

Modernism

Prevalent in the period between the two
World Wars (but also before and after)

In general the term indicates :

- A rejection of the 19th-Century literary tradition (including Realism, Naturalism)
- a wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends (all the –isms: dadaism, surrealism, expressionism, futurism, etc.)
- A reaction to the modern, urban experience
- A rejection of bourgeois values

Compare:



And:

Portrait of Picasso by
Juan Gris



Or:



Georges Braque, Girl with a Cross

OR:



Picasso, Blanquita Suárez (1917)

Modernism

- Discontinuity and fragmentation
- Juxtaposition and multiple points of view
- Lack of a unitary self
- “Self” is seen as artificial, a social fiction of undetermined status
- Individual is stripped of the traditional defining categories of personhood



Weeping Woman (1937)

Modernist fiction

- crisis
- attempts to represent the underlying, multiplicitous truths of consciousness & psyche
- rejection of external, unitary, coherent appearance of realist conventions
- lack of causality
- insufficiency of language
- oppositional relations between the individual and the social, alienation
- antibourgeois
- first person narrator, often unreliable
- A sense of urban dislocation and alienation
- works by male writers tend to be misogynistic

Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)

- born Józef Teodor Conrad Korzeniowski in Russian occupied Ukraine
- 1874 joined French merchant marines, later the British
- 1886 became British citizen
- 1890 traveled to Congo



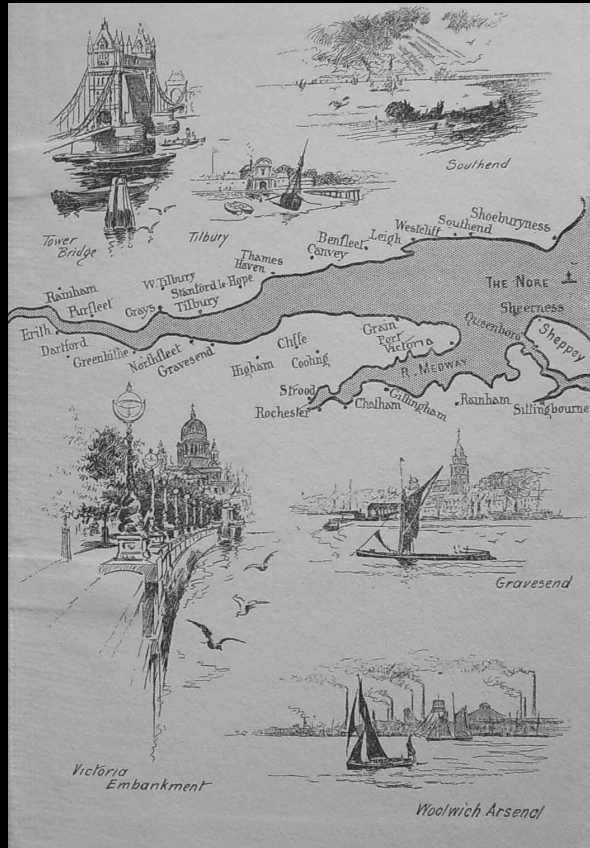
Major works:

- *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897)
- *Lord Jim* (1900)
- *Nostromo* (1904)
- *The Secret Agent* (1907)
- *The Secret Sharer* (1909)

Heart of Darkness (1899, 1902)

- Central questions:
 - What is Conrad saying about European imperialism / civilization?
 - How are we to read this text? Should we read it at all?
- “The title I am thinking of is 'The Heart of Darkness' but the narrative is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilising work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time distinc[t]ly – though not topically treated.” (*Collected Letters* 2: 139-40).

The frame:



- first narrator
- view of England? (5 vs. 6-7)
- conquest (7-8)
- set up of Marlow's narrative
- his audience
- Marlow

In 4 groups, discuss the following. Find at least 3 significant quotes for each.

Characterization of:

1. Europe
2. Europeans
3. Africa
4. Africans



Europe

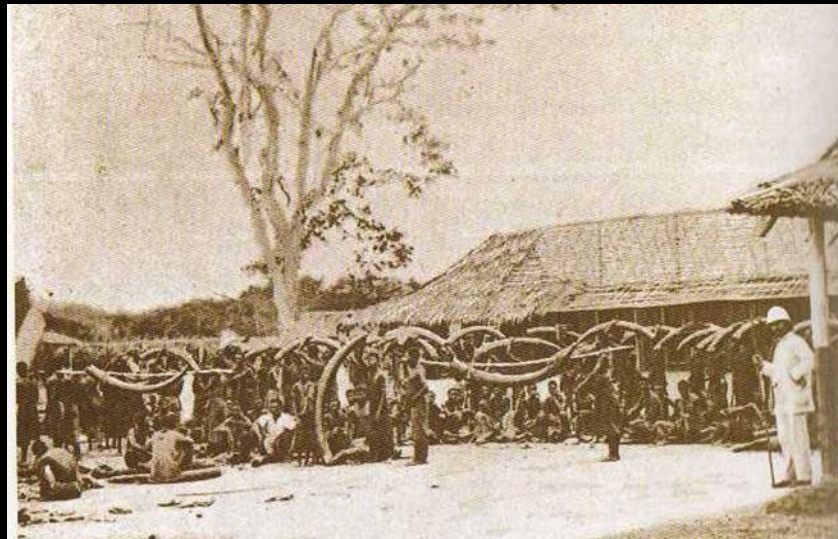
- “And this also, [...] has been one of the dark places of the earth” (5)
- London and gloom
- the Continent “not so nasty as it looks” (9)
- Brussels? “whited sepulchre” (11)
- “a city of the dead” (13)

Europeans

- bizarre, absurd behavior (16, 17, 19, 25)
- the chief accountant (21)
- the general manager (25)
- “faithless pilgrims” (27, 29)
- fist class agent (28)
- backbiting and intriguing (29)
- the Eldorado Exploring Expedition (37)

European values?

- Marlow “did not represent his class” (5)
- efficiency (7)
- “backbone” “character” (21)
- Marlow and lies (32)
- the work (34)
- manners (35)



Africa

Africa

- “a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over” (9)
- first sight: “a God forsaken wilderness” (15)
- “gloomy circle of some Inferno” (19)
- “silent wilderness [...] like evil or truth waiting” (26)
- “the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again” (28)
- primeval mud, primordial forest (31)
- “I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn’t talk” (32)

Africans

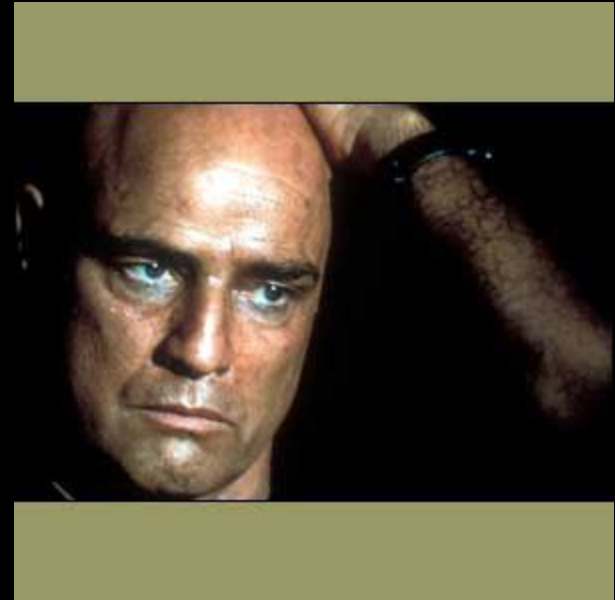
- first sight (16)
- “unhappy savages” (18)
- “his brother phantom rested its forehead” (20)
- “these creatures” (20)
- “mysterious niggers” (22), “sulky niggers” (34) “savages”

Achebe's critique:

- Forum
- Africa as “the other world”, antithesis of Europe
- (lack of) language and Africans (49, 83)
- fear of “kinship” with Africans (44)
- lack of history (43-44, 50)
- Africa as symbolic setting
- dehumanization of Africans (“it” 20, fragmented 55, “not inhuman” 44, “it” 81)
- racism underlying the colonial enterprise
- Kurtz's madness due to contact with Africa (59, 60, 72, 82)

Kurtz:

- a “remarkable man” (22)
- painting (29-30)
- progress” (30)
- “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (61)
- The report (61-62)
- his “talk” (58)
- vs. the helmsman (62)
- lacked restraint vs. the cannibals (72)
- The posts (71-72)
- “the spell [...] of the wilderness” (82)
- mad soul (83)
- His final words (86)



Characterization of women: Forum

- the aunt: “out of touch with the truth” (14)
- the mistress (75-76, 84)
- the Intended (59, 88, 92, 95)

What does the title refer to?

- Look for mentions of “darkness”:
 - London (3, 96)
 - Ancient Britain (6-7)
 - Africa (9, 40, 43, 84, 96)
 - and Kurtz (60, 85, 86, 87, 91)
 - and the Intended (93)
- Choice of “nightmares”? (17, 78, 80, 85, 87)
- Ending?