1. Within the novel The Heart of Darkness we find that there are two narrators, that of our main character Marlow who is a ship captain as well as an anonymous passenger on a ship who is listening to Marlow’s story.
2. This particular story is a story within a story. It follows Marlow as he recounts what happened to him while in the Congo as well as the fact Marlow is telling his experiences to a group of men aboard a ship anchored in the Thames Estuary.
3. The narrator notes that when the Romans first came to England it was a great savage wilderness to them. He imagines what it must have been like for a young Roman captain or soldier to come to a place so far from being home and comforts. As opposed to the empire building English who were right at home and used to luxuries.
4. Marlow says that “There was a vast amount of red; good to see at anytime because one knows that some real work is done there. Over time the unexplored areas get filled up and are explored.” Pg. 11 This change however may foreshadow what the title states, darkness may fall upon these areas once explored. Meaning that the explorers will be harsh in their treatment of the land and what they find there.
5. Marlow is able to secure a position with the trading company due to his aunt. As the book goes; “I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote: ‘It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,’ etc., etc.” pg. 9 “She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat.” pg. 10 The means by which Marlow received his position is not characteristic of him, but it was however what he wanted to be and he simply used his aunt’s ability to help him to his advantage.
6. Marlow receives his position on the account of the fact that the company received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This then makes Marlow even more anxious to go.
7. The headquarters had to odd women knitting black wool, the man in charge was not interested in talking to Marlow and simply said “bon voyage.” Marlow found himself pushed through the entirety of his visit to the building and felt slightly uneasy as well as the fact it is said that he felt the two odd women were guarding the heart of darkness.
8. Marlow’s aunt views his new assignment as an adventure that would be helping stamp out the savage ways of the natives. Marlow however is undecided by his aunt’s ways because he hasn’t had any contact with the natives to declare whether or not they are indeed “savages.”
9. What Marlow means by his quote is that when in England your mindset isn’t on the dangers and hardships of other places. So once in Africa when he witnesses death and misery he realizes he’s away from the “norm” of what he’s used to.
10. The grove of death is a shady spot where Marlow finds some of the natives dying without anyone to notice or care.
11. Marlow meets a white man dressed elegantly and in perfect fashion. He is “amazing” and a “miracle.” After learning he is the chief accountant Marlow does sincerely mean he respects him.
12. The accountant tells Marlow that Kurtz is; “..the best agent he had, an exceptional man of the greatest importance to the Company.” Pg. 27 The accountant however doesn’t write to the agent because Kurtz is at the heart of the ivory country and wants it all for himself without others having to know how much he truly has.
13. On his way to the central station Marlow witnesses many things such as death, decay, sickness, witnessing people dying, ill treatment of the natives, etc.
14. The general manager owes his position to the fact that he himself has not yet been sick since arriving.
15. The steamboat sinks when someone ran the boat too close to a shallow area and then the boat bottomed out ripping the bottom open and then the ship took on water.
16. The company men are the pilgrims. The only motivation for these faithless men is money, and with this Marlow does not condone these men’s actions or intentions.
17. Marlow overhears two men talking and he hears the name Kurtz. Then the two men say “take advantage of this unfortunate accident.” Pg. 28 Meaning that the black man who supposedly set he shed on fire really didn’t and isn’t to blame.
18. The painting found in the brick maker’s cabin was a small sketch in oils on a panel with a woman draped and blindfolded carrying a lighted torch. The background was black. Marlow reacts that the woman was stately and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.
19. The brick maker engages Marlow in conversation and when doing so it becomes evident that he is jealous of Kurtz. He begins trying to pump Marlow for information. Marlow is perplexed by this. He discovers that the brick maker is interested in his aunt’s connections, the ones who got Marlow his position with the Company. Marlow then accuses him of reading confidential Company mail because he could only get that kind of information from that source. Shortly later on we find that he makes the mistake that he believes talking to Marlow will get him in touch with the higher powers.
20. It takes 3 months for the repairs to happen to Marlow’s boat. The reasoning being that the rivets that the boat needed took longer than expected to get to the area.
21. The Eldorado Expedition is a group of white men intending on tearing treasure out of the bowels of the land. Marlow again does not condone the actions of these men.
22. The manager complains that Kurtz has to come to the Congo with plans to turn the stations into beacons of civilization and moral improvement. As well as that Kurtz wants to take over the manager’s position. In simple terms, the manager and his uncle dislike Kurtz.
23. The Eldorado Expedition goes into the wilderness and disappears, along with their donkey’s dying. Marlow isn’t surprised by this and somewhat expected it.
24. Marlow describes the jungle as being the “treetops of death.” This quote means that the jungle is evil and helps build the mood of unhealthy darkness, hopelessness, senseless cruelty, avid greed, and unholy ambition.
25. Marlow has a sense of kinship between himself and the savages along the riverbanks along with his work of keeping the ship afloat and steaming helps keep him occupied and prevents him from brooding too much.
26. Marlow doesn’t romanticize the savages but admires their resilience. Marlow sees the blacks as mostly innocent creatures that are in their right place.
27. Marlow discovers an interesting book written by the Harlequin at the abandoned hut.
28. Marlow feels that the cannibals have a sense of respect for their employers and that’s why they don’t eat the white men aboard.
29. Marlow refuses the managers order to continue up river because Marlow thinks they will surely run aground if they proceed blindly through the fog.
30. The steamboat is attacked by the natives who have spears from the shoreline.
31. “What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive- it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence purely protective.” Pg. 53
32. Marlow states he does not much care for the helmsman because he acts as if he was very important in front of people but he would be very passive when alone, it is important to note however that Marlow does mourn the helmsman after he dies.
33. “He looked Harlequin.” Pg. 64 His clothes were covered with bright patches of color. He had no beard, yet had a boyish face, very fair with no particular features. He had blue eyes and smiles and frowns. Although looking young he was really 25.
34. The Russian believes that Kurtz resembles the archetypal “evil genius”, highly gifted, but a degenerate individual.
35. “To speak plainly, he raided the country, I said. He nodded.” Pg. 69
36. Marlow’s first glimpse of Kurtz reveals that Kurtz is ill and in simple terms in bad shape as opposed to what Marlow expected to see, a man of high power and stature.
37. “She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed clothes, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggins to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow…” pg. 75 “She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us.” Pg. 76 After her description and how she approached the boat it goes on to say that she suddenly opened her bared arms and threw them up above her head as though trying to control her surroundings. She then turned away from the steamer and walked back ashore. This scene for the book created a sense of trans-like feeling where Marlow and the rest stood still watching the woman.
38. Kurtz views the general manager’s rescue mission as doing more harm than good to the Company, he didn’t see the time for such vigorous action.
39. “He informed me, lowering his voice, that I was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer.” Pg. 78 the Russian trusts Marlow because he feels they have connections as seamen and their tobacco and such.
40. The Russian decides to return to the jungle sensing that he is in danger from the general manager and his men, as well as the fact he doesn’t see much more he can do much more for Kurtz.
41. When Marlow wakes up in the middle of the night and notices Kurtz is gone he becomes unnerved and decides he must follow and capture Kurtz himself.
42. “I had immense plans” pg. 82 “I was on the threshold of great things, he pleaded in a voice of longing with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. He had kicked his world to pieces. His soul had gone mad with being alone in the wilderness.” Pg. 83
43. Marlow saves Kurtz’s followers by blowing the boat’s whistle to scare them away because he noticed that the pilgrims picked up their weapons preparing to fire at them. Marlow does it out of compassion remembering how he had sympathy for the chained natives and offered food to a dying native as further evidence.
44. “The horror”, “the horror” (Kurtz’s final words) indicate as to what he has done. As his light fades and he approaches death he falls into the darkness that is death and realizes the truth to his evil actions.
45. Kurtz’s cousin visits Marlow when he returns to Europe. They reveal that Kurtz; “incidentally, Kurtz had been essentially a great musician.” Pg. 90
46. The general assumption is that Marlow wishes to hide Kurtz’s real character from Kurtz’s intended, his “heart of darkness” as it were. He provides her with the lie that he last spoke her name, something she instantly deems as appropriate and predicted.
47. The title of this novel indicates to me dark impulses, to kill, dominate, be cruel, etc. can be at the center of one’s heart.
48. Yes Marlow is an objective narrator. Although having his own personal perspectives of those around him he provides full accounts of what happens and changes his views of some people such as Kurtz at the end of the novel. I don’t think any other character could provide an unbiased account because seemingly the rest of the characters were greedy or evil.
49. “I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally, yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how much I got there, what I saw, and how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap.” Pg. 70 This quote along with the fact Marlow always did his own thing per say, kept to himself throughout his journey indicate that he’s always been an outsider.
50. The white traders feel that the natives are savages, have no understanding of civilization, etc. and that they must be treated like savages to show them the white dominance that was going on in the 1800’s.
51. Initially, Marlow views the natives as alien and strange, but as the novel progresses and by the end of the novel Marlow sees them as humans with feelings and have some values that are being abused by the colonial invasion of their land.
52. While Kurtz and the general manager seem to share some “evil” qualities, the general manager is really a foil to Kurtz. Kurtz’s evil ultimately stems from his devotion to the natives. The manager on the other hand isn’t concerned about anything but himself and his own success.
53. Marlow first learns of Kurtz when the accountant mentions that Marlow will surely meet Kurtz if he is headed toward the interior. Marlow becomes obsessed when he hears the story of Kurtz turning back in the jungle.
54. Marlow’s mythical journey in search of himself in order to bring back a new truth and perhaps because he’s gone into the jungle without truly knowing himself and being unprepared for the whole ordeal puts him beyond his limits of his heart paying the price in realizing through certain lying, etc. his own dark self.
55. Marlow refers to the natives on the boat as cannibals but with this he respects their ability to control their urges and to remain calm in the face of adversity, making them more civilized than the white men aboard the steamboat.
56. Kurtz’s downfall seems to be a result of his willingness to ignore the hypocritical rules that govern European colonial conduct; Kurtz has “kicked himself loose of the earth.”
57. One major effect and reason for Conrad’s use of the “story within a story” is it presents a chainlike reaction for the reader, Marlow telling the story to people on the boat, and that person from the boat recounting to us the reader. It is effective because it gives full account and detail to Marlow’s journey.
58. After researching Conrad I found that his style is both distinctive and individual because he uses his own memories as literary material for his novels. Movies, music, etc. also played a role in specifically The Heart of Darkness, the melancholy mad elephant and the French gunboat firings into a continent are two examples found.
59. Conrad never gives an exact location for the novel and with this the heart of darkness is an imaginative location, a place that may be anywhere. Along with this I found that Conrad himself experienced European cruelty in the Congo witnessing how poorly they treated the natives as in the book, another reason possibly why he doesn’t name specific places. Conrad only names Marlow and Kurtz because they are the center of attention throughout the book. This may be to keep the story paced and fluent and as said focused on the two that are the storyline.
60. Other connections with the theme of The Heart of Darkness can as follow for examples I thought of. My first being that of Frankenstein. After being created the character struggles to find himself in terms of why he isn’t being accepted in society which causes him to go mad and become violent. The next example is that of a historical one, Anne Frank. Although not physically having to struggle per say she had to stay hidden during the hardships of WW2 because of her ethnic background. In the end however she and her family are discovered, sent to concentration camps, and as we know Anne does not survive. The last example is again fiction but does add to the theme, this person is Harry Potter. He struggled throughout the series against overwhelming odds and a foe Voldemort. Harry attempts to beat and overcome this foe that becomes the both a theme and a darkness.