

Heart Of Darkness, Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad (3 December 1857 – 3 August 1924) was a Polish-born British novelist. Some of his works have been labelled romantic, although Conrad's romanticism is tempered with irony and a fine sense of man's capacity for self-deception. Many critics have placed him as a forerunner of modernism.



Marlow and his men he calls 'pilgrims' are sailing on a steamer to find Kurtz, a friend of his.

Where the pilgrims imagined [the beetle] crawled to I don't know. To some place where they expected to get something. I bet! For me it crawled towards Kurtz exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the wood-cutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us --who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign and no memories.

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there...there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were...

(source: <http://www.abbol.com/books/heartofdarkness.htm>, abridged)