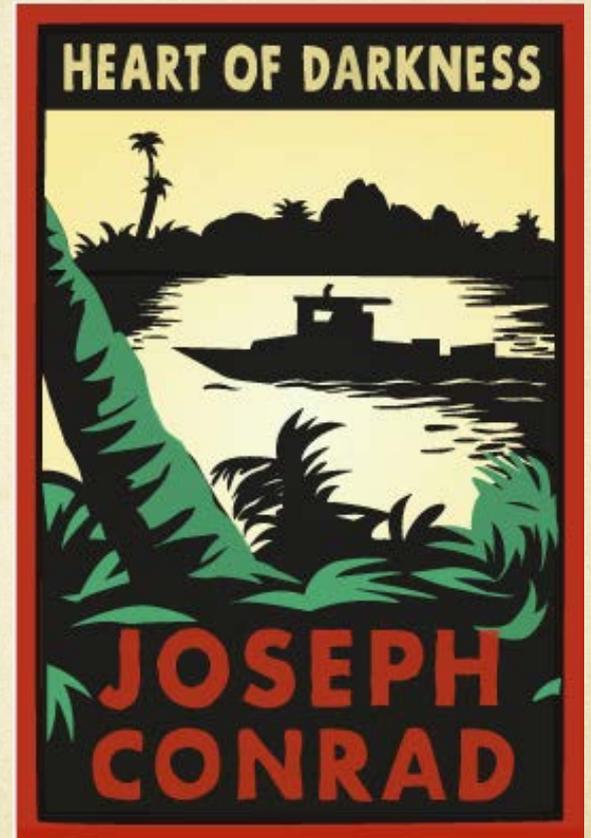
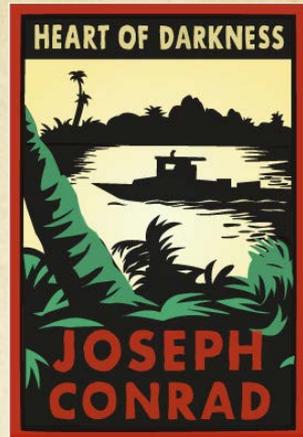


Joseph Conrad's  
*Heart of Darkness*  
An Introduction



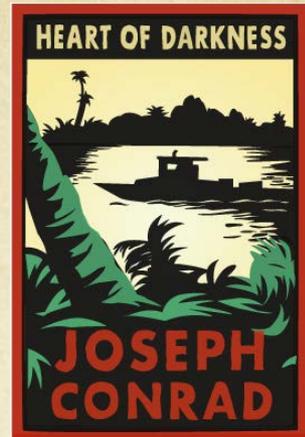
# About the Novel...

- Since its publication, *Heart of Darkness* has fascinated readers and critics, almost all of whom regard the novel as significant because of its use of ambiguity and (in Conrad's own words) "foggishness" to dramatize Charlie Marlow's perceptions of the horrors he encounters.
- Critics have regarded the novella as a work that in several important ways broke many narrative conventions and brought the English novel into the 20th century.
- It is one of the most utilized novels on the AP English Literature Examination...being listed 18 times since 1971 as a choice for question #3, the open question.



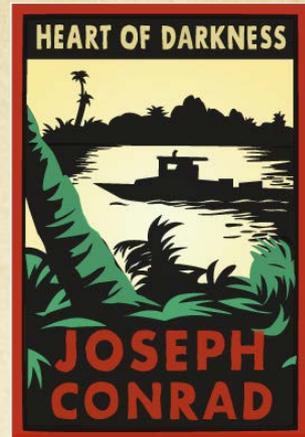
# Key Facts...

- Published in 1902.
- Inspired by Conrad's journey to the Congo in 1890.
- There are two narrators – an anonymous passenger on a pleasure ship who listens to Charlie Marlow's story, and Marlow himself, a middle-aged ship's captain.
- The events of the story occur in the latter part of the 19th century, from the Thames River in London to Brussels and to the Congo, then a Belgian territory.



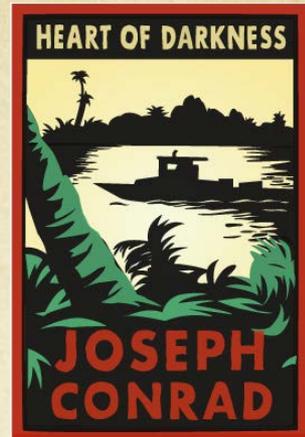
# Narrative Style...

- *Heart of Darkness* is a frame story (a story within a story, or an extended flashback).
- The structure mimics the oral tradition of storytelling. Readers settle down with the sailors on the boat to listen to Marlow's narrative, often described as a quest or myth.
- The novella also exhibits a distinct circular structure as the first narrator begins and ends the novel the same evening while on the boat moored on the Thames.

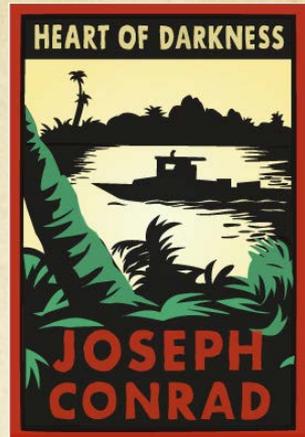


# Historical Context...

- In 1890, Joseph Conrad secured employment as the captain of a river steamboat. Illness forced Conrad's return home after only six months in Africa, but that was long enough for intense impressions to have been formed in his mind.
- Today, the country at the center of *Heart of Darkness* is called Zaire, but when Conrad wrote about it, the country was called the Congo Free State, or Belgian Congo.



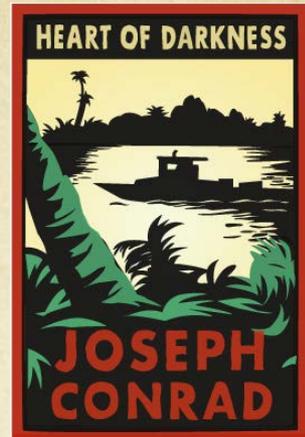
# Themes and Motifs...



- Themes:
  - The hypocrisy of imperialism
  - Madness as a result of imperialism
  - The absurdity of evil
  
- Motifs
  - Darkness
  - Interiors vs. surfaces
  - Inability to find words to accurately describe a situation
  - Images of ridiculous waste
  - Upriver vs. downriver

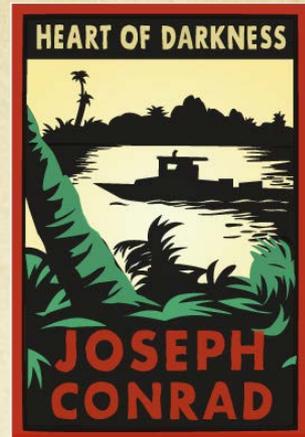
# Structure...

- Often referred to as “order in the midst of chaos,” *Heart of Darkness* is characterized with “patterns of three.”
  - Three chapters
  - Three times Marlow breaks off 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)



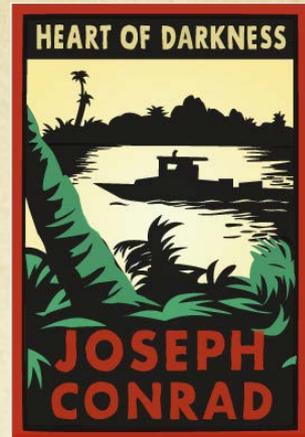
# Modernism...

- Originating in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Modernism is characterized by a break with traditional ways of writing.
- Offered unexpected connections or sudden changes in perspective.
- Played with shifting and contradictory appearances to suggest the shifting and uncertain nature of reality.



# Modernism...

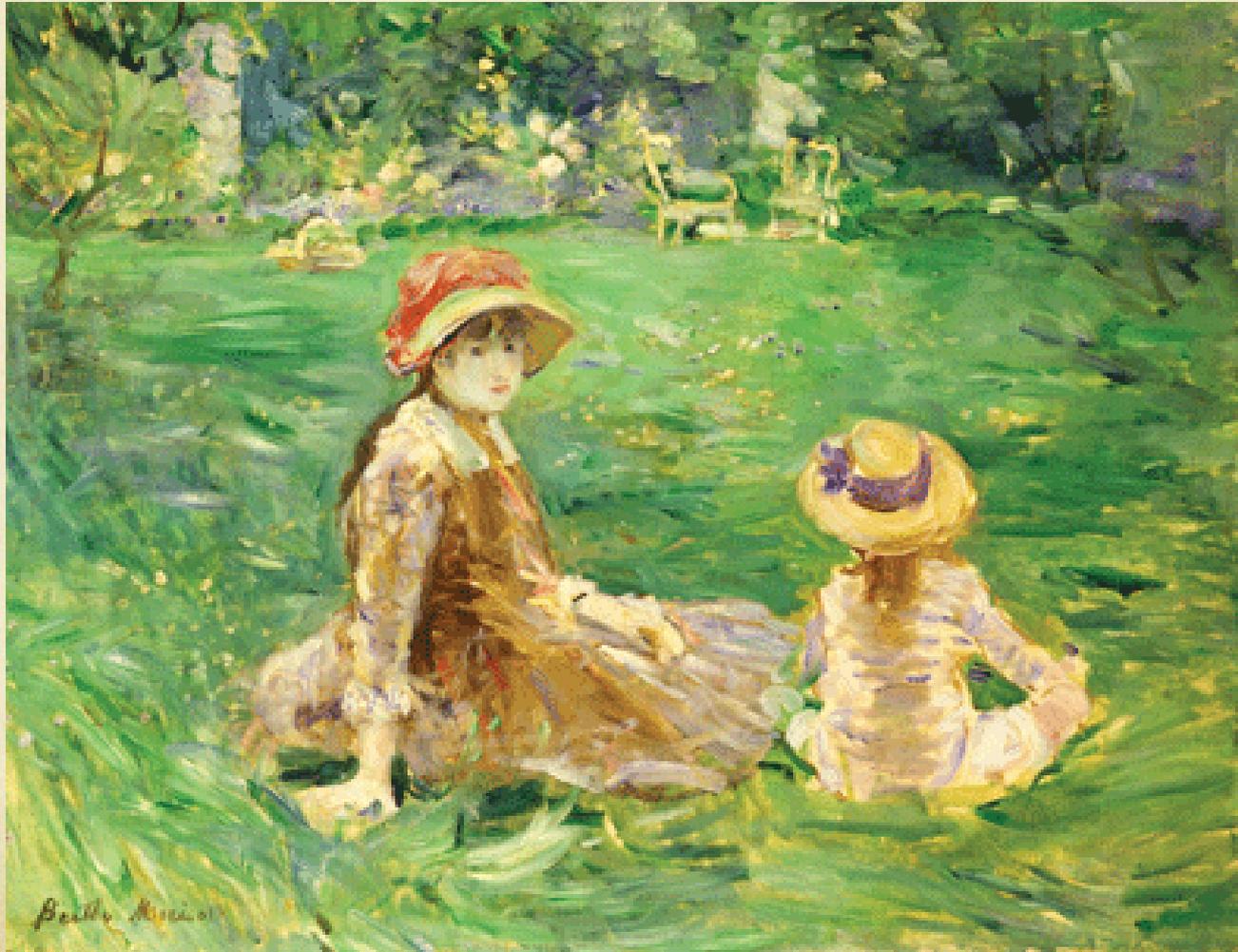
- Blended fantasy with reality while representing real historical or psychological dilemmas.
- Used interior monologues and free associations to express rhythm of consciousness.
- Claimed to show (1) a more accurate representation of reality and (2) a better understanding of human consciousness.



# Impressionism...

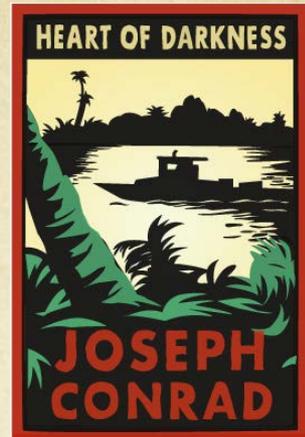


# Impressionism...



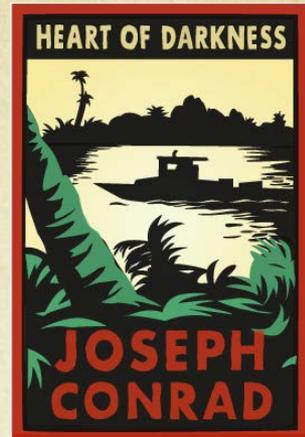
# Impressionism...

- Why the blurriness?
- For modern novelists, the messiness, confusion, and darkness of experience is interesting.
- Rather than trying to simplify and make abstract a particular meaning from experience, novelists tend to celebrate the multiplicity of ideas, meanings, and sensations that experience can provide.



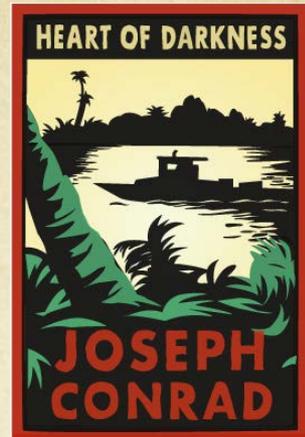
# Impressionism

- Modern novelists are in the business of recreating and communicating the rich complexities of the experience itself.
- Their purpose is to have the reader re-live an experience, with all its complexity, messiness, darkness, and ambiguity.



# Conrad's World View...

- The world as we experience it is not a place that can be reduced to a set of clear, explicit truths.
- Instead, its truths (of the psyche and of the human mind and soul) are messy, vague, irrational, suggestive, and dark.
- Conrad's intention is to lead his readers to an experience of the "heart of darkness."
- His goal is not to shed the light of reason on it, but to recreate his experience of darkness in our feelings, our sensibilities...our own dark, mysterious hearts.



# Question to Ponder...

- What does it mean to be “savage” or “civilized”?
- What are the different meanings of the words “dark” and “light”?
- Why do people choose to engage in good or evil?

