



[Heart of Darkness](#), by Joseph Conrad

In A Nutshell

Published in 1902, *Heart of Darkness* has become one of the most celebrated and effective novels to combine a psychological journey with a horrifyingly stark account of imperialism, or specifically of European colonies in Africa. Based on Joseph Conrad's own experience traveling up the Congo River into the African interior, *Heart of Darkness* follows the disturbing journey of English ivory-trading agent Marlow into the jungles of Africa in search of a mysterious man named Kurtz. The novel sparked controversy in 1975 when famed Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe condemned it, accusing it of dehumanizing Africans and reducing them to extensions of the hostile and primal jungle environment. Since then, writers have heatedly debated this topic. Scholars can't quite seem to conclude whether the novel is racist or anti-racist.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 What is Marlow's purpose in telling this story to the others? What might he hope to gain?
- 2 What are the consequences of Marlow's insatiable curiosity? About the jungle? About Kurtz?

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- 3 What is the nature of madness in *Heart of Darkness*? What brings it on? Is it something that every man can fall into or is it simply the environment that instigates it?

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