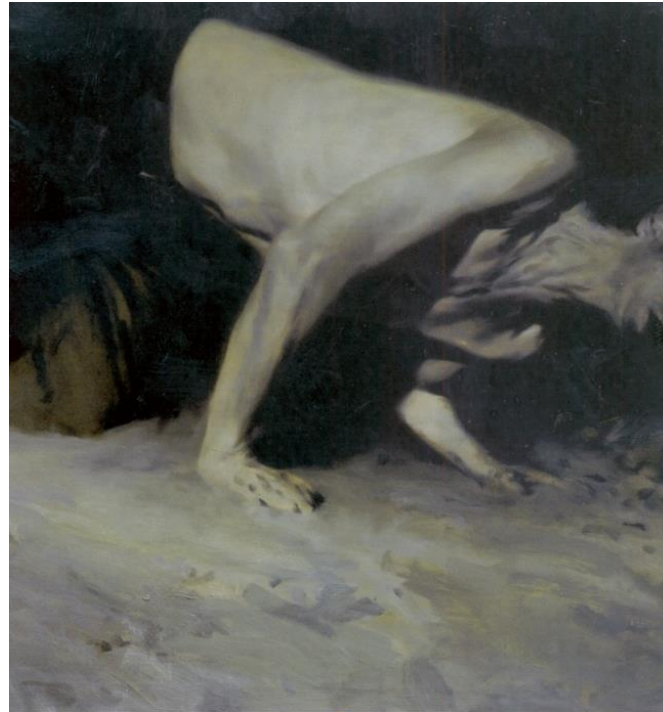


**Evils of Ivory Trade and Imperialism in  
Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness***

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PENGUIN CLASSICS

JOSEPH CONRAD

*Heart of Darkness*

Courtesy: <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/60414/heart-of-darkness/>

**Abstract**

*Heart of Darkness* is an enchanting novel, a marvelous and fascinating novel. The most gripping and powerful of Conrad's stories is the *Heart of Darkness*. It is bewitching and haunting novel giving the thought-provoking ideas and realistic touches. *Heart of Darkness* is published in the volume of short novels or novella entitled *Youth and Other Stories* in 1902. The novella has received considerable attention and regarded as a great masterpiece. It had its origin

form Conrad's experience of his own trip down the Congo in 1890 and that made it a great work of art.



**Joseph Conrad 1857-1924**

Courtesy: <https://www.biography.com/people/joseph-conrad-9255343>

### **Joseph Conrad and His Works**

The ability to create authentic, life-like characters is the test of the greatness of a novelist and in this respect Conrad stands in the foremost position. The abundance and variety of his characters is amazing.

Bernard Meyer says in his *Psychoanalytic Biography of Conrad*, "The writing of fiction is the writer's achievement through his creative fiction of a corrective revision of a painful reality" (8). The story has a universal element in as much as its basis is the curiosity for adventure as well as greed which send men prying into all sorts of remote, unknown, far off places. It vividly brings out the corruption and degradation which results from isolation in the dark, secluded wildernesses of the earth.

### ***Heart of Darkness***

The influential critic and friend of Conrad was Edward Garnett who is highly perspective reviews on *Heart of Darkness* were most influential. It is a compelling adventure tale of a journey into the blackest heart of the Belgian Congo. The story presents attacks by the natives, descriptions of the jungle and the river, and characterizations of white men who, sometimes with ideals and sometimes simply for profit, invade the jungles to bring out ivory. But the journey into the heart of the Congo is also a symbolic journey into the blackness, central to the heart and soul of man, a journey deep into primeval passion and superstition. Conrad uses effective symbols to enhance the richness and complexity of the story.

Superficially, *Heart of Darkness* consists of three parts – Marlow’s journey into the Heart of Darkness, in the Heart of Darkness and out of the Heart of Darkness. More subtly, however the novella may be regarded as a complex and dramatic structure, complete with prologue and epilogue. Each of the three parts is dramatically and naturally linked.

### **Part I Journey of Marlow**

Part I deals with the journey of Marlow into the forest Congo. The story is written as a narrative within a narrative. The first narrator never enters into the story itself; he merely describes events that occur on the deck of a yacht, the ‘Nellie’, anchored in the Thames estuary.

The first narrator is Conrad himself. He decries the deck of the Nellie where he and a group of four persons have gathered: the Director of companies, the Lawyer, the Accountant, and Marlow. It is Marlow, who narrates the story of his never Shattering experience in Congo. From time to time, the scene moves back to the deck of the yacht, and the first narrator picks up the story.

Marlow, sitting cross-legged like the Buddha, begins to relate one of his ‘in conclusive experiences’. He begins by observing the history of England at the time when it was a backward country and Roman Soldiers came to it to plunder and to conquer. He says that England was one of the ‘dark places of the earth’ at the time of the Roman conquest. Then he describes how he came to make the trip to the Congo.

Through the influence of an aunty in Brussels, Marlow secures a position as captain of a river boat whose former captain had been killed by the natives. His mission is to clinking sound, he saw six black men walking erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads. They were black rags around their loins and they were all connected to each with the chain. They were criminals who had broken the law. They passed Marlow without paying any attention to him.

What Marlow could find on their face was an attitude of indifference, gloom and savagery to white man carrying a rifle strolled behind them. In spite of the fact that Marlow had encountered sights of violence, greed and passion of every kind in the course of his life’s experiences, he felt awful and appalled by the sight of these chained criminals who reminded him of beasts.

### **Journey into the Heart of Darkness**

Marlow continues his journey into the heart of darkness, trekking through the jungle accompanied by sixty natives and one other White man. He is struck by the wild chaos of the jungle. The surroundings are desolate and terrifying. Finally, after fifteen days of walking through the jungle, they come to the central station. There, Marlow meets the company manager who does not even invite him to sit down after his twenty-mile walk. Marlow learns that his ship has sunk.

Marlow must repair the sail to the heart of darkness and bring back Kurtz, the agent of a Trading company, trading in ivory. For this purpose, Marlow visits the city of Belgium. It makes him think of ‘Whited sepulchre’. The city appears death – like to him. The colour white

and death together foreshadow the appalling destructive effect of European trading in Africa. He goes to the headquarters of the ivory company and he sees two old ladies knitting black wool and they appear like the mythological fates. an eerie feeling come over Marlow and so he quickly signs his contract at company head quarter.

Marlow begins his journey to the mouth of the Congo River in a French steamer. The steamer moves very slowly, making many stops along its way, and Marlow marvels at the vastness and mystery of the jungle. They pass a French gunboat firing shells into the dense, black depths of the jungle. Marlow is told that there are enemy natives hidden there. Finally, the steamer reaches the mouth of Congo. Here he boards another steamer, commanded by a Swede, and starts on the first leg of his journey up the river. In the course of his journey, again and again Marlow is struck by the incongruity of the European presence in Africa.

Marlow reached the first station of the company, Marlow saw a lot of black and naked people moving like ants. He saw a boiler lying idle on the thick grass. Along the path there, a railway-truck lying on its back, wheels in the air, like a dead carcass. All around him are unused pieces of machinery. Then Marlow heard a bottom of the steamer without proper equipment. The general manager is most concerned to get the ship sailing in order to reach Kurtz, who is ill in the interior.

Marlow meets an agent there who has been at the station for a year, waiting for material to make bricks. he described Kurtz as: “He is prodigy... he is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil... a man of higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose”. (HD 32)

## **Part II - Moralizing**

Part II opens with Marlow on the deck of the little river boat at the central station. As he lies on the deck, the manager strolls by with his uncle, who leads the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. Unaware of Marlow’s presence, they begin to discuss Kurtz with the mixture of dislike and envy. They comment on his moralizing, his courage, and his enormous success in the ivory trade. One man remarks that he had known Kurtz always talking about, “Each station should be likes a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing”. (HD 43)

As the journey continues, Kurtz talks to Marlow about his plans for the future and about his Intended, the woman he had planned to marry. One night, as they move down the river, Kurtz’s grasp on life weakens. As death approaches him, the evil in the man is reflected in his features. Marlow says that “I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair”. (HD 96)

After uttering his final words ‘The horror! The horror!’ Kurtz breathes his last. Later on the manager’s boy brought the news of his death – Mistah Kurtz-dead. His last words are a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth.

### Part III

The death of Kurtz affects Marlow very deeply. He becomes very ill and, still physically and spiritually shaky; he goes back to Brussels with Kurtz's papers and the knowledge of his reputation. An officer of the company and the cousin of Kurtz attempt to get the papers from Marlow. But Marlow decides to give the letters only to Kurtz's beloved. He goes to see her more than a year later. He finds her devoted to the illusion that Kurtz was a great and good man. So Marlow does not want to shatter her dreams. When she questions Marlow about Kurtz's final words, he lies, telling her that Kurtz died uttering her name. For her, the truth about Kurtz would be 'too dark', thus, Marlow withholds it as being too frightening.

The setting returns to the deck of the Nellie. Marlow story ends with him sitting silently in the 'Pose of meditating Buddha'. On the simple, narrative level, the novella is a story of a man's adventure. To make this kind of tale entertaining Conrad has used the ingredients like danger, mystery, suspense, escape, exotic background, plots and intrigues and unexpected attack that make adventure all the more appealing. Marlow's adventures in the heart of darkness have brought to him inner illumination, a better understanding of life and its mystery.

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