. This uncertainty in his articulation leads the reader to doubt the veracity of even the content he presents. The ineffability of Marlow's all experiences in his journey to Congo can be sensed in the way he struggles to put it across. "The open frames of the narratives, the missing clear-cut boundaries between the frame and the embedded narrative and not least Marlow's account itself - coined by interruptions and incoherencies - bestow a somewhat ambiguous light upon the narrated imperialistic acts". (Gert).

It shows that the colonial discourse was ambivalent in itself. This was not just because of Joseph Conrad's overt inclination towards anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism but because of the internal contradictions of the colonial discourse /scheme itself. The very idea of colonialism as civilizing mission cannot hold reasonable completely.

"Conrad's multiple perspectives and viewpoints highlight Bhabha's idea of ambivalence, which is at the heart of the novella. In trying to explore the contradictions of colonial identity, Conrad puts the idea of focalisation to effective use, thereby making it a multi-layered text in which the ambivalence of colonial discourse is thrown into sharp relief by the events that are played out" (Kalua). Narrator's vacillation or the introduction of different narrative voices in novella contributes in rendering Marlow's version of the story unreliable. One should also notice that Marlow - focaliser of the identity issues - is himself mentally conflicted when other focalisers in the novella present their points of views. Kurtz, who is the epitome of the ironies and contradictions of European colonialism, happens to be one of such focalisers in the novella. "The apparent coherence of most narrative or discourse

is often undercut by an underlying contradiction which manifests itself through the presence of other, competing narrative voices. Even though narrative foregrounds someone (say, the narrator or focaliser) who points the way of representation, the focaliser is not necessarily the narrator, alone. Rather, the narrator, who is the narrator/focaliser, may also depend on other character-focalisers, or external narrators, for the interpretation of events. Thus, the entire process of narration becomes a continual questioning of the presentation of events. In the case of Heart of Darkness, Ba would examine how its narrativity keeps shifting from the events in the story to the wider historical context, the latter of which is the backdrop of the story" (Fetson Kalua). The identity of both the colonizer and the colonized undergoes transition as a result of their coming together despite colonizer's schemes of changing the colonized. It gives rise to a third space, interstitial, in-between space which opens up possibilities of cultural dialogue.

Cultural Hybridity in the novella

Though not in macro level, the novella hints at the cultural hybridity cropping up in its primary stage. Keenly observed Harlequin, Marlow and Kurtz demonstrate cultural hybridity in varying degree.

Marlow's colleague looks upon harlequin's mere existence as inexplicable and confusing whereas for Marlow he is "a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake" (Conrad 90), a man with a lot of efficiency. The manager derides Harlequin as "be-patched youth", "that scoundrel", a "wanderer trader", "a pestilential fellow" (Conrad 90-1). The reader is informed that Manager and others deride him for his mixed ancestry. He is ridiculed as an English-half-caste", then as "the half-caste" by manager and his nephew, which shows their racist attitudes. These references in addition to the emblematic image of his motley clothes suggests enough to establish the young man's hybrid condition.

The keen exploration of Marlow's search in the novella 'reveals something, which, unaware of the fact, he has always had, inseparable from himself: the hybridity revealed in his pose and dress. They seem to cry out that collective identities are all

hybrid, always relational and inventive, to be continuously re-imagined and re-invented as inter-cultures. This realization may be at the centre actually reached by Marlow, the only approachable heart in an otherwise impenetrable darkness. In short, this is what Marlow finds when he meets his double, the man in motley' (De Oliveira).

One could see autobiographical elements of Conrad in Harlequin as even Conrad - once the young Korzeniowski- was to shed his official nationality of Poland to become a British citizen as Conrad. The fact that the seeker (Marlow) and the sought (Kurtz) get connected only with the help of Harlequin hints at the significance the character wields in the novella. He is the one who helps both Kurtz and Marlow in their missions, shares the same kind of fascination towards Kurtz as Marlow does. He warns Marlow to keep away the Manager and asks Marlow to ensure that Kurtz 's reputation is not spoiled in Europe. Marlow's journey from beginning till the end is a motif to hint at the journey of his understanding the colonial representations of the 'others' and colonial discourse of civilization. Marlow, Harlequin and Kurtz- all the three characters embody certain elements of cultural hybridity to a certain extent though they are not same in many aspects. Hence, all the three are compatible with one another in their views on colonial agenda. They seem to have attained, in a way, fluid identities of their own in varying degrees. 'This multiple, unsettling representation evades stereotyped images of the conqueror as the carrier of knowledge as well as that of any culture as the holder of purity and truth. Sameness appears inseparable from otherness, announcing "a world where syncretism and parodic invention are becoming the rule rather than the exception (...) a multinational world of institutional transience' (De Oliveira). Thus, a certain postcolonial reading of Heart of Darkness hints at an awareness of hybridization as a result of colonialism

Conclusion

Conrad's strength as a writer especially in this work lies in the ambivalence portrayed in its narration. It enables the work to reflect as well as to question contrasting cultural preoccupations. LiXing

thinks that "like anyone else, Conrad was influenced by the climate of ideas of his day; yet, he responded with a greater articulacy of intelligence and imagination to those ideas than most people would have done. Positioned at the intersection of the late Victorian and the early Modernist cultural phases, Conrad is both romantic and anti-romantic, conservative and subversive. His writing sounds as a combination of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century preoccupation." These words can aptly suggest Conrad's status as a writer. Conrad, a man with a kind of cosmopolitan outlook, finds expression in these in-between spaces. It makes hints at how the reader needs to negotiate the interpretations of Heart of Darkness.

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