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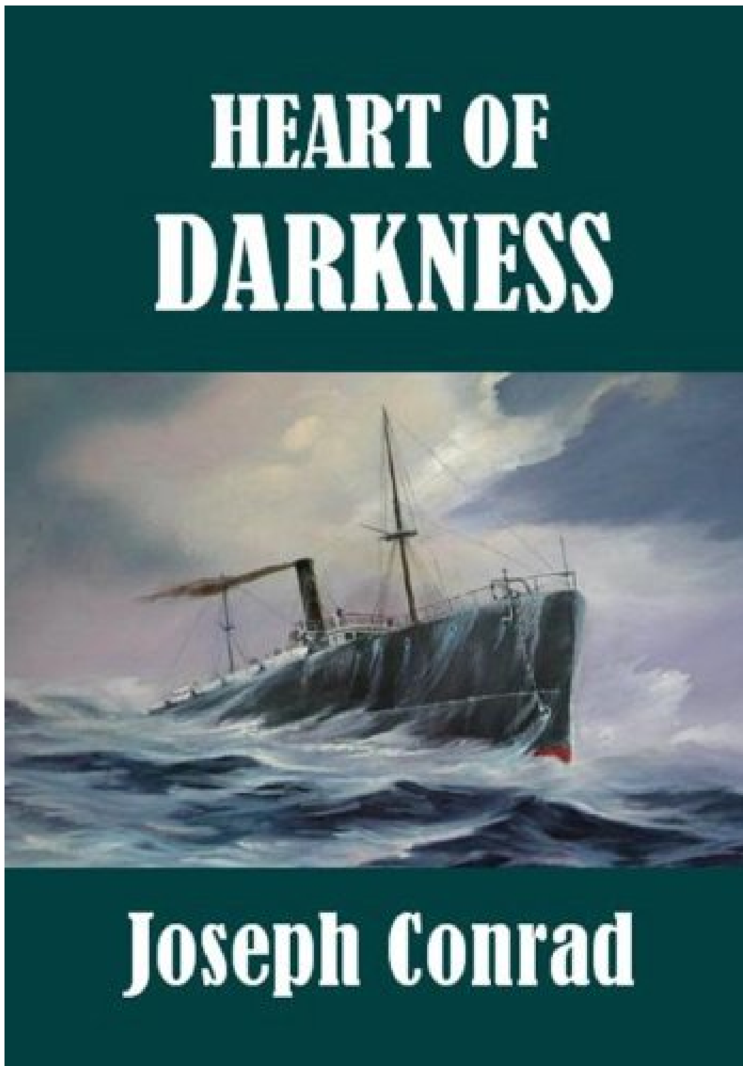

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Par Joseph Conrad : HEART OF DARKNESS (non illustrated) (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised HEART OF DARKNESS (non illustrated) (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMarlow sits at the Thames River in the evening with several other people and begins telling the story about how he entered into the dark continent out of nowhere. No one wants to listen but he continues anyway.Marlow expressed a desire to go to Africa to his Aunt who got him a position as a captain of a steamboat of an ivory company. The previous captain Freslaven died in a scuffle with the natives and Marlow took his place. A few days later, Marlow travels to Africa and gets to the first station where he meets the accountant who keeps track of the funds in Kurtzs company. The man is interesting to Marlow since hes been on the continent for three years, yet he keeps himself clean and well dressed. Marlow finds the blacks being poorly treated and ordered to do meaningless work by the whites. Marlow continues down

the river on his steamboat with a crew of several whites and about 20 to 30 blacks. As he travels down the river, he comes across this shack where he picks up wood, and a note cautioning him to travel carefully. He continues down the river and becomes surrounded by savages in the fog. Marlow is frightened but the savages dont do anything... until the fog rises. The savages attack and Marlows men fire back. The arrows of the savages have little effect on Marlows men or his boat. And the guns of Marlows men have little effect on the savages since they fire too high. Only Marlows helmsman dies. Marlow blows the whistle and mysteriously, all the savages retreat in fear. Marlow shortly reaches the inner station where he is greeted by the Russian Fool who seems to survive in the heart of the continent by not knowing whats going on around him. Kurtz is very ill and needs to be taken back to England, but he does not want to go. In fact, he is the one who ordered the attack on the steamboat so that they couldnt take him back to England. Kurtz is worshipped by the natives and completely exploits them. Kurtz tries to escape to the natives but Marlow catches him and takes him back to the steamboat head back for England. While still on the river, Kurtz dies saying, The horror, the horror. Marlow returns to England. He visits Kurtzs intended who is still in mourning a year after Kurtzs death. She still remembers Kurtz as the great man he was before he left, and Marlow doesnt tell her what he had become before he dies. Marlow gives Kurtz her old letters and leaves. (non illustrated)ExtraitIntroductionMention the name of Joseph Conrad and the answering response will commonly invoke his celebrated African novella of 1899, Heart of Darkness. If the work has acquired an iconic status comparable to that of Edvard Munchs painting The Scream (1893), its title has by contrast become something of a tired clich in being so repeatedly used by newspaper headline-makers. Conrad, who modestly hoped that the work might have a continuing vibration, would have been astonished by these contemporary reverberations.The storys emergence as a twentieth-century classic forms a first stage in the history of its remarkable after-life. A key moment arrived with T. S. Eliots use of a fragment from Heart of Darkness as an epigraph to his poem, The Hollow Men (1925). Eliots epigraph signals a temporary kinship and establishes a bridge between two works, but it also probably signifies a more intangible sense of indebtedness -- to Conrad as an important founder-member of a tradition of British Modernist writing.The storys major re-discovery dates from the 1950s when its apocalyptic symbolism and existentialist uncertainty seem to have entered the collective consciousness of a generation who lived through the Second World War or were coming to terms with its legacy. As one critic of the time put it, the story had become a Pilgrims Progress for our pessimistic and psychologizing age (Guerard, p. 33). Its more recent impact has been equally dramatic, if more controversial. Now standing at the centre of a wider contemporary debate about race, imperialism and feminism, its sthetic dimensions and experimental character have almost been left behind. It has acquired the character of an awkward problem-novel, a standard text in the classroom and -- for better or worse -- a litmus-test for a variety of theoretical preoccupations. As a modern quest parable translated into many languages, it has simultaneously had a powerful generative effect upon twentieth-century writers and film-makers, inspiring emulations, adaptations and counter-versions.IConrads direct and indirect engagement with things African has a long pre-history. It extends as far back as his childhood, when the young Pole pored over maps of the continent, devoured tales of the first European explorers in Africa and vicariously shared the perils of Dr Livingstones travels. Like all dreams of heroic adventure, this one was destined to meet with a rude awakening. In 1890, towards the end of his career as a merchant seaman, the thirty-three-year-old Conrad signed a long-term contract to work for a Belgian company in the Congo Free State. The country he entered had since 1885 been the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium who, under the guise of a philanthropic concern to bring light to the dark continent, was brutally engaged in what Conrad later described as the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration (Last Essays, p. 17).Conrads growing desire to return to Europe was unexpectedly realized when he suffered a physical breakdown: plagued with the after-effects of dysentery and malaria, he ended his stay after seven months, returned to a period of hospitalization in London and suffered a legacy of ill-health for the rest of his life. His first-hand encounter with the effects of Leopolds rule in the Congo almost certainly left him with deeper scars: according to a close friend, the episode formed the turning-point in his mental life, shaped his transformation from a sailor to a writer and swept away the generous illusions of his youth (Garnett, p. xii).One of the products of this period was The Congo Diary (reprinted in this edition), Conrads record of his daily movements during the first part of his stay. Severely factual and never intended for publication, the diary nevertheless offers his earliest written account of a peopled Africa and may have been kept to preserve material that would be of use to the later writer.Conrads first African work, An Outpost of Progress, was

composed six years later. A fine short story in its own right, An Outpost also represents an important stage in Conrads attempt to fashion a serious and grown-up colonial fiction distinct from the boyish adventure stories of G. A. Henty and Rider Haggard. From his early Eastern novels, the story inherits the large spectacle of the European abroad, removed from the constraints of the Western crowd, isolated in the wilderness and undergoing swift collapse. Here, however, the predicament is shaped by an acutely political awareness, with the focus partly upon its two carefully chosen types (a bureaucrat and a soldier) and partly upon the representative imperialist fictions arriving from Europe with them.The degeneration of the two supposed light-bringers is remorseless: they arrive in Africa voicing the conventional view that as racially superior Europeans they have the right and duty to civilize backward peoples, but ironies emerge when it transpires that, as two of Europes failed rejects, they are happy to cultivate failure, content with their fellowship in idleness and oblivious to the civilized litter they leave around an increasingly inefficient trading-post. Ultimately, however, the strengths of the story as a polemic -- its aloof omniscient narration, singleness of focus and sparkling sarcasm -- also serve to define its limits. In Conrads later view, An Outpost was mainly an important stepping-stone towards Heart of Darkness, in which an English narrator, Marlow, agitatedly reflects upon an earlier visit to Africa and his quest there towards the charismatic European trader, Kurtz. According to Conrad, his return to an African subject coincided with a widening sense of its possibilities and was accompanied by an intense nightmare feeling (Letters, II, 162).IIEnigmatic though Heart of Darkness may finally prove to be, its early episodes are remarkable for their trenchant topicality. At the outset of composition, Conrad described the story as being of our time distinc[t]ly in its concern with the criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa (Letters, II, 140-41). For his subject, he again returned to what was bluntly described in a coinage of 1884 as the Scramble for Africa, one resulting in the systematic annexation and exploitation of Africa by European powers during the last decades of the nineteenth century.At an early point, the story offers a summary of these developments. The map of Central Africa available to the youthful Marlow presents it as a white blankness, an unexplored and unnamed terra incognita. To the older Marlow, the area has become, presumably as a result of European expansion, a more impenetrable and menacing place of darkness (p. 00), while yet another map of the continent presents him with a multi-coloured chart, its pattern the visible evidence of European territorial possessions. Even more topically, the storys opening sequences confronted its first readers with echoes of their most recent newspaper-headlines -- as in references to the building of a railway or to expanding trade-syndicates or to increasing militarization in Africa, as signalled by the presence of mercenary soldiers and a blockading French gun-boat.This sense of topical issue is, however, most marked in Marlows acerbic quarrel with manifestations of the periods sophisticated propaganda machinery, of which the popular press formed a crucial cog. Heart of Darkness was written against a background of recent imperial celebration of a feverishly utopian kind. Queen Victorias diamond jubilee in 1897 occasioned an exaltation of the British Empire and the importance of the imperial idea to the countrys future as an international power. In her diary for that year, Beatrice Webb summarized the social mood: Imperialism in the air! -- all classes drunk with sight seeing and hysterical loyalty (p. 140). Articles in the New evoke the wider note of intoxicated eulogy in lauding the Queen as the Great White Mother, the fame of whose virtue has won the loyalty of native races as the genius of Alexander or a Napoleon never could and characterizing the British Imperial idea as an onerous religious destiny: Since the wise men saw the star in the East, Christianity has found no nobler expression (Thierry, p. 318). A stream of propaganda also emanated from Brussels, where, as Conrad later observed, Leopold had commandeered press opinion -- by, in effect, colonizing its language -- in order to engineer an outrageous newspaper stunt (Last Essays, p. 17).The storys early progress from Europe to Africa offers a virtual initiation into the contagious power of the periods official imperial propaganda -- in the anonymous narrators eulogy to the River Thames, in the colourful hyperbole picked up by Marlows aunt from her newspapers and through a variety of European voices in Africa. Sharing his creators sense of the power of the printed word, Marlow is acutely aware of its journalistic misuse in rendering people essentially blinkered and insentient. Its invasive power is further suggested by the fact that for most of these speakers such rhetoric is a reflexive act: they are not, on the whole, individuals seeking to use hyperbole to disguise an unsavoury truth, but inert victims and instruments of linguistic coercion.Marlows counter-response takes a number of forms: sometimes he simply speaks plainly of newspaper rot, often he notes the spurious authority given to bureaucratic functionaries in Africa by their naming (as in the case of the euphemistically-styled Workers or agents), while elsewhere he is shocked by the outrageous incongruities thrown up by the unthinking use of clich. For example, his grim

mirth at hearing from the Harlequin that the heads on stakes belong to rebels prompts the comment: Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers -- and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks.If much of the best imaginative literature thrives on the exposure of what George Orwell termed Newspeak, it also abhors a vacuum. Silences usually prevailed in the popular press of the 1890s about the exact working-nature of European rule in Africa and its effect upon her indigenous peoples and customs. By 1897, however, damning facts about the Congo were beginning to filter into British newspapers, as in The Times of 13 May, which reported an ex-Congo missionarys testimony that gross atrocities were perpetrated by the soldiers of the State on the natives, amounting in some cases to shooting and in others to mutilation, for refusal to labour in the gathering of indiarubber. Whole villages were spoliated and destroyed (p. 7). The first part of Conrads story belongs to this early move towards silence-breaking: I have a voice ; and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced.Marlows initiation into Africa allots him a role not unlike that of an on-the-spot foreign correspondent, with his own independent sense of what is newsworthy: he watches, listens, reports on his interviews and trusts in the power of hard, definite particulars. The picture of Africa to emerge combines the image of a messily organized scramble for loot with that of a chaotic war-zone littered with upturned rusting trucks, abandoned drainage-pipes and gaping craters. He also allows space for voices unheard in the newspapers of the time -- those of the European agents, traders and other hangers-on. These voices range from the brickmaker and his version of justice -- Transgression -- punishment -- bang! Pitiless, pitiless. Thats the only way -- to Marlows companion and his reasons for being in Africa -- To make money, of course. What do you think? -- and include a description of the agents collective voice: The word ivory rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse.The sense given of a narrator wishing to recover an Africa lost, ignored or silenced culminates in the description of the grove of death:[The African workers] were dying slowly -- it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. ; Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. (p. 00)Like a poem by Wilfred Owen from the First World War battlefront, this heightened reportage quickly dispenses with the rattle of official verbiage in order to recover unreported facts -- in this case, of wasted African lives. The sense of waste is intensified by the wider context. Marlow has just passed through a rubbish-tip for discarded pipes and rusty machinery, and the implication is that the worn-out Africans have been similarly discarded: having served their function, they are thrown away like disposable objects. Crass labels discarded, Marlow assimilates the details of human waste into an extended elegy, with an invitation to complete it by recalling a picture of Bosch-like extremity.In conjunction with other contemporary events, Heart of Darkness played no small part in effecting a linguistic change that, in turn, reflected a wider shift in attitudes. In 1897, the words Imperial and Imperialism (both normally capitalized) carried hardly any pejorative meanings and, with their Latin equivalents (Imperium et Libertas), formed a natural part of the periods rhetoric. But by 1903, in the aftermath of the Boer War and when the scandal of the Congo caused E. D. Morel to found the Congo Reform Association, the terms began to acquire less reputable associations and could no longer be used as a form of unthinking national self-congratulation.IIIDuring its composition, Heart of Darkness developed like a genii from the bottle in ways that seem to have surprised Conrad himself, prompting him later to feel that its last two instalments were wrapped up in secondary notions (Letters, II, 146, 157). One sign of its changing character is that Marlow, predominantly a detached figure in Part 1, becomes with his journey upriver an involved participant, increasingly excited, feverish and panic-stricken. Simultaneously, he is obsessed by the charismatic voice of Kurtz, a spectral figure who actively dominates the later part of the story. With these developments, the pattern of the quest becomes more insistent. Marlow conceives of his journey as culminating in a meeting with Kurtz, who is himself engaged in a quest into unexplored regions: when the two make contact late in the story, they become, in effect, agents in each others lives.Successive generations of critics have been impelled to testify to the nature of the elusive developments following upon Marlows up-river departure, and there is now virtually an interpretation of the story to suit every

predilection -- the psychoanalytic, philosophic, political, post-colonial and feminist. Each generation has also thrown up a major dissenting critic. In the immediate post-1950 period, F. R. Leavis was highly influential with his claim that the story was marred by an adjectival insistence upon ; inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery (p. 177). Later generations have been overshadowed by the Nigerian novelist and critic Chinua Achebe whose angry polemic of 1975 accused Conrad of virtually betraying his subject by eliminating the African as a human factor, lamented his preposterous and perverse arrogance in reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind and condemned the author as a bloody racist (p. 788).Traditionally, the most immediate problem for readers has been that of adjusting to the tales dramatically changing character. Although Part 1 anticipates some of the terms of Marlows coming quest, it hardly foreshadows the ambitious symbolic method to be brought into play. In part, Marlow himself becomes an active symbol-maker, constantly seeking a figurative equivalent for his feelings. But in addition, the obscure nightmare in which he is embroiled increasingly determines the character of the story and embraces Kurtz as a significant part of its structure: everywhere felt but only occasionally glimpsed, the latter emerges as a strangely protean presence, forming and re-forming like the genie from a bottle. Achebe regards the story as involving a single petty European, but the symbol of dark nightmare also has a strenuously generalizing effect in suggesting that all Europeans are involved in the breakdown of the imperial dream.Symbolic method also brings with it a new, and in some ways, problematic range of secondary interests. In moving away from the symptoms of colonial rowdyism in Part 1, the tale is not thereby always less topical, but it now devises markedly wider tests in order to probe the originating credentials of the European mission in Africa. As a compendium of decadent excesses, the figure of Kurtz is obviously central to the tales free-wheeling and -- as some readers have felt -- erratically widening scope. His is the most comprehensive test and the most spectacular fall; in one of his many guises, he offers access to what might be called Europes political unconscious -- into the underlying obsessions and needs that both fostered and found relief in the imperial project. And finally, when Marlow returns to Europe, he brings with him a Kurtzian legacy that helps to shape an even wider vision of Western civilization and its discontents.Early in Part 2, with the beginning of Marlows journey to the interior, the tale signals that the narrators own inherited British traditions will be the first to come under scrutiny. The terms of this ordeal would have been familiar to late-Victorian readers, since what is on trial is a principle at the very basis of their culture and underpinning its mission in the colonies -- the work ethic as an agency of order and progress. In Britain, the gospel of work was associated with the Victorian sage Thomas Carlyle, in whose writings the principle gathered numerous moral, religious and philosophic resonances. As a British merchant seaman, Marlows tradition is a seamanly inflexion of the Carlylean gospel. Marlow spells out the tonalities of this humanistic ideal: I dont like work -- no man does -- but I like what is in the work -- the chance to find yourself. Your own reality -- for yourself, not for others (p. 000). For him, the notion brings with it a view the seamans life as involving the pursuit of an honourable vocation, the performance of a social obligation in the cause of human solidarity and the restraining of individuality by the collective ethic. Translated into the context of colonial work, the ethic also involves a tough, no-nonsense pragmatism -- the ability, as Marlow puts it, to bury dead hippo without being too bothered by the smell.But even an immunity to noxious smells cannot defend Marlow from being challenged on several fronts. He is quickly made aware, when he becomes one of the Workers, with a capital (p. 00), that a wider political machinery can itself be found to exploit the superficial rhetoric of the Carlylean work ethic to legitimize its ultimately criminal purpose. (In 1898, Leopold had required of his agents that they accustom the population to general laws, of which the most needful and the most salutary is assuredly that of work [cited in Kimbrough, ed,. p. 79]). Once in Africa, he quickly learns that his work efforts are either rendered futile by a lawless inefficiency or part of a process ultimately devoted to base ends.Even though Marlow tries to attend to practicalities involved with the job in hand -- the problem of acquiring rivets, tracking river-obstacles and efficient steering -- he is increasingly forced to question how far the job-sense is a necessary avoidance of a painful knowledge of the self and world. At a crucial point in the narrative, two documents serve to bring home his crisis of choice: on the one hand, the clear seamanly purpose he finds in Towsons nautical manual, a symbolic reminder of his inherited traditions, or, on the other, the searing self-contradictions of Kurtzs pamphlet, a signpost to the possibility of different kinships and allegiances.In more senses than one, Marlow loses navigational clarity and purpose. The pressures put upon him reflect more widely on a tradition of liberal humanism that, when faced by the flinty actualities of wider colonial politics, has commonly suffered painful defeat and been left with a legacy of nervous irritation, panic, hysteria and frustrated silence. At the point where Marlows panic

sets in, Kurtz becomes a more material presence; as the narrator begins to share empathically in Kurtzs ordeal, their crises intermesh.From a point of hindsight, Conrad himself seems to have been aware of the dangerous risk involved in the treatment of the tales presiding symbolic figure: What I distinctly admit is the fault of having made Kurtz too symbolic or rather symbolic at all (Letters, II, 460). Even in the first part of the tale, the Kurtz who emerges through hearsay and gossip is a bewildering medley of possibilities -- now universal genius, now noted ivory-hunter, now confirmed solitary with ambitious plans for Africa and now threatening spectre. The problem of Kurtzs shifting metamorphoses becomes more formidable as the tale progresses since this figure will become part of tumultuous content of Marlows nightmare, shaping its form and providing its climax. With each of his metamorphoses, moreover, Kurtz also contributes to a shifting sense of the nature and location of the heart of darkness. How various and plural are his main incarnations, and how are their meanings registered in Marlows narrative?One of Kurtzs symbolic identities memorably extends the dark evidence of European rule in Part 1. Several descriptions focus upon his extreme deformity and grotesque, puppet-like movements in order to bring home the sense in which, as Europes offspring, he enacts the logic of its expansionist and acquisitive drives. In his restless energy as an explorer, conqueror and self-styled hero of Empire, he is a powerfully iconoclastic caricature. To the extent that he casts aside the need for any hypocritical pretence and unashamedly acts out the will to acquire vast amounts of ivory, he embodies a brute economic imperative as well as an unnatural idolatry of the material object.Where some nations tended high-mindedly to regard overseas expansion as an organic extension of their destiny, Heart of Darkness can suggest a powerfully alternative vision: of imperialism as a historical deformation, whose working-out involves an inevitable principle of degeneration. Central to this version is the presentation of Kurtz as a malformed seven-feet-long puppet-creature, who enacts a grotesquely choreographed ceremony. Kurtz has become so enthralled to the commodity he seeks that he is himself commodified, as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand (p. 000); or he is imaged as a grimacing open mouth, giving him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him (p. 00). He also acts out with psychopathic intensity the urge towards an autocratically governed empire -- My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--- everything belonged to him (p. 000) -- in which, as the veritable Antichrist of its making, he exacts complete submission from his subordinates and can envisage a policy of what nowadays would be called racial cleansing: Exterminate all the brutes! (p. 000). The iconoclastic power of this portrait depends upon our recognizing that the heart of darkness has its roots firmly in Europe and that Kurtz, as its malformed outgrowth, strikes Marlow as a symbol of present and active degeneration.But overlaying this incarnation is another one, the object of Marlows most excited and unspecific fears -- the spectacle of Kurtz as a lost soul. This version presses us to attend to the fact that Kurtz has a pre-history. There had, it seems, been an original Kurtz (no mere trader, but a person of considerable idealism and with talents as a painter, poet, musician, philosopher and orator), who in Africa has been exposed as a hollow sham (p. 00). This transplanted European, originally the product of a cultured society and identifying himself with the high-minded mission of bringing light to Africa, has been betrayed by a nave belief in imperial watchwords and, with his inherited assumptions exposed as fictions, stands revealed as a morally bankrupt cipher. The image of Kurtz as a greedily devouring mouth is now replaced by one of inner vacancy: he was, says Marlow, strikingly, hollow at the core (p. 000).But for Marlow, the spectacle does not end there: it carries with it the added implication that Kurtz has undergone a spectacular fall in Africa -- brought about by a hollowness so profound as to have resulted in his invasion by the dark atavistic forces of the land. Though the narrator has previously shown himself to have a healthy disrespect for potential obfuscation, he himself seems to acquire a taste for the frisson of metaphysical melodrama in describing how Kurtzs soul has become a battleground for the competing forces of good and evil. Marlows heated imaginings offer two possibilities: that Kurtz has been captured, as if in some illicit and vampirish love affair, by a wilderness that had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation (p. 000).Alternatively, he pictures Kurtzs fall as involving a Faustian pact, in which the man has virtually sold his soul in order to enjoy a high seat amongst the devils of the land -- I mean literally. However, in the absence of substantiating evidence, the impact of the word literally remains muted, and attention is instead re-focused on Marlows horrified sense of the creepy: Everything belonged to him -- but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over (p. 000).There is some force in Achebes objection that the Africa to emerge in parts of the story belongs to a conventional

picture of the dark continent, a place of creepy horrors and the traditional site of the white mans grave. Certainly many of Conrads first reviewers, overlooking the disturbing implications of Kurtzs hollowness, could comfortably regard the story as a version of a familiar type of late-Victorian novel, in which Africas strange devils bring about the decivilization or going native of a European colonist, who finally descends into madness.To Marlows excited imagination, Kurtz simultaneously metamorphoses into yet another symbolic incarnation, that of a charismatic, oracular voice (p. 000), whose utterances will eventually help to shape the spreading nightmare into significant form. Several problems accompany this fascination, not least the fact that Marlow is at such an early stage of his journey fugitively haunted by the sensation that its culmination will necessarily entail a redeeming talk with Kurtz (p. 00) and confirm the rightness of his unconscious loyalty to him. Further, it is not entirely clear why Kurtzs powerful voice -- the grandiloquence of which is often the object of Marlows suspicion -- should be so quickly valued as an unambiguous gift. There is often some confusion in Marlows mind about whether he has actively chosen a commitment to Kurtzs voice or whether he is its fated victim. If the latter is true, then Marlow is possibly nearer than he thinks to the Harlequin, whom he regards as being dangerously captive to the power of Kurtzs charismatic eloquence: We talked of everything, he said, quite transported at the recollection. I forgot there was such a thing as sleep (p. 000).In addition, Marlow has a growing tendency to be so obsessed by Kurtzs gift of eloquence as to relegate his actions to a secondary place: Hadnt I been told ; that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together. That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words (p. 000). If there is some oddity here, it derives from the fact that the Marlow of the early narrative had learned that actions speak louder than words, which can rarely be taken at face value. Here he appears to be haunted by the growing idea that the promise of words from a special being can, in some sense, redeem or justify actions: the pathway to the heart of darkness, it seems, now leads to a powerful oracle.As if in response to Marlows deepest wishes, Kurtz does finally emerge -- by means of a sudden death-bed redemption -- as a significant voice and hero of the spirit. Marlows approach to the spectacle involves a somewhat awkward readjustment of his previous convictions. Perhaps drawing upon an established nineteenth-century view that genius and madness are closely allied, he tells us that Kurtz is no lunatic because his intelligence is perfectly clear, if intensely self-centred; but, he adds, his soul was mad (p. 000). In a darkened cabin, the terminal Kurtz is seemingly allowed the privilege of the dying man to survey his entire life in flashback, with Marlow, his disciple, in attendance to catch the whisper of his final words, The horror! The horror!, this severely bare exclamation being apparently an involuntary one, as if torn out of him by a supernatural power (p. 000). The emerging view of Kurtz combines elements of the Promethean quester, philosopher-outlaw and deranged genius, whose isolated self-absorption is the condition of both his eventual greatness and consuming madness. In addition, Kurtzs death-bed scene brings with it the vindicatory suggestion that the criminal hero discovers in the ultimacy of evil redemptive possibilities not open to average pilgrims of the world (It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors [p. 000]) and is therefore able to see into the essence of things, like the hero described by Thomas Carlyle: A Hero, as I repeat, has this first distinction ; That he looks through the shows of things into things. Use and wont, respectable hearsay, respectable formula: all these are good, or not good (p. 289).Given the scarcity of substantiating details about the wraith-like Kurtz, the problems posed by his metamorphoses are especially acute. How, for example, do we identify a logic that can explain the development of a figure hollow at the core into a veritable hero of the spirit? Is it possible to find any secure foothold in a simulated nightmare where Kurtz seems at once without substance (p. 00) and is, at the same time, everything and everywhere in its formation? Some of the best known literary works are associated with what appear to be unfolding enigmas or riddles, like Coleridges The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), a poem echoed in the story, and the developing Heart of Darkness has some claim to belong to this tradition. In fact, Marlow himself uses the word riddle to describe the form of ultimate wisdom that makes of life a mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose (p. 000). He seems to imply that riddles can have a pattern or logic, but that the pattern does not really signify anything -- it is fundamentally mysterious.In many ways, the tale might be said to reproduce the riddle of a structured pattern that is growingly opaque. As Marlows quest evolves, the relationship between its early beginnings and its developing secondary intuitions becomes increasingly enigmatic. But the medley effect inherent in the later stages of Marlows quest presents a further order of difficulty. As the spectral Kurtz forms and re-forms, some of his incarnations overlap and some have a parallel life, but others seem actively to quarrel

with each other. This medley effect also, of course, makes for an uncommon mixture of styles and genres -- ranging from the spare style of polemic, through the excited stream of consciousness of a confessional, to the breathless fear of a Victorian sensation novel.The problem of how and what Kurtz signifies raises other implications of a general nature. Leaviss complaint about a persistent magazineish element (p. 180) in Heart of Darkness acts as a reminder that the professional Conrad was writing the story for Blackwoods Magazine, a monthly that welcomed fiction of a colourful medley nature. According to a spoof by Edgar Allan Poe, it preferred a style elevated, diffusive, and interjectional, where the words must be all in a whirl, like a humming top ; which answers remarkably well instead of meaning (p. 341). Other readers have felt that the whirling words of the storys later part are signally important in emphasizing that the final horror assailing Marlow is grounded in his discovery that it is impossible to disclose a central core or an essence, even a firm basis for what Kurtz has done and what he is.In other words, Kurtzs protean incarnations reflect upon the insufficiency of language to express anything more than a frustrated desire for meaning. That such extreme linguistic scepticism should appear in an apparently topical work about Africa is foreshadowed in Conrads comments upon a vitriolic attack on imperialism mounted by his friend R. B. Cunninghame Graham in Bloody Niggers (1897): There are no converts to ideas of honour, justice, pity, freedom. There are only people who ; drive themselves into a frenzy with words, repeat them shout them out, imagine they believe in them ; And words fly away; and nothing remains, do you understand? Absolutely nothing, oh man of faith! (Letters, II, 70). If, finally, the figure of Kurtz may be taken as a summarizing rubric for a larger free-wheeling medley of styles and genres, then one other implication tends to emerge: the quest for a presumed unity in the story may turn out to be less rewarding than one focusing upon the elisions, tensions and even collisions in its negotiation with shiftingly plural hearts of darkness.IVIt is hardly surprising that Heart of Darkness is often used to pursue an enquiry into the more general nature and practice of reading, and particularly into the perils and pitfalls of reading a Modernist text. The early part of the story offers a forewarning of challenges to come:The yarns of seaman have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (p. 00)While offering a familiar point of reference in Marlows incorrigible tendency to yarn, the description otherwise emphasises an extreme version of the nebulous and penumbral -- meaning inheres not in a glow, but as in a silhouette produced by a glow, which itself can be spectral. So pictorial is the analogy here that some readers have been prompted to make a link with, for example, the chromatic vibrations and atmospheric mistiness in paintings by the early nineteenth-century painter, J. M. W. Turner, in whose works an obscure revelation is effected by means of intermingled light and shade or chiaroscuro (from the Italian chiaro or clear + oscuro or obscure).The reference to a misty halo serves as a reminder that a cognate image in the story is that of the veil, as in the opening description of the mist as being like a gauzy and radiant fabric ; draping the low shores in diaphanous folds (p. 00), with its accompanying implication that moments of revelation only arrive when the veil is lifted or torn. It also anticipates the ways in which Marlows characteristic acts of seeing are so literally obstructed (the journey downriver in Part 2 finds him successively peering through darkness, impenetrable fog and then dark smoke from the steamers funnel) that he is allowed only glimpses of a veiled kind. That the tale may also tease the reader with something akin to optical illusion is perhaps also hinted at in the word moonshine.An equivalent sense of expressive riddle inheres not only in how we see things, but also in how we hear them. An episode at the beginning of Part 2 presents Marlow drowsing on the deck of his steamer and suddenly disturbed by broken fragments of a conversation between the Manager and his nephew, who are sometimes too far away for him to hear them properly. Marlows imperfect overhearing means that the conversation emerges without a connective logic. It brings him revealing but puzzling snatches (p. 000) that only serve to generate further glimpses of Kurtz. A more important form of partial hearing arrives through the constant ellipses that steadily invade Marlows narration in the form of unfinished or interrupted sentences marked by agitated pauses and silences: And I heard him -- it -- this voice -- other voices ; Voices, voices -- even the girl herself -- now -- (p. 000). The problem of what and how we hear operates at two levels here. Marlows struggle to decipher what he has heard is directly relayed to readers as a problem in how we decipher his chosen snatches. Do his pauses signify a persistent confusion, a willed determination to leave something unspoken, or a panic-stricken sense of the unspeakable?The fashioning of such glimpses into a sequential narrative has the constant effect of deferring any promise of full insight. So,

at one point, Marlow with typical indirection peers through binoculars to catch sight of what appear to be carved balls stuck on posts or discovers a book with mysterious cipher pencilled on its margins. Only later does it transpire, with an accompanying shock and need for readjustment on the observers part, that the objects are shrunken heads and that the cipher is a form of annotation in Russian made by the Harlequin. In the case of the discovered heads on sticks, a further trap awaits the reader, since one puzzle is solved only to generate another -- when, that is, Marlow goes on to deem the heads to be symbolic and adds that they were expressive and puzzling ; food for thought (p. 000).The most extreme forms of expressive puzzle arrive with Marlows attempts to glimpse his own obscure motives. The causal logic of a narrative sequence usually depends upon the readers more or less clear perception of human motive. But Marlow the aspiring narrative-maker is sometimes defeated by an inability to fathom even his own governing motives. No explanation is given for his desire to confront Kurtz in isolation (to this day I dont know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience [p. 00]) or why he wishes to visit the Intended (I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted [p. 000]) or whether he has acquired the correct papers of Kurtz to hand to her (I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle [p. 000]). Such deferrals of meaning could not, it might be supposed, prolong indefinitely. Yet the tales ending tends to do just this when it returns to the point at which it began -- with the narrator sitting among his friends aboard a boat on the River Thames -- and implies that the end is but a beginning to another telling.VCome and find out (p. 00). The African jungles teasing invitation to Marlow is also projected to the storys readers with the implication that, even with a full command of the evidence it has to offer, they will need to read inferentially and conjecturally. The history of Heart of Darkness criticism vividly indicates how the invitation has been taken up by successive generations and how, in the process, the work has undergone constant renewal.The responses of late-Victorian readers bear little similarity to those of modern ones. Nor, among modern readers, is there a comfortable consensus, since Heart of Darkness has the power to divide opinion sharply, particularly in its treatment of race and imperialism. Yet the story continues to find a wide audience by virtue of the subliminal power at work in its treatment of collapse and breakdown. As T. S. Eliot seems to have recognized in 1925, the works path-finding significance lies in its use of a simulated nightmare-quest by which to dramatize the relationship between the self and the modern world, with its attendant feelings of moral and metaphysical panic: I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold (p. 000). Written in 1899, a dark sentiment of this kind helps to explain why Conrads line in the twentieth century -- from T. S. Eliot through Graham Greene, V. S. Naipaul, William Golding and beyond -- has been such a powerful one.Works cited(In addition to the items listed in Further Reading, the followingare referred to in the Introduction.)Achebe, Chinua, An Image of Africa, Massachusetts , 17.4 (1977), 782-94.Carlyle, Thomas, Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship, ed W. H. Hudson (London: Dent, 1967).Conrad, Joseph, Geography and Some Explorers (1924), Last Essays, ed. Richard Curle (London: Dent, 1947).Garnett, Edward, ed., Letters from Conrad, 1895-1923 (London: Nonesuch, 1928).Kimbrough, Robert, ed., Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness, 3rd edn. (New York: Norton, 1988).Leavis, F. R., The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (London: Chatto Windus, 1948).Poe, Edgar Allan, How to Write a Blackwoods Article, The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: Random House, 1938).Thierry, C. de, Imperialism, New , 17 (1897): 316-33.Webb, Beatrice, Our Partnership, ed. Barbara Drake and Margaret Isobel Cole (London: Longmans Green, 1948).From AudioFileIn HEART OF DARKNESS, Marlow, the narrator, undertakes both an outer and an inner journey. The outer journey takes him into the heart of Africa, where he encounters representatives of every colonial stripe. Performing the work instead of simply reading it, Scott Brick emphasizes this aspect of Conrad's classic, clearly conveying class differences and a range of foreign accents, as well as pidgin. Conrad's prose is dense and complex, but Brick delivers it smoothly and gracefully. However, Marlow's inner journey--during which he confronts the mysterious Mr. Kurtz--remains too distant and intellectualized to fully capture the emotional charge of the moment. G.T.B. AudioFile 2003, Portland, Maine-- Copyright AudioFile, Portland, Maine