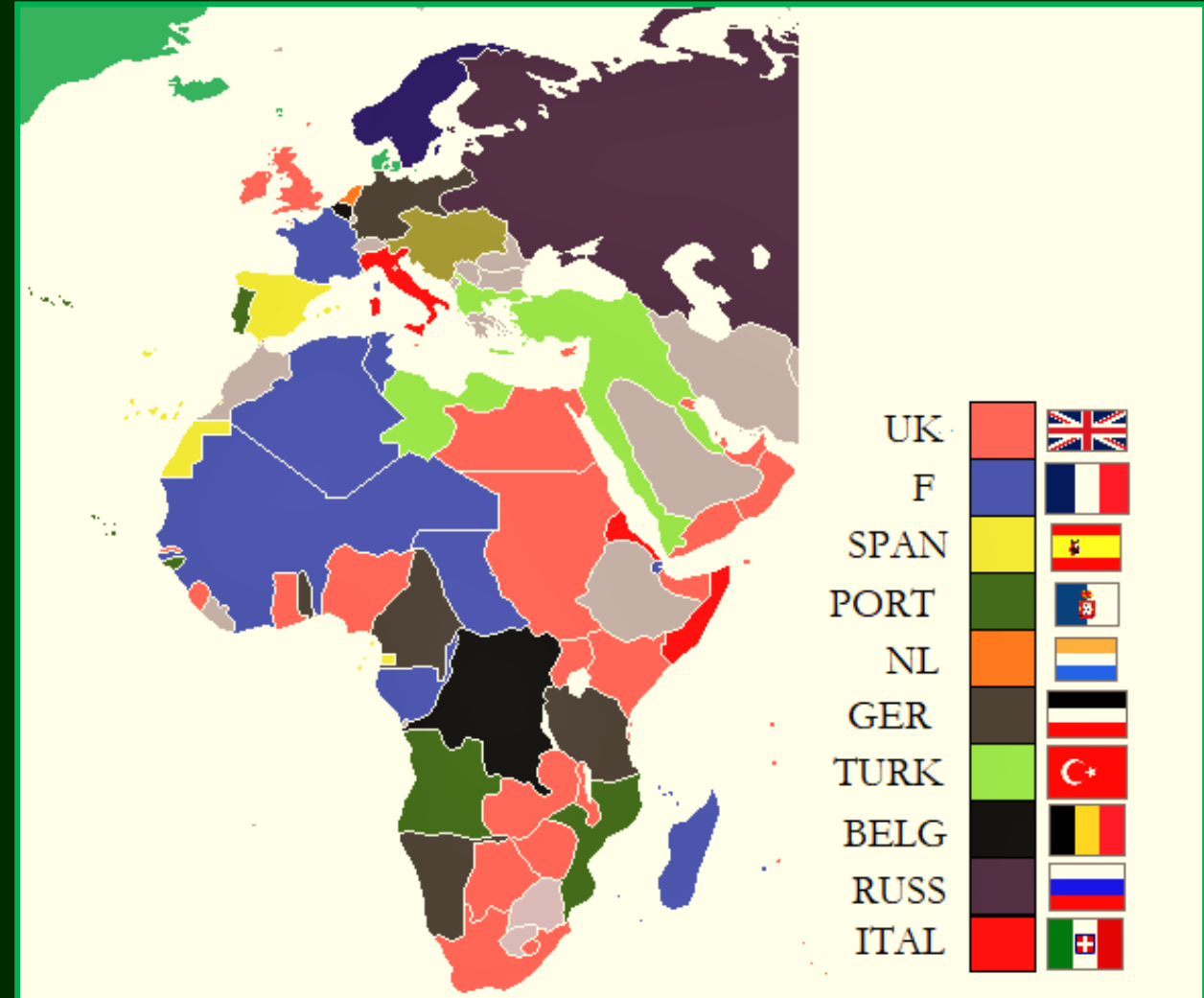


REVEALING THE NATURE OF COLONIALISM: THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899/1902



COLONIAL MAP OF AFRICA 1898

THE PASSING OF EMPIRE

Between Conrad's arrival in England in 1878, and the writing of *Heart of Darkness* twenty years later, it had become increasingly evident that the Victorian world order was collapsing. [...] *Heart of Darkness* is but one of many late nineteenth-century works which, in different ways, implied the coming destruction of existing civilisation.

Ian Watt, 'Ideological Perspectives: Kurtz and the Fate of Victorian Progress,' Elaine Jordan, ed., *Joseph Conrad* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1996), p. 38

Enlightenment civilisation revealed as hollow – what Marlow describes as a 'whited sepulchre' – but Marlow also sees the Romans in the same light all dominated by appetites, cruelty, transgressions

THE REVELATION OF RELATIVITY

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes. Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes, I heard more than enough.

1. READ THE OPENING PASSAGES AND LOOK CLOSELY AT IMAGES
2. CONSIDER LANGUAGE AND CERTAINTY

Conrad relation to Marlow ('introduction')

- On Marlow and his mode of storytelling
- Allegorical figures of fates at Company Offices – foreboding
- Adventure and glamour
- Ellipses and attempt to narrate dreams – Marlow as 'voice' in darkness
- Upriver journey – space as time, silence, Kurtz as destination
- Kurtz as 'disembodied' voice
- Kurtz's 'civilisation' and its relation to 'powers of darkness'
- 'ornamentation' around Kurtz's hut
- First actual appearance of Kurtz – living corpse
- Marlow on Kurtz – pursuit and confrontation
- Kurtz's death
- Marlow's interview with Kurtz's Intended – memory, haunting

CONRAD, *HEART
OF DARKNESS*:
DISCUSSION

MARLOW ON ROMAN IMPERIALISM I

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago -- the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since -- you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker -- may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine -- what d'ye call 'em? -- trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries -- a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been, too -- used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here -- the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina -- and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages, -- precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay -- cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death -- death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush.

MARLOW ON ROMAN IMPERIALISM 2

They must have been dying like flies here. Oh, yes -- he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by and by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga -- perhaps too much dice, you know -- coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him -- all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination -- you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate."

MARLOW ON ROMAN IMPERIALISM 3

What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. **They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force**—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. **It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. 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....”**

THINGS IN PLACE AND OUT OF PLACE: EFFICIENCY & DISORDER

"I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, 'to get a breath of fresh air.' The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.' Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

"Everything else in the station was in a muddle -- heads, things, buildings...."

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SAVAGERY OF THE CONGO

When the first Europeans (the Portuguese) arrived in Congo in 1482, they met a thriving African kingdom. "Despite the contempt for Kongo culture," says Hochschild, "the Portuguese grudgingly recognised in the kingdom a sophisticated and well-developed state - the leading one on the west coast of central Africa. It was an imperial federation, of two or three million people, covering an area roughly 3,000 sq miles, some of which lie today in several countries after the Europeans had drawn arbitrary border lines across Africa in 1886."

The great fascination of the Congo at the time was its mighty 3,000-mile river, variously called Lualaba, Nzadi or Nzere by the people who lived on its banks. Nzere means "the river that swallows all rivers" because of its many tributaries. Just one tributary, the Kasai, carries as much water as Europe's longest river, the Volga in Russia and it is half as long as the Rhine. Another tributary, the Ubangi is even longer. On Portuguese tongue, Nzere became Zaire which was adopted by Mobutu when he renamed the country in 1971. Like most things African, the Europeans changed the river's name to Congo.'

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/35/181.html>

WORDS & IMAGES

... but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called **enemies**. They were called **criminals**, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea.

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SAVAGERY OF THE BELGIANS

The photograph is by Alice Seeley Harris, the man's name is Nsala. Here is part of her account (from the book *Don't Call Me Lady: The Journey of Lady Alice Seeley Harris*):

He hadn't made his rubber quota for the day so the Belgian-appointed overseers had cut off his daughter's hand and foot. Her name was Boali. She was five years old. Then they killed her. But they weren't finished. Then they killed his wife too. And because that didn't seem quite cruel enough, quite strong enough to make their case, they cannibalized both Boali and her mother. And they presented Nsala with the tokens, the leftovers from the once living body of his darling child whom he so loved. His life was destroyed. They had partially destroyed it anyway by forcing his servitude but this act finished it for him. All of this filth had occurred because one man, one man who lived thousands of miles across the sea, one man who couldn't get rich enough, had decreed that this land was his and that these people should serve his own greed. Leopold had not given any thought to the idea that these African children, these men and women, were our fully human brothers, created equally by the same Hand that had created his own lineage of European Royalty.

<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/father-hand-belgian-congo-1904/>

The imposition of colonial rule on Belgium for the King's profits saw a gigantic reduction in the population of the local people – in what has been termed as the first genocide in the world. Since the rubber took center stage, little production of food took place. The result was famine and starvation which killed many more people. Some men who refused to comply with colonial orders were taken to prisons where the conditions [resulted] in mass death.



Rubber quotas were imposed on villages and the Force Publique was called in to enforce these quotas, which were unrealistic to fill. Failure to meet the quotas was punishable by violence and death. The Force Publique would destroy villages, rape women, take hostages, torture, and extort the people. Men who could not fill their quotas would be mutilated and/or killed. At times whole villages that could not fill their quotas would be burned down to the ground as a lesson for other villages. Women and children would be taken hostage until the men filled their designated quotas. The women would be raped.

IMPERIALISM & GENDER

"One thing more remained to do -- say good-bye to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea -- the last decent cup of tea for many days -- and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature ... I was also one of the Workers, with a capital -- you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

'You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

BREAK

15 MINUTES

CROSSING THE LINE

Transgression is an action that involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line that it crosses. [...] The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.'

Michel Foucault, 'Preface to Transgression,' in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* ed., James. D. Faubion (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p.73.

What taboo haunts this book?

DELAYED DECODING: DEVELOPMENT OF TEXTUAL SCHIZOPHRENIA

Sticks, little sticks, were flying about—thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet—perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. **Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at!** I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the land side.

THE RATIONALE FOR TEXTUAL SCHIZOPHRENIA

while the main body of Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs is a magnificent peroration of altruistic intent, its supplementary footnote – 'Exterminate all the brutes!' – introduces what appears to be a contradictory double-voicedness or textual schizophrenia which mirrors the much more complex intersection of different voices within the novel the revelation of the true meaning of 'civilisation': that alternative ways of living should be wiped out as a whole

(See Walter Benjamin: 'every act of civilisation is also an act of barbarism').

WORD & IMAGE: ALL PERCEPTION RESTS ON SHARED ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT REALITY

I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see -- you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream -- making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . "

He was silent for a while.

". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence -- that which makes its truth, its meaning -- its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream -- alone. . . ."

ACTS OF PERCEPTION

‘Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one produces it. [...] The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.’

Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller,’ in *Illuminations* ed., Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 89

SETTING WORDS AGAINST IMAGES

CONRAD'S RADICAL PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions. The Lawyer—the best of old fellows—had, because of his many years and many virtues, **the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug.** The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was **toying architecturally with the bones.** Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, **resembled an idol.** The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more somber every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

THE TRUTH OF SYMBOLS

The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with them it's hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held—there was no other movement and no other glance. **He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck**—Why? Where did he get it? **Was it a badge—an ornament—a charm—a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it?** It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

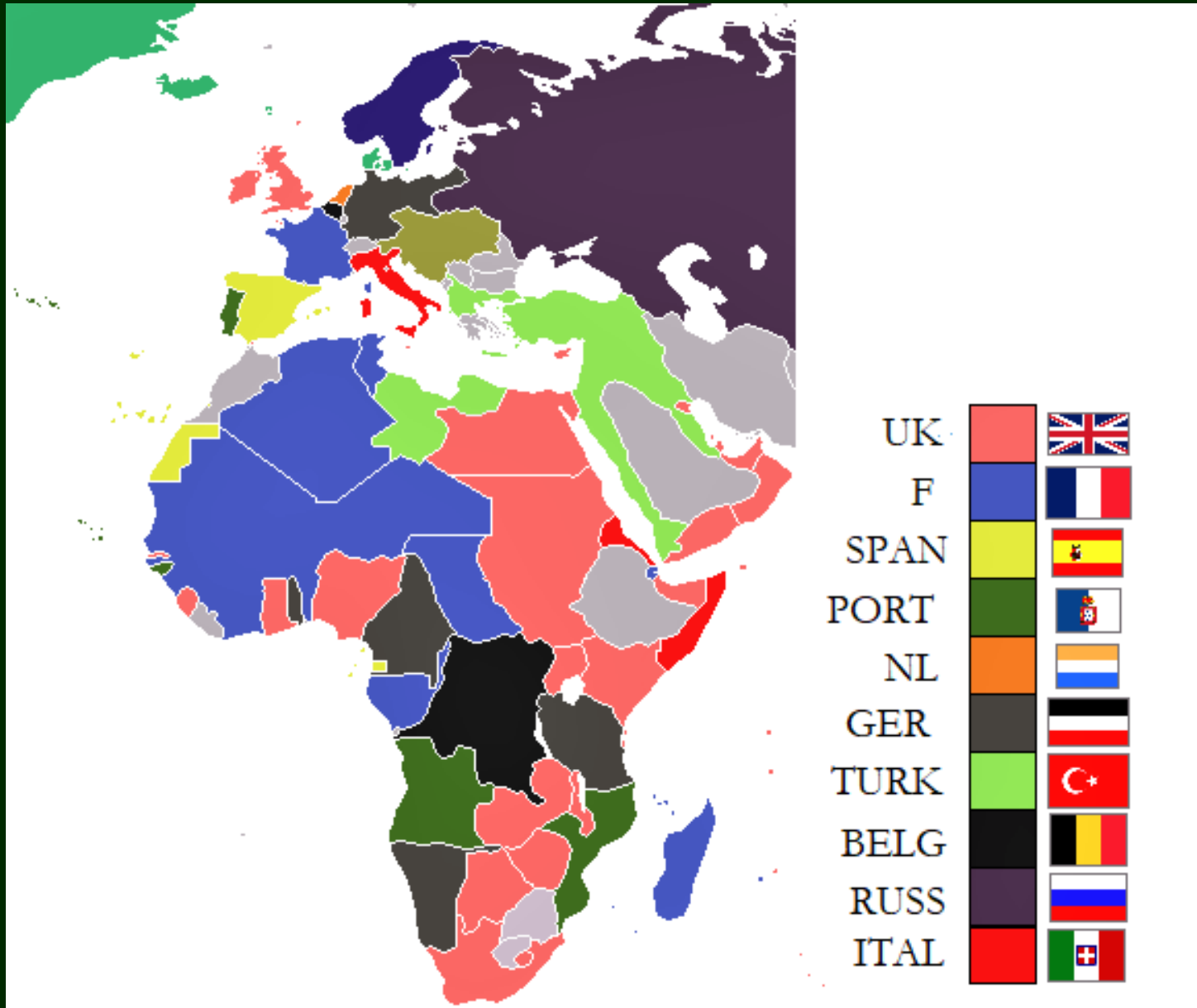
‘Dirt is matter out of place’ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966)

- What here is polluted? What taboo is being broken?

VOICE VERSUS IMAGE

A voice. **He was very little more than a voice.** And I heard – him – it – this voice – other voices – all of them were so little more than voices – and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. [...]

I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz – Kurtz – that means short in German – don't it? Well, **the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death.** He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. **I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him.**



What is the function of this map?
For whom is it made?

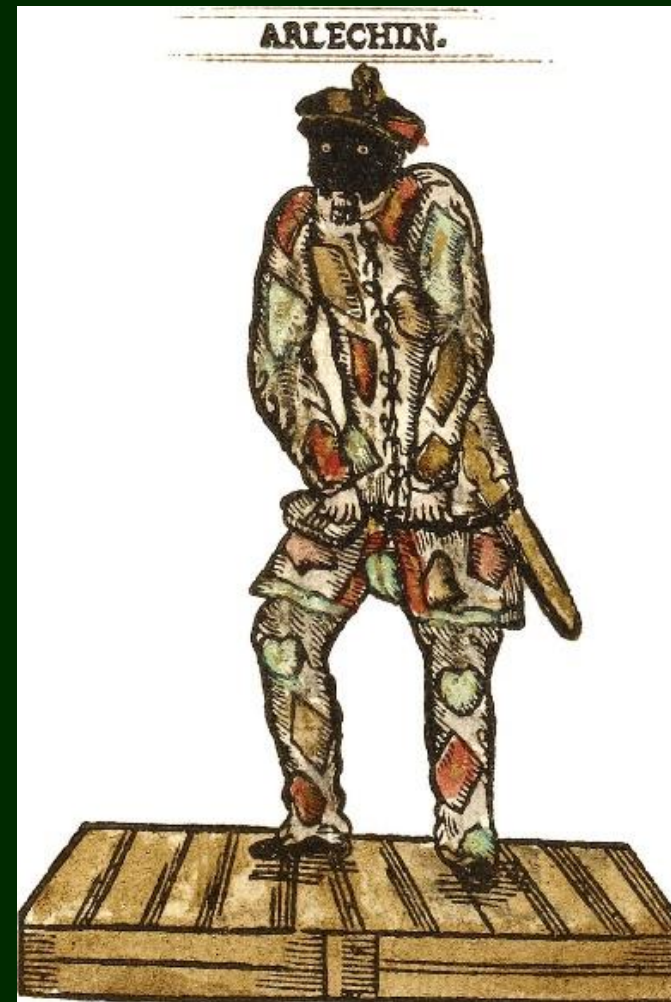
MAPS 1

At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map ... I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. **The glamour's off.** [...] But there was one yet -- the biggest, the most blank, so to speak -- that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled 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.** But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river... resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, **it fascinated me as a snake would a bird -- a silly little bird.... I went on along Fleet Street, but could not shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me.**

MAPS 2

Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me -- still knitting with down-cast eyes -- and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end **a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow**. There was a vast amount of red -- good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. **I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there -- fascinating -- deadly -- like a snake.**



THE HARLEQUIN IN MOTLEY

GLAMOUR OF THE HARLEQUIN – THE MAP PERSONIFIED I

I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain—why he did not instantly disappear. 'I went a little farther,' he said, 'then still a little farther—till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick—quick—I tell you.' The glamour of youth enveloped his particolored rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months—for years—his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity.

GLAMOUR OF THE HARLEQUIN – THE MAP PERSONIFIED 2

I was seduced into something like admiration—like envy. **Glamour** urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. **If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth.** I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely, that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he—the man before your eyes—who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN WRITING

The Russian Harlequin walks off into the jungle in Marlow's spare shoes... without him Kurtz is left to crawl

- Who is the Harlequin?
- What does he represent ?
- A disrupter of reality?

Combines dualities

- Two functions
- Associated with land and water
- Has shoes and is also barefoot
- Attributes of both male and female

Reappears in *To The Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf's revision of *Heart of Darkness*