

Heart of Darkness

by Joseph Conrad



All new material ©2009 Enotes.com Inc. or its Licensors. All Rights Reserved.
No portion may be reproduced without permission in writing from the publisher.
For complete copyright information please see the online version of this text at
<http://www.enotes.com/darkness>

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Overview</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Joseph Conrad Biography</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Summary</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Summary and Analysis</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Section I Summary and Analysis</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Section II Summary and Analysis</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Section III Summary and Analysis</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>Quizzes</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Section I Questions and Answers</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Section II Questions and Answers</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>Section III Questions and Answers</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>Characters</u>	<u>54</u>
<u>Themes</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>Style</u>	<u>63</u>
<u>Historical Context</u>	<u>65</u>
<u>Critical Overview</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>Essays and Criticism</u>	<u>69</u>
<u>Colonial Exploitation and Human Nature</u>	<u>69</u>
<u>The Intertwining of Philosophical and Colonial Themes</u>	<u>71</u>
<u>An Image of Africa</u>	<u>74</u>
<u>Ingress to the Heart of Darkness</u>	<u>80</u>
<u>Suggested Essay Topics</u>	<u>82</u>
<u>Sample Essay Outlines</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>Compare and Contrast</u>	<u>89</u>
<u>Topics for Further Study</u>	<u>91</u>
<u>Media Adaptations</u>	<u>92</u>
<u>What Do I Read Next?</u>	<u>93</u>

Table of Contents

<u>Bibliography and Further Reading</u>	94
---	----

Introduction

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, now his most famous work, was first published in 1899 in serial form in London's *Blackwood's Magazine*, a popular journal of its day. The work was well received by a somewhat perplexed Victorian audience. It has since been called by many the best short novel written in English. At the time of its writing (1890), the Polish-born Conrad had become a naturalized British citizen, mastered the English language, served for ten years in the British merchant marines, achieved the rank of captain, and traveled to Asia, Australia India and Africa. *Heart of Darkness* is based on Conrad's firsthand experience of the Congo region of West Africa. Conrad was actually sent up the Congo River to an inner station to rescue a company agent—not named Kurtz but Georges-Antoine Klein—who died a few days later aboard ship. The story is told in the words of Charlie Marlow, a seaman, and filtered through the thoughts of an unidentified listening narrator. It is on one level about a voyage into the heart of the Belgian Congo, and on another about the journey into the soul of man. In 1902, *Heart of Darkness* was published in a separate volume along with two other stories by Conrad. Many critics consider the book a literary bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and a forerunner both of modern literary techniques and approaches to the theme of the ambiguous nature of truth, evil, and morality. By presenting the reader with a clearly unreliable narrator whose interpretation of events is often open to question, Conrad forces the reader to take an active part in the story's construction and to see and feel its events for him—or herself.

Overview

The Life and Work of Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad was born Josef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski in a Russian-ruled province of Poland (now part of the Ukraine) on December 3, 1857. His father was a poet, a writer, and a political activist. His mother was also politically involved. As a result of his parents' participation in the Polish independence movement, young Conrad and his mother and father were forced into exile in northern Russia in 1862. In the next few years, by the time Conrad was eleven, both his parents had died, and the boy had been sent to live with his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski. Conrad dropped out of school when he was sixteen and took up life on the sea, first joining the French merchant marines and sailing as apprentice and then steward to Martinique and the West Indies. At the age of twenty-one, Conrad joined a British ship, and served with the British merchant marines. During this time, he achieved the rank of captain, became a naturalized British citizen, and traveled to Asia, Africa, Australia, and India. A trip to the Belgian Congo in 1890, during which Conrad sailed the Congo River, was crucial to the development of the 1899 work *Heart of Darkness*.

Poor health, from which Conrad had suffered all his life, forced his retirement from the British merchant marines in 1894. Conrad had begun writing while still in the service, basing much of his work on his life at sea. His first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, was published in 1895 and began Conrad's difficult and often financially unrewarding career as a writer. Not until 1913, with the publication of the novel *Chance*, did he achieve true critical and financial success. Nevertheless, Conrad managed to earn his living by his pen, writing all his novels in his acquired language, English, and always returning to the sea and the outskirts of civilization for his most enduring themes.

In addition to *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's most notable early works include *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Youth*, containing *Heart of Darkness*, (1902), and *Typhoon* (1902). The novels that are widely regarded as Conrad's greatest works are *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and *Chance* (1913). The novel *Victory*, which appeared in 1915, may be the best known of these later works. Conrad collaborated on two novels with his friend and fellow novelist Ford Madox Ford, *The Inheritors* (1901) and *Romance* (1903).

Joseph Conrad married in 1896, had two sons, and died of a heart attack in England on August 3, 1924. He was buried in Canterbury Cathedral, where many of England's greatest writers lie. Although he often struggled to write in his adopted language, Conrad is now considered one of the greatest prose stylists in English literature.

Historical Background

Conrad based *Heart of Darkness* on his journey to the Belgian Congo in 1890. By checking his diaries at the time, we can trace his experience against his fictional portrayal. But this novella is more than an autobiographical account of his time spent there. It is a modern work that challenges the basic ethical question of good and evil in mankind, a topic explored by many authors. We need only think of the Adam and Eve myth, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* to name a few. Francis Ford Coppola based his film *Apocalypse Now* on this philosophical concept by updating Conrad's story to the Vietnam War and the Southeast Asian jungle of the 1960s.

Conrad also tackled the political environment of the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*. When King Leopold of Belgium founded the "International Association for the Suppression of Slavery and the Opening Up of Central Africa," he attempted to impose civilization and order. Greed, though, fostered widespread abuse. By the time Conrad visited the Congo, exploitation festered everywhere. Brutality and degradation reigned, not progress and enlightenment. The natives' sufferings and Kurtz's writings about them reflect the historical reality.

A number of factors influenced Conrad and other twentieth-century British writers. We have to first understand Victorian England and the reasons why the modern novelist rejected the values and beliefs of that time to mold a new society founded on different ideals.

Victorian England believed in materialism and progress. Their bourgeois (middle class) values served to stabilize all facets of society, so they believed. The writings of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot represented the standards of their time, with *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and *Middlemarch* serving as landmarks in fiction at that time. Their novels usually followed the traditional three-volume format. They focussed on many details, often writing at length about seemingly insignificant details.

As the era closed, reaction against Victorian life, commercialism, and community spread. The artist stood, not as a member of society, but in isolation from it. Once embraced by authors, religious faith even declined.

With formal religion destroyed, writers needed to discover a new faith to follow—with art often filling the void. In his preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus*, Conrad wrote: “Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its very aspect.” For him, art was religion.

New techniques emerged for novelists to tell their stories. The stream of consciousness and internal monologue emphasized a shift in focus from the external world to the interior world. Dreams, thoughts, and explanations of a character’s mental process replaced lengthy descriptions of external objects. Even though Conrad did not use these devices per se, he did focus on the internal world of his characters, and the reality of their dreams and thoughts. Marlow’s story suggests a nightmarish journey into the unknown.

More than any other factor, the advent and progression of psychology shaped the new vision of man in the universe, as well as the artist’s conception of him. Freud’s ideas showed the different aspects of man’s personality. With Freud’s analysis, man is not easily understood unless we consider his multi-layered make-up. His terms “ego,” “id,” and “super-ego” reveal the depth of our conscious and subconscious mind. After Freud’s work appeared, many works received a “psychological” interpretation. This added a depth of meaning to each work which had not existed before.

If we look at *Heart of Darkness* specifically and apply Freud’s concept of the human psyche, we can analyze Marlow’s journey not only as a literal one, but a psychological one. Marlow and Kurtz represent different aspects of man’s personality. Marlow reflects the “ego” (man’s more rational side), while Kurtz represents the “id” (man’s primitive force within). This difference explains why Marlow recoils at Kurtz’s barbaric behavior.

The recurring symbols in Conrad’s work show Jung’s influence. Many things represent not only their actual meaning, but a symbolic one, as well. The jungle, Marlow’s journey, and even Kurtz himself suggest other ideas and meanings besides their literal ones. Since Conrad gives no clues, the reader must interpret each one.

Bergson’s theories of time relate to Conrad’s use of a non-chronological narration. He could have had Marlow tell his story without any alteration in time, by starting at the beginning and proceeding straight through until the end. Instead, Conrad lets Marlow jump ahead, then return at whim. This technique merges the past with the present, making the reading more challenging. It shuffles the pieces of a strict chronological plot. As with the symbols, the reader must order the time to organize the sequence of events.

In his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* Joseph Conrad wrote how an artist’s (writer’s) success allowed readers a “glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.” He also said: “Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect.” In each case, notice his reference to the “truth.” Here,

Conrad proclaimed what his contemporaries felt. Only the artist could lead society to the truth. Only the work itself could enable society to understand the truth. The modern artists stood before their audience like prophets addressing the multitudes. The twentieth-century novelists' work represented a way for the reader to see the new reality.

List of Characters

"I"—An unnamed "I" narrator.

The Director of Companies—Captain and owner of the boat.

The Lawyer and The Accountant—People on the boat in the Thames.

Charlie Marlow—Also on the boat. Tells the story of his journey to see Kurtz deep in the jungle.

Kurtz—The manager of an ivory station who has rejected conventional societal beliefs.

Two Knitting Women—They sit outside the outer office.

The Doctor—He examines Marlow before his journey.

The Aunt—Related to Marlow, she helps him get the appointment to the ship.

The Swedish Captain—The man in charge of a little sea-going steamer.

The Accountant—The bookkeeper who draws attention because of his neat appearance.

The Dying Agent—The man tormented by flies at the station.

The Manager—Leader of the station who survives because of his excellent health.

The Pilgrims—Workers who carry long staves. They want any chance to obtain ivory.

The Brickmaker—He does secretarial work for the Manager, but doesn't seem to make bricks.

The Boilermaker—A good worker who talks to Marlow about the rivets they need.

The Manager's Uncle—The leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. He only talks to his nephew.

The Helmsman—A black man killed by arrows shot by the natives.

The Russian—Wearing bright colored clothes, he greets Marlow at Kurtz's station.

Kurtz's Black Mistress—The woman in the jungle. She wears many bracelets, charms, and beads.

A Clean-Shaved Man, Kurtz's "Cousin," a Journalist—Three men who visit Marlow after Kurtz's death. They want Kurtz's papers.

Kurtz's Intended—The woman in Europe who Marlow visits a year after Kurtz's death.

Summary of the Novel

Five men sit on board the *Nellie*, a boat docked in the Thames. An unnamed narrator introduces them to the

reader: the owner of the boat, a lawyer, an accountant, and Charlie Marlow, who tells the story of his journey to the African jungle.

He introduces his tale by referring to ancient times in Britain, some nineteen hundred years ago. After help from an aunt, Marlow gets a job commanding a ship for an ivory trading company. Before he leaves, he meets two knitting women and a doctor from the company who make him feel uneasy.

He sails from Europe on a French steamer. The endless coastline and the appearance of sweating and shouting black men fascinate him. After more than thirty days, he leaves the French steamer for a boat captained by a Swede. He makes it to the company's Outer Station. Rotting equipment and black slaves chained by the neck appall him. Even when he runs from the sight of them, he sees black workers starving and dying slowly. He meets the company's chief accountant, a man whose neat appearance stands out from the company's chaos. He waits ten days here. The hot weather and many flies irritate Marlow. During this time, though, the accountant mentions Mr. Kurtz, a remarkable man, a first-class ivory agent, a favorite of the Administration.

Marlow leaves the Outer Station with a white companion and a caravan of sixty blacks. Through thickets, ravines, and paths they travel two-hundred miles in fifteen days to the Central Station. Marlow finds his steamboat sunk at the bottom of the river. It will take months to repair. He meets the manager, a man Marlow dislikes because he talks without thinking. He speaks of Kurtz, saying he is ill, perhaps dead. Like the accountant, the manager praises Kurtz and reiterates his importance to the company. Marlow turns his back on the manager and concentrates on repairing his steamboat. Everywhere he looks, he notices "pilgrims," white men who carry staves and speak of nothing but ivory. A shed full of goods burns one night. While going to see it, Marlow overhears the manager speaking with another agent about Kurtz.

Marlow meets a brickmaker. He invites Marlow to his room, where he asks him many questions about Europe. As he leaves the room, Marlow sees a sketch in oils of a blindfolded woman carrying a torch. Kurtz had painted it, he says, more than a year ago.

They talk about Kurtz, the agent saying he expects him to be promoted soon. He says Kurtz and Marlow belong to the same "gang" because the same people had recommended both of them. Marlow realizes this man resents Kurtz's success.

Marlow tells the agent he needs rivets to fix the boat. When Marlow finally demands the rivets, the agent abruptly changes the subject. They do not arrive for many weeks. Marlow boards his steamer after the agent leaves. He meets a boilermaker, a good worker with a long beard. They dance on deck after Marlow tells him the rivets will come soon. Led by the manager's uncle, the Eldorado Exploring Expedition appears. Marlow overhears them speak about Kurtz. He had come downriver a few months ago with ivory, but turned back. He had left a clerk to deliver the shipment, instead. He had spoken of Kurtz's illness then, with no further word coming in the last nine months.

The rivets arrive, Marlow repairs the boat, and they resume the journey. The manager, a few pilgrims, and twenty natives accompany Marlow on the steamer. It takes two months to get close to Kurtz's station. During that time, drums roll, people howl and clap, and the jungle becomes thick and dark.

They find an abandoned hut fifty miles below Kurtz's station. Marlow discovers a faded note, a coverless book, and a stack of firewood. Eight miles from Kurtz's station, Marlow and the manager argue over their navigation. Marlow wants to push on, but the manager urges caution. A mile and a half from their destination, the natives attack the boat. A spear kills the helmsman, who falls at Marlow's feet. They throw his body into the river, a simple funeral. They come upon a man on shore. A Russian, this "harlequin" speaks admiringly of Kurtz. He tells them of Kurtz's serious illness.

While the manager and the pilgrims go to Kurtz's house, Marlow finds out many things from the Russian about Kurtz. Kurtz had ordered the attack on the steamer, he had discovered villages, and had even tried to kill the Russian over some ivory. Most importantly, the natives worshipped Kurtz, and offered sacrifices in his name.

They bring Kurtz to the steamer on an improvised stretcher. Physically weak, Kurtz still speaks with power. The natives line the shore to watch their god leave. A black woman, Kurtz's mistress, joins them. Kurtz escapes from the steamer that evening. Marlow follows him, finally returning Kurtz to the boat. Kurtz gives Marlow a packet of papers. He dies a few days later. His last words—"The horror! The horror!"—haunt Marlow. They bury him in a muddy hole the next day.

Marlow returns to Europe. He becomes sick, running a fever. Three people call on him to retrieve Kurtz's writings. A company officer, a musician claiming to be Kurtz's cousin, and a journalist want his papers for their use. Marlow gives them unimportant documents, saving the personal ones for Kurtz's Intended.

More than a year after Kurtz's death, Marlow visits this woman. At her door, he hears Kurtz's last words ring. In a drawing room, Marlow meets her, a beautiful lady suffering over Kurtz's death. Marlow never answers her questions directly. He lies to her, saying Kurtz's last words were her name. She cries to release herself from the agony of loss. Marlow feels bad for betraying Kurtz's memory, but glad for saving the woman from the truth.

With Marlow's story ended, we return to the *Nellie*. The narrator describes Marlow sitting in the pose of a Buddha, then raises his head to the "heart of the immense darkness" in the distance.

Estimated Reading Time

Due to Conrad's complex language, the long paragraphs, and the chronological shifts in narration, *Heart of Darkness* will probably take longer to cover than another work of equal length, with an actual reading time of six to seven hours.

Joseph Conrad Biography

In a part of Russia that once belonged to Poland Joseph Conrad was born Josef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski on December 3, 1857, to his parents, Apollo and Evelina. Members of the landed gentry, his parents believed in liberating Poland, though from opposite extremes. Apollo Korzeniowski came from a family dedicated to the romantic idealism of their cause, eager to act, if necessary, to die for Poland. Though championing the same beliefs, Evelina Bobrowski's family advocated working quietly for their goal, and surviving as best they could under the dictates of the occupying power. Their concerns deeply influenced Conrad's upbringing.



Joseph Conrad

Apollo devoted his life to literary interests and political involvement. He wrote plays and poems of little value, but adeptly translated Victor Hugo and Shakespeare into Polish. In 1862, Conrad's father started a literary journal, *Fortnightly Review*. Politically, Apollo's main concern centered around fortifying resistance against Russian oppression. He helped organize the National Central Committee. He joined a radical wing and was arrested before he took any action. Exiled to the Vologda region of northern Russia in 1862, Apollo longed to have his family accompany him.

Already physically fragile, Conrad's mother suffered under the harshness of exile. The strain of imprisonment hastened her death in 1865 at thirty-four, less than three years after their exile. Authorities allowed Apollo to move to southern Russia after his wife's death. Suffering from tuberculosis later in life, and not considered a threat anymore, Apollo returned home. He spent his last months in Cracow, where he died in 1869.

By the time Conrad was a teenager, he had suffered from his family's political involvement. At four, he saw his father arrested; at seven, he saw his mother die; and, at eleven, he saw his father die. He was left in the care of his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski. These traumatic experiences stayed with Conrad for his entire life.

They fueled his wish to flee Poland. Consequently, they also instilled in him feelings of desertion, betrayal, and guilt for leaving his homeland. These themes were explored deeply in his work *Lord Jim*.

From his parents' tribulations, Conrad concluded that no future lay in store for him in Poland. He needed to escape to fashion a life based on his inner promptings. His desire to see other countries led him to say as he looked at a map of Africa, "When I grow up I shall go there." That place was the Belgian Congo, which became the germ for *Heart of Darkness*.

By traveling, Conrad could secure economic independence, live out adventures, and escape political unrest. Since his uncle had connections in the shipping industry and French was his second language, the French merchant marine attracted him, even though he had never seen the sea. The excitement he had read about in the works of Victor Hugo and James Fenimore Cooper could now become part of his life. His Polish relatives viewed his choice of becoming a sailor as an insult to his cultural background.

Two months before his seventeenth birthday, in 1874, Conrad left for Marseilles and a sea career. The four years he spent on French ships gave him the richness of experience he longed for. He sailed to the West Indies, and Central and South America. On his second voyage, he met Spanish rebels and smuggled guns on their behalf. With his ship wrecked on the Spanish coast, Conrad escaped to France. He fictionalized these experiences in his novels *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Arrow of Gold* (1919).

At this time he met Dona Rita, a Spanish rebel. He supposedly fought a pistol duel with an American, Captain Blunt, over her. Both were wounded. Rita and Blunt disappeared by the time Thaddeus arrived. Conrad told his uncle he had lost money gambling and had tried to commit suicide, he said nothing about the duel. Here, his adventures in France ended.

After turning twenty, Conrad switched allegiances to Britain by becoming an English seaman. He did so for two reasons: he wanted to flee the obligation to the Russian military forces, and he thought that if he learned English, he could be promoted sooner.

Modern British literature profited from Conrad's defection from the French seas. There is a good possibility he would not have undertaken his writing career in English if he had not joined the British navy. In 1886, the same year he was naturalized as a British citizen, Conrad passed his examinations for master mariner. By then it was clear his life had settled and he had made a wise choice.

Conrad served on British ships for nearly sixteen years. As second mate, he sailed on a ship journeying between Singapore and Borneo. He sailed to the Orient on the *Palestine*, a ship that burned and sank off the coast of Java. He used this adventure in *Youth* (1902). In 1888, ten years after his switch from the French to British seas, he commanded his only ship, the *Otago*. His novella, *The Secret Sharer*, reflects this experience. His one interlude from the British service was when he piloted a river boat to the Belgian Congo, the basis for *Heart of Darkness*. This journey also affected his health, a consequence which may have influenced his switch from seaman to writer.

He began writing his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, in 1889, though he did not in any way consider himself a writer. He eventually submitted the manuscript in 1894; it was accepted after Edward Garnett read it. Through Garnett's encouragement, Conrad began writing another novel. He still pursued a sea career, however, attempting to secure a command until 1898. For the next thirteen years, he wrote nearly one volume per year.

Married and with two sons, Conrad found it difficult to live off his literary earnings, even though he lived modestly in country homes. He received a Civil List pension from the British government.

After twenty years and sixteen volumes, Conrad finally achieved popular success with his novel *Chance* (1913). His limited audience grew to a wider acceptance.

During his literary career, Conrad met and made friends with Stephen Crane, H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford, and Henry James—influential writers of their time. Even with their friendships, he lived outside the mainstream of literary life. He was unaware of Freud's work and other scientific advances. He knew nothing of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence—writers with whom his work is often compared. Yet, his relative isolation did not prevent him from formulating his philosophy about art, fiction, and their relation to life. Many of the prefaces of his novels serve as his foundation for his artistic beliefs.

Often linked to Herman Melville and Jack London, other writers of adventure stories, Conrad infused his work with psychological and moral implications. His characters face deep problems, ones with difficult or no answers. Their response to these questions often determines the course of their lives. Symbol and myth fill his fiction, and much of his story lies beneath the surface narrative. The adventure is merely one level of the story, the more intriguing one is buried under the plot. Reading a work by Conrad requires patience, diligence, and concentration.

From his first book, he used "Joseph Conrad" as his writing name, his difficult given name had been misspelled too many times on official sailing papers. A master craftsman and stylist, Conrad labored at the writing process. No writing came easy to him. His major works include *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Youth*, containing *Heart of Darkness*, (1902), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *The Secret Sharer* (1910), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and *Victory* (1915).

Never a healthy man, Conrad suffered from indigestion, hypochondria, and melancholia. Conrad died at his desk in 1924, at the age of sixty-six. A man who did not speak English before he was twenty-two, and did not write English until he taught himself at thirty-two, Joseph Conrad fashioned his life at sea into his life in fiction. By transforming experience into art, he established his permanence as a twentieth-century British novelist.

Summary

Section I

Literally speaking, the action of *Heart of Darkness* is simply the act of storytelling aboard a ship on the river Thames around the turn of the twentieth century. An unnamed narrator, along with four other men, is aboard the anchored *Nellie* waiting for the tide to turn. They trade sea stories to pass the time. One of these men is Charlie Marlow, whose story will itself be the primary narrative of *Heart of Darkness*. Before Marlow begins his tale, however, the unnamed narrator muses to himself on a history of exploration and conquest which also originated on the Thames, the waterway connecting London to the sea. The narrator mentions Sir Francis Drake and his ship the *Golden Hind*, which traveled around the globe at the end of the sixteenth century, as well as Sir John Franklin, whose expedition to North America disappeared in the Arctic Ocean in the middle of the nineteenth century.

As the sun is setting on the *Nellie*, Marlow also begins to speak of London's history and of naval expeditions. He, however, imagines an earlier point in history: he sketches the story of a hypothetical Roman seaman sent north from the Mediterranean to the then barely known British Isles. This is Marlow's prelude to his narration of his own journey up the Congo river, and he then begins an account of how he himself once secured a job as the captain of a river steamer in the Belgian colony in Africa. From here on the bulk of the novella is Marlow's narration of his journey into the Congo.

Through an aunt in Brussels, Belgium's capital, Marlow manages to get an interview with a trading company which operates a system of ivory trading posts in the Belgian Congo (formerly Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). After a very brief discussion with a Company official in Brussels and a very strange physical examination by a Company doctor, Marlow is hired to sail a steamer between trading posts on the Congo River. He is then sent on a French ship down the African coast to the mouth of the Congo.

From the mouth of the Congo, Marlow takes a short trip upriver on a steamer. This ship leaves him at the Company's Lower Station. Marlow finds the station to be a vision of hell—it is a “wanton smash-up” with loads of rusting ancient wreckage everywhere, a cliff nearby being demolished with dynamite for no apparent reason, and many starving and dying Africans enslaved and laboring under the armed guard of the Company's white employees. Marlow meets the Company's chief accountant, who mentions a Mr. Kurtz—manager of the Inner Station—for the first time and describes him as a “very remarkable person” who sends an enormous amount of ivory out of the interior. Marlow must wait at the Lower Station for ten days before setting out two hundred miles overland in a caravan to where his steamer is waiting up the river at the Central Station.

After fifteen days the caravan arrives at the Central Station, where Marlow first sees the ship that he is to command. It is sunk in the river. Marlow meets the manager of the Central Station, with whom he discusses the sunken ship. It will, they anticipate, take several months to repair. Over the course of the next several weeks, Marlow notices that the rivets he keeps requesting for the repair never arrive from the Lower Station; and when he overhears the manager speaking with several other Company officials, he begins to suspect that his requests are being intercepted—that is, that the manager does not want the ship to get repaired for some reason.

Section II

Overhearing a conversation between the manager and his uncle, Marlow learns some information that begins to make some sense of the delays in his travel. Kurtz, chief of the Inner Station, has been in the interior alone for more than a year. He has sent no communication other than a steady and tremendous flow of ivory down to the Central Station. The manager fears that Kurtz is too strong competition for him professionally, and is not particularly interested in seeing him return.

Marlow's steamer, however, finally gets fixed, and he and his party start heading up river to retrieve Kurtz and whatever ivory is at the Inner Station. On board are Marlow, the manager, several employees of the Company, and a crew of approximately twenty cannibals. The river is treacherous and the vegetation thick and almost impenetrable throughout the journey. At a place nearly fifty miles downstream from the Inner Station, they come across an abandoned hut with a sign telling them to approach cautiously. Inside the hut, Marlow discovers a tattered copy of a navigation manual in which undecipherable notes are written in the margins.

Nearing the Station in a heavy fog, the ship is attacked from the shore by arrows, and the passengers—"pilgrims," Marlow calls them—fire into the jungle with their rifles. Marlow ends the attack by blowing the steam whistle and scaring off the unseen attackers, but not before his helmsman is killed by a spear. Marlow imagines that he will not get to meet the mysterious Kurtz, that perhaps he has been killed, and suddenly realizes something:

"I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness."

When they finally reach the Inner Station, they are beckoned by an odd Russian man who is a sort of disciple of Kurtz's. He turns out also to have been the owner of the hut and navigation manual Marlow found downstream. He speaks feverishly to Marlow about Kurtz's greatness.

Section III

The Russian explains to Marlow that the Africans attacked the ship because they were afraid it was coming to take Kurtz away from them. It appears that they worship Kurtz, and the Inner Station is a terrifying monument to Kurtz's power. The full extent of Kurtz's authority at the Inner Station is now revealed to Marlow. There are heads of "rebels" on stakes surrounding Kurtz's hut, and Marlow speaks of Kurtz presiding over "unspeakable" rituals. When Kurtz is carried out to meet the ship—by this time he is very frail with illness—he commands the crowd to allow him to be taken aboard without incident. As they wait out the night on board the steamer, the people of the Inner Station build fires and pound drums in vigil.

Late that night Marlow wakes up to find Kurtz gone, so he goes ashore to find him. When he tracks him down, Kurtz is crawling through the brush, trying to return to the Station, to the fires, to "his people," and to his "immense plans." Marlow persuades him to return to the ship. When the ship leaves the next day with the ailing Kurtz on board, the crowd gathers at the shore and wails in desperate sadness at his disappearance. Marlow blows the steam whistle and disperses the crowd.

On the return trip to the Central Station, Kurtz's health worsens. He half coherently reflects on his "soul's adventure," as Marlow describes it, and his famous final words are: "The horror! The horror!" He dies and is buried somewhere downriver on the muddy shore.

When Marlow returns to Belgium, he goes to see Kurtz's fiancée, his "Intended." She speaks with him about Kurtz's greatness, his genius, his ability to speak eloquently, and of his great plans for civilizing Africa. Rather than explain the truth of Kurtz's life in Africa, Marlow decides not to disillusion her. He returns some of Kurtz's things to her—some letters and a pamphlet he had written—and tells her that Kurtz's last word was

her name. Marlow's story ends and the scene returns to the anchored *Nellie*, where the unnamed narrator and the other sailors are sitting silently as the tide is turning.

Summary and Analysis

Section I Summary and Analysis

New Characters

The Director of Companies: captain and owner of the boat

“I”: unnamed narrator on the boat

The Lawyer, The Accountant: people on the boat in the Thames

Charlie Marlow: also on the boat; tells the story of his journey to see Kurtz deep in the jungle

Two Knitting Women: they sit outside the outer office

The Doctor: he examines Marlow before his journey

The Aunt: related to Marlow, she helps him get his appointment to the ship

The Swedish Captain: the man in charge of a little sea-going steamer

The Company’s Chief Accountant: his neat appearance contrasts with the chaos of the station

The Dying Agent: the man tormented by flies at the station

The Manager: leader of the station who survives because of his excellent health

The Pilgrims: workers who carry long staves; they want any chance to obtain ivory

The Brickmaker: does secretarial work for the manager, but does not seem to make bricks

The Boilermaker: a good worker who talks to Marlow about the rivets they need

The Manager’s Uncle: leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition; he speaks only to his nephew

Summary

A boat, the *Nellie*, is docked in the Thames. Its sails are still, and the water and sea calm. An unnamed narrator, who refers to himself only as “I,” introduces the people on board. Four people sit on deck besides himself: the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, the Accountant, and Marlow. The Director of Companies is their captain and host. An elderly man, the Lawyer, sits on the rug for comfort, while the Accountant plays with a box of dominoes. Finally, Marlow sits cross-legged, his arms dropped, his palms facing outward. The narrator says they “exchanged a few words lazily.”



The *Nellie*

The unnamed narrator thinks of the great history of the sea, its people, and ships. He mentions Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin. He recalls the *Golden Hind*, the *Erebus*, and the *Terror*—ships from the past. He mentions all the greatness, dreams, and empires of history.

The sun sets. In the distance, the lights from the Chapman lighthouse, ships, and London shine at night. Still, a lurid glare glows between London and the sky.

Marlow speaks about London, saying how it's been “one of the dark places of the earth.” No one responds. The narrator tells us that Marlow is the only one who still follows the sea. He considers him to be a wanderer. Their home is the ship, their country is the sea. He says Marlow is not typical. For Marlow, when he tells a tale, its meaning is not inside like a kernel, but outside.

Suddenly, Marlow begins talking about the Romans and ancient times. He pictures the cold, fog, disease, and battles with the savage natives they had to endure. He admires their courage to face the darkness. In the posture of a Buddha, he speaks about how they used only force and violence to get what they wanted. Conquests back then, he says, meant stealing from people who were different from you. He believes there is

more needed to redeem mankind, something to “bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to....”

Marlow stops speaking. There is a long silence and no one speaks. When he starts talking again, he begins to tell a story of one of his journeys. He says it reveals something about himself.

Marlow tells of how he'd spent six years traveling on the Indian Ocean, Pacific, and China Seas before taking the journey he's talking about. When he was young, he used to point to blank spaces on maps and say, “When I grow up I will go there.” He's visited most of them, except one. He calls Africa a “place of darkness.” He compares the Congo river on the map to a snake: its head in the sea, its body curving over a country, and its tail in the deep of the land. As he had looked at a map in a shop window, he says he was as fascinated by this place as a bird is when it looks at a snake.

He cannot secure this job until his aunt helps him. She knows the wife of a person in the Administration. Marlow cannot believe he needs help from a woman.

Marlow tells how the company had recently discovered the death of one of their captains by a native. His name was Fresleven, and his murder stemmed from an argument over some black hens. Months later, when Marlow arrives, he uncovers Fresleven's body, the grass growing over his remains.

In forty-eight hours Marlow crosses the Channel and presents himself to his employer. Knitting black wool, two women—one fat, the other thin—sit outside the office. A map on a wall pictures the world in many colors. Marlow mentions the yellow patch at dead center, his destination.

Marlow meets the secretary, signs his contract, and is told he must have a medical exam. The women continue knitting as he passes through the outer office. They watch him strangely. A young clerk shows Marlow out of the office. It is early for his exam, so Marlow and the clerk have a drink. Speaking admiringly of Africa, the clerk surprises Marlow by not going there himself. “I am not such a fool as I look,” he says. At his exam, the doctor measures Marlow's head with calipers. He asks if there was any madness in Marlow's family. He also adds, “... the changes take place inside, you know.”



The two knitting women.

Marlow visits his aunt to thank her and say good-bye. He finds that his aunt had recommended him as “an emissary of light, something like a lower apostle.” All woman are out of touch with the truth, he says. He feels hesitant about leaving Brussels for Africa, the “center of the earth.” He leaves on a slow French steamer. It stops at many ports to unload soldiers and officers. The monotonous journey lulls Marlow into a depression. Occasionally, a boat from shore paddled by blacks interrupts the boredom. The steamer passes a French man-of-war ship shelling the coastline. They deliver mail to this ship. They also learn that the sailors aboard her were dying of fever at three a day. The steamer moves on, never stopping for Marlow to get a clear impression, except for “hints of nightmares.” They reach the mouth of the river in thirty days. Marlow switches to a small sea-going steamer captained by a Swede to take him farther upstream. The captain tells him he had taken a fellow Swede recently up the river. The man had hanged himself. The captain cannot answer Marlow directly when he asks why. When they reach the Outer Station, Marlow gets his first glimpse of Africa, the ivory trade, and the general waste. Broken machinery and loose rails litter the ground. Commanded by an arrogant guard, a six-man chain gang walks by with the “deathlike indifference of unhappy savages.”

Shocked, Marlow turns away from them and heads for the trees. Marlow avoids an artificial hole and nearly falls into a narrow ravine before reaching the shade. Black shapes occupy the area. These diseased, starving men lean against trees. Marlow gives one young man a biscuit he had gotten from the Swede's ship. He takes it, but does not eat it. Another man crawls to the river to drink.

Marlow walks away from the station. He meets a white man whose fanciful appearance contrasts with the surrounding darkness. He is the Company's chief accountant. Everything about him is orderly, unlike the "muddle" around him.

Marlow spends ten days at the Outer Station. Flies buzz. A deathly sick agent is brought in. He groans continuously. A caravan also arrives. The ensuing uproar causes the accountant to say he hates the savages "to the death." With sixty men, Marlow leaves the next day for the Central Station. He has a white companion, a man who faints and catches fever. Marlow meets a white man in an unbuttoned uniform. He says he repairs roads, but Marlow sees no roads or upkeep.



Marlow meets a white man in an unbuttoned uniform.

After fifteen days, Marlow reaches the Central Station. He finds that the boat he was to command was wrecked at the bottom of the river. The repair job, he knows, will take months. Marlow meets the manager in a curious interview. This man has attained his position because of his good health, not his ability and performance. The manager tells Marlow he had wanted to wait for him two days before, but he couldn't because Kurtz, the Inner Station's manager, was ill. He had visited him, and the skipper of Marlow's boat tore the bottom out. Marlow says he has heard of Kurtz. The manager assures Marlow of Kurtz's value. He also adds that it will take three months to repair the boat. Disgusted, Marlow leaves angered with the manager. He sees "pilgrims," white men carrying staves. A bit later, a shed full of prints, beads, and other goods catches fire. Marlow investigates the scene. He hears two men talking. One mentions Kurtz. The other is the manager. A black man accused of starting the fire is beaten. The "brickmaker" invites Marlow to his room for a drink. Marlow does not see a "fragment of a brick anywhere." He asks Marlow about Europe and his connections there. Marlow realizes the man intends to get information. Marlow notices a sketch in oils on the wall. It is of a "woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch." The manager says Kurtz had painted it a year before at the Central Station.



A man with a black mustache approves of beating the black native blamed for the fire.

Marlow asks about Kurtz. The manager calls Kurtz a “prodigy,” and an “emissary of pity and science and progress....” He says the same people who had sent Kurtz also had recommended Marlow. They go outside. A man with a black mustache approves of beating the black native blamed for the fire. The agent follows Marlow. He doesn’t want Marlow to speak badly of him to Kurtz. Marlow detests this man who, he thinks, has “nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe.” Marlow adds how he hates a lie because it appalls him. He also says it is hard for one person to explain himself to another because “we live, as we dream—alone.”

Momentarily, the story returns to the *Nellie*. The narrator listens intently, though the others may have been sleeping. It is dark. Marlow is more voice than person.

Marlow resumes his story. The brickmaker continues speaking of Kurtz, calling him a “universal genius.” Marlow demands rivets to repair the boat. Every week, a caravan arrives with trade goods, but never any rivets. The man says Kurtz, too, needs rivets. Marlow suggests that, as secretary to the manager, he should find a way to obtain them. The man mentions a hippopotamus, then leaves.

Marlow needs rivets to continue. He says he does not like to work, but enjoys finding himself, his “own reality,” while working. He returns to the boat. He speaks with the foreman, a man Marlow admires because of his dedication to work. A widower with six young children, this man raves about pigeons. He tells the man that rivets will arrive in a few weeks. They dance with joy on the deck.

The rivets do not come for awhile. An exploring party, the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, arrives. For the next six weeks, they appear in sections. A white man on a donkey leads each group, followed by a band of blacks. They are reckless, greedy, and cruel. They will “tear treasure out of the bowels of the land.”

The manager’s uncle leads them. Fat, with short legs, he resembles a butcher. He speaks only to his nephew. They stay together all day with their heads close to one another.

Analysis

Conrad uses a “framed” narrative technique. One narrator, in this case “I,” sets up another narrator, Marlow, who will continue the story. At first, readers may suspect that “I” will narrate the story. He doesn’t. After introducing the passengers to us, Marlow talks. His story becomes *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad reveals some of “I’s” thoughts to us, then Marlow’s story takes over.

The reader should remember that Marlow’s journey has already happened. He is not actually experiencing the events as he speaks of them. Marlow also abandons chronological sequence. Sometimes he jumps ahead in his story, then retraces his narration.

Conrad establishes a calm gloominess at the beginning. The *Nellie* is “without a flutter of sails,” “the wind was nearly calm,” and the air “seemed condensed into a mournful gloom.” Later, when the sun sets, there is still a “brooding gloom in the sunshine.” These descriptions suggest an eerie setting, as if something evil is about to occur. The narrator says the passengers feel “the bond of the sea” between them. We see this shared feeling when the narrator thinks of the sea’s history on the Thames, and Marlow speaks of the Romans nineteen hundred years ago. The past interests them. Marlow’s idea of history, though, includes the savages in Ancient Rome and “aggravated murder on a great scale.” The dark side intrigues him. His first sentence contains the words “dark places.” Even the river on a map resembles a snake, a sinister reptile.



Marlow

Conrad deepens Marlow's uniqueness with his physical posture. He sits cross-legged in "the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes." Very simply, Buddhist philosophy establishes suffering as inseparable from existence. It also contains "nirvana," a state of illumination. If he imitates a Buddha, how has Marlow suffered and what does he know?

He refers to the company he will join when he calls them "conquerors," people who "grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got." He disapproves of them. Since they did not have "belief in the idea," Marlow rejects their ambitions as a mere materialistic hunt.

As the traffic in London continues, the narrator mentions the green, red, and white flames gliding in the river during the "deepening night." Again, images of light and dark play against each other.

In order for Marlow to convey meaning in his tale, he says he must tell us how he got there, what he saw, and how he went up the river to meet the "poor chap," Kurtz. The journey was not "very clear," but it seemed to "throw a kind of light." In a symbolic way now, dark and light mix. Marlow relates his feelings as a child,

when he used to stare at maps and dream of explorations. Since then, many of those places had been visited, named, and inhabited. One place remains, though—the river “resembling an immense snake uncoiled.” Traditionally, snakes symbolize evil. Marlow speaks of it with this meaning, saying the place “had become a place of darkness.” This refers to the Belgian Congo.

Marlow tells how he needed help from his aunt to secure his appointment. He says, “Then would you believe it?—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job. Heavens!” This information seems insignificant. It isn’t. Conrad foreshadows Marlow’s lie to Kurtz’s Intended at the end of the novel. He will sacrifice the truth for a woman.

Our first indication of wasteful suffering during Marlow’s journey comes when he mentions Fresleven’s death. Killed in a fight over two black hens, the captain’s murder suggests an abandonment of rational behavior. Since Marlow has been to the jungle, he says it “didn’t surprise me in the least to hear this.” No respect is even shown to Fresleven’s corpse, because Marlow discovers his body with grass growing over it.

The two knitting women present another sign of the macabre. Marlow thinks of them “guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall....” Everything about them gives him an “eerie feeling.”

Marlow’s visit to the doctor adds to the idea on the unknown. The doctor measures his head, then asks if there was any sign of madness in Marlow’s family. He also says the changes take place “inside.” These clues lead us to believe that Marlow’s journey is more than a physical one, it is a mental and psychological one.

Marlow knows what happens, but he has not told us yet. Conrad withholds information to create suspense. Though short, Marlow’s visit to his aunt contains an important passage. She had recommended him, Marlow believes, using the words “emissary of light.” This connects to a scene later in Section I, when the manager refers to Kurtz as an “emissary.” They share the description of being a messenger or agent. We cannot know their message, though, until Marlow concludes his story.

The beginning of Marlow’s journey on the French steamer initiates his descent into “darkness.” They travel on the “edge of a colossal jungle, so dark as to be almost black....” At this point, light still shows. The sun is “fierce,” the land “seemed to glisten,” and “grayish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf.” Conrad alternates images of light and darkness not only to convey mood but also to allude to ethical questions of good and bad, and right and wrong. As Marlow’s journey progresses though, light fades and darkness dominates.

The Swede’s story of a fellow Swede’s suicide advances the idea of irrational acts. Marlow is not told the reason why he had hanged himself. We can sense the feeling of chaos Marlow will find in Africa. Why is there killing and madness? Notice how Conrad hints at these strange events without actually revealing too much about them.

Marlow notices more decay. He sees an “undersized railway truck lying on its back,” the “carcass of some animal,” and “a stack of rusty nails.” These images define a general sense of squalor, a sign of neglect and waste. As Marlow tells of his travels, he never fails to include these descriptions. He has seen a world few of us have.

The next scene, when Marlow sees the black slaves chained together, shows us his disgust of man’s treatment toward his fellow man. Here, Conrad attacks imperialism—the use by one group or nation over another for their own gain. The whites in the jungle use the blacks, reducing them to machines. Marlow feels guilty of this attitude, saying he is “a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.” He flees from them to disassociate himself from the treatment of the blacks. But Marlow cannot run away. Everywhere, starving and dying blacks lean for rest, crawl for water, and crouch for shade. Marlow is “horrorstruck.” The savage

cruelty reflects the depravity in the jungle. And, he has only begun his journey.

The appearance of the Company's chief accountant represents a sharp contrast. His "brushed hair," "starched collars," and "got-up shirt-fronts" show a sense of order amidst all disorder. Marlow acknowledges him. While all around the manager falls to waste and rots, he keeps himself and his books in "apple-pie order." He cannot tolerate the groans of a dying agent in his office because it makes it "difficult to guard against clerical errors."

Marlow hears of Kurtz for the first time. The manager praises him. Marlow knows nothing of him at this time. Remember, in reality, Marlow knows everything about Kurtz because he is recounting the events, not experiencing them now.



The Company's chief accountant.

The next part of Marlow's journey, with a caravan of sixty men, leads him through "networks of paths." No people are around, "nobody, not a hut." He sees "abandoned villages" and "ruins of grass walls." The jungle gets darker, the isolation more pronounced. The "white men with long staves" in their hands who

appear momentarily represent the “pilgrims,” the ivory hunters. They seek money and profit. They ignore the degradation. Marlow’s meeting with the manager here serves three purposes: he finds out that the steamer he is to command is stuck, he hears more about Kurtz, and he comes to dislike this man because he is a “chattering idiot.” The manager’s superior health contrasts with the information about Kurtz’s illness. We should observe how Conrad’s conception of health includes the physical and mental. The jungle, its weather, and isolation affect everyone in many ways. The accountant and this manager seem to have survived the conditions. Others succumb. Which group will Marlow and Kurtz belong to? The manager is an interesting character. He seems to hate Kurtz. If Marlow and Kurtz are linked together, then he must hate Marlow. This explains why Marlow is uneasy around him.

Marlow feels that the manager can only “keep the routine going—that’s all.” The manager never offers food or rest to Marlow. “Being hungry,” he says, “and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage.” The key word is, of course, “savage.” Are the surroundings influencing Marlow? And if the manager praises Kurtz, but Marlow dislikes the manager, can he accept his assessment of Kurtz?

Marlow sees more “pilgrims,” who speak of ivory. The word “rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed.” He detests this greed for wealth. He considers it to be “philanthropic pretense.” Unconcerned with money, Marlow is the outsider, the intruder.

The brickmaker’s appearance poses an intriguing question. How can he be a brickmaker if there are no bricks around? He fits the man who repairs roads earlier in the section, when Marlow said he did not see roads or upkeep. A mysterious element surrounds many characters. It is difficult to get a sense of them. Conrad leaves us questioning both who these people are, and Marlow’s description of them. Are they the way Marlow describes them, or is he purposely omitting important information about them? If he is, then why? Conrad raises these questions through the use of the first-person flashback narrative.



Kurtz's oil painting.

Marlow's description of Kurtz's oil painting gives us the first solid detail about him. The picture of a woman draped and blindfolded carrying a lighted torch against a black background suggests a few ideas. First, we see the combination of light and dark again. The blindfold refers to the actual darkness, as well as a spiritual and philosophical one, since the person cannot "see." The woman anticipates Kurtz's mistress and Intended, two women who will appear later.

In the next sequence, Marlow reveals much about his philosophy. He says he hates and detests a lie. Again, Conrad foreshadows the ending, when Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended. Later, we have to compare that moment with this statement. Marlow then says it is difficult for him to convey Kurtz to his listeners, the people on the boat. This implies us, the reader, also. "Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream," he says. This points to Marlow's problem. He is trying to tell the untellable, explain the unexplainable. Marlow's words reflect Conrad's function as a writer—to make the reader understand the story. "We live, as we dream—alone." Marlow adds. This statement comes close to illuminating Marlow's tale. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for one person to understand another.

If this is true, then Marlow cannot understand Kurtz, Kurtz cannot understand Marlow, and we cannot understand either of them. We can try to make sense, nothing more. As Marlow's tale becomes philosophical, Conrad takes us back to the *Nellie* and the "I" narrator. This breaks the dream-like trance of the story. We come back to reality, if only for a moment. Everyone but the narrator is asleep. If we are like him, then we are "on watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give ... the clue" to this story. Together, we try to catch Marlow's meaning.

Conrad returns to Marlow's story and a most practical matter: the need for rivets. Without them, his journey ends. This leads to a humorous scene when Marlow meets the Boilermaker, one of the few men he admires in the jungle. They reassure themselves that the rivets will arrive in three weeks, then danced "like lunatics."

The Eldorado Exploring Expedition arrives. Marlow abhors them. They want to "tear treasure out of the bowels of the land." They represent the greedy white men, whose sole purpose revolves around destroying the land to obtain money and wealth. Since the manager's uncle leads them, they further the idea of the pilgrims' infiltration. They lack "moral purpose," something Marlow appreciates.

Instead, Marlow thinks of Kurtz, a man "who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort." His interest stimulated, Marlow begins the next step on his quest to the mysterious ivory agent and the heart of darkness, a mythical place of hell.

Section II Summary and Analysis

New Characters

The Helmsman: a black man killed by arrows shot by natives

The Russian: man who greets Marlow at Kurtz's station

Summary

While on his boat, Marlow hears the manager and his uncle talk about Kurtz. They stand on the shore alongside the steamboat. Without moving, he listens. The manager fears Kurtz's influence. Threatened by Kurtz's influence and success, the manager says, "Am I the manager—or am I not?" The uncle hopes the climate will eventually ruin Kurtz.

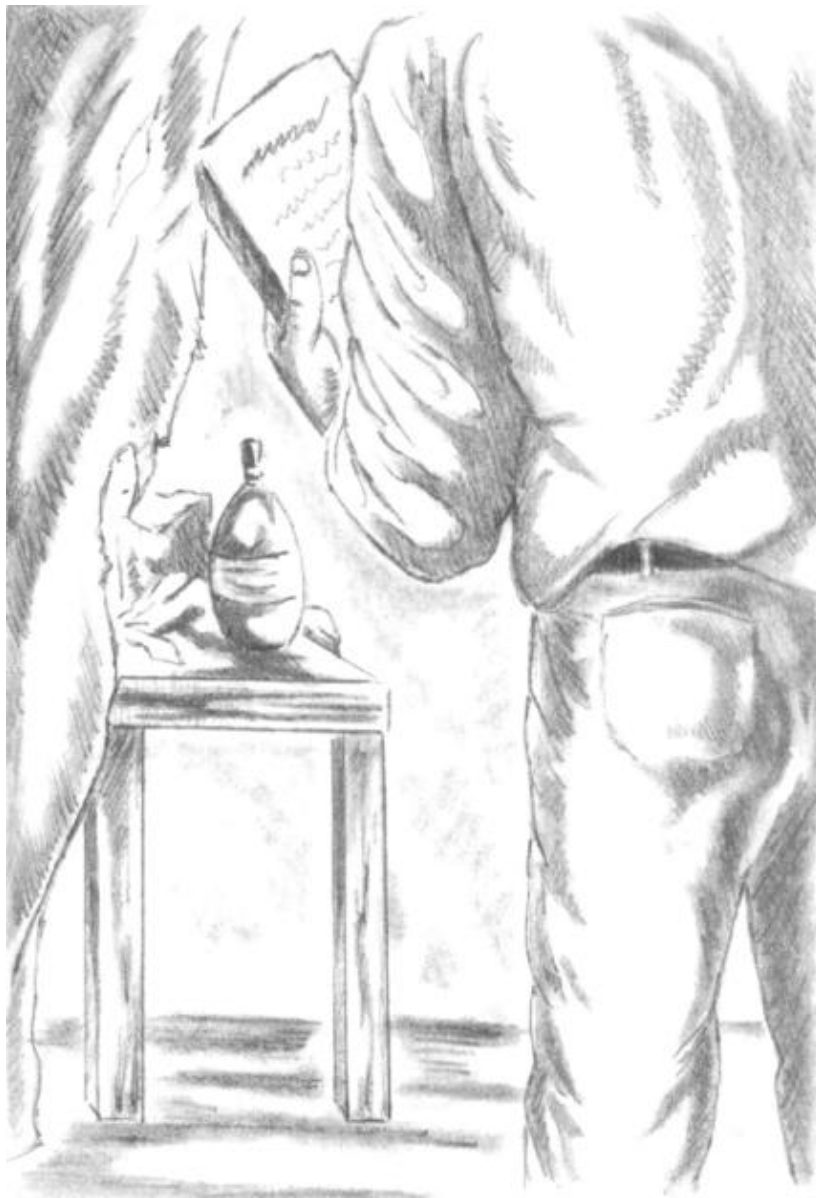
From the "absurd sentences," Marlow hears how Kurtz had traveled three hundred miles with a shipment of ivory nine months ago. Kurtz had then returned upriver in a canoe with four native paddlers, a "half-caste" left in charge of delivering the load of ivory. Kurtz's station has been without goods and stores since then. Kurtz's motives escape the manager and his uncle. Marlow says he sees Kurtz in his mind for the first time, how he faces the wilderness and desolation. The half-caste, a "scoundrel" to the manager and his uncle, had told of Kurtz's illness and how he had "recovered imperfectly." They walk away from Marlow, then return close to the boat again. When they speak this time, Marlow is not sure if they are talking about Kurtz, or about someone else in Kurtz's district of whom the manager disapproves. The manager says neither of them will be free until "one of these fellows is hanged." They agree that the real danger begins in Europe, where the orders come from. The manager quotes something Kurtz had said: "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." He calls Kurtz an "ass" for his ideas and his desire to be a manager one day. The uncle reassures his nephew when he says, "... I say, trust to this." He points to the jungle around him while he speaks, as if to say all these things will help you destroy Kurtz. Marlow jumps up to look at the forest, half expecting to receive an answer from the darkness. They knew he had been listening, he says, because they went back to the station "pretending not to know anything of my existence." Side by side, they walk away, their unequal shadows trailing behind them. The Eldorado Expedition leaves for the wilderness a few days later. In the future, Marlow finds out all

the donkeys died, as well as the blacks, “the less valuable animals.”

Marlow is excited about meeting Kurtz soon. It will not happen for two more months, though. They encounter warm air, empty streams, and the deep forest as they travel upriver. Marlow compares it to going back to the beginning of the world. Hippos and alligators line the sand-banks. Stillness and silence brood over everything. He has to watch for hidden banks to avoid damaging the boat. He looks for wood to burn for the next day’s steaming. He refers to the details of his job as “monkey tricks,” as the mysterious Truth watches him. He says when you attend to things on the surface, reality fades. The inner truth, he adds, is “hidden—luckily.”

For a moment, we return to the men aboard the *Nellie*. One man says, “Try to be civil, Marlow.” The narrator knows one person besides himself is listening. Driving the boat, Marlow says, resuming his story, was like a “blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road.” He sweats and shivers over worrying about the boat. Once, he needs twenty cannibals to help push the boat. With sarcasm and humor, he says they at least did not “eat each other before my face.” He recalls the smell of rotten hippo-meat the cannibals had brought with them. With the manager and three or four pilgrims holding their staves aboard, they pass white men greeting them with joy about ivory, the word itself ringing in the air. Massive trees fill the immense landscape. Marlow’s journey is now headed “towards Kurtz—exclusively.” He is not sure who it crawls to for the pilgrims. He hears the roll of drums, but does not understand if they signify war, peace, or prayer. The snapping of a twig can shatter the stillness of dawn. He again compares his journey to prehistoric times. Ancient man curses, prays, and welcomes them. Like phantoms, they glide past their surroundings. When natives howl and leap, Marlow thinks not how different they are from him, but their “remote kinship” to him. He says it is “ugly,” if you are at least willing to admit it. He philosophizes about man’s mind, and how it encompasses all periods of time and knowledge. Man must meet the truth with his own strength, not an external force.

Someone on the *Nellie* grunts a question. Marlow answers by saying he did not go ashore because he had to worry about the steampipes and the boat. Marlow mentions the fireman, a black man who keeps fire in the boiler. He could have been on shore with the natives, but instead helps Marlow because he has been trained for a profession. His filed teeth, strange patterns shaved on his head, and three scars on each of his cheeks fit well with his belief that an evil spirit lived inside the boiler. Both Marlow and the fireman are too busy with their jobs to think about their “creepy thoughts.”



Marlow finds a book in a reed hut.

Marlow reaches a reed hut fifty miles below the Inner Station, Kurtz's domain. He finds a stack of firewood and a note: "Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously." Marlow knows something is wrong, but is not sure what. They look into the jungle, but find no clues. In the hut, with a plank on two posts serving as a table and rubbish in a dark corner, he finds a coverless book, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*. He handles it with care, even though it is not an "enthraling book." Marlow appreciates the work and concern required to write it. Finding the book and looking at the notes in cipher along the margin equal an "extravagant mystery" for Marlow.

While absorbed with the book, Marlow forgets the forest, the manager, and woodpile. When he looks up, everything has gone. The pilgrims shout at him, as he puts the book in his pocket. The boat is loaded and ready to go. The manager calls the white man who had lived in the hut an "intruder." He assumes he is English, but this will not protect him from trouble unless he is careful. No one in the world is safe from trouble, Marlow observes with "assumed innocence."

Convinced the more rapid current will overpower the steamer, Marlow expects the boat to give “her last gasp.” Somehow, though, it moves on. Marlow thinks of what he will say to Kurtz when he meets him. Then he experiences a “flash of insight” and realizes the importance of this affair is under the surface, beyond his understanding.

In two days they are eight miles from Kurtz’s station. The manager suggests they wait until morning for safety. Annoyed, Marlow reasons that one more night means little after so many months. The unnatural silence makes him believe he is deaf. At three in the morning, fish leap, their splash reminding Marlow of gun fire. Fog accompanies the rising sun. It lifts by eight or nine in the morning. He orders the anchor, which they were taking in, to be paid out again. A clamor “modulated in savage discords” through the air. It ends in a shriek, then stops, leaving silence. Frightened, the pilgrims rush for their guns—Winchesters. They anticipate an attack.

Marlow notices the different expressions on the whites and blacks aboard the ship. The whites look discomposed, shocked at the frightful noise. Though interested, the blacks remain calm. They grunt to each other. One black man says they should catch the people hiding in the jungle. When Marlow asks why, he says, “Eat ’im!” Bothered at first by this idea, Marlow figures they are hungry. Besides some rations they had brought aboard, they had taken only rotten hippo-meat, which the pilgrims had thrown overboard. In theory, Marlow says, they were to use their payment—three nine-inch pieces of brass—to purchase food at the villages. They could not, though, because there were no villages, the people were hostile, or the manager did not want to stop. Sarcastically, Marlow says they could have eaten the wire itself for food. Marlow wonders why the cannibals do not eat the five white men. They could have easily overpowered them. Something had restrained them, but Marlow is not sure what. He and the others look “unwholesome” and “unappetizing,” he concludes. He also believes starvation is easier to fight than “bereavement, dishonor, and perdition of one’s soul....” Fighting hunger requires all of a man’s strength.

The manager wants to push on. Marlow knows they cannot steer properly. The manager authorizes him to “take all the risks.” Marlow refuses. The manager defers to his judgment. Marlow turns away from the manager to look into the fog. He compares the adventures in approaching Kurtz to an “enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle.” The manager fears an attack. Marlow believes the thick fog will prevent it. He associates “sorrow” with the natives, not violence. Marlow feels the pilgrims stare at him as if he is mad. He watches the fog the way a “cat watches a mouse.” Marlow interprets the natives’ actions as protective and desperate, not aggressive or even defensive.

They travel through the thick fog until they come within a mile and a half below Kurtz’s station. A bright green islet appears in the middle of the stream. Marlow can steer either left or right, with each path looking similar. He chooses the western passage because he had been informed the station was on the west side. It is narrower than he had anticipated. He steers the boat close to the bank, where the water is deepest. Marlow mentions the helmsman, a black man who thinks highly of himself. He wears a pair of brass earrings and blue cloth wrapper. When Marlow is next to him, this man steers with “no end of a swagger,” but if no one is near he falls “prey to an abject funk.” Marlow looks at the sounding-pole sticking further out of the water each time the poleman puts it in. This indicates how the water turns shallow.

The next moment, the poleman falls flat to the deck without the pole, and the fireman sits ducking by his furnace. Arrows fly. Marlow instructs the helmsman to steer straight. The pilgrims fire their guns into the jungle. Letting go of the steering, the helmsman grabs a gun. Marlow yells at him to return to his duty. He may have as well “ordered a tree not to sway in the wind.” Instead, he steers the boat toward the bank. They hit overhanging bushes.



The helmsman is hit with a spear.

The helmsman holds his rifle and yells at the shore. Something big appears in the air, knocking the helmsman back. His head hits the wheel twice. He rolls back and stares up at Marlow, a shaft of spear sticking below his ribs. He lands at Marlow's feet. The helmsman's blood fills Marlow's shoes. The helmsman clutches the spear while Marlow forces himself to turn away from him and steer. He pulls the steam whistle cord repeatedly with one hand. The warlike yells die, the arrows stop.

Marlow and a pilgrim in pink pajamas stand over the helmsman. He dies without making a sound, a frown coming over his face at the last moment. Marlow tells the agent to steer. He tugs at his shoelaces. He believes Kurtz is dead now, too. Marlow throws one shoe overboard. He feels disappointment in not being able to speak with Kurtz now. Even though he had heard Kurtz was a swindler and thief, Marlow feels he is still a "gifted creature." Kurtz's ability to talk still fascinates him. He throws his other shoe overboard. Marlow thinks he has missed his destiny in life if he cannot hear Kurtz talk. He feels more lonely than if he had been "robbed of a belief."

On the *Nellie*, Marlow lights his pipe. The match shows his narrow face and dropped eyelids. He draws on his pipe, then the match goes out. This momentary switch in scene ends.

Marlow speaks of missing the privilege of listening to Kurtz. He amazes himself that he does not shed tears over missing Kurtz. He considers Kurtz “very little more than a voice.” The “I” narrator cuts in again, telling us that Marlow becomes silent for a long time. We return quickly to Marlow’s story. Marlow now jumps ahead in his story. He mentions women, specifically Kurtz’s Intended, who will not appear until the end of the novella, after Marlow returns from Africa. He says she is “out of it,” meaning out of touch with all that happened in Africa. He talks of Kurtz’s baldness, an “ivory ball” of a head. Marlow marvels at the amount of ivory Kurtz had collected. It fills the mud shanty and the boat when they load it. There could not be a single tusk either above or below the ground. He says Kurtz watched over it and referred to everything as belonging to him.

Speaking philosophically, Marlow says Kurtz belonged to the “powers of darkness.” He adds how Kurtz sat “amongst the devils of the land....” He tells about Kurtz’s background, how he had been educated in England with a half-English mother and a half-French father. He says all “Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.” He finds out how Kurtz had been instructed by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to write a report. Marlow sees it later, seventeen pages written before Kurtz’s nerves “went wrong.” A beautiful piece of writing, it described Kurtz presiding at midnight dances with unspeakable rites.

Marlow recalls Kurtz’s words. In one section, Kurtz had written how the blacks approach the whites as if they possess the “might as of a deity....” He also had written “Exterminate all the brutes.” Marlow considers the writing to be the “unbounded power of words.” He tells how Kurtz believed his pamphlet would secure his future career. Kurtz was not common, Marlow says. His power to charm had influenced the natives, as well as himself. He cannot forget him, yet he is not sure it was worth the helmsman’s death to reach him.



Marlow throws the helmsman's body overboard.

Marlow ends his jump ahead in the story, the “flash-forward.” He returns to the helmsman’s death. Marlow misses the helmsman and the partnership they had developed as they worked together. The bond now broken, he remembers the “profundity” of the helmsman’s look before he had died. Marlow puts on dry slippers, then throws the helmsman’s body overboard. The current takes his body, it rolls over twice, then disappears. Marlow says he had been a second-rate helmsman, but now he would be a first-class temptation—meaning food for the cannibals. Marlow steers after the funeral. Everyone on board believes Kurtz is dead. One red-haired pilgrim says they must have slaughtered everyone. Marlow says they at least had made a lot of smoke. He thinks they had missed their targets during the fight, by shooting too high. The screeching whistle had sent them running, he maintains. The manager talks of getting down the river for safety before it turns dark.

A decaying building with the jungle background fills the slope of a hill. They finally see the station. A white man wearing a hat like a cartwheel motions to them. Other human forms glide through the jungle. Marlow stops the engine and lets the boat drift. The manager tells the man about the attack. The man knows about it and says everything is all right. He reminds Marlow of a harlequin: bright clothes of blue, red, and yellow

sparkling in the sun. He looks young with a boyish face, no beard, and little blue eyes. He asks Marlow if he is English, and Marlow answers with the same question. Pointing up the hill, he tells them Kurtz is there. Armed, the manager and pilgrims go to the house. The man comes aboard. He says the whistle will scare the natives, “simple people,” he calls them. The sound of the whistle works better to drive the natives away than guns do, he says. People don’t talk to Mr. Kurtz, he adds, they listen to him. The son of an arch-priest, he is Russian, had run away from school, and served on English ships. He had been wandering alone on the river for two years. He is twenty-five, not so young as he looks. He tells Marlow the small house, stack of wood, and note were his. Marlow hands him the book. He makes as if to kiss Marlow, but restrains himself. Marlow finds out that the notes in the book are in Russian, not cipher. He tells Marlow that the natives had attacked because they do not want Kurtz to be taken away, not to kill him and the crew. Kurtz has “enlarged” his mind, he adds. He opens his arms and stares at Marlow.



A white man wearing a hat like a cartwheel motions to Marlow.

Analysis

Marlow hears second-hand information about Kurtz from the manager and his uncle. Their opinion of him contrasts Marlow’s growing admiration for Kurtz. He gathers bits from them about Kurtz, the way we gather

bits from him. He anticipates meeting Kurtz, mirroring our interest. Their fear of Kurtz and his success parallels Marlow's desire to meet him and draw his own conclusions. Marlow understands Kurtz's fine business sense when the manager talks of the ivory, "lots of it," coming from Kurtz's station. This period establishes Marlow's changing reason for his journey. At first, it was for the job and the adventure, but now Kurtz occupies his thoughts. He says he seemed "to see Kurtz for the first time." Surrounded by paddling savages, Kurtz leads the way "towards the depth of the wilderness." At this time, Marlow does not understand Kurtz's rejection of conventional society for unknown territory.

We come to see how the manager and his uncle represent the selfishness and greediness of civilized Europe. They care only about themselves, their positions, and promotions. They ridicule Kurtz's philosophy of how each station should be a "beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." Kurtz's idyllic vision aggravates them. Ironically, we will find out how Kurtz's life and practices contrast with his once idealistic views. When the manager's uncle asks him if he feels well, we see the power of the jungle, as it weakens and kills people. The uncle gestures toward the forest as he suggests how the climate may destroy Kurtz. Marlow calls the man's wishes a "treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart." Physically, the jungle conquers most men, leaving only the strong to live on. The power of nature overwhelms the power of man.

Marlow then compares traveling farther into the jungle to prehistoric times. The "empty stream," "great silence," and "impenetrable forest" validate this association. No civilization or laws governed people then. Marlow recalls his own past "in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence." As he journeys deeper into the forest, reality fades. A dream-like quality, with its "inner truth" surfaces. He adds to this idea of the ancient past without laws by speaking of the cannibals on the boat. These "fine fellows" show their progression to modern man by working well and not eating each other in front of Marlow. As civilized and tamed people, they fit Marlow's European view of man, not the native African, which he speaks of next. As the drums roll, Marlow sees the natives on shore. Their howling, leaping, and spinning thrill him. Their behavior evokes a "remote kinship with this wild and passionate roar." Instead of rejecting their outbursts, Marlow identifies with them; he understands that part in himself. Since the "mind of man is capable of anything," Marlow intellectually merges past and present.

This enables him to meet the truth before him—these savages dancing in the jungle. Notice how the farther he moves away from Europe, the more he identifies with the natives. The fireman, who fires the boiler, represents a combination of both worlds, savage and civilized. Marlow says he "ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank." Physically, he resembles a typical native. He wears a charm made of rags around his arm and a piece of polished bone through his lower lip. He considers the fire in the boiler to be an "evil spirit." Since "he had been instructed," though, he works on the boat. He personifies the transformation from the savage native to the educated white man. Marlow compares him to a dog walking on his hind-legs, which simultaneously insults and compliments him.

The hut they come upon some fifty miles below the Inner Station foreshadows Marlow's meeting with the Russian and a packet of papers Kurtz will give him. We find out at the end of Section II of *Heart of Darkness* that the Russian had left the note, firewood, and book. Marlow handles the coverless book, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*, "with the greatest possible tenderness." A plain book, this work attracts Marlow because it represents "an honest concern for the right way of going to work." He appreciates the care necessary to write it. He compares having to stop reading to tearing himself "away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship." Later, in Section III, when Kurtz hands Marlow his personal papers, Marlow will handle them with extreme care, too. Their value transcends their tattered appearance.

As the boat progresses up the river, Marlow and the manager disagree about their navigation. The manager urges caution, while Marlow wants to push on. Fearing the warning alluded to in the Russian's note, the

manager suggests traveling in daylight for safety. Yearning “to talk openly with Kurtz,” Marlow intends to get there as quickly as possible. Any delay annoys him. He disregards the dangers.

Marlow returns to the idea of the savage cannibals. They belong to the beginnings of time and eat rotten hippo-meat. He marvels at how they simply do not overpower the white men to eat them. For all their supposed barbarity, the savages and cannibals control their behavior more than the white man, who initiates violence in the search for ivory and wealth. The cannibals’ “primitive honor” restrains them from physical aggression. They even check their hunger through some kind of restricting code of law. The arguments between Marlow and the manager build the tension and accentuate their differences. Since Marlow thinks of Kurtz as “an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle,” he wants to avoid caution and further delays. The closer Marlow gets to Kurtz, the more reckless he becomes. The manager always remains wary. Marlow’s personal quest interferes with the manager’s business-like approach. The forest turns thickest within a mile and a half of Kurtz’s station. Trees stand in “serried ranks,” twigs overhang the “current thickly,” and a “broad strip of shadow” falls across the water.

Conrad intends this blurring on literal and symbolic levels. While the vegetation prevents Marlow from seeing the natives in the jungle, man’s humanity and morality mix with his inhumanity and immorality. It becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. The jungle disguises man’s external and internal worlds. The densely matted forest allows the natives to attack Marlow’s boat. Marlow sees “human limbs in movement” in the “tangled gloom,” but cannot prepare for the arrows. The pilgrims, with their more sophisticated weapons, lose any advantage they might have. Accustomed to the jungle, the natives seize the initiative with their primitive spears. The pilgrims fire at random into the forest. They cannot see their targets, but their targets can see them. The helmsman’s death in battle establishes Marlow’s growing obsession with meeting Kurtz.

The helmsman suffers a horrible death, a spear hitting him in the side below the ribs. He spills a pool of blood onto the floor and Marlow’s feet. After watching him die, Marlow thinks that Kurtz must be dead as well. “For the moment that was the dominant thought,” he adds, showing his disregard for the helmsman’s life. This man means little to him in relation to Kurtz. Later, he checks himself by saying that meeting Kurtz may not have been “exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him.” When Marlow next considers Kurtz to “present himself as a voice,” we see how Conrad connects him to Kurtz. In Section I, the narrator had said Marlow telling his story “had been no more to us than a voice.” The way we listen to Marlow parallels the way Marlow listens to Kurtz. Marlow believes Kurtz to be “something altogether without substance.” This is what Marlow is for us, the reader—merely a voice speaking words. Of course, Conrad throws in a catch. There is “substance” to Kurtz’s story and Marlow’s story. Marlow must interpret Kurtz’s words, while we must interpret Marlow’s words. These comparisons determine important distinctions. Marlow is like Kurtz because he leads, but he also resembles us because he listens.

Next, Conrad interrupts Marlow’s story to return to the *Nellie*. These transitions accomplish two things: one, they force us to listen more intently; two, they break the dream-like quality of Marlow’s journey by bringing us back to the reality of the present on the boat. The first time, Marlow lights his pipe, which illuminates his face momentarily. The second time, Marlow becomes silent. The idea of light and dark couples with sound and silence. The alternating shades of white and black suggest the good and evil of the actions of Marlow’s company toward the natives, the changing shades in the jungle, and the white Europeans and the black Africans. The sound and silence reflect the intermittent noises in the jungle, and Kurtz’s voice in life against his silence in death for Marlow.

Marlow then jumps forward in his narrative. By breaking the chronological structure, Conrad again forces us to listen to Marlow’s suggestion of looking beneath the surface to understand the finer points of his tale. We cannot simply accept the story as told, but must consider how Conrad gives us information. The deception Conrad incorporates in his narrative mirrors the deception Marlow encounters in the jungle. While he

navigates the Congo, we navigate his story.

One oversight affects the rest of the journey/story. In his jump ahead, Marlow offers us glimpses of Kurtz before he appears. First, he mentions Kurtz's Intended, the woman who waits for him in Europe. She will not appear until the end of the novella. He covets ivory, with his bald head even summoning the image of "an ivory ball." He refers to everything as "my," and belongs to the powers of darkness. Kurtz represents evil, a connection to man's dark side. In a "high seat amongst the devils of the land," Kurtz leads the natives in literal and symbolic ways. Marlow's ambition of speaking to Kurtz shows how he wants to embrace and understand Kurtz, his world, and his philosophy. In a sense, Marlow wants to transform himself into one of the natives, a follower of this mad deity. Marlow attributes Kurtz's origin not to Africa and the jungle, but Europe. Since "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," we see how Conrad rejects the idea of the black natives as evil, instead accusing the white European society of creating this devilish man. Here, Conrad flips the traditional image of white/good and black/bad around. Appearances can be deceiving, as the jungle often proves. Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs enhances his relationship to the dark side. Marlow learns of the "unspeakable rites" Kurtz presided at, the sacrifices "offered up to him," and the "exterminate all the brutes" ideology he espoused. Kurtz preaches a racial inequality, with the blacks looking at the whites "in the nature of supernatural beings." Ironically, Kurtz becomes a savage while reporting for their suppression. Marlow does not say whether he approves of Kurtz's ideas, even if he admires the "unbounded power of eloquence" of the words. Confused by the contradicting images of Kurtz, Marlow thinks that "whatever he was, he was not common." He could "charm or frighten rudimentary souls."

In Section I, the narrator said "Marlow was not typical." Conrad develops another similarity, here, suggesting how Marlow charms us with his words, and frightens us with them, as well. Marlow says Kurtz will not be forgotten, which he will assure because "as it turned out, he was to have the care of his memory." Will we carry on Marlow's memory?

The appearance of the Russian next adds a sort of strange, humorous element to the story. A brightly dressed "harlequin" with blue, red, and yellow patches over all his clothes, this man announces Kurtz's presence to Marlow. He is reminiscent of the "Fool" in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a character who looks nonsensical, yet imparts much wisdom. He speaks to Marlow while the manager and pilgrims investigate Kurtz's situation. He fills in some missing details for Marlow. He tells him that the hut, firewood, and note had been his. He explains how the natives had run for fear from the boat's whistle, adding how they "don't want him to go"—meaning Kurtz. And, most importantly for Marlow, he relates how Kurtz's speaking had captivated him. Almost as a sign of thanks for these bits of information, Marlow gives him the book he had found in the hut. The Russian returns the thanks by making to kiss Marlow, but "restrained himself." This act foreshadows Marlow's return of Kurtz's manuscript to Kurtz's Intended at the end of the novella. Marlow always handles with care the things he treasures, particularly Kurtz's memory. The Russian says Kurtz has "enlarged" his mind. Kurtz's life has answered some deep need for the Russian. Marlow's need to meet Kurtz will be answered shortly, in the next section. For the moment, though, when the Russian "opened his arms wide," Marlow receives his long-awaited invitation to Kurtz's world. This last image alludes to a religious service, where a priest (the Russian) invites his parishioner (Marlow) to worship their god (Kurtz).

Section III Summary and Analysis

New Characters

Kurtz's Black Mistress: black woman in the jungle who wears many ornaments

A Clean-Shaved Man, Kurtz's "Cousin," a Journalist: three people who visit Marlow in Europe to get Kurtz's papers

Kurtz's Intended: Kurtz's fiancée in Europe

Summary

Marlow looks at the Russian, whose “improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering” existence fascinates him. He wonders how he had survived in the jungle. Marlow imagines he will disappear before his eyes. The Russian tells Marlow to take Kurtz away quickly. Marlow does not envy the Russian's devotion to Kurtz because he had not “meditated over it.” He believes it is a “most dangerous thing.”

Marlow compares the Russian and Kurtz to ships “becalmed near each other.” The Russian fulfills Kurtz's need to have an audience. He says he had talked to Kurtz many nights, especially about love. Kurtz had made him “see” things.

The Russian throws his arms up in praise of Kurtz. The headman of Marlow's wood-cutters looks at Marlow. Frightened, for the first time he sees the jungle as a dark place without hope.

The Russian's friendship with Kurtz had been broken, not continuous. He had nursed Kurtz through two illnesses. Often, he had waited many days for Kurtz to return from his wanderings.

He tells Marlow how Kurtz had discovered villages, a lake, and searched for ivory. It had always been worth the wait. Marlow reminds the Russian how Kurtz had run out of goods to trade for ivory. The Russian says, “There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet.”

Marlow figures that Kurtz had raided the country. He asks if Kurtz had the natives following him. The Russian says the natives adore Kurtz, lured by his “thunder and lightning.” He says Kurtz can be terrible at times, but no one can judge him as you would an ordinary man. Once, Kurtz had tried to kill him, he says. Kurtz had wanted his ivory. The Russian had given it to him. He had to be careful, until he had reestablished his friendship with Kurtz. He had nursed him through his second illness then. Marlow says Kurtz is mad. The Russian objects. He tells Marlow he will change his mind when he hears Kurtz speak.



Marlow sees heads on posts.

Marlow sees people moving in the forest through his binoculars. He compares the woods to the “closed door of a prison.” The silence disturbs him. The Russian tells Marlow that Kurtz is very ill now. Only lately had he come to the river, after an absence of many months. Marlow sees round knobs on posts near Kurtz’s house. They are “black, dried, sunken” heads. The first one in the row faces him. It seems to smile at some “dream of that eternal slumber.” Marlow believes the heads show Kurtz’s lack of restraint. The wilderness had made him mad, he figures. Marlow can only wonder if Kurtz knows of his own “deficiency.” He puts down his binoculars.

The Russian tells Marlow about Kurtz’s ascendancy, how the chiefs venerate him, and how keeping him alive has occupied all his time. Marlow does not want to hear about the ceremonies used to honor Kurtz. Marlow believes he is in a “region of subtle horrors.” The Russian justifies Kurtz’s savagery by telling Marlow the heads had belonged to rebels, Kurtz’s opposition. Kurtz’s trying life, he adds, had led him to these cruel acts. Only keeping Kurtz alive, the Russian says he had nothing to do with these killings.



A group of men carry Kurtz on a stretcher.

A group of men carrying Kurtz on a stretcher, appears from around the house. Waist-deep in the grass, they appear to rise from the ground. Naked human beings with spears, bows, and shields follow. The bushes shake and the grass sways, but then stop in “attentive immobility,” as if everything waits for something to happen next. The Russian tells Marlow that if Kurtz does not say the right thing, they are done for.

Kurtz sits up. Marlow resents the absurd danger. Through his glasses, he sees Kurtz move his arm, talk, and nod his head. He realizes Kurtz means “short” in German, and feels the name fits, though he looks “at least seven feet long.” The cage of his ribs and bones of his arms show. He thinks of Kurtz as an “animated image of death.” Marlow hears Kurtz’s deep voice from afar.

Kurtz falls back, then the savages carry him forward again. Some savages vanish into the forest, which after breathing them out, was drawing them back in.

Some pilgrims carry Kurtz’s guns as they walk behind the stretcher. Bent over and talking, the manager walks beside him. They take Kurtz aboard the steamer and put him in a little cabin. Kurtz plays with the

letters they had brought him. Marlow notices both the fire in Kurtz's eyes and the dullness. Speaking for the first time, he says to Marlow, "I am glad." Kurtz had received special recommendations about Marlow. The grave voice contains power. The manager appears in the doorway, and the Russian stares at the shore. Marlow follows his glance.

A woman appears along the shore. She wears brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, and necklaces of glass beads. A "wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman," she walks with measured steps. She wears the "value of several elephant tusks upon her." The land, wilderness, and mysterious life seem to look at her. She approaches the steamer. Standing still, she faces them. The Russian growls, and the pilgrims murmur at Marlow's back. She lifts up her arms, the shadows darting out. Silence hangs over the scene. She turns and walks away, looking back at the men once.

The Russian says he would have shot her if she had tried to come aboard. He had been keeping her away from Kurtz for two weeks. According to the Russian, she had created problems. Once, while pointing at the Russian, she had to talk to Kurtz for an hour. Kurtz had been ill that day, or else "there would have been mischief." Marlow hears Kurtz yelling at the manager. He accuses him of caring only for the ivory. He says he is not as sick as the manager believes he is. The manager has interfered with his plans, and he will return to complete them. The manager walks from behind the curtain and tells Marlow how "low" Kurtz is, how he has done more harm than good for the company, and how they have done all they can for him. He agrees there is much ivory, but on the whole "the trade will suffer." Despite Kurtz's amazing success in obtaining ivory, the manager considers his method "unsound." Marlow ignores the manager's disapproval. He tells him that Kurtz is a remarkable man. The manager says Kurtz "was" a remarkable man. According to the manager, Marlow belongs to the same group as Kurtz.

Kurtz is "as good as buried," Marlow believes. The Russian taps Marlow on the shoulder and stammers out broken sentences. Marlow implores the Russian to speak. The Russian believes the white men hold ill-will toward him. Marlow agrees, saying the manager wants him hanged. The Russian plans to leave the area for a military post three hundred miles away. He asks Marlow to keep secrets so as to save Kurtz's reputation. Marlow promises.

He tells Marlow that Kurtz had ordered the attack to prevent them from taking him away. He is a simple man, though, and does not understand these matters. He has a canoe and three black fellows waiting for him. He asks for cartridges. Marlow hands them to him. The Russian takes some of Marlow's good English tobacco. He asks Marlow for shoes, showing him soles tied like sandals under his bare feet. Marlow gives him an old pair. He tells Marlow how Kurtz had read his own poetry, and he will never again meet a man like him. He rolls his eyes with delight and repeats how Kurtz had enlarged his mind. With cartridges in one pocket and the seamanship book in the other, the Russian vanishes. Marlow compares him to a "phenomenon!"

Marlow wakes after midnight. A fire burns on the hill, a line of agents guards the ivory, and men chant to themselves. Where Kurtz's "adorers" keep a vigil, red gleams waver in the forest against the intense blackness. Marlow dozes off again. When he wakes, he looks into the cabin and sees a light, but not Kurtz. An agent sleeps on a deck chair three feet from Marlow. Leaping ashore, Marlow says he will never betray Kurtz. He feels "jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience."



A trail in the wet grass.

Marlow discovers a trail in the wet grass. Kurtz crawls on all-fours. Marlow surprises himself by thinking of one of the knitting women. He believes he will never make it back to the steamer, instead living alone in the woods to an old age. He confuses the beat of the drums with that of his heart. He overcomes Kurtz, some thirty feet from a fire. Kurtz stands “like a vapor exhaled by the earth.” He fears Kurtz will shout. A sorcerer, or witch-man, stands close behind them. Kurtz tells Marlow, “Go away—hide yourself.” When Marlow asks Kurtz if he knows what he is doing, he says, “Perfectly.”

Marlow threatens to smash Kurtz’s head, even though nothing is near to use. Kurtz says his plans have been thwarted and he “was on the threshold of great things.” Marlow assures him of success in Europe. He believes Kurtz belongs to no one, “nobody either above or below.” His common words suggest dreams and nightmares. Kurtz’s “perfectly clear” intelligence appears before Marlow. He says Kurtz’s mad soul defies description. Marlow carries him back to the couch, comparing Kurtz’s weight to a child’s. He shakes, though, as if he “had carried half a ton on my back down that hill.”

At noon the next day, with Kurtz aboard, Marlow steers the steamer away. Covered in dirt from head to foot, three men strut on the slope. Blacks fill the clearing, the black woman among them. They nod their horned heads, sway their bodies, and shake black feathers toward the river. The black woman puts out her hands and shouts. In chorus, the mob responds to her sounds, reminiscent of a “satanic litany.”

In the pilot-house, Marlow asks Kurtz if he understands their actions. Kurtz answers, “Do I not?” Pulling the string of the whistle, Marlow scares the natives away. The pilgrims get their rifles. Someone on deck tells him to stop. The three men fall face down on the shore. Only the black woman remains in view. She stretches her arms after them over the river. The men aboard the boat begin firing, the smoke blocking Marlow’s vision.

The steamer heads toward the sea at twice the speed it had come up the river. The manager watches Kurtz and Marlow. Kurtz is dying. The pilgrims look at Marlow with disfavor. He considers himself numbered with the dead. He accepts this “unforeseen partnership.”

Kurtz mutters of his Intended, station, career, and ideas. He speaks of wanting kings to meet him at railway stations, a childish concept to Marlow. He insists on having the “right motives.” He asks Marlow to close the shutters, and Marlow obliges.

The steamer breaks down, as Marlow had expected. One morning, Kurtz hands him papers and a photograph tied with a shoestring. He tells Marlow to keep them in his care, away from the manager, the “noxious fool.” Kurtz mutters, “Live rightly, die, die....” Marlow believes he is rehearsing for some speech, or repeating a newspaper article.

Marlow spends more time helping the engine-driver fix the boat than speaking to Kurtz. One night, Kurtz says he is waiting for death. Marlow says, “Oh, nonsense.” Marlow has never seen anything like the changes on Kurtz’s face as he approached death. Kurtz’s last words are, “The horror! The horror!”

Marlow goes to the mess-room and sits opposite the manager. He avoids his glance. Flies stream over the lamp, cloth, hands, and faces. The manager’s boy peeks in the doorway, and says, “Mistah Kurtz—he dead.” The pilgrims run to see, but Marlow stays to eat dinner. The voice is gone. The next day they bury Kurtz in a muddy hole. “And then they very nearly buried me,” Marlow adds.

Marlow cannot compare himself to Kurtz, he says, because Kurtz had something to say. “The horror” is an expression of belief, a “moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats,” he reasons. Kurtz had been able to summarize and judge with his final pronouncement. He remains loyal to Kurtz because of this conviction. Marlow returns to Europe, back to the “sepulchral city.” He resents the sight of people hurrying about, drinking beer, and eating. He feels they do not know what he now knows. He often runs a fever and “was not very well at the time.” His aunt tries to nurse him. He hears of Kurtz’s mother’s death, watched over by his Intended.

One day a company official stops by to get Kurtz’s writings. Marlow says he had two fights about them with the manager, and he still refuses to give them up. The man says the company needs the reports, adding how it would be a great loss if he could not get the papers. Marlow finally gives him the “Suppression of Savage Customs” with the postscript torn off. He wants more. “Expect nothing else,” Marlow says.

Two days later, another man, calling himself Kurtz’s “cousin,” appears. He is an organist and tells Marlow that Kurtz had been a talented musician. Marlow does not doubt this man’s opinion. Marlow adds how to this day he does not know what Kurtz’s profession was. He had been a painter, a journalist, a “universal genius.” Marlow gives him some family letters and unimportant memoranda.

Then a journalist shows up. He considers Kurtz to have been a politician, an extremist leader. He says Kurtz could not write, but “heavens! how that man could talk.” The man says Kurtz’s faith could make himself believe anything. Marlow hands him the report, the man saying he will publish it. Left with a packet of letters and a portrait of a beautiful girl, he wants to visit Kurtz’s Intended.

Kurtz’s soul, body, station, plans, ivory, and career had passed out of Marlow’s hands by now. Only his memory and this woman survive. He recalls one day when Kurtz had complained how the company would try to claim the ivory as theirs, though he had collected it himself. At her house, Marlow has a vision of Kurtz on a stretcher, as he whispers again “The horror! The horror!”

All in black, she comes forward in her drawing room. It is more than a year after Kurtz’s death. She mourns for him, as if he had died “only yesterday.” Marlow hands her the packet. When she asks Marlow if he had known Kurtz well, he says, “I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.” She had not been able to share her memories of Kurtz with anyone since his mother’s death. Marlow says he had heard how her family had disapproved of the engagement.

They promise always to remember him. She says he will live on because of his words and because “his goodness shone in every act.” She puts out her arms across the light of the window. This action reminds Marlow of the black woman’s movements in the jungle. She regrets not being with Kurtz at his death. Marlow says he had stayed with him until the end.



Kurtz's Intended

When she asks about Kurtz's last words, Marlow says they were her name. She sighs, saying, "I knew it—I was sure!" Marlow believes he could not have told the truth, something too painful for her to bear. She hides her face in her hands and weeps. Marlow expects the house to collapse for telling a lie, but "the heavens do not fall for such a trifle."

We return to the *Nellie*, with Marlow in the pose of a meditating Buddha. The story is over. The Director says they have lost the first of the ebb. The narrator raises his head and sees a black bank of clouds, the tranquil Thames, and an overcast sky. All "lead into the heart of an immense darkness." The novella ends as it had begun, in darkness.

Analysis

Section III opens with the Russian extolling his admiration for Kurtz, his idol. "Something like admiration—like envy" for the Russian, Marlow listens to Kurtz's exploits—how he talks eloquently, discovers ivory and land, and receives adoration from natives.

The Russian never says anything derogatory or negative about Kurtz, even though Kurtz had tried to kill him over some ivory.

While Marlow by this time admires Kurtz, he rejects the Russian's complete devotion. Since the Russian "had not meditated over it," Marlow figures it to border on a "most dangerous thing."

The Russian embraces Kurtz "with a sort of eager fatalism." Marlow still judges him objectively. Considering Kurtz "mad," Marlow contrasts the Russian's unwavering idolization. This insight into Kurtz's behavior tempers Marlow's growing reverence. We also discover how Kurtz has suffered two illnesses, the nature of which we are not told.

By the next scene, however, when Marlow sees the heads attached to poles, we know that Kurtz suffers from mental illness. Marlow considers them "not ornamental but symbolic." "Food for thought," they show Kurtz's extreme policies. His actions exceed acceptable behavior. They show no "restraint in the gratification of his lusts." Not coincidentally, only one head faces Marlow, the rest pointing the other way. As a symbol, this represents Kurtz staring at Marlow, or Marlow coming to terms with his other half, the side similar to Kurtz, where desires dominate logic.

Marlow attributes Kurtz's madness to the jungle. By taking a "terrible vengeance" out on him, it has forced Kurtz to abandon morality and reasonable judgment. The whispering forest echoes "loudly within" Kurtz because he is "hollow at the core...." This shatters Marlow's earlier image of Kurtz.

At this point, Marlow compares Kurtz's world to a "region of subtle horrors." He denounces Kurtz, considering him "no idol of mine." The Russian opposes Marlow's refutation by justifying Kurtz's savagery. Since the heads belonged to rebels, Kurtz had no choice. Marlow rejects the Russian's explanation. A few moments later, Kurtz appears for the first time. Marlow sees him "in the gloom," while he stands "in the sunshine." This contrast of light and dark shows how Marlow still isolates himself from Kurtz's world. The natives trail behind, though, as if they follow a god.

When Marlow notices Kurtz's deep voice, he completes the idea he had established earlier—Kurtz as more of a spiritual being than a physical one. Kurtz's "thin arm," "bony head," and eyes of an "apparition" de-emphasize his physicality. Marlow thinks of him as "an animated image of death carved out of old ivory."

On the boat, Kurtz's first words to Marlow, "I am glad," represent an ironic acknowledgment. Since people had mentioned Marlow to Kurtz, they show the simple pleasure of meeting someone. However, we know Marlow feels the same way toward Kurtz, even with his recent doubtings. Marlow could have spoken these words, in turn.



Kurtz's black mistress

Kurtz's black mistress, "the wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman," links him to a woman in Africa the way his Intended connects him to a woman in Europe. Although the pilgrims and the Russian disapprove of her, she stands immune from their censure. She is a reverse Kurtz in a female form, though more of a physical presence with her "flash of barbarous ornaments." She never speaks, whereas Kurtz is a voice. Her "savage and superb" physical strength opposes Kurtz's physical frailty.

The manager questions Kurtz's sanity by calling his methods "unsound." He believes he lacks judgment. Marlow defends Kurtz, saying, "Nevertheless, I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man." Marlow sides with Kurtz for two reasons. First, he dislikes the manager, so this contradiction, he knows, annoys him. Second, when he finds himself "lumped along with Kurtz," he takes it as a compliment.

This affinity determines the next scene, when Marlow promises the Russian that he will save Kurtz's reputation by keeping his savagery secret. Marlow surprises himself. "I did not know how truly I spoke," he says. When the Russian flees the area, we see a further connection with Marlow. The Russian has a "canoe and three black fellows waiting" to take him away. This parallels Marlow's steamer and crew on a smaller

level. The Russian also needs shoes, which Marlow gives him. Remember earlier, Marlow needed shoes when the helmsman's blood had soaked into them. The Russian also says he will never meet such a man again. We know Marlow feels the same way.

The next scene turns dream-like. Marlow falls asleep, then awakes after midnight with fires burning and drums filling the air "with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration." The natives keep "their uneasy vigil" over Kurtz's house, a religious connotation. When Marlow chases Kurtz through the jungle to get him back to the boat, we notice how possessive of him he feels. He says he is "jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience." Yet, he shares the memory of Kurtz with us as he narrates his adventure.



A native

Kurtz's crawling on all-fours to escape links him to the native in Section I who had crawled on all-fours to drink from the river. They both crawl to survive, they both are near death, and they both fall victim to the jungle. And, since the natives worship Kurtz, they should share similarities.

In the fragmented conversation with Kurtz, Marlow fluctuates between wanting to kill Kurtz and assuring him of success in Europe based on his accomplishments. Marlow knows that Kurtz personifies contradictions. There is nothing “above or below him”; he is mad, yet intelligent; and, he is “alone in the wilderness,” yet Marlow “supported him, his long bony arm clasped round my neck.” During the next scene, the natives and black mistress line the jungle to watch Kurtz leave, their god being taken from them. She leads them in a “roaring chorus,” suggesting a religious response at a formal service. When Marlow asks Kurtz if he understands their actions, he smiles and says, “Do I not?” He understands their devotion, and how removing him betrays their belief.

Marlow then scares the natives, to the dismay of some people on the boat. He fears for his life, so he blows the whistle. Only the black mistress remains, her arms “stretched tragically” in the pose of a priestess. She stays devoted until the end, the same way Kurtz’s Intended, another woman, will at the end.

As they escape “out of the heart of darkness,” Marlow continues his dedication to Kurtz. The manager and pilgrims look upon him with “disfavor.” His “unforeseen partnership” with Kurtz forges his complicity. Marlow even helps Kurtz by closing the shutters to the outside, as he requests. Kurtz’s separation from the jungle unnerves him. He does not want to leave Africa and his followers the same way Marlow does not want to leave Kurtz. This explains why Marlow murmurs, “Oh, nonsense,” when Kurtz says he waits for death. “The horror! The horror!”—Kurtz’s last words—suggest many interpretations. They refer to his death, his destroyed plans, his submission to his evil side, and the pain of life. Marlow “blew the candle out” and then left the cabin. This extinguished light signifies not only Kurtz’s life, but the sanctity he embodies for Marlow.

Appropriately, a native announces Kurtz’s death. Marlow would not because he would rather deny it. Since Kurtz represents a god, his followers should pronounce his death. Ironically, Marlow appears “brutally callous” by not remaining with Kurtz; we know this is not true. His emotional closeness to Kurtz surpasses any pilgrim’s. Marlow agrees with the Russian when he proclaims Kurtz’s greatness. Kurtz “had something to say.” His judgment, as summarized in “The Horror!” expresses conviction and an “appalling face of a glimpsed truth.” Kurtz’s life extended to extremes. He “stepped over the edge,” while Marlow “had been permitted to draw back his hesitating foot.” Marlow withdraws where Kurtz advances.

This distinction represents the Freudian psychological terms ego and id. The id is man’s instinctual impulses and the satisfaction of primal needs. This is Kurtz, the man who satisfies his needs by returning to the primitive forest. He lets loose his urges, no matter how excessive or deviant they are. Conversely, Marlow is the ego—the part of the personality that controls behavior and external reality. He questions the savagery, killing, and abandonment of laws for pleasure.

Marlow never relinquishes his rational side for Kurtz’s irrational one. Marlow is the way Kurtz once was, and Kurtz is what Marlow does not want to be. When Marlow returns to Europe, the daily routine of working, eating, and drinking bores him. His experience has taught him things these people can never know. He feels like “laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance.”

He runs a fever, fulfilling the doctor’s predictions in Section I, when he had said that the changes take place inside. Like Kurtz, Marlow is mentally, not physically, ill. His “inexcusable behavior” proves the jungle’s influence.

The visits by the company official, Kurtz’s “cousin,” and the journalist illustrate their impersonal concern for Kurtz’s life, unlike Marlow’s deeply personal one. They want his papers for official and public reasons. Marlow gives them only unimportant papers, saving the personal letters and photographs for Kurtz’s Intended. Marlow finds the seamanship book and Kurtz’s writings. He gives the book to the Russian because he knows he values it, and Kurtz’s letters to his Intended because she values them.

Marlow's last act—his visit to Kurtz's Intended more than a year after his death—completes Marlow's journey. She constitutes the European version of Kurtz's black mistress in Africa. Her "fair hair," "pale visage," and "pure brow" oppose the black woman's ornamental excesses. She speaks of her loss to Marlow. The black woman had expressed it through physical movements. They talk of intimacy, knowing Kurtz, and love. Ironically, she says she "knew him best." In many ways, Marlow knows Kurtz on a deeper level than she does. She also is unaware of his black mistress, barbaric actions, and mental illness. She says he "drew men towards him." For Marlow, nothing could be more true. Mesmerized by Kurtz, he remains loyal to his memory. Marlow avoids breaking the "illusion that shone with an unearthly glow" in Kurtz's Intended. He believes she is not capable of dealing with the truth, a force too powerful to oppose. Her misconception shows when she says Kurtz's "goodness shone in every act." Marlow agrees, furthering the deception. He connects Kurtz's Intended to the black mistress. These women show their love for Kurtz by cherishing their image of him—each mirroring their culture's ways.

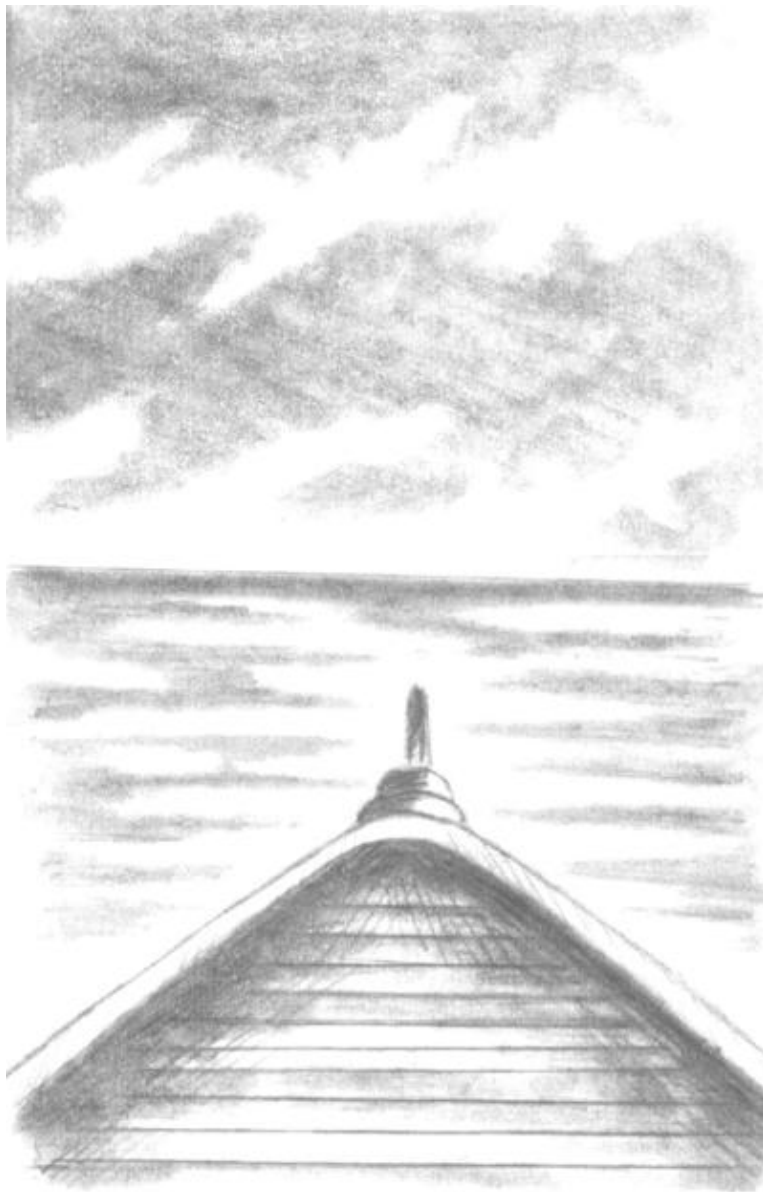


Marlow

Let's return for a moment to the oil painting Marlow had seen in Section I. We now recognize a reference to the black mistress and his Intended in the picture. The blindfold and torch reflect his Intended, her delusion

toward Kurtz and her light of love in his dark world. The somber, black background and stately movement reflect his black mistress, the African jungle and her measured gestures. With only Kurtz's words left to them, Marlow and the woman talk of his verbal gifts. When she wants to know Kurtz's last words, Marlow lies and tells her they had been her name, not "The horror! The horror!"

Earlier, in Section I, Kurtz had said he detested a lie because there is a "taint of death" in it. He lies to Kurtz's Intended to shield her from the truth. He has seen the truth in the jungle, but knows the lie here is better. Kurtz's Intended cries, and, in so doing, comforts herself. It would have been "too dark altogether" for her. Marlow finalizes his idea of "how out of touch with truth women are," which he had announced in Section II. He also atones, in a way, for his attitude toward his aunt for helping him secure his job. There he had belittled a woman, here he protects a woman.



The Nellie

The framed narrative ends. We return to the *Nellie* and Marlow's "pose of a meditating Buddha." As we had asked in Section I, what has he learned and suffered? Now we can answer these questions. He has learned of man's darker side, his attraction toward evil, through Kurtz. He has discovered how the heart of darkness is

not only a physical place (Africa), but a place within all men. He has suffered from seeing that darker side. Few people can claim this, which explains why Marlow “sat apart” from the others on the boat. Finally, the Director says, “We have lost the first of the ebb.” He ignores Marlow’s tale. Nothing reaches him, none of the philosophy and insights into human nature. The narrator lifts his head and sees “the heart of an immense darkness” in the distance. Marlow’s story has enlightened him. If we have listened, it has done the same for us.

Quizzes

Section I Questions and Answers

Study Questions

1. Identify the people on the *Nellie*.
2. Why is it ironic that Marlow needs his aunt's help to secure his appointment?
3. What happened to Fresleven, one of the Company's captains?
4. How are the two women outside the secretary's office symbolic?
5. Name two unusual procedures at Marlow's physical exam.
6. How did the Swede die?
7. What is unique about the chief accountant's appearance?
8. Why was the manager successful at his job?
9. Why does Marlow call some people on the boat "pilgrims"?
10. Why does Marlow need the brickmaker's help?

Answers

1. A narrator, a company director, a lawyer, an accountant, and Marlow are aboard the *Nellie*.
2. It is ironic that Marlow needs his aunt's help because she is a woman in a male-dominated world, the sea.
3. Fresleven was murdered by a native in a quarrel over black hens.
4. The women outside the secretary's office knit black wool, the symbol of death.
5. The doctor measures Marlow's head with calipers, and asks if there has been madness in his family.
6. The Swede hanged himself.
7. The chief accountant is neat and orderly.
8. The manager was successful because he was always healthy.
9. Marlow calls them "pilgrims" because they carry staves and their "pilgrimage" is to obtain ivory.
10. Marlow needs rivets from the brickmaker to repair the boat.

Section II Questions and Answers

Study Questions

1. When he is on the boat, who does Marlow overhear speaking about Kurtz?
2. Why does Marlow compare the jungle to prehistoric times?
3. How does the cannibals' food affect Marlow?
4. Why does the book Marlow finds in the hut interest him?
5. Why couldn't the men aboard the boat spend their money for food?
6. Who aboard the boat is killed during the attack?
7. How does Marlow scare the natives during the fight?
8. Why does Marlow throw his shoes overboard?
9. Why does the Russian leave a note on the woodpile?
10. Why did Kurtz write a report?

Answers

1. Marlow overhears the manager and his uncle talk of Kurtz.
2. The violence, degradation, and lack of civility in the jungle remind Marlow of prehistoric times.
3. The cannibals' hippo-meat is rotten, smells, and makes Marlow think of his own hunger.
4. The book in the hut interests Marlow because it reflects a task planned and done well.
5. The men on the boat could not buy food because the manager did not stop, and/or the villages were destroyed.
6. The helmsman dies during the attack.
7. Marlow blows the steam whistle and the natives fear the noise.
8. Marlow throws his shoes overboard because they are soaked with blood from the helmsman's wounds.
9. The Russian leaves a note to tell someone to hurry and prepare for the coming danger.
10. Kurtz writes a document because he was instructed to chronicle his experience with the savages.

Section III Questions and Answers

Study Questions

1. Why does the Russian nurse Kurtz through two illnesses?

2. What frightening sight does Marlow see outside Kurtz's house?
3. Who is with Kurtz when Marlow first sees him?
4. Why does the manager disapprove of Kurtz?
5. Why does the Russian leave Kurtz's area?
6. Why is Kurtz carried from the forest?
7. Why does Kurtz give Marlow papers before he dies?
8. Explain the irony of where they bury Kurtz.
9. Why do three people visit Marlow when he returns to Europe?
10. What lie does Marlow tell Kurtz's Intended?

Answers

1. The Russian's admiration and love for Kurtz compels him to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses.
2. Marlow sees heads stuck on poles outside Kurtz's house.
3. Weak, Kurtz is on a stretcher carried by the natives when Marlow first sees him.
4. The manager disapproves of Kurtz because he believes Kurtz has done more harm than good for the company by his unsound methods.
5. The Russian leaves Kurtz's area because he fears the manager wants him killed.
6. Kurtz is taken from the forest to a cabin on the boat so he can be rescued and cured.
7. Kurtz gives Marlow a packet of letters to preserve his work and memory.
8. Worshipped in life by the natives, Kurtz is buried in a "muddy hole," a place of filth and emptiness.
9. Three people visit Marlow in Europe to get Kurtz's writings.
10. He tells her Kurtz's last words were her name.

Characters

The Aunt

The Aunt uses her influence to help Charlie Marlow secure an appointment as skipper of the steamboat that will take him up the Congo River. Echoing the prevailing sentiments of the Victorian day, the Aunt speaks of missions to Africa as “weaning the ignorant millions from their horrid ways.”

The Chief Accountant

The Chief Accountant, sometimes referred to as the Clerk, is a white man who has been in the Congo for three years. He appears in such an unexpectedly elegant outfit when Marlow first encounters him that Marlow thinks he is a vision. Both the Chief Accountant's clothes and his books are in excellent order. He keeps up appearances, despite the sight of people dying all around him and the great demoralization of the land. For this, he earns Marlow's respect. “That's backbone,” says Marlow.

The Clerk

See The Chief Accountant

The Company Manager

See The Manager

The Doctor

The Doctor measures Marlow's head before he sets out on his journey. He says he does that for everyone who goes “out there,” meaning Africa, but that he never sees them when they return. The Doctor asks Marlow if there's any madness in his family and warns him above all else to keep calm and avoid irritation in the tropics.

The Fireman

The Fireman is an African referred to as “an improved specimen.” He has three ornamental scars on each cheek and teeth filed to points. He is very good at firing the boiler, for he believes evil spirits reside within and it is his job to keep the boiler from getting thirsty.

The Foreman

The Foreman is a boilermaker by trade and a good worker. He is a bony, yellow-faced, bald widower with a waist-length beard and six children. His passion is pigeon flying. By performing a jig and getting Marlow to dance it with him, he shows that the lonely, brutalizing life of the interior of Africa can make people behave in bizarre ways.



Still from the 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, starring Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen, which was a modern-day interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* set during the Vietnam War.

Captain Fresleven

Fresleven, a Danish captain, was Marlow's predecessor. He had been killed in Africa when he got into a quarrel over some black hens with a village chief. He battered the chief over the head with a stick and was in turn killed by the chief's son. Fresleven had always been considered a very quiet and gentle man. His final actions show how drastically a two-year stay in Africa can alter a European's personality.

The Helmsman

A native, the Helmsman is responsible for steering Marlow's boat. Marlow has little respect for the man, whom he calls "the most unstable kind of fool," because he swaggers in front of others but becomes passive when left alone. He becomes frightened when the natives shoot arrows at the boat and drops his pole to pick up a rifle and fire back. The Helmsman is hit in the side by a spear. His blood fills Marlow's shoes. His eyes gleam brightly as he stares intently at Marlow and then dies without speaking.

The Intended

The Intended is the woman to whom Kurtz is engaged and whom he had left behind in Belgium. One year after his death, she is still dressed in mourning. She is depicted as naive, romantic, and, in the opinion of Victorian men of the day, in need of protection. She says she knew Kurtz better than anyone in the world and that she had his full confidence. This is an obviously ironic statement, as Marlow's account of Kurtz makes clear. Her chief wish is to go on believing that Kurtz died with her name on his lips, and in this, Marlow obliges her.

The Journalist

The Journalist comes to visit Marlow after Marlow has returned from Africa. He says Kurtz was a politician and an extremist. He says Kurtz could have led a party, any party. Marlow agrees and gives the journalist a portion of Kurtz's papers to publish.

Mr. Kurtz

Kurtz, born of a mother who was half-English and a father who was half-French, was educated in England. He is an ivory trader who has been alone in the jungles of Africa for a long time. No one has heard from him in nine months. The Company Manager says Kurtz is the best ivory trader he has ever had, although he suspects him of hoarding vast amounts of ivory. Marlow is sent to rescue him, although he has not asked for help. The word "kurtz" means "short" in German, but when Marlow first sees the man, seated on a stretcher with his arms extended toward the natives and his mouth opened wide as if to swallow everything before him, he

appears to be about seven feet tall. Though gravely ill, Kurtz has an amazingly loud and strong voice. He commands attention. Kurtz, previously known to Marlow by reputation and through his writings on “civilizing” the African continent, is revealed upon acquaintance to be a dying, deranged, and power-mad subjugator of the African natives. Human sacrifices have been made to him. Rows of impaled human heads line the path to the door of his cabin. Kurtz is both childish and fiendish. He talks to the very end. His brain is haunted by shadowy images. Love and hate fight for possession of his soul. He speaks of the necessity of protecting his “intended” and says she is “out of it,” a sentiment Marlow will later echo. Kurtz’s final words, uttered as he lies in the dark waiting for death, are: “The horror! The horror!” With this utterance, Kurtz presumably realizes the depth to which his unbridled greed and brutality have brought him. That realization is transferred to Marlow, who feels bound to Kurtz both through the common heritage of their European background and the infinite corruptibility of their natures as men.

Kurtz's Cousin

Kurtz’s Cousin is an organist. He tells Marlow that Kurtz was a great musician. Marlow doesn’t really believe him but can’t say exactly what Kurtz’s profession was. Marlow and the Cousin agree Kurtz was a “universal genius.”

The Manager

The Manager, a man of average size and build with cold blue eyes, inspires uneasiness in Marlow, but not outright mistrust. He is an enigma. He is smart, but cannot keep order. His men obey him but do not love or respect him. The Manager has been in the heart of Africa for nine years, yet is never ill. Marlow considers the Manager’s greatness to lie in that he never gives away the secret of what controls him. Marlow speculates that perhaps there is nothing inside him, and maybe that is why he is never ill. The Manager says Kurtz is the best agent he ever had; yet he also says Kurtz’s method is unsound and that he has done more harm than good to the Company. When Marlow discovers his ship is in need of repair, the Manager tells him the repairs will take three months to complete. Marlow considers the man “a chattering idiot,” but his three-month estimate turns out to be exactly right.

The Manager's boy

The Manager’s “boy,” an African servant, delivers the book’s famous line, “Mistah Kurtz—he dead.”

The Manager's Uncle

The Manager’s Uncle, a short, paunchy man whose eyes have a look of “sleepy cunning,” is the leader of the group of white men who arrive at the Central Station wearing new clothes and tan shoes. The group calls itself the “Eldorado Exploring Expedition,” and uses the station as a base from which to travel into the jungle and plunder from its inhabitants. Marlow observes that they steal from the land “with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe.” The Manager’s Uncle and the Manager refer to Kurtz as “that man.”

Charlie Marlow

Marlow, a seaman and a wanderer who follows the sea, relates the tale that makes up the bulk of the book. He is an Englishman who speaks passable French. He sits in the pose of a preaching Buddha as he tells a group of men aboard the *Nellie*, a cruising yawl in the River Thames, the story of his journey into the interior of the Congo. Marlow had previously returned from sailing voyages in Asia and after six years in England decided to look for another post. He speaks of his boyhood passion for maps and of his long fascination with Africa, that “place of darkness.” Through the influence of his aunt, Marlow is appointed captain of a steamer and charged with going up river to find Kurtz, a missing ivory trader, and bring him back. Marlow says he is acquainted with Kurtz through his writing and admires him. His trip upriver is beset with difficulties. Marlow encounters several acts of madness, including a French man-of-war relentlessly shelling the bush while there appears to be not a single human being or even a shed to fire upon. Later, he comes upon a group of Africans who are blasting away at the land, presumably in order to build a railway, but Marlow sees no reason for it,

there being nothing in the way to blast. Everywhere about him, he sees naked black men dying of disease and starvation.

Revulsion grows within him over the white man's dehumanizing colonization of the Congo. It reaches a peak when Marlow finally meets Kurtz and sees the depths of degradation to which the man has sunk. Nevertheless, Marlow feels an affinity toward Kurtz. He sees in him both a reflection of his own corruptible European soul and a premonition of his destiny. Although Kurtz is already dying when Marlow meets him, Marlow experiences him as a powerful force. When Kurtz says, "I had immense plans," Marlow believes the man's mind is still clear but that his soul is mad. Marlow takes the dying Kurtz aboard his steamer for the return trip down river. He feels a bond has been established between himself and Kurtz and that Kurtz has become his "choice of nightmares." When Marlow hears Kurtz's last words—"The horror! The horror!"—he takes them to be Kurtz's final judgment on his life on earth. Seeing a kind of victory in that final summing up, Marlow remains loyal to Kurtz. One year after Kurtz's death, Marlow visits Kurtz's fiancée, who has been left behind in Brussels. He finds her trusting and capable of immense faith. Marlow believes he must protect her from all the horrors he witnessed in Africa in order to save her soul. When the girl asks to hear Kurtz's final words, Marlow lies and says he died with her name on his lips. Marlow then ceases his tale and sits silently aboard ship in his meditative pose.

The Narrator

The Narrator remains unidentified throughout the book. He tells the reader the story Charlie Marlow told to him and three other men (the captain or Director of the Companies, the accountant, and the lawyer) as they sat aboard the becalmed *Nellie* on London's River Thames, waiting for the tide to turn. The Narrator is an attentive listener who does not comment on or try to interpret the tale. He is, instead, a vessel through which Marlow's story is transmitted, much as Conrad is a vessel through whom the entire book is transmitted. When Marlow finishes speaking, the Narrator looks out at the tranquil river and reflects that it "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness."

The Official

The Official demands that Marlow turn over Kurtz's papers to him, saying the Company has the right to all information about its territories. Marlow gives him the report on "Suppression of Savage Customs," minus Kurtz's final comment recommending extermination, and says the rest is private. The Official looks at the document and says it's not what they "had a right to expect."

The Pilgrim in Pink Pajamas

See The Pilgrim

The Pilgrim

The Pilgrim is a fat white man with sandy hair and red whiskers. He wears his pink pajamas tucked into his socks. He cannot steer the boat. He assumes Kurtz is dead and hopes many Africans, whom he and all the other white people refer to as "savages," have been killed to avenge Kurtz's death. Marlow tells the Pilgrim he must learn to fire a rifle from the shoulder. The pilgrims fire from the hip with their eyes closed.

The Pilgrims

The Pilgrims are the European traders who accompany Marlow into the jungle. They fire their rifles from the hip into the air and indiscriminately into the bush. They eventually come to look with disfavor upon Marlow, who does not share their opinions or interests. When they bury Kurtz, Marlow believes the Pilgrims would like to bury him as well.

The Poleman

See The Helmsman

The Russian

The Russian is a twenty-five-year-old fair-skinned, beardless man with a boyish face and tiny blue eyes. He wears brown clothes with bright blue, red, and yellow patches covering them. He looks like a harlequin—a clown in patched clothes—to Marlow. As he boards Marlow's boat, he assures everyone that the “savages” are “simple people” who “meant no harm” before he corrects himself: “Not exactly.” The Russian dropped out of school to go to sea. He has been alone on the river for two years, heading for the interior, and chatters constantly to make up for the silence he has endured. The *Towson's Book on seamanship*, which Marlow had discovered previously, belongs to the Russian. Marlow finds the Russian an insoluble problem. He admires and envies him. The Russian is surrounded by the “glamour” of youth and appears unscathed to Marlow. He wants nothing from the wilderness but to continue to exist. The Russian describes Kurtz as a great orator. He says one doesn't talk with him, one listens to him. He says Kurtz once talked to him all night about everything, including love. “This man has enlarged my mind,” he tells Marlow. The Russian presents Marlow with a great deal of information about Kurtz, chiefly that Kurtz is adored by the African tribe that follows him, that he once nearly killed the Russian for his small supply of ivory, and that it was Kurtz who ordered the attack on the steamer to scare them away.

The Savages

“Savages” is the blanket term the white traders use to refer to all African natives, despite their differing origins. The savages range from the workers dying of starvation and disease at the Outer Station to the cannibals who man Marlow's boat to the tribe who worships Kurtz. For the most part Marlow comes to consider all the natives savages, although he expresses some admiration for the cannibals, who must be very hungry but have refrained from attacking the few white men on the boat because of “a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other.” When Marlow first arrives in Africa, he is appalled by the whites' brutal treatment of the natives, and never expresses agreement with the pilgrims who eagerly anticipate taking revenge on the savages. He also seems to be shocked by the addendum to Kurtz's report that says, “Exterminate all the brutes!” Nevertheless, Marlow never sees beyond the surface of any of the natives. He compares watching the boat's fireman work to “seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs,” and shocks the pilgrims when he dumps the body of the helmsman overboard instead of saving it for burial. For Marlow, the native “savages” serve only as another illustration of the mystery Africa holds for Europeans, and it is because of this dehumanization that several critics consider *Heart of Darkness* a racist work.

The Swedish Captain

The Swedish Captain is the captain of the ship that takes Marlow toward the mouth of the Congo. He tells Marlow that another Swede has just hanged himself by the side of the road. When Marlow asks why, the Swedish Captain replies, “Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.”

The Woman

The Woman is the proud, “wild-eyed and magnificent” African woman with whom Kurtz has been living while in the interior. She is the queen of a native tribe. When she sees Marlow's steamer about to pull away and realizes she will never see Kurtz again, she stands by the river's edge with her hands raised high to the sky. She alone among the natives does not flinch at the sound of the ship's whistle. Marlow considers her a tragic figure.

The Young Agent

The Young Agent has been stationed at the Central Station for one year. He affects an aristocratic manner and is considered the Manager's spy by the other agents at the station. His job is to make bricks, but Marlow sees no bricks anywhere about the station. The Young Agent presses Marlow for information about Europe, then believes his answers are lies and grows bored. The Young Agent tells Marlow that Kurtz is Chief of the Inner Station. He refers to Kurtz as “a prodigy ... an emissary of pity and of science and progress.” The Young Agent establishes a connection between Kurtz and Marlow by saying that the same group of people who sent

Kurtz into Africa also recommended Marlow to come and get him out.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, which tells of a journey into the heart of the Belgian Congo and out again, the themes of alienation, loneliness, silence and solitude predominate. The book begins and ends in silence, with men first waiting for a tale to begin and then left to their own thoughts after it has concluded. The question of what the alienation and loneliness of extended periods of time in a remote and hostile environment can do to men's minds is a central theme of the book. The doctor who measures Marlow's head prior to his departure for Africa warns him of changes to his personality that may be produced by a long stay in-country. Prolonged silence and solitude are seen to have damaging effects on many characters in the book. Among these are the late Captain Fresleven, Marlow's predecessor, who was transformed from a gentle soul into a man of violence, and the Russian, who has been alone on the River for two years and dresses bizarrely and chatters constantly. But loneliness and alienation have taken their greatest toll on Kurtz, who, cut off from all humanizing influence, has forfeited the restraints of reason and conscience and given free rein to his most base and brutal instincts.

Deception

Deception, or hypocrisy, is a central theme of the novel and is explored on many levels. In the guise of a “noble cause,” the Belgians have exploited the Congo. Actions taken in the name of philanthropy are merely covers for greed. Claiming to educate the natives, to bring them religion and a better way of life, European colonizers remained to starve, mutilate, and murder the indigenous population for profit. Marlow has even obtained his captaincy through deception, for his aunt misrepresented him as “an exceptional and gifted creature.” She also presented him as “one of the Workers, with a capital [W] ... something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle,” and Conrad notes the deception in elevating working people to some mystical status they can not realistically obtain. At the end of the book, Marlow engages in his own deception when he tells Kurtz's fiancée the lie that Kurtz died with her name on his lips.

Order and Disorder

Conrad sounds the themes of order and disorder in showing, primarily through the example of the Company's chief clerk, how people can carry on with the most mundane details of their lives while all around them chaos reigns. In the larger context, the Company attends to the details of sending agents into the interior to trade with the natives and collect ivory while remaining oblivious to the devastation such acts have caused. Yet on a closer look, the Company's Manager has no talent for order or organization. His station is in a deplorable state, and Marlow can see no reason for the Manager to have his position other than the fact that he is never ill. On the other hand, the chief clerk is so impeccably dressed that when Marlow first meets him he thinks he is a vision. This man, who has been in-country three years and witnessed all its attendant horrors, manages to keep his clothes and books in excellent order. He even speaks with confidence of a Council of Europe which intended Kurtz to go far in “the administration,” as if there is some overall rational principle guiding their lives.

Sanity and Insanity

Closely linked to the themes of order and disorder are those of sanity and insanity. Madness, given prolonged exposure to the isolation of the wilderness, seems an inevitable extension of chaos. The atmospheric influences at the heart of the African continent—the stifling heat, the incessant drums, the whispering bush, the mysterious light—play havoc with the unadapted European mind and reduce it either to the insanity of thinking anything is allowable in such an atmosphere or, as in Kurtz's case, to literal madness. Kurtz, after many years in the jungle, is presented as a man who has gone mad with power and greed. No restraints were placed on him—either from above, from a rule of law, or from within, from his own conscience. In the wilderness, he came to believe he was free to do whatever he liked, and the freedom drove him mad. Small acts of madness line Marlow's path to Kurtz: the Man-of-War that fires into the bush for no apparent reason, the urgently

needed rivets that never arrive, the bricks that will never be built, the jig that is suddenly danced, the immense hole dug for no discernible purpose. All these events ultimately lead to a row of impaled severed human heads and Kurtz, a man who, in his insanity, has conferred a godlike status on himself and has ritual human sacrifices performed for him. The previously mentioned themes of solitude and silence have here achieved their most powerful effect: they have driven Kurtz mad. He is presented as a voice, a disembodied head, a mouth that opens as if to devour everything before him. Kurtz speaks of “my ivory ... my intended ... my river ... my station,” as if everything in the Congo belonged to him. This is the final arrogant insanity of the white man who comes supposedly to improve a land, but stays to exploit, ravage, and destroy it.

Duty and Responsibility

As is true of all other themes in the book, those of duty and responsibility are glimpsed on many levels. On a national level, we are told of the British devotion to duty and efficiency that led to systematic colonization of large parts of the globe and has its counterpart in Belgian colonization of the Congo, the book's focus. On an individual level, Conrad weaves the themes of duty and responsibility through Marlow's job as captain, a position that makes him responsible for his crew and bound to his duties as the boat's commander. There are also the jobs of those with whom Marlow comes into contact on his journey. In *Heart of Darkness*, duty and responsibility revolve most often about how one does one's work. A job well done is respected; simply doing the work one is responsible for is an honorable act. Yet Conrad does not believe in romanticizing the worker. Workers can often be engaged in meaningless tasks, as illustrated in the scene where the Africans blast away at the rock face in order to build a railway, but the rock is not altered by the blasts and the cliff is not at all in the way. The Company's Manager would seem to have a duty to run his business efficiently, but he cannot keep order, and although he is obeyed, he is not respected. The Foreman, however, earns Marlow's respect for being a good worker. Marlow admires the way the Foreman ties up his waist-length beard when he has to crawl in the mud beneath the steamboat to do his job. (Having a waist-length beard in a jungle environment can be seen as another act of madness, even from an efficient worker.) Section I of the novel ends with Marlow speculating on how Kurtz would do his work. But there is a larger sense in which the themes of work and responsibility figure. Marlow says, “I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself.” It is through the work (or what passes for it) that Kurtz does in Africa that his moral bankruptcy is revealed. For himself, Marlow emerges with a self-imposed duty to remain loyal to Kurtz, and it is this responsibility that finally forces him to lie to Kurtz's fiancée.

Doubt and Ambiguity

As reason loses hold, doubt and ambiguity take over. As Marlow travels deeper inland, the reality of everything he encounters becomes suspect. The perceptions, motivations, and reliability of those he meets, as well as his own, are all open to doubt. Conrad repeatedly tells us that the heat and light of the wilderness cast a spell and put those who would dare venture further into a kind of trancelike state. Nothing is to be taken at face value. After the Russian leaves, Marlow wonders if he ever actually saw him.

The central ambiguity of *Heart of Darkness* is Kurtz himself. Who is he? What does he do? What does he actually say? Those who know him speak again and again of his superb powers of rhetoric, but the reader hears little of it. The Russian says he is devoted to Kurtz, and yet we are left to wonder why. Kurtz has written a report that supposedly shows his interest in educating the African natives, but it ends with his advice, “Exterminate all the brutes!” Marlow has heard that Kurtz is a great man, yet he suspects he is “hollow to the core.” In Marlow's estimation, if Kurtz was remarkable it was because he had something to say at the end of his life. But what he found to say was “the horror!” After Kurtz's death, when various people come to Marlow representing themselves as having known Kurtz, it seems none of them really knew him. Was he a painter, a writer, a great musician, a politician, as he is variously described? Marlow settles for the ambiguous term “universal genius,” which would imply Kurtz was whatever one wanted to make of him.

Race and Racism

The subject of racism is not really treated by Conrad as a theme in *Heart of Darkness* as much as it is simply

shown to be the prevailing attitude of the day. The African natives are referred to as “niggers,” “cannibals,” “criminals,” and “savages.” European colonizers see them as a subordinate species and chain, starve, rob, mutilate, and murder them without fear of punishment. The book presents a damning account of imperialism as it illustrates the white man's belief in his innate right to come into a country inhabited by people of a different race and pillage to his heart's content.

Kurtz is writing a treatise for something called the “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.” This implies the existence of a worldwide movement to subjugate all nonwhite races. Kurtz bestows a kind of childlike quality upon the Africans by saying that white people appear to them as supernatural beings. The natives do, indeed, seem to have worshipped Kurtz as a god and to have offered up human sacrifices to him. This innocence proceeds, in Kurtz's view, from an inferior intelligence and does not prevent him from concluding that the way to deal with the natives is to exterminate them all.

Early in his journey, Marlow sees a group of black men paddling boats. He admires their naturalness, strength, and vitality, and senses that they want nothing from the land but to coexist with it. This notion prompts him to believe that he still belongs to a world of reason. The feeling is short-lived, however, for it is not long before Marlow, too, comes to see the Africans as some subhuman form of life and to use the language of his day in referring to them as “creatures,” “niggers,” “cannibals,” and “savages.” He does not protest or try to interfere when he sees six Africans forced to work with chains about their necks. He calls what he sees in their eyes the “deathlike indifference of unhappy savages.” Marlow exhibits some humanity in offering a dying young African one of the ship's biscuits, and although he regrets the death of his helmsman, he says he was “a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara.” It is not the man he misses so much as his function as steersman. Marlow refers to the “savage who was fireman” as “an improved specimen.” He compares him, standing before his vertical boiler, to “a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs.”

Violence and Cruelty

The violence and cruelty depicted in *Heart of Darkness* escalate from acts of inhumanity committed against the natives of the Belgian Congo to “unspeakable” and undescribed horrors. Kurtz (representing European imperialists) has systematically engaged in human plunder. The natives are seen chained by iron collars about their necks, starved, beaten, subsisting on rotten hippo meat, forced into soul-crushing and meaningless labor, and finally ruthlessly murdered. Beyond this, it is implied that Kurtz has had human sacrifices performed for him, and the reader is presented with the sight of a row of severed human heads impaled on posts leading to Kurtz's cabin. Conrad suggests that violence and cruelty result when law is absent and man allows himself to be ruled by whatever brutal passions lie within him. Consumed by greed, conferring upon himself the status of a god, Kurtz runs amok in a land without law. (©2004 eNotes.com) Under such circumstances, anything is possible, and what Conrad sees emerging from the situation is the profound cruelty and limitless violence that lies at the heart of the human soul.

Moral Corruption

The book's theme of moral corruption is the one to which, like streams to a river, all others lead. Racism, madness, loneliness, deception and disorder, doubt and ambiguity, violence and cruelty—culminate in the moral corruption revealed by Kurtz's acts in the Congo. Kurtz has cast off reason and allowed his most base and brutal instincts to rule unrestrained. He has permitted the evil within him to gain the upper hand. Kurtz's appalling moral corruption is the result not only of external forces, such as the isolation and loneliness imposed by the jungle, but also, Conrad suggests, of forces that lie within all men and await the chance to emerge. Kurtz perhaps realizes the depth of his own moral corruption when, as he lays dying, he utters, “The horror! The horror!” Marlow feels this realization transferred to himself and understands that he too, living in a lawless state, is capable of sinking into the depths of moral corruption. The savage nature of man is thus reached at the end of the journey, not upriver, but into his own soul.

Style

Point of View

Heart of Darkness is framed as a story within a story. The point of view belongs primarily to Charlie Marlow, who delivers the bulk of the narrative, but Marlow's point of view is in turn framed by that of an unnamed narrator who provides a first-person description of Marlow telling his story. The point of view can also be seen in a third consciousness in the book, that of Conrad himself, who tells the entire tale to the reader, deciding as author which details to put in and which to leave out. Beyond these three dominant points of view are the individual viewpoints of the book's major characters. Each has a different perspective on Kurtz. These perspectives are often conflicting and are always open to a variety of interpretations. Whose point of view is to be trusted? Which narrator and which character is reliable? Conrad leaves these questions to the reader to answer, accounting for the book's complexity and multilayered meanings.

Setting

The novel takes place in the 1890s and begins on a boat sitting in the River Thames, which leads from London to the sea, waiting for the tide to turn. Marlow's story takes the reader briefly onto the European continent (Belgium) and then deep into Africa by means of a trip up the Congo River to what was then called the Belgian Congo, and back to Europe again. The Congo is described as a place of intense mystery whose stifling heat, whispering sounds, and strange shifts of light and darkness place the foreigner in a kind of trance that produces fundamental changes in the brain, causing acts that range from the merely bizarre to the most extreme and irrational violence.

Structure

The book's structure is cyclical, both in geography and chronology. It begins in the 1890s, goes back several years, and returns to the present. The voyage describes almost a perfect circle, beginning in Europe, traveling into the heart of the African continent, coming out again, and returning almost to the exact spot at which it began. The novel was originally published in serial form, breaking off its segments at moments of high drama to make the reader eager to pick up the next installment. When the full text was published in 1902, it was divided into three parts. Section I takes the story from the present-day life of the unidentified narrator to Marlow's tale, which began many years before and unfolds over a period of several months. This section leads from London into Belgium and from there to the Congo's Central Station. It ends with Marlow expressing a limited curiosity about where Kurtz's supposed moral ideas will lead him. Section II takes the journey through a series of difficulties as it proceeds deeper into the African interior and finally arrives, some two months later, at the Inner Station. It is here that Marlow meets the Russian and is told that Kurtz has "enlarged" his mind. Section III covers the period from Marlow's eventual meeting with Kurtz to his return to Europe.

Symbolism

The title of the book itself, *Heart of Darkness*, alerts the reader to the book's symbols, or items that suggest deeper interpretations beyond their literal meanings. The "heart of darkness" serves both as an image of the interior of a dark and foreign continent as well as the interior workings of the mind of man, which are dark and foreign to all observers. The literal journey into the jungle is a metaphor, or symbol, for the journey into the uncharted human soul. On another level, the voyage into the wilderness can be read as a voyage back to Eden, or to the very beginning of the world. On still another level, the actual trip into and then out of the African continent can be seen as a metaphor for sin and redemption. It parallels the descent into the depths of human degradation and death (in Kurtz's case; near-death in Marlow's) and the return to the light, or life. As the book begins, the *Nellie* is waiting for the tide to turn. This can also be taken as a metaphor for the brewing revolution in the Congo at the time, for the tide of history was about to turn. The dying Kurtz himself, who is half-French and half-English and of whom Marlow says, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," can be seen as a symbol for a decaying western civilization. Other symbols in the book include the river, whose flow, sometimes fast and sometimes stagnant, mirrors the stream of life; the knitting women waiting

outside Marlow's interview room, who recall the Fates of Greek mythology and thus can be seen as potential judges; and the cross-legged pose in which Marlow sits during his narration, suggesting the figure of the enlightened Buddha and thus a kind of supreme wisdom. The presentation of Kurtz as a talker, a voice who enlarges the mind of his listeners, can also be taken as a symbol for Conrad himself. As a writer, Conrad talks to his listening readers and enlarges their view of the world. Marlow's function, too, is a metaphor for the author's: they both tell stories; they both make people see and feel.

international committee agreed to the formation of a new country to be known as the Congo Free State. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad refers to this committee as the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Leopold II, who was to be sole ruler of this land, never set foot in the Congo Free State. Instead, he formed a company, called simply the Company in *Heart of Darkness*, that ran the country for him.

The Ivory Trade

A prevalent feeling among Europeans of the 1890s was that the African peoples required introduction to European culture and technology in order to become more evolved. The responsibility for that introduction, known as the “white man's burden,” gave rise to a fervor to bring Christianity and commerce to Africa. What the Europeans took out of Africa in return were huge quantities of ivory. During the 1890s, at the time *Heart of Darkness* takes place, ivory was in enormous demand in Europe, where it was used to make jewelry, piano keys, and billiard balls, among other items. From 1888 to 1892, the amount of ivory exported from the Congo Free State rose from just under 13,000 pounds to over a quarter of a million pounds. Conrad tells us that Kurtz was the best agent of his time, collecting as much ivory as all the other agents combined.

In 1892, Leopold II declared all natural resources in the Congo Free State to be his property. This meant the Belgians could stop dealing with African traders and simply take what they wanted themselves. As a consequence, Belgian traders pushed deeper into Africa in search of new sources of ivory, setting up stations all along the Congo River. One of the furthestmost stations, located at Stanley Falls, was the likely inspiration for Kurtz's Inner Station.

Belgian Atrocities in the Congo

The Belgian traders committed many well-documented acts of atrocity against the African natives, including the severing of hands and heads. Reports of these atrocities reached the European public, leading to an international movement protesting the Belgian presence in Africa. These acts, reflected in *Heart of Darkness*, continued, despite an order by Leopold II that they cease. In 1908, after the Belgian parliament finally sent its own review board into the Congo to investigate, the king was forced to give up his personal stake in the area, and control of the Congo reverted to the Belgian government. The country was granted its independence from Belgium in 1960, and changed its name from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Zaire in 1971. A relatively bloodless revolution in 1997 returned the country's name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Critical Overview

When published in 1902 in a volume with two other stories (*Youth* and *The End of the Tether*), *Heart of Darkness* was praised for its portrayal of the demoralizing effect life in the African wilderness supposedly had on European men. One respected critic of the time, Hugh Clifford, said in the *Spectator* that others before Conrad had written of the European's decline in a "barbaric" wilderness, but never "has any writer till now succeeded in bringing ... it all home to sheltered folk as does Mr. Conrad in this wonderful, this magnificent, this terrible study." Another early reviewer, as quoted in Leonard Dean's *Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness': Backgrounds and Criticisms*, called the prose "brilliant" but the story "unconvincing."

In his review published in *Academy and Literature* in 1902, Edward Garnett called the volume's publication "one of the events of the literary year." Garnett said when he first read *Heart of Darkness* in serial form, he thought Conrad had "here and there, lost his way." But upon publication of the novel in book form, he retracted that opinion and now held it "to be the high-water mark of the author's talent." Garnett went on to call *Heart of Darkness* a book that "enriches English literature" and a "psychological masterpiece." Garnett was particularly taken with Conrad's keen observations of the collapse of the white man's morality when he is released from the restraints of European law and order and set down in the heart of Africa, given free reign to trade for profit with the natives. For sheer excitement, Garnett compared *Heart of Darkness* favorably to *Crime and Punishment*, published by the great Russian novelist Dostoyevsky in 1866. Garnett calls *Heart of Darkness* "simply a piece of art, fascinating and remorseless."

Kingsley Widmer noted in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography* that Conrad's literary reputation declined sharply in the mid-1920s after the publication of *Victory*, which Widmer flatly called a "bad novel." But the following generation gave rise to a revival of interest in Conrad's work, centering largely on a few works written between 1898 and 1910 and including *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Lord Jim*, which were given the status of modern classics.

Widmer concluded that although "much of Conrad's fiction is patently poor," his sea stories contain a "documentary fascination in their reports of dying nineteenth-century merchant marine sailing experience." Widmer faults Conrad for gross sentimentality, shoddy melodrama, and chauvinism. But he acknowledges that Conrad's best fiction, among which he counts *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Sharer*, and *The Secret Agent*, which he says may be "Conrad's most powerful novel," achieves a modernism that undercuts those heavy-handed Victorian characteristics and provides the basis on which Conrad's reputation justifiably rests.

In more recent years, *Heart of Darkness* has come under fire for the blatantly racist attitudes it portrays. Some critics have taken issue with the matter-of-fact tone in which Marlow describes Africans as "savages" and "niggers" and portrays African life as mysterious and inhuman. Noted Nigerian author Chinua Achebe for instance, argued in a *Massachusetts Review* article that "the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot." Other critics, however, have reasoned that Conrad was merely portraying the views and attitudes of his time, and others have even suggested that by presenting racist attitudes the author was ironically holding them up for ridicule and criticism.

Despite such controversy, *Heart of Darkness* has withstood the test of time and has come to be seen as one of Conrad's finest works. The way in which Conrad presents themes of moral ambiguity in this novel, never taking a side but forcing the reader to decide the issues for him or herself, is considered a forerunner of modern literary technique. Frederick Karl, in *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, calls *Heart of Darkness* the work in which "the nineteenth century becomes the twentieth." Others have called it the best short novel

in the English language. “*The Secret Sharer* and *Heart of Darkness*,” said Albert J. Guerard in his introduction to the novel, “are among the finest of Conrad's short novels, and among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language.” The book continues to this day to be taught in high schools, colleges, and universities and to be held up as an example of great literature.

Essays and Criticism

Colonial Exploitation and Human Nature

In this essay, Roger Moore provides an overview of *Heart of Darkness*, exploring both Conrad's searing indictment of European Colonial exploitation and the symbolic journey into the deepest recesses of human nature. Moore discusses the themes of hypocrisy, unmitigated evil, ambiguity, doubt, and the meaningless.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is both a dramatic tale of an arduous trek into the Belgian Congo (the heart of darkest Africa) at the turn of the twentieth century and a symbolic journey into the deepest recesses of human nature. On a literal level, through Marlow's narration, Conrad provides a searing indictment of European colonial exploitation inflicted upon African natives. Before he turns to an account of his experience in Africa, Marlow provides his companions aboard the *Nellie* a brief history lesson about the ancient Roman invasion and occupation of Britain. He claims that the Romans were "no colonists" for "they grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was for robbery and violence, aggravated murder on a great scale." The reader is initially encouraged to consider that enlightened European colonists of Marlow's day were motivated by objectives far loftier than those of the Romans. Thus, Marlow's aunt who arranged his commission with the Company proclaims that the white man's purpose in Africa is to wean the continent's ignorant savages from their "horrid ways." Marlow himself says that modern efficiency and the "unselfish idea" of conquering the earth, rather than some "sentimental pretense," is what "redeems" the colonial enterprise in which he has been enlisted.

But when Marlow arrives at the mouth of the Congo River, it becomes immediately apparent that uplifting the natives from their savagery is not the driving force behind the European mission. At the Company's Outer Station, Marlow sees six black men yoked together and realizes that these pathetic figures "could not be called enemies, nor were they criminals." They are, in fact, brutalized victims "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." In its actual practice, the controlling value of efficient colonial administration consists primarily of working the natives until they die and then replacing them with still more victims. The European pilgrims that Marlow encounters are equipped with modern weaponry for the ostensible purpose of defending themselves against feral savages. In fact, the natives pose very little threat to the white conquerors. As Marlow's craft steams up the Congo River toward the Inner Station, they are attacked from the shore by a group of natives who shoot arrows and hurl spears at the craft. Yet as the narrator recalls this assault, "the action was far from being aggressive—it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective." We later learn that the purpose of this attack was merely to prevent the party aboard from taking the tribe's "god," Mr. Kurtz, away from them. With the exception of a few "improved specimens" who are transformed into cogs in the machinery of exploitation, the European colonists are engaged in their own form of "murder on a great scale," showing no interest at all in bettering the lot of the Congo's inhabitants.

Hypocrisy is a salient theme in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow's account repeatedly highlights the utter lack of congruence between the Company's rhetoric about "enlightening" the natives with its actual aims of extracting ivory, minerals and other valued commodities. As one of the fevered pilgrims whom he meets on his overland trek tells Marlow, it is not a virtuous idea or even efficiency per se that moves the colonists to treat the natives as members of an inferior species: it is, instead "to make money, of course."

The colonial enterprise extends beyond the Company to an International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Marlow is told that this organization entrusted Kurtz to prepare a report for its future

guidance. In it, Kurtz's dutifully acknowledges the importance of attaining maximum efficiency in the prosecution of the ivory trade, and he advocates creating the illusion that whites are supernatural beings in the minds of the child-like natives. As Marlow tells his listeners, while reading through Kurtz's proposal he found "at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, life a flash of light in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'" From Kurtz's perspective, the most efficient way of suppressing savage customs among the natives is to simply annihilate them. Upon his return to Europe, Marlow presents the deceased Kurtz's report to the Company's manager. The latter seems to be disturbed by the sheer brutality of its conclusion, saying that "'this is not what we had a right to expect.'" It is not, however, that the Company manager takes issue with Kurtz's opinion that the natives are entirely expendable; it is that he disagrees with and is offended by the candid expression of this view. The time is not yet ripe for the Company to disclose its true colors, and the Company objections to Kurtz's barbarous methods are based on the damage that they might inflict upon its carefully crafted propaganda campaign about bringing Christian civilization to people who live in darkness. The Company and, indeed, all Europe is engaged in a fundamentally hypocritical endeavor, rationalizing their savagery on the pretext of alleviating the natives of their amoral primitivism.

The Central Station manager says to Marlow, "you are of the new gang—the gang of virtue." By doing so, he directly implicates Conrad's narrator into the broader hypocrisies of European colonialism. Although it is through his private account aboard the *Nellie* that the abominations being perpetrated against the Africans are detailed, Marlow is by no means virtuous in the active sense of that term. He is, at bottom, a paid employee of the Company. While he attempts to distance himself from the other pilgrims invading Africa through a muted, retrospective indignation, at no point in his story does Marlow make any effort to intervene in the crimes that he witnesses. Even upon his return to Europe, he consciously refrains publicizing what is actually occurring in Colonial Africa. He even goes so far as to safeguard Mr. Kurtz's reputation. Thus, Marlow lies to Kurtz's fiancée, reporting that Kurtz's "'end ... was in every way worthy of his life,'" and then adding that Kurtz's final words were her name.

Kurtz's dying words were, of course, "The horror! The horror!"; and *Heart of Darkness* is centrally preoccupied with the problem of horror, of unmitigated evil. Marked by successive stages from the outer to the central to the inner stations, Marlow's journey closely resembles the descent into hell that Dante undertook in his epic poem the *Inferno*, finding the beast Satan at the center of Hell. The manager of the Central Station apprises Marlow that Mr. Kurtz is "is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else." It is this last association that has some truth to it. Kurtz is a diabolical figure, a surrogate of the devil himself. When Marlow finally reaches the Inner Station where Kurtz presides, he finds that the "various rumors" of Kurtz's evil reign are, if anything, understatement. He sees a row of severed heads impaled on sticks and learns that they were taken from natives who rebelled against Kurtz's absolute dominion. Not only does Kurtz brook no dissent to his reign, the natives that have gathered around him worship Kurtz as if he were a god. Kurtz does not limit the scope of his monstrous actions to the natives. The misplaced Russian who has attached himself to Kurtz recounts that after Kurtz stole his ivory, his idol then declared that he would shoot him "because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased." Kurtz is a megalomaniac; he exerts life-and-death power for its own sake, he engages in evil simply because it is possible for him to do so. Marlow concludes that Kurtz is insane, but Kurtz himself insists on two separate occasions that he is perfectly conscience of his actions.

Whether Kurtz can be equated with Satan is, however, another matter altogether. He is both fiendish and childish, and as Marlow comes to suspect, he may be "hollow at the core." In the words of the Company's chief accountant, Mr. Kurtz is "a very remarkable person," yet, even before he meets Kurtz, Marlow observes that "I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him." When he finally comes face to face with Kurtz, Marlow finds an unnaturally elongated sickly figure stretched as "an image of death carved out of old ivory." Not only is Kurtz a physically unimpressive being, he is

not a genius nor was he ever an especially noble individual even when he had all of his mental faculties. Kurtz is both grand and pathetic.

The disparity between the epic scale of Kurtz's evil and his seeming hollowness is but one example of the discordant notes that arise throughout Marlow's story. Ambiguity and contradiction abound in the *Heart of Darkness*. There are numerous instances in which seemingly inexplicable events occur. Before departing for Africa, Marlow undergoes a physical examination that has no real purpose. He then witnesses a European warship firing its guns into the bush along the African coast for no apparent reason, and the pilgrims who accompany him on the overland segment of his journey routinely discharge their rifles along the way without aiming. The colonists are engaged in massive projects that alter the natural landscape for no rhyme or reason, digging a huge pit that seems to have no purpose. There is absolutely no explanation for the admiration that the Russian sailor extends towards Kurtz. The figure of the native woman (or queen) who appears along the riverbank as Kurtz is taken from his people is a complete enigma. Conrad's story is filled with unexplained details, and the reader gains the suspicion that they may be meaningless and that this journey into the *Heart of Darkness* is, in fact, devoid of any lessons.

Reinforcing this motif of ambiguity, doubt, and the meaningless, Conrad's text appears to challenge the very premise that human experience can be related in words. In a sense, *Heart of Darkness* is about the act of story-telling itself. The framing of the tale, with an external narrator describing Marlow sitting aboard the *Nellie*, highlights the status of his story as an act of narration. Although Marlow as narrator is competent to perform the task at hand, holding his audience in rapture, at several points in his story, he falters and appears to be at a loss for words, telling his listeners, for example, that it is "impossible" to convey the feelings that he experienced. Marlow says that Kurtz presided over "unspeakable rituals" (that he does not describe) and that in the Congo the "earth seems unearthly." At each of these junctures, Conrad suggests that words are inadequate, that normal communication is somehow futile, and that, at bottom, human experience itself is without meaning and, like Kurtz, hollow at its core. Like Marlow's listeners, at the conclusion of his story, the reader is apt to sit in silence, pondering what, if anything, has been revealed.

The Intertwining of Philosophical and Colonial Themes

In the following essay, Kevin Attell explores how *Heart of Darkness* has been viewed as both a commentary on the evils of colonialism and a philosophical exploration of the human psyche. Attell argues that critics who argue that the novel is either historical or philosophical "misses Conrad's insight that the two are in fact inseparable."

The original publication of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was a three-part serialization in London's *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899. It was subsequently published in a collection of three stories by Conrad in 1902. The date of *Heart of Darkness* should be noted, for it provides a historical context which illuminates the story's relation to both the contemporary turn-of-the-century world to which Conrad responds in the tale, and also the influential role Conrad plays in the subsequent progress of twentieth-century literary history.

Traditionally there have been two main ways of approaching the interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*. Critics and readers have tended to focus on either the implications of Conrad's intense fascination with European colonialism in Africa and around the world, or they have centered on his exploration of seemingly more abstract philosophical issues regarding, among other things, the human condition, the nature of Good and Evil, and the power of language. The former interpretive choice would concentrate on the ways Conrad presents European colonialism (of which he had much firsthand experience, being a sailor himself), while the latter would primarily investigate Conrad's exposition of philosophical questions. Even a cursory reading of the tale makes it clear that there is ample evidence for both of these interpretive concerns. What is perhaps less obvious, but equally important, is the way the historical reality which Conrad takes as his subject matter

and the philosophical meditation to which Kurtz's story gives rise are intrinsically connected to one another.

The turn of the twentieth century was a period of intense colonial activity for most of the countries of Europe. Conrad refers to European colonialism countless times in *Heart of Darkness*, but perhaps the most vivid instance is when Marlow, while waiting in the office of the Belgian Company, sees “a large shining map [of colonial Africa], marked with all the colours of the rainbow. There was,” he says, “a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch.... However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow.” These colors, of course, correspond to the territorial claims made on African land by the various nations of Europe: red is British, blue French, green Italian, orange Portuguese, purple German, and yellow Belgian. The map bears noting. On the one hand it establishes the massive geographical scale of Europe's colonial presence in Africa, but it also symbolically sets this presence up in relation to another central thematic concern of the novella: the popular conception of colonialism in Europe.

Conrad links the colored maps to the childlike ignorance and apathy of the European public as to what really goes on in the colonies. Just a few moments before describing the map in the office in Brussels Marlow had recalled his childhood, saying: “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 the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, ‘When I grow up I will go there.’” Much of *Heart of Darkness* is then a grim and detailed exposition of the real “glories of exploration” which Marlow observes firsthand, but in these opening moments before Marlow has left for Africa Conrad has given his assessment of the perspective on the colonies from the point of view of the common European: on public display in the waiting-room of the Company office in Brussels, and in the imagination of the European public, the representation of European activity in Africa is as abstract and pleasant as a multicolored map.

Another example of the distance between the popular conception of the colonies and their reality can be found in the frequent reference made to the purportedly civilizing aspect of colonial conquest. Marlow's aunt speaks of “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” and Kurtz's early pamphlet ominously claims that “by the simple exercise of [the colonists’] will [they] can exert a power for good practically unbounded.” Marlow's direct experience of the trading stations in the Congo, and Kurtz's scrawled note “Exterminate all the brutes” at the end of the pamphlet put the lie to these European pretensions to civilizing charity. And to Conrad's British readers of 1900 these revelations may have been shocking. There was, it should be noted, a growing anti-colonial campaign being waged by dissidents throughout Europe at the time, and Conrad's novella can be considered a part of that campaign.

But in addition to the aggressive presentation of the grim conditions which existed in Europe's colonies—which Conrad succeeds in making very vivid—*Heart of Darkness* also creates a theme from certain philosophical problems which become central to the dawning literary movement called Modernism. Conrad shows the way the European public is profoundly ignorant (perhaps willfully) of what goes on in their colonies, but he also suggests that that very separation reveals a problematic relation between belief and reality, between representation and truth, which can also be investigated as a philosophical question. Keeping in mind the way this problem has been introduced in the novella (i.e. the specific relation between Europe and its colonies), let us briefly sketch out the philosophical and literary attempts to address the problem of representation in Modernism.

Roughly speaking Modernism had its peak in the years between World War I and World War II. The great canonical Modernists include such writers as James Joyce Ezra Pound Gertrude Stein Virginia Woolf William Faulkner and others. In most accounts of the period what links the Modernist writers loosely together is their intensive formal experimentation with literary and linguistic techniques; that is to say, their experimentation with the actual *modes* of literary representation. Stein's experiments with syntax, Joyce's melding of languages

and myths, Faulkner's endless sentences, can all be seen as various ways of working through difficult questions raised about the very nature of language and how it works. Language in Modernist literature is no longer seen as a stable vehicle for the communication of meaning, but rather it is put up for radical questioning in itself. Modernist experimentation, one might say, arises out of the doubt that language (at least language as it has been used in the past) is able to communicate or sufficient to represent meaning or truth. And the seeds of this very doubt, to bring us back to Conrad, can be seen in *Heart of Darkness*. Some of the most illustrative examples of how Conrad introduces these Modernistic concerns can be seen at the points of Marlow's narration where the actual question of *meaning* explicitly arises.

Clearly Marlow has no trouble narrating events; he is indeed quite a storyteller. Yet, at various times in the narration the flow of his speech is interrupted and he seems at a loss for words. If we pick one of these moments we can see the way Conrad is creating a theme from the very instability and inadequacy of language itself (“words,” “names,” the “story”) to contain and convey what one might call “truth,” “meaning,” or “essence” (Marlow calls it all three). At a point well into his tale Marlow says:

“At the time I did not see [Kurtz]—you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams....”

He sat silent for a while.

“... No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone....”

Conrad has set up a clear opposition in Marlow's speech here: the opposition is between language on the one hand and truth or meaning on the other. In the quoted passage Marlow is exasperated because when faced with the task of communicating something deeper than just the narrative of events he is at a loss for words—or more precisely, the words themselves fail him. His pronouncement that it is “impossible” for language to do certain things—for language to hold the *essence* of things as they exist—foreshadows the dilemma at the center of Modernist and indeed much of twentieth-century philosophical thought. But what he is trying to tell is not just “the Truth” in the abstract, but rather the truth about Kurtz, the *truth of his experience of the European colonies*. This suggests the way that the philosophical themes of the tale are intertwined with if not identical to the colonial themes. Conrad has the two coexisting in such close proximity that they in fact appear to be two sides of the same coin.

The debate, then, over whether *Heart of Darkness* should be interpreted in terms of *either* colonial and historical *or* philosophical questions misses Conrad's insight that the two are in fact inseparable. As the complex textual fusion of the two in *Heart of Darkness* implies, the seemingly abstract philosophical problems concerning language and truth arise only out of concrete problems (such as colonialism) which exist in the social world, while at the same time the concrete problems of colonial domination at the turn of the twentieth century have extensive philosophical implications.

Source: Kevin Attell, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1997. Attell is a doctoral candidate at the University of California-Berkeley.

An Image of Africa

In the following excerpt, Chinua Achebe argues that the racist attitudes inherent in Conrad's novel make it "totally inconceivable" that it could be considered "great art."

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting peacefully "at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks." But the actual story takes place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that "going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world."

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point. What actually worries Conrad is the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames, too, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque, suggestive echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and of falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings.

I am not going to waste your time with examples of Conrad's famed evocation of the African atmosphere. In the final consideration it amounts to no more than a steady, ponderous, fake-ritualistic repetition of two sentences, one about silence and the other about frenzy. An example of the former is, "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention," and of the latter, "The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy." Of course, there is a judicious change of adjective from time to time so that instead of "inscrutable," for example, you might have "unspeakable," etc., etc.

The eagle-eyed English critic, F. R. Leavis, drew attention nearly thirty years ago to Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery." That insistence must not be dismissed lightly, as many Conrad critics have tended to do, as a mere stylistic flaw. For it raises serious questions of artistic good faith. When a writer, while pretending to record scenes, incidents and their impact, is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery, much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity. Generally, normal readers are well armed to detect and resist such underhand activity. But Conrad chose his subject well—one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance. He chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths.

The most interesting and revealing passages in *Heart of Darkness* are, however, about people. I must quote a long passage from the middle of the story in which representatives of Europe in a steamer going down the Congo encounter the denizens of Africa:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we straggled 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. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the

comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.

Herein lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and the fascination it holds over the Western mind: “What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours.... Ugly.”

Having shown us Africa in the mass, Conrad then zeros in on a specific example, giving us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes:

And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen, he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam gauge and at the water gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed his teeth, too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

As everybody knows, Conrad is a romantic on the side. He might not exactly admire savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet but they have at least the merit of being in their place, unlike this dog in a parody of breeches. For Conrad, things (and persons) being in their place is of the utmost importance.

Towards the end of the story, Conrad lavishes great attention quite unexpectedly on an African woman who has obviously been some kind of mistress to Mr. Kurtz and now presides (if I may be permitted a little imitation of Conrad) like a formidable mystery over the inexorable imminence of his departure:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent.... She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.

This Amazon is drawn in considerable detail, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval; and second, she fulfills a structural requirement of the story; she is a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman with whom the story will end:

She came forward, all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning.... She took both my hands in hers and murmured, “I had heard you were coming.”... She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa. They only "exchanged short grunting phrases" even among themselves but mostly they were too busy with their frenzy. There are two occasions in the book, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech, even English speech, on the savages. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them:

"Catch 'im," he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp white teeth—"catch 'im. Give 'im to us." "To you, eh?" I asked; "what would you do with them?" "Eat 'im!" he said curtly....

The other occasion is the famous announcement.

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.

At first sight, these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad. In reality, they constitute some of his best assaults. In the case of the cannibals, the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out of their own mouth, Conrad chose the latter. As for the announcement of Mr. Kurtz's death by the "insolent black head of the doorway," what better or more appropriate *finis* could be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilization who willfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness and "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" than the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined?

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism. Certainly, Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his story. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator. The primary narrator is Marlow but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person. But if Conrad's intention is to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator, his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Marlow seems to me to enjoy Conrad's complete confidence—a feeling reinforced by the close similarities between their careers.

Marlow comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English liberal tradition which required all Englishmen of decency to be deeply shocked by atrocities in Bulgaria or the Congo of King Leopold of the Belgians or wherever. Thus Marlow is able to toss out such bleeding-heart sentiments as these:

They were all dying slowly—it was very clear. 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.

The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe, and America. It took different forms in the minds of different people but almost always managed to

sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people. That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which I have often quoted but must quote one last time Schweitzer says: "The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother." And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being. Naturally, he became a sensation in Europe and America. Pilgrims flocked, and I believe still flock even after he has passed on, to witness the prodigious miracle in Lambaréne, on the edge of the primeval forest.

Conrad's liberalism would not take him quite as far as Schweitzer's, though. He would not use the word "brother" however qualified; the farthest he would go was "kinship." When Marlow's African helmsman falls down with a spear in his heart he gives his white master one final disquieting look.

And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

It is important to note that Conrad, careful as ever with his words, is not talking so much about *distant kinship* as about someone *laying a claim* on it. The black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable. It is the laying of this claim which frightens and at the same time fascinates Conrad, " ... the thought of their humanity—like yours.... Ugly."

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely, that Conrad was a bloody racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticism of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely undetected. Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness. They will point out to you that Conrad is, if anything, less charitable to the Europeans in the story than he is to the natives. A Conrad student told me in Scotland last year that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz.

Which is partly the point: Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Of course, there is a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind. But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. I would not call that man an artist, for example, who composes an eloquent instigation to one people to fall upon another and destroy them. No matter how striking his imagery or how beautiful his cadences fall, such a man is no more a great artist than another may be called a priest who reads the mass backwards or a physician who poisons his patients. All those men in Nazi Germany who lent their talent to the service of virulent racism whether in science, philosophy or the arts have generally and rightly been condemned for their perversions. The time is long overdue for taking a hard look at the work of creative artists who apply their talents, alas often considerable as in the case of Conrad, to set people against people. This, I take it, is what Yevtushenko is after when he tells us that a poet cannot be a slave trader at the same time, and gives the striking example of Arthur Rimbaud who was fortunately honest enough to give up any pretenses to poetry when he opted for slave trading. For poetry surely can only be on the side of man's deliverance and not his enslavement; for the brotherhood and unity of all mankind and against the doctrines of Hitler's master races or Conrad's "rudimentary souls." ...

[Conrad] was born in 1857, the very year in which the first Anglican missionaries were arriving among my own people in Nigeria. It was certainly not his fault that he lived his life at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level. But even after due allowances have been made for all the influences of contemporary prejudice on his sensibility, there remains still in Conrad's attitude a residue of antipathy to black people which his peculiar psychology alone can explain. His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing:

A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards.

Certainly, Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting as when he gives us this brief description:

A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms.

As though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to have *white* arms! But so unrelenting is Conrad's obsession.

As a matter of interest Conrad gives us in *A Personal Record* what amounts to a companion piece to the buck nigger of Haiti. At the age of sixteen Conrad encountered his first Englishman in Europe. He calls him "my unforgettable Englishman." and describes him in the following manner:

[his] calves exposed to the public gaze ... dazzled the beholder by the splendor of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory.... The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men illumined his face...and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth ... his white calves twinkled sturdily.

Irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that tormented man. But whereas irrational love may at worst engender foolish acts of indiscretion, irrational hate can endanger the life of the community....

Whatever Conrad's problems were, you might say he is now safely dead. Quite true. Unfortunately, his heart of darkness plagues us still. Which is why an offensive and totally deplorable book can be described by a serious scholar as "among the half dozen greatest short novels in the English language," and why it is today perhaps the most commonly prescribed novel in the twentieth-century literature courses in our own English Department here. Indeed the time is long overdue for a hard look at things.

There are two probable grounds on which what I have said so far may be contested. The first is that it is no concern of fiction to please people about whom it is written. I will go along with that. But I am not talking about pleasing people. I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question. It seems to me totally inconceivable that great art or even good art could possibly reside in such unwholesome surroundings.

Secondly, I may be challenged on the grounds of actuality. Conrad, after all, sailed down the Congo in 1890 when my own father was still a babe in arms, and recorded what he saw. How could I stand up in 1975, fifty years after his death and purport to contradict him? My answer is that as a sensible man I will not accept just

any traveller's tales solely on the grounds that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even of a man's very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad's....

But more important by far is the abundant testimony about Conrad's savages which we could gather if we were so inclined from other sources and which might lead us to think that these people must have had other occupations besides merging into the evil forest or materializing out of it simply to plague Marlow and his dispirited band. For as it happened, soon after Conrad had written his book an event of far greater consequence was taking place in the art world of Europe. This is how Frank Willett, a British art historian, describes it [in *African Art*, 1971]:

Gauguin had gone to Tahiti, the most extravagant individual act of turning to a non-European culture in the decades immediately before and after 1900, when European artists were avid for new artistic experiences, but it was only about 1904-5 that African art began to make its distinctive impact. One piece is still identifiable, it is a mask that had been given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. He records that Derain was "speechless" and "stunned" when he saw it, bought it from Vlaminck and in turn showed it to Picasso and Matisse, who were also greatly affected by it. Ambroise Vollard then borrowed it and had it cast in bronze.... The revolution of twentieth century art was under way!

The mask in question was made by other savages living just north of Conrad's River Congo. They have a name, the Fang people, and are without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form. As you might have guessed, the event to which Frank Willett refers marked the beginning of cubism and the infusion of new life into European art that had run completely out of strength.

The point of all this is to suggest that Conrad's picture of the people of the Congo seems grossly inadequate even at the height of their subjection to the ravages of King Leopold's International Association for the Civilization of Central Africa. Travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves. But even those not blinkered, like Conrad, with xenophobia, can be astonishingly blind....

As I said earlier, Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry, the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparing it with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity, it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild irresistible allure of the jungle and lo! the darkness found him out.

In my original conception of this talk I had thought to conclude it nicely on an appropriately positive note in which I would suggest from my privileged position in African and Western culture some advantages the West might derive from Africa once it rid its mind of old prejudices and began to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystification but quite simply as a continent of people—not angels, but not rudimentary souls either—just people, often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society. But as I thought more about the stereotype image, about its grip and pervasiveness, about the willful tenacity with which the West holds it to its heart; when I thought of your television and the cinema and newspapers, about books read in schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realized that no easy optimism

was possible. And there is something totally wrong in offering bribes to the West in return for its good opinion of Africa. Ultimately, the abandonment of unwholesome thoughts must be its own and only reward. Although I have used the word *willful* a few times in this talk to characterize the West's view of Africa it may well be that what is happening at this stage is more akin to reflex action than calculated malice. Which does not make the situation more, but less, hopeful.

Source: Chinua Achebe “An Image of Africa,” in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Winter, 1977, pp. 782-94. Achebe is a noted Nigerian novelist whose works include *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*; he has frequently lectured in the United States and served as a professor at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst in 1987-88.

Ingress to the *Heart of Darkness*

In the following excerpt, Walter F. Wright suggests that the scene in which Marlow conceals the nature of Kurtz's death “is really a study of the nature of truth.”

The tragedy of Kurtz and the education of Marlow fuse into one story, since for Marlow that tragedy represents his furthest penetration into the heart of darkness. As Marlow enters the forest to intercept Kurtz on the way toward the ceremonial blaze he senses the fascination which the savage ritual possesses. In the light of Conrad's other tales we know that it is because he is guided by well-established habits that he is able to complete his mission and carry Kurtz back to his cot, though not before he himself has apprehended the lure of the primitive. He has duplicated in his own experience enough of Kurtz's sensations to have good reason to wonder what is real and what is a false trick of the imagination. It was this fascination and bewilderment that Conrad aimed to suggest, and the presenting of Kurtz at the most intense moment of his yielding to it was to transcend time and bring a unity of impression.

When Marlow, soon after, hears the dying pronouncement, “the horror, the horror!” he has more than a mere intellectual awareness of what the words mean; and as we have vicariously shared Marlow's quasi-hysterical emotion on the trip toward the camp fire, we feel likewise the completeness with which Kurtz has savored degradation. He is a universal genius because he has had both the dream of sweetness and sacrifice in a cause shared by others and the disillusionment of being, in the very midst of the savage adoration, irretrievably alone, devoid of all standards, all hopes that can give him a sense of kinship with anything in the universe. Now, as he faces the last darkness of all, he cannot even know that Marlow understands and that he feels no right to condemn....

Conscious will was, in the novelist's opinion, not merely fallible, but often dangerous. Reliance upon it could lead one completely away from human sentiments. In *Heart of Darkness* itself Kurtz twice replies to Marlow that he is “perfectly” conscious of what he is doing; his sinister actions are deliberate. This fact does not in the least, however, mean that Conrad wished for a condition devoid of will. He believed that man had the power to pursue the interpretation of experience with deliberate intent and by conscious endeavor to reduce it to proportions. The imagination would bring up the images and incidents, but the reason could help select and arrange them until they became the essence of art. In his trip up the Congo and in his rapid descent Marlow is protected by habits which tend to preserve sanity, but the experience is of the imagination and emotions. Were he to stop short with the mere sensations, he would have no power to distinguish reality from the unreal, to speculate, with touchstones for reference, about life. What we are coming to is the obvious question, If Kurtz's dictum represents the deepest penetration into one aspect of the mind, why did Conrad not stop there; why did he have Marlow tell the girl that Kurtz died pronouncing her name? Is the ending tacked on merely to relieve the horror, or has it a function in the conscious interpretation of life in the proportions of art?...

The fact is that Conrad, fully capable of building to a traditional climax and stopping, wanted to put Kurtz's life in the perspective which it must have for Marlow *sub specie aeternitatis*. Marlow does not have a final answer to life, but after we have shared with him the steady penetration to the brink of degradation we have almost forgotten what life otherwise is like. It is now that Conrad's method of chronological reversal is invaluable. We are quickly returned to Europe, where the marvel of Kurtz's genius still remains, as if he had left but yesterday.

The scene in which Marlow conceals from the girl the nature of Kurtz's death is really a study of the nature of truth. If he had told the girl the simple facts, he would have acknowledged that the pilgrims in their cynicism had the truth, that goodness and faith were the unrealities. Marlow appreciates this temptation, and we are hardly to suppose that sentimental weakness makes him resist it. He does not preach to us about the wisdom he has achieved, in fact he deprecates it, and now he says merely that to tell her would be "too dark altogether." He is still perplexed as to the ethics of his deception and wishes that fate had permitted him to remain a simple reporter of incidents instead of making him struggle in the realm of human values. Yet in leaving in juxtaposition the fiancée's ideal, a matter within her own heart, and the fact of Kurtz's death, Marlow succeeds in putting before us in his inconclusive way the two extremes that can exist within the human mind, and we realize that not one, but both of these are reality.

When Marlow ends his monologue, his audience [is] aware that the universe around them, which, when we began the story, seemed an ordinary, familiar thing, with suns rising and setting according to rule and tides flowing and ebbing systematically for man's convenience, is, after all, a thing of mystery. It is a vast darkness in that its heart is inscrutable. What, then, has Marlow gained, since he has ended with this conclusion which we might, *a priori*, accept as a platitude? He has certainly helped us eliminate the false assumptions by which day to day we act as if the universe were a very simple contrivance, even while, perhaps, we give lip service to the contrary. Moreover, instead of letting one faculty of the mind dominate and deny the pertinence of the others, he has achieved a reconciliation in which physical sensation, imagination, and that conscious logic which selects and arranges have lost their apparent qualities of contradiction. He has achieved an orderly explanation, conscious and methodical, of the strange purlieus of the imagination. Because those recesses harbor shadows, the exploration must not be labeled conclusive; but the greatness of the darkness, instead of leaving a sense of the futility of efforts to dispel it, has drawn the artist to use his utmost conscious skill. Life itself, if we agree with Conrad, may tend to seem to us as meaningless and chaotic as were many of Marlow's sensations at the moment of his undergoing them, and the will may often appear to play no part at all, or a false part, in guiding us. But the genius of art was for Conrad that it accepted the most intense and seemingly reason-defying creations of the imagination and then discovered within them, rather than superimposed upon them, a symmetry coherent and logical.

Through Marlow's orderly narrative, with its perfect identity of fact and symbol, with its transformation of time and space into emotional and imaginative intensity, the shadows have contracted, and we are better able than before to speculate on the presences which seem to inhabit the very heart of darkness. Time is telescoped and we have as if in the same moment the exalted enthusiast and the man who denied all except horror; and we realize that they are and always have been the same man. We perceive that Africa itself, with its forests, its heat, and its mysteries, is only a symbol of the larger darkness, which is in the heart of man.

Source: Walter F. Wright, "Ingress to the *Heart of Darkness*," from his *Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad*, University of Nebraska Press, 1949, reprinted in *Conrad's Heart of Darkness and the Critics*, edited by Bruce Harkness, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1960, pp. 153-55.

Suggested Essay Topics

Section I

1. From the very opening on the Thames in *Heart of Darkness*, when day mixes with night, Conrad uses images of light and dark. Traditionally, light represents “good” and dark represents “bad.” Does Conrad use these interpretations in the same way? What do his constant references to light and dark suggest about Marlow’s story? Remember, Africa is the “dark continent,” where the black natives live.
2. Conrad alters his narration by making Marlow jump back and forth in time. Marlow mentions people and events we won’t know about until later. Cite examples when he does this, and explain how it affects the story. What advantages are there in breaking the sequence of events? Why does he tell us some things, while withholding others?
3. In a sense, two narrators speak—a nameless “I” and Charlie Marlow. The narrator introduces Marlow, then tells us some of his ideas. When Marlow speaks, we see everything from his perspective. Suppose someone else told Marlow’s story? Say, perhaps, the narrator or, possibly, one of the people Marlow meets along his journey. How would the story change? Would the information and details be different?
4. After taking the steamer captained by the Swede, Marlow sees the blacks for the first time. Why does the sight of them appall him? Why is he bothered by the way they are treated? No one else seems to be disturbed by their condition, so why is Marlow?
5. Section I contains a number of shorter episodes, as Marlow switches steamers and heads deeper into the jungle. What does he see and experience at each temporary stop over? Is there a progression as he moves from one boat to another? Does each stop affect Marlow’s attitude and opinion toward what he sees?

Section II

1. Marlow hears about Kurtz when other people talk about him. The accountant, brickmaker, manager, and the manager’s uncle speak of Kurtz to each other and/or Marlow. He pieces together their offhand remarks to form his opinion of Kurtz. From their references, characterize Kurtz. Is he admirable, a good ivory-agent, successful? Is it possible their positions influence their feelings toward Kurtz?
2. Marlow’s journey to Africa enables him to meet for the first time the natives, people unlike him in many ways. How does Marlow, as well as the other white men, contrast with the blacks? Focus not only on their physical differences, but their behavior and general way of life. Are they representative of their distinct cultures, since one group comes from “civilized” Europe and the other comes from the “dark” continent?
3. A few times during Section I, Marlow mentions how he anticipates meeting Kurtz. Why does Kurtz intrigue him? Has the gossip about Kurtz fueled his interest? Is there any logical reason why he becomes obsessed with meeting Kurtz, a white man like himself?
4. The conversation between Marlow and the manager in Section I, and the talk between the manager and his uncle at the beginning of Section II, establish the manager’s character. According to Marlow, he has no good qualities. Show how the manager is greedy, self-centered, and more of a hindrance to Marlow than a help. Remember, the manager envies Kurtz, a man Marlow longs to meet. Could this account for Marlow’s unflattering picture of him?
5. Conrad ends Section I between when the manager’s uncle arrives and the manager talks to his uncle about Kurtz. Section II ends right after the Russian greets Marlow and tells them preliminary information about himself and Kurtz. Why does Conrad end these sections here? Are they important breaks in the plot? Would

Heart of Darkness have been different if Conrad had left the novella as one chapter, with no separate sections?

Section III

1. From what the Russian says, he worships Kurtz. He always praises him, even justifying Kurtz's barbaric killings. Marlow admires Kurtz also. How, though, does their admiration for Kurtz differ? Is the Russian's more exaggerated, and Marlow's more controlled? Since the Russian already knows Kurtz and has spoken to him, and Marlow has not met Kurtz yet, can that influence their respective feelings?
2. There are many indications of Kurtz's mental illness. The decapitated heads on poles outside his home, his "exterminate all the brutes" philosophy, and his obsessive quest for ivory show his "unsound method," as the manager terms it. Is Kurtz mad, or has he simply adapted to a barbaric society? Is he just playing by the rules of the jungle, which differ from those of a civilized society?
3. Though seemingly minor, the three women are important to Marlow's adventure. His aunt, Kurtz's black mistress, and Kurtz's Intended influence the story in various ways. Compare the three of them. What does each one represent? Include how they come from different parts of society with separate values and beliefs, especially Kurtz's two loves.
4. Kurtz appears in *Heart of Darkness* for a very short time. He does and says little. Why then is he so important to the story? Why didn't Conrad expand his actual role? Does his limited appearance detract from his importance?
5. Describe the three people who visit Marlow to get Kurtz's papers after he returns to Europe from Africa. What do their positions and interest in Kurtz say about Kurtz's reputation? Why is Marlow so reluctant about giving them Kurtz's papers? What are his personal reasons for protecting them?
6. Besides Marlow and Kurtz, Conrad identifies all the characters who appear by description, not name. We see the chief accountant, the manager, the manager's uncle, the helmsman, the Russian, etc. Why does Conrad use these vague references? By not giving them names, does he shift the emphasis away from them, even though they all contribute to Marlow's journey? Is their function, as suggested through their title, more important than their name?

Sample Essay Outlines

• Topic #1

Marlow's conflicting feelings toward Kurtz depend on a number of things. Sometimes he admires him, other times he denounces him. Write an essay analyzing these opposing feelings.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Based on Kurtz's actions and ideas, Marlow's feelings toward him alternate between admiration and reprehension.*

II. Feelings of admiration

A. Kurtz's talents

1. Obtained ivory
2. Organized the natives to work for him
3. Wrote of his experience and honestly evaluated them

B. Idolatry for Kurtz

1. Natives performed sacrifices in his honor
2. The Russian worships him
3. Marlow honors Kurtz's memory to protect him

III. Feelings of reprehension

A. Kurtz abandoned morality

1. Killed people who opposed him (heads on poles)
2. Threatened to kill the Russian over ivory

B. Kurtz shows little restraint

1. Covets ivory and its importance
2. Regards the natives as inferior people—"Exterminate all the brutes" he wrote in his report
3. His methods are "unsound"

IV. Conclusion: Depending on what aspect of Kurtz Marlow considers, his feelings vary from one extreme to the opposite, from respect to revulsion.

• Topic #2

Who is the main character in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow or Kurtz? Develop an argument showing how each one can be viewed as the main character.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Marlow and Kurtz each can be considered the main character. One cannot exist without the other.*

II. Kurtz is the main character

A. He is Marlow's goal

1. Marlow becomes obsessed with meeting Kurtz along the journey
2. Kurtz represents a side of Marlow that he is afraid to become

B. All the people and action revolve around Kurtz

1. The chief accountant, manager, and other company workers deal with Kurtz
2. All the ivory trading goes back to Kurtz

III. Marlow is the main character

A. As narrator, Marlow's story is more important

1. Marlow's feelings and judgment govern what the reader knows
2. The story shows his change after the journey
3. Marlow is in the entire novella, Kurtz isn't

B. Marlow makes Kurtz a great figure

1. Only Marlow admires Kurtz in an extreme way
2. After Kurtz's death, Marlow keeps him alive by preserving his memory

IV. Conclusion: An argument can be made for either Marlow or Kurtz as the main character.

• **Topic #3**

Heart of Darkness shows how the forces of nature control man. The jungle exposes man's weakness. Write an essay showing how nature dominates all the people in the jungle.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *The jungle influences everyone's behavior. It not only affects them physically, but also mentally. It exposes man's weakness in many ways.*

II. Nature's power

A. The forest's trees and heat

1. Makes it difficult for the boats to sail
2. Blocks the natives and seamen from each other

B. Affects men physically and mentally

1. Causes the helmsman's death
2. Marlow's fever
3. Kurtz's insanity

III. Man's weakness

A. Man must adapt to survive

1. Lack of food and water affects their behavior
2. Breakdown leads to violence

IV. Conclusion: Nature's power overwhelms man, exposing many weaknesses. Either mentally or physically, all the characters in *Heart of Darkness* succumb to nature's force.

• **Topic #4**

The title *Heart of Darkness* refers to Africa as well as a psychological side of man. Develop these two meanings of the title.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Heart of Darkness is both a metaphor for an internal side of man, and a literal allusion to Africa. It simultaneously suggests a physical and mental reference.*

II. It is a literal place

A. Africa is the dark continent

1. Savages live there
2. Dense jungle shades the land
3. It is separated from the civilized world

- B. Inequalities of power
 - 1. Whites control the natives
 - 2. Abuse of power for ivory and wealth
 - 3. Marlow despises the whites and empathizes with the natives

III. It is a psychological reference

- A. Suggests man's dark side
 - 1. Kurtz's irrational acts
 - 2. Marlow's illness after meeting Kurtz in Africa
 - 3. Natives' extreme devotion to Kurtz, a mad god

IV. Conclusion: *Heart of Darkness* refers to both physical and mental aspects of the novella. These external and internal worlds influence each other.

• **Topic #5**

Women play a prominent role in Marlow's experience in Africa. Without them, his story is incomplete.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Though in the background, the three women who appear in Heart of Darkness play an important role in Marlow's journey to and from Africa.*

II. Marlow's aunt

- A. She is the only "family" Marlow mentions
- B. She helps him secure his position in the company
- C. He visits her before he leaves for Africa
- D. She refers to him as an "emissary of light"
- E. She nurses him through his illness when he returns

III. Kurtz's black mistress

- A. She is Kurtz's love in the jungle
- B. Marlow admires her physical beauty
- C. She never speaks, unlike Kurtz, who Marlow says is a "voice"
- D. She follows Kurtz when they take him to the boat
- E. The pilgrims shoot her as they leave

IV. Kurtz's Intended

- A. She contrasts Kurtz's black mistress
 - 1. She lives in Europe
 - 2. She talks
 - 3. She shows her emotions
- B. Marlow visits her after meeting Kurtz
 - 1. Marlow gives her Kurtz's important papers
 - 2. Marlow lies to protect her from the truth

V. Conclusion: In a predominantly male world, Marlow's aunt, Kurtz's black mistress, and Kurtz's Intended affect him before, during, and after his experience in Africa.

• **Topic #6**

The three sections in *Heart of Darkness* serve as borders around Marlow's journey from London to Africa and back.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Though Conrad uses a non-chronological narration, he separates Heart of Darkness into three sections to show Marlow's emotional and literal progression as he journeys to Africa to meet Kurtz.*

II. Section I establishes Marlow's introduction to Kurtz

- A. Marlow joins the company and undergoes a physical
- B. He works his way from the Outer to the Inner Station
- C. He hears about Kurtz for the first time from the manager and accountant

III. Section II develops Marlow's interest in meeting Kurtz

- A. Marlow thinks of his journey in terms of speaking to Kurtz
- B. He gets closer to Kurtz's station
- C. The natives attack Marlow's boat from their proximity
- D. Marlow meets the Russian at Kurtz's station

IV. Section III culminates in Marlow finally meeting Kurtz

- A. The Russian speaks of Kurtz's greatness
- B. Marlow meets Kurtz and speaks with him privately
- C. Marlow shares in Kurtz's death
- D. Marlow preserves Kurtz's memory when he meets Kurtz's Intended

V. Conclusion: Each section of *Heart of Darkness* establishes a deeper relationship between Marlow and Kurtz.

• **Topic #7**

Conrad incorporates many symbols. As with most symbols, their meanings vary with different interpretations or approaches.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Through the use and frequency of symbols in Heart of Darkness, Conrad deepens the meaning of the story. Taken separately or in pairs, they add another level of analysis beneath the surface narrative.*

II. Objects as symbols

- A. Kurtz's painting of the blindfolded woman
- B. Heads on poles outside of Kurtz's hut
- C. Shoes
 - 1. Marlow's shoes
 - 2. The Russian's shoes
- D. Books
 - 1. *An inquiry into Points of Seamanship*
 - 2. Kurtz's writings

III. Animals (non-humans) as symbols

- A. Black hens at Fresleven's death

- B. Snake in reference to the river on the map
- C. Hippos/hippo meat
- D. Flies over the dying agent, then over Kurtz

IV. Places as symbols

- A. Europe
- B. Africa
- C. Thames River
- D. Jungle River

V. Conclusion: Conrad's symbols embody more meanings other than their actual reference. By interpreting them in different ways, we expand the profundity of *Heart of Darkness*.

Compare and Contrast

- **1890s:** The iron steamship has supplanted the sailing ship. The British, French, and Dutch Merchant Marines are associated with colonization and the development of manufacturing. With the introduction of the steel steamship in the mid-nineteenth century, Great Britain takes first place in ship building and shipping.

Today: The turbine and diesel engine bring new power and speed to shipping, and a new age of nuclear-powered shipping is launched. Ocean-going vessels are still the dominant means for world transport of commercial goods.

- **1890s:** The African slave trade has begun to die out in the Belgian Congo. The Brussels Act of 1890 is signed by eighteen nations and greatly limits the slave trade. But forced labor continues in the Congo with appalling brutality as the lucrative trade in rubber and ivory takes up where trade in human beings left off.

Today: Slavery is all but abolished throughout the world, although it is reported to still exist in parts of Africa and Asia.

- **1890s:** Because of the ivory trade, the collection of ivory (present only in the tusks of elephants) thrives in Africa, where elephant tusks are larger than they are in Asia. Antwerp (Belgium) and London are major centers of ivory commerce, with Europe and the U.S. being major importers.

Today: The diminishing number of elephants, due largely to their wholesale slaughter for tusks, leads to a complete ban on ivory trading. A new method of determining the origin of a tusk through DNA testing enables zoologists to fight poaching and determine where the elephant population is large enough to safely permit a limited trade.

- **1890s:** The Congo Free State is established by King Leopold II of Belgium and is to be headed by the King himself. Leopold II never visits the Congo in person, and when reports of atrocities committed there by his agents reach him, he orders that all abuses cease at once. His orders are ignored. Belgium annexes the Congo in 1908.

Today: The Belgian Congo is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Congo River is the Zaire. The Congolese army mutinied in 1960 and the Congo was declared independent. In 1989, the country defaults on a loan from Belgium, resulting in the cancellation of development programs. Since 1990, a trend of political turmoil and economic collapse continues, even after a relatively bloodless revolution in 1997.

- **1890s:** Christian Missionaries are very active in the Belgian Congo. They are mostly Roman Catholic and pursue what is known as the "white man's burden" to bring western religion, culture, and technology to the nations of Africa.

Today: More than three-fourths of the inhabitants of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are Christian. Many also follow traditional religious beliefs and a substantial number belong to African Protestant groups. The population of the Congo comprises about two hundred ethnic groups, the

majority of whom speak one of the Bantu languages, although the country's official language is French.

Topics for Further Study

- Research the Belgian atrocities, committed in the Belgian Congo between 1889 and 1899, and compare them to the evidence of same presented in *Heart of Darkness*.
- Research Henry Stanley's three-year journey (1874-1877) up the Congo River and compare the stations Stanley founded along the river to those mentioned in *Heart of Darkness*.
- Compare the view of women, as presented in *Heart of Darkness*, to today's view. Argue whether Conrad should or should not be considered a sexist by today's standards.
- Compare the view of Africans, as presented in *Heart of Darkness*, to today's view. Argue whether Conrad should or should not be considered a racist by today's standards.
- Research a contemporary psychological study of the effects on an individual of isolation, solitude, or a wild jungle environment and compare it to Kurtz's situation.

Media Adaptations

- Directed by Nicolas Roeg, *Heart of Darkness* was adapted for television and broadcast on TNT in 1994. The film features Tim Roth as Marlow and John Malkovich as Kurtz, and is available on cassette from Turner Home Entertainment.
- The structure of *Heart of Darkness* was incorporated into Francis Ford Coppola's award-winning 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, starring Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen. The insanities presented in the book as stemming from isolation in the African jungle are in the film transposed to the jungles of Vietnam. Available from Paramount Home Video.
- Two sound recordings of *Heart of Darkness* exist. Both are abridged and produced on two cassettes each. One was recorded by HarperCollins in 1969, is narrated by Anthony Quayle, and runs 91 minutes. The other is a 180-minute recording, published by Penguin-High Bridge audio in 1994, with narration by David Threlfall.

What Do I Read Next?

- In *Lord Jim*, published in 1900, another maritime tale, Conrad deals with issues of honor in the face of grave personal danger and colonial imposition of will upon a native people. Marlow again becomes a narrator. Here he tells the story of Jim, a simple sailor who tried and failed to adhere to an honorable code of conduct
- *Nostromo* (1904), Conrad's largest and most ambitious novel, has multiple heroes and flashes forward and back over a wide time frame. The familiar Conradian preoccupation with colonial interests in remote lands is here transposed to a fictional South American country seething with political unrest.
- Conrad's novel of political terrorism, *The Secret Agent* (1907), illustrates the author's fascination with a hero who, unlike Kurtz, seeks to remain neutral and avoid commitment in a world of conflict. Against his own will, Adolf Verloc, the book's double agent, is forced into actions which result in more than one murder and a suicide.
- Set in the author's native Nigeria, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) shows the tragic effects of European colonialism on one man.
- Winner of the 1991 National Book Award for fiction, *Middle Passage* by Charles Johnson relates the story of a free black man living in New Orleans who stows away on a ship only to discover it is a slave trader bound for Africa.
- In *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900*, Volume 1, Tim Youngs collects actual nineteenth-century British accounts of African voyages, and includes discussion of social, cultural, and racial attitudes. The volume includes an analysis of *Heart of Darkness* as a travel account, and compares Marlow's version of the Congo with that of British-American explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley.

Bibliography and Further Reading

Sources

- Adams, Richard. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Marlow*. New York: Chelsea House, 1992.
- Burden, Robert. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Macmillan Educational, 1991.
- Clifford, Hugh. Review in *The Spectator*, November 29, 1902.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
- . *Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.
- . *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1960.
- Dean, Leonard F., ed. *Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness": Backgrounds and Criticisms*. Prentice-Hall, 1960.
- Garnett, Edward. *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Norman Sherry. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 131-33.
- Glassman, Peter J. *Language and Being: Joseph Conrad and the Literature of Personality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
- Guerard, Albert J. Introduction to *Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer*. Signet Books/New American Library, 1950.
- Guetti, James L. *The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad and Faulkner*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- Gurko, Leo. *Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962.
- Hawkins, Hunt, and Brian Shaffer, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and "The Secret Sharer."* New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002.
- Hay, Eloise Knapp. *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Karl, Frederick R. *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979.
- Karl, Frederick R., and Marvin Magalaner. *A Reader's Guide to Twentieth-Century English Novels*. New York: Octagon Books, 1984.
- Leondopoulos, Jordan. *Still the Moving World: Intolerance Modernism and Heart of Darkness*. New York: P. Lang, 1991.
- London, Bette Lynn. *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Parry, Benita. *Conrad and Imperialism*. New York: Macmillan, 1983.

Pecora, Vincent P. *Self and Form in Modern Narrative*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Schwarz, Daniel R. *Rereading Joseph Conrad*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

Watt, Ian. *Essays on Conrad*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Widmer, Kingsley. "Joseph Conrad," in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, Volume 5: *Late Victorian and Edwardian Writers, 1890-1914*. Gale Research, 1992, pp. 84-122.

Further Reading

Glassman, Peter J. *Language and Being: Joseph Conrad and the Literature of Personality*. Colombia University Press, 1976. Chapter 6 develops a philosophically tinged argument about the relation between language and death in *Heart of Darkness*.

Hay, Eloise Knapp. *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*. Chicago University Press, 1963, pp. 107-61. The author relates the political component of *Heart of Darkness* to its stylistic techniques.

Hewitt, Douglas. *Conrad: A Reassessment*. Bowes, 1952. Chapter 2 treats *Heart of Darkness* together with the other early tales that also have Marlow as their narrator.

Land, Stephen K. *Paradox and Polarity in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. St. Martin's Press, 1984. A 311-page book in which Stephen Land takes a critical look at several of Conrad's works, including *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*. Land pays particular attention to an examination of the Conradian hero.

Meyer, Bernard. *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography*. Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 168-84. Chapter 9 deals with *Heart of Darkness* within the book's broader project of a psychoanalytic reading of the relation between Conrad's life and his fiction.

Parry, Benita. *Conrad and Imperialism*. Macmillan, 1983, pp. 20-39. The author develops an argument about Conrad's ambiguous relation to European colonialism. Chapter 2 treats *Heart of Darkness* directly.

Sherry, Norman. *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. A collection of contemporary reviews of Conrad's work. Contains ten reviews of *Heart of Darkness*.

Teets, Bruce E., and Helmut E. Gerber. *Joseph Conrad: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1971. An extremely useful bibliography of Conrad criticism, from contemporary reviews to later critical studies and articles.

Watts, Cedric. *A Preface to Conrad*. Longman, 1982. Explains the themes that recur in Conrad's work. More generally about Conrad's ideas than a reading of *Heart of Darkness* or any single work of his.