A2 Achebe Blog: 11/18/14

Absent: Gruber / Proffitt (Blood Drive), Dalton (tired from play)

Eble talked about racism, the KKK; focused class discussion on Achebe’s essay.

TJ: Africa is depicted in a racist way; it’s not given a face. It’s a stereotype of an unknown land.

* Logan: Read from the essay. Africa = a device to analyze European people (pages 6-7).
* Eble: So… how?
* Zane Cooper: He neglects to give the natives any voice. Explained the two instances of dehumanization. They’re not good enough even to have voices, English at all.
* Eble read from page 5. Even to whom the natives upon whom Conrad confers a voice, that voice is what?
* Chase: Savage?
* Andrew Smith: They’re objects, almost animals, like horses… they’re kind of just “there.”
* Logan: Referenced Amy Tan’s description of her mother in “Native Tongue.”
* Smith: If you were to meet those people… the 21st century example of immigrants coming to class, you’ll feel like you’re superior. Much like immigrants.
* Eble: What figurative language does Achebe point out here?
* Hawkins: Synecdoche…
* Eble: Takes away the humanity; it’s just a head, not a person.

Sam: People can’t do that much…

Logan: Talks about Albert Schweitzer views Africa. Eble asked for some clarity from Logan about page 6. Then, he quotes *Heart of Darkness* when they talk about the savages being ugly. It feels familiar.

* Kevin Collins: Brings up Albert Schweitzer to show that Europeans see Africans as less… as Junior brothers…
* Hawkins: Achebe claims that the frame narrative functions to keep Conrad from seeming racist. Conrad uses the frame narration to separate himself…
* Smith: He’s basically saying that Conrad’s ideas are hidden?
* Eble: So what does he provide as support for this claim?
* Sam W: Read from page 6.
* Smith: Page 7—he talks about his life.
* Eble: So…where racism?
* Shagena: Black figure… black legs… long black arms.
* Eble: Yes—sardonic tone. But why give a shit?
* TJ: People praise this book as one of the best ever; he’s mad that people don’t call out Conrad.
* Logan: Society at the time was racist, but people didn’t notice or care. By acknowledging the racism in the story, we tap into a larger idea about starving children in Africa.
* Eble clarified, brought ideas together. Brought in the river metaphor about how this book is just a tributary to a larger river.

Zane Cooper: Page 9; focused on the penultimate paragraph, Africa as a strange place full of savages. Shared the anecdote from the start… this book perpetuates stereotypes.

* Eble: So how does he establish his ethos?
* Logan: Letters at the end of the first paragraph about *Things Fall Apart*.
* Zane: Shared an anecdote about last year in Mr. Campbell’s class. Description of modern society by someone who had never seen it; someone who had been secluded, never seen the city. The idea that in their culture, their traditions are odd, but ours isn’t.
* Eble read from the quote on page 7 about Marco Polo, talked about how / asked for depictions of Africans being depicted. Went to the mask part.
* Logan: Spoke about Picasso, Matisse being amazed by the mask, despite the depiction of savagery.
* Hawkins: They weren’t useless savages.
* Eble summarized.
* Logan: That’s tough… if you’re Marco Polo, in China, you’re going to look for things in which you can find solace. You’ll gravitate to that which you know, understand.
* Smith: It’s human culture. People don’t want to branch out, try new things. Shared an anecdote about Ireland, being born there.
* Eble: We look for sameness…
* Smith: To Bohne’s class…just trying something different…
* Eble: The problem, according to Achebe, is when you see a place as a backdrop.
* Smith: Vacation versus living in a place…
* Eble clarified.
* Zane: I think you’re trying to say… if you’re going on vacation…
* Eble: So… summary…
* Smith: Challenges… Marlow looks at them, notices them. He notices them. He’s not saying they’re terrible.
* Harrison: He’s traveling… that doesn’t make him a racist. I don’t want to get ganged up on… Who thinks it’s not racist?
* Chase: Not trying…
* Logan: Reflection of a racist society…not written under the intention of being racist… if you look at the book objectively. It does have a racist base…
* Wermes: Shared Conrad’s experience… he didn’t get the whole picture… by default, the book is racist.
* Smith: Time frame… general belief of Africa. Shared an anecdote about *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.
* Wermes: Hard for us to see this as racist.
* Eble shared the part about page 8 dealing with the two grounds on which this could be contested.
* Wermes: Achebe can read this, see the depiction of Africans—as a learned scholar—and see it as racist. I’m not blaming Achebe… it’s easy for us *not* to see racism. I have never read a book that I can say “That’s racist.”
* Logan: Just because people don’t see something as racist doesn’t not make it racist. It’s viewed as an important text; people don’t recognize it as racist, but as a great piece of art.
* Wermes: Today… our stereotypes against black people. Low-income places, no jobs, rely on government aid. Stereotypes among white people. You have to open your mind when you read this… I don’t think that’s the point of the novel; to show the white people. You can get the full point of the novel with taking out that…
* Smith: When I read *Heart of Darkness*, I didn’t think it was racist.

Eble article: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>

TJ: So… is this a misogynistic text? Beckdale test…

* Logan: Sure…
* Harrison: Time period…women didn’t have power… European women wouldn’t go.
* Smith: Read it how you want to read it.
* Eble: Sure… but I haven’t heard any other reason for why it’s not a racist text.
* Harrison: He portrays the Europeans negatively.