



Heart of Darkness

Joseph Conrad

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Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is an exploration of the nature of evil and how far a man can go towards it when released from the constraints of what can be called civilisation.

Before beginning his life as a writer at the age of 36, Conrad spent 16 years as a merchant seaman. In 1889 he became captain of a steamboat in the Congo Free State, and the atrocities he witnessed there, perpetrated by the representatives of the Belgian colonial powers, led him to write what he called his Congo Diary.

The repulsion Conrad felt for his time in the Congo was compounded by his infection whilst there with malaria, which left him with a malarial gout in the wrist of his writing hand, the pain of which would stay with him for the rest of his life.

When *Heart of Darkness* was published in 1899, it echoed much of Conrad's horrific experience. The journey up the infested Congo River taken by his character Marlow is much like Conrad's own, but the ultimate antihero, Kurtz, with his compulsively magnetic madness, tinkering with the edges of pure evil, is a phenomenal literary creation, one which has excited imitations ever since, most famously in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*.

It is a terrifying and exhilarating journey, with Conrad taking you to the very depths of human nature and, in Marlow's case, leaving him there.

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