
* Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai is a thought leader in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management with a strong interest in appreciating academic and applied research with organizational strategies in the domain of knowledge and technology creation and how it can potentially unite to create radical levels of insight and innovation in enterprises. The author can be reached at max.bhanabhai@gmail.com

© 2013 Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai. All Rights Reserved.

Question 3

How effectively does Conrad use point of view to reveal the ways in which evil and corruption can be portrayed.?

Support your views with close reference to the novel.

In Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad uses point of view very effectively in order to reveal the ways in which evil and corruption can be portrayed. He does this by presenting the views of Charlie Marlow, a foil against the evil that lurks within all individuals. Conrad's utilization of language devices such as narrative technique, symbolism, juxtaposition, contrast and irony all help to reflect the journey of Marlow, that allows him to resist the voracious appetite of the evil. As such the text becomes an astute comment on human nature and the polarities of good and evil that humans are capable of achieving.

Heart of Darkness provides a bridge between Victorian values and the ideals of modernism. It is set in the Belgian Congo in the late 19th century during a time when imperialistic powers actively sought "uncivilized" nations to exploit commercially and bring into their empires for seemingly benevolent motifs. Generally, Victorian notions of imperialism were that it was acceptable to exploit the "barbarous" nations, and the colonized peoples' should have been grateful because they were being "gifted" with better values, attitudes, laws and ways of life. Conrad continually challenges this paradigm by showing the irony of the colonialists' inefficiency, cruelty, greed and essential savagery. Kurtz comes to symbolize the very worst of these things as he is given "voracious" aspects. The hypocrisy of it all is symbolized by the character of the Manager who is intellectually inept, exceedingly racist, awfully conceited regarding his ostentatious nature, below mediocre in performance, to the point of being very inefficient. He epitomizes all the worst attributes a person can possess in the "civilized" world, but he in fact is a person of consequence in the colony. The fact that a "civilized" society can place such a man above other human beings shows the spiritual hollowness of that society and how human nature is vulnerable to corruption, malevolence and bleakness. By using Kurtz

* Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai is a thought leader in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management with a strong interest in appreciating academic and applied research with organizational strategies in the domain of knowledge and technology creation and how it can potentially unite to create radical levels of insight and innovation in enterprises. The author can be reached at max.bhanabhai@gmail.com

© 2013 Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai. All Rights Reserved.

as the binary opposition to Marlow, who is able to reject the temptation to unleash his darker heart, Conrad uses character contrast to ensure that the point of view offered by Marlow successfully reveals the ways in which evil and corruption can be portrayed.

Charlie Marlow, recounts his physical and psychological journey into the “dark heart of Africa”, which he has “a hankering after”. The novel opens with a description of the Thames Estuary at the end of the day. Marlow says “and this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth”. This sort of imagery promotes the idea that the inherent darkness of human nature originated from the spiritual hollowness of the seemingly “civilized” world. When the first narrator thinks of the heroic deeds of British conquerors, Marlow sees the Roman invaders, the civilized men of “very old times” facing a dark and hostile continent. But he also sees them as violent men stealing what they could from the invaded country. This already shows that the so-called bringers of light, who faced the darkness of the wilderness, were themselves agents of darkness. Although Marlow asserts that the British are different from the Romans, his realization about colonialism is universal and applies to all colonizers. It stresses the ambivalent nature of colonialism as being “...something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...” showing that it is something that in its efforts to control other nations and peoples, subjugates any original good intentions, and in itself becomes what is seen as worthwhile. The financial rewards and the power it brings to the colonizers are what is worshipped, and Marlow, by describing it as something to which “sacrifice” may be offered makes it abundantly clear that its very nature is sacrilegious and undermining to all notions of goodness. The contrast between the “light of civilization” and “dark places” in the setting conveys a duality also to be found in men and their enterprises and Conrad’s presentation of Marlow’s point of view is therefore significant as he is able to reveal the contradiction inherent in colonialism, the discrepancy between the European’s words, particularly their public utterances and their actions, revealing evil and corruption as he does so.

* Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai is a thought leader in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management with a strong interest in appreciating academic and applied research with organizational strategies in the domain of knowledge and technology creation and how it can potentially unite to create radical levels of insight and innovation in enterprises. The author can be reached at max.bhanabhai@gmail.com

Already on his way out to Africa, Marlow notices that the only settlements seen from the coast are trading places with names out of some “sordid farce” and he thinks there is “a touch of insanity” about the man-of-war firing into the continent. Even at this early stage, the colonial expedition strikes him as a “merry dance of death and trade”. The supremacy that Europeans felt over non-whites led to the exploitation of the Africans and their land for resources. The natives are treated as slaves and are forced to work until “*they are exhausted*”, which becomes terribly apparent in the “*grove of death*” with its desolate atmosphere and the horror that touches the heart of Marlow and reveals the darkness of the human heart that is unconstrained by social mores. This supremacy is seen through the juxtaposition of the Company’s chief accountant against the “*dusty niggers*” and the “*muddle*” and inefficiency of the Central Station. “*Despite the great demoralization of the land [the accountant] kept up his appearance*”, while his colleagues engaged in pointless blasting. Paradoxically, this view of the accountant helps to reveal the hypocrisy so ensconced in Victorian values and attitudes that it is a paradigm in its own right. The way in which the so-called civilized Christians use demeaning language when referring to their fellow humans beings reinforces the hypocrisy of the time. The Africans are constantly referred to in animalistic terms such as “*savages*” and “*brutes*”. Altogether, Marlow’s point of view is able to reveal the evil inherent in human nature, and the fact that supposed goodness is behind colonization becomes a mockery of the word “goodness”.

The various examples of humans breaking down in the unstable backdrop of Africa indicates that European civility is simply a thin veneer covering the innate evil lurking in all men and that the colonization of Africa is responsible for mental disintegration as well as for physical illness. The absence of any real sense of responsibility in the manager is reflected in the behavior of his agents, whom Marlow ironically calls “faithless” and “bewitched” pilgrims. Indeed, their behavior is a parody of the purposefulness that ought to inspire what the men saw as their “mission” to civilize Africa. They are entirely motivated by self interest and have avarice for ivory. With long staves in their hands, they “stroll aimlessly about in the

* Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai is a thought leader in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management with a strong interest in appreciating academic and applied research with organizational strategies in the domain of knowledge and technology creation and how it can potentially unite to create radical levels of insight and innovation in enterprises. The author can be reached at max.bhanabhai@gmail.com

sunshine” and they revere ivory like an idol: “praying to it”. They serve, in fact, the “flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly” which presides over so many imperial enterprises. They are amoral beings who neither can be fulfilled nor destroyed since they are empty, dehumanized characters to begin with. Marlow, on the contrary, has sufficient consciousness to be aware of the danger he faces and this is reflected in the imagery he uses to show his realization that he is often tempted to give in to the “wilderness outside and within him”. His inappropriate response to the rivets incidence is enough to make him aware of how thin the veneer of civilization is within him. Ultimately, the goodness within Marlow, which is reinforced by various social controls, triumphs, and it is ironic that his inner journey has made him a fit person to be in Africa, just when he determines he must leave it. **Marlowe’s point of view is important because he symbolizes a redeeming element of human nature. He shows that some individuals might resist the corrupting influences of the evil within.**

It is in Kurtz, Marlow’s binary opposite, that the confrontation with evil results in complete loss of control, and indeed, madness is illustrated. Before Africa, Kurtz is seen as a noble man with authentic rationales relating to his mission to carry the influences of civilization to Africa. He believes that each ivory station would “stand like a beacon of light” and provide the natives with a better way of life. However, once out of the checks and regulations of society, Kurtz succumbs to the darkness within, losing all “restraint” and going mad. Instead of sticking to his benevolent motives, which are outlined in the postscript to his report, Kurtz becomes a victim of the evil that is part of human nature, and oppresses and murders the very people he had intended to aid. To Kurtz, ivory symbolizes more than the tusk of an elephant. It symbolizes freedom and power, and is the crucial factor that accommodates his sense of gratification. Conrad reflects this with vivid diabolic imagery, showing how the ivory had “taken him...loved him...consumed his soul to some devilish initiation”, which resulted in Kurtz taking “seats amongst the high devils of the land”. By taking advantage of the primal situation, he manipulates the minds of the natives through “thunder and lightning”. They revere this charismatic

* Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai is a thought leader in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management with a strong interest in appreciating academic and applied research with organizational strategies in the domain of knowledge and technology creation and how it can potentially unite to create radical levels of insight and innovation in enterprises. The author can be reached at max.bhanabhai@gmail.com

© 2013 Mohit (Max) Bhanabhai. All Rights Reserved.

but dangerous man as some sort of a “primitive god”, showing how the colonists, like colonization itself, becomes,” something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...”

It is Marlow’s recognition of the good and evil inherent in humans, and the way that goodness can be swamped by the evil that makes Conrad’s use of his point of view to reveal the ways in which evil and corruption can be portrayed so effective. The nature of other characters and a variety of techniques, aid Conrad’s use of point of view.