

Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness

pages 8 and 9

Before you Read Nautical vocabulary

1 There are references to different types of ocean or river-going vessels throughout Heart of Darkness. Match these nouns to their dictionary definitions.

1	trireme C	a	a boat with two masts, often used for racing today. Its name derives from the Dutch word <i>jol</i> .
2	yacht F	c	a large flat-bottomed boat. Mainly used on rivers and canals to transport goods.
4	barge B	e	a type of warship used by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Phoenicians.
6	yawl A	g	a craft which is driven by steam power.
8	man-of-war G	i	a canoe made from the hollowed-out trunk of a tree.
10	steamer/steamboat D	k	mainly used for recreation and racing today, these craft were originally built for speed.
12	dug-out E	m	An old Royal Navy term for a heavily-armed warship.

2a Jobs in Sailing. Write definitions for these jobs related to sailing at the time Conrad was writing. Check them in your monolingual dictionary.

- 1 sailmaker - a person who makes sails
- 2 helmsman - someone who steers a boat
- 3 lookout - someone who watches out for any danger to the boat
- 4 woodcutter - someone who cuts wood to burn or feed the boiler
- 5 pilot - an expert who steers a boat
- 6 skipper - the captain of a boat
- 7 boilerman - someone who keeps the fire burning on a steamboat

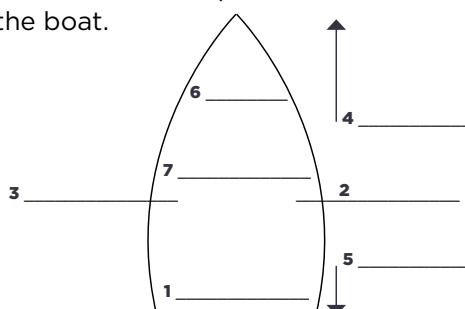
2b Consider/Discuss these points.

Which of these jobs would have been the most difficult in the late nineteenth century?

Which of these jobs would have been the most dangerous in the late nineteenth century?

3 Basic Boating Vocabulary. Read the descriptions of the following nautical terms and use them to label the positions on the boat.

- a bow 6
- b stern 1
- c port 3
- d starboard 2
- e amidships 7
- f forward 4
- g aft 5



- 4** Some other words used by Conrad. Fill the blanks in the sentences taken from the text, using words from the box. You will need a monolingual dictionary.

seaward	snags	yarns	tide	sea-reach	mizzen mast
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- 1 "The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us."
- 2 "The only thing for it was to come and to wait for the turn of the tide."
- 3 "He stood in the bows looking to seaward."
- 4 "Marlow sat [...] leaning against the mizzen-mast."
- 5 "The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity."
- 6 "I had to watch the steering and circumvent those snags."

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Part One Looking Back

- 1** London and the Thames. Answer the questions about the River Thames.

- 1 What does the narrator mean when he describes the river as

Possible answers

"an interminable waterway" a never-ending stretch of river

"the venerable stream" long-used by man, respected

"the sleepless river" busy all day and all night

- 2** Compare the description of late nineteenth century London with Marlow's imaginings about London at the time of the Roman Empire. Make notes.

Late Victorian London	Roman London
Possible answers busy, bustling, a hub of international trade, crowded, etc.	Possible answers a dark place of Earth, marshes, uncivilized, cold, foggy, full of savages, savagery

- 3** Why do you think Conrad makes this comparison between modern and ancient London?
Possible answers

To contrast exploration of Africa with the Roman exploration of Britain. To compare two different attempts at colonization.

- 2** The Company Headquarters. Are these statements true or false? Correct the false ones.

- 1 The Company headquarters is in a European city. T

- 2 Two women are sitting gossiping at the door to the Company headquarters. F

They are knitting

- 3 The map is marked with different colours. T

- 4 The secretary is very unsympathetic to Marlow. F

The secretary is kind and evidently feels sorry for him.

- 5 The doctor is interested in Marlow's state of mind. T

- 6 The doctor tells Marlow it is important to be careful in the tropics. F

He tells Marlow it is important to be calm.

- 3** Arrival in the Congo. Answer the questions.

Possible answers - *also note text change*

- 1 How does Marlow describe the *African Coast*?

featureless, still in the making, a straight ruled line, sinister

- 2 How does Marlow feel when he sees the African chain-gang and the forced labourers?

outraged, appalled

- 3 What was remarkable about the chief accountant?

that his clothes were spotless, starched and elegant in such circumstances

- 4 What do we find out about Mr Kurtz in part one?

that he's a first-class agent, he sends a lot of ivory, he is ill, he is an exceptional man, he is a painter, a prodigy, he is transgressive

- 5 How long does it take Marlow to trek through the jungle to the Central Station?
fifteen days
- 6 What is the problem with Marlow's river steamer?
it has sunk
- 7 What is Marlow's attitude to the Company and the Company's agents?
he doesn't respect them, he thinks the whole venture is pointless and that the officials are petty place-seekers and ludicrous.

Looking Ahead

In Part Two, Marlow begins his steamer journey up the River Congo towards the Inner Station. He has orders to bring Kurtz back. How do you expect Conrad to describe the river? Make a list of words you think he might use.

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Part Two Looking Back

- 1 Choose the best answer – A, B, C or D.
 - 1 Marlow overhears the manager and his uncle
A *discussing Kurtz's behaviour and state of mind.*
B plotting to execute Kurtz for disloyalty to the Company.
C arguing about the best route to the Inner Station.
D chatting about life back in Europe.
 - 2 A message about the Eldorado Expedition said that
A Everyone had been killed in a fight.
B *All the donkeys had died.*
C Everyone had died from disease.
D They had been forced to turn back.
 - 3 Marlow describes the cannibals on the steamer as
A small, hardworking but grimy.
B slow, lazy but cheerful.
C tall, slim but ugly
D *fine, hungry but restrained*
 - 4 Marlow then describes the 'pilgrims' as
A *unwholesome and unappetising.*
B slow and lazy.
C fine and sleek.
D conscientious and hardworking.
 - 5 Inside the hut by the river the men find
A plenty of wood and a note.
B *a book on navigation.*
C some food and drink.
D nothing interesting.
 - 6 When the crew come under attack from the riverbank
A *the African helmsman is killed by a spear. – note text change*
B the 'pilgrims' refuse to fight.
C Marlow gives orders to fire at the men on the riverbank.
D the cannibals leave the ship.

- 7 When the steamer arrives at the Inner Station
 A Kurtz is waiting to meet them.
 B Kurtz has disappeared.
 C *the Russian trader is waiting to meet them.*
 D Marlow falls ill.

- 2** Conrad's description of nature on the journey upstream is very vivid. Match the combinations of adjectives he uses with their subject. [consegna]

the trees	fog x 2	air	water
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- 1 choking, warm, stifling FOG
 2 warm, thick, heavy, sluggish AIR
 3 massive, immense TREES
 4 treacherous, shallow WATER
 5 white, warm, clammy FOG

- 3** Marlow's State of Mind. Answer the questions. [consegna]

Possible answers

- 1 Why is Marlow is disappointed when he thinks Kurtz may already be dead?
 because he won't have the chance to talk to him
- 2 Why do you think Marlow responds to the death of the African helmsman by throwing his own new shoes overboard?
 for example, he is disgusted, he is angry.
- 3 What made Marlow throw the body of the helmsman into the river?
 the bond that had formed between them, he didn't want the cannibals to eat him, Marlow was anxious to move on

Looking Ahead

In Part Three, Marlow meets Kurtz and they start their journey downstream. Consider the following points.

- 1 Do you think Marlow will continue to be fascinated by Kurtz?
 2 Kurtz says "The horror! The horror!" What do you think he is referring to?
 3 Marlow says "And then they very nearly buried me". Why?

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Part Three Looking Back [titolo]

- 1** Answer the questions about Part Three of *Heart of Darkness*. [consegna]

Possible answers

- 1 Why does the Russian trader want Marlow to take Kurtz back quickly?
 Kurtz is ill. The trader is afraid for him.
- 2 Who is the beautiful African woman on the shore?
 A leader. She clearly has a relationship with Kurtz.
- 3 How does Marlow alienate himself from the Company manager?
 By siding with Kurtz against the manager.
- 4 Why does the Russian trader leave the Inner Station quickly?
 Marlow tells him the manager thinks he should be hanged.
- 5 Where does Kurtz go in the middle of the night?
 Into the forest/jungle.
- 6 What does Marlow discover on the fence posts around Marlow's house?
 Shrunken heads.
- 7 Is the journey downstream initially faster or slower than the journey upstream?
 Faster.
- 8 When the steamer breaks down, why does Kurtz become depressed?
 He knows he is going to die there.
- 9 Before his death, what does Kurtz entrust to Marlow?
 Papers and a photograph.

- 10 Who says the words “Mistah Kurtz - he dead”?
The African boy (the manager’s servant).
- 11 Who nurses Marlow back to health?
His aunt.
- 12 What words has Marlow removed from the pamphlet he gives to the Company representative?
“Exterminate all the brutes.”
- 13 What does the man calling himself Kurtz’s cousin say about Kurtz?
He was a great musician.
- 14 What lie does Marlow tell Kurtz’s ‘Intended’?
That Kurtz’s last words were her name.

2 In Part Three, many people give their impression of Kurtz. Match the comments about Kurtz to the character making them. [consegna]

1	“He drew men towards him by what was best in them. It is the gift of the great .. I loved him.” C	a	Marlow
2	“Nevertheless, I think Mr Kurtz is a remarkable man.” A	c	The Belgian official
4	“Mr Kurtz’s knowledge of unexplored regions must have been necessarily extensive and peculiar - owing to his great abilities ...” B	e	Kurtz’s Intended
6	“How that man could talk! He electrified large meetings ... He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.” E	g	The Russian Trader
8	“He is very low, very low. We have done all we could for him - haven’t we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company.” F	i	The journalist
10	“We talked of everything. I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Everything! Everything! Of love too.” D	k	The manager

3 Write a short paragraph to explain your interpretation of the phrase “a choice of nightmares” applied to *Heart of Darkness*.

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Heart of Darkness Looking Back

1 Essay Topics. Choose an essay topic and develop your answer. Support your answer with examples from the text.

Various answers are possible - some key words are suggested below

- 1 One major theme in the book is imperialism. How is European imperialism portrayed in *Heart of Darkness*? brutal, pointless, petty, grasping
- 2 How does Conrad use colour symbolically in *Heart of Darkness*? black, white, red, colours on maps
- 3 What do we learn about Marlow’s attitude to Africans in *Heart of Darkness*? very little, he expresses opinions about the helmsman, the African woman and the cannibals.
- 4 Who is/are the hero/heroes of the book? Marlow and Kurtz - hero and antihero

2 Interpretations of Heart of Darkness. Read about these different interpretations of Conrad's work. Add your own comments in the spaces below.

a In 1975, Chinua Achebe delivered a lecture entitled *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. He gave the opinion that the book is essentially racist because it dehumanises Africa and Africans, reducing them to "the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind". What examples can you find of dehumanisation of Africa and Africans in the text? Do you agree with Achebe's statement?

b Some critics have drawn attention to the negative portrayal of women in Heart of Darkness. How do you read Conrad's description of [consegna]

- Marlow's aunt?
- The African woman at the Inner Station?
- Kurtz's Intended?

3 Characters. Choose one of these characters for a study. [consegna]

- The aunt
- The chief accountant
- The Russian trader
- The helmsman

Think about what we learn about the character in terms of appearance, opinions & attitudes and importance to the central characters. Write your study below.

4 What's your view? Did you enjoy Heart of Darkness? Why/Why not?

Further Reading

Criticism

Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *the Massachusetts Review*, (Winter 1975)

Robert Burden, *Heart of Darkness* (Macmillan, 1991)

Peter Hyland, 'The Little Woman in the *Heart of Darkness*', *Conradiana*, 20.1 (1988)

websites of The Joseph Conrad Society (UK) and The Joseph Conrad Society of America
Historical Background

Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991)