Journey into a Dark Heart Study Guide

Journey into a Dark Heart by Peter Høeg

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"Journey into a Dark Heart" was first published in Danish in 1990 in Peter Høeg's *Fortællinger om naten,* a collection of eight short stories about love that take place on the night of March 19, 1929. This collection, which was translated into English in 1998 as *Tales of the Night,* set the standard for contemporary Danish writers. Despite this fact, Høeg is mostly known for his novels. His most famous novel, translated into English in 1993, is *Smilla's Sense of Snow.* Høeg's short fiction displays the same blend of narrative skill and intellectual range that has made his novels so popular. "Journey into a Dark Heart" is saturated with historical references, including as characters two noted men from history: author Joseph Conrad (posing under his real name of Joseph Korzeniowski) and the German World War I veteran Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness,* which is referred to several times in the story, draws on his knowledge of the horrors of colonialism, which he witnessed during a voyage up the Congo River. In a similar fashion, Høeg's "Journey into a Dark Heart" introduces the character David Rehn, a naïve young mathematician who is obsessed with truth. Through the many conversations with the other two men on their fateful train trip into the Congo, David's Western notions about colonial Africa are challenged. The story can be found in the paperback version of *Tales of the Night,* which was published by Penguin Books in 1999.

Author Biography

Peter Høeg was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 17, 1957. He graduated from Frederiksberg Gymnasium in 1976 and then studied literary theory at the University of Copenhagen, earning his master's degree in 1984. While at school, Høeg began writing his first novel, *Forestilling om det tyvende arhundrede,* which he worked on for six years, endlessly revising as he gained greater skill in writing. When the book was published in 1988, Danish critics were quick to praise it. His next book, *Fortællinger om naten* (1990), also received positive criticism and established him as the premier contemporary Danish writer. However, it was his third book, the novel, *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992), which established Høeg's international fame. The book, translated into English as *Smilla's Sense of Snow* in 1993, became a bestseller in the United States.

Following this success, Høeg's existing works began to be translated into English along with his new works, creating an odd situation in which English-speaking readers were exposed to both the author's newest and oldest works in the same time period. In 1994, Høeg's *De måske egnede* (1993) was translated into English as *Borderliners.* In 1995, Høeg's first novel was translated as *The History of Danish Dreams.* In 1996, his novel *Kvinden og aben* and its English translation, *The Woman and the Ape,* were released. Finally, Høeg's second book, the short-story collection *Fortællinger om naten,* which had originally been published in 1990, was not translated until 1998, when it was published in English as *Tales of the Night.* The collection, which includes the story "Journey into a Dark Heart," features a wide range of international settings and a diverse cast of characters. In 1997, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* was adapted into a film, which helped increase the author's exposure.

This fame is not something that Høeg wants, however. Høeg is famous for his aversion to publicity, and he rarely gives interviews. Unlike many other writers, he refuses to accept advances for his books, preferring to work at his own pace, without any pressure. He also does not discuss his books with anybody, including his family and friends. Even his publisher does not know when the next Høeg book will arrive or what it will be about.

Like the characters in his stories, Høeg has multiple interests. Before he began writing fulltime, he worked as a classical ballet dancer, a sailor on pleasure boats, an actor, and a drama instructor. He has also competed as a professional fencer and has climbed mountains. Høeg is an extensive traveler, and much of his writing, including the story "Journey into a Dark Heart," has benefited from his firsthand experience in Third World regions like Africa, Cuba, and the Caribbean. Africa, in particular, is a frequent destination for the author and his wife, Akinyi, a native of Kenya. Høeg lives and works in Copenhagen.

Plot Summary

"Journey into a Dark Heart" begins by introducing David Rehn, a young Dane (citizen of Denmark), who is attending the 1929 dedication of a new railway line. The railway runs from the western coast of Africa in Cabinda through the Belgian Congo and deep into the heart of the continent. The dedication includes many representatives of royalty and international business, and the grand display reinforces David's view that European civilization is indeed great. David has come to this event as a fluke, having acquired a position with a global trading company after he gave up his lifelong pursuit of mathematics. David had always relied on the stability of mathematics to get him through any emotional crisis until one year earlier, when he met Kurt Gödel, a mathematician whose ideas were bound to shake up the world of mathematics. With his passion for mathematics threatened by these new ideas, David abandoned mathematics.

Despite his rejection of mathematics as a career, David is fascinated by the construction of the railway, which he sees in quantitative terms such as the number of workers and length of railroad track. During the dinner, everybody is in joyful spirits over the completion of the railway. This good mood intensifies when the Belgian king announces that, according to an English journalist who will be going on the train trip the next day, European forces have defeated the African rebel bands who have impeded the construction in the past. In addition, Lueni, the feared African leader, has been killed, and his body is to be shipped to Cabinda.

The next afternoon, the various delegates, including David, prepare to take the first train trip ever from Cabinda to Katanga. David ends up in a train car with three others: a distinguished soldier, a black servant girl, and the elderly white man whom she serves. The old man, who is the English journalist who told the Belgian king about the death of Lueni, introduces himself as Joseph Korzeniowski. This is the actual birth name of Joseph Conrad, an author famous for his stories about colonial regions like the Congo, which were largely based on his own travels. Joseph K. hints that he has made the journey into the Congo before, and, by virtue of this experience, declares himself the host of the train car, saying that they should make this trip an open and honest journey. David introduces himself as a mathematician, thus realizing that he has not given up on his passion totally. The German soldier, who is covered in medals indicating his military valor, introduces himself as General Paul von Lettow Voerbeck. This name is a slight variation from the real-life name of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, a German military official famous for his defense of German colonies in Africa during World War I.

Joseph K. refers to the books that the general has written, which have reinforced the European notion that Africa is dark and evil and that war and colonization are humane enterprises. Thus begins the first of many increasingly tense discussions between Joseph K. and the general. Joseph K. also says that he understands the dream of Africa better than anybody else. David challenges Joseph K., saying that the only African pictures that make their way to Europe are dark images of forests, which are accompanied by legends of murder by the natives. Joseph counters by saying that Africa is dark and opens the shades of the train car's window to prove it. It is pitch black

outside. David suddenly blows out the oil lamps, and, after a moment, the formerly black landscape appears in the moonlight. David uses this as proof that Africa may not be as dark as outsiders think.

David says that he is only interested in the truth, but Joseph K. says that truth does not pay that well. He gives more information about his background, referring to his famous writing career and alluding to *Heart of Darkness.* He says that the public liked the fictional aspects of this colonial narrative but did not appreciate the truth, and so he has referred to his writing as fiction ever since. Joseph K. also rebukes the general for publishing his own lies as memoirs, an insult that causes the general to grab Joseph K. by the lapels. Joseph K. elaborates, saying that the general's published assertion that the African natives were happy to be conquered is a lie. The general agrees that some masks are necessary for politics. Joseph K. uses this moment as an opportunity to expose the fact that the general is technically a prisoner of war, although he has been awarded diplomatic immunity for the occasion.

The discussion turns to the masks people wear, and David says that they are all wearing masks, except for the black servant girl, a representative of Africa. He says that Africa has nothing to hide, while Europe does. The general tries to leave the conversation, and the train car, but is stopped by the servant girl, who, to their surprise, speaks perfect English. She introduces herself as Lueni of Uganda, the supposedly male rebel leader who had been announced as dead the day before, and holds them at gunpoint. Lueni says that they are all going to die when the train goes over the next bridge because her people have removed most of the bridge supports. The conversation among the three men continues. David talks about his former passion for mathematics and the goal that he and other learned men had to reduce all life—including humanity—down to a set of equations. Joseph K. is quick to agree with this point, saying that he had suspected all along that this might be possible. However, David says that it is not possible because a fellow mathematician is working on proof that will show that complex systems, like humanity, include unpredictable variables like emotions.

David notes that all of them have left their homes behind, but Lueni seems to be in hers; she corrects him, saying that she is four thousand kilometers from home and that she was educated in England. She also challenges the positive European view of the railroad, saying that it was built mainly by African laborers, many of whom died while being forced to build it. At the next turn, the train slows down, and Lueni gets off. Joseph K. produces a gun of his own and says that he has sold Lueni some guns and that their lives are going to be spared; they will be jumping off the train at the next turn. In their last few minutes, Joseph K. tells a tale illustrating the ignorance and cockiness of Europeans when it comes to dealing with Africans. A German officer tried to buy an African mask that could not be bought. Even the mask warns him, saying that if the officer buys it, it will lead him into hell. The man ignores the advice, obsessed by the talking mask. The officer takes the mask with him everywhere, showing it off to everybody, but he can never get it to talk for him again. His obsession eventually kills him.

The train reaches the next turn, and Joseph K. forces them to jump. Once on the ground, the general thinks that Joseph K. is going to kill him, but Joseph K. says that he is a free man. The general begins the two-hundred-kilometer walk back to Cabinda. David talks briefly with the African woman, they shake hands, and she walks away. David buries his head in his hands, distraught over the fact that the foundations of his beliefs in mathematics, Africa, and even the sanctity of Europe, have been cracked.

Characters

Black Servant Girl

See Lueni

Joseph K.

See Joseph Korzeniowski

King of Belgium

The King of Belgium is overjoyed when he hears that the last group of African rebels has been defeated in the Belgian Congo. The rebels had been a constant threat during construction of the new railway.

Joseph Korzeniowski

Joseph Korzeniowski, the persona of the reallife, famous author Joseph Conrad, reveals himself to be an African sympathizer and arms supplier to the rebels. In 1929, Conrad was already five years dead, but Høeg resurrects him to play a part as one of the passengers on the first railway trip into the Congo. Conrad's African colonial narrative, Heart of Darkness, describes a similar journey up the Congo River in the late nineteenth century. Joseph K. mentions this work, although not by name, several times, the first being when he says that, since he has been this way before and he is very old, he has more experience than the other two passengers and so will be their host. He proves to be a subversive host, first of all indicating that they should all be honest with each other and then withholding pertinent information about himself until the end. In the meantime, he incites discussions that provoke both David and General Paul von Lettow Voerbeck. Joseph K. says that when he told the truth about the evils of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness,* the public did not like it. As a result, since then, even when he is writing the truth, he calls it fiction.

Joseph K. calls the general a liar, since the general has published his own views about Africa as truthful memoirs, claiming that the African natives appreciate being conquered, among other falsehoods. As the story progresses, Joseph K. criticizes the European colonization of Africa more explicitly. When Lueni, who is posing as Joseph K.'s servant girl, reveals herself to be the leader of the African rebels, Joseph K. acts like he did not know this. He and the general provide an example for David, who is afraid of dying, to be calm. After Lueni leaves the train, Joseph K. reveals that he is in league with Lueni, so their lives are going to be spared. At the urging of Joseph K. and his gun, the three white men jump off the train when it slows down to take a turn.

Lueni

Lueni, the black servant girl whose true identity is not revealed until the last part of the story, is the Ugandan leader of the African rebels, who plan to destroy the European train. The story never indicates whether Lueni is her first or last name, but what is certain is that none of the European delegates expects Lueni is a woman. Joseph K. brings news of Lueni's death to the Belgian king, which makes Lueni's appearance on the train even more surprising. Lueni tells the other passengers on the train that she was educated in London, and the reader finds out at the end of the story that Joseph K. has sold her some rifles to use in the rebellion. Lueni offers stories from her African tribe that illustrate points she is trying to make.

David Rehn

David Rehn is a young, disillusioned Danish mathematician who goes to the railway dedication as part of a delegation from a Danish trading company. Up to the previous year he had followed his passion for mathematics, which he thought would always be a pure science founded on stability. However, after meeting Kurt Gödel, a mathematician who would prove that complex systems would always retain an element of unpredictability, David abandoned mathematics. On the train trip through the Congo, however, David surprises himself when he tells the others that he is a mathematician. His scientific desire for truth motivates much of the conversation in the train car, during which many assumptions about Africa and Europe are proven to be false. David has been under the impression that Europe is a great region and that Africa is a dark continent hiding many secrets.

At the end of the story, David realizes that the opposite is true. Europe's view of colonialism—and war—as a benevolent enterprise is shattered, and he sees the horrors of colonialism. This insight is similar to the revelation of Marlow, the main character in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness,* which Joseph K., the persona of the real-life Conrad, alludes to several times. David assumes that the black servant girl is obedient and cannot understand English, so he is very surprised when she reveals herself to be the London-educated leader of the African rebels. He also assumes the railroad is a great enterprise, until he finds out about the thousands of Africans who died at gunpoint while being forced to build the railway line. In the last scene, with all of his assumptions turned upside-down, David, who craves the order that he used to find in mathematics, is more disillusioned than ever.

General Paul von Lettow Voerbeck

In history, General Paul von Lettow Voerbeck von Lettow-Vorbeck in real life) was a distinguished German military leader in World War I who successfully defended Germany's African colonies against much larger forces. During the story, it is revealed that this conquered military leader, who is technically a prisoner of war, has been granted diplomatic leave to make this symbolic train trip. This character serves as a

symbol of successful colonization in Africa, an idea that helps reassure the railroad's stockholders. As the train trip progresses and all three men tell their stories, the general becomes increasingly antagonistic towards Joseph K., who says that the general's published observations about Africa are lies. The general is in favor of war, especially when it benefits his country. His comments allude to the impending rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and the beginning of World War II. When the general finally gets fed up with the antiwar comments from Joseph K. and David, he tries to leave, at which point Lueni, posing as the black servant girl, stops him, at gunpoint. After Joseph K. reveals himself to be associated with Lueni, the general assumes that Joseph K. will shoot him. However, Joseph K. lets him go, at which point the general begins the two-hundred-kilometer (roughly one hundred and twenty miles) walk back to Cabinda.

Themes

Love

In the introductory note to *Tales of the Night,* Høeg says: "These eight stories are linked by a date and a motif. All of them have to do with love. Love and its conditions on the night of March 19, 1929." Without this guiding motif, readers might have trouble picking out the theme of love in "Journey into a Dark Heart," since the story does not deal with love in the traditional, romantic sense. Instead, Høeg's exploration of love manifests itself in the characters' tales about their life passions. For David, this passion is mathematics, a vocation to which he is deeply devoted. As the narrator says, David "became a mathematician out of a deep, burning passion for that crystal-clear, purifying algebraic science from which all earthly uncertainty has been distilled." Joseph K.'s passion is for writing and exploration. He notes: "As a boy I used to look at maps, I was . . . obsessed with maps." This passion led him to go to sea, which in turn led him to write about his adventures. When referring to *Heart of Darkness,* he says, "I put my heart and soul into that book." Finally, the general is motivated by his love for "the spirit of Teutonic brotherhood" and as such spends most of his efforts on German military and political ventures.

Truth

When the three men board the train, Joseph K. suggests that they make the trip "an open and honest journey." This is the first invitation for the three men to give information about themselves, which continues as the trip progresses. Joseph K. is revealed to be first a journalist, then a famous author, and ultimately an accomplice to the African rebels. The general is revealed to have lied in his memoirs about World War I, and his presence on the train is only as a token of reassurance to stockholders nervous about the dark African colony. Technically, his active military role in World War I means that he needed to be granted amnesty before he could be allowed to make the journey.

As the men offer more truths about themselves, other truths about colonialism come to light. David notes: "You, Joseph K., have left your writing behind, the general his soldiers, and I mathematics. We seem to be on the wrong track." He then notes that Lueni appears to be in her place, since she is an African and they are in Africa. She dispels this myth that all of Africa is the same and says that she is several thousand kilometers from her home. Furthermore, she says that she was educated in England, thereby disproving the myth that Africans are an inferior race who cannot learn like Europeans. In fact, before she speaks, David naturally assumes that, even though it appears as if she is listening to them, Lueni "could have understood nothing." These and other truths about the horrors of colonialism come to light. The most powerful example is Lueni's debunking of the idea that there is no slavery in the African colonies. She talks about "the seven thousand slaves" who built the railway. The general reacts with the European belief, saying that slavery "has been abolished." Lueni counters this

myth by illustrating the slave conditions to which African rail workers were subject: "They worked under armed guard, under the lash, and with steel rings around their necks so they would be easily recognizable should they run away."

The force of these horrible truths shatters David's idealism, which only adds to his feeling of instability about the world, driving him into despair at the end of the story. In the meantime, Joseph K. and the general go on with their lives; they have long since been hardened to the deceitful ways of the Western world.

War

The story is saturated with references to war. The general fought in World War I, a war that, Joseph K. notes, has sparked many "voices throughout Europe that rail against war." This war also served as a springboard for the general's published lies about African colonization. Joseph K. debunks these lies, which state that the Africans appreciate the civilizing effect of the Western world and that they willingly fought for the Germans in World War I. The truth, as Joseph K. notes, is that "they walked into that war on the point of a German bayonet, with their heads in a cloud of promises and religious hot air." Although David thinks that the general will kill Joseph K. for this accusation, the general admits that he lied, saying that "A military mask may be necessary . . . if one is to arrive at a deeper political truth." The general also feels that World War I, during which he successfully defended the German colonies of Africa against a much larger force, "proved the potential within our colonies for the founding of a new Germany." This statement foreshadows the new Germany of the Nazi regime, which would terrorize the world in World War II. War in a cultural sense is also addressed. Although the Western world has colonized Africa, peace has not been achieved. Rebel tribes, like those led by Lueni, attempt to avenge the deaths from their tribes by staging counterattacks like the sabotage of the Congo train bridge in the story.

Style

Fable

"Journey into a Dark Heart," like the other stories in the collection, is a fable. A fable is a narrative that is intended to convey a moral. However, unlike classical fables, this story does not include animals or inanimate objects as characters. The story does have some fantastic elements, however. To tell his tale, Høeg places actual historical figures in unrealistic situations. For example, Conrad died in 1924, but he is resurrected to play a part in this story about 1929. Conrad's role, as Joseph K., is extremely important to the fable. The moral of this story is that the Western view of colonialism in the early twentieth century was distorted, that true colonialism was much more evil than people realized. It is through Joseph K.'s background and prompting that the evils of colonialism are gradually revealed. In the beginning, he tells them that "no one has ever understood the dream of Africa as well as I." As the story progresses, he reveals his own experiences with the horrors of colonialism on his previous river trip through the Congo. In addition, he antagonizes the general until he disproves the general's—and the Western world's—assertions about the humanity of colonization.

Setting

The time in which this story takes place, March 1929, is extremely important to the story. This point in history precedes the Great Depression and the Holocaust. These two monumental events helped open people's eyes to many truths, including humanity's capacity for evil. The location, the Belgian Congo, is also important. It provides an unfamiliar and different setting—and because of that a wild one that is perceived as chaotic—in contrast to the supposed order and civility of Western cultures, a contrast that the supporters of colonialism take for granted as justification for what may essentially be imperialist invasion. With Joseph K.'s announcement of Lueni's death, the various governments at the dedication are not expecting an attack in the remote jungle.

Suspense

Høeg uses the technique of suspense to increase the anticipation of the reader throughout the story, placing David in what seem to be increasingly dangerous situations, where his sense of apprehension also increases. In the beginning, David sees everything in Africa in idealistic terms. The Belgian king gives a moving speech about the civilizing aspects of colonization, calling the railroad tracks "the pure lines of thought and commerce," an image that appeals to David. During the dedication dinner, news reaches the king that European forces have "defeated the native rebel bands that have posed the greatest problem to construction work in recent years." Everything seems to be going along even better than planned, and David is hopeful. However, the next day, "there arose a moment's doubt." A new car has to be added on to the train.

While this is happening, David notices three "silent and strange" passengers. When David enters the train car, all of the inhabitants initially remain silent, creating "a narrow void of doubt and irresponsibility." Finally, Joseph K. breaks the silence, but David interprets the old man's offer to serve as their host as "a command."

In fact, at one point in their conversation, David challenges Joseph K.'s understanding of Africa, and the old man suddenly loses his good mood: "The smile left Joseph K.'s face, and when he answered his voice was quiet and cold." The story now starts to turn dark, and the reader wonders what is going to happen to David. This suspenseful mood increases as Joseph K. gives his dark vision of Africa, calling the Congo River "a mighty serpent, coiled up with its head in the sea and its body in a fever-ridden hell." As the antagonism between Joseph K. and the general increases, so does the suspenseful tension. At the same time, David starts to notice details that indicate something is not right. David is the only one who notices that a different African waiter comes to serve them "and that he wore a uniform that was far, far too small for him." He also notices that the waiter carries the wine bottle the wrong way. When Lueni identifies herself, the sound of her "dark and faultless English" comes as a shock to the characters and the reader. When Lueni draws her gun and tells them how they are going to die on the bridge, the story gets even more suspenseful. Lueni leaves, and the reader assumes that David and the others will die, but then Joseph K. draws his own gun and forces the two to jump with him. In the end, Joseph K. reveals that he is going to let David and the general live, and the suspense finally breaks, culminating in David's profound sense of despair at knowing the horrible truth about Europe and colonization.

Historical Context

The Congo in the Early 1990s

When Høeg was writing the story in the late 1980s, the situation in the Congo was deteriorating. After almost thirty years under a corrupt ruler, Mobutu Sese Seko (born as Joseph-Désiré Mobutu), the country, which had been known as Zaire since 1971, was nearly bankrupt. When the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, Mobutu lost financial support from Western nations, which had used the country's centralized location and Mobutu's resources to their advantage. As a result, he began to lose control of his regime.

The Escalation to World War II

The story takes place in 1929, another unstable time. The world was still recovering from World War I, while trying to prevent another world war. However, despite the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed war, attempts at world disarmament moved slowly. The more heavily armed states did not want to give up their military protection easily, while other states which had been forced to disarm after World War I wanted to rearm for their own protection. One of the biggest issues facing the Allies was the negotiation of final war reparations for Germany. As part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, the Allies included a war guilt clause, which stated that Germany caused the war and should therefore pay for the Allies's losses and damages. However, a specific figure was hard to assess. Under the 1924 Dawes Plan, the two sides agreed that, to start with, Germany would pay one million gold marks each year, rising to two-and-ahalf million gold marks each year by 1928. By 1929, the plan was working so well that the British and French governments started renegotiations with Germany for their final reparations payments.

Germans, inspired by Adolf Hitler and frustrated over their rising unemployment, became increasingly hostile on the issue of war reparations payments. This issue helped Hitler and his Nazi Party gain in popularity, especially when the worldwide depression in the early 1930s affected Germany's ability to make its reparations payments. In addition to rebelling against making reparations, Hitler also spoke out against Jews, blaming the rising rate of German unemployment on Jewish businessmen. This charge was the beginning of an ethnic-cleansing policy that would eventually take the lives of millions of Jews. While Hitler enjoyed the support of many German veterans for his endorsement of their efforts in World War I, not all of them were swayed to support the Nazis. For example, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, a patriotic, conservative German, made an unsuccessful attempt to organize an opposition to Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Antiwar Sentiment

Most people were anxious to avoid another world war. The antiwar atmosphere manifested itself in many ways in the late 1920s, but one of the most prominent was in the publication of several literary works by veterans, all of whom indicted World War I. Siegfried Sassoon, an English poet who had been wounded while serving in the trenches in World War I, became famous during the war for his angry antiwar poems. In 1928, Sassoon published his autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man.* After its success, he followed it with a 1930 sequel, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer.* While he was injured during the war, Sassoon wrote a letter of protest to the war department, saying that he refused to fight any more. During this protest, he was supported by another English writer, Robert Graves. In 1929, Graves wrote his own antiwar novel, *Goodbye to All* That, which depicts in graphic detail his own experiences before, during, and after World War I. In Farewell to Arms, also published in 1929, Ernest Hemingway uses his own experiences to depict the fragile quality of love and relationships during wartime. However, the book that caused the largest stir was Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Remarque, a German Catholic, incurred the wrath of Adolf Hitler with the publication of his antiwar novel, which threatened Hitler's efforts to rally support for German military actions.

Scientific Theories

While the horrible realities of modern warfare were on many people's minds, others were caught up in more academic pursuits. In 1929, scientists were working on various theories that they hoped would either prove or disprove stability and uniform structure in the natural world. In "Journey into a Dark Heart," David notes Gödel's monumental conclusion, which was destined to shake the world of mathematics: "within any complex system there are certain elements that cannot be deduced from its basic characteristics." This evidence of unpredictability would be published in 1931 and would come to be known as Gödel's proof. Gödel's findings eliminated the possibility of standardizing the foundations of mathematics, something that mathematicians had been attempting to do for almost a century. In physics, however, scientists were still attempting to discover a unified field theory, a single theoretical structure that could encompass all fundamental physical forces. In 1929, Albert Einstein submitted a theory that supposedly united gravity and electromagnetism within one framework, a step that would have been a huge first step towards a unified field theory. Einstein's theory, however, was eventually proven wrong, as were the attempts of others.

Critical Overview

When *Fortællinger om naten* was first released in Denmark in 1990, the Danish press loved it. Says Thomas Satterlee, in his entry on Høeg for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography:* the book "confirmed for Danish critics what they had suspected from Høeg's first book: the author's talent was substantial, and the breadth of his knowledge was impressive." Satterlee also notes that Danish critics considered the book "a literary" work, especially with its similarities to the stories of Isak Dinesen. Satterlee also says that, with the publication of *Fortællinger om naten,* "Høeg's influence on contemporary Danish fiction increased," as critics started to "view his ambitious work as a standard by which other Danish writers might be judged."

The book was also received well when it was translated into English in 1998 as *Tales of the Night.* Katherine Dunn, in her 1998 review for Washington *Post Book World,* says that it is "an intriguing collection of short stories." Likewise, the 1998 reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* calls the book "an accomplished and provocative debut collection from one of the world's least predictable writers." However, although most reviewers had at least one good comment about the book, several qualified their praise with negative criticism. For example, in the 1998 *Publishers Weekly review,* the reviewer says that there is "a certain stiffness in the prose." Although, the reviewer says that this may be "the fault of the translation." In the end, the reviewer assesses the collection as "potent but problematic" and says that it "must make do without the dazzling lucidity of Høeg's more recent works." Bill Ott, in his 1998 *Booklist* review, says that, since this collection is one of Høeg's earlier works and does not show the skill of his later books, one can see in the stories a writer "struggling to come to terms with his craft." For this reason, Ott recommends the collection, but only to "anyone curious about the evolution of a great writer."

Several English-speaking critics also note the relation of Høeg's works to Dinesen's. Says Edward B. St. John in his 1998 review of the collection for *Library Journal:* "Høeg's use of a polished nineteenth-century prose style to examine twentiethcentury issues strongly recalls the work of fellow Dane Isak Dinesen." Likewise, Dunn says that the stories reveal Høeg to be "an old-fashioned storyteller in fable forms reminiscent of Isak Dinesen and occasionally Joseph Conrad." The similarity of "Journey into a Dark Heart" to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is also commonly mentioned by critics. For example, Dunn calls the story "gleefully satiric" and says that it is a homage to *Heart of Darkness* that travels "by train rather than riverboat." In his 1998 review of the collection for the *New York Times Book Review,* Jay Parini says, "The main interest in the story lies with the narrative technique, borrowed from Conrad, of the tale told within tales."

The use of Conrad, who was dead at this point in history, has also attracted the attention of critics. Says Dunn: "Høeg inserts historical figures into several of these fictions, molding them for his own purposes." St. John thinks that this historical context in "Journey into a Dark Heart" helps make it "the strongest story in the collection." However, not all critics appreciate Høeg's use of many historical figures and other allusions. Says Parini: "Høeg is vastly learned, referring easily to a dizzying range of

historic events, geographical places, figures from the past and scientific theories, but his learning often gets in the way." Parini finds this to be most apparent in "Journey into a Dark Heart." The blatant use of the 1929 date for Høeg's self-professed love stories is also a common topic of discussion for critics. Satterlee says that in this year "before Adolf Hitler's rise to power, Europeans had not yet suffered the disillusionment of the Holocaust, and simple romance was still possible." *The Kirkus Reviews* reviewer notes that, while the use of a "love motif" is "gimmicky," it does give Høeg the opportunity to place "these olden fancifully symbolic stories firmly within a context of political and economic ferment and approaching European war." Finally, the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, referring to the famous 1929 stock market crash, links Høeg's choice of date with the moral quality of the stories, saying that the date is "a sort of universal Black Monday of the soul."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Høeg's use of contrasting dark and light imagery in "Journey into a Dark Heart."

Høeg's moral message in "Journey into a Dark Heart" is clear. Western attitudes towards African colonialism in the early twentieth century were based on false assumptions or outright lies. However, while this idea comes through clearly with the dialogue, particularly that of Lueni and her accomplice, Joseph K., Høeg underscores this idea through the use of contrasting dark and light imagery and the meanings behind these images.

In the story, Høeg uses many contrasting images, such as the wealth of Europe compared to the poverty of Africa or the modern train with its European conveniences traveling through the primitive jungle. At one point in their conversation, David even introduces a number of opposites: "A great mathematician once said that when God created heaven and earth and separated light and dark and water from land and above from below, he showed himself to be a mathematician." However, the greatest contrast is between dark and light which is also the most prevalent contrast in the story.

Throughout the story, many items and people are described in terms of dark and light or black and white. "Black" servants wear "white" gloves or clothes, which helps emphasize the differences between the two races. Also, at one point, when describing David's adjustment to life in Africa, the narrator says that "David believed himself to be more or less accustomed to the sudden shifts between darkness and light," which had given him headaches when he first arrived.

Traditionally in literature, darkness and blackness have negative associations, such as death and evil. In fact, from the beginning, readers are led to believe that the "dark heart" of the title refers to the Congo, the region of the African interior through which the characters will pass by train. Africa is viewed as a dark and evil place, which is demonstrated at the dedication dinner. When Joseph K. brings word to the Belgian king that the African rebel, Lueni, has been killed, everybody breathes a sigh of relief. As the narrator notes, Lueni—and the associated resistance movement—is a "name from the innermost chamber of Africa's dark hell."

By contrast, lightness and whiteness often have good associations in literature, such as life and goodness. This connection is also reinforced at the dedication dinner. During his speech, the Belgian king refers to the Europeans' African railroad rails as two "pure lines of thought and commerce that, as the arteries of civilization, shall carry clean, revitalized blood three thousand kilometers through the jungle, deep into the heart of the dark continent." This assumption that Europe is pure and civilized and Africa is dark and primitive reflects the prevailing prejudice of the time. David, a truthseeker, is nevertheless swayed by this powerful speech, which idealizes colonization by making it seem as though Europe's efforts to civilize the Africans are noble. This feeling of moral

superiority is amplified when David goes outside into the garden. The narrator describes the setting in bright, idealistic terms: "With its white pillars the governor's palace looked for all the world like a floodlit Greek temple." The use of the color white is meant to indicate goodness and purity, and the allusion to a Greek temple symbolizes advanced learning and civilization. The picture is completed by the presence of "the constellation of Libra, that great celestial square." Libra is a European symbol of justice, and at this early point in the story, David thinks that Europe has been fair to the Africans. David takes comfort in these feelings and thinks that he is perhaps on the right track after all.

However, not all juxtapositions of the black and white imagery are flattering to the Europeans. There are also concrete images of the subordination of Africans by whites. As the narrator says when David is at the dedication dinner, "he mingled with black servants and white guests." Despite the fact that the Africans are supposedly being civilized, none of them is allowed to be a guest. Instead, they are all relegated to the subordinate position of servants. In fact, David even notes that the black servants will always symbolize Africa, and never Europe. The lavish dedication reminds him of home, but "the white tropical suits, the suntanned men, and the black servants in their livery and white gloves betrayed the fact that this was not Europe." Later in the story, after the general has introduced himself, the narrator gives background on the military leader, including his successful defense of Germany's African colonies with "white troops and black askaris." The fact that the black troops are referred to by a different name indicates the segregation. In fact, Joseph K. takes this a step further when he challenges the general's published assertion that the Africans volunteered to fight for the Germans. As Joseph K. notes, the truth is that "they walked into that war on the point of a German bayonet." This information reinforces the subordination of blacks by whites.

In fact, even David, an amiable, naive young man, is a product of his European background, which assumes that blacks are inferior to whites. When David first meets his traveling companions, he notices that Lueni, who at this point is posing as Joseph K.'s black female servant, "settled herself, unasked, on a stool in the corner." This language indicates the European expectation that blacks would ask their masters for permission before sitting down. David and the general also expect that Lueni cannot speak English, another side effect of the belief that the Africans are an inferior race. When David notices that she is watching him, he is surprised, because he believes that she "could have understood nothing." In fact, when Lueni does speak up, in "dark and faultless English," the general is so shocked that he just stares at her: "And he was looking at her still as he said, to no one in particular and without seeming to have heard a word of what she had said: 'She speaks English." The idea of an African girl speaking English is unfathomable to the general. He regains his composure and tries to enforce his white superiority on the servant: "Stand up when a white man is talking to you. Who are you?" However, as the general soon realizes when Lueni draws her gun, their roles have been reversed. Lueni is in control, and the white men are subordinate to her.

Besides the association of darkness with evil and subordination, the darkness of Africa also represents mystery in the minds of the Europeans. When David arrives on the continent, the "dark, inscrutable faces all around him . . . weigh on his mind." Furthermore, David is intrigued by the mysterious pictures of Africa that show up in

Europe, which only "show the dark fringes of a forest, from which sudden death strikes in the form of a wild animal or a poisoned dart." At first, Joseph K. tries to support this idea that "Africa is dark" and attempts to prove it by opening the curtains to reveal "the tropical night, black and impenetrable." However, David challenges this notion by blowing out the lamp, which turns the dark landscape white from the moonlight. David says that "the light of learning" can blind people, making them think that their surroundings are "dark and unfathomable." Furthermore, he observes: "Anyone who travels through Africa in a brightly lit railway carriage is bound, on his return home, to tell everyone that Africa is a lowering forest fringe."

This is the turning point in the story. From this point on, Joseph K. and Lueni increasingly challenge European assumptions about colonialism, and even the general admits that he has lied about Africa for political gain. At one point, Joseph K. even reverses the traditional associations of black as mysterious, when he is discussing his passion for maps. Says Joseph K.:

As a boy I used to look at maps, I was . . . obsessed with maps, the white areas most of all. They denote those places of which we know nothing, dark spots in the universe that exert a . . . savage attraction.

In this example, which closely echoes a passage in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* the color white suddenly represents the hidden, the unknown. This reversal is intentional in both texts. At this point in Høeg's story, enough hidden truths about Europe have been revealed, and its questionable practices in Africa are indeed starting to look "dark" and "savage."

If Europe is not to be trusted, where does one seek the truth? As Joseph K. and Lueni reveal, it is only through darkness that one may find the path to truth. Earlier in the story, Joseph K. has noted that "this expedition into the heart of darkness may also be a journey into the light." In the figurative sense, this is exactly what happens. In a 1997 article about Høeg's works for *Scandinavian Studies,* Hans Henrik Møller notes the following about this story: "The trip also assumes symbolic significance in its movement toward the characters' heightened comprehension: it is a journey into the mind, travel through the dark parts of a western civilization."

While Joseph K. has provided the majority of the debunking of Western notions about colonialism throughout the story, at the end, Lueni takes over and becomes the educator. In this way, the traditional roles of whites as the civilizing force on Africans is also reversed. During Lueni's speech, she educates the Europeans. Even after she has drawn her gun, Lueni remains quiet and calm. David notes that the three men are all away from their homes and assumes, based on Lueni's African status, that she is in her home. "You, Miss, on the other hand, appear to be . . . in your proper place." Lueni corrects him, noting that she is in fact several thousand kilometers from her African home.

She also notes that she was educated in London. Because of this, she is able to use the language of her oppressors to convey the massive destruction that Europeans have

wrought in the Congo. "The European languages . . . are good for large numbers. In English, for example, the seven thousand slaves who built this railway are easily counted." Lueni continues, giving them detailed accounts of how Africans were forced into labor and killed in large numbers during the construction of the railroad and challenges the general's notion that there is no slavery in Africa. At the end, she notes the following: "In my tribe we say that the railroads across Africa run not over railway track but over African bones. What would you call slavery if not that, General?"

After David and his two companions jump safely from the train, he speaks briefly with Lueni, saying that "Europeans are experts when it comes to waging war." As the narrator says, David is "unaware that he spoke as though this were a class in which he no longer found himself a subset." David has become totally disillusioned at the end. All of his assumptions about the meanings of dark and light, Africa and Europe—like his previous assumptions about mathematics—have been challenged and debunked. As the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer notes of many stories in *Tales of the Night* "the deep despair and foreboding of well-intentioned Europeans victimized by the very culture that was supposed to educate them is often painfully credible."

When David sits down on the tracks and puts his head in his hands at the end, he is not sure what to do with himself or where to go. Meanwhile, as one final contrast, Høeg leaves his readers with the following image: "Libra crossed the zenith of the night sky and dropped toward the horizon. European justice descending over tropical Africa." However, the meaning of this image, like many of the contrasting images in the story, has changed. In the beginning, David, like most Europeans, viewed colonization efforts as a positive, civilizing force. It is only at the end, after David has been educated by Lueni, that this celestial image of justice becomes one more empty European symbol masking the terrible truth of the horrors of colonialism.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "Journey into a Dark Heart," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Covintree is currently pursuing a master of fine arts degree at Emerson College. In this essay, Covintree explores the way Høeg illustrates colonialism in his short story.

Almost one hundred years after Joseph Conrad wrote his acclaimed novella *Heart of Darkness,* Danish author Peter Høeg has written "Journey into a Dark Heart." Like Conrad's, Høeg's story is set deep in the jungle of central Africa. Høeg follows many of Conrad's conventions, though this time, instead of a journey by boat, it is a journey by train. Høeg sets his story on March 19, 1929, five years after Conrad's death. Still, Høeg chooses to include a character on his journey that is a resurrected Conrad with the name Joseph K. (for Korzeniowski which was Conrad's real last name). He is one of three men in the train who are accompanied by one black female servant. The other male travelers are the German General Paul von Lettow Voerbeck, famous for his military skill during WWI, and a disillusioned Danish mathematician named David Rehn. The black female is assumed to be Joseph K.'s servant, but during the course of the tale is discovered to be a rebel leader. Parallels could be made between these characters and those in Conrad's story as well as between the two narrative styles, but Høeg's story is still unique, with new voices. As Hans Möller says in his article "Peter Høeg or the Sense of Writing" from *Scandinavian Studies,* Høeg uses his story "to create [a] convincingly new and engaging fictional reality which is nonetheless a continuation of an older tradition." In following that older tradition, Høeg uses this story and its four main characters to look at Europe's colonization of Africa.

Like the Greeks before them, the Europeans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believe it is their duty to create empires outside of their own nations. By placing the story in 1929, Høeg examines a time in Africa when colonialism is still strong. In her essay "The Other Woman and the Racial Politics of Gender: Isak Dinesen and Beryl Markham in Kenya," Sidonie Smith explores the various reasons for Europe's appeal in Africa. She observes that the African people were "categorized as less civilized" and "located closer to nature." This immediate low status raised the status of all Europeans in Africa, because at least they weren't African. For Høeg's European characters, he shows that they have no desire to be African. As Smith explains, "Africa represented a new kind of playground, 'a winter home for Aristocrats' as one Uganda Railroad poster advertised." In the opening scene, there is a large formal dinner set in the jungle. Even in the middle of this jungle, the colonialists engage in the habits of their home country. "The dinner service was Crown Derby, the wine was Chambertin-Clos de Beze, and the saddle of venison tasted to David just like the red deer at home." During this elaborate dinner, the guests can imagine they are in Europe, because nothing of the African culture has been integrated into their experience.

When David enters his Pullman car to start the journey, he is again met with Europe inside Africa. He enters an elaborate car that is "the most extreme and yet classic example of European comfort." David and his traveling companions can forget about their actual tropic location and settle themselves into the familiar. They are supplied with "leather upholstered chairs," "paintings of cool oak forests," and "an open marble

fireplace." None of these items have any logical use in the jungle. Though it could get cool at night in Africa, finding a fireplace and having it be of marble is highly unlikely. Such a thing is unnecessary in this environment. Leather chairs would be made from the hides of animals not traditionally found on the continent of Africa. In addition, having paintings of oak trees shows the vast contrast between the scenery in Europe and in the Congo. It also shows the aesthetic of the Europeans. They do not perceive Africa to contain beauty as Europe does. Africa only contains undiscovered resources.

These are the resources that propel the character of Joseph K. to come to Africa. Joseph K. confesses during their journey that as a boy he was "obsessed with maps, the white areas most of all. They denote those places of which we know nothing, dark spots in the universe that exert a . . . savage attraction." Since they are blank, foreign spaces to the Europeans, they believe they can claim them for their own. This idea of entitlement is strengthened by the fact that they color these unknown areas white. Though these parts of the maps are empty, the Europeans already connect this white space with their own skin color. Thus they see that land as already connected to them and want to impose their European identity on that space. Smith writes,

the image of Africa constructed by Europeans both invited and justified colonization, on one hand the project of "civilizing" the native Africans, on the other the aggressive expression of the will to power the desire to dominate, appropriate, and transform.

In their domination, the Europeans dismiss the culture and people of the land. In addition, they disregard the work they subject the natives to: "All the guests were filled with the sense of a tough job well done. Their limbs ached slightly, as though they personally had shoveled earth and sleepers into place." Not only have they appropriated the native land, they have also appropriated the feeling of satisfaction for doing exhaustive work. These noble Europeans did none of this work. Instead, they found a blank place on the map that intrigued them and used whatever means necessary to own that area. This railroad was not being built for the people of Africa but for the people who wanted to consume Africa.

Because the story is set in the jungle, however, most readers know these areas are not white, blank, or empty. The environment is lush with life and culture. To celebrate any existing culture would deny the discovery made by the Europeans. They want to make every part of the uncharted map their own. But this will never happen. The native people, who did not need a map to discover they exist already, occupy the white space Joseph K. and the other colonialists are interested in. For the Europeans, these natives are a dark blemish on the vast, uncharted, white emptiness. These Europeans do their best to either ignore or control the darkness they perceive.

The darkness has several forms, most literally the night and the natives. The skin of the native people is dark and easily camouflaged at night. When Joseph K. pulls back a curtain in the train car, he shows "the tropical night, black and impenetrable." This darkness cannot be denied, but colonialists have generalized the continent based on these fixed circumstances. They have chosen to black out all African civilizations in order to create their own dream of the continent. As Joseph K. admits, "the dream . . .

created by me, . . . and it is dark because Africa is dark." But when David turns out the lights in the train car, the jungle comes to life: "out of the gloom, the moonlit landscape outside emerged, glittering whitely, as if the treetops were covered with an endless carpet of snow." This is a completely different Africa, now revealed because it is not being "blinded by the light source itself." Invading colonists have manipulated the image of Africa and in doing so have manipulated their understanding of Africa.

In seeing themselves as governing the image of the dark land, they do not see what is possible in the people. In many ways, they do not see the people of Africa at all. Although von Lettow Voerbeck does not believe that the current railroad workers are slaves, when the facts are stated it becomes difficult to see it any other way:

Belgian troops rounded up four thousand Africans from the Gold Coast and Angola. Some were drawn by the promise of what was a very low wage. . . . They worked under armed guard, under the lash, and with steel rings around their necks so they would be easily recognizable should they run away.

Clearly these workers are here because they have been forced. If they were free to leave, would rings around their necks be necessary? This is not equal or fair treatment and shows that the Europeans believed the natives to be less than human. They only see in the natives what they want to see.

When David turns out the lights, the outside moonlight can only reflect off the servant girl's dress. The servant girl's face disappears: "The light did not penetrate to her dark face." In the same way that the moonlight ignores her face, the three gentlemen also ignore her. Like the railway slaves, she is seen as an inconsequential member of the party. She goes unnoticed and remains a silent observer while the other three characters engage in a discourse as varied as math, religion, and colonialism. Though she listens to their opinions and ideas about Africa, she simply sits quietly. It is only when von Lettow Voerbeck tries to leave the car that she finally speaks.

Smith explains in her essay, "both woman and African remain the potential site of disruption— subjects waiting to speak," and to hear the black servant girl speak startles the men. Her words are simple, "the doors are locked," but the meaning is clear. She has understood their entire conversation and exposed them to their own vulnerability. By using her voice and speaking in their language, she has given Africa back some control of the European experience. She has disrupted the European balance. She can maintain this control even from a small stool. When ordered to stand, she simply makes herself more comfortable. She has subverted the notion of a passive Africa that will let anyone control her. She has, metaphorically speaking, turned out the lights again and forced them to look beyond their constructed image.

She further subverts their assumptions by being the leader of the rebel party. She is Lueni, the rebel leader whose name "constituted the essence of fear, it represented death" to the Europeans in Africa. At the beginning of the story, the Europeans assume that Lueni is a man, but she has shown otherwise. When she speaks her name, she is merely a girl, but a girl with immense power. When her role changes, the whole

experience for the other characters is forced to shift dramatically. Their entire notion of power has been questioned, as has their destination.

Lueni becomes a symbol for the people affected by colonialism. The natives may appear silent and complicit, but they are observing their captors and will find ways to regain the power of their land and people. The three men are no longer heading for the African wilderness that will bring them uncharted riches, they are heading to an unknown they cannot have mastery over. With the destruction of the train, Høeg shows that colonialism will eventually crumble. Then, the Europeans will be forced to reexamine where they are. They are going to be consumed by Africa and will be forced to experience a truer version of Africa. This Africa will not have false European elegance, but African integrity.

Source: Kate Covintree, Critical Essay on "Journey into a Dark Heart," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Adaptations

Høeg's novel *Smilla's Sense of Snow* was adapted into a movie in 1997 and was released in the United States by Twentieth Century Fox. The film was directed by a Danish-born director, Bille August, and featured Julia Ormond as Smilla. It is available on VHS and DVD from Twentieth Century Fox.

Topics for Further Study

Research the political policy of the Belgian government during the time of the story and discuss what kinds of actions it might have taken after finding out about the sabotage of the train. Write a synopsis for an extended ending to the story that includes the most likely actions of the Belgian government. In the synopsis, also indicate what you think would happen to David.

Read several newspaper articles about Africa, circa March 1929. Pretend you are a news correspondent in the Congo, who has heard about the deadly sabotage of the train, and write an article about the incident. Write in the style of the times, making sure to preserve any bias or prevailing attitudes.

Read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and compare David Rehn's revelatory colonial experience to the revelation of Marlow, Conrad's narrator.

In the story, David Rehn assumes that Europe's story of Africa is true and is shocked to find out the truth of colonialism. Research any recent African issue that has made international headlines and discuss how Western nations responded to this issue. Pay particular attention to any cover-ups that have been brought to light.

As the story indicates, during the construction of railroads in the Congo, thousands of Africans were forced into labor, and many of them died from disease. Research the types of diseases that claimed lives in this time and compare them to the current AIDS epidemic in Africa.

Compare and Contrast

Late 1920s: Adolf Hitler sets his ethnic-cleansing campaign into motion. His anti-Semitic propaganda helps gain the support of many Germans for his Nazi Party.

Today: Following terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, the world experiences several other attempted terrorist attacks.

Late 1920s: The stock market crash of 1929 marks the onset of the Great Depression. Although the causes of the crash are heavily debated, at least some blame goes to the massive amount of speculative trading in the 1920s, which was supported by the optimistic and naïve view that the good economy would continue to improve.

Today: The crash of overinflated technology stocks, which many people had thought would continue to rise in value, helps initiate a recession in the United States. The economy gets worse as much evidence of rampant corporate corruption is brought to light through several lawsuits.

Late 1920s: The violent regime of King Leopold II, in which millions of Africans were killed or forced into labor, has long since been replaced by a new Belgian government. However, Africans in the Congo are still abused and forced into labor, which leads to a revolt in 1928.

Today: The effects of European colonization still plague Africa. While all regions have technically been decolonized, they retain their European-imposed boundaries that help create conflicts among the various ethnic groups in many countries. Africa experiences one of its most violent periods since the European conquest.

What Do I Read Next?

Edwin A. Abbott's classic *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) is a short, mathematical, fantasy novel featuring a flat, two-dimensional world inhabited by geometric shapes. When one resident, A. Square (which is also the pseudonym under which Abbott originally published the novel), discovers the third dimension, he is forced to change his assumptions about reality.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* originally published in 1899, details the journey of the narrator, Marlow, into the Belgian Congo. Marlow is sent to find a company agent who has gone mad and who has fallen out of touch with his European company while at the Inner Station. In the process, Marlow witnesses the horrors of European colonialism. The book inspired the famous 1979 movie *Apocalypse Now,* which set Conrad's story in Vietnam.

Critics have noted that Høeg is one of the most popular and talented Danish authors since Karen Blixen, who wrote under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen. Dinesen's *Out of Africa* (1937) is a novel based on her experiences in Kenya from 1914 to 1931, where she owned and operated a coffee plantation. The novel depicts life in colonial Africa during this time and is told from Dinesen's limited, and sometimes distorted, European perspective. The book was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film by the same name in 1986.

Reviewers also note that Høeg's *Tales of the Night* owes a literary debt to Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934). Like Høeg's book, Dinesen's collection combines characteristics of the modern short story with the conventions of nineteenth-century Gothic tales and features many references to noted historical figures.

Høeg's novel *Borderliners* (1994; originally published in Danish in 1993 as De Maske Egnede) depicts the life of three children at a Danish boarding school. The three children are social outcasts, and as they band together to survive in the hostile school environment, they realize that everything is not what it seems. The students, led by the narrator Peter, try to uncover the brutal social experiment that is being conducted by the school.

Høeg's first novel published in the United States, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1993), was originally published a year earlier in Danish as Frøken *Smillas fornemmelse for sne.* The novel tells the story of Smilla, a half Inuit, half Danish glaciologist with a fascination for mathematics, whose extensive knowledge of the properties of snow and ice leads her to question the snowrelated death of a neighbor boy. Smilla's investigation takes her on a geographical and scientific journey that ultimately leads her to uncover a crime—as well as Denmark's colonial exploitation of Greenland.

Further Study

Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism,* translated by Joan Pinkham, New York University Press, 2000.

This classic work on colonialism, originally published in France in 1955, helped influence education and activism on colonial issues in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The author exposes the falsehoods of Western notions of colonial life and gives an accurate depiction of what life was really like in the colonies, for both the colonizer and the colonized.

Devlin, Keith J., *Mathematics: The Science of Patterns,* Scientific American Library, 1997.

Devlin goes beyond the assumption many people have made that mathematics deals only with numbers and places it within its cultural and historical context. The book, which features very little mathematical instruction, is nevertheless a great introduction for those interested in learning more about mathematical concepts.

Hochschild, Adam, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa,* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Hochschild's revealing history of King Leopold II's murderous regime in the Congo exposes the lengths to which he went to cover up his colonial crimes. Hochschild's many characters include Conrad, whose *Heart of Darkness* was based on the experiences he had in Leopold's Congo at the end of the nineteenth century.

Pakenham, Thomas, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912,* Avon Books, 1992.

In this book, Pakenham explores the colonization and division of Africa into European colonies. Also, while many of the horrific acts recounted in the book are condemned by modern readers, Pakenham explains the social attitudes of the time that led to these atrocities.

Reader, John, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent,* Vintage Books, 1999.

Reader, a photojournalist, gives a sweeping history of Africa, from the formation of civilizations on the continent in ancient times to its circumstances in the present day. Along the way, he chronicles the continent's many historical, ecological, and geographical developments, providing a greater context for issues in modern Africa.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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