

*"At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there. . . True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. I had got filled in since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery -- a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness" (Conrad 5).*

# Historical Background – *Heart of Darkness*



# *British Empire-Building*

✧ Atlantic Slave Trade  
(1650 - 1900): up to 28  
million central & west  
Africans captured &  
driven to coasts to be sold  
as slaves

✧ 1450 and 1850: at least 12  
million Africans were  
shipped from Africa to  
New World--notorious  
“Middle Passage” (20%  
mortality rate)

✧ Mid-18<sup>th</sup> C. British-  
French wars for control of  
India (Robt. Clive &  
British East India Co.)

# *British Empire-Building*

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✧ **1789:** *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustava Vassa* = slave narrative fuels anti-slavery movement

✧ **1792:** Slave uprising in Haiti led by Toussant L'Ouverture 55,000 blacks, wage guerrilla & frontal war against British for years.

✧ **1795 - 1818:** British seize control of Cape Colony, South Africa, from Dutch, declare control & increase Brit. immigration; Dutch Boers move inland & seize land



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# Imperialism and Colonialism

# IMPERIALISM DEFINED

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- ✧ Imperialism is the policy or action by which one country controls another country or territory.
- ✧ Most such control is achieved by military means to gain economic and political advantages. Such a policy is also called *expansionism*.
- ✧ An expansionist state that obtains overseas territories follows a policy usually called *colonialism*. An imperialist government may wish to gain new markets for its exports, plus sources of inexpensive labor and raw materials. A far-flung empire may satisfy a nation's desire for military advantage or recognition as a world power.



# COLONIALISM DEFINED

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- ✦ Colonialism is the policy or practice by which one country installs a settlement of its people on the lands of another society.
- ✦ Usually, a colonizing country also quickly establishes political control over the other society.
- ✦ Colonialism is generally associated with the European overseas expansion that began about 1500. (But it has occurred in most parts of the world and in most historical eras, even the most ancient.)

# KING LEOPOLD II OF BELGIUM

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**Ruled: 1865-1908**

# LEOPOLD II and STANLEY

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✦ **King Leopold II of Belgium commissioned the explorer Henry Stanley to secure agreements from the tribes who inhabited the Congo Basin in Africa (1879-84).**

- ✦ **Stanley did so through a combination of promises, threats, and trickery.**
- ✦ **The agreements allowed the Belgians into the Congo to take its rich natural resources.**

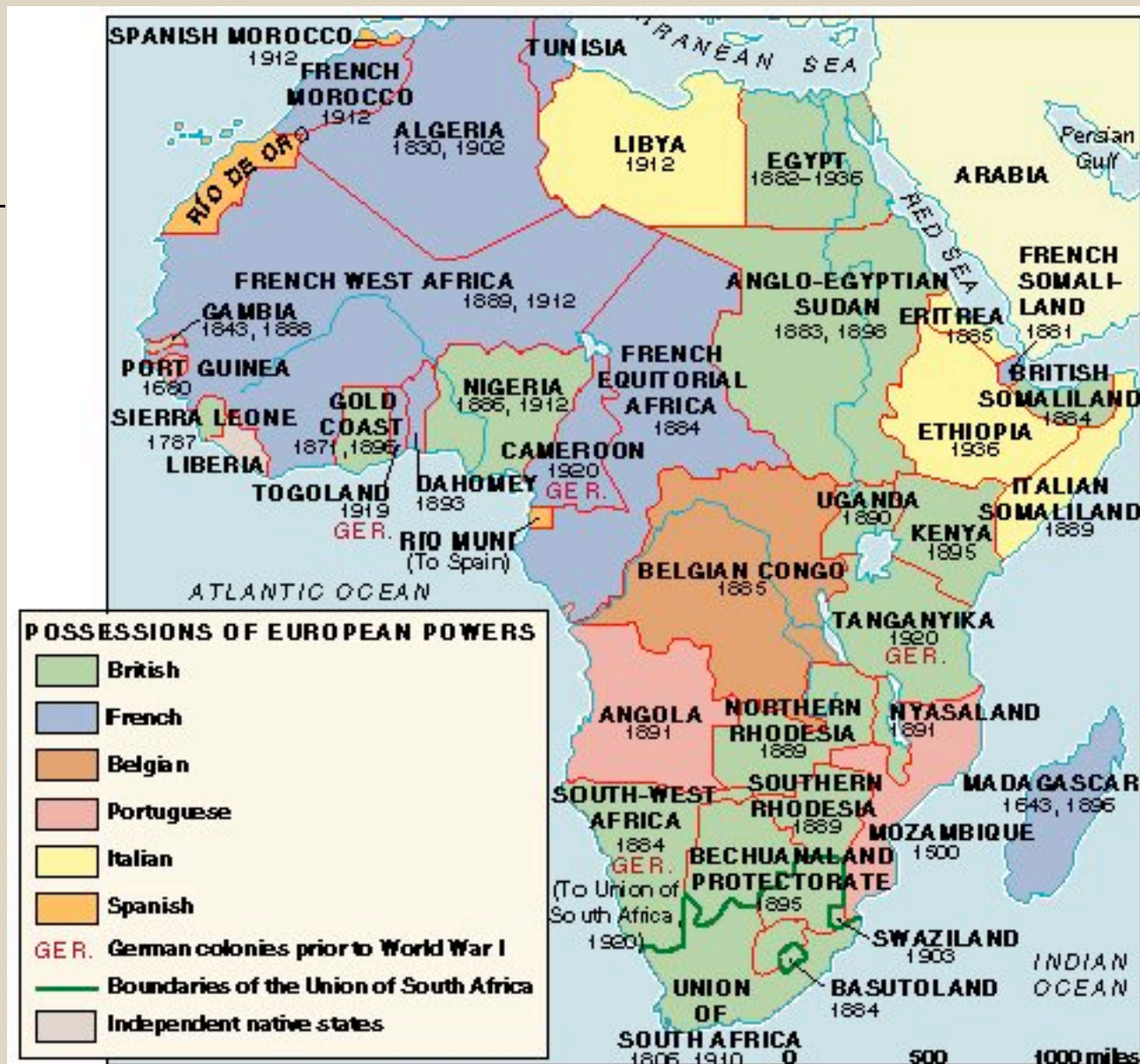


# CONFERENCES

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- ✦ **At the Berlin Conference of 1884, the European powers met to carve up Africa. Leopold called Africa "that magnificent African cake." From this beginning, the Congo Basin became the Congo Free State, 900,000 square miles, in essence the private estate of Leopold.**
- ✦ **At a European conference in 1885 Leopold was named sovereign over the Congo Free State (later renamed Zaire and now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo).**





# COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

- ✦ **A racially based (or racist) system of political, economic, and cultural domination forcibly imposed by a technologically superior foreign minority on an indigenous majority.**
  - ✦ It relied on "scientific" assumptions about White superiority.
  - ✦ It assumed that the nation state and an industrial capital economy were the most advanced forms of human organization.
  - ✦ It assumed an innate moral inferiority on the part of Africans.
  - ✦ It depended on economic exploitation and political oppression





# COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

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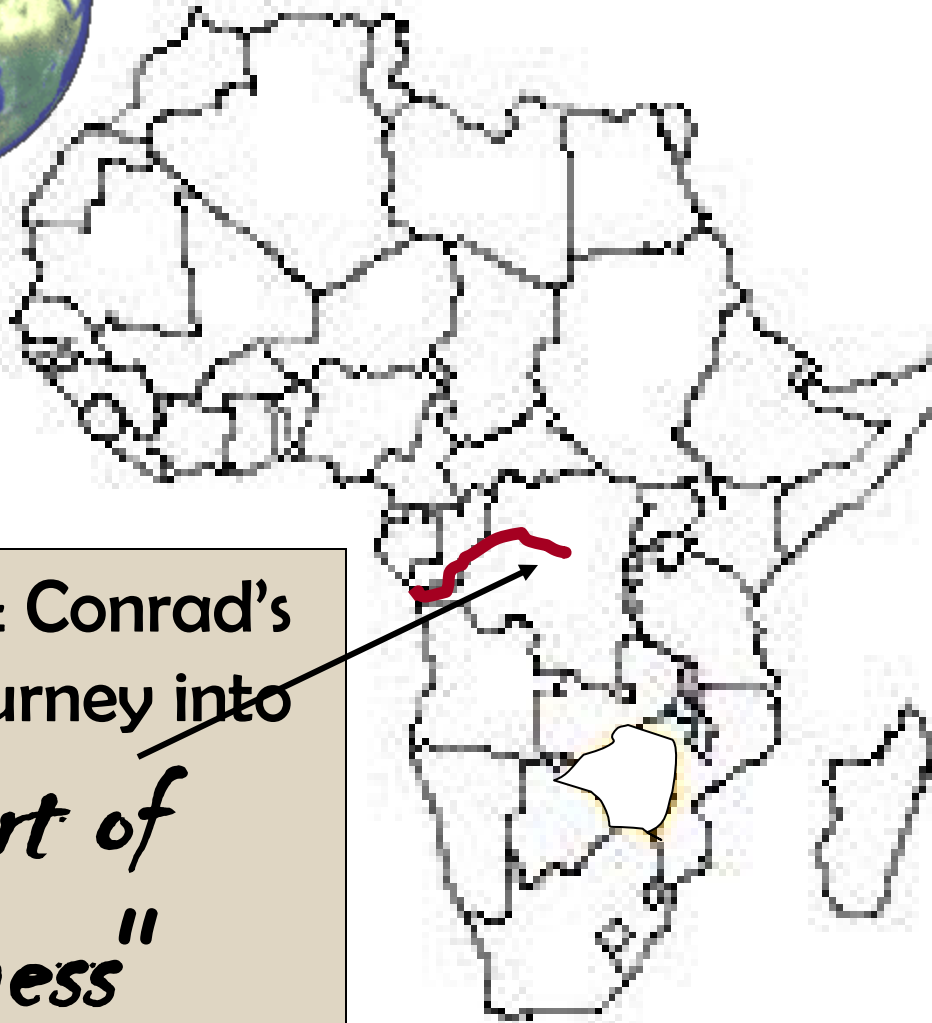
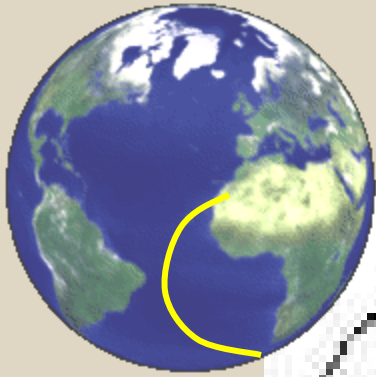
Periods Involved:

1800 - 1880 : European exploration and trade with Africa  
by merchants, explorers, and missionaries.

1880 - 1900 : Partition and Scramble for Africa

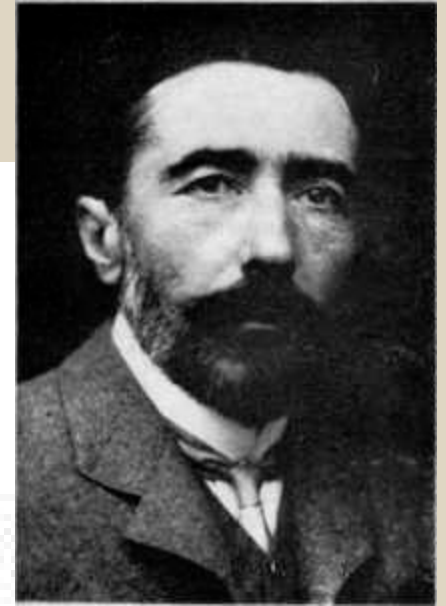
1900 - 1920 : Colonization and Colonial Rule

1950 - : Independence and the Post-Colonial Era



Marlow's & Conrad's  
1889-90 journey into

*"Heart of  
Darkness"*



Joseph  
Conrad  
(1857-1914)



# *Personal & Collective Crisis*

- ✦ Mid-1870s “Scramble for Africa”
- ✦ 1876-1884: King Leopold II (r. Belgium, 1865-1909) uses Stanley to explore, acquire, colonize “Congo Free State” as his personal possession
- ✦ 1885 Berlin Conference  
European powers divide up Africa

- ✦ 1889-90: Conrad goes to Congo & captains river steamboat to retrieve Klein; trauma & illness haunt him the rest of his life



# *Heart of Darkness* = Harrowing Critique of Western Colonialism

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- ✧ 1899, 1902: *Heart of Darkness* exposes predatory European Colonialism & its atrocities
- ✧ Brussels = “whited sepulchre”; hypocrisy of hollow ideals: “civilizing mission” & “White Man’s Burden”
- ✧ Public opinion turns against “jingoism” (e.g. Rudyard Kipling)
- ✧ 1908: Leopold II loses Congo to Belgian government
- ✧ 1960: Belgian Congo achieves independence

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# Modernism



# *Genre Theory (> Aristotle)*

- ✦ Genre (>French): a type of literary work with defining conventions & audience expectations
- ✦ Genres develop in response to particular cultural, communication, & creative situations
- ✦ Literary genres evolve like social institutions: their conventions/codes emerge, develop, & change over time, reflecting the (changing) values, imagination, spirit of an age, culture, artist



## *Genre History: Dialogues with Tradition*

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“Once you start making...rules,  
some writer will be sure to  
happen along and break every  
abstract rule you or anyone else ever thought up,  
and take your breath away in the process. The  
word *should* is... dangerous. ...It’s a kind of  
challenge to the deviousness and inventive-ness  
and audacity and perversity of the creative spirit” -  
-Margaret Atwood



# Modernism – General Definition

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- ✦ broke up the logically developing plot typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century novel and offered unexpected connections or sudden changes in perspective
- ✦ an attempt to use language in a new way
  - ✦ to reconstruct the world of art as much as the philosophers and scientists had redefined the world of their own disciplines
- ✦ played with shifting and contradictory appearances to suggest the shifting and uncertain nature of reality
- ✦ used interior monologues and free association to express the rhythm of consciousness



# Modernism – General Definition

---

- ✦ made greater use of image clusters, thematic associations, and “musical” patterning to supply the basic structures of both fiction and poetry
- ✦ drew attention to style instead of trying to make it “transparent”
- ✦ blended fantasy with reality while representing real historical or psychological dilemmas
- ✦ raised age-old questions of human identity in terms of contemporary philosophy and psychology

# Early Modernism & *Heart of Darkness*

- ✧ Social breakdown, fragmentation: lose faith in progress, science, religion, politics, bourgeois morality
- ✧ Alienation from urban bureaucratic society, a sterile, materialistic “waste land”
- ✧ Question, challenge structures of human life-- e.g. Christianity- challenged as “convenient fictions” created to impose order, meaning on random, senseless, violent world

# *High Modernism*

## *Early 20th century – Post -WW I*

✦ Decline of West:  
Catastrophe of WWI  
shook faith in Western  
civilization & its  
cultural values

✦ Radical break from  
traditional structures  
of Western culture &  
art

✦ Artists sought new  
forms to render  
contemporary disorder  
& alienation

# 20<sup>th</sup> century versus 19<sup>th</sup> century

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✦ 20<sup>th</sup> century vision implies a criticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a period of comfortable certainty and positive assurance that was dangerously unreal.

✦ Note: this vision neglects the roots of modern consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> century science, sociology, and art. Modernity was already as subject of widespread anxiety and argument as the Industrial Revolution transformed social, economic, and political life.

# Modernism (20<sup>th</sup> century)

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✧ Modernism claims to have –

- ✧ achieved a more accurate representation of reality
- ✧ a better understanding of human consciousness

✧ 20<sup>th</sup> century “vision” – emphasis on *how* we know – on structures of perception themselves

# *Challenges for Readers*

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- ✦ Narrator/author suggests/evokes, does not explain; personal symbol system
- ✦ new, previously forbidden subjects
- ✦ unsettle readers' expectations; shock out of complacency
- ✦ Open-ended, ironic, multi-layered, "inconclusive"
- ✦ Process/search/journey meaningful in itself (even if goal never reached)
- ✦ Reader must be active co-creator of meaning: "emplot" life



# *Experimental Forms for Multiple “Realities” of Uncertainty*


- ✦ Flow of consciousness & memory structures  
narrative: associative (vs. linear) “logic”  
intertwines present awareness & memory
- ✦ Interior monologue, “stream of consciousness, flashforward/flashback

- ✦ Narrative frame
- ✦ Marlow’s 1st-person “limited” narration: discontinuous / fragmented, suggestive / evocative-rational connections, introspective

# *The “Contract”*

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- ✦ Audience must agree to “play” the imaginative game (“suspend disbelief”)
- ✦ Atwood: “...your life as the writer of each particular story is only as long, and as good, as the story itself.”
- ✦ The “speaking voice” mediates reader-listener’s access to the story, but it is ...
- ✦ “double-voiced” dialogue (Bakhtin) between teller & listener each with active roles in making meaning.



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# Influential Figures And Philosophies

# Influence of Existentialism

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- ✧ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976): somber vision of the “absurd” condition of human beings, “thrown into the world” without any understanding of their fate.
- ✧ Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): derived from the same “absurd” freedom an ideal of human “authenticity” which consists in choosing our actions at each point, avoiding the “bad faith” of pretending that others are responsible for our choices, and choosing not just for oneself but “for all” inasmuch as each choice envisages the creation of a new world. (lonely tragic hero)

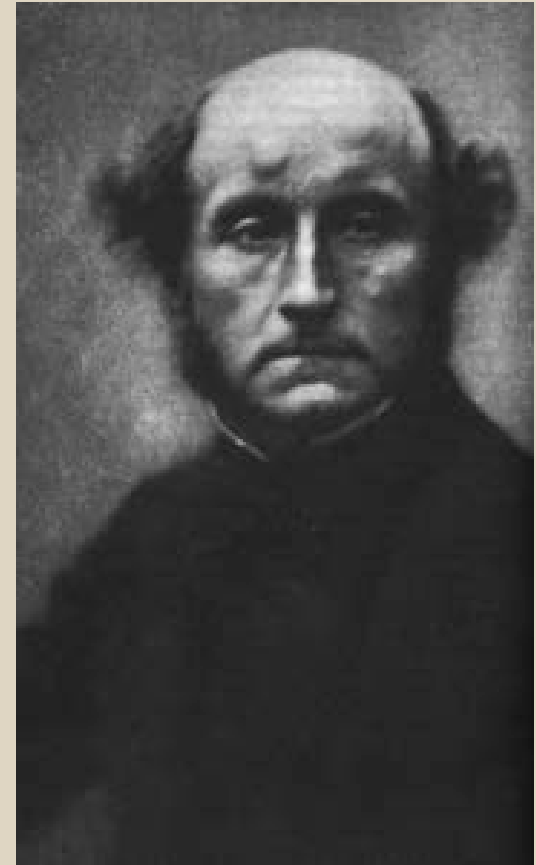
# JOHN STUART MILL

✧ (1806-1876)

## ✧ Utilitarianism

- ✧ ethical doctrine that the moral worth of an action is solely determined by its contribution to overall utility

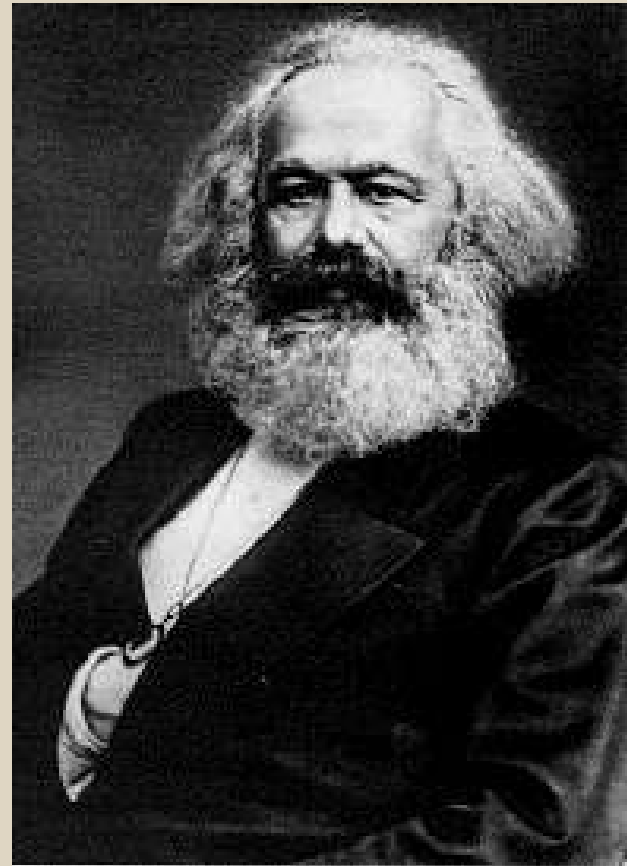
✧ preached the dignity of man, the rights of women, and the possibility of happiness for all



# KARL MARX (1818-1883)

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- ✧ vision of modern man as an alienated cog in the industrial economic machine, no longer in control of his own productivity, expressed for many the antihuman aspect of modern technological progress
- ✧ Yet, he believed in the power of rational systems to find answers for social ills.





# FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

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✧ (1844-1900)

✧ focused on the individual, not society, and admired only the superhero who refused to be bound by the prevailing social paradigms of nationalism, Christianity, faith in science, loyalty to the state, or bourgeois civilized comfort.



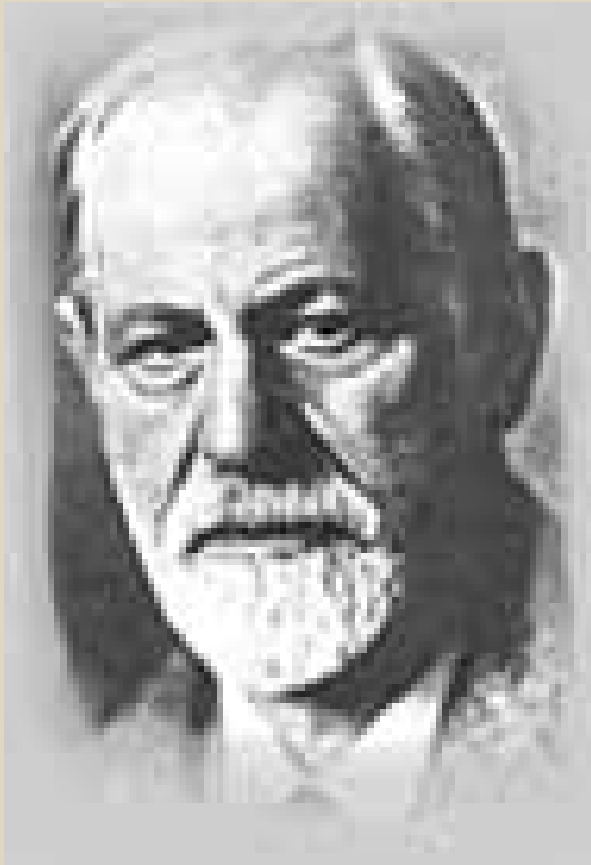
# NIETZSCHE'S Ideology

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✦ distinction between the Dionysiac (instinctual) and the Apollonian (intellectual) forces in man, *his insistence on the individual's complete freedom (and responsibility) in a world that lacks transcendental law ("God is dead")*, and his attack on the unimaginative mediocrity of mass society in the modern industrial world

# SIGMUND FREUD (1856-1939)

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- ✦ argued that dreams and manias contain their own networks of meaning and that human beings cannot properly be understood without taking into consideration the irrational as well as the rational level of their existence

# *Psychological Novel*

- ✧ Freud (1856-1939):  
feeling, unconscious,  
inward journey into self,  
back into past/ childhood  
keys to understanding  
human nature/behavior
- ✧ Psychoanalytical method:  
healing through  
storytelling

- ✧ Focus: mental life,  
perceptions of story teller  
and his search for meaning  
(vs. tale itself)
- ✧ inward journey into  
dream/nightmare world of  
irrational “uncontrollable”  
unconscious

# FREUD'S Ideology

✦ He focused attention on the way that everyday, “rational” behavior is shaped by unconscious impulses and hidden motivations, and on the way human beings actually create (and modify) their images of self through engaging in dialogue with others.



# ID, EGO, and SUPEREGO

- ✦ **Id:** not an organized system but a chaos of primal energies that urges us to action (*pleasure principle*, immediate gratification)
- ✦ **Ego:** psychic system that operates on the *reality principle* and mediates between the blind energy drives of the id and the real world restrictions. It is a negotiating instrument – negotiating effectively and realistically to meet our needs. \*In a healthy individual the ego is in command.
- ✦ **Superego:** system of moral values acquired through interaction with the world

# PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

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- ✦ Id, ego, and superego are reflected in literature through *psychological realism*.
- ✦ Definition: duplicate inner workings of a character's mind, stream of consciousness technique
- ✦ Device: stream of consciousness

# CARL JUNG (1875-1961)

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## What is an archetype?

- ✧ the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies
- ✧ an inherited idea or mode of thought in the psychology of C. G. Jung that is derived from the experience of the race and is present in the unconscious of the individual

# *Mythic Journey*

✧ Unsettling global correspondences in world “myths” & rituals: e.g. Frazer’s Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion (1890) & Weston’s From Ritual to Romance (Fisher king)

✧ Carl Jung (1875-1961): all humans share common spiritual/ psychic heritage: collective unconscious, racial memories, archetypes emerge in dreams, myth/religion, art & literature



# SHADOW ARCHETYPE

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- ✧ The Shadow is a very common archetype that reflects deeper elements of our psyche, where latent dispositions which are common to us all arise.
  - ✧ Our shadow may appear in dreams, hallucinations and musings, often as something or someone who is bad, fearsome or despicable in some way.
- ✧ It also reflects something that was once split from us in early management of the objects in our lives.



# SHADOW ARCHETYPE cont.

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- ✧ We tend to see it in “others.” That is to say, we *project our dark side onto others* and thus interpret them as “enemies” or as “exotic” presences that fascinate.
- ✧ *The shadow is the personification of that part of human, psychic possibility that we deny in ourselves and project onto others.*
- ✧ The *goal* of personality integration is to integrate the rejected, inferior side of our life into our total experience and to take responsibility for it.

# SHADOW ARCHETYPE CONT.

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- ✦ It is, by its name, dark, shadowy, unknown and potentially troubling. It embodies chaos and wildness of character.
  - ✦ The shadow thus tends not to obey rules, and in doing so may discover new lands or plunge things into chaos and battle.
  - ✦ It has a sense of the exotic and can be disturbingly fascinating. In myth, it appears as the wild man, spider-people, mysterious fighters and dark enemies.

# *Heart of Darkness* as the Archetypal Quest

- ✧ a modern myth (= tradition of quest narrative)
  - ✧ In a quest, the story develops as a central character, the hero, meets and overcomes a series of obstacles on the way to accomplishing a task.
  - ✧ archetypal quest stories – Virgil's *Aeneid* & Dante's *Inferno*
  
- ✧ The story has mythological elements: fellow journeymen (the Pilgrims), a fool (the Harlequin – a.k.a. the Russian), and a set of obstacles as they travel down river (“descent to underworld”).

# Archetypal Quest

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✦ **But is there a conventional hero? It is unclear whether the hero is Marlow or Kurtz.**

- ✦ **Marlow is a flawed hero - for most of the book he lacks insight and is uncertain of the nature of his own quest, nor is it clear why he is obsessed by Kurtz.**
- ✦ **Kurtz himself remains an enigma. This quest yields an empty prize: the mystery, the task, remains incomplete, "unsolved."**

# Stages of Journey ... ask yourself:

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- ✦ What is the central question of the novel?
- ✦ What is the answer the novel's action provides to the reader?
- ✦ Is there any way to ignore the question posed by the book?
- ✦ Is there any way to argue with the answer the novel provides?



# BEGINNING OF QUEST

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- ✧ How was his visit to the office a foreshadowing of his voyage into the *heart of darkness*?
- ✧ What gives momentary reality to the monotony of the journey? Why?
- ✧ Explain the evolution of the sound of the surf from “the speech of a brother” to “dangerous, as if Nature herself tried to ward off intruders.”
- ✧ What does Marlow see at his first point of entry in the Congo that revolts and shocks him?



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# LITERARY CRITICISM & THEORY

# MARXIST

✧ Marxist: You can see *Heart of Darkness* as a depiction of, and an attack upon, colonialism in general, and, more specifically, the particularly brutal form colonialism took in the Belgian Congo.

- ✧ the mistreatment of the Africans
- ✧ the greed of the so-called "pilgrims"
- ✧ the broken idealism of Kurtz
- ✧ the French man-of-war lobbing shells into the jungle
- ✧ the grove of death which Marlow stumbles upon
- ✧ the little note that Kurtz appends to his noble-minded essay on The Suppression of Savage Customs
- ✧ the importance of ivory to the economics of the system.

# SOCIOLOGICAL / CULTURAL

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✧ Sociological/Cultural: Conrad was also apparently interested in a more general sociological investigation of those who conquer and those who are conquered, and the complicated interplay between them.

- ✧ Marlow's invocation of the Roman conquest of Britain
- ✧ cultural ambiguity of those Africans who have taken on some of the ways of their Europeans
- ✧ the ways in which the wilderness tends to strip away the civility of the Europeans and brutalize them
- ✧ Conrad is not impartial and scientifically detached from these things, and he even has a bit of fun with such impartiality in his depiction the doctor who tells Marlow that people who go out to Africa become "scientifically interesting."

# PSYCHOLOGICAL / PSYCHOANALYTICAL

✦ Psychological/Psychoanalytical: Conrad goes out of his way to suggest that in some sense Marlow's journey is like a dream or a return to our primitive past--an exploration of the dark recesses of the human mind.

- ✦ Apparent similarities to the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud in its suggestion that dreams are a clue to hidden areas of the mind
- ✦ we are all primitive brutes and savages, capable of the most appalling wishes and the most horrifying impulses (the Id)
- ✦ we can make sense of the urge Marlow feels to leave his boat and join the natives for a savage whoop and holler
- ✦ notice that Marlow keeps insisting that Kurtz is a voice--a voice who seems to speak to him out of the heart of the immense darkness



# RELIGIOUS

- ✦ Religious: *Heart of Darkness* as an examination of various aspects of religion and religious practices.
  - ✦ examine the way Conrad plays with the concept of pilgrims and pilgrimages
  - ✦ the role of Christian missionary concepts in the justifications of the colonialists
  - ✦ the dark way in which Kurtz fulfills his own messianic ambitions by setting himself up as one of the local gods

# MORAL-PHILOSOPHICAL

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✧ Moral-Philosophical: *Heart of Darkness* is preoccupied with general questions about the nature of good and evil, or civilization and savagery

- ✧ What saves Marlow from becoming evil?
- ✧ Is Kurtz more or less evil than the pilgrims?
- ✧ Why does Marlow associate lies with mortality?

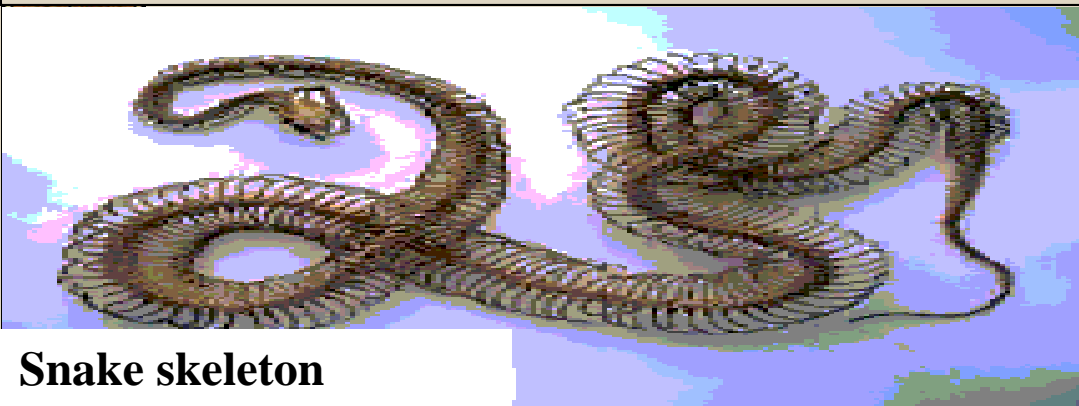


# FORMULIST

- ✧ Formulist:
- ✧ Threes: There are three parts to the story, three breaks in the story (1 in pt. 1 and 2 in pt. 2), and three central characters: the outside narrator, Marlow and Kurtz
- ✧ Contrasting images (dark and light, open and closed)
- ✧ Center to periphery: Kurtz->Marlow->Outside Narrator->the reader
- ✧ Are the answers to be found in the center or on the periphery?

# Survey of various interpretations of Heart of Darkness

1.	<b>Realism</b> <b>Autobiography</b>	the real journey	the Congo River expectation	Brussels main office	description of condition in the colony	Stanleyville Inner Station	Marlow (Conrad) close to dying	return to civilisation
2.	<b>Anticolonialism</b> <b>Politics</b>	journey	do	absurd bureaucracy alienation	criticism of colonialism	Europe's so-called civilising influence turned upside down		alienation inability to communicate
3.	<b>Myth</b> <b>(Arthurian)</b>	quest	expectation	delegation of task departure	learning process	culmination temptation, trial	cleansing purification	return, mission accomplished
4.	<b>Mythology</b> <b>Classical, Norse</b>	quest	Styx, Lethe ? journey	Nornes, Fates descent into Hades	Hades, Hel the underworld	dénouement climax	danger of the for- bidden, nemesis	homecoming
5.	<b>Christian</b> <b>Mythology</b>	A Pilgrim's Pro- gress, Everyman	Snake, temptation	tomb, descent memento mori	lost souls limbo	inner Sanctum of Hell, Inferno	punishment purgatory	forgiveness salvation
6.	<b>Psychology</b> <b>Psychiatry</b>	analysis, introspection	method	first scary revelations	learning process desperation	final step into the Id	crisis	cure
7.	<b>War movie</b>	mission	'circuit cable plugged into Kurtz'	staff office, bureaucracy	absurdity of the war, 'arsehole of the world'	civilisation and morality dissolved	Willard alive on Kurtz' terms	mission accom- plished, return



**Snake skeleton**

# *The road to hell is paved with good intentions...*

- ✦ Progression downward to hell (structure)
- ✦ Kurtz is Dante's Satan & Milton's Satan (diff.)  
mired in a cold understanding of the world
  - ✦ heartless and soulless
- ✦ Hamlet's & Rask.'s  
ontological questions  
of being (seeming rather  
than being)





# 4 levels of meaning (polysemous)

---

- ✧ **Literal** – Belgian Congo (colonialism)
- ✧ **Allegorical** – avarice (greed) and rapacity (Dante); inability to operate as a global community
- ✧ **Psychological (moral)** – relating to other people ... “in a mirror darkly” / shadow archetype; fascinated by unknown territory (“fascination of the abomination”)
  - ✧ Miltonic idea – depths of human spirit to confront monster/shadow and see it is you ... face it???
- ✧ **Spiritual (moral)** – \*exegesis (critical analysis) of work – Kurtz as Marlow’s spiritual father (one of the great men of the earth); Nicomachean Ethics – \*virtuous (habit) man (character) choosing best course of action\* - think Hamlet’s Humanism ideas ... potentiality of man → becomes something horrible

# Biblical Allusions

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✠ (a term Jesus used to describe the Pharisees of His day) He said, "...ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness."  
(Matt.23:27)

# Central Oppositions in HOD

---

- ✧ Civilization versus wilderness
- ✧ Culture versus savagery
- ✧ Fascination versus repulsion
- ✧ Freedom versus restraint
- ✧ Innocence versus experience
- ✧ Justice versus injustice
- ✧ Reality versus unreality
- ✧ Strength versus weakness
- ✧ Success versus failure
- ✧ Work versus idleness

# A few more motifs and themes...

---

- ✧ Light versus dark (inversions)/chiaroscuro
- ✧ Man's inhumanity to man (injustices)
- ✧ Hypocrisy of imperialism ("whited sepulchers")
- ✧ Work ethic or lack thereof
- ✧ Unrestrained lusts (versus "restraint")
- ✧ Lure of the abyss
- ✧ Savage ("the other") vs. civilized
- ✧ Internal heart of darkness (interior versus exterior)
- ✧ Madness (rational versus irrational)
- ✧ Absurdity of evil
- ✧ Isolation / Alienation

**\*Remember: Motifs help *develop* themes. Identify motifs and themes as you read.**

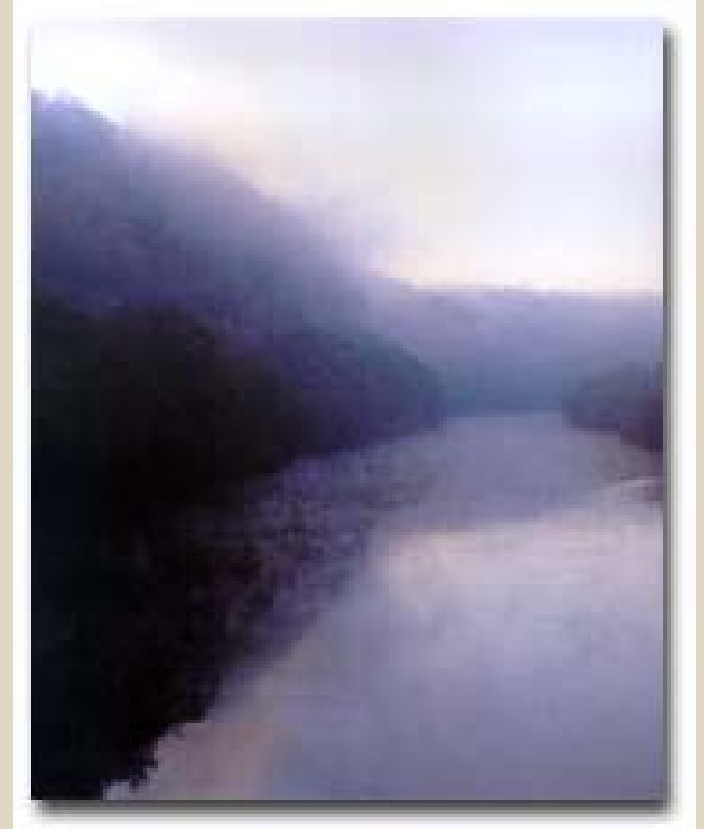
# A few more motifs and themes...

## ✧ Role of Women

- ✧ Civilization exploitive of women
- ✧ Civilization as a binding and self-perpetuating force

## ✧ Physical connected to Psychological

- ✧ Barriers (fog, thick forest, etc.)
- ✧ Rivers (connection to past, parallels time and journey)





# PART I – “DEVILS”

- ✦ Marlow says, “I felt as though instead of going to the center of a continent I were about to set off for the centre of the earth.”
- ✦ At the Outer Station (19), Conrad describes two devil types: one, a “strong, lusty, red-eyed lusty” devil; and two, “a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil, of a rapacious and pitiless folly.” Both are foreshadowing of the *villain force* prominent in this story, as seen in two different men. What two men are foreseen in each of these devils?
- ✦ At Central Station (24) - what is the reference Marlow makes that reminds you of the “flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil” mentioned above? To whom is he referring?

# PART I – STATIONS

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## ✧ Outer Station:

- ✧ Blasting (connection to “man-of-war”) (“lugubrious drollery”)
- ✧ Chain gang – “great cause ... high and just proceedings”
- ✧ Grove of death – “the gloomy circle of some Inferno”
- ✧ Accountant / flies (Beelzebub = “lord of the flies”)
- ✧ Mention of Kurtz

## ✧ Central Station:

- ✧ General Manager (Kurtz) / “Hollow Men”
- ✧ Brickmaker (“papier-mâché Mephistopheles”) (“Hollow Men”) / (Kurtz)
- ✧ Painting
- ✧ Authorial intrusion (30) / “We live, as we dream – alone ...”
- ✧ Rivets (Foreman)
- ✧ Hippopotamus
- ✧ EEE

Heart of Darkness

– Joseph Conrad

# Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)



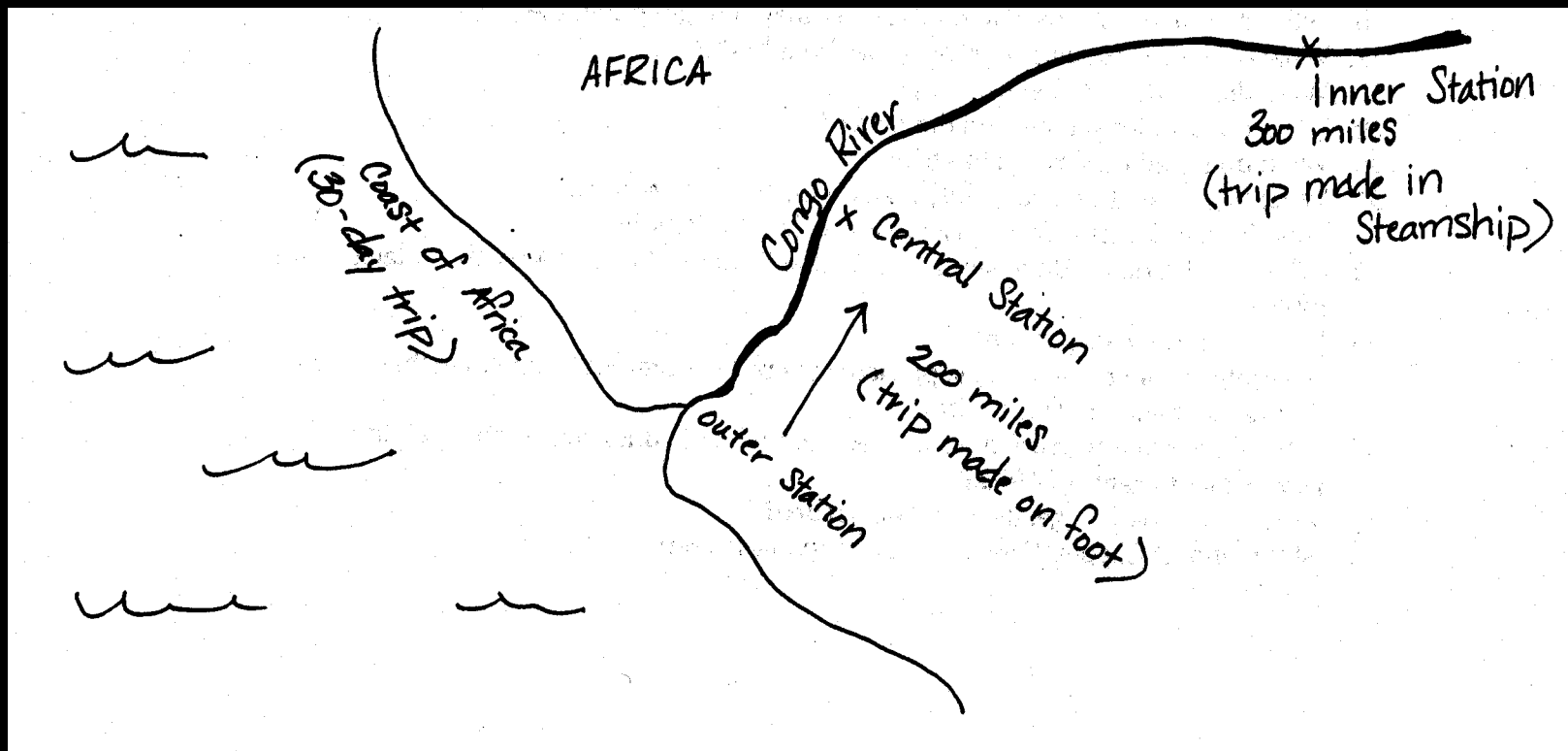
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# CONRAD and *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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- ✦ Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* had its genesis in his personal experience working on a Congo River steamer in 1890, five years after King Leopold of Belgium established the Congo Free State.
- ✦ By 1898, when Conrad sat down to write the story, conditions in the Congo were already becoming a political issue in England. Protests by the Aborigines Protection Society of systematic abuses in the Congo led to debate in the British House of Commons in 1897.





## Conrad and *Heart of Darkness* cont.

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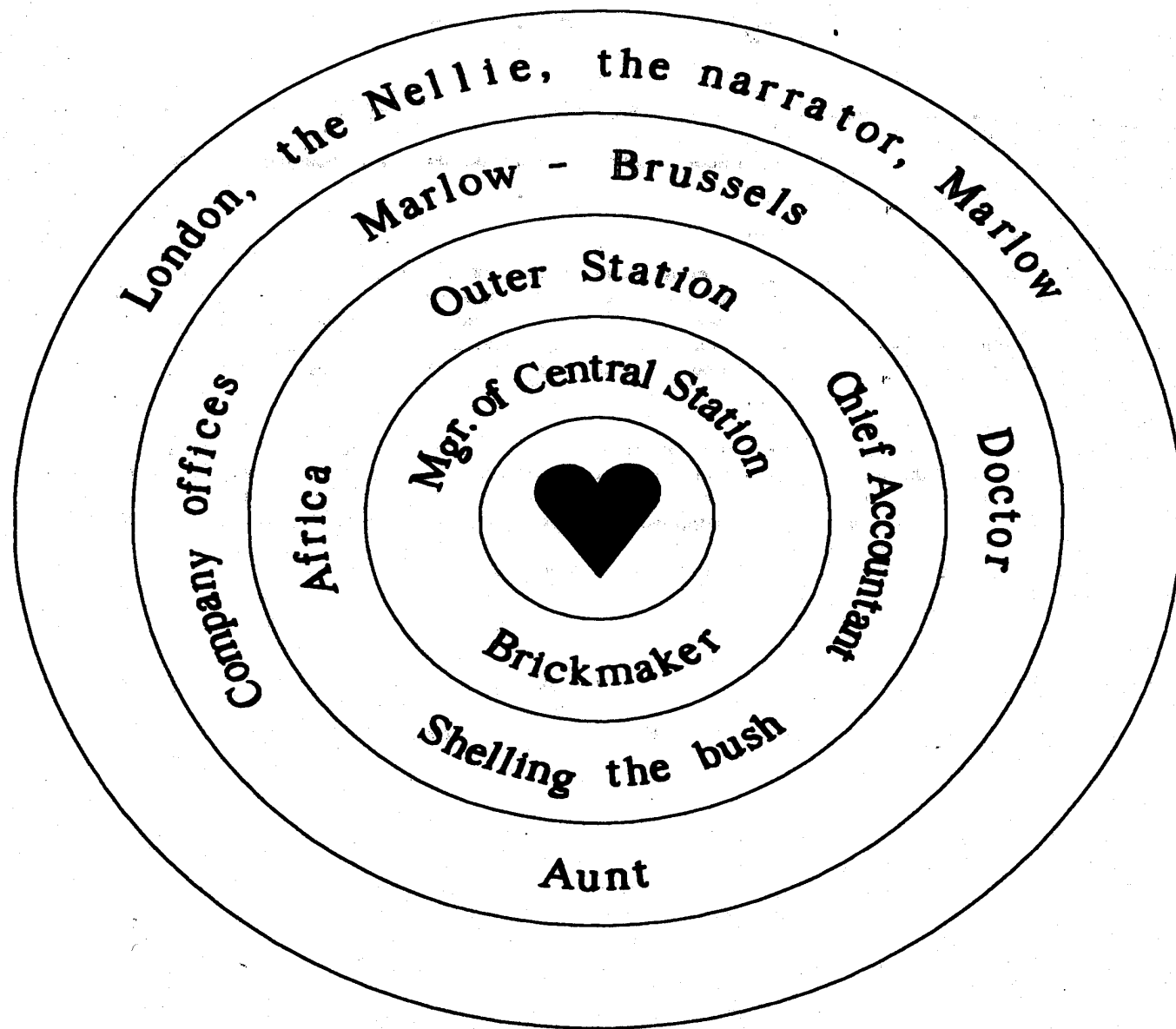
- ✧ Although it did not begin as a political statement, and Conrad later declined invitations to join the Congo Reform Association, *Heart of Darkness* was an important literary intervention into the emerging debate about atrocities in the Congo.
- ✧ Edmund Dene Morel, who founded the Congo Reform Association in 1904, described Conrad's story as "the most powerful thing ever written on the subject." For Morel, the title became synonymous with the "tortured African world" of the Congo that suffered under the autocratic rule of King Leopold, a man Morel described as "a great genius for evil."



# Style Basics

# *Heart of Darkness* Style

- ✦ *Heart of Darkness* is a frame story (a story within a story). The first narrator sets the scene, describes the boat and the Thames, and introduces Marlow, the primary narrator.
- ✦ The structure mimics the oral tradition of storytelling: Readers settle down with the sailors on the boat to listen to Marlow's narrative.
  - ✦ Oral storytelling brings with it associations of fables, legends, and epic journeys. Readers are introduced to the idea that the tale Marlow tells is a quest, a myth.





# Style cont.

- ✦ The story within a story technique also distances Conrad as the author. Readers are unsure whether they are reading the tale at second- or third-hand. It becomes difficult to distinguish whether the opinions expressed are Conrad's own or the narrator's.
- ✦ The book is divided into three chapters that indicate changes in Marlow's attitude towards Kurtz or the idea of Kurtz.
  - ✦ In Chapter One, Marlow begins to build a picture of Kurtz from other people's descriptions of him. Chapter Two sees Marlow's growing obsession with meeting and talking with Kurtz. In Chapter Three, Marlow and Kurtz actually meet.

# Style cont.

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- ✦ The book also has a distinct circular structure: the first narrator begins and ends the novel in the same evening while on the boat moored on the Thames.
- ✦ "Darkness" - by which he means excess, madness, destruction, nihilism - is not only in the jungle but everywhere - "even" in London, then the heart of the empire and colonialism.

# PATTERNS OF “THREE”

**Note the following patterns in your books:**

- ✦ **Three chapters**
- ✦ **Three times Marlow breaks the story**
- ✦ **Three stations**
- ✦ **Three women (Aunt, Mistress, Intended)**
- ✦ **Three central characters (Kurtz, Marlow, Narrator)**
- ✦ **Three characters with names**
- ✦ **Three views of Africa (political, religious, economic)**

# SYMBOLISM

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- ✧ **multiplicity**
- ✧ **creative power**
- ✧ **growth**
- ✧ **forward movement overcoming duality**
- ✧ **expression**
- ✧ **synthesis**
- ✧ **tripartite nature – beginning, middle, end;  
mind, body, soul; birth, death, life; past,  
present, future; heaven, earth, waters; three  
phases of the moon – “all”**