**Analysis of Heart of Darkness by Heart of Darkness**

**( The analysis is taken from Conrad’s Heart of Darkness & the Secret Sharer: Cliffs Notes by Dan Moran)**

**pp.10-13**

*Heart of Darkness* begins on the deck of the *Nellie*, a British ship anchored on the coast of the Thames. The anonymous narrator, the Director of Companies, the Accountant, and Marlow sit in silence Mar- low begins telling the three men about a time he journeyed in a steam- boat up the Congo River. For the rest of the novel (with only minor interruptions), Marlow narrates his tale.

As a young man, Marlow desires to visit Africa and pilot a steam- boat on the Congo River. After learning of the Company—a large ivory- trading firm working out of the Congo—Marlow applies for and received a post. He left Europe in a French steamer.

At the Company’s Outer Station in the Congo, Marlow witnesses scenes of brutality, chaos, and waste. Marlow speaks with an Accoun- tant, whose spotless dress and uptight demeanor fascinate him. Mar- low first learns from the Accountant of Kurtz—a “remarkable” agent working in the interior. Marlow leaves the Outer Station on a 200-mile trek across Africa, and eventually reaches the Company’s Central Sta- tion, where he learns that the steamboat he is supposed to pilot up the Congo was wrecked at the bottom of the river. Frustrated, Marlow learns that he has to wait at the Central Station until his boat is repaired.

Marlow then meets the Company’s Manager, who told him more about Kurtz. According to the Manager, Kurtz is supposedly ill, and the Manager feigns great concern over Kurtz’s health—although Marlow later suspects that the Manager wrecked his steamboat on purpose to keep supplies from getting to Kurtz. Marlow also meets the Brickmaker, a man whose position seems unnecessary, because he doesn’t have all the materials for making bricks. After three weeks, a band of traders called The Eldorado Exploring Expedition—led by the Manager’s uncle—arrives.

One night, as Marlow is lying on the deck of his salvaged steam- boat, he overhears the Manager and his uncle talk about Kurtz. Mar- low concludes that the Manager fears that Kurtz is trying to steal his job. His uncle, however, told him to have faith in the power of the jun- gle to “do away” with Kurtz.

Marlow’s boat is finally repaired, and he leaves the Central Station (accompanied by the Manager, some agents, and a crew of cannibals) to bring relief to Kurtz. Approximately fifty miles below Kurtz’s Inner Station, they find a hut of reeds, a woodpile, and an English book titled *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*.

As it crept toward Kurtz, Marlow’s steamboat is attacked by a shower of arrows. The Whites fire rifles into the jungle while Marlow tries to navigate the boat. A native helmsman is killed by a large spear and thrown overboard. Assuming that the same natives who are attacking them have already attacked the Inner Station, Marlow feels disappointed now that he will never get the chance to speak to Kurtz.

Marlow reaches the Inner Station and notices Kurtz’s building through his telescope—there is no fence, but a series of posts orna- mented with “balls” that Marlow later learns were natives’ heads. A Russian trader and disciple of Kurtz, called “The Harlequin” by Mar- low, approaches the steamboat and tells Marlow that Kurtz is still alive. Marlow learns that the hut they previously saw is the Harlequin’s. The Harlequin speaks enthusiastically of Kurtz’s wisdom, saying, “This man has enlarged my mind.”

Marlow learns from him that the steamboat was attacked because the natives did not want Kurtz to be taken away. Suddenly, Marlow sees a group of native men coming toward him, carrying Kurtz on a stretcher; Kurtz is taken inside a hut, where Marlow approaches him and gives him some letters. Marlow notices that Kurtz is frail, sick, and bald. After leaving the hut, Marlow sees a “wild and gorgeous” native woman approach the steamer; the Harlequin hints to Marlow that the woman is Kurtz’s mistress. Marlow then hears Kurtz chiding the Man- ager from behind a curtain: “Save me!—save the ivory, you mean.” The Harlequin, fearing what might happen when Kurtz is taken on board the steamboat, asks Marlow for some tobacco and rifle cartridges; he then leaves in a canoe.

At midnight that same night, Marlow awakens to the sound of a big drum. He inspects Kurtz’s cabin, only to discover that he is not there. Marlow runs outside and finds a trail running through the grass—and realizes that Kurtz is escaping by crawling away on all fours. When he comes upon Kurtz, Kurtz warns him to run, but Marlow helps Kurtz to his feet and carried him back to the cabin.

The next day, Marlow, his crew, and Kurtz leave the Inner Station. As they move farther away from the Inner Station, Kurtz’s health dete- riorates; at one point, the steamboat breaks down and Kurtz gives Mar- low a packet of letters and a photograph for safe-keeping, fearing that the Manager will take them. Marlow complies.

One night after the breakdown, Marlow approaches Kurtz, who is lying in the pilothouse on his stretcher “waiting for death.” After try- ing to reassure Kurtz that he is not going to die, Marlow hears Kurtz whisper his final words: “The horror! The horror!” The next day, Kurtz is buried offshore in a muddy hole.

After returning to Europe, Marlow again visits Brussels and finds himself unable to relate to the sheltered Europeans around him. A Com- pany official approaches Marlow and asks for the packet of papers to which Kurtz had entrusted him. Marlow refuses, but he does give the official a copy of Kurtz’s report to The Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs with Kurtz’s chilling postscript (“Exterminate all the brutes!”) torn off. He learns that Kurtz’s mother had died after being nursed by Kurtz’s “Intended,” or fiancée.

Marlow’s final duty to Kurtz is to visit his Intended and deliver Kurtz’s letters (and her portrait) to her. When he meets her, at her house, she is dressed in mourning and still greatly upset by Kurtz’s death. Mar- low lets slip that he was with Kurtz when he died, and the Intended asks him to repeat Kurtz’s last words Marlow lies to her and says, “The last word he pronounced was—your name.” The Intended states that she “knew” Kurtz would have said such a thing, and Marlow leaves, dis- gusted by his lie yet unable to prevent himself from telling it.

The anonymous narrator on board the *Nellie* then resumes his nar- rative. The Director of Companies makes an innocuous remark about the tide, and the narrator looks out at the overcast sky and the Thames—which seems to him to lead “into the heart of an immense darkness.”