

JOSEPH CONRAD, *HEART OF DARKNESS*

General preparation

Before class, read a reliable online summary of the **entire novella** so that you understand:

- Marlow's journey from Europe to the Congo;
- the Company's search for ivory;
- the growing reputation of Kurtz;
- Marlow's journey to the Inner Station;
- Kurtz's illness and death;
- Marlow's final meeting with Kurtz's Intended.

You are **not required to read the entire novella before this class**. However, you must understand the general plot before reading the selected passage.

Selected Passage

Part I: Marlow at the Outer Station

Read the continuous passage beginning:

"I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope..."

Continue through:

1. the apparently pointless blasting of the cliff;
2. the chained African prisoners;
3. Marlow's entrance into the shaded grove;
4. his encounter with the exhausted and dying African workers;
5. his attempt to give a biscuit to one of them;
6. his departure from the grove;
7. his first meeting with the Company's chief accountant.

End after the description of the accountant and his discussion of Kurtz, at:

"...a very remarkable person."

Depending on the edition, this selection is approximately **8–10 pages**. Students using the Project Gutenberg edition should locate it in **Part I**.

Why This Passage?

The passage presents colonialism not as an efficient civilizing project but as a world of:

- meaningless destruction;
- bureaucratic indifference;
- forced labour;
- physical suffering;
- economic exploitation;
- racial dehumanization;
- disturbing contrasts between appearance and reality.

It also introduces Kurtz before he physically appears. Kurtz first enters Marlow's story as a **name, reputation and idea**, rather than as a fully known person.

Reading Instructions

Read the selected passage at least twice.

First reading

Concentrate on what happens.

Mark:

- the places through which Marlow moves;
- the people he encounters;
- the order in which he encounters them;
- references to work, trade, efficiency and civilization.

Second reading

Annotate the passage using these symbols:

- **I** — striking imagery;
- **S** — possible symbol;
- **IR** — irony;
- **C** — contrast;
- **N** — significant narrative comment;
- **Q** — language or representation you find questionable.

Bring the annotated passage to class.