



# Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction

*Joseph Conrad , A. Michael Matin (Introduction)*

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One of the most haunting stories ever written, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* follows Marlow, a riverboat captain, on a voyage into the African Congo at the height of European colonialism. Astounded by the brutal depravity he witnesses, Marlow becomes obsessed with meeting Kurtz, a famously idealistic and able man stationed farther along the river. What he finally discovers, however, is a horror beyond imagining. *Heart of Darkness* is widely regarded as a masterpiece for its vivid study of human nature and the greed and ruthlessness of imperialism.

This collection also includes three of Conrad's finest short stories: "Youth," the author's largely autobiographical tale of a young man's ill-fated sea voyage, in which Marlow makes his first appearance, "The Secret Sharer," and "Amy Forster."

Features a map of the Congo Free State.

A. Michael Matin is a professor in the English Department of Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. He has published articles on various twentieth-century British and postcolonial writers.

### Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction Details

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## From Reader Review Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction for online ebook

### MichelleG says

I don't believe much can be said about this book that hasn't already been said, many times over. But let me say, my thoughts on this book is that although it really is very well written and deemed one of the all time classics and listed in so many of the "must be read" lists that it simply begs that this book absolutely must be read - at least once in a persons life.

With that being said, I am glad I am now finally able to tick it off the list, but for the actual book itself well obviously it is sadly dated and the content is a look into past that fills me with such loathing and disgust that I rejoiced when I finally finished this book - even though it is a small book, it certainly packs a punch, and not in a good way!

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### Mark Lawrence says

I read this a long time ago, and then again this weekend, and realised that I remembered maybe 5% of it. It's perhaps not that surprising because the existential meandering dominates the actual events, and many of the those events involve lying around being too hot, too sweaty, and too sick, just waiting. That's unfair - events do unfold, characters are met, unpleasantness witnessed, at at the creshendo, blood is spilled. The pace, however, is slow. Nineteenth century slow. Dickens sprints by comparison. Each moment of emotion and contemplation is picked apart, over-written, beaten into submission with \$100 words.

Two things save this from being discarded within pages and perhaps (along with academia's love affair and inclusion on ten thousand secondary school English curricula) explain its longevity. Firstly, if you forgive the overblown language that is perhaps a sign of his times more than anything, Conrad has a rare eye for characterisation and description. He 'sees' and manages to share, delivering, when he chooses to, whole people with a handful of lines. Secondly, the heart of the heart... of darkness is a mystery that obsesses the narrator and starts to compell the reader. Like our narrator steaming his way upriver into the unknown, we want to meet Kurtz, to find out what it is about this man that's so extraordinary.

In the end, like anything that is built up and built up again, Kurtz is a let down, but somehow Conrad saves it with the man's last words. Another mystery left for the reader and one that's kept people reading the work for a hundred years.

3.5 stars from me - I can appreciate its worth, but I wasn't enraptured.

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### Kevin says

Finally read it and now I finally get Apocalypse Now, really I should have read this years ago but it just

seems like the world is steaming up this river now.

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### **Rogelio Briseno says**

A very confusing and boring book. The whole book was mainly about Marlowe travelling to the Congo and finding out about Kurtz and then him trying to meet him. The book felt very slow at most times throughout the book. The book tackles the morals of imperialism and if it is right or wrong. The main character seems to be against imperialism yet he traveled with an imperialistic company so he can go to the Congo. A very dull book overall.

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### **Karl says**

I wanted to read this book mainly due to Conrad's influence on Lucius Sheppard's work. So far I have gone through almost fifty pages of introduction material. That's almost as long as the whole work itself.

The extensive imagery and use of language is amazing. It's hard to imagine in these times of Political Correctness just how harsh these colonial British times were in relation to the population they were "ruling".

This is certainly an intense and thought provoking book. I am amazed I had not read it up to this point in my life. This is certainly not light and escapist reading. What is also amazing is that this is Conrad's third language. He has completely mastered its use and imagery.

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### **Chelsey says**

I did not necessarily dislike this book, but - my gosh! - the language is so difficult! I now wish I had read it in a classroom, because one small book club discussion was not enough!

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### **Matt says**

This is a review for Heart of Darkness. Read 5/3/17 - 5/11/17

3/5 stars for Heart of Darkness. I'm not sure I fully understand it but I think what Conrad was getting at is the evil consequences of colonialism in Africa, and to illustrate every man's search for the "meaning of life". Marlow's journey into the dark jungles of The Congo was gripping. His journey is one of self discovery and I think another point to this story was that Kurtz had found the "meaning of life", and Marlow only got to see a glimpse of it before Kurtz died. Was Kurtz able to pass his worldly knowledge on to anyone?

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### **Aram Mohammed says**

It is amazing novel. Really it is about the nature of human! We should guide ourselves to the best and correct path of live.

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## Zachariah says

Heart of Darkness is an astounding feat of literature, displaying an uncanny command of the written English language, and written by a man who learned English as his third fluent language while in his late teens. I will not spoil the story here, but Heart of Darkness is a strange and grim, yet fascinating, look into the horror that was the Belgian Congo and the horror of human enterprise. The language may at times seem difficult for after-all, it is the common British-English of 1899.

As greatly as I enjoyed Heart of Darkness, I was even more elated with the other selected stories; Youth!, Amy Foster, and The Secret Sharer. All of these tales, including Heart of Darkness, are nautically informed and drawn from Conrad's experience as a sailor. Most unfamiliar nautical terms are explained in the end-notes and those that aren't will not diminish the story.

Youth! is an enticing story about a young man on somewhat of a micro-Odyssey. He is charged with the task of serving on a vessel upon its last sea-legs, a vessel which must make the long journey from Britain to Bangkok. It is a story of a man views the world, his experiences, through the lens of youth.

Amy Foster, is a tragic tale of a shipwrecked man, a stranger in a strange land if you will, who finds himself alive but downtrodden and utterly perplexed with the unfamiliarity of his new 'home'. Ultimately, the novella is a tale of a broken heart, a broken body, and a man and his wife.

The Secret Sharer, the final and perhaps my favorite of Conrad's stories, centers around two men, a fugitive and a captain who are parallel to each-other yet strangers on the captain's own ship. Strangers to the crew and to the ship itself, that is. The captain struggles to bring some sort of salvation to his unlikely companion. I found this story to be quite the page turner and was quite satisfied with its language, length, and intrigue.

Overall, I highly recommend Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction to a wide variety of readers, especially; to those who enjoy short stories of adventure, insight into the human mind, literature of the period(ca. 1900), and of course, to those who are intrigued by nautical tales.

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## Zebardast Zebardast says

Joseph Conrad was born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski on December 3, 1857, in Berdichev (now Berdychiv), Ukraine. His parents, Apollo and Evelina (nee Bobrowska) Korzeniowski, were members of the Polish noble class. They were also Polish patriots who conspired against oppressive Russian rule; as a consequence, they were arrested and sent to live in the Russian province of Vologda with their 4-year-old son. When Conrad's parents died several years later, he was raised by an uncle in Poland.

Conrad's education was erratic: He was first tutored by his literary father, then attended school in Krakow and received further private schooling. At the age of 16, Conrad left Poland and traveled to the port city of Marseilles, France, where he began his years as a mariner.

After his sea-faring years, Conrad began to put down roots on land. In 1896 he married Jessie Emmeline George, daughter of a bookseller; they had two sons. He also had friendships with prominent writers such as John Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford and H.G. Wells.

Conrad began his own literary career in 1895 with the publication of his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, an adventure tale set in the Borneo jungles. Before the turn of the century he wrote two of his most famous and enduring novels. *Lord Jim* (1900) is the story of an outcast young sailor who comes to terms with his past acts of cowardice and eventually becomes the leader of a small South Seas country. *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is a novella describing a British man's journey deep into the Congo of Africa, where he encounters the cruel and mysterious Kurtz, a European trader who has established himself as a ruler of the native people there.

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### **Sarah says**

This book sucked me in one end and spat me out the other and I'm still not entirely sure what happened. It was incredibly absorbing because it took place exclusively inside the narrator's head. This felt something like a whirlpool of thoughts. This was fascinating and I really want to reread it so I can understand more of it.

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### **Daniel says**

Predivna kolekcija. Ako nekom treba najbolji na?in da upozna Jozefa Konrada ove tri pi?e su odli?an uvod. Ili neka pogleda *Apocalypse Now*, i to funkcioniše :) Tolko emocija, ljudskosti i uopšte poznavanje ljudske psihe i to tako verno preneti na papir ... pa prosto ne umem d objasnim kako to neki ljudi mogu.

Naravno pi?e kao pi?e su relativno obi?ne ali dubina pisanja i pažnja koja mora da se posveti ?itanju su daleko ve?a nego ve?ina knjiga koje sam ?itao u poslednje vreme tako da to što nema 1000 strana uopšte ne umanjuje obimnost ovoga dela.... u suštini tolko me je oduševilo da više buncam nego što šišem tako da PRO?ITAJTE knjigu.

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### **Rowland Pasaribu says**

A group of men are aboard an English ship that is sitting on the Thames. The group includes a Lawyer, an Accountant, a Company Director/Captain, and a man without a specific profession who is named Marlow. The narrator appears to be another unnamed guest on the ship. While they are loitering about, waiting for the wind to pick up so that they might resume their voyage, Marlow begins to speak about London and Europe as some of the darkest places on earth. The narrator and other guests do not seem to regard him with much respect. Marlow is a stationary man, very unusual for a seaman. The others do not understand him because he does not fit into a neat category in the same manner that the others do. He mentions colonization and says that carving the earth into prizes or pieces is not something to examine too closely because it is an atrocity. He then begins to narrate a personal experience in Africa, which led him to become a freshwater sailor and gave him a terrible glimpse of colonization. With the exception of two or three small paragraphs, the perspective shifts to Marlow, who becomes the main narrator for the rest of the novel.

A novella, *Heart of Darkness* is Joseph Conrad's most famous work and a foundational text on the subject of colonialism. *Heart of Darkness* is based in part on a trip that Conrad took through modern-day Congo during his years as a sailor. He captained a ship that sailed down the Congo River. Conrad gave up this mission because an illness forced him to return to England, where he worked on his novella almost a decade later. Conrad's works, *Heart of Darkness* in particular, provide a bridge between Victorian values and the ideals of modernism. Like their Victorian predecessors, these novels rely on traditional ideas of heroism, which are

nevertheless under constant attack in a changing world and in places far from England. Women occupy traditional roles as arbiters of domesticity and morality, yet they are almost never present in the narrative; instead, the concepts of “home” and “civilization” exist merely as hypocritical ideals, meaningless to men for whom survival is in constant doubt. While the threats that Conrad’s characters face are concrete ones—illness, violence, conspiracy—they nevertheless acquire a philosophical character. Like much of the best modernist literature produced in the early decades of the twentieth century, *Heart of Darkness* is as much about alienation, confusion, and profound doubt as it is about imperialism.

The presence of ill characters in the novella illustrates the fact that *Heart of Darkness* is, at least in part, autobiographical. Many speculations have been made about the identity of various characters, such as the Manager, or Kurtz, most recently and perhaps most accurately in Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost*. But the geographical, as well as biographical, vagueness of the novel—which is one of its most artistic, haunting characteristics—make it almost impossible to pin down these details for sure.

*Heart of Darkness* first appeared in a three-part series in *Blackwood Magazine* in 1899. It was published as a complete novella in 1904. It has since been referred to by many authors and poets. Its most famous lines are both from Kurtz: “exterminate the brutes,” and Kurtz’s deathbed utterance, “the horror! The horror!”

Francis Ford Coppola directed the film version, *Apocalypse Now*, in which the action occurs in Vietnam in 1979.

This novella is unusual in that the author does not name most of the characters in his book, other than assigning them titles that describe their larger organizational goals. It is not quite an allegory, while he does allow them some individual characteristics of speech and dress, but they are for the most part stand-ins for larger groups. The obvious exception is Marlow, and his reaction against the colonial structures supported by people with names like “the Manager” and “the Lawyer” place him slightly outside this system. Groupthink is evident in named groups like the pilgrims and the natives. These groups have a few outstanding members, such as the native woman of arresting beauty or the red-haired pilgrim drunk with bloodthirstiness, but they mostly move together, make the same decisions, and have the same intentions. Conrad critiques such patterns, in which individual in a society think like other members of their group without stopping to think for themselves. Although Marlow is by no means a heroic character, Conrad does illustrate the need for individual thought by singling him out.

Although there is controversy over whether Conrad is critiquing colonialism or not, it is clear that he is critiquing religion. The two groups in the novel, the pilgrims and the natives, are linked by having religious beliefs, and the pilgrims seem at least as bloodthirsty as the natives. The rite in the woods that Marlow describes seems alien but certainly no more dangerous than the ambush. One of the seemingly admirable characteristics of Kurtz, as presented by Conrad, is that he seems just as compelled by African religion as by Christianity but seems beholden to neither. Marlow genuinely admires his ability to independently critique religions. He may not agree with Kurtz’s evaluation, but he respects Kurtz’s ability to have his own opinions in the face of the various religious traditions he encounters.

A logical way to begin analyzing the tale is by applying the title to the novel. “Darkness” is a problematic word with several meanings. It is initially mentioned in the context of maps, where places of darkness have been colored in once they have been explored and settled by colonists. The map is an important symbol. It is a guide, a record of exploration. The incomplete map has a dual purpose in that maps unlock mysteries, on the one hand, by laying out the geography of unknown lands for new visitors, and on the other hand, by creating new mystery and inspiring new curiosity about the lands listed as unknown, in addition to new questions about what is only partly known. The river is another important symbol, perhaps our first symbol of the “heart,” which is itself a symbol of the human spirit. Always moving, not very predictable, the gateway to a wider world, it is an excellent metaphor for Marlow’s trajectory. Marlow says that as a child he had a “passion” for maps, for the “glories of exploration.” Although this description seems positive, it also

sounds ominous. Marlow's tone is of one who recalls childhood notions with bitterness and regret.

The cause of this regret is evident in the first description of Marlow. His sallow skin and sunken cheeks do not portray him as healthy or happy. He has had the chance to explore, but apparently the experience has ruined him. This is Conrad's way of arranging the overall structure of the novella. The audience understands that this is to be a recollection, a tale that will account for Marlow's presently shaky, impenetrable state. The author is also presupposing knowledge of colonialism. The bitterness of Marlow's recollection suggests Conrad's strong bias against colonialism, which he seems to be imparting to the reader by expressing Marlow's difficulties.

The imagery of light and dark clearly corresponds to the tension already evident between civilization and savagery. The Thames River is called a "gateway to civilization" because it leads to and from the civilized city of London. It is important to note that the city is always described in stark contrast with its dark surroundings, which are so amorphous as to be either water or land.

The vivid language of maps becomes more interesting when we consider that the word "darkness" retains its traditional meaning of evil and dread. The fact that Marlow applies the concept of darkness to conquered territories may indicate Conrad's negative view of colonialism. We read clearly that colonists are only exploiting the weakness of others. Their spreading over the world is no nobler than violence and thievery. On the map, places that are blank and devoid of outside interference are apparently the most desirable for certain people.

Darkness has another meaning that retains deep resonance—a color of skin. Much of this chapter describes Marlow's first encounters with and observations of the natives of the African Congo. The darkness of their skin is always mentioned. At first glance, Marlow describes them as "mostly black and naked, moving about like ants." While in the shade, "dark things" seem to stir feebly. There is absolutely no differentiation between dark animals and dark people. Even the rags worn by the native people are described as tails. "Black shapes" crouch on the ground, and "creatures" walk on all fours to get a drink from the river. They are called shadows: reflections of humans, not substantial enough to be real. Marlow observes the piece of white string on a young man, and he is taken aback by how much the whiteness stands out against the darkness, thinking about the string's probable European origin. He cannot seem to conceive of mixing black and white. Conrad portrays Marlow's experience of otherness to such an extreme, and with such literary care, that it is hard to see Conrad simply expressing his own experience through Marlow, although Conrad likely was well aware of his own and others' impressions of such places and did have a choice in how to present them. Writing through Marlow's experience is a choice that leads us to look through Marlow's eyes at the darkness he sees.

It is not accidental that Marlow is the only person on the Thames boat who is named. He is a complex character while, even in England, the others are presented not so much as individuals as with titles that name their occupations. Marlow is distinct from them as well; he belongs to no category. He is a man "who does not represent his class" because he crosses boundaries. His reaction to the African natives may not be sensitive by modern standards, but he is more engaged than the other officers at the stations. The Chief Accountant dismisses the cries of a dying black man as merely irritating. Marlow's gesture of offering a biscuit to the young boy with the white string appears to be somewhat considerate. But it also seems condescending, which seems to be more of a character trait than a racist tendency. Marlow can think of nothing else to do as he looks into the boy's vacant eyes. Marlow means well, and despite his individual character he is partly a product of his society.

Immediately following the encounter with the young boy, he meets the Chief Accountant, who is perfectly attired with collar, cuffs, jacket, and all the rest. He refers to him as "amazing" and a "miracle." We observe at this moment the distinctions between savagery and civilization as perceived by Marlow. The diction demonstrates a type of hero worship for this man. His starched collars and cuffs are achievements of character, and Marlow respects him on this basis. It is far too early for readers to think we understand what Marlow is all about.

Beyond Marlow's distinction of savagery and civilization, we have a window into Conrad's distinction when we consider his presentation of colonialism through Marlow and the colonists. The bitter irony here is that those who look the most civilized are actually the most savage. Indeed, the institution of colonialism is referred to as a "flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil." Everything it touches turns sour: the station is an administrative nightmare, and decaying machinery lies everywhere. Marlow takes this situation, however, as indicative of a poor work ethic, which he despises. For this reason he is drawn to the blustering accountant, who is a hard worker if nothing else. Marlow, in his own bumbling way, does occasionally try to relate to the natives.

The sense of time throughout the chapter is highly controlled. Conrad purposely glides over certain events while he examines others in minute detail. He does this in order to build suspicion about the place to which Marlow has committed himself. Notice that he painstakingly describes precursor events such as the doctor's visit and all conversations that involve the unseen character Kurtz. Thus begins Marlow's consuming obsession with this man.

So far, Marlow's interest in Kurtz is more or less inactive and does not inspire fear. Perfectly placed leading questions such as the one about a history of family insanity have the desired effect, however, of alerting readers to a rather fishy situation. That Marlow ignores all of these warnings creates some dramatic irony; it will take him longer to arrive at conclusions that the reader has already reached.

It also is important to recognize that Marlow is telling a story. His recollections have a hazy, dreamy quality. The narrative is thus an examination of human spirit through his perspective, which is quite subjective. Thus, we should question how trustworthy the narrative speakers are. This situation puts even more distance between Conrad's perspective and the perspective taken by characters in the story. The outside narrator only refers to what Marlow says and does; all others are ignored, and we understand their perspective only through Marlow's account of what they say and do. Marlow selects the facts (even though Conrad ultimately selects them). Readers interested in this topic should consider in particular Marlow's perception of the African environment, which develops into the novella's larger themes.

So far as Kurtz is concerned, there has been incomplete communication. Marlow and the reader know him, but not much, yet. He seems sinister; people discuss him in a hushed manner, making sure to praise him. The fact that nobody has anything negative to say about him is suspicious, suggesting that they are all terribly anxious to stay on his good side. The portrait of the blind woman holding a torch, in the first agent's room, suggests the failing of Kurtz: perhaps he has blindly traveled into a situation and has become absorbed in it, much as the woman is absorbed into the darkness of the painting (despite the torch, she is painted in insufficient light). This preemptive warning is useful to keep in mind as we consider subsequent chapters.

Heart of Darkness explores the issues surrounding imperialism in complicated ways. As Marlow travels from the Outer Station to the Central Station and finally up the river to the Inner Station, he encounters scenes of torture, cruelty, and near-slavery. At the very least, the incidental scenery of the book offers a harsh picture of colonial enterprise. The impetus behind Marlow's adventures, too, has to do with the hypocrisy inherent in the rhetoric used to justify imperialism. The men who work for the Company describe what they do as "trade," and their treatment of native Africans is part of a benevolent project of "civilization." Kurtz, on the other hand, is open about the fact that he does not trade but rather takes ivory by force, and he describes his own treatment of the natives with the words "suppression" and "extermination": he does not hide the fact that he rules through violence and intimidation. His perverse honesty leads to his downfall, as his success threatens to expose the evil practices behind European activity in Africa.

However, for Marlow as much as for Kurtz or for the Company, Africans in this book are mostly objects: Marlow refers to his helmsman as a piece of machinery, and Kurtz's African mistress is at best a piece of statuary. It can be argued that Heart of Darkness participates in an oppression of nonwhites that is much more sinister and much harder to remedy than the open abuses of Kurtz or the Company's men. Africans become

for Marlow a mere backdrop, a human screen against which he can play out his philosophical and existential struggles. Their existence and their exoticism enable his self-contemplation. This kind of dehumanization is harder to identify than colonial violence or open racism. While *Heart of Darkness* offers a powerful condemnation of the hypocritical operations of imperialism, it also presents a set of issues surrounding race that is ultimately more troubling.

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## Chory says

### "Racism Couched in a Critique of Racism"

Certainly it was relevant in 1977 for a black African man with a “western” education to offer criticism of the dominant paradigm of the “western,” “white” status-quo; however, in his article “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” Chinua Achebe entirely misses the mark. His assertion is, essentially, that given the novel’s having not been written in the latter half of the twentieth century with the bleeding-heart sensibilities of a “white” man of that time, it is, therefore, inherently racist and seeks to hold up all of Africa as a “foil to Europe [...] in comparison with which Europe’s [...] spiritual grace will be manifest.” (337) Achebe’s evidence of this is tenuous at best, and often hinges on logical fallacy, blatant misrepresentation of Conrad’s text, or wild postulation and slander. To this end, I will (as I have done above) include my additions to the text (both his and Conrad’s), as well as omissions from it, in brackets—something Achebe has failed to do in order to further his effort to distort Conrad’s meaning and pervert an English language classic. I assert (and seek to prove) that, to quote himself, “my observations should be quite clear [...], namely that [Chinua Achebe:] was a thoroughgoing racist.” (343) Firstly, to deal with Achebe’s distortion and misrepresentation of the text: Achebe distorts Conrad’s prose through skillful lies of omission: “Herein lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and the fascination it holds over the Western mind: ‘What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours.... Ugly.’” (339) What Achebe omits is Conrad’s insistence of kinship and similarity: the real quote reads “[...]humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit [...] a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you [...] could comprehend.” [my emphasis:] (339) Conrad’s insistence is not on Africans as Achebe’s “just limbs or rolling eyes,” (340) but as human beings, who—though their customs, beliefs, societies, and even their skin may not look like our (European) own—are more like us than we (European denizens of the 19th century) would like to perhaps admit. Achebe’s willful ignorance to these facts, his deliberate misrepresentation of the text, and his refusal to accept historical perspective speak not to Conrad’s racism, or even the insidious racism of Victorian Europe, but to Achebe’s own racist-ly preconceived notion that all “white,” “western” men are inherently racist and anti-Africa. Achebe seems unaware that a work (or a quote) exists within a context, and that outside of that context it has little meaning. Out-of-context quotation is a hallmark of his efforts here. Twice in the article he employs secondary sources, one of which is actually a third-hand quote of Conrad stripped of all relevance in order to serve Achebe’s racist purpose: “His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing: ‘A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterward.’ Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest [...].” (344-5) Firstly to deal with the word “nigger:” The word was the accepted English language descriptor for people of black African descent no matter where they existed in the world (from the dark heart of Africa to the white halls of London) at the time in which Conrad lived. To take issue with Conrad’s use of nigger in his own time is an idiotic argument; the same could be done with Achebe’s libelous uses of “western” and “white” as indictments of racist guilt in all people who could be so described. One must look with unclouded eyes, instead, at the essential language of the sentence, this “blind, furious, unreasoning rage” is not a characteristic of blacks or Haitians, or any other subset of humanity, but (in Conrad’s grammatical construction) of “the human animal,” a universal observation. That this man in Haiti was a

“nigger” is wholly irrelevant, he could as easily have been an enraged Scotsman...the observation (and its universal nature in Conrad’s experience of it) remains true. Secondly, to deal with Achebe’s quotation of Bernard C. Meyer: he quotes Meyer as saying that Conrad was ““notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history,”” (346) Achebe seems here to have missed the fact that *Heart of Darkness* is a work of novelistic fiction, and not a part of Conrad’s memoirs. Conrad is not (!) Marlow (though Marlow’s travels may have been informed by Conrad’s own—one is inclined, as they say, to “write what you know”) and therefore the moral decisions which Marlow makes (or the allegedly immoral suppositions he has) are not Conrad’s, but his own; just as Steven King’s writing of serial-killers does not make him the very same. Further, Meyer’s quote, again, lacks any form of contextual reference back to either Conrad or Marlow, and is, therefore, presented in the form of logical fallacy: *post hoc ergo propter hoc*—Conrad has been wrong in the past, so he must always be wrong.

When Achebe rants, “as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms!” in response to Conrad’s repetitive descriptive use of the term black in the sentence “A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving black arms,” (345) he undermines the use of descriptive language and seems to miss a central tenant of descriptive writing (although he uses the words “white” and “western” many dozens of times in his article to the same end, forcing their belaboured repetition herein). Albeit, Conrad is beating us over the head with blackness, but that assertion is not inherently racist; it is merely observational, Marlow recognizing the difference (the otherness) of the people of the Congo. To deny them their blackness (to engage in the bleeding-heart “I don’t see colour” assertion) is far more racist in its denial of race—and accompanying racial experience—than any simple acknowledgment of race could ever be. However, it would seem that Achebe prefers the appearance of racial integration to any real discussion of it. One cannot dialogue about racial issues while denying the existence of race! The thought is absolutely absurd and belittles the experience of “others” in their “otherness.”

Achebe makes two direct comparisons of Conrad to historical figures. One is to Marco Polo, the other Adolf Hitler in a section redacted eleven years after his initial release of the critique (or, rather, artists who worked in Nazi occupied Germany during the war; Achebe’s misunderstanding—or intentional misrepresentation of [see below:]—historic fact makes the distinction irrelevant). In comparing Conrad to Marco Polo, Achebe uses the term xenophobia, almost libelously. He asserts that Marco Polo was xenophobic for not recognizing the Chinese accomplishments of the printing-press and the architectural wonder of the Chinese Great Wall in his writings on his travels. Oddly—and uncharacteristically—Achebe includes a concession to reality here (perhaps because he is not out to directly attack Marco Polo) in admitting the possibility that the voyager may never have encountered either technological wonder in his time in China. The assertion that the Great Wall “is visible from the moon!” (347) verges on insanity; who ever thought Marco Polo traveled to the moon? Is Achebe insinuating that because Polo failed to do so he is inherently xenophobic and racist? The inclusion of this information verges on a straw-man logical fallacy, except that Achebe does not seem to be hinting at anything beyond it. Instead, he maintains that both Polo and Conrad are “unloaded [ing:] physical and moral deformities [onto Africa/China:] so that [they:] may go forward, erect and immaculate.” (348) How two individual men representing a society as diverse as the nations of Europe could do this is entirely beyond my comprehension.

In equating Conrad with “All those men of Nazi Germany who lent their talent to virulent racism,” and asserting that “poetry surely can only be on the side of man’s deliverance [...] and against the doctrines of Hitler’s master races or Conrad’s ‘rudimentary souls,’” (footnote, 344) Achebe misses the reality that there were no mechanisms within the Nazi machine to create any form of art. Instead, artists had to appeal to a censorship board with whatever they created. Achebe here attempts to remove any form of personal responsibility for one’s creation, and instead assert that merely being white (or Germanic) makes one a racist (or anti-Semitic). Achebe’s implication that all Germanic people during the war period were Nazis is in itself a racist assertion which undermines his point (but illustrates mine brilliantly!). He also asserts himself as the ultimate moral judge of the validity of all art, insisting that the artist who creates art which he (Achebe) does not like “is no more a great artist than another may be called a priest who reads the mass backwards.” (footnote, 344) Achebe’s essential assertion, the linch-pin upon which the weight of his entire argument hangs, is that Conrad’s European-ness leaves in him a “residue of antipathy to black people.” (344) Chinua Achebe’s critique of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is as far off the mark as would be an assertion by

this author that the novella is hetero-sexist and homophobic because it does not include a gay character, and fails to imply homo-eroticism in the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz (or Kurtz and the Russian, or Marlow and his shipmates—all apt opportunities). Simply turning Achebe's argument on its head (there remains in Achebe's attitude a residue of antipathy toward white people) illustrates the absurdity of it. His logical errors, denial of historical context (and therefore appropriate behaviour in a character), insistence of his own moral superiority, and placement of himself as ultimate judge of artistic value, work to wholly undermine his argument and, except in the eyes of the most racist individual (or most bleeding-heart, white-guilt, squish-brained "liberal"), place his critique soundly in the moral rubbish-bin along with the ravings of The Reverend Wright and Jerry Falwell.

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## Eric says

**I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude --and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core...**

*Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, is a book that I've been meaning to get to for some time. The theme and underlying story has influenced many other pieces of fiction so returning to the source has intrigued me. Man versus himself, combating his own inner depravity, is an especial interest of mine, and this book is purported to be one of the pivotal pieces of fiction on the topic.

This is an important book, no doubt, not because of the story it tells, but that it has powerful themes, and interesting metaphorical undertones. Our protagonist, Marlow, finds himself recalling the story of a trip he took up an African river to locate and assist a Mr. Kurtz, a man responsible for the largest ivory output for the area's trading company, because he was reported to be ill. Marlow covers the events that lead up to his appointment of his boat, the preparations necessary, the crew he takes with him, and the events that he faces in the fertile, dark, and primitive, African jungle.

**We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil.**

I can't say that I enjoyed reading it, though it's growing on me. Not unlike the river we find ourselves traveling down in the story, I'd describe Conrad's writing as winding, choppy and ambiguous, and it was difficult to get through at times. Some scenes are very vivid, and nicely described while others are vague and practically abstract. Conrad does write the story from the perspective of the protagonist, Marlow, so it could just be his recollection of the events and methods of storytelling that he's using. Despite this, I find myself returning to the book, reading over passages, and pondering its themes and meanings. I certainly lean towards the allegorical and metaphorical in terms of my reading interests, and from that standpoint, it does not disappoint.

*Heart of Darkness* is reportedly the most scrutinized and studied book in literature. I don't know if that's true, though, if so, I can understand why; yet, there's part of me that understands that when we, the reader, is left to consider large ambiguities, we provide our own context and subtext, providing meaning and value we bring ourselves. Interestingly, with such a work as this, the subliminal meaning is actually quite fascinating. As Kurtz is able to peer into himself and see the true darkness, depravity, and horror that he is capable of, that lies within him, perhaps Conrad is masterfully allowing us a glimpse of ourselves. Whether we agree or accept it, is completely up to us. It also touches on the supposed dichotomy between 'civilized' culture and 'primitive' culture, and that the dividing line isn't as certain as many hope.

I'll likely read it again, if not in its entirety, then portions. The book has value, if for nothing else than as an inspirational piece to pay homage to in other, perhaps more readable, works. The central theme that man, when left to his own devices, unchecked, is corruptible, and when following that path to its deepest, darkest roots, there lies horror beyond description is sorrowful, sobering, and frightening; that the line between good and evil, light and dark, is the same in both 'primitive' and 'cultured' and it's the simple individual choices that can either spare us, or gradually expose us to the true darkness.

**"The horror! The horror!"**

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