

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Brideshead Abbreviated

John Crace

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## About the Book

John Crace's Digested Read column in the *Guardian* has rightly acquired a cult following. Each week fans avidly devour his latest razor-sharp literary assassination, while authors turn tremblingly to the appropriate page of the review section, fearful that it may be their turn to be mercilessly sent up.

Now he turns his critical eye on the classics of the last hundred years, offering bite-sized pastiches of everything from *Mrs Dalloway* to *Trainspotting* via *Lolita* and *The Great Gatsby*. Those who have never quite got around to reading *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* will be delighted to find its essence distilled into a handful of paragraphs. Those who have never really enjoyed *Lord of the Flies* will be pleased to find it hilariously parodied in an easily swallowable 889 words. And those who find all such works a little highbrow will be relieved to find that they can also discover, between the covers of this book, John Crace's take on the likes of Ian Fleming, P.G. Wodehouse and the author of the *Highway Code*.

Witty and sharp, this is essential reading both for those who genuinely love literature and those who merely want to appear ridiculously well read.

## About the Author

John Crace is a *Guardian* staff feature writer and columnist, and author of the regular Digested Read and Digested Classic columns.

# BRIDESHEAD ABBREVIATED

*The Digested Read of  
the Twentieth Century*



JOHN CRACE



arrow books



For Jill

## FOREWORD

SO MANY BOOKS, so many years ... Compiling any list is an arbitrary, thankless task. Why 100 books? Why not 103? Compiling a list of the 100 classic reads of the twentieth century is more arbitrary and more thankless than most. Inevitably it involves compromise and the omissions are as striking to me as they must be to you.

My choices are almost entirely skewed towards European and American writers. This isn't because there are no great Chinese, Indian or African writers; it's because they are not widely known or published in the west, and there's little fun to be had in parodying a book very few people are likely to have heard of, let alone read. So my selection is conservative; it reflects the consensual view of the western literary canon rather than trying to reshape it.

Even within these parameters, though, there are some key books missing. Where is *Ulysses*? Where is *The Leopard*? Where indeed. When I began this project, I formulated some rules. No author could appear more than once: partly to allow me to include as many different authors as possible and partly because repeating the stylistic mannerisms of a particular author could get ... well, repetitive. So *Ulysses* lost out to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a book I reckoned more readers - myself included - were likely to have finished.

I also decided to divide the book into 10 decades featuring 10 books each. Apart from giving the book a very obvious symmetrical structure, it also offered a good way in to both what was considered important at the time and to tracking different literary traditions - from the late

Victorians to the modernists, the existentialists, the social realists and post-modernists. But it also has its drawbacks. Some decades are far richer in literature than others; in any other decade but the 1950s, *The Leopard* would have made the cut. But rules are rules ...

It also became harder to decide what constituted a classic the later on into the twentieth century I progressed. Will people still be reading *High Fidelity* in 100 years' time as they now continue to read *Howards End*? Perhaps not, but *High Fidelity* is important - if not for its stylistic brilliance then for creating a new genre of lad-lit. Similarly, no one would claim *Harry Potter* to be a masterpiece but it was and is a cultural phenomenon that turned many kids on to the pleasures of reading.

So I've taken the word 'classic' in its broadest sense. Not just so as to include those books the critics tell us are of lasting literary value, but also those with a wider social significance to the twentieth century. My guess is that most people will find little to quibble with in about 80 of my choices. I suspect there will also be little agreement about which 80 these are. But please feel free to make your feelings known. It's a conversation well worth having.

John Crace  
June 2010

- 1900 -

# THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

*L. Frank Baum*

DOROTHY LIVED IN the midst of the great Kansas prairies with Uncle Henry and Aunt Em. Their house had four walls, for if there had been only three it would have toppled over. Uncle Henry and Aunt Em never smiled; it was Toto the dog that made Dorothy laugh. Today they were not playing, though, for a low wail of wind approached from the north.

Uncle Henry and Aunt Em made it to the cellar before the cyclone struck; Dorothy and Toto were not so fortunate. The house started whirling around and lifted many miles into the air. Dorothy got bored waiting for them to land, so she fell asleep.

She awoke to find herself in a luscious country surrounded by the queerest people. 'Are you the Seven Dwarves?' she enquired of the little men with white beards and pointy hats.

'Good guess,' said one, 'but in fact we are Munchkins. And you are very welcome because your house has squashed the Wicked Witch of the East and freed us from our bondage.'

Just then a little lady appeared. 'Who are you?' said Dorothy.

'I am the Good Witch of the North,' the little lady replied, 'and if you put on the Wicked Witch's silver shoes ...'

'I'll look like Lady Gaga.'

'... you'll have magic powers. Now where would you like to go?'

'Anywhere that Andrew Lloyd Webber is not.'

'Then you must avoid meeting the Wicked Witches of the West and the North-West.' And so saying, she kissed Dorothy on the forehead and took off her magic hat. A sign then appeared on the ground which read *Follow the Yellow Brick Road to see the Great Oz in the Emerald City.*

After Dorothy had been walking for an hour, she came across a Scarecrow that winked at her. 'Are you alive?' she asked.

'Of course I am.'

'Then why don't you move?'

'Because I've got a pole rammed up my arse.'

Dorothy and the Scarecrow started walking. 'How I wish I had some brains instead of a head full of straw,' the Scarecrow sobbed.

'A lot of people back home in Kansas feel the same way,' Dorothy replied, and they carried on walking until they came across a Tin Woodman.

'What happened to you?' Dorothy asked.

'It's a sad story. The Wicked Witch of the East killed my love for a Munchkin by making my axe slip. First I chopped off all my limbs and then I cut out my heart so now I don't feel anything.'

'How would you know it's sad if you don't have any feelings?'

They all chose to ignore this inconsistency and carried on walking until they came across a Lion. 'I want to be very brave,' the Lion said. 'But really I'm a bit of a pussy.'

Eventually the four of them, along with Toto, reached the Emerald City, where they each in turn had an audience with the Great Oz. To Dorothy he appeared as a giant Head; to the Scarecrow as a lovely Lady; to the Tin Woodman as a terrible Beast; and to the Lion as a Ball of Fire. Dorothy

asked to be returned to Kansas, the Scarecrow for brains, the Tin Woodman for a heart and the Lion for courage. Yet to each the answer was the same: 'First go with Dorothy to slay the Wicked Witch of the West.'

Off they headed along the West Road, where they encountered Cackling Crows, Beastly Bees, and the Winged Monkeys who were under the Wicked Witch's command. Yet Dorothy wasn't that bothered because she could already see how things were shaping up. The Scarecrow wasn't nearly as stupid as many Republicans she knew, the Tin Woodman was actually a bit of a softy and the Lion was really very brave. So when Dorothy threw a bucket of water over the Wicked Witch of the West, it wasn't the slightest bit surprising when she evaporated.

'The thing with children's allegories,' she explained to the others, 'is not to question anything.'

'Oh dear,' said the Great Oz, when they returned to claim their reward. 'You see, I'm actually a charlatan from Omaha.'

'Are you sure you're not a President from Texas?' Dorothy asked.

'Quite sure. But if I pumped a load of manure into the Scarecrow he would have shit for brains. If I drew a heart on the Tin Woodman he'd be more human than Simon Cowell, and if I gave the Lion a bottle of vodka he'd have Dutch Courage ...'

'Yes, yes,' said Dorothy testily. 'We get the point. But can you get me back to Kansas?'

'No chance, but you can come with me in a balloon to Omaha.'

'I guess that's better than nothing.' But before she could get in, the balloon flew off without her.

Dorothy wept with frustration. So did the readers. 'I guess we'd better start walking somewhere again,' she announced to her companions, and off they set once more.

Again they faced many difficulties. The Scarecrow rescued them from a smack overdose in a poppy field; the Tin Woodman rescued them from Marauding Trees by chopping down loads of branches; the Lion accidentally scared off a few Tigers; and the Winged Monkeys did the rest.

‘Hello,’ said Glinda, the Good Witch of the South. ‘How can I help?’

‘I want to go back to rule Oz because they are used to having an idiot in charge,’ said the Scarecrow.

‘I want to rule over the Winkies because I’m a right Winker,’ said the Tin Woodman.

‘The Beasts of the Forest have asked me to be their Lion King,’ said the Lion.

‘I sense a spin-off musical there,’ said Dorothy.

‘These three things I can do,’ Glinda smiled. ‘And what of you, Dorothy?’

‘I want to go back to Kansas.’

‘You could have done that anytime. All you had to do was click your Lady Gaga heels three times.’

‘You mean, we needn’t have gone through endless repetitions of the same story,’ everyone gasped.

‘Precisely so.’

With that Dorothy clicked her silver heels three times and woke to find herself back home.

‘Where have you been?’ asked Aunt Em.

‘I’ve been to Oz.’

‘How was it?’

‘I could have done without Andrew Lloyd Webber.’

- 1901 -

## CLAUDINE IN PARIS

*Colette*

PAGE ONE AND I am already exhausted! But I can just about raise my head to look at myself in the mirror. How my hair has been shorn! I may be 17, but I do declare I could pass for 15. Still your beating hearts, *mes petits* schoolgirl fantasists!

For the honour of my notebooks, I shall have to explain how I come to be in Paris. Oh Papa, I am as furious with you as I am with my naughty eyebrows! How could you have forced us to leave Montigny after a publisher failed to respond to the delivery of your manuscript on the *Malacology of Fresnois* within half an hour? It was all I could do to find my darling cat, Fanchette, before our train departed.

My memory of our arrival at the apartment in the dismal Rue Jacob is confused in a fog of misery. The effort of unpacking a single box of clothes left me with a brain fever so profound the doctors feared I might never try on a pair of cami-knickers again. The violets by my bedside prolonged my illness for they reminded me of Montigny and it was several months before I was well enough to venture outside.

'We should visit my sister, your Aunt Coeur,' Papa said one day.



'But my hair is far too short!' I complained. 'And I have nothing to wear!'

The whipped-cream living-room couldn't have been more 1900 and I was curious to get to know my aunt's grandson, Marcel, who was waiting there. The days before our dinner engagement passed slowly. I spent my mornings having my bottom pinched - *Ooh la la!* - and the afternoons worrying that my breasts were too tiny for my décolletage - *Encore ooh la la!*

It was annoying to be seen in public with Marcel as he was far too pretty to be a boy and everyone stared at him not me. Yet I contained my jealousy and fluttered my eyelashes coquettishly at him.

'I am not a goody-goody,' he said, 'but I will not make love to you. Rather, let me tell you about my dear friend Charlie.'

How thrillingly racy for the Paris *demi-monde!* A boy's forbidden love for another boy! We must become each other's confidante!

'Tell me all about Charlie's naughty bits,' I demanded.

'Only if you tell me all about your Fresnois Sapphism,' he pouted.

How I yearned for a glimpse of Aimée's budding breasts! How I used to delight in beating Luce about the head when I caught sight of her staring at me pulling my silken stockings over my milky thighs! How strange it was she had not replied to my letter! But, no! I would make Marcel wait awhile.

After a few days' tiring shopping, Marcel introduced me to his father, my Uncle Cousin Renaud. Mon Oncle bowed low before me, taking my hands in his and kissing them softly, brushing his silver moustache against my quivering skin. My cheeks flushed with excitement. How could I contain my incestuous feelings for an older man!

'Let me take you to the opera,' he whispered in my ear, 'and thrill you with scandalous tales of men who dress as

women while we watch Marcel and Charlie slip away into the night together.'

Paris was muggy that month and men were staring at the sweat glistening on my exposed breasts when I unexpectedly met Luce, dressed in the most expensive fashions, on the Rive Gauche.

'*Ma chère* Claudine,' she said. 'I moved to Paris to escape my horrid papa and threw myself on the mercies of my wealthy 127-year-old uncle, who gives me 30 Louis each month for the pleasure of my flesh! But I yearn for you. My breasts are rounder now; take them in your greedy hands and ravish them.'

She pushed her mouth towards mine and I felt a momentary passionate quiver, before beating her cruelly until she gasped her little death. I dismissed her contemptuously, enjoying her squirm every bit as uncomfortably as the Messieurs who are reading this on the Métro.

'So tell me about all the saucy things that you and Charlie do?' I begged Marcel, as he tried on a crêpe de Chine cravat.

'It is a special love we have,' he replied, guilefully. 'Not like Papa. He is a journalist and he sleeps with any older woman whose nipples harden for him.'

How I hated those other women! And how my own nipples also strangely hardened!

'Do not call me Oncle any more,' Oncle implored, as we shared a bottle of Asti Spumante. 'It makes me feel such a dirty old man.'

'That is precisely why I love to use it,' I said, feeling quite gay. 'I would be your daughter, if I could, as that is so much more shocking. Yet, if you insist, I will call you Renaud.'

'Oh, Claudine! My grey hair is turning blond once more. Let us be wed!'

How I enjoyed the twisted thrill of older men imagining themselves in bed with a submissive teenaged girl! And yet how strangely coy and dated it now seemed!

'You're only getting married to Papa to get his money,' Marcel sulked.

'I cannot marry you,' I cried, thrusting myself against Renaud in a last attempt at titillation. 'I will be your mistress instead.'

'*Non*,' Renaud insisted. 'I may be a dirty old perve, but I am a dirty old perve with family values.'

- 1901 -

## KIM

*Rudyard Kipling*

HE SAT ASTRIDE the gun Zam-Zammah, opposite the Lahore Wonder House. Burnished black by the sun, though definitely not a native as he was the orphaned son of an Irish soldier, Kim yonder espied a Tibetan lama.

‘Whither goest thou, Most Holy Asiatic man?’ he asked.

‘I searcheth for the River in which the Arrow of Life has landed,’ the lama replied. ‘And what, pray, is thy name, boy?’

‘They callest me Friend of the World,’ Kim said, ‘and I shall be your *chela* on your quest to escape the Wheel of Things. But first, letteth me say farewell to my erstwhile guardian.’

‘God’s curse on all Unbelievers,’ Mahbub Ali exclaimed, reflecting the colourful diversity of the Indian sub-continent. ‘Since thou musteth go, then sendeth a letter to the British commander in Umballa telling him the pedigree of his stallion is pukka.’

With the natural disguise of the native and the intelligence of the sahib, Kim overheard two brigands talking. There was more to Mahbub Ali’s note than met the eye. ‘Come,’ he said to the lama. ‘Letteth us leave on the terein before there’s trouble afoot.’

‘Thou art a doughty fellow,’ Colonel Creighton said, glancing at the note. With the natural disguise of the native

and the intelligence of the sahib, the Friend of the World realised the Game was on. There was to be fighting in the North! But first, he would remain the lama's *chela* and seek out the River of the Arrow.

'Hit ye not that snake,' the lama cried as they walked along the Grand Trunk Road. 'For within that snake is a fallen man seeking redemption.'

'Actually,' the cobra hissed, 'I was a millipede in my last life and I'm on the way up.'

'How happy we are,' the Sikh and the Pathan declared, sharing their victuals with Kim and the lama. 'We artest truly blessed to enjoy the rich diversity of India.'

'Indeed we are,' the Old Soldier agreed. 'The Mutiny is but a long-forgotten aberration. Verily, those that did riseth up against the Sacred Sahibs were grippest by a Fevered Madness. How else can one explaineth so profane an act against the undisputed benevolence of the Raj?'

With the natural disguise of the native and the intelligence of the sahib, Kim procured some tikkuts for the te-rain and, after many pages on the richness of Indian culture, realised the plot was getting seriously waylaid.

'Forsooth,' cried Kim, 'my parents always toldeth me the Red Bull would beareth me Good News. And thither is the flag of the Red Bull.'

'Behold,' whispered the lama. 'It is the ensign of your father's regiment. Seeeth how the prophecies cometh true.'

'Well, young man,' the chaplain declared. 'Seeing as thou art a pure sahib by birth, the regiment will taketh thee in and schooleth thee at Lucknow.'

'God's teeth,' the Colonel exclaimed. 'With his natural disguise of the native and his intelligence of the sahib, the boy will becometh a top spy in the Great Game once we have taughteth him a feweth lessons. Come playeth the White Man, boy!'

'I musteth returneth to my spiritual quest for the River of the Arrow,' the lama whispered. 'Else I shall be grindeth

by the Wheel of Things. Yet letteth me payeth for my *chela's* schooling and letteth him visit me from time to time.'

'Thou art a mischievous imp, O Friend of the World,' Mahbub Ali groaned some three years later. 'Thy constant scampish cunning and thy boundless romantic idealising of Indian imperialism becometh rather wearing after a whileth. Prithee, forgeteth the fake fakirs and get oneth with the story. Such as it iseth.'

Kim flung himself upon the next turn of the Wheel, learning the arts of the Game, first with Sahib Lurgan and his Hindu servant, and then with Babu Hurree Chunder Mookherjee.

'What the dooce!' cried Babu Mookherjee. 'We needeth to find the eveeeedence of an attack in the north.'

'Taketh no notice of Babu's funny voice,' the Colonel laughed. 'He talketh stupid to letteth you know that though he iseth a well-educated Indian, he iseth stilleth a native and canneth never be oneth of us.'

'Do not thou and I also talk quaintly?' Kim enquired.

'Pon my word tis a bitteth late to thinketh of that. Now get thee hence to the North to playeth the Great Game.'

'Come, *chela*, perhaps the River of the Arrow is to be found in the Karakorum,' the lama said. 'Yet what manner of Unenlightened strangers shall be found in the mountains?'

'*Da. Niet. Dosvedanya.*'

'Good fortune!' Kim said. 'We haveth cometh upon the Russians, and yet it iseth the Russians who are the enemy of Blessed India. Keepeth them talking while I nicketh their code books and diaries and thence we shall sneaketh off.'

'You haveth the eveeedence, O Friend of the World.' Babu smiled. 'The Great Game hath beeeeen won.'

'Methinks I hath been looking for the River of the Arrow in the wrong place,' the lama said sadly. 'Wilt thou comest with me to find the Meaning of Life further south?'

'Perhaps I will. For I am Kim. Or am I?'

- 1902 -

## ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS

*Arnold Bennett*

'THERE YOU ARE, Anna,' cried Mr Henry Mynors, the superintendent of the Bible Class, who had been waiting for her outside the school.

Tall and sturdily built with the lenient curves of absolute maturity, Anna Tellwright stood motionless. This was one of the great tumultuous moments of her life - she realised for the first time she was loved.

How calm and stately she is, Mynors thought, as she took his hand in greeting and they walked together through the forbidding street that united the five contiguous towns that marked the ancient home of the potter. 'I mean to call on your father to discuss business,' he said, 'but I trust you will be in.' Anna's heart shuddered with expectant perturbation.

She sat in the bay window of the parlour, her mind drifting as pages of tedium detailed every last ha'porth of her father's wealth, in case anyone failed to realise he was a tight-fisted bastard.

'Tha' art twenty-wun t'day, lass,' said Ephraim Tellwright, the only person so morally defective as to talk with a t'Staffordshire accent. 'So tha' inherits the fifta' thoosand poond tha' late mutha' left tha'. Burt doan't tha' worra' aboot wha ta do wi' t. Tha' canst leaf that ta me.'



'Thank you, father,' Anna replied, mindful of her duty, 'for I am too feeble to manage it myself.'

'Noo, get tha' sen down to Mr Price. He owes ma' twenta' poonds in rent.'

'Oh, Miss Tellwright,' sobbed old Titus Price, as his son Willie hid quietly in the corner. 'Times are very hard. We are but honest folk trying to make an honest living. I could give you ten pounds now. Will that do?'

How Anna longed to tell Mr Price that he could forget about the rent! And yet she had a duty to her father, whom she knew would not relent on even a half-penny of what he was owed.

'For now,' she said. 'But mind you give me the rest soon.'

Such harshness grated on her soul, yet her passivity allowed her no recourse to graciousness so she pondered these things deep within herself at the Methodist Revival meeting. How she longed to find Christ and yet somehow He did not come despite the playing of the Cornet.

'So, Mr Tellwright,' Mynors said, as he paid him a call later that evening. 'Will you invest in my pottery?'

'Nay, lad,' Tellwright replied. 'Me brass is all tied oop. But ma daughter will. Woan't tha', lass?'

'Whatever you say, father, for I am too stupid to make financial decisions for myself.'

'Thass settled thun. Noo giv Mr Mynors another morsel of fat and thun go an lean on Mr Price for more brass.'

Anna was much troubled by this, but she knew her duty was to be obedient to her father even though it was to precipitate the catastrophe that nobody would give a toss about what was to befall Mr Price.

'How nice that you can come on holiday with us to the Isle of Man now that you are monied,' cried Mrs Sutton. 'I do also declare Mr Mynors is enamoured of you.' There had been a time when Anna would have dreaded such a disclosure, but now she merely smiled as if to say, 'Yes I, the shy, dreary one, am beloved by the man desired of all.'

Few men in Bursley took conscious pride in the ancient art of the potter, steeped as it was within the weft of human life, yet Mynors's works were acknowledged to be among the finest available for those of modest means. 'Thrift is a great virtue,' he said to Anna. 'That's why it is for Mr Price's good you must ensure he pays you what is owed.'

'Would you be so gracious as to take a promissory note from Mr Sutton as our pledge?' Titus asked.

'I'll tak' it,' Tellwright answered.

The separation from the tight paternal fiscal grip lightened Anna's mood on holiday and she nearly ventured to initiate a conversation before thinking better of it. Fortunately Mrs Sutton's daughter caught influenza and Anna was able to stay silent indoors and nurse her. It is far better that someone as dull as me should risk infection, she thought, than that Mrs Sutton should be put in jeopardy.

'The fever has passed,' she said after a lengthy nine-day vigil.

Mynors was deeply touched by her servitude. 'You clearly know your place,' he said. 'Allow me to do you the honour of becoming your husband.'

What strange transport!

'He onla wunts ta marry tha' for tha' brass, tha' mis'erable old cow,' Tellwright said. 'Burt doan't let it wurry tha'. Tha' wonst git a betta offa.'

'Shocking news!' cried Mynors. 'Titus Price has hung himself.'

Grieved and confused, Anna fell prostrate. Like Christ she had consorted with sinners. Yet had it been her obedience to her father's will that had precipitated Mr Price's downfall?

'You are the meekest of angels,' said Willie Price. 'Thy soul is pure. My father killed himself because he had forged Mr Sutton's promissory note and was to be exposed.'

Anna looked deep into Willie's eyes and in that moment they somehow knew they were in love. Yet Anna did not

break off her engagement to Mr Mynors because she was so unbelievably dull. Instead she gave Willie one hundred pounds and bade him leave for Australia. She never heard from him again. Neither did anyone else, for Willie threw himself down a pit-shaft, an anti-climactic tragedy that moved no one, save those who wished they had done much the same themselves long ago.

- 1902 -

## HEART OF DARKNESS

*Joseph Conrad*

THE FLOOD HAD made, the wind was nearly calm and the only thing for it was to wait for the turn of tide. The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! ... The dreams of men, the germs of empires.

Between us four was the bond of the sea, making us tolerant of each other's yarns. Which was just as well when Marlow, sitting serenely as a Buddha, began his two-hour, neo-Freudian critique of colonialism.

'This also has been one of the dark places of the earth,' he said didactically, leadenly ensuring we should not miss the parallels between the Romans in Britain and what was to follow. 'Many men must have died here. The conquest of the earth is not a pretty thing. All that redeems it is the idea.'

He broke off a while to let his words hang portentously. We waited patiently for him to continue. There wasn't anything else to do. 'I don't want to bother you much with personal details,' he said eventually. 'But I'm going to anyway.'

'When I was a little chap I had a passion for the blank spaces on the map. And there was one, the biggest, the most blank of all, that I had a hankering after. True, by the

end of my boyhood it was no longer a blank. It was a place of darkness. Yet like a giant snake, ensnaring me with its phallic symbolism, this mighty river drew me in and I got appointed as a steamboat skipper.

'I crossed the Channel to show myself to my employers and in a few hours I was in the whited sepulchre of their city. I saw the Company doctor, inspected another map which showed the river coiling snake-like through the darkness and said goodbye to my aunt. It's queer how stupid women are. They live in a world of their own.

'As the steamer made its way along the serpentine channel of the river, we passed several settlements where many niggers lay dying in the service of the Company. We eventually disembarked and, in the company of a vastly overweight, unattractive white man, the very obvious physical embodiment of imperial greed and exploitation, began the two-hundred-mile journey on foot to the Central Station.

'I arrived to find that my steamboat had been sunk and I kept myself to myself, content to overhear snippets of conversation about a man called Kurtz. "Who is this Kurtz?" I asked at last. "He runs the Inner Station," the Manager said. From this reply, I inferred that this man was afraid of Kurtz, as if he held up a mirror to the moral bankruptcy of Dutch colonialism while somehow escaping judgement himself.

'Two months passed, time which I spent being charmed by the snake-like properties of the river as it slithered its way into the wilderness of the jungle id, before my boat was seaworthy and I could set off in search of Kurtz in the heart of darkness. I had on board with me several white men, whom I shall meaningfully call pilgrims, a bunch of cannibals - surprisingly jolly fellows when they were not eating rancid hippopotamus - and my sturdy, silent helmsman. This fine black specimen did not speak, but had he done so would undoubtedly have said, "You are a good

man, Mistah Marlow. We niggers have no language or culture worth mentioning. It is just a shame that we've been civilised by those fat Dutch bastards instead of by someone with your more refined sensibilities."

'We stopped briefly at an abandoned settlement where a written note warned of dark, portentous events ahead, and as we neared Kurtz's station on a bend of this vast snaking river, we were becalmed by fog. The screech of savages assailed us from the darkness and a hail of pitiful arrows rained down on the deck. My sturdy helmsman rashly opened a shutter and was struck by a spear. He looked up, grateful that his last vision before he passed into his own heart of darkness should be of me. I patted my pet affectionately as he died, before tossing his body into the murky darkness of the snake-like river. Rather the fishes should eat him, I thought caringly, than the cannibals.

'At last we reached a clearing in the jungle darkness and there we found Kurtz, semi-delirious with disease, being tended by a young Russian man. "It was Kurtz who ordered the natives to attack you," he told us. "They are in awe of his savagery. They treat him like a god." We gathered up his vast stockpile of ivory and I began to read his journal that started as a witness to a noble moral ideal and ended in unimaginable barbarism with the exhortation to exterminate all the savages. Yet somehow I could not bring myself to pass judgement.

'Kurtz escaped during the night and I found him heading back towards the heart of darkness. He talked briefly of his Intended before whispering, "The horror, the horror." We carried him back onboard and set off down the muscular, coiling stream, yet he died before we reached the brightness of the ego.

'I too almost succumbed to illness and it was with a sense of moral fatigue that I visited Kurtz's Intended on my return to Europe. "I hadn't seen Kurtz for nine long years," the Intended murmured. "Pray tell me his last words."