

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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(Murray 019, Tuesdays 2:30–4:30)

September 22, 2016. Conrad (2).

review

- ▶ Conrad's delayed specification

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- ▶ frame effects (*who* narrates?)

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today

- ▶ race
- ▶ Conrad's imperial critique (1): symmetry
- ▶ Conrad's imperial critique (2): the job

four-minute free write

How does Conrad represent race?

two-minute passage search

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)

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And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on hind-legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. (140)

criticizing Conrad

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as “the other world,” the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where a 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. They only “exchanged short grunting phrases” even among themselves but mostly they were too busy with their frenzy.

Chinua Achebe, “[An Image of Africa](#),” *Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 783, 786. (Essay revised 1987.)

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, 788)

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.

another account

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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)

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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. (Conrad, 130)

Conrad's critique (I): symmetry

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The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. (136, qtd. by “BK”)

The tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (187)

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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)

“I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.” (172)

“Just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilise you.” (108)

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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 “JM”)

not *quite* symmetric

“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.”
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Conrad's critique (2): the job

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“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 University Press, 2009), 91.

doing a good job vs. doing good

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 11 at 5 p.m. on Sakai (via Assignments).
- ▶ choose a topic or *your own*
- ▶ criteria:
 - ▶ evidence
 - ▶ argument
 - ▶ motive

next

- ▶ *Portrait*: as far as you can (focus on chaps. 1–2)
- ▶ use the notes, but don't get bogged down
- ▶ commonplace by Monday at 5 p.m.
- ▶ read the paper assignment carefully