Heart of Darkness

(Illustrated)

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By

Joseph Conrad

Illustrated

by

Murat Ukray

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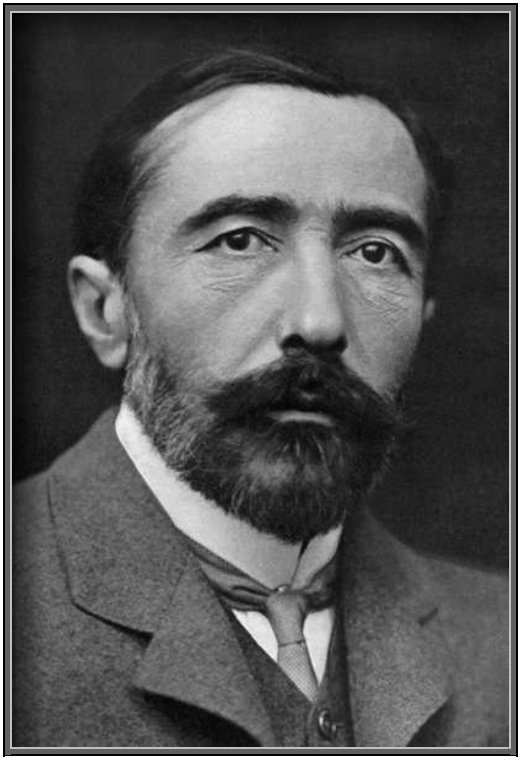
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ABOUT AUTHOR



Joseph Conrad (born; Berdichev, Imperial Russia, 3 December 1857 – 3 August 1924, Bishopsbourne, Kent, England) was a Polish author who wrote in English after settling in England. He was granted British nationality in 1886, but always considered himself a Pole. Conrad is regarded as one of the

greatest novelists in English, though he did not speak the language fluently until he was in his twenties (and always with a marked accent). He wrote stories and novels, often with a nautical setting, that depict trials of the human spirit in the midst of an indifferent universe. He was a master prose stylist who brought a distinctly non-English tragic sensibility into English literature.

Early life

Joseph Conrad was born on 3 December 1857 in Berdichev, in Podolia, a part of modern Ukraine that had belonged to the Kingdom of Poland before the 1793 Second Partition of Poland. He was the only child of Apollo Korzeniowski and his wife Ewa Bobrowska. The father was a writer, translator, political activist and would-be revolutionary. Conrad, who would actually be known to his family as "Konrad" rather than "Józef", was christened *Józef Teodor Konrad* after his maternal grandfather Józef, his paternal grandfather Teodor, and the heroes (both named "Konrad") of two poems by Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* and *Konrad Wallenrod*.

Though the vast majority of the area's inhabitants were Ukrainians, the land was almost completely owned by the Polish *szlachta* (nobility) that Conrad's parents belonged to. Polish literature, particularly patriotic

literature, was held in high esteem by the area's Polish population.

Because of the father's attempts at farming and his political activism, the family moved repeatedly. In May 1861 they moved to Warsaw, where Apollo joined the resistance against the Russian Empire. This led to his imprisonment in Pavilion X (*Ten*) of the Warsaw Citadel. Conrad would write: " In the courtyard of this Citadel – characteristically for our nation – my childhood memories begin." On 9 May 1862 Apollo and his family were exiled to Vologda, 500 kilometres north of Moscow and known for its bad climate. In January 1863 Apollo's sentence was commuted, and the family was sent to Chernihiv in northeast Ukraine, where conditions were much better. However, on 18 April 1865 Ewa died of tuberculosis.

Literary career

In 1894, aged 36, Conrad reluctantly gave up the sea, partly because of poor health and partly because he had become so fascinated with writing that he had decided on a literary career. His first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, set on the east coast of Borneo, was published in 1895. Its appearance marked his first use of the pen name "Joseph Conrad"; "Konrad" was, of course, the third of his Polish given names, but his use of it – in the

anglicised version, "Conrad" – may also have been an homage to the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's patriotic narrative poem, *Konrad Wallenrod*.

Edward Garnett, a young publisher's reader and literary critic who would play one of the chief supporting roles in Conrad's literary career, had – like Unwin's first reader of *Almayer's Folly*, Wilfrid Hugh Chesson — been impressed by the manuscript, but Garnett had been "uncertain whether the English was good enough for publication." Garnett had shown the novel to his wife, Constance Garnett, later a well-known translator of Russian literature. She had thought Conrad's foreignness a positive merit.

Style

Conrad, an emotional man subject to fits of depression, self-doubt, and pessimism, disciplined his romantic temperament with an unsparing moral judgment. Despite the opinions even of some who knew him personally, such as fellow novelist Henry James, Conrad – even when he was only writing elegantly crafted letters to his uncle and acquaintances – was always at heart a writer who sailed, rather than a sailor who wrote. He used his sailor's experiences as a backdrop for many of his works, but he also produced works of similar world view, without the nautical

motifs. The failure of many critics in his time to appreciate this caused him much frustration.

An October 1923 visitor to Oswalds, Conrad's then home – Cyril Clemens, a cousin of Mark Twain — quoted Conrad as saying: "In everything I have written there is always one invariable intention, and that is to capture the reader's attention."

Language

Conrad spoke both his native Polish language and the French language fluently from childhood and only acquired English in his twenties. Why then did he choose to write his books in, effectively, his third language? He states in his preface to *A Personal Record* that writing in English was for him "natural", and that the idea of his having made a deliberate choice between English and French, as some had suggested, was in error. He explained that, though he was familiar with French from childhood, "I would have been afraid to attempt expression in a language so perfectly 'crystallized'." In a 1915 conversation with American sculptor Jo Davidson, as he posed for his bust, in response to Davidson's question Conrad said: "Ah… to write French you have to know it. English is so plastic — if you haven't got a word you need you can make it, but to write French you have to be an artist like Anatole

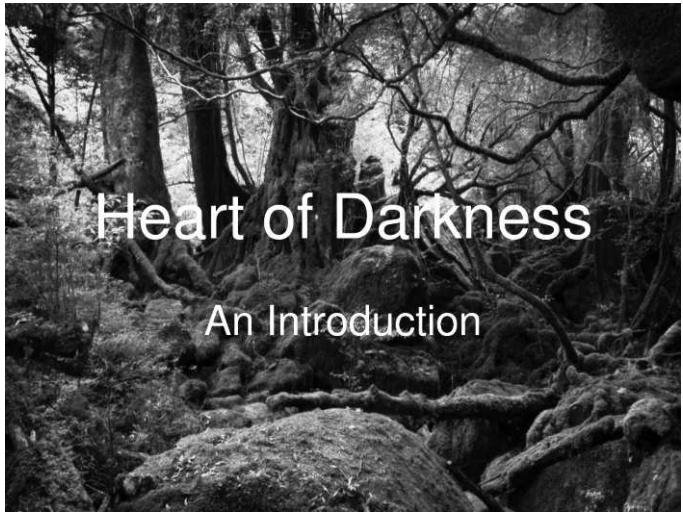
France." These statements, as so often happens in Conrad's "autobiographical" writings, are subtly disingenuous. In 1897 Conrad was paid a visit by a fellow Pole, Wincenty Lutosławski, who was intent on imploring Conrad to write in Polish and "to win Conrad for Polish literature". Lutosławski recalls that during their conversation Conrad explained why he did not write in Polish: "I value too much our beautiful Polish literature to introduce into it my worthless twaddle. But for Englishmen my capacities are just sufficient: they enable me to earn my living". Perhaps revealingly, Conrad later wrote to Lutosławski to keep his visit a secret.

More to the point is Conrad's remark in *A Personal Record* that English was "the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions—of my very dreams!" In 1878 Conrad's four-year experience in the French merchant marine had been cut short when the French discovered that he did not have a permit from the Imperial Russian consul to sail with the French. This, and some typically disastrous Conradian investments, had left him destitute and had precipitated a suicide attempt. With the concurrence of his uncle Bobrowski,

who had been summoned to Marseilles, Conrad decided to seek employment with the British merchant marine, which did not require Russia's permission. Thus began Conrad's 16 years' seafarer's acquaintance with the British and with the English language.

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PREFACE (ABOUT THE BOOK)



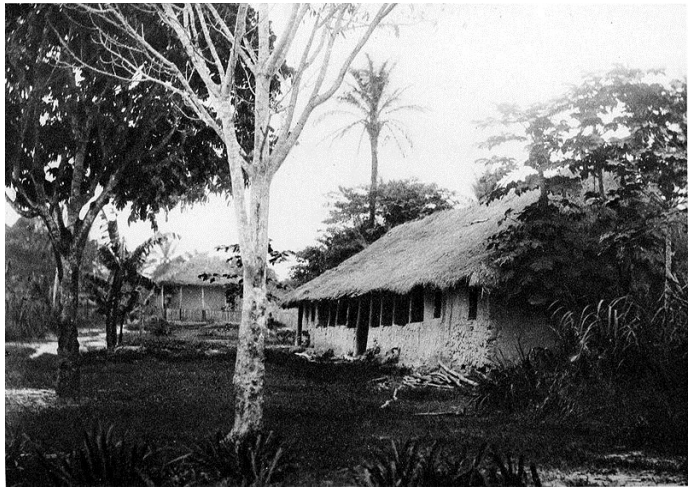
Heart of Darkness (1899) is a short novel by Joseph Conrad, written as a frame narrative, about Charles Marlow's life as an ivory transporter down the Congo River in Central Africa. The river is "a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land." In the course of his travel in central Africa, Marlow becomes obsessed with Mr. Kurtz.

The story is a complex exploration of the attitudes people hold on what constitutes a barbarian versus a civilized society and the attitudes on colonialism and racism that were part and parcel of European imperialism. Originally published as a three-part serial story, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the novella *Heart of Darkness* has been variously published and translated into many languages. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked *Heart of Darkness* as the sixty-seventh of the hundred best novels in English of the twentieth century.

Short Summary

Aboard the *Nellie*, anchored in the River Thames near Gravesend, England, Charles Marlow tells his fellow sailors about the events that led to his appointment as captain of a river-steamboat for an ivory trading company. He describes his passage on ships to the wilderness to the Company's station, which strikes Marlow as a scene of devastation: disorganized, machinery parts here and there, periodic demolition explosions, weakened native black men who have been demoralized, in chains, literally being worked to death, and strolling behind them a white Company man in a uniform carrying a rifle. At this station Marlow meets

the Company's chief accountant who tells him of a Mr. Kurtz, and explains that Kurtz is a first-class agent.



Old Belgian river station on the Congo River, 1889

Marlow leaves with a caravan to travel on foot some two hundred miles deeper into the wilderness to the Central Station, where the steamboat that he is to captain is based. Marlow is shocked to learn that his steamboat had been wrecked two days before his arrival. The manager explains that they needed to take the steamboat up-river because of rumours that an important station was in jeopardy and that its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Marlow describes the Company men at this station as lazy back-biting "pilgrims", fraught with

envy and jealousy, all trying to gain a higher status within the Company, which in turn, would provide more personal profit; however, they sought these goals in a meaningless, ineffective and lazy manner, mixed with a sense that they were all merely waiting, while trying to stay out of harm's way. After fishing his boat out of the river, Marlow is frustrated by the months spent on repairs. During this time, he learns that Kurtz is far from admired, but is more or less resented (mostly by the manager). Not only is Kurtz's position at the Inner Station a highly envied position, but sentiment seems to be that Kurtz is undeserving of it, as he received the appointment only by his European connections. Once underway, the journey up-river to the Inner Station, Kurtz's station, takes two months to the day. On board are the manager, three or four "pilgrims" and some twenty "cannibals" enlisted as crew.

They come to rest for the night about eight miles below the Inner Station. In the morning they awake to find that they are enveloped by a thick, white fog. From the riverbank they hear a very loud cry, followed by a discordant clamour. A few hours later, as safe navigation becomes increasingly difficult, the steamboat is hit with a barrage of sticks—small arrows—from the wilderness. The pilgrims open fire into the bush with

their Winchester rifles. The native serving as helmsman gives up steering to pick up a rifle and fire it. Marlow grabs the wheel to avoid snags in the river. The helmsman is impaled by a spear and falls at Marlow's feet. Marlow sounds the steam whistle repeatedly, causing the shower of arrows to cease. Marlow and a pilgrim watch the helmsman die, and Marlow forces the pilgrim to take the wheel so that he can fling his blood-soaked shoes overboard. Marlow presumes (wrongly) that Kurtz is dead. Marlow notes that the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs commissioned Kurtz to write a report, which he did eloquently. A footnote in the report, written much later, states "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Later, Kurtz entreats Marlow to take good care of the pamphlet.) Marlow does not believe Kurtz was worth the lives that were lost in trying to find him. After putting on a pair of slippers, Marlow returns to the wheel-house and resumes steering. By this time the manager is there, and expresses a strong desire to turn back. At that moment the Inner Station comes into view.

At Kurtz's station Marlow sees a man on the riverbank waving his arm, urging them to land. Because of his expressions and gestures, and all the colourful patches on his clothing, the man reminds Marlow of a harlequin. The pilgrims, heavily armed, escort the

manager to retrieve Mr. Kurtz. The harlequin-like man, who turns out to be a Russian, boards the steamboat. The Russian is a wanderer who happened to stray into Kurtz's camp. Through conversation Marlow discovers just how wanton Kurtz could be, how the natives worshipped him, and how very ill he had been of late. The Russian admires Kurtz for his intellect and his insights into love, life, and justice. The Russian seems to admire Kurtz even for his power—and for his willingness to use it. Marlow suggests that Kurtz has gone mad.

From the steamboat, through a telescope, Marlow can observe the station in detail and is surprised to see near the station house a row of posts topped with disembodied heads of natives. Around the corner of the house, the manager appears with the pilgrims, bearing Kurtz on an improvised stretcher. The area fills with natives, apparently ready for battle. Marlow can see Kurtz shouting on the stretcher. The pilgrims carry Kurtz to the steamer and lay him in one of the cabins. A beautiful native woman walks in measured steps along the shore and stops next to the steamer. She raises her arms above her head and then walks back into the bushes. The Russian informs Marlow that Kurtz had ordered the attack on the steamer. The Russian refers to a canoe waiting for him and notes

how delightful it was to hear Kurtz recite poetry. Marlow and the Russian then part ways.

After midnight, Marlow discovers that Kurtz has left his cabin on the steamer and returned to shore. Marlow goes ashore and finds a very weak Kurtz making his way back to his station—although not too weak to call to the natives. Marlow appreciates his serious situation, and when Kurtz begins in a threatening tone, Marlow interjects that his "success in Europe is assured in any case"; at this, Kurtz allows Marlow to help him back to the steamer. The next day they prepare for their departure. The natives, including the native woman, once again assemble on shore and begin to shout. Marlow, seeing the pilgrims readying their rifles, sounds the steam whistle repeatedly to scatter the crowd on shore. Only the woman remains unmoved, with outstretched arms. The pilgrims open fire. The current carries them swiftly downstream.

Kurtz's health worsens, and Marlow himself becomes increasingly ill. The steamboat having broken down and being under repair, Kurtz gives Marlow a packet of papers with a photograph. As Kurtz dies, Marlow hears him weakly whisper: "The horror! The horror!"