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MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC
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FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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EXISTENTIAL HUMANISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S
HEART OF DARKNESS

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
fulfilment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree**

By:

Miss. Ibtissem HERIZI

and

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2017

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DEDICATION

*To my first love, who gave me the greatest gift ever, he believed in me, my
hero and father « Mohamed »*

Rania Abir

DEDICATION

*To the dearest persons in my life, whose support never ends, my beloved
parents « HERIZI Mohamed» and « HERIZI Ghania».*

Ibtissem

ABBREVIATIONS

HD: Heart of Darkness

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the different existential tendencies in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. What is noticeable is the melancholic hypnotic tone and mood the novella's style and themes create. Conrad's depiction of characters, settings, women, and themes reflect tendencies expressed in Jean Paul Sartre's ideology of Existential Humanism. Therefore, the present research aims at scrutinizing Conrad's existential views which are manifest in the novella. It uses the Existentialist approach to literary criticism in order to unveil the characters' freedom, responsibility, and absurdity in a meaningless world. Thus, chapter one presents a theoretical background on the Existentialist philosophy and its main figures. The second chapter, moreover, delves into Existential tendencies in *Heart of Darkness*. To conclude, the existential philosophy has a deep influence on *Heart of Darkness*, since the novella contains multiple existential themes, which assert that *Heart of Darkness* is a mirror for the existential philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

Critics have shown that there are shared similarities between Conrad and the two French philosophers, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Both philosophers focus on isolation of individuals in a meaningless world. This is an existential trait in Joseph Conrad's world view manifest in his fiction. According to Adam Gillon, Sartre has been largely responsible for the dramatization of existentialism in literature and his work reveals some remarkable similarities with Conrad's fiction as well as significant differences.¹ Both Conrad and Sartre were aware of the absurdity of the universe and the alienation of the individuals.

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the pioneer of French Existentialism, is one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century philosophy. He is a humanist whose major ideas stress man's freedom to decide and to create his own values and meaning of the world. Moreover, he deals with the issue of human existence in the world. Sartre obviated the experimental philosophers such as Locke and others since knowledge for them is limited to the five senses. But he resorted to Descartes, one of the greatest French philosophers, in order to derive some shared ideas. Therefore, Descartes' philosophy has an apparent influence on Sartre and French existentialism. Descartes stated in his famous cogito "*I think, therefore I am.*"² This is the starting point of philosophy since it begins with the absolute assertiveness on self-awareness as a being, existing and thinking.

¹Adam Gillon, *Conrad and Sartre*. Halifax, N.S.: n.p., 1960.

²'*I think therefore I am*', or in Latin, the cogito—'Cogito ergo sum'.

Sartre found in the preceding philosophies what he needs to build his new existentialism. Consequently, many literary works, vary between novels, short stories and political essays, were published to reinforce Sartre's new vision towards life.

Furthermore, he defends existentialism in his writing such as *Nausea*,³ published in 1938, which is a novel that reflects his deep philosophical thoughts and beliefs. In *Nausea*, the main character Roquentin experiences emptiness and meaningless of life which is a reference to *ennui* or tedium. Roquentin feels that the human life is absurd, without specific objective to achieve; and the world is hostile and silent. There was a kind of despair and pessimism that unsettle the major character. This latter realizes that even the world is meaningless; humans should create their own meaning. Consequently, the situation of nausea starts to vanish after Roquentin's awakening. Sartre, together with Simone de Beauvoir⁴ detest the bourgeois world, they decided to destroy it through literature and writings, not through politics. Sartre thought of creating a new tendency in philosophy, that guides the individuals in this world which is full of disorder. This displays Sartre's dissatisfaction with reality and with the world's absurdity. Moreover, isolation is one of the major concepts of existentialism. Not far from Sartre, Conrad is also aware of this absurdity, he stated his belief to Cunningham Graham that:

there is no morality, no knowledge, and no hope;
there is only the consciousness of ourselves which
drives us about the world. That is always but in vain
and floating appearance.⁵

³Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*(Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1959), p. 165.

⁴French writer, intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist and social theorist

⁵ G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 19:27), I, p. 226.

Graham explains that the social restrictions and the morality have nothing to do with exploring the world. Only the essence of the individuals may guide them towards the world's understanding, thus all the exterior characteristics are fake.

The Sartarian world view is optimistic because it enables the individuals to create their own purpose and meaning in the world, as well as the freedom to create their own choice and free will. This serves as a reference to his existential humanism, "*there is no other universe, except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity.*"⁶ His famous essay "*Existentialism is a Humanism,*" in French "*L'existentialisme est un humanisme,*"⁷ defends his modern existentialism. From its inception, critics started to criticize existentialist beliefs for their pessimism, however, Sartre stated at the opening of his essay,

My purpose here is to offer a defense of existentialism against several reproaches that have been laid against it. First, it has been reproached as an invitation to people to dwell in quietism of despair.⁸

According to Sartre, existentialism is an optimistic philosophy that aims to heal the society, restore the dignity of the individuals and to concern all humanity. In this essay,⁹ "*existence precedes essence*" became one of Sartre's major existentialist maxims. In his book, "*Existentialism is a Humanism*", Sartre asserts the idea that existence precedes essence. Thus, man exists then defines himself and creates his own meaning and intended purpose of his life.

Heart of Darkness is considered to be the preface of modernism. Existentialism emerged in the twentieth century after WWII but Conrad's novella was published in

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *l'existentialisme est un humanisme* (paris : les Editions Nagel, 1948)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.01

⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin (New York : Citadel Press, 1968), p.37

1902. That reveals that it anticipates many of the twentieth century ideologies and philosophies. This study will expose the topic of existentialism rather than mere imperialism or racism, by delving into the inner life of the characters and by discovering their existential inclinations.

Throughout this study several questions are raised about on Conrad's existential beliefs within his choice and depiction of characters and settings. Hence, this dissertation will attempt to answer following question: What is existentialism and what are its main figures and tenets? How does existentialism manifest in Conrad's depiction of characters and settings in *Heart of Darkness*?

In order to answer these questions, this work will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will expose the theoretical foundations of this research including the existential theory, an overview of existentialism, its tenets and its figures as well as its impact on literature. Moreover, it examines some major existential themes through the novel and compares them with other existential works. The second chapter will approach the novella using Sartre's existential theory of Existential Humanism to display the existential thoughts in the major characters and to show that their deeds and inner struggles can be explained from an existential perspective.

To sum up, Joseph Conrad has some shared similarities with the French existential pioneer Jean Paul Sartre. Conrad's novella "*Heart of Darkness*" embodies the Sartrean existentialism within its plot, themes, as well as its characters. These latter display some existential tendencies through their actions and their inner struggle in their journey to find a meaning for their existence. Moreover; Sartre's philosophy is strongly present in Conrad's fiction "*Heart of Darkness*", through his existential

theory of Existential Humanism, as a new process that enable the human beings to realize themselves as existing.

CHAPTER ONE: EXISTENTIALISM: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Existentialism is the philosophy of the twentieth century that is concerned with remarkable human issues. It exhibits an ejection of the previous abstract theories that aimed at glossing over the messiness and the absurdity of the real scene in their lives. It denies giving subjective facts of individuals with regard to the fulfilment of human existence in the world, as well as the centrality of the human decision by making rational decision even though the world is an irrational place to live in. Moreover, Existentialism focuses on life choices and free will since existentialists believe that each man is entirely free but responsible.

Existentialism is a new philosophical and literary trend that posits the human affairs, predominately individual existence. This latter displays emphasis on the ways persons find and create their own meaning and their intended purpose in life. Thus, it stresses the idea that existence is prior to essence. Moreover, existentialism leads individuals to a journey of self-awareness through personal experience and total freedom of choice with the commitment of the full responsibility. Sartre writes,

Existentialism is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and human subjectivity.¹⁰

Despite the fact there are books about existentialism dating back to the Greek era that show that it had forerunners in the previous centuries, for instance the appearance of the Socratic beliefs in the Socratic dictum “know thyself” which denotes to its early occurrence. Existentialism, in the broadest sense, is the movement that emerged in the twentieth century. Its origin can be traced to the late nineteenth century; its roots are

¹⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin (New York : Citadel Press, 1968), p.32

attributed to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard who is considered to be the father of existentialism, and whose ideas and beliefs were developed by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and his compatriot Karl Jaspers. However, Existentialism peaked in the mid-twentieth century with the French philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. They adopted a new dogmatism towards life due to diversified circumstances by embracing existence.

Existentialism appeared as a result of the ennui which dominated Europe after the First World War. A wave of anxiety and despair expanded coinciding with the outset of the Great Depression (1929) and the Second World War (1945).

The early historical events in Europe, starting from the dominance of the church led people to call for intellectual and social emancipation. This paved the way for existential thoughts to take shape as a new ideology chiefly during the Second World War as an upshot of what people had seen for centuries.

Existential thoughts appeared in Germany after WWI and spread into France and Italy then into the other European countries and this was due to traumatic experiences during WWII. Europeans had thought that WWI is the last war whereby all the wars would end, but instead they had been through the most virulent and bloody war witnessed in history, and this happened shortly after the Nazis sparked a second war. As a result, the European view towards life had changed. For them, the world became hostile and life was characterized by nothingness, emptiness, meaninglessness and absurdity. Consequently, that new view of life generated suspicions about several ideas, and doubts incited people about faith and authenticity of the divine existence. Therefore, they considered religions as obstacles which hinder the individual from achieving total freedom. Consequently, the need for rational existential beliefs for life was a necessity to demolish the absurdity of WWII.

I.1. Development of Existentialist Philosophy

As aforementioned, existentialism appeared in the nineteenth century with the Kierkegaard who is considered to be the official founder of this new tendency. From its appearance till now, existentialism is divided into two main types: the religious and the atheist. The former is Christian or the so-called the religious camp to which Kierkegaard and other contributors such as Karl Jaspers, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber belonged. Whereas, the latter is the atheist one, in which the humanist aspect was developed during the twentieth century. The atheist camp includes several philosophers as well as some writers especially the French ones such as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir.

The German atheist Friedrich William Nietzsche (1844-1900), who defined himself as an anti-Christ, is one of the remarkable figures of his era. His philosophical thoughts arose during the nineteenth century with his works entitled *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), *The Antichrist* (1888), and *The Will to Power* (1901). These latter were an introduction of his existentialist beliefs. Nietzsche proclaimed that ¹¹“*God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him*” which is a sign of his atheism. Moreover, he went further than that when he avowed that man should be a hero and should have that strong character to accept the idea that God does not exist as well as religions. According to him this man is the superman. This superman should have the will to power which he describes as the definitive reality that includes the world.¹² This world is the place where man is invited to display his full acceptance of life with its ups and downs. Man should live

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882, 1887) para. 125, Ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974),p.181.

¹² Bruce Detwiller makes the case that "superman" is a more fitting term than "overman" or *Übermensch*, as they carry much negative historic baggage, relating Nietzsche's philosophy to the German National-Socialist Party

the happiness as well as the pain when required. Furthermore, that will to power is one of the distinctive characteristics of a man whose heroism does not allow distress to be an obstacle in his life and to pave the way for pessimism.¹³

One of the most significant and original philosophers of the 20th century is Martin Heidegger, who is also a metaphysician. His main interest was the Being or the ontology, thus his famous work is *Being and Time* (1927). In this book, Heidegger metaphysically questions being through different questions that has no answers as what is the meaning of being?¹⁴ He answers not at all, by this way he calls people and their perplexity to forget about the clear questions of being and think deeply about the being and its relation to time, recovering the classical question of *Hamlet*, “*to be or not to be.*”¹⁵ This set of ideas about being has a clear existential dimension, since the question of being is the question of the individuals and their existence. Heidegger considers death the most important event in human life because it shapes man’s long path from birth to death, and this latter explains the relationship between being and time. Thus, to be means to live a period of time in life then to face death as a final step in the process of life.

Albert Camus is a French Existentialist philosopher and writer. He is regarded as one of the major figures of existentialism. Camus’ interest is man’s relation with his soul and with others and also his place within the world. Camus presents his ideas through two main concepts: absurdity and revolt. Life for him is meaningless because death is the last station for each individual; however, people must confront this reality and revolt against it to reach happiness. In his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942),

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882, 1887) para. 125 ,Ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p.181.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson(Great Britain : Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962),p.20

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Algiers : Flites Editions, 2009), Act iii, p.71.

Camus demonstrates the motif of the absurd and its acceptance even that there is no hope to change fate. He questions how life could be lived better with no meaning. He considers suicide one possibility of the absurdity; however, this possibility is a huge philosophical issue because it is an unethical matter. In addition, suicide can end the absurd of one individual only not the whole community. Suicide means escaping the problem and not solving to it. In *The Rebel* (1951), Camus expounds on how man can define himself through the challenges he takes and the struggles he faces to resist the exterior pressures. This revolt against the absurd will shape the essence of the individual and his consciousness.

I.2. Bridging the Gap: Existentialist Literature

The 20th century existentialism as an ideology did not influence thinkers and philosophers only; it impressed the writers' minds and style though. Writers started working on their literary pieces using some of the existential themes, which were highlighted during that era. Those themes were developed because of many philosophical questions such as, what is my purpose in life? What should I do to make my life meaningful? Am I responsible for the decisions I take? Why do I exist?

Literary works introduce existential themes in a way that people who do not understand this philosophy would not recognize the touch of existential thinking in the writer's work. To discuss these existential themes within any literary work we must have a deep look into the major themes of this movement, taking into account the reason behind each theme.

There are several existential themes that were depicted in literature. However, the present research will discuss five of the most common themes, which are: existence precedes essence, absurdity, freedom and responsibility, death, and anguish.

Existence Precedes Essence

This theme is inspired by Sartre, in which he explains that the purpose behind the creation of humans is different than the creation of things. Things are created for a clear purpose before their creation, thus, without this purpose man does not need to create these things. For example, a pen is created as a tool of writing so without this purpose which is writing the pen would not be created. However, humans exist first without predefined characteristics as honesty and bravery. Then, they choose what they want to be or the way they want to act in. Therefore, the essence is a result of the free choices and decisions taken by humans after their existence. Sartre states that *man is nothing else but what he makes of himself*.¹⁶

Absurdity

Men are thrown into this life without a clear purpose, their birth is not their choice and their end is death which is unavoidable; why they are created here and now? and for what reason? These two questions that can explain this theme: people find themselves living a life that has no purpose, walking in a path that has no direction. Because death is the final step for each person, all their experiences and struggles will face an end, thus all their experience in life and existence is absurd and meaningless.

Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician and philosopher explains,

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, and the little space I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which knows me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there, why now rather than then.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin (New York : Citadel Press, 1968),p.36

¹⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: Modern Library, 1941), p. 205.

Freedom and Responsibility

Freedom for existentialists is a part of human existence, which cannot be separated from it, and each person is free during his existence. It is true that man is not free to choose his culture, parents and so on; however, he is free to choose the way of life that fits him, emotions that he adapts, decisions that he takes and that are related to his personal life. Searching for a purpose for his life and shaping his essence is always guided by this freedom or free will. However, freedom is related to responsibility, thus each one of the two stands for the other, and this explains that a free person cannot achieve his freedom without taking a full responsibility of the decisions he takes, because taking a free decision may help or harm not the individual only but the whole community. Therefore, responsibility is an essential step in the process of achieving freedom.

Anguish

The feeling of anguish is a result of the thought that taking a decision is not for the person only but for all mankind. Without knowing whether this decision is right or wrong, the human mind will suffer because of this huge responsibility, because the result, either good or bad, will not stop on him only, it will affect all people. Sartre gives the example of the military leader, in which he explains that the decision of this leader to send his army to fight is a free decision, thinking for the best way to save humanity, this decision may affect his emotions because he knows that death is their destiny despite the honourable mission they do.¹⁸

¹⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin (New York : Citadel Press, 1968), p.38

Death

Death is the final step in life, a universal event for all human beings. In other words, it is the end of their lives and actions, which they cannot avoid because it is inevitable. Each person will die sooner or later, and this reality has a great effect on people's thinking and their way of living. It creates an absurdity in the human mind; and people lose their hope in life, paving the way to a new belief which is represented in the concept of meaninglessness. Therefore, Existentialists encourage people to face their mortality and rebel against it by living fully and accepting the results of their choices. Albert Camus in one of his quotations stated that ¹⁹*I rebel; therefore I exist*. Thus people must confront this reality of death and face it bravely and create a reason and a meaning for their life.

I.3. Existentialism in Fiction

According to the Existential philosophers, literature and especially novels are the best way to reproduce those Existential themes and to exemplify and expound them in the characters to be fully understood. Several writers were influenced by Existentialism and they depicted Existential themes and motives in their writings. Furthermore, they contributed to the development of Existentialism. The Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) can be seen as a major figure whose Existentialist ideas are apparent in his works such as *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866). *Notes from the Underground* is told by an unreliable narrator who considers himself as a man of the underground. The novel is divided into two parts: the first part expounds on the different philosophical thoughts and arguments and deals with some existential terms such as humanism and

¹⁹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (United States : Vintage International Edition, 1991)

optimism. The second part of the story depicts the character's encounter with the world. "*Dostoevsky probed deeply into human subjectivity and freedom in his works.*"²⁰

Sartre's novel *Nausea* won the Nobel Prize in literature but he is the first one to decline this prize. According to him, the prize would limit the freedom which he fought for. *Nausea* tells the experience of Roquentin whose view to life was characterized by despair, loss and pessimism. Roquentin's view was altered from a negative one to a positive one as a miracle of self-realization by creating a meaning of life in the irrational meaningless world. Not far from his compatriot, Sartre; Albert Camus wrote several works, among them is *The Rebel* in which he supports those humans who want to rebel against the creation, this is called "*the metaphysical rebellion.*"²¹ Therefore, his ideas are related to revolt and absurdity because he delves into man's spiritual character.

One of the masterpieces that embraced this movement was Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This latter connotes several existential tendencies that differ from one character to another. *Heart of Darkness*, which narrates the journey from Europe to the heart of Africa, posits that the matter in its plot is a matter of being and existence, almost all the characters have this Existential belief that alludes to the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's tragedy of *Hamlet*, "*to be or not to be.*"²²

The second chapter will expound on how Conrad shares the major tenets of Existential humanism with Camus and Sartre. Furthermore, the portrayal of characters depicts Conrad's sceptical religious life and Existential tendencies. These latter led him to write the preface to modernism *Heart of Darkness*.

²⁰Peterfreund and Denise, 1967, p.192-193.

²¹Albert Camus, *The Rebel*(France: n.p .Print,1951)

²² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*(Algiers : Flites Editions, 2009), Act iii, p.71

CHAPTER TWO: EXISTENTIAL TENDENCIES IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Joseph Conrad was born on December 3, 1857 in Berdichev, Ukraine. His family was a well-educated family, including his cousins, aunts and uncles who were political activists. His parents, Apollo and Evelina Korzeniowski, took part in the rebellion against the imperialist Russian rule that subjugated his country, Poland, at the time. All these circumstances have shaped the personality of young Conrad and his future ideas within his writings. He draws his characters according to what he witnessed of the brutal world and the challenges of the moral beliefs within this world. Conrad takes his first lessons from his father, then he continues his studies in private schools in Krakow. At the age of sixteen, he left Poland for Marseilles and starts a new phase in his life as a mariner for a French commercial navy in 1874. Then, he joins a British commercial navy with the help of his uncle. After that huge experience in the sea, Conrad turns his interest into writing by using all the images of the dark places he visits and the moral conflicts he faces and witnesses. His literary life starts by the publication of his first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1894); then several novels are published as *Lord Jim* (1900), *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899). This latter is a novella based on his last journey to the Congo River, where he witnesses the brutal systems of colonialism and the dark side of human nature in the isolated places.

Heart of Darkness, Conrad's masterpiece, which is considered the preface of Modernist literature, recounts the story of a narrator called Charles Marlow and his journey to the heart of darkness through the Congo River to meet the mysterious and the ambiguous Mr Kurtz, an ivory trader. His journey is not a journey for searching

for Mr Kurtz only, but it is a journey of a self-discovery within the dark places. Through his journey, Marlow discovers several facts about the world and the conflict of man within his inner soul and the exterior world. The image of the mysterious Kurtz is majestic in Marlow's imagination and the truth behind this man gets clearer at each step he does through characters' declarations about Mr Kurtz. When he is about to meet Mr Kurtz, Marlow meets a Russian boy with colorful clothes who tells him more than he knows and reveals the secrets of that mysterious prodigy. Marlow discovers who really is Mr Kurtz, a brutal heartless man with a look on his eyes full of greed and evil, an opposite image of what does he draw on his mind of Mr Kurtz as his name is opposite to his appearance, the name means short in German but Mr Kurtz is very tall.

I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz – Kurtz—that means short in German – don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death. He looked at least seven feet long.(*HD*,114)

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre, who are considered the chief exponents of Existentialism, by presenting their Existential beliefs and philosophy, have influenced a lot of writers, and this can be observed through their writings. Writers use several existential elements such as the investigation of human being and the influence of the outside world on the human soul. Conrad is one of the modern writers, who are influenced by this philosophy of existence and being, and this can be concluded from analyzing the setting and characters, which have been chosen by Conrad in his novella *Heart of Darkness*.

Conrad depicts an existential setting in *Heart of Darkness* since an existential setting is the most appropriate ground for existential characters. There are three

important settings in the novella. First, the Thames River “*the sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable,*” (HD, 9) “*what greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of unknown earth!*” (HD, 12) Second, the Congo River, “*going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings [...] into the gloom of over-shadowed distances.*” (HD, 66) Third, there is the Inner Station, “*through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from under-growth. The jungle and the ground made a background.*” (HD, 100) All these settings display existential tendencies which serve the subjective experience of the characters in their journey to self-discovery. It also reveals the true nature of man and the spiritual breakdown in the absence of morals and social constraints. Marlow here serves as a guide for the reader, since his journey up that river to find the mysterious Mr Kurtz exposes how man can be defeated by his dark side in the wilderness in the absence of society and morals and how man can find the essence of himself by being isolated within his individual experience.

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with his great solitude. (HD, 111)

All the characters in *Heart of Darkness* have existential tendencies, since each of them is searching for a purpose and a meaning for his life through making free choices and questioning their own beliefs. This novella is a theatre for all these existential thoughts, in which Conrad gives each character a role of the so-called “Overman,”²³ Nietzsche’s idea.

²³Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 48-49

Mr Kurtz travels to the heart of darkness for adventure by his free will and he is the only one who has to take full responsibility of his will that is ended by his failure in the existential test, and this failure is represented through his famous expression "*the horror! the horror!*"(HD,133). Marlow as another existential character in the novella makes his choices as going to the Congo River, then searching for Mr Kurtz. Marlow faces the isolation and the voices of his dark inner soul as Mr Kurtz does. However, all these circumstances do not influence his soul; it makes him conscious of his existence and teaches him that the heart of darkness is found within each heart. Some face it and defeat it and others accept it and give in to it.

Conrad in his novella expresses his opinion about the existential world of women and femininity. He mentions Kurtz's Intended and her way of reasoning, in which he explains that women live in their ideal world. Women see the world from their own perspective regardless of the true facts of life, and men should not disturb their peaceful world not to destroy their essence. Therefore, they use lies to deal with them such as Marlow's news to the Intended that Kurtz's last words were her name, "*don't you understand I love him [...]the last word he pronounced was – your name,*" (HD, 148) hiding Kurt's announcement of "*the horror! the horror!*" (HD, 133)

Heart of Darkness projects the modern life of the nineteenth century as a hostile world, where people change their attitudes and their ideologies. Conrad foreshadows the reason behind losing their faith and the meaning for their lives. He exposes his Existential philosophy through the projection of several Existential themes, settings, and characters. He narrates the capacity of man to discover himself under different situations, the effect of free will to guide our destiny, and the Existential test that people pass in life to reach their true essence.

II.1. Existential Characterization in *Heart of Darkness*

Throughout the novel, Conrad employs different characters who show existential tendencies. Mr Kurtz, Marlow, and the Intended represent how Conrad's characters reflect Existentialist ideology in *Heart of Darkness*.

II.1.1. Mr Kurtz: the Tragedy of a Prodigy

Kurtz is one of the significant characters in *Heart of Darkness*, the adventurer, the talented, the genius, the dying god, the dark side of human nature, all these contradictory items shape the mysterious Mr Kurtz, and which fascinate Marlow. Kurtz is the making of European culture and values as he is from a French mother and an English father. Throughout the novel, the character of Kurtz reveals a lot of facts about the nature of human existence and the danger of the wilderness on the human soul. Analyzing this character shows the different existential themes and ideas used by Conrad. Kurtz's experience in Africa is a long journey to the self. He starts his adventure as an adventurer and an ivory trader. Nevertheless, this voyage is not only for trade; Kurtz wants to achieve another goal in the darkest places there, that is enlightening the natives of those places as he mentions in his seventeen pages report.

Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for!
but this must have been before this – let us say – [...]. He
began with the argument that we whites, from the point
of development we had arrived at, must necessarily
appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural
beings – we approach them with the might of a deity.
(*HD*, 96)

His dream of enlightening the Africans turns up into a nightmare because he has not failed only in enlightening them but he has failed in saving himself from the voices and powers of the wilderness.

Throughout his mission to the Company, Marlow starts to hear news about the mysterious Mr Kurtz. Many opinions from different characters but they are all about the greatness of this man, that is the reason why Marlow decides to put Mr Kurtz as an object for his journey. Marlow is blinded by the greatness of this man. The first time Marlow hears about him is in the Outer station, when the accountant declares something about him:

In the interior you will no doubts meet Mr Kurtz. On my asking who Mr Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class agent; and seeing my disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, "he is very remarkable man". Further questions elicited from him that Mr Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading-post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory as all others put together. (HD, 38)

From the description of the accountant we can discover that Mr Kurtz is a successful man. He is also an upper class agent. It means that he was raised in very good conditions which are not chosen by him but he finds them since his birth. They shape his way of life, his way of thinking and his reputation. He has chosen to go to Africa by his free will, to spread culture and knowledge. This is his purpose in life. Sartre's belief of "*Existence Precedes Essence*" explains Conrad's idea here:

What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be.²⁴

Kurtz is made of what his society and culture impose on him. His existence is not chosen by him. Moreover, his journey to the heart of darkness will reveal the reality

²⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin(New York : Citadel Press, 1968),p.35-36.

behind his essence. When Marlow reaches the Central Station, he meets the manager of the station and the young brickmaker, who enlarge Marlow's imagination about Mr Kurtz.

Mr Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. (HD, 45)

Tell me, pray, said I, who is this Mr Kurtz? he is the chief of the Inner station, he answered in a short tone, looking away. Much obliged, I said, laughing. And you are the brick maker of the Central station. (HD, 51)

Kurtz was perfect for everyone he knows him. He is great and his greatness makes Marlow more curious about him. Moving towards Kurtz's station raises a lot of deep questions for the reader and for Marlow, questions that trigger more deeper questions and this technique of writing shows that Conrad has a great understanding of existential ideas. In Martin Heidegger's book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger invites people and their perplexity to forget about the clear questions and go deeper in their investigation about being.

The question of meaning of being must be formulated, if it is a – or even the – fundamental question, such questioning needs the suitable transparency. Thus we must briefly discuss that belongs to a general question in order to be able to make clear that the question of being is an eminent one.²⁵

Meeting the Russian is the turning point for Marlow's understanding the object of his quest, Mr Kurtz. This meeting is the bridge between what was Mr Kurtz for Marlow and who is the real Mr Kurtz. He serves as Marlow's guide towards Mr Kurtz. All what the Russian tells Marlow about Mr Kurtz has opened his eyes about the secret of life and the effect of isolation on the human essence.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Great Britain : Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962),p.24

What was he doing? Exploring or what? I asked. Oh, yes, of course; he had discovered lots of villages, a lake, too – he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much – but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. [...] Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he? I suggested. He fidgeted a little. They adored him, he said. (*HD*, 107-108)

The Russian explains to Marlow how Mr Kurtz turns his interest into searching for ivory. He is in a dark place surrounded by his loneliness without the social restrictions and the public opinion. Free from all the things that restraint him and control his desires, Kurtz becomes the slave of his inner soul. His greed and obsession for ivory makes him forget about his morals and principles, the ivory becomes everything for him, which becomes the most important reason for his moral corruption as Marlow used the word ivory in relation to Kurtz's body in different sections in novella, "*I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride.*" (*HD*, 133)

Kurtz fails in preserving his own principles and values in the wilderness. He destroys the image of the perfect Mr Kurtz and buries the last pieces in that exotic world. He engages in checking primitive life without asserting his self-control, he believes that no exterior power will change him. He has a huge gap within his heart to fill and the wilderness had filled it by its devilish powers.

The experience of the Russian with Mr Kurtz also explains his greed and evil soul, in which he tries to kill him because of a little amount of ivory, forgetting the kindness and the partnership of that boy to him in that isolated place. The Russian explains, "*He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and cleaned out of the country.*" (*HD*, 108)

Kurtz faces evil far away from an organized society that can save him, an evil that should be faced with a strong essence in isolation. However, Kurtz fails in defeating his dark side and he becomes a prisoner of his hidden weaknesses. These hidden weaknesses result from darkness and isolation. Without an external restraint, man must restrain his unconscious desires and rely on himself to take the right decisions. Marlow realizes then that the moral corruption of that great man was his loneliness and the voices of wilderness.

I tried to break the spell – the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness – that seemed to draw him to its pettiness breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. (*HD*, 127)

Kurtz's choice and decision to go to Africa and civilize those dark regions is interrupted by his desires and weakness. Instead of helping them and enlightening their minds, Kurtz points himself as a god for those primitive people, enslaving them and stealing their ivory. The Russian, after revealing many secrets about Kurtz to Marlow, defends Mr Kurtz by saying that Mr Kurtz has suffered a lot through his journey so no one can judge him; "*You cannot judge Mr Kurtz as you would an ordinary man.*" (*HD*, 108)

Being free in an isolated place imposes on us to be responsible for the decisions we take to reach our essence. Thus, freedom is always related to responsibility. Kurtz was free to choose the way he wants to live in his station. However, his greed is powerful than his morals which leads him to the corruption of his essence. His greatness is demolished and absorbed by the darkness. Kurtz becomes a tragedy of his choice.

Marlow witnesses the last moments of Kurtz's death and his last words "*the horror! the horror!*" (*HD*, 133) This experience makes Marlow loyal to Kurtz by saving his reputation and all the secrets he learns about him. Marlow believes that Kurtz has finally discovered himself and his true essence. Therefore, people cannot judge him as they do not know the power of the darkness that surrounds him. Kurtz's journey is summarized through analyzing his report which starts by a noble purpose, which is civilizing and enlightening the natives and ends by the expression, "*Exterminate all the brutes!*" (*HD*, 97)

II.1.2. Marlow in the Wilderness

Marlow, the narrator and the protagonist of the story, witnesses the experience of Mr Kurtz in the wilderness. Through his observation, he enlightens the reader's mind about the truth about man and the universe. Marlow undergoes intellectual and psychological transformation, which explains that he moves through a difficult experience in the jungle that turns him into a wise man.

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled idol. (*HD*, 10)

Marlow starts his voyage searching for adventure and seeking for exploration. However, his goal is interrupted by the ambiguity that surrounds the object of his quest, Mr Kurtz. The greatness of that Kurtz leads Marlow to a deep philosophical study about life and existence.

Through his journey up the river towards Mr Kurtz, Marlow observes several things as the primitive dances, the sound of the drums, and the inexplicable cries.

It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whatever it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. [...] But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. (*HD*, 69-70)

Those primitive dances and cries are rituals that Marlow does not participate in. He shows self-restraint. He does not search for the meaning behind those cries and jumps for his purpose is reaching Mr Kurtz only. He can join those primitive methods; however, he does not, his inner conscious holds his savage senses. His inner strength avails his existence. Marlow focuses on his job as a captain of the steamer not to allow his instincts embrace the wilderness.

When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell u – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily. (*HD*, 67)

The reality of existence and inner consciousness is exemplified through the cannibals, who are hungry but they do not eat the whites on the boat. They restrain their hunger because of this primitive honour as Marlow describes it,

Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear – or some kind of primitive honour. (*HD*, 81)

When the steamer reaches the shore, the Russian warns them of the river's danger and tells them of Mr Kurtz's reality. This meeting changes Mr Kurtz's image for Marlow. His struggle to reach the mysterious Mr Kurtz starts to become clearer.

Marlow knows the responsibility he holds, to find Kurtz and to save him from the darkness that he is in. After Marlow finds Kurtz and observes his situation, he sympathises with him and tries to help him. However, the manager convinces him to write a report about Mr Kurtz, who harms the Company by the bad things he has committed. Marlow does not agree with this judgment; the manager cannot judge Mr Kurtz as he does not pass through the experience that Mr Kurtz has passed.

‘Nevertheless I think Mr Kurtz is a remarkable man’ I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a heavy glance, said very quietly, ‘he Was’, and turned his back on me. (*HD*, 119)

Marlow believes that Mr Kurtz at least has discovered himself,

²⁶It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote: “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point.

Marlow witnesses Kurtz’s final words of the horror, which declare the end of Marlow’s experience. Indeed, it is an expression which concludes his whole moral experience. Marlow keeps his loyalty to Kurtz, he saves all his knowledge about him and all his evil deeds, because he chooses to follow him and he must take responsibility for his decision, “*I did not betray Mr Kurtz – it was ordered I should never betray him -- I should be loyal to the nightmare of choice.*” (*HD*,124)

Through his existential meeting with Kurtz, Marlow discovers himself and reaches his essence. The moral failure of Kurtz prompts Marlow’s success in finding his essence. After Kurtz’s death, Marlow gains knowledge about existence, which explains why death is an important theme for existentialists.

²⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin(New York : Citadel Press, 1968),p.41

Marxists have answered “Your action is limited by your death, but you can rely on others to later take up your deeds and carry them forward to the revolution.”²⁷

This explains that the one’s death is not a final step to his achievements. However, his deeds which precede his death will create a strong basic for others to accomplish what that person wanted to achieve.

II.1.3. Existential Representation of Women in *Heart of Darkness*

The first female character to appear in the novella is Marlow’s aunt who was sent to secure him a job. Marlow considers her and the other women inferior to men. “*Would you believe it? - I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job.*” (HD, 18) However, his aunt could help him get his appointment to the Belgian Company, believing that he is an emissary to spread the western civilization across Africa. She views Europeans as messengers who would redeem the native Africans from their ignorance and their outrageous ways. Moreover, they would fetch civilization, religion and light to a dark place. According to her, the colonial force is a positive thing that would be fruitful. Marlow recognizes that his aunt is blind to the realities of European presence in Africa. Her blindness, according to Marlow, alludes to women’s own world which is detached from men’s world, “*It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether.*” (HD, 26)

The second female characters that Marlow encounter are the knitting women. At the company they were knitting with black wool.²⁸ Brent states that their role of greeting the men who enter the office of the Company on their way to Africa—men

²⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Ed. Wade Baskin (New York : Citadel Press, 1968), p.46

²⁸ Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in cinema studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in history of American cinema at the University of Michigan.

who generally never return—imbue them with both the foreknowledge of the fate of each man. They symbolise the dark underbelly of the Company as if they are deciding men's fate in Africa.²⁹

Marlow's experiences in the wilderness have a great impact on his mentality and his view towards life. These changes have inspired in him much wisdom, but also they have prevented him from communication with the others. He believes that individuals cannot perceive his new vision of life since they have not been a part of Africa which requires them to be in confrontation with both the darkness and the wilderness. Thus Gillon states:

People who live in an organized, civilized community, protected by law and police, cannot understand the powers of darkness.³⁰ Owing to his experience, Marlow's knowledge is deep whereas this knowledge is superficial to so many. Just like his aunt, most of the people are unaware of the fact that darkness strongly exists. Marlow says, "*I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew.*" (HD, 136) Just like his aunt, most of the people are unaware of the fact that darkness strongly exists.

One of those characters Marlow intends to project is Kurtz's Intended. Marlow's visit to her aims at delivering some letters and her picture that is painted by Kurtz. However, he is unable to recognize the reasons behind this visit, "*perhaps it was an impulse of unconsciousness loyalty or the fulfilment of one of these ironic necessities that lurk in the facts on human existence.*" (HD, 140)

²⁹ Liz Brent, *Critical Essay on Heart of Darkness*; in *Short Stories for Students* (The Gale Group, 2001)

³⁰ Adam Gillon, *The Appalling Face of a Glimpsed Truth* (Twayne, 1982), p. 69

The Intended's house generates some absurdity owing to its location on a street that is featured by stillness. This reminds Marlow of a graveyard, which foreshadows death and darkness. Moreover, abruptly a reminiscence of Kurtz appears, "*his mouth wide open voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind.*" (HD, 140)

Despite the fact that it has been over a year since Kurt's death, his fiancée is still in grief. She, dresses in black, reflects purity and fidelity bewailing and sorrowing over the loss of her beloved.

"I saw her and him in the same instant of time – his death and her sorrow- I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death... I saw them together- I heard them together." (HD, 143)

The Intended keeps on praising Kurtz. She sees him as an ideal man with several values and achievements. According to her, it is undeniable that Kurtz is admired by everyone he meets.

Later, the nameless fiancée begs Marlow to tell her Kurtz's last words. Consequently, she puts Marlow in a difficult situation in which he is required to choose. Marlow encounters his choice, whether to smash her illusion and to shock her with the truth in order to remain faithful to his commitment and morals or to tell a lie and save her by giving her something to live with. Marlow tells her that Kurtz's last words were her name. As a result, Marlow's chooses to protect her illusion with a lie to save her existence in her world. She exults, cries and says, "*I knew it- I was sure.*" (HD, 148) Marlow lies (at least, so he tells us) to preserve the Intended's opportunity for affirmation and survival. He also lies because he perceives something of Kurtz in

himself as well as in the Intended. The melodramatic interview ends with Marlow bowing before the inscrutable enigma of existence.³¹

Eventually, Marlow regrets and considers his lie as a moral failure. But he chooses what can prevent the Intended from depression and despair in case he tells the truth. Therefore, his lie aims to keep the Intended's fantasy world secure. Conrad insinuates throughout this crucial locking, or summarizing, scene that in order to sustain life one must project one's own illusions for living. Self-deception, the essential condition for happiness, becomes a kind of existential higher understanding, and thus Conrad invalidates all conventional truths and moralities in his iconoclastic narrative of the truth of fiction and the fiction of truth.³²

Marlow's lie is under pressure of circumstances. Thus, he considers action as loyalty to Kurtz, kindness to the Intended and despair of himself because of his deviation from his morals.

II.2. Existential Exotic Settings: The Politics of Time and Place

Heart of Darkness was written during the time of European colonialism of Africa, a time during which Africa was not fully explored. The novella is based on Conrad's own experiences as a seaman on his voyage to the Belgian Congo (1890-1891). He was fascinated by maps.

“Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I

³¹ Ted Billy, *The Clash of Nebulous Ideas* ; in *A Wilderness of Words: Closure and Disclosure in Conrad's Short Fiction*(Texas : Tech University Press, 1997), p. 69.

³² Ted Billy, *The Clash of Nebulous Ideas* ; in *A Wilderness of Words: Closure and Disclosure in Conrad's Short Fiction*(Texas : Tech University Press, 1997), p. 69-70

would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.'" (*HD*, 17)

Conrad's journey into the Belgian Congo is recounted in *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1902, eight years after his return to Europe. At the time of its publication, the term existentialism did not subsist yet, but Conrad's novella embraced the beliefs of this philosophy which he obtained owing to his suffering in his early life. Therefore, scepticism together with his pessimistic view of life had their impact on his characters and settings.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad innovates in his choice and description of the setting. He turns away from the traditional form of settings by employing a fictional African setting. Gruesse asserts that *Heart of Darkness* is the first work with an African setting in which Europeans come to Africa to learn about themselves as well as to escape civilization.³³

The setting has a philosophical depth which is characterized by existential humanism in the plot of the novel. This latter varies from one place to another, opening and ending with the European setting. However, major events take place in the African setting. Conrad's journey in Africa makes a profound impact on his, "³⁴*It may be said that Africa killed Conrad the sailor and strengthened Conrad the novelist.*"

Yet the Congo journey was valuable to Conrad beyond supplying him with material for his fiction. Before it, he said, he was a mere animal.³⁵

³³ Dave Kuhne, *African Settings in Contemporary American Novels*(The United States of America: Greenwood Publishing Group,1999)

³⁴ Adam Gillon, *The Appalling Face of a Glimpsed Truth: Heart of Darkness, in Joseph Conrad*, (Twayne,1982), p.70.

³⁵ Adam Gillon, *The Appalling Face of a Glimpsed Truth*(Twayne,1982), p.70

The Congo experience has a profound impact on Marlow's state of mind, the scenes he witnesses in Africa serve the novella's plot.

II.2.1. Europe as a Place of Darkness

In the novel, the Thames River serves as the antithesis of the Congo River. The Thames is a shelter for several admirers of exploration seafaring. Later on, it becomes one of the most essential passages that contribute to the development of European trade, specifically the English one.

“It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith – the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark 'interlopers' of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned 'generals' of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire” (HD,12)

Brussels, the Company's headquarters, is described as “*the whited Sepulchre.*”(HD,20) This allusion embodies death and imprisonment since the journeys made to Africa bring serious diseases to the European employees. Thus, Marlow visualizes Brussels as a place of burial.

“In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.” (HD,20)

The white colour symbolises men who are ostensibly honest and pure, but internally deceptive and disingenuous. They represent the Belgian Company, whose declared

aims seem humanitarian and charitable, whereas the hidden ones are sinister and infernal.

“Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two penny-half-penny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital – you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about ‘weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,’ till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable.” (*HD*, 25-26)

II.2.2. The Deterioration of Kurtz in the Heart of Darkness

The Belgian Company is a symbol of dehumanization, cruelty and exploitation of the natives. But Conrad sheds light on the spoilage that imperialism and greed do to the souls of the white employees.

"I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men - men, I tell you. (*HD*,33)

These acts done by the Company have an existential depth represented by the absurdity of evil and by being the incarnate devils in Africa.

“The word ‘ivory’ 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. By Jove! I’ve never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.” (*HD*,46-47)

The White men’s moral principles are tested in the wilderness. This alludes to the moral corruption that fulminates over the Company and the souls of the whites.

“It was as unreal as everything else – as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account - but as to effectually lifting a little finger – oh, no.” (*HD*,49)

Marlow’s journey to the Inner Station is the darkest one. He hears a lot about Kurtz from the Russian. Finally he meets Kurtz; he discovers that Kurtz is ill, and he lives among the native savages.

He realizes that Kurtz has made a deity of himself. He is worshiped by the Africans. Kurtz’s struggle with his illness does not last long. He dies on Marlow’s steamer announcing the horrors of his experience in the wilderness, which is characterized by darkness and isolation. Kurtz, as a European, has deviated from his moral values, he has become brutal and dark just like his surroundings. Therefore, Conrad makes Africa as a setting for the deterioration of Mr Kurtz.

“The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz’s life was running swiftly, too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time. ... I saw the time approaching when I would be left alone of the party of ‘unsound method.’” (*HD*, 130)

Conrad’s description of the African setting adds a new existential perspective to the novella. Several features contribute to serve the plot, the wilderness, the river, the dense jungles, the silence, and the thick fog. Savagery and silence create the physical setting of the novel. Each feature deepens the human perception of the novella as well as the world since each stands for an existential theme. This setting might be as the primary reason that leads men to madness.

The Congo River plays an indispensable role in shaping the novella's existential setting. It serves as a barrier between Marlow, the native Africans and Kurtz's wickedness. This division enables Marlow to discover the two sides of the continent, the good side and the bad one, which alludes to the human goodness and evil. Conrad asserts, "*before the Congo I was a mere animal.*" (HD, 33) The journey up the Congo River becomes darker and savage as Marlow moves forward.

"In and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened with slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares."
(HD,29-30)

The gloomy river triggers danger and fear, which reflects Marlow's inner thoughts and hesitation about the journey. It resembles a snake which stands for evil and viciousness. Marlow's struggle with this snake upstream is a reflection to his inner struggle to answer the question, where am I?

"But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird - a silly little bird." (HD17-18)

Moreover, the river was blurred by fog that obscures the vision over it. As a result of darkness, Marlow and his crew face the thick fog which distorts by serving as a barrier that does not allow them to see what lies ahead. Thus, Marlow is required to make his own decision based on an absurd choice, but the authenticity of this choice cannot be judged. The fog in the plot is a reference to the diverse situations that

require humans to make their own decision and choices. In the plot, Marlow's encounter with the fog necessitates a decision on what is right even though what will face them later is a mystery as a choice of nightmares.

When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all around you like something solid." (*HD*,77)

Marlow has described the fog as something solid, in which it hides the surrounding place more than the night; this blinding fog in fact is the doubts that surround the individual's experience throughout his journey to a self-awareness.

II.2.3. Stations in *Heart of Darkness*

Starting from his departure on the French vessel, Marlow's existential tendencies appear in every place he stops at in. When he reaches Africa his journey of self-awareness begins. He pauses at several trading posts in the stations. Conrad displays the journey of self-awareness represented by the stations, where the Outer Station, the Central Station and the Inner Station are joined by the Congo River. The voyage up the river symbolises the quest for the self. The individual ponders his existence in the chaotic universe and its purpose of life, as well as questions the meaning of everything. The journey of self-discovery should be made in isolation. Before reaching Africa, Marlow felt isolated despite the presence of the others. Marlow's internal isolation at this point parallels the external isolation, later when he reaches the Inner Station and confronts Kurtz.

After leaving the French steamboat, Marlow reaches the mouth of the river. He pauses in the Outer Station. He was an eyewitness of the disrepair, inhumanity and

rapacity of the Company. The prevailing situation at the station is chaotic except for the accountant's decent appearance.

"When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear." (*HD*, 36)

With regard to the accountant's elegance, the setting that surrounds him is disastrous: scenes of rusted machinery, fallen buildings, as well as miserable black shadows of disease and starvation. Marlow's existential experience deepens as he witnesses the inhumanity of the European existence in Africa. He feels guilty of being a part of the Company that loses its humanitarian principles and succumbs to moral corruption. Therefore, Marlow's isolation increases when he sees the absurd behaviours of his fellow Europeans. These scenes represent a warning that aims at keeping Marlow away from this journey.

They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly." (*HD*, 35)

As the setting at the Central Station becomes darker, Marlow experiences more cruelties and evil.

'ivory' 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. By Jove!" (*HD*,46-47)

I remembered the old doctor — 'It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.' I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. (*HD*,41)

CONCLUSION

The present research explored existential philosophy and its reflection in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Thus, it drew a general overview about existentialism: its origin, development, and leading figures. In addition, the dissertation unveiled existential tendencies in *Heart of Darkness*, through analysing its main existential characters and settings.

Existentialism is a new philosophical movement, which has an interest in the human existence. Therefore, the dissertation focused on the characters' life choices and free will that are strongly related to responsibility. Moreover, it highlighted the characters' quest to have a purpose in life and to demolish the absurdity of existence.

The study traced back the origin of this philosophy to nineteenth century, with the existential father, Martin Heidegger, who has put the first existential basics. However, existentialism has spread in the twentieth century through the integration of this philosophy with the field of literature.

Moreover, the dissertation showed the major factors that led to the rise of Existentialism. After WWI, feelings of despair and fear prevailed, in which people's trust for the church weakened and their morals degraded. WWII came to affirm the need to demolish the church's beliefs and values; as a result, intellectuals and philosophers started to call individuals to search for their essence and meaning for life, regardless of all the religious benefits and social constraints.

Furthermore, the dissertation delved into the ideas of the different leading figures of Existentialist philosophy. Nietzsche believes that people must confront reality and shape their fate. He invites man to be the hero of his own existence. Jean Paul Sartre

is another existential figure, who calls people to search for their essence regardless of religious beliefs and public opinion. There is also Martin Heidegger, who examines being and ontology through time. He calls people and their perplexity to ask deeper questions about their existence. Moreover, Albert Camus has also spawned this philosophy by his idea of rebellion against absurdity.

All these philosophers and writers have a great influence in shaping existentialism. And their influence has affected modernist literature in its different themes. *Heart of Darkness* is one of the British existentialist works that projects this philosophy, in which Conrad shares different tenets of existentialism as he asserts his sceptical beliefs and existentialist tendencies through characters and settings.

Conrad projects several existentialist themes in *Heart of Darkness*, which prove his existentialist tendency. Mr Kurtz, one of the main characters in novella, represents moral corruption of human beings in absence of social restraints. His reputation is different than his essence that he has discovered lately. However, his isolation in the jungle has revealed his evil essence.

Conrad has explained how essence is discovered by isolation and individual experience. He expounds on the fact that human essence is not what society imposes on the individual, but it is what the individual himself becomes after being isolated.

In addition, the study highlighted the complementary relationship between freedom and responsibility. Conrad depicts the theme through the protagonist of his novella, Marlow, in which this man is responsible for his free will to discover who Mr Kurtz is by being loyal to him and keeping his secrets, and saving his reputation.

Heart of Darkness invites people to realize their inner strength, which serves in every situation as a guide to control their savage instincts. The resistance of Marlow up the river, by holding his savage instincts in order not to join the call of the wilderness, is the best example for this.

Furthermore, Conrad believes that women have their own existential world, where everything is colourful and great. Women see the world from their own perspective regardless of the real world. Kurtz intended believes that her beloved is an idol, who has a noble message to convey in Africa, whereas the truth is worse.

Besides, the study analysed Conrad's use of exotic settings to isolate his characters and project his existentialist themes. To serve his existentialist tendencies, Conrad chooses the darkest places as the Congo River and the inner station to exemplify the darkness that surrounds each individual through his personal experience in life. Moreover, the fog is the image of doubt which covers human soul through its journey to self-awareness.

This existential study of *Heart of Darkness* and its different existentialist themes proves Conrad's existential tendencies and preoccupations. Thus, it may open the door to further future studies for researchers who are interested in the existentialist philosophy and its effect on literature.

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الميولات الوجودية المختلفة في رواية "قلب الظلمات" للروائي جوزيف كونراد. اللافت للانتباه هو الطابع الكئيب الذي خلقه كل من أسلوب الكاتب ومواضيع الرواية. تصوير كونراد للشخصيات وخياراته لزمكانية القصة يعكسان نزعات جون بول سارتر الوجودية. وبالتالي تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعمق في التصوير الوجودي للشخصيات وعنصر الزمكان في القصة بحيث تستعمل المنهج الوجودي للنقد الأدبي من أجل كشف النقاب عن حرية ومسؤولية الشخصيات في عالم غريب. وهكذا يقدم الجزء الأول خلفية نظرية حول الفلسفة الوجودية وأبرز روادها. علاوة على ذلك يخوض الجزء الثاني في التوجهات الوجودية للرواية قيد الدراسة. وفي الختام يمكن القول أن للفلسفة الوجودية تأثير عميق على رواية "قلب الظلمات" بما أنها تتضمن عدة مواضيع وجودية والتي بدورها تجزم أن الرواية هي مرآة للفلسفة الوجودية.