

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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(36 Union St. 217, Wednesdays 12:00–2:00)

September 22, 2014. Conrad (2).

## review

- ▶ Conrad's delayed specification
- ▶ principles for thinking about the novel and empire
- ▶ race and racism in the novel

## review: racism

Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth.

Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor....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?

(Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" [1975, 1987])

## 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.

## perspective

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. (30)

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"Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know...."

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. (*Heart*, 130)

## critique: symmetry (1)

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This story, and one other...are all the spoil I brought out from the centre of Africa, where, really, I had no sort of business. (“Author’s Note,” 189)

## critique: symmetry (2)

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“The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to....” (107, qtd. by Sarah M.)

## critique: symmetry (3)

“They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.”  
(139, qtd. by MM)

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## critique: the job (I)

### Discussion

How does the novella represent work and workmanship? And what might doing a job have to do with an ethical perspective? Brainstorm for a bit, then look for an example to think more about.

## critique: the job (2)

“What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work—to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted.” (130)

“*An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*...Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light.” (141)

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Moral outrage gets expressed as traffic rage.

(Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* [Durham: Duke U.P., 2009], 91)

## critique: the job (3)

I dream of peace, a little reputation, and the rest of my life devoted to the service of Art and free from material worries. (Conrad to a friend in 1897)

## blame the system?

“The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair.”  
(172)

To him [Marlow] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze. (105)

## the first paper

- ▶ 5–7 pp., due October 6 at 5 p.m. on Sakai (via Assignments 2).
- ▶ choose a topic or *your own*
- ▶ criteria:
  - ▶ evidence
  - ▶ argument
  - ▶ motive

## introductions

There are many views about otherness in Conrad. Difference is a complicated subject with many specific versions

introductions: bzzzt

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start specific, stay specific

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's first encounter with Africans is sinister:  
“‘A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path’” (116)....

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In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's first encounter with Africans is sinister: "A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path" (116)....

- ▶ extensive use of passages or arguments from lecture: problematic

# logistical

- ▶ page format as specified. Proofread.
- ▶ online submission
- ▶ drafts and late policy

next

- ▶ “Melanctha”: as much as you can; at least half