THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor: Michael Scott

The Critics Debate

General Editor Michael Scott

Published titles:

Sons and Lovers Geoffrey Harvey

Bleak House Jeremy Hawthorn

The Canterbury Tales Alcuin Blamires

Tess of the d'Urbervilles Terence Wright

The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday Arnold P. Hinchliffe

Paradise Lost Margarita Stocker

King Lear Ann Thompson

Othello Peter Davison

The Winter's Tale Bill Overton

Gulliver's Travels Brian Tippet

Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience David Lindsay

Measure for Measure T.F. Wharton

Hamlet Michael Hattaway

The Tempest David Daniell

Coriolanus Bruce King

Wuthering Heights Peter Miles

The Metaphysical Poets Donald Mackenzie

Heart of Darkness Robert Burden

Further titles are in preparation

The Great Gatsby Stephen Matterson

To the Lighthouse Su Reid

HEART OF DARKNESS

Robert Burden

M
MACMILLAN

To H.T.

© Robert Burden 1991

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 33–4 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1991

Published by
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Burden, Robert

Heart of darkness — (The critics debate).

1. Fiction in English. Conrad, Joseph, 1857–1924

I. Title II. Series

823.912

ISBN 978-0-333-48309-1 ISBN 978-1-349-21294-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-21294-1

Contents

<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	vii
<i>A Note on Text and References</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix

Part One: Survey

1 Biographical criticism and source studies	1
2 Mythic and psychoanalytic criticism	13
3 Anthropological and political criticism	17
4 Realism and modernism	32
5 Stylistic analysis	45
6 Narratology and Marxist criticism	53

Part Two: Appraisal

1 Introduction to discourse theory	65
2 The discourses of <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	67
3 The clash of discourses	76
4 The post-colonialist reader	78

<i>Bibliography and References</i>	83
<i>Index</i>	88

To criticize, however, is to put into crisis, something which is not possible without evaluating the conditions of the crisis (its limits), without considering its historical moment.

(Roland Barthes, 1971)

General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross-currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second part the authors provide their own appraisals of the text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therein hopes to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation as the critics debate.

Michael Scott

A Note on Text and References

THE edition of *Heart of Darkness* referred to throughout the text is the single volume published by Penguin (Harmondsworth, 1982, first published 1902), abbreviated to HD. Critical works are listed in full in the bibliography.

Preface

LET US begin by justifying this little book. What can my writing, within the strict limits of this series, contribute to your understanding and enjoyment of Conrad's short novel?

Heart of Darkness (HD) has become part of an industry within academic criticism, judging by the number of publications which are concerned in part or wholly with it. The author of this latest book on that text feels the weight of all those pages, and all those claims about the meaning and value of a text written, by all accounts, in some haste by an author who needed the money, before he could continue with what he felt to be the more important larger project that was to become *Lord Jim*. Ironically, HD has become one of the most frequently taught in the Conrad canon, and certainly in modern literature. It is the ideal early modernist set text, brief yet heavy with meaning; a book containing within its covers many of the concerns that were to preoccupy in one way or another a whole generation of writers. We could adopt a slogan from the American critic, Albert Guerard [1958] who reminds us of what Thomas Mann said about his short novel, *Death in Venice* (1912): 'a little work of inexhaustible allusiveness'. The history of the interpretation of HD certainly justifies our adopted slogan.

The meaning and value of such a work of fiction has not been settled once and for all. Why should it be? Recent work in the theory of criticism has given us a new set of imperatives. We are now being called upon to negotiate not just between competing readings of the one text, but competing practices of criticism. Herein lies the double task of this study. The first is contained in the following statement: 'The life history of a work of imaginative literature includes the meanings it has had for successive generations of readers . . . from the first readers . . . with their special advantages and prejudices.' [Dean, 1960 p. 143]. The second derives from the French

Marxist critic, Pierre Macherey [1966] who claimed that the critic produces the text he or she studies as an object of knowledge.

'The Critics Debate' should not be understood here as an open forum of enlightened thinkers. In our culture, the activity of debating carries with it precisely that implication which masks the serious dispute about what the activity of criticism ought to be. The varied writings on HD are not just so many possible opinions in a transparent debate. Each item of criticism selected for this study is symptomatic of a practice of writing about literature, with its specific presuppositions about what that practice should be. Often they are mutually exclusive, monolithic discourses that produce, as we shall see, strong readings of HD; readings that appear to settle the debate once and for all. In these cases the text of HD becomes more obviously an object of knowledge in Macherey's sense.

We justify the addition of another book about HD by differentiating its purposes from those other books that collect the different interpretations of HD. The Casebook *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *Under Western Eyes*, as the general preface to that series states, 'charts the reputation of the work . . . from the first appearance to the present time'. The basic purpose of that indispensable series is to present, 'an integrated selection of readings, with an introduction which explores the theme and discusses the literary and critical issues involved'. While that series presents a 'selection of critical opinions', the Critics Debate series aims to foreground the discussion of criticism as such.

This book then is as much about critical theory as it is about HD. The collection of essays on HD in the Casebook belongs to that tradition which includes the American Twentieth-Century Views series [Mudrick, 1966]; the Critical Heritage series [Sherry, 1973]; the critical editions of HD like Dean [1960], and the American Norton critical editions [1963, 1971, 1988]. It is with the most recent revision of the Norton edition [Kimbrough, 1988] that the latest controversies about HD, and what a critical reading of it could be, are collected in an excellent volume. The dispute about the accusation that Conrad was a racist by Chinua Achebe in 1975 (a truly post-colonialist claim, and one that is discussed below), and the significance of Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now* (1979) on the subsequent reading of HD (from which it derives), themselves would also justify a more topical study of HD. It is indeed with the publication of the latest Norton edition, and also with the three essays on HD

in Tallack [1987] that the debate about Conrad's short novel has taken a new turn. This book will assist the emergence of that debate for the 1990s.

Let us start therefore with a brief and highly selective survey of the history of readings of HD, and the critical practices those readings represent.