

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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September 18, 2014. Conrad (I).

review

How do Woolf's, Bürger's, and Casanova's accounts of what makes literature modern differ? Think about contrasts either in description or prescription. Is there a unifying factor?

The modern: describing and prescribing

1. Woolf: it is/should be about inner life
“An ordinary mind on an ordinary day”
2. Bürger: it tries/should try to reintegrate art into life
3. Casanova: it tries/should try to be innovative in form

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Shared features

- ▶ close relation between the new and *renewal*
- ▶ historiography of ruptures and breaks
- ▶ “if a writer were a free man and not a slave”

One more “modern”

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- ▶ Making the modern world possible for art (T.S. Eliot, 1923)
- ▶ Modernism...is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. (Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 1976)

delayed specification

At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed....Sticks, little sticks, were flying about—thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house....Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! (149)

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Heart of Darkness is essentially impressionist in one very special and yet general way: it accepts, and indeed in its very form asserts, the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding. (Ian Watt)



Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski,
in 1904

BLACKWOOD'S
EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

NO. M.

FEBRUARY 1899.

VOL. CLXV.

SPECIAL DOUBLE NUMBER.

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THE HEART OF DARKNESS.

BY JOSEPH CONRAD.

THE "Nellie," a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for us was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seawards. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realise his work was not out

there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions. The Lawyer—the best of old fellows—had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idiot. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily.

Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity that had a still and exquisite brilliance. The water

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HEART OF DARKNESS.

I.

THE *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

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1899 serialized version

1902 novella version in *Youth*

audience

Discussion

Who narrates in *Heart of Darkness*? Who is narrated to? What is the significance of this configuration?

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Character-bound narrators

CN1: “I” (on the *Nellie*)

CN2: Marlow

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Character-bound narrators

CN1: “I” (on the *Nellie*)

CN2: Marlow

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself. (137)

empire and novel (I)

The great cultural archive...is where the intellectual and aesthetic investments in overseas dominion are made. (Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [New York: Vintage, 1993], xxi)

empire and novel (2)

By this time it was not a blank space any more (108)

a large shining map, marked with all the colours of the rainbow (110)



Britannica 1890 (Wikimedia)

“civilizing mission” (I)

To open to civilization the only part of our globe where it has yet to penetrate, to pierce the darkness which envelops whole populations, it is a crusade worthy of this century of progress.

(King Leopold II of Belgium, 1872

Personal sovereign of Congo Free State, 1885–1908)

Atrocities denounced by George Washington Williams (1890), Roger Casement (1904)

“civilizing mission” (2)

A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path....I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain. (*Heart*, 116)

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation...Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts...they sickened. (118)

race (I)

It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality. (114)

race (2)

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as “the other world,” the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality.

It is clearly not part of Conrad’s purpose to confer language on the “rudimentary souls” of Africa. In place of speech they made “a violent babble of uncouth sounds.”

(Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” [1975, 1987])

race (3)

Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?...The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. (Achebe)

discussion

Work out your responses to Achebe's argument: what evidence supports it in *Heart of Darkness*? What evidence complicates it? Use specific parts of the text.

teaser: ambivalence

The almost oppressive force of Marlow's narrative leaves us with a quite accurate sense that there is no way out of the sovereign historical force of imperialism. (Said, 24)

Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism is essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that "natives" could lead lives free from European domination. (Said, 30)

next

- ▶ finish *Heart of Darkness*
- ▶ commonplace
- ▶ (get ahead on Stein)