

**Jennifer Chen**

**Rhetorical Analysis:**

Conrad describes Marlow and other characters in many ways that appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos. Marlow is initially introduced as a seaman, and many of his observations lead back to this characterization and allow the reader to trust Marlow's narration (ethos). The novel is immersed in many heartbreaking scenes as well that all contribute to the pathos in Marlow's journey. For example, the instances in which Marlow believes he cannot find Kurtz strike the reader as extremely emotionally tolling. Marlow also uses logos in his many attempts to rationalize and sympathize with the lives of the African inhabitants. His logic seems tainted, however, by his upbringing under European shadows.

The entire novel shows glimpses of European negligence, all adding to the characterization of Marlow and the tone that is given off by the plot's narrator. Even with Conrad's inattention and naiveté towards racial sensitivity, the book acts as a very eye-opening reading experience. Marlow's unique character being placed in such an exotic territory makes for an extremely convincing and thought-provoking plot that brings to question many of society's ideals regarding racism and prejudice. The novel embodies our world's diverse and segmented history in the context of a seaman's journey through Africa. It gives a very unique glimpse into a hypothetical situation that is foreign and abstract to many.

**Tyler Whitehouse**

**Themes:**

1. Social Darwinism is absurd.

Throughout the beginning of the novel, especially when Marlow begins to narrate his story, the facts that Britain was conquered with the help of Roman African Legionnaires and Marlow's pondering at how absurd it is to judge another on the shape of their facial features/skin color brings this theme to light. Throughout the novel, Conrad underscores this theme, even though he portrays Africans in a very negative light. This theme is also underscored when the colonial Europeans subject Africans to cruelties and thus, show a darker side to the 'pinnacle of human civilization' which is Europe.

2. Imperialism comes nowhere close to its professed goals.

The whole justification behind imperialism in the late 1800s was to spread the decency of European civilization and Christianity to the places of the globe that were uncivilized by European standards. In reality, as Conrad explores through the fictional Marlow, this was a

hypocritical justification. The European colonizers brutally exploit the Africans, desecrate their bodies, and take their resources all in the name of 'civilizing them'.

3. Men must protect women from the harsh realities of the world.

Joseph Conrad weaves this sexist theme in throughout his book. The roles of European women in Conrad's novel are fairly subservient to men and insulated from the real world. Marlow's aunt works in Europe and is connected however, she has not seen the actual horrors that take place in the Congo. Also, Kurtz's intended spouse is European, naive, and loving. She wants nothing more than to live with Kurtz and has no idea of what he does in Africa. On the other hand is Kurtz's mistress. She exerts influence over the happenings around Kurtz's station and is somebody to be feared. She seems to be power-hungry as a product of the harsh realities of colonial life. Conrad is trying to convey how women must be insulated from the realities of the world if they are to remain innocent and benevolent.

### **Kyle Reilly**

#### **Important Quotes:**

1. "The horror! The horror!" -Kurtz's last words (Pg 112)

The meaning of Kurtz's final words was left up to the reader to interpret. One interpretation is that the horror that Kurtz is referring to is all the things Kurtz had witnessed during his time in Africa. Some of the things that Kurtz had witnessed in Africa were the exploitations of Africa by the European imperialists and the evil that resides within everyone.

2. "The last word he pronounced was - your name" -Marlow (Pg 123)

At the end of the novel Marlow returns to Europe and visits with Kurtz's fiancée. Kurtz's fiancée asks Marlow what her Kurtz's last words were. Marlow decides to lie by saying Kurtz's last words were her name instead of telling her the truth. One theme of the novel is that men must protect women from the harsh realities of the world. When Marlow lies he is protecting her from knowing the truth about the person her fiancée had become and the terrible things that occurred in Africa.

3. "I have no opinion on that point, but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being here. They only showed that Mr Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him-" -Russian Trader (Pg 95)

The Russian trader states that when Kurtz puts the head on the stakes he is not financially gaining anything. The heads actually just show that Kurtz has given into his desires and has lost his sanity.

## **Christopher Mei**

### **Plot Summary:**

The book opens on the British ship “Nellie” during a flood on the River Thames. Aboard the ship are four men, the nameless narrator, a lawyer, an accountant and Marlow. For a brief period, the narrator contemplates the river’s history and mentions the journeys of British adventurers who brought trade and civilization to less fortunate peoples. Afterwards, Marlow begins to recount his past experiences in Africa (The Dark and, according to maps, blank Continent) as a fresh-water sailor.

In his past, Marlow was so fascinated by the Congo River that he sought a job with a Belgian ivory trading company that conducts business along the body of water. When the originally commissioned Captain Fresleven dies in an argument with some natives over hens, Marlow receives his chance. After thirty days of travel, Marlow arrives at the Outer Station along Africa’s coast, and there he sees black slaves for the first time. While staying at the Outer Station, Marlow hears rumors of a, supposedly, very skilled and capable man named Kurtz. According to hearsay, Kurtz collects more ivory than the other posts combined and is also well versed in a wide variety of other fields as well. Marlow finally departs from the Outer Station with a caravan after ten days, and makes his way to the Central Station.

Upon arriving at the Central Station, Marlow discovers that the steamboat he was to use to travel along the Congo was damaged and that the rivets he requires to repair the ship are not available at the time. While staying at the Central Station Marlow meets the Manager and the Brickmaker. The Manager is a rather mediocre and deceitful individual who shows a disdain for Kurtz and also informs Marlow that Kurtz is sick. The Brickmaker is a mysterious and somewhat bizarre character who works closely with the Manager. Though Marlow has never met Kurtz, he assumes that Kurtz must be better than the Manager and his associates who are willing to lie and harm others to satisfy their own desires. Marlow expresses a clear hatred for lies.

One day, while waiting for rivets, Marlow overhears the Manager and the Manager’s uncle discussing Kurtz. According to their conversation they believe that Kurtz is too influential with the company heads and is stealing ivory. The two hope that the climate and environment kill Kurtz. As time passes, Marlow begins to display a greater and greater obsession with Kurtz. After a few months of hearing about the legendary Kurtz, Marlow’s original business motives shift into a desire to meet with Kurtz. Eventually, Marlow does manage to repair his ship, and after doing so embarks on a journey to the Inner Station.

On the way to Kurtz’ station, Marlow and his crew encounter an abandoned hut. At the hut, the crew discovers fire wood, a note that says “Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously,” and an old book on seamanship. Marlow assumes all of this must have been left by the Russian trader whom he has heard about through the Manager’s complaints. Three days later, after a morning fog lifts, the ship is placed under attack from a group of native Africans hiding amid bushes. One of the ship’s African helmsmen attempts to retaliate to the attack, but is hit with a spear and dies. In an act of desperation, Marlow blows the ship’s horn, and manages to scare off the attackers.

After talking about the attack, Marlow breaks the flow of the narrative to offer more information about Kurtz. He mentions that Kurtz had a fiancée, Kurtz's intended, and that Kurtz had written a report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. In regards to Kurtz's intended, Marlow notes that Kurtz treated her very much as a possession rather than a partner. And in Kurtz's report, Marlow pays special attention to the significance of Kurtz's concluding statement, "Exterminate all the brutes!"

As the ship arrives at the Inner Station, the Russian trader beckons to the crew from the shore. After the ship docked at the Inner Station, the manager went to retrieve Kurtz, and the Russian trader boarded the ship to speak with Marlow. In the following discussion, Marlow learns that the trader was a merchant employed by a Dutch trading house to go into the African interior, and that the boat may have been attacked because the Natives do not want Kurtz to leave. Also, just as many people Marlow had spoken to before seemed to be impressed, if not mesmerized with Kurtz, the Russian trader seemed to regard Kurtz very highly as well as he claimed that Kurtz had enlarged his mind. As their discussion continues, the Russian trader asks Marlow to take Kurtz and leave. He explains his somewhat concerning relationship with Kurtz, having been threatened by Kurtz at gunpoint over a small stash of ivory, but emphasizes the point that Kurtz is in great need of help. He is extremely ill, is reluctant to leave Africa with his new tribal following, and has been abandoned by the Company.

Soon after the conversation, the manager and the accompanying pilgrims return to the ship with Kurtz on a stretcher. After Kurtz is brought inside the ship, Marlow moves about the ship's deck and as he looks to the shore, he sees a native woman pacing. According to the Russian trader, the woman is Kurtz's mistress and a troublesome existence that has significantly influenced Kurtz. Attention is then brought back to Kurtz, who is speaking with the manager, as he is heard yelling at the manager for coming to retrieve ivory rather than to help him. When the manager comes back outside he tells Marlow that there is nothing left that can be done for Kurtz and that he plans to report Kurtz to the Company's directors. Shocked and disgusted by the Manager's decision, Marlow tells the Manager that he thinks Kurtz is a remarkable man and, with this statement, loses the trust of the Manager and all other members of the Company.

That night, Marlow awakens from his sleep to look for signs of trouble. From the ship he sees the fires of the natives' camp and can hear drums and chanting. Marlow then checks Kurtz's cabin to find that Kurtz is missing. Searching for Kurtz on his own, Marlow follows a trail in the grass made by Kurtz. As he follows the trail and nears the native camp, Kurtz reveals himself to Marlow. At first Kurtz is reluctant to return to the ship and tells Marlow to leave, but Marlow eventually convinces Kurtz to return when he tells him that he will be lost if he continues towards the ritual. The following day, the ship departs from the Inner Station and as it leaves, Kurtz's mistress and the other natives stand by the shore and shout to the ship.

As the ship travels back to more familiar civilization, the two "excommunicated" members of the company are left alone to talk. Through their discussion, Marlow finds that he is both impressed by Kurtz's philosophical sophistication and disappointed by Kurtz's grandiose and unrealistic plans to attain fortune. Later, the ship breaks down, and because of this delay,

Kurtz becomes more confident that he will not survive the journey back to civilization. Worried that the Manager would take control of his legacy after he died, Kurtz gives Marlow a bundle of his papers. As Kurtz's condition worsens he tells Marlow that he is waiting for death, and when Marlow then approaches him Kurtz cries out, "The horror! The horror!" frightening Marlow and causing him to flee. Soon after, a servant informs everyone that Kurtz has passed away. After Kurtz dies, Marlow falls extremely ill and nearly dies as well. During his illness he worried that he would leave this world with nothing to say, and remembered that Kurtz always had something seemingly significant to say. However, he survived and left Africa for Brussels.

While recovering in Brussels, Marlow is visited by a Company representative who asks him to hand over Kurtz's papers. Marlow refuses and only agrees to give the representative the pamphlet on the "Suppression of Savage Customs." Then Marlow meets with a man who is supposedly Kurtz's cousin and gives him some of Kurtz's letters. After a brief discussion about Kurtz's many talents, the two agree that Kurtz should simply be considered a universal genius. Eventually, Marlow holds nothing but a few letters and a picture of Kurtz's intended, whom he visits about a year after Kurtz's death. During his visit to Kurtz's intended, she and Marlow discuss Kurtz and his numerous achievements and skills. She asks Marlow what Kurtz's final words were and oddly Marlow lies to her and says that Kurtz's final statement was the Intended's name. This final meeting marks the end of Marlow's story.