

# Heart of darkness novel on seaman's life charlie marlow

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Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* is about a seaman named Charlie Marlow and an experience he had as a younger man. Early in the novel it becomes apparent that there is a great deal of tension in Marlow's mind about whether he should profit from the immoral actions of the company he works for which is involved in the ivory trade in Africa. Marlow believes that the company is ignorant of the tension between moral enlightenment and capitalism. The dehumanization of its laborers which is so early apparent to Marlow seems to be unknown to other members of the Company's management.

In this story Marlow's aunt represents capitalism. Her efforts to get him a job are significant because of the morally compromising nature of the work of which she seems totally ignorant. When Marlow expresses doubts about the nature of the work, she replies, " You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire" (12). It is clear that Marlow has mixed feelings about the whole idea. At one point, trying to justify his actions to himself, he says, " You understand it was a continental concern, that Trading Society; but I have a lot of relations on the living continent, because it's cheap and not so nasty as it looks they say" (12). Marlow finally takes the job, however, and tells himself that the pain and unusually harsh treatment the workers are subjected to is minimal.

During the tests and the requirements that he has to undergo before entering the jungle Marlow feels that he is being treated like a freak. The doctor measures his head and asks him questions such as, " Ever any madness in your family?" (15). In this part of the story Marlow is made to feel

small and unimportant. Any feelings or concerns that he has are not important to the company, and as a result, he feels alone. It is only logical that Marlow would have been second guessing his decision and feeling some kinship with the other (black) workers who are exploited, but he does not reveal any such understanding.

Upon reaching his destination in Africa, Marlow finds that things are just the same. At the point when he is denied rest after traveling twenty miles on foot he sees things are not going to change. Marlow then tells of how disease and death are running wild through out the area, and the company does nothing in the way of prevention other than to promote those who stay alive. Marlow's theory on why the manager was in that position was that "... he was never ill" (25). This is a bad situation for Marlow because he sees his boss as a simple man with little else to offer the company other than to be a mindless foreman over the operation. This is an example of the company stripping self worth from its workers in the sense that it does not encourage or expect input from them. This is all significant because Marlow finds himself in a position where he is giving up a big piece of himself and his beliefs to makemoney.

The tension between capitalism and moral enlightenment in the first twenty pages of this story is evident. Conrad uses Marlow to depict a seemingly good-hearted person caught in the middle of the common dilemma of moral ethics and desire for monetary success. Marlow knows that there is a great deal of repugnance in what he is doing, yet he finds himself forced to deal with it in his own personal way, which is justify it or ignore it. It is clear that

the company also is forced to deal with this same issue, but it does it simply by pretending that it is not dehumanizing its entire work force. This blindness allows the Company to profit and prosper, but only at the expense of the lives of the workers in the jungle who have no way to protest or escape and the "white collar" workers like Marlow who have to live with their hypocrisy.