

Lecture 11:
Heart of Darkness Two

Heart of Darkness: Part II

While Marlow is waiting for his ship to be repaired, he overhears one night the manager and his uncle complaining about Kurtz and discussing how to get rid of him. He hears them say that Kurtz was very ill and they hope he would just die. ❖

Marlow then leaves on a two-month trip up the river to Inner Station where Kurtz is. He takes along the manager and several "pilgrims." The river is treacherous and the trip is difficult; the ship proceeds only with the help of a crew of natives the Europeans call cannibals, who actually prove to be quite reasonable people. ❖

Fifty miles away from Kurtz's Inner Station, Marlow and his companions find a hut with a stack of firewood and a note that says, "Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously." They can't read the signature, but it is clearly not Kurtz's. ❖

Inside the hut, Marlow finds a battered old book on seamanship with notes in the margin in what looks like code. The manager concludes that the wood must have been left by the Russian trader, a man about whom Marlow has overheard the manager complaining. After taking aboard the firewood that serves as the ship's fuel, the party continues up the river, the steamer struggling and about to give up working completely. ❖

Marlow wonders about Kurtz constantly as they crawl along toward him.. ❖

They stop again 8 miles away from Kurtz' station because of the fog. They hear a ❖
loud, desolate cry, followed by savage voices, and then silence again. They prepare
for attack. The whites are badly shaken, but the African crewmen respond with quiet
alertness.

The leader of the cannibals tells Marlow that his people want to eat the people ❖
making the loud cries. Marlow realizes that the cannibals must be very hungry. their
only food, a supply of rotting hippo meat, was long since thrown overboard by the
pilgrims.

Marlow does not think the natives will attack because their cries sounded more ❖
sorrowful than warlike. But they do attack about a mile and a half from the station.
Suddenly the air was filled with arrows. The helmsman is killed with a spear.

Marlow frightens the attackers away by sounding the steam whistle repeatedly, and ❖
they give up the attack and make a prolonged cry of fear and despair. Marlow thinks
that Kurtz is now dead as well, and he feels a terrible disappointment at the thought.

The narrative comes back to the Nellie on the Thames. Marlow notes that Kurtz had ❖
a fiancée, his Intended (as Kurtz called her), waiting for him in Europe. What Marlow
find significant about her is the air of possession and ownership Kurtz assumed
when speaking about her: indeed, Kurtz spoke of everything - ivory, the Inner
Station, the river - as being his. It is this sense of dark mastery that disturbs Marlow
most.

Marlow also mentions a report Kurtz has written at the request of the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. The report is eloquent and powerful, if lacking in practical suggestions. It concludes, however, with a handwritten postscript: “Exterminate all the brutes!” ❖

Marlow suggests that this is the result of Kurtz’s absorption into native life—that by the time he came to write this note he had assumed a position of power with respect to the natives and had been a participant in “unspeakable rites,” where sacrifices had been made in his name. At this point, Marlow also reveals that he feels he is responsible for the “care of [Kurtz’s] memory,” and that he has no choice but to remember and continue to talk about the man. ❖

Marlow returns back to the story. The Inner Station comes into view now. It looks decayed but is still standing. ❖

A white man, the Russian trader, beckons to them from the shore. He wears a patchwork suit and babbles incessantly. He tells Marlow that the natives mean no harm, and that the ship’s whistle is the best means to scare them off. He tells Marlow he has been a merchant seaman and was working for a Dutch company. ❖

The Russian tells Marlow that the steamer was attacked because the natives do not want Kurtz to leave. The Russian also offers yet another enigmatic picture of Kurtz. One does not talk to Kurtz but listens to him. He credits Kurtz for having “enlarged his mind.” ❖