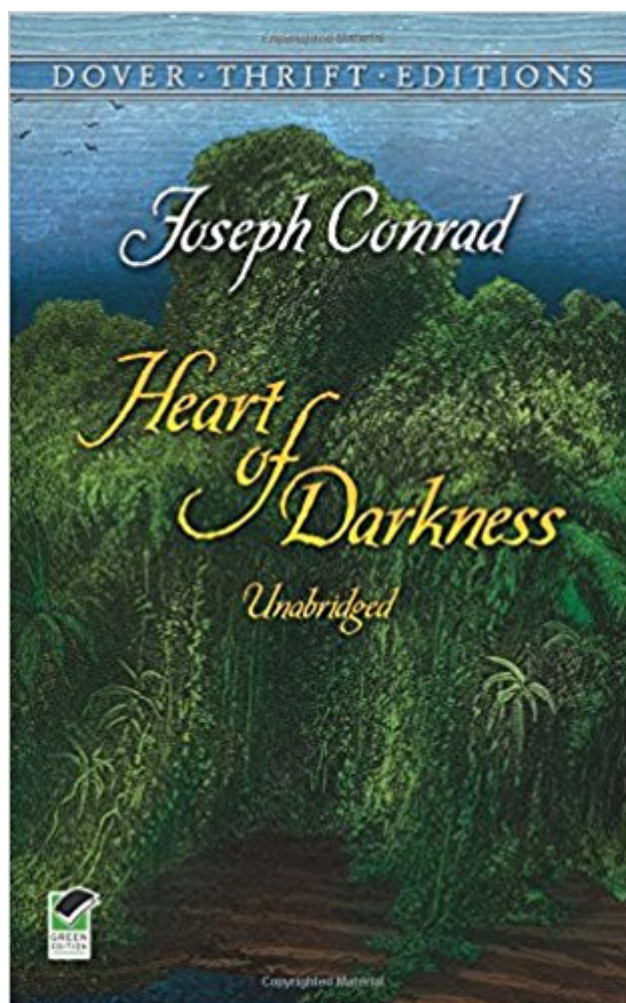


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Heart Of Darkness (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Although Polish by birth, Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) is regarded as one of the greatest writers in English, and *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1902, is considered by many his "most famous, finest, and most enigmatic story." — Encyclopaedia Britannica. The tale concerns the journey of the narrator (Marlow) up the Congo River on behalf of a Belgian trading company. Far upriver, he encounters the mysterious Kurtz, an ivory trader who exercises an almost godlike sway over the inhabitants of the region. Both repelled and fascinated by the man, Marlow is brought face to face with the corruption and despair that Conrad saw at the heart of human existence. In its combination of narrative and symbolic power, masterly character study and acute psychological penetration, *Heart of Darkness* ranks as a landmark of modern fiction. It is a book no serious student of literature can afford to miss.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was once one of those students forced to read this book at school. I was dragged kicking and screaming to its pages and read it only because I did not want to flunk my English Literature class. I was riveted from the first page, right up to the last paragraph. It is quite simply Conrad's finest book, (yes, I read his other books after this one.) However be aware, this is not everyone's cup of tea. There will be some people who will read this book and think, "Oh God, you have to be kidding!" However if you can get passed this mentality then you are in for a real literary treat. The story is simple enough, a young Englishman; Marlow (this character appears in Conrad's story "Youth") goes out to Africa to seek his fortune. He is at first idealistic, and full of himself. However he quickly

realises that Africa is full of petty bureaucrats who have no idea how to make use of this dark jewel they have acquired. Like Colonists before them, they proceed to ravage and plunder the land of its natural resources. Enter Kurtz, an Ivory Trader who has gone Native. He has become a Renegade, living with his Black mistress in the heart of Africa's interior; systematically turning his back on his supposed civilised self. Marlow meets Kurtz after an eventful trip up the Congo and finds himself curiously attracted to this strange man who is [very ill], and obviously going insane. Kurtz in turn is an embarrassment to his employers who would rather see him dead than returned to "civilization." Of course this is unspoken, and the hypocrisy of human natures sticks out like a sore thumb in this novel, especially as Kurtz is one of the best Ivory Traders on the Congo route.

Several people I am acquainted with have questioned my reading of "Heart of Darkness," using as argument the fact that they read it "in high school." Apparently, for these very well-read souls, if the book was in their high school reading list, then it should never be approached again. Well, both the poem of "El Cid" and the novel "Don Quijote" first revealed their wonders to me when I was in high school, and now that I have read them again (and "Don Quijote" complete this time), they have just proved to be timeless classics with something to tell a person of any age. "Heart of Darkness," by Joseph Conrad, is a classic that, given its length, invites several readings, particularly if one goes beyond the "high school-depth" sadly evident in those acquaintances of mine. The different, dark, alien world of the Congo as barely seen through Marlow's eyes, juxtaposed with the author's subtle-but-powerful condemnation of a system that promotes exploitation of those seen as "inferior," is one of this novella's most important, and often missed, commentaries. Marlow is the English sailor who does not, and cannot, understand anything that is not English, from the nameless city across the Channel (Brussels, most probably), to the ghost-like figures that people his employer's offices, to the multi-coloured map that shows how Africa has been carved, to the multi-coloured Russian whose language Marlowe cannot recognize and believes is cypher, to the river itself, to the native inhabitants of the land he is invading. This trip up the Congo river that Marlow tells his shipmates about while on the Thames is a journey after a man's voice, his treasure of ivory, and his report on the natives.

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