



Joseph Conrad; 1857-1924

Joseph Conrad grew up in the Polish Ukraine, a large, fertile plain between Poland and Russia. It was a divided nation, with four languages, four religions, and a number of different social classes. A fraction of the Polish-speaking inhabitants, including Conrad's family, belonged to the szlachta, a hereditary class in the aristocracy on the social hierarchy, combining qualities of gentry and nobility. They had political power, despite their impoverished state. Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, studied for six years at St. Petersburg University, which he left before earning a degree. Conrad's mother, Eva Bobrowska, was thirteen years younger than Apollo and the only surviving daughter in a family of six sons. After she met him in 1847, Eva was drawn to Apollo's poetic temperament and passionate patriotism, while he admired her lively imagination. Although Eva's family disapproved of the courtship, the two were married in 1856.

Instead of devoting himself to the management of his wife's agricultural estates, Apollo pursued literary and political activities, which brought in little money. He wrote a variety of plays and social satires. Although his works were little known, they would have tremendous influence on his son.

A year into the marriage, Eva became pregnant with Joseph, who was born in 1857. The Crimean War had just ended, and hopes were high for Polish independence. Joseph's family moved quite a bit, and he never formed close friendships in Poland.

After Apollo was arrested on suspicion of involvement in revolutionary activities, the family was thrown into exile. Eva developed tuberculosis, and she gradually declined until she died in 1865. The seven-year-old Conrad, who witnessed her decline, was absolutely devastated. He also developed health problems, migraines and lung inflammation, which persisted throughout his life. Apollo too fell into decline, and he died of tuberculosis in 1869. At age eleven, Joseph became an orphan.

The young boy became the ward of his uncle, who loved him dearly. Thus began Joseph's Krakow years, which ended when he left Poland as a teenager in 1874. This move was a complex decision, resulting from what he saw as the intolerably oppressive atmosphere of the Russian garrison.

He spent the next few years in France, mastering his second language and the fundamentals of seamanship. The author made acquaintances in many circles, but his "bohemian" friends were the ones who introduced him to drama, opera, and theatre. In the meantime, he was strengthening his maritime contacts, and he soon became an observer on pilot boats. The workers he met on the ship, together with all the experiences they recounted to him, laid the groundwork for much of the vivid detail in his novels.

By 1878, Joseph had made his way to England with the intention of becoming an officer on a British ship. He ended up spending twenty years at sea. Conrad interspersed long voyages with time spent resting on land.

When he was not at sea, writing letters or writing in journals, Joseph was exploring other means of making money. Unlike his father, who abhorred money, Conrad was obsessed by it; he was always on the lookout for business opportunities.

Once the author had worked his way up to shipmaster, he made a series of eastern voyages over three years. Conrad remained in the English port of Mauritius for two months, during which time he unsuccessfully courted two women. Frustrated, he left and journeyed to England.

In England in the summer of 1889, Conrad began the crucial transition from sailor to writer by starting his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. Interestingly, he chose to write in English, his third language.

A journey to the Congo in 1890 was Joseph's inspiration to write *Heart of Darkness*. His condemnation of colonialism is well documented in the journal he kept during his visit. He returned to England and soon faced the death of his beloved guardian and uncle. In the meantime, Conrad became closer to Marguerite, an older family friend who was his closest confidant. For six years he tried to establish intimacy with her, but he was eventually discouraged by the age difference and the disparity between their social positions.

Then, 1894 was a landmark year for Conrad: his first novel was published; he met Edward Garnett, who would become a lifelong friend; and he met Jessie George, his future wife. The two-year courtship between the 37-year-old Conrad and the 21-year-old Jessie was somewhat discontinuous in that Conrad pursued other women during the first year of their relationship, but his attention became strongly focused on Jessie by the autumn of 1895. Garnett disapproved of the match, especially since Jessie was miles behind Joseph in education. Nonetheless, they married in March 1896.

The children who followed the union were not warmly welcomed by their father; an absent-minded sort, he expressed surprise each time Jessie delivered a baby. His days were consumed with writing, a struggle no doubt exacerbated by the gaps in his knowledge of the English language.

The major productive phase of Conrad's career spanned from 1897 to 1911, during which time he composed *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*, among other works. During this period, he also experienced serious financial difficulties, often living off of advances and state grants, there being little in the way of royalties. It was not until the publication of *Chance* in 1914 that he experienced some level of commercial success.

As the quality of his work declined, he grew increasingly comfortable in his wealth and status. Conrad had a true genius for companionship, and his circle of friends included talented authors such as Stephen Crane and Henry James.

Still always writing, he eventually returned to Poland, and he then travelled to America, where he died of a heart attack in 1924 at the age of 67. Conrad's literary work would have a profound impact on the Modernist movement, influencing a long list of writers including T.S. Eliot, Graham Greene, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner.

Heart of Darkness : Plot Summary

Heart of Darkness opens on the deck of the yawl, *Nellie*, which is anchored along the Thames awaiting the return of the tide. Five individuals are on her deck, each exchanging a few lazy words. There is the owner of the boat, a lawyer, an accountant, the narrator -- who remains ambiguous in profession, and Marlow, the only one of the group who still works at sea. Looking to the river, Marlow describes what it must have been like for ancient travelers to Britain and how the area must have seemed like the end of the earth. He ponders how they tackled the "darkness" and overcame the "mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, [and] in the hearts of wild men" (Conrad 69). He then tells the group about his time spent as a fresh-water sailor -- his time in the "darkness."

He explains how he had just returned to London after life on the sea in the Far East, and how he became tired of his long vacation and tried to find another ship. His aunt knew of an ivory trade company in Africa and suggested he inquire. His aunt's influence paid off and he became employed as a steamboat captain on the Congo River.

He departed from Europe on a French steamer down the coast of Africa. The ship he was on seemed to make an infinite amount of stops. On these stops, Marlow became entranced by the endless coastline and the isolation created by the unfamiliar people. When the boat would stop and the black men would come out to trade with the ship, Marlow was fascinated by their presence and the reality they seemed to convey in contrast to the dreamlike features of his journey so far. Marlow realized his journey

would be anything but normal. "For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long" (p. 78).

Marlow's journey on the French steamer came to an end at the river's mouth, where he transferred to a river boat commanded by a Swede. The captain told Marlow of the corrupted government and country he was entering, and he added that an earlier passenger of his hanged himself up river for no apparent reason. Nearly one hundred miles up river, the boat landed at the company's Outer Station. The station was littered with abandoned equipment rusting away in the grass. Accompanying the valuable equipment were groups of black workers chained to each other and the dead bodies of others. Marlow was troubled at the sight before him.

Marlow moved up to the company buildings where he met the company's chief accountant. His dress was immaculate as were his quarters -- a complete contrast to the confusion that defined the rest of the station. Here, Marlow learned of a man named Kurtz for the first time. The man told Marlow that Kurtz was an amazing man who was in charge of the inner, and most important, station. He said that it wouldn't be long before Kurtz made it into administration, as he had sent more ivory down river than any other agent.

After spending ten long days at the Outer Station, Marlow headed toward the Central Station over land with a caravan of sixty blacks and a white man. Fifteen days and two-hundred miles later, Marlow made it to the station exhausted from his journey. Adding insult to injury, he discovered his awaiting steamboat at the bottom of the river. The manager of the station made no acknowledgment of Marlow's long journey and went on and on about the wreck and how it would take three months to get it running again. The manager began talking about Kurtz and how no one knew if he was dead or alive.

Marlow quickly determined that the manager "was a chattering idiot" (p. 89) and not worth his time, so he isolated himself from those who resided at the station. He decided to focus all of his time toward raising the steamboat. While he was there, however, he noticed the "pilgrims," white men who carried staffs and constantly spoke of the ivory trade, and he couldn't help overhear the constant talk of Kurtz.

One evening, the brickmaker of the station invited Marlow to his room. The agent's quarters were a marvel compared to the rest of the station, just as the accountant's had been at the Outer Station. It did not take long for Marlow to realize the agent's motive. He was trying to extract information about Marlow's influential friends and sources back in Belgium. The agent was convinced Marlow knew of the company's plans for Kurtz, as Marlow and Kurtz shared recommending sources. Marlow revealed nothing and instead questioned the agent about Kurtz after discovering a painting by him. The agent expected a promotion for Kurtz soon, but said nothing more. Marlow soon realized the agent resented Kurtz, as he continued to pry information out of him.

Later, Marlow told the agent that he needed rivets to repair the steamboat. Weeks passed, but there were no rivets. Marlow knew that supply convoys came in from the Outer Station, and he knew there were rivets there as he had almost tripped on bags of

them earlier. The only supplies that came, however, were cheap trade goods. Marlow, demanded rivets, but the agent acted indifferently towards his "forgetfulness."

As Marlow continued to wait, a group known as the Eldorado Exploring Expedition came into the station. The group was headed by the manager's uncle. One evening, as Marlow was lying in the shadows on the deck of the steamer, he overheard a conversation between the manager and his uncle. He discovered the manager had purposefully neglected to send supplies to Kurtz's Inner Station. A clerk of Kurtz's, while delivering a shipment of ivory, informed the manager that Kurtz was ill, and from then on, no news was heard from him again.

Finally, after months of waiting, rivets arrived. Marlow repaired the steamboat and began his journey upriver with a crew of about twenty natives, a few of the "pilgrims," and the manager. They progressed slowly over two months and encountered many native villages along the way. Marlow was determined to get to Kurtz and discover for himself the true nature of the man. The journey was difficult for "the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, [and] the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it" (p. 107).

A few miles from the Inner Station, after clearing through a snag, the steamer was showered with arrows. Chaos ensued as men from the boat "squirited lead into the bush" (p. 117). Marlow's helmsman was killed in the attack, and a few of the crew were wounded. Speculation of whether Kurtz was still alive at this point was abundant. The manager, who became frightened by the attack, insisted they turn around. Just as he said this, however, the Inner Station came into view.

When they pulled to the bank, they were greeted by a rather peculiar looking Russian. He told Marlow that Kurtz's health was failing, so the manager and the "pilgrims" headed out to find him and return him to the steamer. Marlow discovered from the Russian that Kurtz, without goods to trade with, had rounded up his recent supplies of ivory at gunpoint. He had become a god to the surrounding natives, and the Russian later informed Marlow that Kurtz was the one who ordered the attack on the steamer. When Marlow asked why, the Russian responded, "They don't want him to go" (p. 126). The Russian, who was obviously devoted to Kurtz, was nearly shot by Kurtz as he was aiding him to recovery.

When the group found Kurtz, he was in horrible physical condition, but his speech was amazingly strong. They carried him to the steamer under the watchful eyes of the natives, who seemed to silently protest the move. An ominous looking woman in the tribe stood out from the woods and made her presence known to the group.

Later that night, Marlow discovered Kurtz had escaped from the steamer. After locating him, Marlow carefully approached him. Kurtz was watching the natives perform one of their ceremonies, and Marlow saw the apparent torment Kurtz experienced. Marlow carried him back to the steamer, and they set out down river the next day.

As they traveled down river, Marlow watched Kurtz's decline, and he developed a kind of partnership with him. Kurtz entrusted his private papers and a photograph of a woman to Marlow, because he knew anyone else would exploit his findings. Not long after, Kurtz died speaking his final words, "The horror! The horror!" (p. 147), and was buried in the jungle.

After the event, Marlow returned to Europe to recover from an illness. A few men inquired information on Kurtz's papers, but he denounced their value and told them they were for his mourning love. Marlow took the papers to the woman, who was in obvious pain and distress over her loss of Kurtz. She questioned Marlow intently, but he evaded her questions as he did not have truthful answers about the man he hardly knew. He could not get Kurtz out of his mind, though, and thought constantly of Kurtz's situation and how he had separated himself from the world into an entirely different existence. Marlow ended the woman's sorrow by assuring her that her name was Kurtz's last word. Marlow was incensed that he lied to the woman, but did nothing and left her.

Finally, the scene returns to the present deck of the Nellie where silence ensues with the end of Marlow's story. The men share no feelings of the emotional story they have just heard and are more or less indifferent. They just sit afloat on the Thames, which seems to flow into the endless "darkness" of the horizon.

"Heart of Darkness" : A Critical Appreciation

Conrad's agonizing Congo experiences of 1890 were re-worked nine years later into Heart of Darkness which is generally regarded as one of the greatest short novels in the English language.

It is a crucial work in the development of modern literature, in that it establishes the dominant theme of twentieth-century writing: fear and disillusion about the western man's place in the world and the values by which he lives. The narrator and central character, Marlow, travels up the Congo to meet the demonic trader, Kurtz. He witnesses the violence and hypocrisy of his colonizing culture and his faith in the western world, and even his own sanity is threatened.

Heart of Darkness is based upon **Conrad's own experiences** of the Belgian Congo when he visited that country in the year 1890. It is a largely personal and autobiographical book. Being based upon what Conrad actually witnessed during his travels through what he calls the "heart of darkness", the book has the stamp of authenticity. Knowing Conrad's integrity as a writer, we have to accept Heart of Darkness as a truthful account of the conditions in which the savages of the Congo, a country of the dark continent of Africa, lived under the imperialist rule of the white man, and also a truthful account of the behaviour and the attitudes of the white men who went to that country as traders or as the agents of a trading company, or as explorers. The fictitious character called Marlow, who narrates the story, is Conrad himself in

disguise. Most of the experiences of Marlow, and most of Marlow's reactions to what he beheld in the Belgian Congo, were Conrad's own experiences, observations, and reactions.

The **theme** of Heart of Darkness is the **conditions** prevailing in the Congo under the **imperialist** rule of the Belgian King Leopold II. These conditions include the impact of the white traders and explorers on the life of the African savages, and the influence of the native way of life on the white men, with special reference to one man who is given the name of Kurtz. (Kurtz is a German word meaning "short"). There is another theme also which is equally important for the thoughtful reader i.e. **reality versus dream**. As Marlow voyages to the Belgian Congo by a French steamer, he observes closely the sights on the coast and falls into a meditative mood. The sights which he witnesses now, and those which he beholds subsequently, appear to him to be half real and half unreal. The unreality of these sights becomes the basic condition of Marlow's experiences.

Heart of Darkness is **replete with symbolism**. The very **title** of the novel has a symbolic meaning, in addition to its literal meaning, Literally, "Heart of Darkness" means the interior of a dark country, namely the Congo. Symbolically, the title means the depths of the human mind or the human consciousness. The book describes not only **Marlow's** exploration of the Congo but also his exploration of his own mind and of the deeper layers of his mind. Then there are other symbols in the novel also. The women, knitting wool, symbolize the Fates of ancient classical mythology. Mr. **Kurtz**, who is the dominating character in the novel, is a symbol of the modern western man's lust for power and pelf. The chief accountant of the Belgian trading company is as telling an image of modern man as the demonic Mr. Kurtz and there are other symbolic suggestions in the novel also.

Heart of Darkness is a **remarkable** book by virtue of its **imagery** also. Conrad here gives us ample evidence of his **descriptive powers**. The imagery in this book is **remote** and **wild**; but it is described in such a **graphic manner** that we begin actually to visualize it. There are, first of all, the sights which Marlow witnesses along the coast as he sails by a French steamer. Then there are the sights which Marlow witnesses on landing from the Swedish captain's sea-going steamer. These are memorable sights indeed. We can never forget the boiler lying uselessly in the grass, the steep path, and the several pieces of decaying machinery and the rusty rails, the blasting of the rock, the clanking of the chain-gang criminals, and so on. Soon afterwards, Marlow feels as if he had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno and thus the description and the imagery continue throughout the novel.

Heart of Darkness is a profound book. Part of its **profundity** is due to its **philosophical character** and to the writer's **psychological insight**. There are a large number of philosophical passages in the book. Marlow is not only a man of action and an adventurer, but also a thinker and a kind of philosopher. He tends to reflect and meditate upon whatever he observes and beholds. At the very time of setting out on his voyage, he makes the remark that he felt for a second or two as though, instead of going to the, centre of a continent, he was about to set off for the centre of the earth. Now, this is a philosophical remark, though not a deeply philosophical one. Soon

afterwards, he makes the remark that, as he entered into a grove near the Company's first station, he felt as if he had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno. But a more philosophical remark comes when he says that, at one point, in the course of his experience, he found it difficult to distinguish between reality and dream. When the brick-maker is talking to Marlow about Kurtz, Marlow feels that he does not at this moment see Kurtz. In fact, it seems to him at this time that he is seeing a dream and experiencing a dream-sensation. Then Marlow goes on to make the following philosophical observation: "**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**".

There is also plenty of **psychological analysis in Heart of Darkness**. In the course of his narration, Marlow gives us a peep into the minds of the various characters, at the same time making it possible for us to look into his own mind as well. Much of the interest of this book lies in its psychological studies of the various characters. For instance, Marlow gives us a penetrating portrayal of the chief **accountant** of the Company. That man is able to maintain a neat and tidy appearance even in the midst of the chaotic conditions around him. Everything at the station is in a muddle (disorder), but the accountant's clothes and his account-books are being excellently maintained. Similarly, Marlow gives us a penetrating portrayal of the **manager** of the Central Station. He makes a significant remark when he says that perhaps there was nothing "within" the manager, and that, after commenting upon the effect of the climate on the white visitors to this region, the manager smiled in a manner which showed as if his smile had been a door opening into a darkness which the manager had in his keeping. Again, Marlow enables us to look into the working of the **brick-maker's** mind. Marlow quickly perceives that the brick-maker wants to know exactly where Marlow stands in relation to the higher officials of the Company which has sent him to the Congo. But it is in his descriptions of **Kurtz** that Marlow shows his real psychological insight. He skilfully, subtly, and effectively brings to our notice **Kurtz's passion for ivory**, Kurtz's passion for power, Kurtz's influence over the savages, Kurtz's secret ambitions, Kurtz's surrender to the rites and customs of the savages, Kurtz's love for his "intended", and so on. Indeed, we are able to form a comprehensive picture of Kurtz's moral character and his mental make-up' though Kurtz still remains a mysterious figure to us.

Heart of Darkness is an interesting **mixture of the traditional and the modern** in several ways. The Company's doctor, who examines Marlow before Marlow leaves for the Congo is, for instance, very much a modern figure. This doctor is something of a psychiatrist, having an interest in analysing the mental changes of individuals. The sciences of psychology and psychiatry are modern sciences which were being developed in Conrad's own time. And Marlow, in the course of his narration, himself shows a keen interest in tracing the mental processes of the various persons with whom he comes into contact. At one point in the story; Marlow speaks of the mental change going on within himself. Here he remarks that he was becoming a fit subject for scientific study by a psychologist. Furthermore, Marlow experiences a feeling central to the literature of modernism. He experiences the anarchy and the futility of modern life. He keenly experiences the truths of the modern western world whose products include its colonialism and a sense of racial superiority. The "powers of darkness" to which Marlow

refers at one point are the powers of European culture to which Kurtz belongs, and which Kurtz had imbibed. In this context Marlow says that Kurtz would be claimed by the powers of darkness to whom he really belonged. These powers of darkness, according to one interpretation, are the influences of European culture on Kurtz: "**All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.**" The trader Kurtz is a demonic person who writes and speaks with inspiring eloquence but who yet performs rites of unspeakable savagery. **Kurtz** is also the **embodiment of the colonial appetite for possessions and power**. At the same time this story has to be read as a myth. The mythical elements in it belong to tradition. There are the two ominous women knitting black wool who suggest the Fates of classical mythology. There is Marlow's journey through a certain region of the Congo which resembles Dante's Inferno. Such elements in the novel suggest that it should be read as we read a myth. Thus looked at, the novel would seem to be a statement on the timeless problems of mankind in its existence on the planet known as the earth.

Heart of Darkness has an **unusual kind of structure**. Conrad was an innovator so far as the structure of most of his novels was concerned. The structure of Heart of Darkness is very complex. In the first place, there are two narrators in this novel. The first narrator appears before us at the very beginning of the book. It is this first narrator who tells us about the boat "Nellie" lying anchored in the river Thames and about the men on the deck of this boat. It is this first narrator who introduces to us the second narrator. While the name of the first narrator is not given to us, the second narrator's name is given as Marlow or Charles Marlow. Now, the real story comes from the lips of this second narrator; and yet the first narrator also, intervenes occasionally in the course of the novel. This mixing up of the two narrators confuses the average reader. It is not really necessary for a novelist to adopt a device of this kind except as a point of departure from the traditional way of telling a story.

Heart of Darkness is a **masterpiece of an unusual kind**. It is a profound book, and it is at the same time a starkly realistic book. It excels both in respect of external description and imagery, and in respect of its analysis of the mental processes of its characters and its probing of the conscious and the sub-conscious mind.

Heart of Darkness : Main Ideas Explained

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 disguise 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 cannot 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 honourable 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 non-white 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, and beaten, subsisting on rotten hippo meat, forced into soul-crushing and meaningless labour, 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. 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.

Heart of Darkness : Significance of Title

"**Heart of Darkness**" is a short novel by Polish novelist Joseph Conrad, written as a frame narrative, about Charles Marlow's experience as an ivory transporter down the Congo River in Central Africa. The river is "a mighty big river, that we can see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land". In the course of his travel in central Africa, Marlow becomes obsessed with Mr. Kurtz. The phrase "**Heart of Darkness**" has two meanings. Literally, the title refers to the dark continent of Africa known as the Congo. "**Heart of Darkness**" is an appropriate title for the novel because Marlow describes his experiences of the interior region of the continent which was known as Congo. The events at the beginning and at the close of the novel occur outside Congo but the major and the most significant events of the story take place in the Congo and on the river Congo. The savages really belong to the heart of darkness.

There are other features of the novel too, justifying the title "**Heart of Darkness**". One such feature is the **description of the wild scenery of the thick, impenetrable jungle, and the suggestive picture of the natives not fully visible to the white men sailing over the river Congo**. At one point in the novel Marlow says that sailing

up the river Congo was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world. He then refers to the great silence of the impenetrable forests where the air was warm, thick, heavy and sluggish. Marlow perceived no joy in the brilliance of the sunshine in that region. The long stretches of the water-way ran on into a mob of wooded islands. One could lose one's way on that river as one might lose one's way in a desert. The stillness prevailing there was not the stillness of peace but of a relentless force brooding over some mysterious purpose. Now, a description of this kind occurs later when Marlow tells us that the night came suddenly and seemed to strike him blind. Then, about three in the morning, Marlow heard a loud splash as though a gun had been fired. When the sun rose, there was a white fog, very warm and damp, and more blinding than the night. The fog remained there like something solid. A little later in the morning the fog lifted as a shutter lifts. Marlow then had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense jungle, and of the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it, all perfectly still. And then the white fog came down again. There are other descriptive passages of the same kind in the book, too.

The **barbarism of the natives** reinforces the effect of these descriptive passages and **intensifies the atmosphere of mystery and fear**. Reading about the natives, we get an even stronger impression that we are in the midst of darkness. On one occasion, the natives, seeing Marlow's steamer sailing up the river, draw near the river-bank in order to launch an attack upon the intruders. Marlow on this occasion hears a muffled rattle, then a very loud cry. This cry gives rise to a feeling of terror in the hearts of all the white men. Then the attack by the natives actually begins. The white men then hit back by firing their rifles. In the fighting, the helmsman of the steamer is killed with a spear hurled at him by a native. It is the **backwardness** and the **ignorance** of the natives which **creates the effect of darkness**. The natives have merely attacked the steamer because they have received instructions to do so from their supremo, Mr. Kurtz. The personality of Mr. Kurtz is very important because it is he who sums up the whole essence of the barbarism and the savagery of the natives. Marlow has conveyed to us the demonic character of Mr. Kurtz by the use of highly suggestive phrases. Instead of civilizing the natives, Mr. Kurtz has himself become barbarian. Mr. Kurtz has begun to identify himself with the savages. He has been presiding over their midnight dances which always end with "**unspeakable rites**". In Marlow's opinion, Mr. Kurtz has taken a high place among the devils of the land. He has been experiencing "**abominable satisfaction**", and he has been gratifying without restraint his "**various lust**". In short, Mr. Kurtz has become part of the darkness of the Congo.

The phrase "**Heart of Darkness**" has yet another meaning. It also stands for an exploration of the depths of Marlow's own mind or soul. The human mind may also be regarded as a kind of Dark Continent whose exploration is even more difficult than the exploration of Congo. The book called "**Heart of Darkness**" may be treated as a **journey** by Marlow into **his own sub-conscious mind or into the sub-conscious mind of all mankind**. The novel called "**Heart of Darkness**" is symbolically the story of an essentially solitary journey involving a profound spiritual change in the voyager. Marlow prepares us for such a journey at the very outset. But it is, at the same time, a **psychological** and **mystical journey**. Marlow also tells us indirectly that, by paying close attention to the surface reality of the story and its external details, we would be

able to arrive at an **inner meaning**. Thus Conrad is here able to blend morality and adventure in a unique manner, as he has done in some of his other novels as well.

There are many passages in the course of Marlow's narration in which he gives us glimpses of his own mind. At one point he tells us in explicit terms that he has always hated and detested lies because he has always found a taint of death and a flavour of mortality in lies. In the same context, Marlow also says that it is not possible for any man to convey to others the life-sensation of any period of all existence. He says: "**We live, as we dream – alone.**"

At another point Marlow says that the mind of **man is capable of anything** because everything is in it. In order to endure the stark realities of human life, a man should possess an inner strength. What a man needs is a deliberate belief, at yet another point in the novel, Marlow tells us of the effect on his own mind of the savage sight of human skulls hanging from the tops of the posts fixed to the ground outside Mr. Kurtz's residence. Later, Marlow tells us of the effect on his mind of Mr. Kurtz's arguments defending his action in slipping away from the ship's cabin into the jungle. Towards the end of the novel, Marlow tells us the working of his own mind when several persons come to him, one after the other, claiming the packet or papers and the photograph which, Mr. Kurtz had given him for safe custody; and he also reveals to us the working of his mind when he goes to meet Mr. Kurtz's Intended. In all these cases, Marlow tells us not about his conscious thoughts but also tries to probe his sub-conscious mind. This subconscious mind is also the heart of darkness which Marlow or Conrad tries to explore.

Finally the "**darkness**" is many things: it is the unknown; it is the subconscious; it is also a moral darkness; it is evil which swallows up Mr. Kurtz and it is the spiritual emptiness which he sees at the centre of existence; but above all it is mystery itself, the mysteriousness of man's spiritual life.

Heart of Darkness PUACP Theme of Evil

Evil has a tangible reality in "Heart of Darkness" and it dominates the novel manifesting itself in several ways. At the very outset Marlow refers to the ancient Roman conquest of Britain who used only brute force. They grabbed what they could get. It was just "**robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale**". Marlow then says that the conquest of any territory by any nation means the taking that territory away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than the conquerors. This talk by Marlow pertains to the evil of conquest, and to the brutality and the slaughter which any military conquest necessitates.

There is a hint of evil in Marlow's reference to the city of Brussels as a "**whited sepulcher**". The phrase "**whited sepulcher**" means a place which is outwardly pleasant and righteous but which is inwardly corrupt and evil. The evil character of this city is emphasized when Marlow points out that the Belgian conquerors were running an over-sea empire in the Congo and making no end of coin by trade. Then there is a hint

of evil in Marlow's description of the two women knitting black wool. "**In the outer room the two women knitted black wool, feverishly.**"

These knitting-women remind us of the mythological Fates constantly busy in spinning the yarn of human destiny. They seemed to him to be guarding the door of darkness and knitting black wool as of to make a shroud. When Marlow is about to set out on his voyage, he feels that, instead of going to the centre of a continent, he is going to the centre of the earth. Such a remark also hints at the evil which exists in this universe.

Marlow's descriptions of the natural scenery which he witnesses in the course of his voyage have a strong suggestion of evil in them. Indeed, the wilderness and the thick forest seem to be the abode of evil. Marlow sees a huge jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black. The sun is fierce and the land seems to glisten and drop with steam. He speaks of the empty stream, the great silence, and the impenetrable forest in which the air is warm, thick, heavy and sluggish. There is no joy in the brilliance of the sunshine here. "**And the river was there – fascinating – deadly – like a snake.**"

Marlow's steamer penetrates deeper and deeper into the "**heart of darkness**" and the very earth seems unearthly. Marlow's narration heightens our sense of evil which is lurking in the forest behind the millions and millions of trees.

The other sights also suggest the existence of evil. At one point, Marlow sees a warship anchored off the coast and firing its guns without having any target in view. The firing seems to be absolutely aimless and futile. He sees several trading posts where "**the merry dance of death and trade**" goes on "**in a still and earthy atmosphere**" resembling that of an over-heated tomb. He sees a lot of people, mostly black and naked. "**A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants.**"

At one place, a rock is being blasted with gunpowder even though this it does not stand in the way of the railway line which is to be laid. Then he sees the horrible sight of a chain-gang. Men in this chain-gang are criminals who have been sentenced to hard labour.

"I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking."

Marlow remarks that he had previously seen the devil of violence, the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire. He was seeing the "**devil of rapacious and pitiless folly**".

The white men, whom Marlow encounters in Congo, by no means provide any relief to Marlow. These men, cowardly civilized, are actually degenerate fellows. There is no goodness in them at all. The manager of the Central Station is a wicked fellow who can inspire neither fear, nor love, nor respect but only uneasiness. Marlow says that there was "nothing within" this man. The white agents are seen loitering about idly, talking maliciously and scheming against one another. The brick-maker is the manager's spy who keeps a watch upon the other white men at the Central Station. Marlow describes

this man as a “**papier-mâché Mephistopheles**” meaning that his man is a veritable devil, but a follow kind of devil. The white men, who have come to civilize the natives, are only exploiters having no regard for the welfare of the savages.

Evil is the keynote of the latter portion of the novel in which Marlow records his impressions of Mr. Kurtz. He has been told that Mr. Kurtz is a “**remarkable man**” who is expected to rise at a very high position because he has been collecting more ivory than all the other agents taken together. Ivory had become a passion and an obsession with Mr. Kurtz which shows the man’s extreme greed. He has begun to identify himself with the native savages. He presides over their midnight dances which always end with “**unspeakable rites**”. This means that he has begun to take pleasure in the shedding of the blood of human beings, in sexual orgies, in sexual perversions and in similar other practices. In short, Mr. Kurtz has become evil incarnate. Even when Mr. Kurtz is being taken to Europe for medical treatment, he slips away from the ship into the jungle. When Mr. Kurtz is dying, he utters the words: “**The horror! The horror!**”

The portrayal of Mr. Kurtz is perhaps even more important in this novel for this portrayal of a civilized man is meant to convey Conrad's own ideas about evil. Conrad believes that there is much evil in the savages. He does not believe in the existence of the “**noble savage**”. The barbarian customs of the savages are certainly horrifying to him. Because of his prolonged stay with the savages Mr. Kurtz becomes a devil. Conrad says that the western man should beware of falling a prey to the barbarism of the savages whom he conquers. Conrad depicts the savages in a favourable light too, but it is fully alive to the obnoxious customs of the savages and warns the western white men against the menace of those customs. Conrad's other message is that the white man should civilize the savages instead of exploiting them to fulfill his own greed.

Heart of Darkness: Theme of Self Restraint

Self-restraint (self-control) is certainly one of the themes of the novel “**Heart of Darkness**”. Self-restraint is only a subsidiary or secondary theme. This theme has been handled by Conrad very skillfully, and almost subtly, so that it does not project itself on our attention or undermine the other themes.

The **white men** who have gone to the Congo for trade show no **self-restraint** but **unlimited greed**. They are all there to **collect ivory**; and ivory has begun to **dominate** their **thoughts**. Ivory has become their **obsession**. The manager has begun to feel jealous of Mr. Kurtz because Mr. Kurtz collects more ivory than all the other agents put together. The desire of these men for ivory knows no bounds.

Then, all these men **seek power and authority**; and they show **no self-restraint** in this aim. The most striking example of greed is to be found in Mr. Kurtz who knows no self-restraint at all. Mr. Kurtz becomes the embodiment of the passion for ivory and for power. Many times he was heard saying:

“my ivory, my station, my intended, my career, my ...”

Indeed, Mr. Kurtz has become a **devil seeking wealth** in the form of **ivory** and **seeking power** in the form of **control over the natives**. He has collected all the ivory in the Congo. On one occasion he got ready even to kill his friend, the Russian, because he was having a small quantity of ivory which he did not wish to part with and which Mr. Kurtz had demanded from him. Mr. Kurtz's passion for power also knows no bounds. He has been acquiring more and more power over the savages till he has become in their eyes a god. If any native rebels against his authority, Mr. Kurtz has him executed. The time comes when nothing on earth can prevent him from killing whomsoever he wants to kill. And he still has more plans for his self-aggrandizement.

Nor does Mr. Kurtz show any **self-restraint** in the **satisfaction** of his **primitive instincts** which have begun to **dominate him**. Mr. Kurtz has become an active sharer in the demonic practices of the savages. He presides over their midnight dances which always end with "unspeakable rites" including sex-orgies, sadistic and masochistic practices, human sacrifice and other obnoxious acts. He indulgence in all such proceedings has assumed vast scope and has begun enjoying "abominable satisfactions". He now gives a free outlet to his "monstrous passions" in the company of the savages.

Mr. Kurtz shows no **self-restraint** even in his desire for **possessing things** and for **owning things**. Indeed, his sense of ownership and proprietorship has assumed abnormal proportions. He has developed a feeling that everything belongs to him. And yet there is emptiness in his soul. His mind is by no means insane, but his soul has certainly gone mad. He is "hollow at the core", as Marlow puts it. And yet this man is able to stir feelings of friendship and respect in Marlow. Here we are faced with a paradox.

There is also a **lack of self-restraint** in the **Russian** who has developed an attitude of worship towards Mr. Kurtz. The Russian, a highly intelligent and well-educated man, begins to adore Mr. Kurtz. According to the Russian, Kurt's has taught him many things and has enabled him to look into the essence of things. The Russian regards Mr. Kurtz as one of the immortals. Surprisingly Marlow himself develops an attitude of respect towards Mr. Kurtz. He has discovered that Kurtz is hollow at the core and has taken a high place among the devils of the land. And yet Marlow himself falls under Mr. Kurtz's influence. When Mr. Kurtz has slipped away from the ship's cabin into the forest, Marlow follows him to bring him back. Marlow writes:

"I did not betray Mr. Kurtz – it was ordained. I should never betray him – it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice."

Marlow also says that Mr. Kurtz had **conquered** his soul which is totally untainted by selfishness. Marlow interpret Mr. Kurtz's last words as indicative of Mr. Kurtz's victory over the evil within him. Thus we can safely affirm that even Marlow shows a **lack of self-restraint** in his feelings of **admiration** and regard for Mr. Kurtz.

This **theme of self-restraint finds expression** also in the manner in which Marlow has depicted the **cannibal crew** on his **steamer**. These cannibals were very **hungry**, and they could easily have killed some of the white men on board the steamer and consumed

their flesh but they **showed self-restraint. This self-restraint on the part of the cannibals is quite puzzling and highly commendable, though surprising.** In respect of self-restraint the cannibals score a **point over the civilized white men.** Even the white manager of the Central Station shows restraint in his mental make-up. He refrains from giving orders to Marlow and says that Marlow has the right to decide whether he should continue the voyage to the Inner Station or stop for a few hours to find out whether the savages would attack the steamer.

According to an eminent critic, restraint or self-restraint is a major theme in "Heart of Darkness". Mr. **Kurtz has no restraint** because he has no urgent work to do and has no belief. Mr. **Kurtz's extremism and faith are the opposite of true belief which is needed to tackle darkness.** On account of this lack of moral equipment and his greed of money and power, Mr. Kurtz is unable to cope with the forces of savagery and evil within him. Mr. Kurtz's only defence is his eloquence but this is not enough. These heads, stuck to the poles show that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts. The native helmsman, steering Marlow's steamer, also showed a lack of restraint which results in his murder.

"In fact nobody in the story has any real restraint except the most savage of all men, the half-starved cannibals on board the steamer who amaze Marlow by the fact that they restrained themselves from tucking into the pilgrims."

This true restraint on the part of the cannibals is incomprehensible to Marlow. Marlow's failure to solve this mystery and many other mysteries in the story is linked to a lack of restraint in the language which Marlow uses. Marlow occasionally employs excessive rhetoric, thus showing his lack of restraint in the use of language also.

Heart of Darkness : Theme of Isolation

"**Heart of Darkness**" has a multiplicity of themes interwoven closely and produces a unified pattern. The theme of isolation and its consequences constitute a theme in this book, though a minor one. **Marlow and Mr. Kurtz illustrate this theme**, dominate the novel and have symbolic roles. Both **these men stand for much more than the individuals** which they certainly are.

Marlow strikes us from the very start as a **lonely** figure. Although he is a member of a small group of people sitting on the deck of the steamer called the "Nellie". He is, at the very outset, differentiated from the others. He sits cross-legged in the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes without a lotus-flower. Then he begins his story, and nowhere in his narration does he appear to be feeling perfectly at home among other people. He seems to have the temperament of a man who would like to stay away from others, though he would certainly like to observe others and to mediate upon his observations.

When Marlow goes to Brussels for an interview, he depicts himself as an alien who has stepped into an unpleasant environment. The city of Brussels makes him think of a

"whited sepulcher". This feeling clearly shows that he has nothing in common with the people of this European city, though he is himself a European. Then he finds something ominous in the atmosphere of the office of the Company. The two knitting-women strike him as mysterious and sinister beings. **"In the outer room the two women knitted black wool, feverishly."**

Even the doctor tells him that he is the first Englishman to have come under his observation. Marlow says: **'The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. "Good, good for there," he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head.'**

There seems to be a distance even between Marlow and his aunt who has got him the job. She is enthusiastic and cordial enough, but Marlow has his reservations. He thinks that she is a most unrealistic woman. She is under the impression that the white men go into the backward regions to confer benefits upon the savages. But, in Marlow's opinion, this view of the white men is entirely wrong.

When **voyaging** upon the sea in order to get to the Congo Marlow found himself to be perfectly **idle** and **isolated** from all the others on board the steamer because he had no point of contact with them. The sound of the sea-waves was the only source of comfort to him because these sounds seemed to be like "the speech of a brother". He finds a kinship with the sea-waves but no kinship with the human beings on board the steamer.

Marlow's sense of loneliness increase when he sees certain **sights in the Congo**. These sights convey to him the futility of the white man's exertions and activities in the Congo, and miseries of the black natives. His realization by him of white man's cruelty creates a kind of barrier between him and the white men living in Congo. When he has to deal with the individual white men, his isolation is further emphasized. He finds absolutely no point of contact with the manager of the Central Station, with the manager's uncle, and with the brick-maker. The manager is a man who inspires no fear, no love, no respect and there is "nothing within this man". The manager's uncle is an intriguer and plotter as the manager himself. The brick-maker is described by Marlow as a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles" and a devil who is hollow within. The only man, whom Marlow can respect, is the chief accountant who keeps his account-books in apple-pie order and is always seen dressed neatly and nicely; but perhaps Marlow is speaking here ironically. Actually none of the white men seems to have any merit in him. Marlow does discover some good points in the natives but none in the white men. The cannibal crew of his steamer shows an admirable self-restraint and are hard-working but the white agents seem to be useless fellows and to them he gives the nickname of the "faithless pilgrims". It is only when Marlow meets Mr. Kurtz that some sort of contact is established between him and the chief of the Inner Station of the Company.

The **effect of isolation** upon Marlow is **profound**. He is by nature somewhat unsociable. He is a kind of philosopher who meditates upon whatever he sees. Isolation further heightens his meditative faculty. Finding no point of contact with others, Marlow becomes more of a **thinker** and more of a **philosopher-cum-psychologist** and studies the character and habits of Mr. Kurtz; and it is because of his isolation that he falls a

victim to the influence of Mr. Kurtz whom he has himself described as a devil. This isolation can have grave consequences.

Mr. Kurtz is another isolated figure. He has become an **absolutely solitary man** after his **prolonged stay** in the Congo. He is not solitary in the sense that he does not mix with others. In fact, he **has begun to identify himself with the savages and has become a sharer in their activities and in their interests**. He participates in their "unspeakable rites" and he gratifies, without any restraint, his various lusts and his monstrous passions. "**The wilderness has caressed him, loved him, embraced him, entered his blood, consumed his flesh and has taken complete possession of his soul.**"

In the case of Mr. Kurtz, it is isolation which proves the man's undoing. Being **cut off from all civilized society** at the Inner Station of the Company, Mr. Kurtz begins slowly to fall **under the influence of the savage till he becomes one of them**. Gradually he acquires great power and begins to be regarded as a god by them. Thus now he has to keep himself at a distance even from them. He "**presides**" over their midnight dances which end with "**unspeakable rites**".

But he is a **solitary figure** in the context of his **western education and European upbringing**. Even among the savages, he stands far above them. The savages regard him as a man-god. Mr. Kurtz is indeed a deity for the savages, and therefore he is a solitary figure even among them. Perhaps the savage closest to him under these conditions is the native woman who is his housekeeper and also perhaps his mistress. But the evil within him has already acquired huge proportions. Thus **the effects of isolation in Mr. Kurtz's case are disastrous**.

Heart of Darkness : White Imperialism

Heart of Darkness is a short novel, and yet it has several themes. It is indeed strange that such a short book should deal with so many themes.

There is in this book the theme of self-restraint. Then there is the theme of the working of the sub-conscious mind of man. There is the theme of the exploration of a little-known continent. There is the theme of the influence of barbarism and primitivism on a civilized man when he is cut off from civilized society. And there is, of course, the obvious theme of the imperialist exploitation of a backward country. Thus Heart of Darkness is a masterpiece which, in its brief compass, deals with a number of important ideas. Conrad's treatment of the theme of white imperialism was influenced by his own visit to the Congo and his exploration of that dark country; and his rendering of Marlow's conscious and sub-conscious thoughts was also based upon his own reactions to what he had himself witnessed in the course of his travels through the Congo.

Marlow's Reference to the Ancient Roman Conquest of Britain: - The keynote of the theme of imperialism is struck at the very outset of Marlow's narration. Marlow speaks at the very beginning of the ancient Roman conquest of Britain, and says that the

ancient Romans were conquerors using brute force. The ancient Romans, says Marlow, grabbed what they could get. Their conquest of Britain was "robbery with violence"; and the violence in this case meant murder on a large scale. The conquest of another country, says Marlow, mostly means the taking away all things from those who have a different complexion or who have flatter noses than the conquerors have. Such a conquest is unpardonable. What can, however, excuse such a conquest is the idea at the back of it: not a sentimental pretence but an idea, and an unselfish belief in the idea. What Marlow here wishes to say is that conquest can be excused only if the conquerors perform some constructive work in the backward country which they have conquered. Marlow here does not use the phrase "the white man's burden;" but he has evidently that concept in his mind. The white man certainly has a duty to the savages whom he dues, and whom he begins to govern. The test of the white man's intentions lies only in his performance of this duty. If he fails in this duty, his government of the backward countries cannot be justified.

Ivory a Symbol of Imperialist Greed and Commercial Mentality: - Marlow's (or Conrad's) experiences in the Congo clearly show that the white man there had failed to perform his functions. Instead of civilizing the savages, the white men who went there became exploiters, pure and simple. The Congo was at that time being governed by the Belgian King, Leopold II; and the Belgian trading companies were sending their agents into the Congo for trading purposes. The chief commodity which these Belgians found worth their pains was ivory. Ivory was of no use to the natives, themselves, while the white men collected ivory and sent it to Europe where it could profitably be used for the making of numerous ornamental articles. Now, as we go through this book, we find that ivory is being constantly mentioned. Ivory dominates the thoughts of the manager of the Central Station, the thoughts of the brick-maker, the thoughts of the several white agents who loiter around the Central Station and to whom Marlow gives the name of "faithless pilgrims." Subsequently we find that ivory not only dominates the thoughts of Mr. Kurtz but has become an obsession with him. The manager of the Central Station tells Marlow that Mr. Kurtz collects more ivory than all the other agents taken together; and the Russian tells Marlow that, on one occasion, Mr. Kurtz had threatened to kill him if he did not surrender to Mr. Kurtz a small quantity of ivory which the Russian had received as a gift from a native tribal chief. Thus ivory becomes a symbol in the book. Ivory symbolizes the white man's greed and the white man's commercial mentality. The white man's chief concern in the Congo is to collect ivory and send it to Europe. The greater the ivory collected by an agent, the greater is his achievement in the eyes of his employers, and the higher is the promotion which he can expect. Ivory, becomes a source of revenue to the trading company which can, therefore, afford to invest a lot of money in sending its agents into the Congo. Nowhere do we find any mention of any service being rendered by these white men to the natives of the Congo.

The White Man's Callousness towards the Natives: - The sights seen by Marlow, when he has got down from the Swedish captain's steamer, are of a very depressing kind. These sights depict the wretchedness and the misery of the natives of the Congo, and the sheer futility of the white man's seemingly useful work. Marlow sees a lot of black people, mostly naked, moving about like ants. Later he sees half a dozen men chained. to one another, and each wearing an iron collar on his neck. These men

are criminals, who have violated the laws and are being punished with hard labour under the orders of the white rulers of the country. Marlow feels deeply upset to see this sight. Going further, he sees black figures crouching under the trees, leaning against the trunks, and clinging to the earth. These men, says Marlow, were dying slowly. These men were not enemies; they were not criminals; they were only black figures representing disease and starvation, and lying in a state of confusion in the gloom of the trees. Here Marlow feels as if he has entered into the gloomy circle of some inferno. Now, it is made obvious to us that the white man's indifference and his unconcern are responsible for this state of affairs. These sights have been described by Marlow in order to convey to us the callousness of the white man towards the natives.

A Waste of Time and Effort by the White Man: No Rivets: - Accompanying all these sights are a few others which clearly indicate the hypocrisy of the white men who are simply wasting time and effort to show that some kind of constructive work is going on. There is a project to build a railway line in this region. But Marlow sees that a rock is being blasted with gunpowder even though this rock does not stand as an obstruction in the way of the railway line. Likewise, he sees a boiler lying unused in the grass. Then he comes upon some pieces of decaying machinery, and a large heap of rusty rails. Similarly, before landing here, Marlow had seen a warship anchored close to the land, and firing its guns into the forest aimlessly. Marlow had found a touch of madness in this firing of guns to no purpose at all. Outwardly, of course, the warship was frightening away the savages; but actually it was merely a waste of ammunition. This waste of effort and the unused machinery lying in the grass offer a sharp contrast to the starving natives. The whole effort of the white man is completely misdirected. It is a sad commentary on the efficiency of the white man that Marlow should not be able to get any rivets to repair the wrecked ship for weeks when these are needed badly.

The Meanness and Pettiness of the White Colonizers: - The futility of the white man's endeavours in the dark country called the Congo becomes even more evident when we meet certain employees of the trading Company which has sent Marlow here. The manager of the Central Station has been described by Marlow in scathing terms. Marlow makes us despise this man who could inspire neither respect nor love nor fear, and who could inspire only uneasiness. Marlow found nothing within this man. Marlow's description of the brick-maker is equally satirical and critical. He describes the brick-maker as a "papier-mache Mephistopheles" because of this man's cunning. The brick-maker is here, but he makes no bricks. His function is to act as a spy for the manager. The men, who are loitering around the Central Station, are idlers having no work to do but only to gossip, to speak ill of one another, and to hatch intrigues. When the manager's uncle turns up as the leader of an exploring expedition, he turns out to be a seasoned schemer and plotter. The manager's mind is full of fear lest he should be superseded by Mr. Kurtz. If such are the colonizers in the dark continent of Africa, what possible benefit can they confer upon the savages there? Conrad conveys his strong disapproval and disapprobation of these white, men to us most effectively, so that we begin to look upon these white men with the greatest possible contempt.

The Shabby Treatment, Meted Out to the Black Crew: - It is equally disgusting for us to watch the manner in which the cannibal crew of Marlow's steamer are being

treated by the white owners of the steamer. The cannibal crew are most efficient, hard-working, and sturdy fellows who deserve every possible encouragement. But the pity of it is that they are not fed properly. It goes to the credit of the cannibal crew themselves that they are exercising self-restraint and are not attacking the white men on board the steamer in order to kill them and eat their flesh. Thus the white men, led by the manager, are absolutely unconcerned about the welfare of the very men on whose labour and toil they depend. Without this cannibal crew the steamer could not have gone ahead at all; and yet the white bosses do not bother whether or not these men are properly fed.

The Lamentable Failure of Mr. Kurtz to Uplift the Savages: - Even Mr. Kurtz, who has begun to identify himself with the savages, and who had at one time held that the white man should confer huge benefits upon the backward people, has done nothing for the uplift of the natives. Instead of improving their mode of life, he has himself become a savage in their company. He has miserably failed to exercise any self-restraint, and has begun to satisfy his various lusts without any limit. Even in his prime of life, when he had supported the view about the white man's civilizing role, he had written down the following words conveying an opposite message: "Exterminate all the brutes." In fact, Mr. Kurtz has now become brutalized, and even dehumanized. Such is the irony of the achievement of Mr. Kurtz who had once upon a time believed that the white man could prove himself to be the Messiah of the natives.

Conrad's Exposure of the Belgian Imperialist Rule: - Heart of Darkness conveys to us in a 'nutshell' the deceit, fraud, robberies, arson, murder, slave-trading, and general policy of cruelty of the Belgian rule in the Congo. There is an incident of fire in the story, and there is the long trek during which the natives have to carry a heavy load on their heads in the service of their white masters. The portrayal of the Company's chief accountant is in itself a grim commentary upon the white man who can afford to dress flawlessly when the natives around are disease-stricken and starving. (Marlow of course admires this man but to us this admiration seems to be ironical). Indeed, in this novel the brutal futility of the Belgian imperialist rule is memorably captured in image after image: a natural ravine is clogged with a wanton smash-up of imported drainage-pipes; and the grass grows through the ribs of a trader's corpse in a village abandoned in panic upon his accidental killing, colonialist and local community destroyed equally by their encounter.

The Wider Implications of This Novel: - We can go so far as to say that Conrad is here not only exposing the hollowness and the weaknesses of the Belgian imperialist rule over the Congo but also indirectly reminding us of British imperialism in various countries of the world of his time. Today the picture-of the world is widely different from what it was in Conrad's time. Today white imperialism has crumbled; and most of the countries of Asia and Africa have become independent. But in Conrad's time all the African countries were still a part of the dark continent, and most of the Asian Countries were being governed by their white rulers, chiefly the British. Therefore his picture of imperialist misrule and callousness in, the backward countries had in those days an undeniable relevance. Conrad's denunciation of imperialist rule in the Congo had a valuable message for both the exploiters and the exploited. Today, of course, this

message has only a historical interest. Now all the subject-countries have become independent, though independence has brought new problems for them. The evil of imperialist rule has ended, but other evils have come into existence.

Heart of Darkness : Pessimism in the Novel

A pessimist generally ignores the bright side of life, and concentrates on the dark and depressing side. Conrad very rarely speaks about the joys of life and about man's victories and triumphs in this world. He is aware of the grandeur of human nature. But he chiefly dwells upon the short-sightedness, corruption, egotism, and fanaticism which govern human life. The general trend of his thinking is pessimistic, and he feels especially troubled by the mystery of fate. Almost all his novels and stories lay stress on the numberless varieties of human suffering. The weaknesses of human nature everywhere dominate his novels. Conrad is of the opinion that the fundamental selfishness of man turns him into a wolf. He is certainly aware of the virtues of loyalty, fidelity, and integrity which are found in human beings; but the emphasis in his novels is upon the misery and the misfortunes which afflict human life.

Heart of Darkness is a sombre and grim novel. The title of this book is Heart of Darkness, and the book deals with the dark continent. But the story itself is also essentially dark and bleak. There is very little in this book to relieve the darkness which prevails. After reading this novel, we rise from our seats with very heavy hearts; and for days together we find ourselves unable to recover from the sadness which had begun to oppress us.

Marlow's Opening Remarks: - Marlow's very opening remarks about the Roman conquest of Britain centuries ago have a touch of sadness about them. He tells his listeners that all conquest is "robbery with violence," and that violence in this context means "aggravated murder on a great scale." Powerful nations and communities strive to grab whatever they can get by attacking the weaker nations. Marlow is here undoubtedly hinting at the imperialist rule of the modern western nations also. In this context, we must remember that Marlow's voice is essentially the voice of Conrad himself. When Marlow criticizes and censures the ancient Roman conquest of the backward countries like Britain, it is Conrad who is censuring the Belgian, the Spanish, and the British conquerors who had established their own empires in modern times. These opening remarks by Marlow bring before us scenes of the reckless slaughter of the backward people and the establishment by the invaders of their own governments in the conquered territories.

The Sight of the Knitting-Women and the Talk of the Doctor: - Marlow's comments upon the two women who sit knitting black wool in the Company's office also have a tinge of sadness in them. These knitting-women appear to Marlow to represent the Fates who keep busy spinning the yarn of the destiny of human beings on this earth. After seeing these women, Marlow speaks in terms of shrouds and dead bodies. They bring to his mind the spectacle of gladiators getting killed in the arena where bloody contests used to take place for the amusement of emperors and commoners. Thus the

sight of these women is ominous and suggests dark thoughts. Even the Company's doctor, who examines Marlow and who is by nature a jovial man, says something which has a hint of tragedy in it. The doctor says that he, as a scientist, would very much like to study the changes that take place in the mind of a white man who goes into a dark and unexplored country like the Congo. Evidently, the doctor is aware of the fact that a white man would almost go crazy in a country where he meets only savages and has to deal with them. Subsequently we learn that no white man has been able to spend more than three years in the Congo. Everyone, who went there, fell ill and had to be sent back to Europe. The manager of the Central Station is, of course, a man with an exceptional stamina; and he can withstand the rigours of the climate of the Congo; but most of the white men have been unable to do that.

The Sights of the Suffering and Misery of the Natives of the Congo: - Marlow's feeling of isolation is conveyed to us very effectively when he is sailing towards the Congo by a French steamer. In this context, Marlow tells us that he was a lonely man on that steamer because he had no point of contact with any member of the crew, and also because he had no duties to perform. The sights which Marlow witnesses on reaching the Company's very first trading post are of a kind which would depress and sadden any visitor. Marlow sees a number of black men held together by means of a chain, and each wearing an iron collar around his neck. This chain-gang of criminals gives rise to awful thoughts in Marlow's mind. The other sights, which Marlow sees here, make him feel that he has entered the gloomy circle of some inferno. He finds large numbers of black men sitting in groups, close to the tree-trunks, and dying slowly of starvation and disease. These sights are intended by Conrad to convey to us the white man's total indifference to the needs of the black natives of the Congo, and the white man's self-centeredness. The white man was supposed to ameliorate the conditions of life for the savages; but the white man is absolutely unconcerned with the indescribable sufferings and misery of these black men. The white man evidently makes full use of the labour and toil of the backward and ignorant natives but pays no attention to their uplift.

Depressing Portrayals of the White Men Working in the Congo:- Conrad also shows his pessimism in the manner in which Marlow portrays the white men whom he meets at the Central Station. The manager is described by Marlow as a man who could inspire neither love nor fear nor respect but who could certainly inspire "uneasiness." There was "nothing within him." In other words, the manager was a man with a barren soul. Conrad's purpose here is to convey to us the spiritual emptiness of the white men who went to the backward countries for purely trading purposes. The manager's chief anxiety is to collect as much ivory as possible, though at the same time he feels jealous of Mr. Kurtz who is achieving an enormous success in collecting ivory. The white agents, who are seen by Marlow loitering about the Central Station, seem to be idlers who have no work to do and who merely spend their time in talking ill of one another and in hatching intrigues. These men are described by Marlow satirically or ironically as "pilgrims". Then there is the brick-maker who earns Marlow's strong disapproval by his cunning. This man talks a lot, but there is little meaning in his talk. Marlow describes him as a "**papier-mâché Mephistopheles.**" Naturally we feel greatly depressed by Marlow's sketches of these men who have come to the Congo as the ambassadors of progress and enlightenment but each of whom is cutting a sorry figure.

The Most Pessimistic Part of the Novel:- The most pessimistic part of the novel, however, is that which deals with the character and deeds of Mr. Kurtz. This man had at one time given evidence of possessing a highly progressive and liberal outlook. In the prime of his life, he had believed in the great benefits which the white men could confer upon the backward peoples of the earth. But, after having stayed among the savages, this man has himself become a savage. Instead of civilizing the beasts, he has himself become a beast. He certainly retains his identity as a civilized man, but he gives evidence of that identity only when he is spending some time at his headquarters at the Inner Station. When he goes into the interior to collect ivory, he begins to participate in the life of the savages and to share all their activities. He has now become a powerful man and is worshipped by the savages as a kind of deity. He now presides over their midnight dances which always end with "unspeakable rites." He has now begun to gratify his various lusts without restraint, and he is now giving a free outlet to his monstrous passions. Marlow frankly says that Mr. Kurtz has now taken a high place among the devils of the land. Such is the effect of a savage environment on a civilized man when he is cut off from civilized society. Mr. Kurtz has now become a barbarian, giving a free vent to his primitive instincts which have risen to the surface under the influence of the savages. A large number of posts are fixed to the ground outside his residence are; and on the top of each post there is a human head or skull. These heads and skulls are of those natives who had incurred Mr. Kurtz's displeasure and who had been executed under his orders. In short, the spectacle of an enlightened man falling a prey to the evil influence of barbarism has an intensely depressing effect on us. We begin to feel that civilization is only a thin veneer which wears off soon under adverse conditions of life. Beneath his refinement and culture, a human being continues to be essentially a primitive. In fact, a change has begun to occur even in Marlow; and, if Marlow had stayed among the savages in the Congo for any length of time, he too would have morally degenerated and become a savage.

Heart of Darkness : Symbolism

Symbolism means a **deeper meaning** in **what has been written than meets the eye**. The complexity with profundity of most of the modern writers leads them to fill their wirings with greater significance than we find on the surface. "**Heart of Darkness**" is replete with symbols. Every person and everything means more than what we find on a superficial view. The novel is based on the facts of history as well as on the facts of Conrad's own life; but Conrad has tried to convey the evasive and elusive truth underlying both the historical facts and his personal experiences.

Almost every character in "Heart of Darkness" has some symbolic significance. The central figure **Mr. Kurtz**, firstly, symbolizes the **greed** and the **commercial** and **corrupt** mentality of the **western countries**. Secondly, he symbolizes the **white man's love for power**. Power corrupts man and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Thirdly, the **change**, which comes over him during his stay among the savages, symbolizes the **influence of barbarism** upon a civilized man. It also symbolizes the

irresistible influences of barbarism upon a civilized man cut off from civilized society. Where there is no check on a man, the worst of him may come out.

Finally, Mr. Kurtz symbolizes the **repentant sinner**. Mr. Kurtz's desire to collect the maximum quantity of ivory conveys the exploitation of the backward people of Congo by the white colonizers.

Marlow too has a symbolic role in the novel. **Firstly**, he symbolizes the **spirit of adventure and a love of knowledge**. **Secondly**, he **symbolizes the thoughtful observer of human life and the thoughtful student of human nature**. He also **symbolizes** a philosophical approach to human life by constantly meditating upon what he observes. To some extent, he too **symbolizes the influence of savagery** because his own primitive instincts have been awakened when he heard a lot about Mr. Kurtz's way of life and then by his close personal contact with that man.

The subsidiary characters too possess symbolic significance. There is the **manager of the Central Station**. It is wrong to say that he symbolizes inefficiency. If he had been inefficient, he would not have been able to continue at his post. He **symbolizes spiritual emptiness**. If he is unable to inspire respect or love or fear, it is because he is spiritually barren and has no originality and no solid ideas in his head, though he can do his manager's work like a machine.

The **brick-maker** acts as a "**papier-mâché Mephistopheles**" and **symbolizes cunning and trickery**. There are numerous white agents or traders loitering around the Central Station because they are idle. These men are described by Marlow as "faithful pilgrims".

The **cannibal crew** on Marlow's steamer really symbolizes **efficiency** because they do not shirk work. More than efficiency, they symbolize **self-restraint** because they do not try to satisfy their hunger by killing and eating white men's flesh.

The **knitting women** in the beginning of the story **symbolize the Fates** who determine the future of every human being on the earth. These knitting women symbolize the danger which lies in store for Marlow. **In the outer room the two women knitted black wool, feverishly.**

The **majestic-looking native woman**, who appears on the riverbank when Mr. Kurtz is being taken away, symbolizes a **woman's strong devotion and steadfast loyalty** to her lord and lover.

Mr. Kurtz's fiancée also symbolizes **loyalty** but her **loyalty is that of an innocent**, inexperienced woman who is deluded by false appearances and does not know the ways of the world. The fiancée symbolizes the hold of an illusion upon a woman's mind.

The **Russian** symbolizes **inquisitiveness or the desire to learn**. But he also **symbolizes loyalty and fidelity**, the two virtue which Marlow also symbolizes.

Many **sights seen by Marlow** also possess symbolic significance. The **French warship firing** aimlessly into the forest, and the rock being blasted with gun powder but without any purpose **symbolize the sense of futility and an aimless endeavour**. **Ivory** symbolizes the white men's greed.

Then there is the sight of one over-worked and starved native labourers dying slowly of disease and starvation. The condition of these men symbolizes the sufferings of the natives who do not receive any sympathy from the white colonizers. **They were dying slowly ... They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation.**

The chain-gang with half a dozen native men chained to one another, and each wearing an iron collar round his neck, symbolize the white man's sway over the ignorant backward people without any concern for their welfare. **... the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.**

The description of the **natural scenery** also serves a symbolic purpose. The scenery is wild and awe-inspiring. The silence of the woods and the abundance of trees symbolizes **mystery and horror**. Marlow has given us many pictures of the thick, dense, matted forests. **And the river was there – fascinating – deadly – like a snake.**

The **city of Brussels symbolizes** the **inner corruption and degeneracy of white man's civilization**. Brussels seems to Marlow to be the white sepulchre – something outwardly pleasant and holy but inwardly rotten.

Finally, Marlow's whole **journey into the Congo** has symbolic significance besides its literal meaning. It may be regarded as a **journey into subconscious** mind of Marlow in particular and of mankind in general. **"Heart of Darkness" is the story of a journey involving spiritual change in the voyager.** Symbolically, Marlow's journey into the Congo is an arduous physical activity or adventure. The literal meaning of 'heart of darkness' is the inmost region of Congo; but symbolically this phrase means the inmost region of man's mind or soul. As Marlow stands for Conrad, the novel becomes a kind of Conrad's exploration of his own mind during his visit to the Congo in 1890. **In the business of exploration, both exploiter and exploited are corrupted.**

In short, the imperial exploitation of the Congo has effectively been conveyed through a symbolic description of numerous scenes and situations.

The papier-mâché Mephistopheles is the name Marlow gives the brick-maker of the Central Station. He, at first glance, appears to be a kind soul, but it doesn't take long for Marlow to discover that he isn't: he is a "devil", more than an enabler or the grim-reaper, but less than Lucifer (who, I anticipate, is Mr. Kurtz himself). This is therefore the second level of the "Inferno". He is in papier-mâché because he is not real, though he could very well be: he is not really Mephistopheles, merely because he wants to be wants to be this type of character.

Heart of Darkness: Autobiographical Elements

Many of Conrad's works are based upon Conrad's own experiences in life. Heart of Darkness definitely, belongs to the category of autobiographical works. This novel is actually a record of Conrad's own experiences in the course of his visit to the Congo in 1890. Conrad was only nine years old when, looking at a map of Africa of the time, he said to himself. "**When I grow up, I shall go there.**"

In Heart of Darkness the fictitious character, Charles Marlow, also tells his friends on the deck of a steamboat that, in his boyhood, he had been greatly attracted by the African country known as the Congo, and that the river Congo flowing through' that country had exercised a particular fascination upon him.

In 1890, **Conrad actually travelled to the Congo.** As a grown-up man, Conrad felt even more interested in going to the Congo because of the exploits of the explorer named Henry Morton Stanley. His exploration of the dark continent had led to the Belgian King Leopold II taking control of the region to which was given the name of the Congo Free State. As a result of Stanley's exploration, certain trading stations and administration centres were also established by Belgian Companies. Conrad's interest in Africa was greatly increased by Stanley's exciting experiences and discoveries. By the time Conrad reached the Congo, it had almost become the private property of King Leopold II and it had begun to be exploited by the Belgian trading companies in the name of Christianity and civilization.

Conrad's Unpleasant Experiences: - In order to go to the Congo, Conrad had to take the help of an aunt who was by vocation a writer of novels. Through her influence, Conrad obtained a job with a trading company as the captain of a steamboat which was to take an exploring expedition led by Alexandre Delcommune to a place called Katanga in the Congo. Conrad felt very pleased with the prospect of being able to visit the region of his boyhood dreams. However, Conrad's pleasure was greatly marred by a quarrel which he had with Alexandre Delcommune's brother who was functioning as a manager under the same trading company at a trading station on the way. Conrad formed a very adverse opinion about this manager whom he blamed for the many things which went wrong with his voyage on the river Congo, especially the delay in his arriving at his destination. Conrad had many other unpleasant experiences as well. Most of Conrad's experiences in the course of this visit were recorded by him in a diary to which he gave the name of the Congo Diary. One entry in this diary informs us that hardly sixty per cent of the Company's European employees stayed in the Congo for more than six months because of the diseases which overtook them. Hardly seven per cent of the Europeans could withstand the climate of the Congo for more than three years. Thus Conrad began to feel disillusioned with this region in the very early part of his visit. He felt also disappointed to find that most of the Europeans spoke ill of one another, and had very little else to do. In the course of his visit, Conrad had to walk over rocky territory in the scorching sun, camping at night in the damp and cold, and facing threats of mutiny from the porters. Finally, Conrad arrived at a station where the company's ships were assembled or repaired.

An Agent Called Klein, the Original of Mr. Kurtz: - Conrad's main duty now was to bring one of the Company's agents whose health had been failing. The name of

this agent was Klein. This man had arrived in the Congo late in 1883 and had been placed in command of the Company's station at Stanley Falls in 1890. He subsequently died aboard Conrad's steamship by which he was being brought. It was this agent, by the name of Klein, who is transformed into Mr. Kurtz in Heart of Darkness. During this time Conrad's own health began to be damaged by the unwholesome climate and environment. Hence he decided to give up his job and return to Europe. However, he stayed on as long as he could; and, by the time he returned, he was a broken man. In fact, he never afterwards regained his normal health. And it was as a consequence of this permanent impairment of his health that he gave up voyaging altogether, and turned to writing as a profession.

"Heart of Darkness," Largely a Record of Conrad's Own Experiences: - In Heart of Darkness the character named Marlow is largely Conrad himself. Alexandre Delcommune's brother becomes the manager of the Central Station in Heart of Darkness. In the novel, Marlow makes very unfavourable comments on the manager of the Central Station because Conrad had formed an adverse view of Alexandre Delcommune's brother with whom Conrad had quarrelled. Similarly, in Heart of Darkness, Marlow says that the white men at the Central Station had very little work to do and spent much of their time plotting and intriguing against one another. Marlow, like Conrad, experiences a strong sense of disillusionment and disappointment after observing the behaviour of the white traders and also the conditions of life of the natives. The colonial exploitation of the dark continent by the white traders in ivory, as witnessed by Conrad himself, is described by Marlow in scathing terms. Marlow also records the disastrous effects of the climate of the Congo upon the white traders and agents who were sent by the Belgian Companies to this region. Only the manager of the Central Station has the stamina to withstand the rigours of climate here, while most other agents had to go back to Europe after spending a short period of time here (in the Congo). Furthermore, Marlow experiences the same sense of enlightenment and the same process of maturing through disillusion and defeat which Conrad himself underwent during his travels in the Congo. It has therefore to be recognized that Heart of Darkness is, to a large extent, an autobiographical book because, in most of the essentials, Marlow's experiences and feelings are very much the same as Conrad's own had been. There is a lot of resemblance between Conrad's Congo Diary and the contents of the novel Heart of Darkness to justify such an assumption. Conrad's experiences in the Congo have been described by a critic as exasperating, frustrating, and humiliating; and Marlow's experiences in his contact with most of the white men in the Congo are of the same kind. Marlow undergoes an extreme personal crisis; and this crisis is very much the same through which Conrad himself underwent in the Congo. Thus, both in externals and in terms of the inward mental life, Marlow meets the same fate which Conrad had met.

The Difference between Marlow and Conrad: - However, the autobiographical character of the novel should not be over-emphasized. There are certain substantial differences between Conrad's personal experiences and Marlow's experiences as described in the novel. Conrad's own experiences have served only as the raw material for the story of the novel. Marlow's development from idealism to disillusion and his greater understanding of life is very much the same as that of Conrad himself had been

during his exploration of the Congo. But the differences are also noteworthy. Marlow is presented in the novel as being sceptical from the very beginning, as we see in his hesitation and his suspicion of the enterprise in Brussels, while for Conrad the opportunity to go to the Congo was the idealized reality of a boy's ambition. In other words, Marlow is doubtfully and apprehensive in the very beginning, while Conrad had been full of idealistic and romantic notions at the time of his departure for the Congo. Marlow at the very outset feels that he is not going to the centre of a continent but to the centre of the earth itself. Conrad, on the other hand, had gone to the Congo with bright expectations.

The Difference between Mr. Klein and Mr. Kurtz: - But more important than this fact is Marlow's portrayal of the character of Mr. Kurtz, which does not correspond to anything that Conrad had actually witnessed and experienced. The character of the agent called Mr. Klein does not much resemble the character of Mr. Kurtz as portrayed in the novel. Conrad had not, in the course of his travels, met anybody who can be compared to Mr. Kurtz. Mr. Klein can be regarded only as a starting-point for the subsequent portrayal of Mr. Kurtz in the novel. During his personal travels through the Congo, Conrad had certainly gone to rescue the ailing Mr. Klein, but Conrad had not found in Mr. Klein that embodiment of evil which Marlow finds in Mr. Kurtz. Conrad in his diary does not dwell upon the character of Mr. Klein at such great length as Marlow does in the novel while speaking about Mr. Kurtz.

Marlow, the Mouthpiece of Conrad: - In conclusion, we may add that Marlow's outlook upon life or his philosophy of life is very much the same as Conrad's own was. Marlow appears as a pessimist in the novel; and Conrad himself was a pessimist too. Marlow recognizes the existence of certain virtues in human beings just as Conrad himself did. But, on the whole, Conrad had formed certain depressing ideas about life in general, and Marlow too expresses similar ideas about life. Marlow's reactions to most people, whom he meets in the course of his travels, are unfavourable and disappointing; and so were Conrad's own reactions to the people whom he met in the course of his voyage. Besides, we can read Conrad's own mind in Marlow's in such utterances as Marlow's declaring that he hates and detests a lie not because he is straighter than other people but simply because a lie appals him. Similarly we can read Conrad's own mind in such remarks as the following: "**We live, as we dream alone.**" Marlow is more or less a lonely, isolated figure despite the presence before him of four of his associates to whom he tells his story; and Conrad himself was a lonely figure too.

Conrad's use of irony "Heart of Darkness"

Irony always arises from a contrast of some kind. The contrast may be between things, as they appear to be, and as they actually are. A man may say something and mean just the opposite. When that happens, we say that he has made an ironical remark. Then we may expect something to happen, but find that just the opposite has happened. In such a case there would be irony in what we had expected. Similarly, we may expect a man to behave in a particular way, and we may then find that he has behaved in just the opposite way. In such a case, there would be irony in our expectation of that man's

behaviour. Irony is one of the most common, and one of the most effective, weapons in the hands of a writer. Conrad was an adept in the use of irony. Indeed, irony is as pervasive in his novels as it is in the novels of Jane Austen. His novels deal largely with life on the distant seas and with the unusual experiences of human beings. Much of Conrad's irony has a sombre or grim quality.

The greatest irony in Heart of Darkness is the **transformation** which takes place **in Mr. Kurtz** during his stay at the interior station of the Company. Mr. Kurtz had been a kind of intellectual during the years of his prime. He had once written a pamphlet stating his views about the role of the white man in the backward countries explored by him. In that pamphlet he had written that the whites necessarily appeared to the savages as supernatural beings and as deities. The whites could therefore exercise a great power over the savages and bring about a great betterment in their way of life. The whites, according to Mr. Kurtz, could confer great benefits upon the backward people of the countries which they visited, which they conquered, and which they governed. The whites could suppress the savage customs of those backward people, and could civilize those people. Thus **Mr. Kurtz held highly progressive views about the role of the white men in the dark and unexplored countries of Africa**. And yet Mr. Kurtz had written at the end of that pamphlet the following words: "**Exterminate all the brutes.**" This bit of writing at the end seemed to contradict what he had written about the constructive role of the white people.

Mr. Kurtz was expected to strive to bring about all possible improvements in the way of life and in the way of thinking of the savages of the Congo where Mr. Kurtz had settled down to carry out his duties as an agent of a Belgian trading company. However, just the reverse happens. Mr. Kurtz, **instead of civilizing the savages**, himself **becomes a savage**. This is one of the most **surprising developments in this novel**. Thus the opposite of what was expected from Mr. Kurtz has happened. This is the chief irony in the story of this novel.

Another great irony in this novel is the **attitude which Marlow ultimately adopts towards Mr. Kurtz**. Marlow's impressions about Mr. Kurtz are of a very adverse kind in the beginning. From the various reports that he has heard about Mr. Kurtz, he forms a most unfavourable opinion about Mr. Kurtz's character. And yet, afterwards, Marlow becomes an admirer of Mr. Kurtz, and begins to harbour strong feelings of friendship and respect towards that man. We had expected that a rational and intelligent man like Marlow would continue to react to Mr. Kurtz in the same adverse manner. But what happens is just the opposite of what we had expected. Knowing fully the evil which has begun to dwell, in Mr. Kurtz, Marlow yet begins to cherish feelings of regard and esteem for that man. Evidently, Marlow's own primitive instincts, have also been aroused, and been brought to the surface. That is why Marlow has begun to perceive a kind of kinship between himself and Mr. Kurtz. Thus, another civilized man, one who is an embodiment of reason and sanity, has also fallen a near-prey to the influences of savagery and primitivism.

There is **irony** also **in the attitude of Mr. Kurtz's fiancée towards Mr. Kurtz**. She has been entertaining feelings of the highest admiration and esteem for him. She has

been feeling proud of the man who had proposed marriage to her, and whom she had agreed to marry in opposition to the wishes of her own family. After hearing about the death of her lover, this woman is plunged into grief and, when Marlow goes to meet her a year after Mr. Kurtz's death, he finds her still in mourning. She talks about her deceased lover in glowing terms and pays to him the highest tribute which a woman can pay to her lover. **The irony in this case lies in the fact that the man, whom this woman still worships and adores, had become a devil as a result of his stay among the savages.** The irony becomes all the greater when Marlow tells her that the last word uttered by her lover before his death was her own name. She feels overjoyed to hear that Mr. Kurtz had spoken her name while dying though the actual fact is that the last words spoken by him had been: "The horror!" The irony in this case arises from the contrast between what Mr. Kurtz had actually become and what his fiancée still continues to think about him.

There is a similar **irony** in the **Russian's attitude of worship towards Mr. Kurtz**. Mr. Kurtz has become a devil, as Marlow tells us. But, to the Russian, Mr. Kurtz has been a kind of hero worthy of adoration. The Russian tells Marlow, that Mr. Kurtz had enlarged his mind and that Mr. Kurtz had taught him to perceive the very essence of things. In other words, Mr. Kurtz had appeared to be a great sage and moralist to the Russian. The Russian had found in Mr. Kurtz a hidden wisdom which was a source of great enlightenment and illumination to the Russian. It is very strange that a man, who has become a savage and a beast, should be able to inspire such a deep respect in the Russian who is by no means a fool or a simpleton.

There is **irony** also in **Marlow's descriptions of things at certain points in his narration**. For instance, his description of the blasting of a rock with gunpowder, when the rock does not stand in the way of the building of the railway line, is surely ironical. Ironical also is his description of the warship firing its guns without any purpose. The supposed purpose of the firing of these guns is to destroy the enemy, but no enemy is visible anywhere in the forest; and the warship is merely wasting its ammunition. There is irony also in the fact that, although the white man has brought a lot of machinery into the dark country of the Congo, the machinery is lying unused. Equally ironical is the fact that, although there are heaps and heaps of rivets lying at one of the Company's stations, no rivet are made available to Marlow for the repairing of the wrecked steamer which he has been able to pull out of the river-bed.

Irony in Some of Marlow's Portrayals of the White Persons

There is **irony** also in the way in which Marlow **describes** some of the **white persons**. His description of the two **knitting-women**, in the Company's office in Brussels is **ironical**. There is a tinge of irony in his description of the **Company's doctor** and the manner in which he examines the prospective employees of the Company. There is a lot of irony in **Marlow's description** of the **white agents** who are seen loitering about at the Central Station in the Congo, and in Marlow's describing these men as faithless pilgrims. The irony here becomes most pungent. For instance, referring to the sticks which these men carried, Marlow says: "**I verily believe they took these sticks to bed with them**". Besides, the irony here is not sombre or tragic but most comic and

most amusing. Then there is irony in his portrayal of the manager's uncle, and the brick-maker who tries to extricate some information from Marlow because in his view, Marlow is a highly connected man wielding a lot of influence among the higher officials of the Company.

To conclude, irony deepens a particular effect. In this novel, the use of irony deepens the effect of melancholy and sadness which constitute the prevailing atmosphere of the story. Irony sharpens the sorrow which we, experience when we read about the unexpected transformation which comes, over Mr. Kurtz. The ignorance of Mr. Kurtz's fiancée about this transformation in him saddens us because, being innocent and idealistic, she still visualizes him as her noble knight and her adorable hero. Similarly we feel a deep regret at the moral deterioration which unexpectedly takes place in Marlow and which him admire Mr. Kurtz.

Heart of Darkness : Marlow's Symbolic Character

Marlow is one of the two narrators in "Heart of Darkness" and he is the more important of the two. Conrad has created a complex narrator in Marlow, a man who is not all good or all bad. Marlow narrates the story constituting the real substance of the novel. A mere narrator would objectively tell a story, keeping himself out of it. But in "Heart of Darkness", Marlow himself is one of the central characters. As a narrator, Marlow is unreliable that he is not an objective teller of the story, but is instead emotionally conflicted about the events and people within his tale. He is also a figure who is alienated from the mainstream. He is also an observer, a thinker, and a commentator. Half of the interest and appeal of this novel would be lost if we were to ignore the role of Marlow in "Heart of Darkness". Marlow also has a symbolic role. He stands for something bigger and larger than himself.

Marlow symbolizes the spirit of adventure and the love of exploration. The spirit of adventure is ineradicable and inborn but only some people possess it. The man seeks adventure to acquire knowledge. Marlow showed his spirit of adventure in his very boyhood when world-maps aroused his curiosity. He felt attracted by the African country, Congo, and fascinated by a river Congo. On growing up, he became a sailor, sailed upon many seas, and got an opportunity to explore the Congo and sail upon the river Congo. He does not go to there for trading purposes. It is to satisfy his spirit of adventure, and his boyhood longing, that he goes into the heart of darkness.

Marlow serves also as a symbol of the thoughtful observer of human life and the thoughtful student of human nature. Marlow symbolizes the class of curious people. He tries to probe the mind of everybody whom he encounters in the course of his travels. Firstly, Marlow observes the white men who have come to the Congo for trading purposes. He observes the chief accountant of the trading Company and feels much impressed by him who has kept up appearances even in a sordid environment and whose account-books are in apple-pie order. Marlow then observes the manager who is obeyed by his subordinates, but who can inspire neither respect, nor love, nor fear. To Marlow, he seems to be hollow. Next, Marlow observes the brick-maker and concludes

that he is a papier-mâché Mephistopheles. The group of white traders, idling about, creates upon Marlow the impression that they are "faithless pilgrims". Marlow clearly brings out the failings and the meanness of the white men. There is nothing admirable about what Marlow sees of their life in Congo.

Marlow observes the natives with same keenness and minuteness. He depicts the misery and the suffering of the poor, wretched and over-worked natives. He finds many of these starving to death slowly.

'They were dying slowly ... 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.

He also sees a group of muscular natives paddling their boat in a carefree manner, enjoying their work. Then Marlow observes the self-restraint of his cannibal crew who are feeling very hungry but do not kill the white men to eat their flesh. Marlow also admits the hard-working helmsman on his steamship, but greatly laments the lack of caution on the part of that helmsman, leading to his death.

Marlow also gives us vivid pictures of the wild scenery on both banks of the river Congo, and he conveys to us fully the darkness of the jungle and its impenetrable thickness of trees, in addition to the dangers which lurk there.

Marlow as a keen observer, thinker and a commentator, appears even more in his study of the character of Mr. Kurtz. Marlow here appears as a philosopher-cum-psychologist by giving us a detailed portrayal of Mr. Kurtz. He conveys to us the evil which had taken control of Mr. Kurtz's mind and his actions. He tells us about the influence of barbarism of the natives that had begun to exercise upon Mr. Kurtz. He had begun to participate fully in the "unspeakable rites" and ceremonies of the savages and their mode of life. He had begun to gratify all his lusts, monstrous passions and had begun to experience all kinds of abominable satisfaction. Marlow also conveys Mr. Kurtz's inextinguishable gift of eloquence in speech and his irresistible influence upon those who encounter him. Here we must note that Marlow himself also falls to some extent, a prey to the evil in Mr. Kurtz. He also begins to experience the surge of primitive instincts in his own mind. Of course, much remains mysterious about Mr. Kurtz despite Marlow's insight and Marlow's vast knowledge of human nature; but the salient features of Mr. Kurtz have effectively and vividly been brought to our notice by Marlow who therefore becomes a symbol of the writer having a penetrating mind and a masterly way of writing.

Marlow also symbolizes self-exploration. Marlow's journey into the Congo symbolizes a journey by Marlow into his own sun-conscious mind, and even into the sub-conscious mind of mankind in general. "Heart of Darkness" is not only a physical journey into an unexplored dark continent, but also a psychological and mystical journey. The Inner Station, where Mr. Kurtz lives, symbolizes the sub-conscious mind of man, and particularly of Marlow himself. On several occasions, Marlow reveals the working of his own mind to us in clear terms. Marlow shows a lot of bluntness when talking about himself and about the thoughts which cross his mind. He tells us freely about his hatred

of lies, his assent in the brick-maker's mistaken idea about him, his motive in telling a lie to Mr. Kurtz's fiancée at the end of the story. At least the lies have a pure motive, for they save the distraught fiancé. Just as he tells us frankly about the nightmare being the evil embodied by Mr. Kurtz, similarly he tells us of the inner strength which enabled him to withstand the dangers of his travel in the Congo, and he speaks of the dream-like quality of some of his experiences.

Unlike most Europeans who bought into the justifications for imperialism and saw it as a righteous cause, Marlow saw that it was nothing but greed. However, Marlow's ability to distance himself from the dominant thinking of the time does not fully free him from that kind of thinking. In the end, he accepts the injustice of imperialism by supporting the lies, which justify it.

Significance of lie in Heart of Darkness

The closing scene of The Heart of Darkness , Marlow's interview with the dead man's white Intended (a pale figure of delusion juxtaposed against the black Athena who had usurped her place for Kurtz at the Inner Station), leaves the reader with ambivalent feelings about Conrad's chief narrator. The paradoxical ending of Heart of Darkness has caused considerable critical consternation, if not outrage. That the novel should end with a lie should be told to a beloved amazing, that the lie should be told in a novel ostensibly directed towards a bewareing of the nefarious nature of the human heart almost astounding; that such a lie should be practiced by modern Buddha absolutely preposterous. The ending has therefore been criticized as being 'a botched scene', 'a fatal blunder' and even as 'the final flaw in a flawed novel'. Yet a contextual reading of the novel would almost lead a discerning reader to a radically different conclusion. The conclusion would be that even though the ending does not satisfy the human desire for the whole truth or for a satisfying rounded final, the ending is not only appropriate, but also something devoutly to be wished for.

Every aspect of the ending is steeped in grandeur, pervaded with touch of the ethereal. The setting suggests magnificence and splendid idealism: the drawing room is 'lofty', the windows are long and luminous, the tall marble fireplace has monumental whiteness , the piano is grand and stands massively looking like a sombre and polished sarcophagus and the door is high. The lady is described in an almost equally idealized and hollowed manner:

"She has a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering... this hair, this pale visage this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident and trustful."

She was dressed in black although it was almost a year since Kurtz's death, and this unceasing mourning is revelatory of the fact that she was 'girlish', that 'she was one of those creature who were not the play thing of time'. Her attitude towards Kurtz, her reverence for him is flawless. Illumined by the inextinguishable light of love and belief, she declares, 'it was impossible to know him and not to admire him.'

The grandeur of the scene is shattered when Marlow lies to her. Marlow's lie gives a lie to the carefully crafted and meticulously woven façade of glory. The answers to Marlow's motivation are to be discovered in the nature of the lie itself and in the nature of the liar. Lies, of course, have proven indispensable to fabulists ever since Cain lied to God in Genesis and Odysseus slipped out of one disguise into another in *The Odyssey*. But Marlow's lie is neither as wicked as Cain's (especially since it acknowledges his need to be the keeper of his spiritual brother's memory) nor as self-serving but justifiable as Odysseus's. When the beloved declares that she would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance of the dying Kurtz, and laments that there may not have been anyone to hear his last words, Marlow unwittingly states that he had heart 'his very last words'. When pressed to reveal the final words of Kurtz, the self reviling and desperate Marlow can only utter a lie: 'the last word he pronounced was your name' the final victorious truth expressed in *articulo mortis* by Kurtz---'The horror! The horror!' - is thereby suppressed.

The questions remain as to why Marlow tells an untruth. Such a lie may be explicable in the case of an inveterate liar, but not in the case of Marlow since it made it abundantly clear that lies are abhorrent to him. When he speaks about lying early in the novel, he says, 'lying appals me,' it is exactly what I hate and detest in the world,' it makes me miserable' and sick like biting into something rotten wound'. As Garrett Stewart points out in *Lying as Dying in Heart of Darkness*, 'his strict ethical theorem, the equation of death with lying, is even in the early context no stray remark, for it threads untruth to death in the casual nexus of the European experience in Africa.' All through the novel his one endeavour has been to know the truth about himself, and it is inconceivable that a man so meticulous about knowing the truth should lie to others.

The answer might be one of the various proffered—that he was being merciful to the Intended whom he admired, that he was generally mild and protective towards women as they were cocooned from reality, and that he wanted the truth only for himself. That Marlow may be tempted to hide the hideous truth from the lady whom he found to be a veritable paragon of virtue, one who was about to dedicate her entire life to Kurtz, is quite likely. That he does so because he desires to shield all women from the unbearable truth of the darkness of the human heart too is plausible in view of his earlier remark about woman, 'it is queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own...' Marlow would be the last to shatter the fragile edifice of their make-believe world. If Marlow's assertion seems to deny women the right or need for the quest for the truth, one might go further and suggest that Marlow's was a journey of self-discovery and that therefore he was never interested in telling her truth.

Even though the reasons preferred may contain some truths, perhaps the greatest truth behind the lie is something different. It is not merely designed to provide relief to a particular woman or even to all women and certainly his purpose could never have been the selfish one of attaining the truth only for himself. Much more likely is his realization that not only can mankind 'not bear too much reality', but also the mankind must be saved from the reality. Society can exist only if there is some idealistic basis, even if it is an illusion. It is only save mankind from devastating truth about itself, that Marlow

makes the supreme sacrifice of telling a lie, something foreign to his nature, alien to his spirit.

Conrad's Use of Journey Motif in Heart of Darkness

The novella *Heart of Darkness* was written in 1899 by Joseph Conrad explores the idea of self-discovery and can be described as a story of initiation. Marlow, the protagonist of the novella, undertakes a boat ride up the Congo River in search of Kurtz, the chief of the Inner Station, however this journey, which can be seen as a journey into the self, one's 'inner spirit'. Conrad uses the journey both in its literal and figurative meanings. Most obvious is Marlow's journey to discover Africa, and the effects of imperialism. On a deeper level, it seems as if Conrad uses the journey to cloak Marlow's true journey into himself. Through the use of the physical journey in *Heart of Darkness*, the reader can see the inner journey that the characters in the novella undertake and the effects that their unconscious has on their thoughts and actions. Marlow's journey from Europe, to the Outer Station and then to the Central Station also tests his ability to distinguish between good and evil since he witnesses such proceedings that draw out a moral judgment from him.

The journey in *Heart of Darkness* passes not only through the capricious waters that span the physical world, but also the paradoxical ocean which exists in the heart of man and all of mankind. Through Marlow's somewhat fanatical eyes we view the enigma that is humanity, and the blurred line between light and dark. It is a voyage into the deepest recesses of the human heart and mind (a voyage of self-discovery or, like Albert Guerard it can also be viewed as a 'night journey'), leading to epiphany, enlightenment, and finally spiralling downwards into the crevices of a hell existing within each and every one of us, which is represented by the character of Kurtz. Although through Marlow Conrad depicts a journey into the Congo, his use of symbolism and wordplay divulge that it is something much more profound.

Almost every action, object, and character in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has a deeper, more relevant meaning behind it, serving to bring us ever closer to the conclusion that the voyage is indeed an inward one. The first major indication of this is the posture of Marlow as he recounts his journey into the Congo. According to the narrator, "he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower." This lotus position is one typically used for meditation, which is in fact defined as a spiritual journey promoted by a lucidity of thought. Successful meditation leads to a more discerning understanding of human nature and allows one to contemplate the innermost workings of the mind. Therefore Marlow's stance capitalizes on his true destination, insinuating from the very first pages that his journey is actually within himself.

From the start of Marlow's tale there are countless of symbols relating to the unchartered places of the subconscious, and the journey intended to discover them. For instance, Marlow is lead to a room by two silent women spinning black wool (The women represent the Fates of Greek mythology, who spin a skein of wool which symbolizes a person's life. The fact that these women's thread is black creates an ominous sense of

foreboding.). There his attention is drawn to a map and he finds himself enthralled by a large river coursing through the heart of Africa. He notices that the river resembled a snake, and that it was "fascinating." For some odd reason, this long, sinuous river tempted him, despite its reptilian connotations, which already alerts the reader to danger ahead. The river is akin to the serpent in the biblical story of Adam and Eve, offering the unwitting pair a forbidden fruit - wisdom, and a dark knowledge of oneself. Also, throughout the journey, there are repeated references to both life and death.

Uncannily, these two are always intertwined. For example, there is a theme of bones which is constantly recurring in Marlow's story. The Swede mentions a man who died, and whose skeleton was left sprawled on the ground until the grasses began to grow up through his ribcage. The grass represents life, and of course, the skeleton represents death. These two are woven together. Also, there is Kurtz's obsession with ivory (dental bone), and according to Marlow he has the appearance of the object of his fixation. From Marlow's description, Kurtz bears a skeletal resemblance even when he is alive. Conrad's frequent symbolic combination of life and death is probably one of his numerous parallels to light and dark, echoing the fact that the two must exist simultaneously - there cannot be without the other. Conrad's book is based on the presence of light and dark within everyone, and in Marlow's journey the question is often posed of which is predominant. There are times when darkness usurps the light, others when it is the opposite. However, the darkness (evil) usually tends to prevail.

Conrad is implying that a sense of evil resides in the core of every human, and therefore reigns at the centre of humanity, however veiled by morals, civilization and refinement. This is one of the main facts Marlow ascertains on his journey, for he sees darkness everywhere, even when there is light. Just as the line between light and dark is indistinct, the barrier segregating civilization from savagery is equally obscure. In Africa, Marlow repeatedly encounters natives, and his crew is comprised of twenty cannibals. As they progress deeper into the heart of the forest, we can take note that black people are dehumanized. They are perpetually referred to in animalistic terms, and are treated as such. However, it is these "savages" who survive and thrive in the heart of darkness, and whose ways eventually engulf Kurtz. There is also the indication here that technology, civilization, and refinement have been rendered useless.

Every character thought to be at the pinnacle of cultivation and etiquette either dies or becomes corrupted by his surroundings (Kurtz, Fresleven). It is apparent that civilization is utterly futile in such surroundings. Kurtz serves as a prime example of a civilized gentleman who capitulates to his barbaric side due to his environment. Regardless of the respect and admiration showered upon him by his peers, not to mention the jealousy, he was at heart a hollow man, consumed by his greed for ivory. This is probably why he gave in so readily to his primitive instincts, partaking in the horrendous rituals of the natives, and letting his dark essence become the hub of his actions.

Kurtz is also symbolic of the evil within our society, for people saw him as the "emissary of science and progress." He represents the person found deep within the recesses of our subconscious, the core of darkness ever-present beneath the gauzy layers of refinement and civility. "One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little

tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' In this quote we can see that, symbolically, Kurtz is so overcome by darkness that he is blind to light. This is also embodied in an oil painting done by Kurtz, depicting a blind folded woman surrounded by darkness but carrying a torch which casts a sinister light over her face. The blindfolded woman can be taken as a common Western symbol of justice and liberty, things that man has created to differentiate himself from the beasts and savages. The fact that the woman is enshrouded in darkness with only insufficient torchlight to guide her says a lot about the nature of our society.

The culmination of Marlow's journey leads into the heart of darkness, or in a more worldly sense, Hell. Heart of Darkness fosters the allusion that hell is within us that it is the evil existing deep inside our souls. Marlow visits this place when he finally encounters Kurtz, and his innocent morals are challenged. He views first-hand the inhumanity man is capable of, and the journey begins to take on all the properties of a nightmare. When Kurtz himself is lying on his deathbed, he sees into his own heart, looks his personal hell in full view, and utters things which give Marlow a grim revelation as to what lies within that black abyss. Kurtz's final words, as he ends his voyage into his bitter core, are "The horror, the horror!" referring to what he sees inside himself.

The journey Marlow undertakes is seemingly in our own world, something which we reside in yet know so little about. We delude ourselves into believing that we can tame and subdue it, and that it will readily succumb and be molded to our good intentions. However, just as trying to harness the dark and primal nature within ourselves is impossible, this is an equally unattainable fantasy. Conrad's world is an embodiment of humanity, its ocean is its heart, and its impenetrable forest is its mind. Through Marlow's epiphany it is revealed that at the mouth of every river, at the core of every grove, subsists a perpetual darkness encased in light.

Thus what makes Heart of Darkness more than an interesting travelogue and shocking account of horrors is the way that it details — in subtle ways — Marlow's gradual understanding of what is happening in this far-off region of the world. Like many Europeans — including his creator — Marlow longed for adventure and devoured accounts such as those offered by Stanley. But once he arrives in the Congo and sees the terrible "work" (as he ironically calls it) taking place, he can no longer hide under the cover of his comfortable civilization. Instead, all the horrors perpetrated by European traders and agents — typified by Kurtz — force him to look into his own soul and find what darkness lies there. In the first half of the novel, Marlow states, "The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach" — but by the end of his journey, he will have peeked beneath "the surface" and discovered the inhumanity of which even men such as the once-upstanding Kurtz are capable.

Marlow's descent into his mind in "Heart of Darkness"

Heart of Darkness is a novel which clearly shows the influence of psychology and psychiatry (psychoanalysis) which were emerging as full-fledged sciences at the time

when this novel was written. Heart of Darkness is a record of the inner life of Marlow during the period of his travels in that country.

Heart of Darkness certainly gives us a vivid description of the thoughts and ideas which crossed his mind during his stay in that country. Marlow appears in this novel as a thinker who broods and meditates upon everything that he sees. Marlow appears as a keen observer, and he also appears as a thinker who reflects upon everything that he observes. Marlow is an introspective man who keeps constantly examining his own thoughts as they arise in his mind. Thus the book is to be treated as a kind of an exploration by Marlow of his own mind, of both his conscious mind and his sub-conscious mind. The phrase "**heart of darkness**" also means the inmost depths of the human mind which requires a great subtlety to plumb and probe.

From the very beginning, this novel gives us the **internals as well as the externals**. The externals are the outward scenes, happenings, incidents, and the persons with whom Marlow comes into contact, while the internals are the workings of Marlow's own mind or the thoughts which take their rise in his sub-conscious. Thus the novel is a record of a two-fold journey—a journey into the Congo which had at that time not yet been fully explored, and a journey into the dark realm of Marlow's mind and, in a sense, into the dark realm of the human mind in general. He narrates his experiences to a small group of his friends, he not only gives them his experiences of outward happenings but also his inward reactions to his experiences. For instance, he tells his friends that the city of Brussels made him think of a "**whited sepulchre**" (that is, a place which outwardly seems to be pleasant and righteous but is actually corrupt and disgusting). When he speaks about his encounter with the two knitting-women, he also describes his mental reaction to them: "**Hail, old knitter of black wool. Those who are about to die salute you!**" After seeing the knitting-women and after meeting his aunt, Marlow feels as if, instead of going to the centre of a continent, he were about to start for the centre of the earth. Similarly, he describes his reactions to the doctor who examines him and who measures the dimensions of his skull because it is in the interests of science for him to do so. The doctor at this time tells Marlow that it would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals during their stay in the dark continent.

When Marlow is **sailing towards the Congo** on a French steamer, he again **records his thoughts**. He tells us that during this journey the voice of the surf was now and then a positive pleasure to him like the speech of a brother. This voice, he says, was something natural which had its reason and which had a meaning. Marlow sees half a dozen black men linked together with a chain, and each wearing an iron collar around his neck. These men were criminals who had violated the law. This sight produces a deep effect on Marlow, giving rise to a chain of awful thoughts in his mind. He here says that he had previously seen the devil of violence, the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire, but that these half a dozen black men were strong, muscular, red-eyed devils.

Marlow's **encounter with the manager** of the Central Station and the brick-maker there also **gives rise to many thoughts in his mind**. The manager seems to be a man with nothing inside him, while the brick-maker appears to be a cunning and inquisitive man who tries to find out, by questioning Marlow, whether Marlow has any influence

among the higher officials of the trading company which has sent him here. In this context, Marlow tells us that he has always hated and detested lies, not because he is straighter than the other people, but because a lie simply appals him. Marlow finds a taint of death and a flavour of mortality in lies. However, on this occasion, Marlow allows the brick-maker falsely to assume that he did have a lot of influence among the high officials of the company. In the same context, Marlow says that the figure of Mr. Kurtz at this time was like a dream to him. He further says that no man can convey to others a dream-sensation, and that it is impossible for a man to convey to others the life-sensation of any given period of his existence. Marlow then adds: "**We live, as we dream alone.**" Thus here we find Marlow probing his own mind and delving into depths of his mind.

Later, **Marlow speaks about his work-ethic.** He has to work hard on the ship which he has to command. In pulling the wrecked steamer out of the river and repairing it, Marlow has to work very hard. His hard work made him fall in love with the steamer. Marlow says that work gives a man the chance to find himself and his own reality.

When Marlow has actually become the skipper of the Company's steamer and begins his voyage on the river Congo, he **continues to meditate upon whatever he sees and overhears.** For instance, at the very outset he says that, in performing the daily duties of a routine kind, a man comes to know only the surface reality of life because the inner truth is hidden from him. In command of a steamer on a strange and unknown river, Marlow feels like a blind-folded man driving a motor-van over a bad road. Then Marlow describes his reactions to the scenery which he witnesses. "**We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness,**" he says; and the earth at that time seemed unearthly to him. A little later, he says that the **mind of man is capable of anything because everything is in its all the past as well as all the future.** Furthermore, a real man is he who can meet the naked truth with his own true stuff.

Marlow discovers a book on the **subject of seamanship in the deserted hut.** Such a book being found in that hut was something wonderful, says Marlow; but still more surprising were the notes written in pencil in the margin. The notes seemed to be in cipher and looked like an extravagant mystery. Later, however, the mystery is solved because Marlow learns that the notes were written not in cipher but in the Russian language. Here Marlow also observes that **no man in this world is safe from trouble at any stage in his life.**

Marlow's **reflections upon his cannibal crew** are also noteworthy. Here again he records his mental reactions to an outward situation. The crew consists of cannibals who would like to eat human flesh to satisfy their hunger. They could easily kill the white men on board the steamer and eat their flesh; but they did not do so. Marlow feels amazed to find that, in spite of their gnawing hunger, they did not kill the white men on board. It is really easier to face the death of a close relative than to face prolonged hunger. It is easier to endure dishonour and even the damnation of one's soul than to bear the pangs of hunger. Marlow is therefore filled with **admiration for the self-restraint of those cannibals** in not killing the white men and eating their flesh to appease their hunger.

Then there are **Marlow's reflections upon the helmsman**, who gets killed by one of the natives through his own folly. The look in the dead helmsman's eyes haunts Marlow. In this context Marlow says that the helmsman had been lacking in self-restraint. There are also **Marlow's reflections upon Mr. Kurtz** about whom he has been hearing a lot. Mr. Kurtz was a gifted creature, with eloquence as his greatest gift. When Marlow is told by someone that Mr. Kurtz might be dead by this time, Marlow feels deeply disappointed. He does not, of course, shed tears, but he is certainly grieved at the idea of having lost the privilege of meeting Mr. Kurtz and listening to his eloquent talk.

From this point onwards the **narration centres round the deeds and the personality** of Mr. Kurtz; and, in telling us the facts about Mr. Kurtz, Marlow also gives us his own reactions to those facts. The facts about Mr. Kurtz are certainly very intriguing, but so are **Marlow's reactions to those facts**. Mr. Kurtz has now become an embodiment of evil, so that it seems to Marlow that Mr. Kurtz has taken a high seat among the devils of the land. And here Marlow once again talks about the need of inner strength in a man if a man has to face such grim facts as the devilry of Mr. Kurtz. Furthermore, Marlow now speaks about the spell which Mr. Kurtz's reputation has begun to cast upon his own mind. Marlow here says that subsequently he became a devoted friend of Mr. Kurtz, and that Mr. Kurtz was able to conquer his soul. After meeting that man, Marlow begins really to admire him despite the man's demonic character.

In fact, Marlow now becomes deeply devoted to Mr. Kurtz and goes to the extent of saying that he would never betray him and that it had already been ordained that he would always remain loyal to him. Marlow admits that Mr. Kurtz was a nightmare but he still maintains that he would never betray him because; Mr. Kurtz was "the nightmare of his choice". Thus Marlow has developed a keen personal interest in that man, whose evil he also recognizes fully. Even after returning to Europe, Marlow remains loyal to Mr. Kurtz's memory because, when Mr. Kurtz's fiancée asks him what Mr. Kurtz's last word before death had been, Marlow tells her a lie and says that Mr. Kurtz's last word had been her own name. Now this loyalty to Mr. Kurtz again means only one thing. Marlow has been able to convey to us indirectly and subtly the influence of Mr. Kurtz's primitivism upon himself, without being able to define that influence in specific and explicit terms. It is in the last one-third of the novel that Marlow tries to lay bare his sub-conscious mind. The writing in this part of the novel anticipates the technique which came afterwards to be known as "stream of consciousness" technique. This technique was subsequently practised by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Conrad was a forerunner of that technique whereby the inner consciousness of a character is revealed. The inspiration and the incentive to explore the sub-conscious mind had come, of course, from the findings of Sigmund Freud.

Colonization and Greed in Heart of Darkness

The book Heart of Darkness written by Joseph Conrad is a masterpiece in literature. Conrad obtained many of his perspectives for his work from 'hands on experience' and also from his harsh background and childhood. When Conrad was still a child his father was exiled to Siberia because of suspicions on plotting against the Russian government.

After his mother died, Conrad's father sent him to his mother's brother in Krakow for education purposes. This was the last time Conrad ever saw his father.

In 1890 Conrad took command of a steamship in the Belgian Congo. Conrad's experiences in the Congo paved the way and the outline for his brilliant novel Heart of Darkness. During his time in the Congo, Conrad's health took a devastating blow so he returned to England to recover. Returning to sea twice before finishing Almayer's Folly in 1894 Conrad wrote several other books including one about Marlow which was called Youth (a narrative before beginning Heart of Darkness in 1898). Conrad wrote most of his other major works Lord Jim (which features Marlow), Nostramo and The Secret Agent as well as several collaborations with Ford Madox during the following two decades. Conrad died in 1924 but will always have and hold a place in the hearts of many readers. In his book Heart of Darkness Conrad gives us an understanding of how the Africans were mistreated during colonization. The book also pinpoints many cases that show the greed and selfishness of imperialism.

The evilness of how the Africans were treated is critiqued well in a quote "**the men who work for the company describe what they do as 'trade' and their treatment of native Africans is part of a benevolent project of civilization**". This is a very true statement which shows that the way the colonizers treated the African was more like slaves rather than people. The book Heart of Darkness describes this inhuman behaviour in the quote "**Each chief was authorized to collect taxes; he did so by demanding that individuals should work for a specific period of time for a minimum payment. This, of course, was another name for slavery. The so-called taxpayers were treated like prisoners; their work was carried out under the supervision of armed sentries, and, as can be easily imagined, the system lent itself to all kinds of tyranny, brutality and subsequent reprisals by the natives. In one concession alone one hundred and forty-two Africans were killed. The spirit of bitterness and hatred generated in the people was quite terrifying, but little could be done about it as there was not enough control in the area to prevent the various agents from misusing their power**".

This quote sums up the immorality and the misuse of power against the Africans. It also gives insight into the horror of the colonization that was taking place at the time. One critic (Wilson Harris) helps describe Conrad's view and vision of the way that the Africans were treated. Harris writes "He sees the distortions of imagery and, therefore, of character in the novel as witnessing to the horrendous prejudice on Conrad's part in his vision of Africa and the Africans". This quote helps explain why Conrad describes the Africans the way he did (which some people may consider racist), but in actual fact it was just the reality of the situation.

The evilness of imperialism is shown very well in this quote "**As Marlow travels from the outer station to the central station and finally up the river to the inner station, he encounters scenes of torture, cruelty and near slavery**". This shows that the colonizers would do whatever it took including taking over the people and using them as 'near slaves' for their own personal benefits. The results of this madness and greed can be best shown through Conrad's use of life and imagery. The land of Africa is

described throughout the book as a living thing, and the Congo is brought to life as a snake. Also the hills are described as being 'scarred' from the recourses being taken out of them. During the course of the book, the trees and land in Africa are constantly moving and swallowing up the travellers. It is sort of forcing them towards Kurtz and barring their retreat. This in my mind is the land and the spirit of what 'used to be' rebelling against the colonizers that include the travellers searching for Kurtz. The evilness and greed of what was taking place is unimaginable and so this spirit being still very much alive is defiantly very realistic.

Colonization, greed and the mistreatment of human people happens all the time in our current day life. It is very sad, but true that we are living in one of the (if not the) biggest powers of imperialism ever. In Iraq for instance, America left Saddam in Iraq during the first gulf war for a reason. America had the power and the resources to do exactly what we are doing now back then. It was all about the oil, and sadly but truly oil was not even a necessity anymore. Technology has grown so much that we now obtain the power to generate enough electricity and power through wind alone. America has the ability to run cars off of water rather than gas, but if we look at where American president and his family had their money we clearly can see the problem. It was all invested in the oil business. Why was it so great that the vice president of American Mr Cheany was heading up a campaign to salvage the oil fields? Was it such a big surprise that he also had money invested in the whole oil business as well? This is one example of a current day situation that is reflected to the greatest extent in the wonderful novel Heart of Darkness. This book was an excellent portrayal of the evilness and suffering caused by imperialistic powers exercising their power in the wrong ways. It also helps us understand the suffering that took place in Africa.

The Significance of Idealism in Heart of Darkness

One of the prevalent themes in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness is **idealism**, a seemingly inescapable component of human nature. Conrad addresses the desirability of such a quality, and his stance on this can be discerned through his use of symbolism, underlying myths, and language. He uses the background presence of the Company and the characters of Kurtz and Marlow to criticise the surface prettiness of idealism, which serves to disguise uglier intentions and leads ultimately to darkness.

One who falls to such darkness, the tragic hero Kurtz, harbours high ideals that veil a possible hypocrisy and may precipitate his mental and spiritual degradation. By most accounts a "remarkable" man, he is the epitome of the culture and civilisation of Europe – a "**universal genius**" and an "**emissary of pity and science and progress**". Yet he is a man of contrasts. For example, his idea of justice is given form in his painting of "**a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch**". The light, however, cannot hope to penetrate the sombre darkness, just as Kurtz cannot see the lighted candle hovering before his eyes as he pronounces, "**I am lying here in the dark waiting for death**".

Additionally, in the report he has written for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, the contrast comes sharply into play through words. He writes of "**a power for good practically unbounded**" among other altruistic notions. Impossible to overlook, however, is the prophetic postscriptum: "**Exterminate all the brutes!**". Kurtz, whose "**immense plans**" are lost, or perhaps twisted, by abandonment and solitude, is a metaphor for a humanity which is capable of anything, even the most immense of darkness. Restraint, like the rotten fence in the story, falls away all too easily (though restraint is ironically exhibited by the cannibals on the boat), and Kurtz (like the manager and the brick maker) is hollow inside, and try as he might to "**swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him**", nothing could fill that void but an echoing wilderness.

On the other hand, the Company, a collaboration of imperialistic notions, hides its core of darkness behind noble ideas of civilisation and commerce. At the beginning of the story, Marlow defines the Company as being "**run for profit**", an ironic retort to his aunt's "**emissary of light**". The trading Company, as a model for colonialism, has as its visible aim a "**heavenly mission to civilise**" the "**darker**" regions of the world. However, elements of foreshadowing indicate a more sinister aspect to the Company. It is located in a "**white sepulchre**" of a city, and the description of its physical structure is reminiscent of Fresleven's remains – the "**grass sprouting between the stones**".

The two knitting women whom Marlow encounters guard the "**door of Darkness**" – a door that leads to the schemes and bureaucracy of an empire that holds the fate of millions in its hand. The women are symbolic of two of the three Fates who control the destiny of humankind, knit black wool, representing the dark-skinned natives of Africa. The true face behind the mask of the Company's idealism, as Marlow finds out, is in the grove of death he stumbles upon. In stark contrast, immediately after the horrific discovery, Marlow meets an impeccably-dressed accountant who is possessed of a mentality that enables him to say, with indifference, "**When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages – hate them to the death**". These encounters are perhaps some of the very first chisels to chip away at Marlow's ideals.

It is through this divesting of long-held and **cherished idealism** – reminiscent to him of childhood – that Marlow truly begins to gain insight into the human condition. In his journey into the heart of the Congo (a journey that has a symbolic counterpart and bears similarities to mythic rites of initiation), he is confronted with savagery and an unforgiving humanity that bring him closer to despair. Yet, it is through despair and a leaving behind of acceptable society that Marlow can be made privileged to a vast knowledge. He grows cynical with the Company's ideals, and sees the imperialists as trying to conquer something much more immense than could be conceived.

Furthermore, he starts to discard his own convictions, such as his revulsion of lies, by letting the "**papier-maché Mephistopheles**" believe in his non-existent influence in Europe. However, this near-lie may actually represent spiritual progress, as rivets (the motive behind the lie) have become to him "**a symbol of the redeeming ideas of civilisation, the ideas of humanity and solidarity which enable man to constrain**

hostile nature". Marlow confesses with true clarity, "... what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets – and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it" (46). Marlow's most significant lie is perhaps to the Intended, when he chooses not to reveal Kurtz's expiating last words – "The horror! The horror!" (118). It is a sign of his new-found knowledge that he does not unthinkingly respond to the Intended as he did his aunt. He lies to the Intended because the "truth" was "too dark altogether" and he perceives that "a part of Kurtz, the noblest part, the part he "Intended" has in fact survived the powers of darkness" (Boyle 115).

The story, in fact, ends on a hopeful note of idealism – within the "**heart of an immense darkness**" lies an imperfect and fleeting light, and though transient like a flash of lightning, it is our attempt to "**live in the flicker**" that ultimately redeems us.

Is Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' Racist?

Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness follows one white man's nightmarish journey into the interior of Africa. Aboard a British ship called the Nellie, three men listen to a man named Marlow recount his journey into Africa up the Congo River in a steam boat as an agent for a Belgian ivory trading Company.

Marlow says that he witnesses brutality and hate between the white ivory hunters and the native African people. Marlow becomes entangled in a power struggle within the Company, and finally learns the truth about the mysterious Kurtz, a mad agent who has become both a god and a prisoner of the "native Africans." After "rescuing" Kurtz from the native African people, Marlow watches in horror as Kurtz succumbs to madness, disease, and finally death.

The description of African people in Heart of Darkness is disgusting. They are seen as and referred to as **savages**. This is what the narrator says about the Africans and Africa: "It (Africa) was unearthly and the men (Africans) 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 (Africans) howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity — like yours — the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar."

That is not enough because there is some more of this kind of description: ". . . as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rich 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 . . . The prehistoric man (the African) was cursing us (white men), praying to us, welcoming us — who could tell!"

The structure and style of Heart of Darkness is the first challenge. We have a narrator reporting Marlow's narration of Marlow's experiences in Africa. This is a story inside another story, inside a story! We may say that technically, Heart of Darkness ceases to be Conrad's story and therefore if the story is racist, then Conrad is not necessarily racist!

The story is partially Marlow's because only what is remembered or deemed important by him gets to be narrated. It is also partially the narrator's story because his record of what he heard Marlow say is his sole experience. We are, therefore, faced by a situation where we should not fully ascribe to either Conrad or Marlow. Again: technically the story operates from several "subsequent" points of view. We keep on saying: who is racist here?

Chinua Achebe, Africa's most prominent novelist, who happens to find the novel racist, thinks that Marlow speaks for Conrad because Conrad does "**not hint, clearly and adequately at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters.**"

Achebe's assertion that Marlow speaks for Conrad is further strengthened by the fact that Conrad himself makes a journey similar to Marlow's down the Congo River in 1890. It is the nature of literature to be wholly or very partially autobiographical.

Those who agree with Achebe insist on the point that: in the nineteenth century where adventure novels are heavily loaded with the author's experiences the authors tended to agree to be associated with their major characters. Conrad, who tended, throughout his life, to see the multiple conflicting dimensions of one thing, would definitely not want to disassociate himself from Marlow, who undertakes the same journey as his creator

For Achebe, Heart of Darkness is racist because it projects the image of Africa as "the other world, the antithesis of Europe . . . 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 do not doubt Conrad's great talents. Even Heart of Darkness has its memorably good passages and moments

The "Achebe school" is also angered by the portrayal of the Thames River as representation of modernity against the savage muddiness and hazardous Congo River of Africa. There is also the "wild and gorgeous apparition of an (African) woman" pitted against the serene civilised mood of the intended (white woman). The "worst insult" is the pitying of the thoughtful life-like white men against the grunting men of Africa.

Those who disagree with Achebe and company put across a series of arguments that revert back to the ideological environment under which the novel was conceived and written. Their argument is that the writing of Heart of Darkness was done at a time when considering Africans as savages as and lesser beings than non-Africans was the norm.

They point out that Conrad set his story in the Belgian (King Leopold II's) Congo of the 1890s when the Africans in the Congo region were being forced to extract ivory and rubber for the Empire at gunpoint. Those who resisted got killed or dismembered and to imagine a kind of discourse that saw blacks as having equal humanity with other races was unthinkable. They even think that Conrad attacks imperialism because he identifies it with clear plunder and not the pretensions of civilizing the savage and spreading Christianity.

However, even then, Conrad's attack of imperialism has its contradictions. Conrad questions the morality of colonialism and exploitation but he does not question the colonial mission itself. Although Conrad's Africans are pitiable, they are nonetheless niggers and are victimised quite as much by their own stupidity and ignorance as by European brutality.

One of Kurtz's last utterances: "Exterminate the brutes!" demonstrates that the term "going native" does not mean becoming one with the savages. Despite the delirium, Kurtz knows the clear cut racial divisions and his white man's duties in Africa.

In addition, "Darkness" in Heart of Darkness tends to be metaphorical. Darkness holds a multiplicity of meanings.

The only clear meaning of darkness in the novel seem to be one's descending to inhuman levels of thought and behaviour — like Kurtz and the whole Belgian colonial establishment. In Heart of Darkness evil is portrayed as African and if it is also African that is because some white men in the Heart of Darkness behave like Africans!

Reading Heart of Darkness, we are certain that for the western readers of the 1890s, it must have shown the extremities of conquest, of course, but, it definitely must have confirmed the western concept of Africa as the land of savages. If the novel caused sympathy towards the African, it was that sympathy one has for an animal in agony, not fellow human beings.

Character of Kurtz in Heart of Darkness

Heart of Darkness is an important novella in terms of pre 1914 literature and is considered by many one of the most important books in literature. In the 1890's Conrad sailed up the river Congo, so the novel was written from a good knowledge of the surroundings and personal experience of colonialism and the oppression that was a major part of Africa in the late 1800's. Although slavery was abolished in most places, slavery was still a major part of African life in those days due to many European countries fighting over the prospect of ivory and land and when they did get the land they slaved the Africans either keeping them in Africa to help with the ivory trade or shipping them off to Europe to be slaves there. In the novel Conrad presents Kurtz as a mystical being a god almost to the native people but he also shows him to be an evil and sinister man with a 'heart of darkness' he does this by not actually presenting Kurtz as a human but a figure a 'vapour of the earth.' Conrad also leads the reader along by not actually meeting Kurtz until the very end the rest of the book relies on peoples tales of Kurtz and what he has done which lead us to believe that he is a supernatural being.

The role of the narrator in the novel is a key part of what makes the novel so appealing because it is the story teller Marlow who has been through all of it, although there is one other narrator at the start of the novella who sets the scene. The primary narrator also talks about Marlow in a strange way he claims that he was sat in a way that 'resembled an idol.' This infers that Marlow is a very wise and very powerful figure. He also talks a

lot about the light and the dark 'the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light.' Only the gloom to the west. Brooding over the upper reaches became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.' This extract paints a very vivid picture in the reader's minds it talks about getting closer to Africa every minute and the evil is just waiting there as if angered by their presence. This could be a warning sign as to how the story could end up as the narrator is referring to Africa as the gloom, when the first narrator ends it is quite difficult to see where he ends and Marlow begins but it becomes clearer when you read on. But before the first narrator stops he tells us that Marlow has 'the propensity to spin yarns.' This means he has the habit of over exaggerating this gives the reader doubts if this whole story is true and the way Marlow talks about Kurtz later on in the story as a supernatural being may well be an over exaggeration of Kurtz's power. This makes the reader feel doubtful and question Marlow's integrity as he may be exaggerating some parts of the story particularly Kurtz, and this may make the reader unable to trust Marlow's farfetched stories

Although this has been said there was absolutely no mention of Kurtz until page 38 were Marlow is talking to the accountant Marlow is keen to find out what Kurtz has done and why he is so praised and feared all over Africa he asks the accountant who Mr Kurtz was and the accountant simply said 'he was a first-class agent.' He then added 'he was a very remarkable person' this is the first time Marlow gets any information about Kurtz and he realises how powerful and inspirational this man really was. This mention of Kurtz only makes the reader want to read and as Kurtz is talked about as a supernatural being and as the story progresses the reader is more aware of the impact that Kurtz has had and is more anxious to meet him.

The setting is a big part of how the story unfolds, and the closer the boat gets to Kurtz up the river the more sinister and edgy the descriptions of the settings are. Conrad shows vivid pictures of sinister rainforests and murky rivers. 'silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.' This could show the silent power of the jungle just lying in wait for colonialism to end and for those people to go. Conrad writes about the jungle in unexplainable darkness and is linking this with Kurtz's path of destruction up the river 'for me it crawled towards Kurtz exclusively.' This shows the way that Marlow had somehow become obsessed with the finding of Kurtz and now it had consumed him so much that all he thought about was him. The forest had done that to him as there was so much evil in the leading to Kurtz it was hard not to see it 'a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart.' The jungle also seemed to become an enemy to Marlow as there was an heir of uneasiness all around this is because of the way Conrad writes about the setting the way he talks about the darkness the impenetrability of it, it seemed like a fortress was surrounding Kurtz and slowly Marlow was getting to it.

Kurtz is in many ways the most important character of the novella and although he is not present for most of the book the reader feels that there was something of him there in the way that the forest was described and the way that the river seemed to be against Marlow, there always seemed to be a part of Kurtz there the evil of his mind. Conrad

makes this possible by making Kurtz a god like being a 'vapour of the earth' and his mind and spirit was everywhere in the jungle that he owned. He was described and praised by many people 'whatever he was he was not common' but even though we hear so much about him there is no evidence of he has done they are all just rumours and maybe exaggerations. Kurtz was described and talked about by most people Marlow came across but he was said to have been an evil person only when Marlow was sailing up the river there are hints of his immense evil. 'the inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily' this could show that maybe Marlow might be going insane slowly, the constant thinking of Kurtz and his power may have slowly been making Marlow insane. And when the realisation dawns upon him that he might not even be able to see Kurtz he realises that "now I will never hear him." The man presented himself as a voice.' This shows the amount that Marlow respects and honours Kurtz he can't even imagine him being a real person. Kurtz was definitely a mystery to Marlow because he doesn't know anything about Kurtz and what he has done all that has been said about him was that he was an extraordinary man.

Kurtz's effect on others was very strong. He made people believe that he was something special something amazing and people worshiped him for it a good example of a person that worshiped Kurtz was the harlequin character. The harlequin was in awe of Kurtz's abilities and talked about him as if he was a god or a supernatural person as if he could not be real. Marlow was in awe of how much he had got in such little time. 'Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own.' This is a very important quote as it shows what Marlow really knows about Kurtz and his powers have made him so great but Marlow asked himself what made him so powerful how did he become this great and how many powers of darkness did Kurtz himself belong to. 'He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land - I mean literally.' But ultimately the prospect of Kurtz was too much for Marlow as when Marlow does finally see Kurtz he had fallen ill and was facing death 'it was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze.'

Kurtz's character in many ways is a real character and could be a realistic and real person and therefore is convincing. Although he shows unremorseful evil all through the book and is seen to be the heart of darkness when Marlow finally does meet him he seems to be quite sane. 'Believe me or not his intelligence was perfectly clear' he also shows remorse with his dying words 'the horror, the horror.' This is open to many interpretations and is a very famous quote but in my opinion Kurtz has realised that mankind given the chance can do horrific things like what he did in Africa and only when he dies he realises this. Although the character is convincing to be a man of pure evil, there may have been some exaggeration in the novel as at the start of the novel the anonymous narrator does tell us Marlow has the 'propensity to spin a yarn.' And therefore Kurtz's whole story and background could be an exaggeration. But in my opinion Kurtz was a very real character and was a convincing and intriguing character all the way through the novel.



