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'*Heart of Darkness*,' which appeared at the very beginning of our century, 'was a Cassandra cry announcing the end of Victorian Europe, on the verge of transforming itself into the Europe of violence,' wrote the critic Czeslaw Milosz.

Originally published in 1902, *Heart of Darkness* remains one of this century's most enduring--and harrowing--works of fiction. Written several years after Conrad's grueling sojourn in the Belgian Congo, the novel tells the story of Marlow, a seaman who undertakes his own journey into the African jungle to find the tormented white trader Kurtz. Rich in irony and spellbinding prose, *Heart of Darkness* is a complex meditation on colonialism, evil, and the thin line between civilization and barbarity. This edition contains selections from Conrad's Congo Diary of 1890--the first notes, in effect, for the novel which was composed at the end of that decade.

Virginia Woolf wrote of Conrad, 'His books are full of moments of vision. They light up a whole character in a flash. . . . He could not write badly, one feels, to save his life.'

Heart Of Darkness And Selections From The Congo Diary Details

Date : Published (first published 1899)

ISBN :

Author : Joseph Conrad

Format : Kindle Edition 176 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Cultural, Africa, Literature

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Catherine says

I read this book as a result of having read *King Leopold's Ghost*, so my interest was not so much literary as historical. Because of that, I read things out of order - skipped all the commentary at the beginning, went straight to the story, then read excerpts from Conrad's diary, and then returned to the start of the text and read what critics had to say.

I found the story plodding, to be honest - the style of a long and rambling narration by one character just didn't hook me, and I frequently found myself doubting that anyone would speak as the central protagonist did. There were leaps in description that moved the action from boats to land and back to boats again without that being made very clear. I fully grasped that the whole story was a meditation on Kurtz, as a stand-in for Europe as a whole, losing his mind (and soul) because of his actions in Africa, but that struck me as shallow. So I didn't have too terribly much use for the story as *story* - as a glimpse at a moment in time, as history, however, it was interesting enough.

Conrad's diary was much more interesting to me - again, no doubt, because it was a primary source that I could sink my teeth into - and I would happily have read the whole thing, not just the excerpts offered.

The critics were a mixed bunch. The introduction offered by Caryn Phillips was so fawning as to make me actually embarrassed for the man, and his rejection of Achebe's criticism of the text as being too modern, too post-colonial was just facile. Achebe's criticism, on the other hand, struck me as completely awesome, and I loved that he pointed out the Euro-centric definitions of the text, and the risk of such a book becoming a "classic" given the attitudes toward Africa that would be continually revisited and supported as a result.

Overall, then, I enjoyed the experience. Mixed bag!

Dillwynia Peter says

I have read most of Conrad's works now & have always been apprehensive over Heart of Darkness. Lauded by many, I didn't want my Conrad discovery to be over once this was read. However, I have matured to overcome my apprehension & in one way, I waited to the right time.

What an exciting time the end of the 19th century & the start of the 20th was in literature. The broad canvas Victorian novel was disappearing and the pared back experimental one was emerging. Heart of Darkness is so much more than a short story, rather it is a grand novel that is distilled and refined to the bare essence remains. The most important character in the book is also presented in the new style that would influence many novels for the next 50 years: the character that is almost ephemeral or ghost-like, a character we never ACTUALLY meet in a blunt sense, but we know so much about him.

Heart of Darkness juxtapositions one of the oldest narrative styles - the quest - with this modernist approach. The narrator makes a personal journey, in the past to enlightenment, but Marlow instead discovers something rotten and dead, and this so embodies the feelings of Europeans as they entered the new century.

There are many studies dissecting Heart of Darkness, so I will stop here, but I will say, this novel hasn't dated - it is still the Modern novel that is worthy of study by students. It is a slow read, but as I have stated, as an essence, one doesn't waste it, but rather mulls over the nuances.

The Congo Diary is more an academic piece - it states bluntly Conrad's land journey up the Congo from the sea port to Kinchasa. Much of his experience is re-worked into Heart of Darkness. For the general reader, The Congo Diary is dull & uninteresting, for the academic it is the springboard to insights and discussion.

Simon Firth says

This was a reread after many years and Conrad's novella was both more complex and more interestingly opaque than I had remembered. You often don't really know what has happened, and that's often the point. I was also struck this time by the existential dread that pervades not only Kurtz's story but the narrator, Marlow's, too. I had remembered it as a cautionary tale of an emblematic European, Kurtz, unequipped by his upbringing to live with success or humanity beyond that society's bounds. But the indictment is far wider: colonialism exposes a fundamental hollowness in European society as a whole. All that's left is a small kindness, Marlow's refusing to tell Kurtz's fiance of his final despairing words. Yet even that is cop out, Conrad suggests - Marlow is once again sustaining the European failure to examine its own dark heart.

Marius Hohlbrugger says

Joseph Conrad, Jonas Lie and the blank spaces on the map of Africa: A speculation.

I don't know how familiar readers (other than Norwegians) are with Jonas Lie and his most famous novel Familien på Gilje, first published in the Norwegian language in 1883. Jonas Lie's stated aim with the novel was to portrait a Norwegian officer's family in the 1840s and as such it is a work of literary realism, or more precisely, naturalism. The text has no relation to the Victorian imperial romance, fictional colonial (or colonialist) texts.

I would however like to draw attention to a short passage in Familien på Gilje which is so similar to Joseph Conrad's famous passage in Heart of Darkness where Marlow tells his listener about how he in his boyhood used to dream about "blank spaces on the map [of Africa]...[which] had now become a place of darkness". This passage from Conrad's text, first published 1899, is so similar to a passage in Jonas Lie's text, published 13 years earlier, that it is worth giving some attention. Not least because its poetic and symbolic significance so neatly captures a 19th century European mindset concerning uncharted and unexplored (i.e. not penetrated or discovered by Europeans) territories in Africa, and that Conrad is given credit for capturing this in Heart of Darkness. The question I am asking is whether Lie should be credited with symbolic insight first.

Central to this question is of course whether Lie's text was published in English, or any other language that Conrad knew, before the latter wrote his text. And if it was, is there any evidence or source which suggest

that Conrad had read or had any knowledge of Lie's text.

Below are the two passages compared side to side. Notice that both passages refer to 1) boyhood dreams about the 2) blank spaces on a map of Africa and 3) how these places are now "explored" and filled in (they are no longer blank spaces).

Lie's passage first: CHAPTER VI, 118- 119.

" I certainly need to go to the mountains now, I always come down again three or four pounds lighter."

" I have wandered about that part of the country from the time I was a schoolboy," remarked Grip. "We must put Lake Bygdin into the geography — that it was discovered only a few years ago, in the middle of a broad mountain plateau, which only some reindeer hunter or other knew anything about."

"Not laid down on any map, no — as blank as in the interior of Africa, marked out as unexplored," the captain pointed out. " But then there is traffic going on between the districts, both of people and cattle, and the mountains have their names from ancient times down among the common people."

" True,the natives also knew the interior of Africa, but on that account it is not called discovered by the civilized world," said Grip, smiling. "I always wondered what could be found in such a mysterious region in the middle of the country. There might be a great deal there: valleys entirely deserted from ancient times — old, sunken timber halls, and then wild reindeer rushing here and there over the wastes."

SOURCE: (<https://archive.org/stream/familyatgi...>). In the Norwegian language version above it is pages 80-81.

Here is the passage from Conrad's text:

"Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, 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.

SOURCE: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5...>

If anyone out there has read this far, thank you! It would be interesting to hear what any of you have to say about this comparison, so please feel free to comment. Marius.

Emily says

I know this is the required reading book everyone hates, but I thought it was stunning, honestly due to the language for the most part. Everything was described so perfectly, so eloquently, and so beautifully. It was a simple story, and a very short one - a novella, really. A guy goes into the Congo, meets this crazy dude, and takes him back as he dies. That's it. But the way Conrad describes how Kurtz's heart has been infiltrated and darkened by the wilderness around him is just amazing, as is the way he describes... well, everything else. It's astonishing that English is Conrad's third language.

Brett Judith says

Gave me a migraine.

Nicholas says

The horror! The horror!

Edwina Callan says

"Conrad is a bad writer." - Ernest Hemingway
I have to agree with Hemingway.
All I got out of reading this book was a headache.

Joseph F. says

A feast of words will spellbound you into following closely Marlowe's journey deep into the steaming primordial jungle. What does he expect to find? What became of the mysterious Kurtz and why has he halted trading the much coveted ivory?
You will have to find out if you dare!
This short novel is going to go down as one of my favs. This particular edition has some interesting essays by other writers as well.

Agata Vehi says

Una gran obra, muy dura e impactante. Inolvidable. Conrad era, sin duda, un maestro en el noble arte de narrar.

Marci says

I have been to the "heart of darkness" many times over the years with other authors - in critical texts, histories and New Yorker articles. I've been there so many times that going there started to feel trite. Yet Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is anything but trite. It's serious, heart-wrenching and horrible. Still, reading it I found that I expected more. Probably too much, for a book of its time.

"Africa" appears early on to be a state of mind for Conrad's narrator. Marlow travels to the physical continent of Africa, but stays put within a fetid European outpost or on board his steamboat as it powers down the Congo River. African people are glimpsed from afar, and even his ship's crew, routinely referred to as "savages," are wordless. In one memorable scene, his ship's European denizens are confronted with an African woman dripping with ivory and witch doctors' charms, who compels them with her beauty but frightens them with her barbarism. She's no character but a classic, Orientalist fantasy.

By the time she appears at the side of the river, readers have already learned that responding to "Africa" means inviting degradation. This is what befalls Conrad's Kurtz, the ivory trader, who ultimately dies of his folly while muttering his famous last words, "Oh, the horror! The horror!" It's all meant to be a metaphor, of course, for the colonial European encroachment into Africa. But whatever was meant, I found the book frustrating. Because even as the story revels in its metaphors, Africa remains a real place.

European colonialism is critiqued, yes, but the book still treats "Africa" as an extension of the European imagination. Again, I realize that I'm likely asking for too much as I sit here typing in the post-colonial era. I'm just grateful we're a hundred years away from what is portrayed in this book.

Bonnie says

"The horror! The horror!"

Patrick says

In a world overshadowed with madness and hypocrisy, Conrad draws a disintegrated picture of a world divided into two separate spheres. A world where dark figures lurk and have no speech, another that gives the reader an illusion of an enlightening darkness. According to Achebe, Heart of Darkness is an "offensive and deplorable book". However, I think that he did not get Conrad's message perfectly. Western Civilization has constructed the lowest form of humanity and tried demolishing the whole authentic African Civilization. Both need to be civilized but by whom?

Julianna says

"he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while i had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. and perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all the truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible" (88).

"heart of darkness" is a meditation on the origin of the european colonial identity, and conrad argues that morality in its fundamental form is nonexistent. this book speaks to the darkest, emptiest aspects of the human condition, and there are many parts of this book that i will carry inside of me for a long time.

Melki says

"L'Horreur" by Anthony Petrie, based on 'Heart Of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

Ain't that the truth, and sadly. the history of much of mankind...the haves become the have-nots, and we chalk it up to progress.

I hesitated to give five stars, as I did not *love* this book. It was as sad and depressing as watching the evening news. Without question, there is some beautiful writing here:

Watching the coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you - smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering. Come and find out.

What can I say? I was spellbound, and I don't often get to say that about a book. I would read it again in a heartbeat.

He had summed up - he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth - the strange commingling of desire and hate.

A truly nasty, yet vital and truthful masterpiece.
