

COLONIALISM IN FICTION

Coordinator: John Becker

The term "Colonial literature" typically refers to works written during a time of colonization or imperialistic exploitation of another country or geographic area. This study group begins with *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, a classic tale of a river journey in which the indigenous population plays almost no part. We then consider stories of spiritual and moral conflict in which stereotypical values of Empire are questioned. *A Passage to India*, by E. M. Forster, examines the customs of different cultures, and the resulting challenges to mutual understanding. *The Quiet American*, by Graham Greene, demonstrates what can follow from the belief that the United States is uniquely positioned to bring democracy to other parts of the world. V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* offers a pessimistic view of Africa's future as former colonies take their first steps toward political independence. Finally, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, both a response and a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, tells the story from the viewpoint of a young woman from the Caribbean, depicting her subsequent descent into madness and captivity in England.

John Becker has coordinated many study groups in literature, history and cinema.

Type of Study Group: Mostly discussion

Readings:

Readings approximate 90 pages per week.

Please try to obtain the indicated editions of each book.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad – any edition;

A Passage to India by E. M. Forster, Penguin Books, ISBN 978-0-241-54042-8;

The Quiet American by Grahame Greene, Penguin Books, ISBN 978-0-14-303902-0;

A Bend in the River by V. S. Naipaul, Vintage International, ISBN 978-0-679-72202-1;

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys, W. W. Norton and Company ISBN 978-0-393-35256-6.

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***** SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: *Heart of Darkness*

QUESTIONS:

What racial attitudes undermine the professed goal of bringing civilization to the natives? What does the story tell us about the true nature of colonialism?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: *Heart of Darkness*, cont'd.

QUESTIONS:

How much "truth" is Marlow able to convey? What examples of "darkness" does the reader encounter in this story?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: *A Passage to India*

QUESTIONS:

How does the political situation in India affect the possibility of friendship between Aziz and Fielding? What role does religion play in dividing the Christian British and Indians, and also Indian society from within?

WEEKS 4 & 5: *A Passage to India*, cont'd.

WEEKS 6 & 7: *The Quiet American*

WEEKS 8, 9 & 10: *A Bend in the River*

WEEKS 11 & 12: *Wild Sargasso Sea*

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