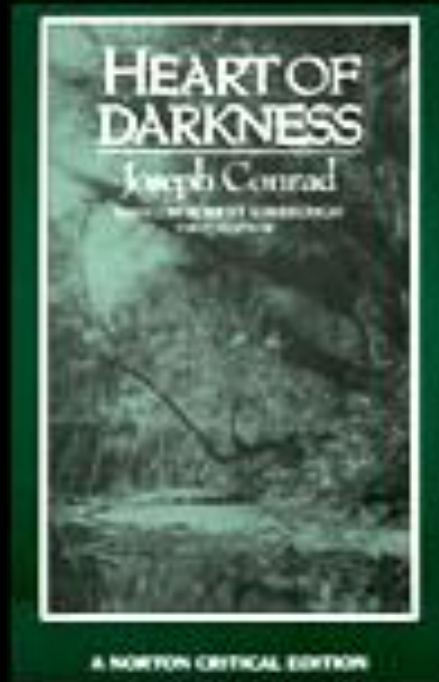


The Heart Of Darkness



Written By Joseph Conrad

Published in 1899



Background Information

- *Heart of Darkness* was first published in 1899 as a series in the British Blackwood's Magazine.
- Eventually it was published in whole as a part of Conrad's 1902 novel *Youth*.
- The novel is loosely based on Conrad's own experience traveling with a steamboat crew up the Congo in 1890.
- Since its publication, *Heart of Darkness* has been the center of both controversy and praise for its stunning, and sometimes biased description of the state of Africa in the Colonial era.

Confusion of Setting: Where is this story taking Place?

- Although most of *Heart of Darkness* tells of Marlow's adventures down the Congo River in Africa, the story actually starts out on a London steamboat traveling down the Thames.
- The unknown main character (the Narrator) listens to the account Marlow gives of his adventure in Africa.
- Thus the story is set-up as thus:

The reader listens to *Unknown Narrator* listening to *Marlow* tell his story.

Central African Republic

Sudan

Equateur

Orientale

Congo Republic

Uganda

Democratic Republic of

CONGO

Ruwanda

Burundi

Tanzania

Brazzaville

Léopoldville

Léopoldville

Kasai

Kivu

Bukavu

Luluabourg

Albertville

Angola (Portugal)

Katanga

Teixeira de Souza

Kamina

Kisenge

Kolwezi

Jadotville

Elizabethville

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Name of province: | <i>Name</i> | Mining centers: | |
| Name of city: | Name | UN base: | |
| National capital: | | Katangans: | |
| Provincial capitals: | | Mercenaries: | |
| Principal cities: | | Lumumbists/Simbas: | |
| Rail roads: | | <i>Armée Nationale Congolaise:</i> | |

Northern Rhodesia (Zambia after 1962)

So what do we call this type of narration?

- *Heart of Darkness* is an example of a frame-tale.
- A frame-tale is basically a story within another story.
- Instead of listening directly to the narrator's account of Africa, Conrad gives us a middle-man (Marlow) to listen to.
- This technique effectively protects Conrad from all accountability. We cannot blame him for any of the negative portrayals of Africa because it is Marlow who is speaking and not the author.

The Main Characters



Charlie Marlow: The main character of the tale who relates the account of his voyage up the Congo River. He has been sent by The Company to relieve Kurtz of his trading position in the Inner station.

- Marlow becomes increasingly disillusioned as he travels deeper and deeper into the Congo to find Kurtz. He becomes startled by the state of Africa and its people. As the story progresses, he begins to question the way Europe has oppressed and damaged many parts of the Congo. Marlow's account slowly becomes a criticism of the all forms of Imperialism.

Main Characters (cont.)



Kurtz: A top ivory trader for The Company who works deep in the heart of the Congo at the Inner Station. Mystery surrounds his work in the jungle and the company sends Marlow to relieve him of his post.

- Kurtz has set himself up as a type of missionary while he conducts business in the Congo. He has lost all regard for the Empire and has set himself up as a God-like figure to the people near the inner-station. However, he is a contradictory figure because he embodies Colonialism while at the same time assaulting European values.

Theme 1: The Hypocrisy of Imperialism

● *Heart of Darkness* delves into the validity and ideology surrounding Imperialistic rule in the 19th and 20th century. The reader first begins to see this in Marlow's descriptions of the cruelty he witnesses while traveling down the river.



Quotes:

- “Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair”(chapter 1).
- “They were dying slowly it was clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but gloom.”(section 1).

Theme 2: Atavism

- Atavism is a reversion or a throwback within the frame of a tale. Conrad uses this theme in *Heart of Darkness* to show a contrast between civilized British society and the supposed primitive African setting.
- Conrad suggests that Africa is not as strange as Marlow makes it out to be. Instead, Africa can be seen as the past that Britain has forgot. This suggests that Marlow's trek through the Congo is also a journey back through time. Thus demonstrating that Africa is the past the British Empire has forgotten.



Quote:

- “Yes, it was ugly enough...a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you-you so remote from the night of the first ages-could comprehend”(chapter 2).

Controversy: Questioning Conrad's Tale

- Although Conrad's has remained a popular novel, much criticism surrounds his tale.
- His novel has been called racist because of its depiction of Africa and its people.
- Many people feel that Conrad's novel offers a very biased and imperialistic view of Africa in the early 20th century.
- Authors including Chinua Achebe have written novels in response to this piece. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* shows the deep culture and civility that existed in Africa at the time.

To learn more about the criticism surrounding *Heart of Darkness* visit: [The Heart of Darkness Page](#)