

Joseph Conrad: Speaking of His Own Time and to Our Own

Henry James said to Joseph Conrad, “No-one has *known*—for intellectual use—the things you know, and you have, as the artist of the whole matter, an authority that no one has approached.” More than almost any of the other major writers of his time, Conrad was a man with considerable experience of the rapidly evolving world of the late 19th century. He was born into a Poland that existed only in its people’s historic memory (his citizenship was Russian). From ages 5-11 he experienced, with his parents, life in the Russian gulag. He had a 20 year career as a sailor, with one trip up the Congo river.

In this course we’ll study three of Conrad’s major works. “Heart of Darkness” explores issues of colonialism, bureaucracy and race. *Lord Jim* appears to be a typical 19th century colonial adventure-romance while questioning the presumptions of that genre and exploring issues of personal responsibility. *The Secret Agent*, the only one of Conrad’s major works set in Britain, strongly foreshadows the work of later writers like Graham Greene and John le Carré in its exploration of the world of spies, double agents and the cynical manipulation of political opinion by both foreign powers and local authorities.

Texts:

I use the Penguin editions of *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent*, but you should feel free to use any other edition. For “Heart of Darkness” I use the Norton Critical Edition, but, again, you should feel free to use any other text.

Syllabus:

Meeting 1, Feb 18: “Heart of Darkness”

Meeting 2, Mar 24: *Lord Jim*, Chaps. I-XX

Meeting 3, Apr 28: *Lord Jim*, Chaps. XXI-end

Meeting 4, May 19: *The Secret Agent*, Chaps I-VIII

Meeting 5, Jun 9: *The Secret Agent*, Chaps IX-end

About the Instructor:

Raymond Brebach is an emeritus professor of English at Drexel University. His research has centered on the work of Joseph Conrad and he is especially interested in Conrad's manuscripts. Over the last 35 years he has done considerable work for The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, serving as contributing editor, and he is assistant editor of *'Twiixt Land and Sea*.