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CONRAD'S MARLOW: THE QUESTION OF NARRATIVE UNRELIABILITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

The body of nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction includes numerous experiments with the so-called "unreliable narrator."[1] The term is generally applied to the narrator whose understanding of a story is at odds with that of the skillful reader. The accepted measure of a narrator's reliability is his proximity to what Wayne Booth terms "the implied author."[2] When an author creates a work of fiction, he presents, through the sum total of all the elements within that work's structure, a certain picture of himself. That is, he "implies" that he is a person who shares the outlook and values inherent in his own work. A narrator whose outlook seems contrary to that of this "implied author" may be termed "unreliable."

In many cases the gap between the implied author and the narrator is instantly recognizable. For example, narrators such as Huck Finn and Salinger's Holden Caulfield are presented as children, but few readers would take this to mean that The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye had actually been written by children. The child-narrator is in a way analogous to the psychotic

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[1]Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp.158-59.

[2]Ibid., p.75.

narrator as exemplified in Browning's dramatic monologues. Even a relatively uninformed reader would not be tempted in either case to assume identity between author and narrator.

In the case of a creation such as Conrad's narrator Marlow, this question of distance is slightly more involved. Marlow is neither psychotic nor a child, but this is not to say that he is at one with the implied author. Moreover, their relative closeness(in comparison, for example, with that between the Duke of Ferrara and the implied author of Browning's "My Last Duchess") may make it especially difficult for the reader to detect instances where they diverge. These possibilities of confusion have prompted me to undertake a study which I hope will prove of value: that of the potential for unreliability in Marlow as he appears in "Heart of Darkness," Lord Jim, and Chance.

It is now necessary to provide a brief explanation of how the idea of distance between narrator and implied author might work in practice with regard to Conrad's novels. I would like to anticipate briefly my first chapter by citing a couple of examples from "Heart of Darkness." The concept itself will often be referred to in the course of the thesis as "irony," but it is useful to keep the word "distance" in mind because it helps to explain how irony is detected. For example, although there is every indication that the opera-

tions of the Company in the Belgian Congo are demonic, Marlow remains proud of his work and even seems to consider it a possible means to salvation. We see Marlow ironically here. That is, we detect a distance between the views of the person who created the story, and those of the narrator who is merely telling the story. My thesis will also argue that Marlow is the victim of irony in his final treatment of Mr. Kurtz. Marlow's notion that Kurtz dies repentant seems wrong-headed given the tangible evidence of Kurtz's nature that he has already conveyed to us. An apparent inability such as Marlow's to draw correct inferences from characters and events is the crux of narrative unreliability.

I feel that Marlow's distortions form a "tangled web" of an amazingly consistent pattern throughout his narratives, and that one of the important keys into the mysteries of his personality lies in the confusing language he uses. To dismiss the latter problem out of hand as the mere result of a lack of control on the author's part is, I think, to undervalue the author's artistic integrity. It seems more likely that, for various psychological reasons which I will explore in the next three chapters, the meaning of Marlow's stories at times eludes him. And this is very different from F. R. Leavis's criticism of Conrad himself for "not knowing what he means."[3]

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[3]F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition(New York: New York University Press, 1964), p.180.

I would like to begin this examination of Conrad's narrative technique by looking very briefly at "Youth," the short story in which Marlow first appeared in 1898. There are obvious similarities between this story and the novels, the most important being that it too engages Marlow in the mode of retrospective autobiography. However, the distinguishing feature of "Youth" is that it presents the younger Marlow as the only major character within the tale. Whereas the novels call upon Marlow to delve into the psyches of their tormented protagonists, "Youth" merely requires him to recreate the illusions of his younger self. This situation tends to limit the reader's opportunities to view the narrator ironically. In the novels, there is room to question Marlow's understanding of the protagonists, but it is more difficult to question Marlow's personal recollections of his own thoughts and feelings. Judging by Marlow's account in "Youth," the excitement and adventure of his perils at sea, and the alluring prospect of the East rendered him for the large part oblivious to fear, pain, humiliation, and thirst. One might <u>suspect</u> that the older Marlow's selection of psychological detail has the effect of exaggerating the bravery of his former self. However, there is no solid evidence within the text itself to support such a case against Marlow, and hence no positive indication that Conrad intends us to view his narrator

ironically. In fact, if we take Marlow the narrator at his word, then the younger Marlow becomes the embodiment of the idea of unconscious heroism which later plays an important role in Lord Jim.

Yet there may be another way to approach the matter of Marlow's authority in "Youth." Although we are not in a position to question the truthfulness of his story, we may still choose to be skeptical of his interpretations. There is a sense in which, as John Weston notes, "the older Marlow has not been so much disillusioned as re-illusioned."[4] Although Marlow treats his former romantic ideal, Bankok, with an obvious irony, he is seemingly oblivious to the fact that "silly, charming, beautiful youth"[5] is itself a romantic ideal which he now clings to with equal intensity, and no more reason. There is the possibility that the story may indicate a darkness inherent in Marlow's younger self of which the narrator is unaware. Again, Weston characterizes the young Marlow as a "romantic egotist" who "risks his and his crew's lives, all for 'independent cruising.'"[6] The label "egotist" introduces some ironies to which the narrating Marlow is evidently not privy. He has fostered

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[4]John Howard Weston, "'Youth:' Conrad's Irony and Time's Darkness," Studies in Short Fiction, 11, No.4(1974), p.403.

[5]Joseph Conrad, "Youth" and "The End of the Tether" (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981), p.33.

[6]Weston, "'Youth:' Conrad's Irony and Time's Darkness," p.405.

an illusion of youth as a "silly" but otherwise ideal state, whereas readers may see it as appalling in its egotism.

I feel, however, that the gap between narrator and implied author is not large in this instance. Although individual readers may disagree with Marlow's evaluation of his own youth, the structure of the story seems in general to endorse his leniency. Young Marlow in his youthful enthusiasm behaves irresponsibly, but the plot of "Youth" does not produce any adverse consequences. It strikes me that the cursing captain of the Celestial that Marlow encounters on reaching port does serve as a reproach to his foolishness, making him feel as if he has "in some way, sinned against the harmony of the universe."[7] However, by including this incident, the implied author has really given Marlow no more than a playful scolding. He and the rest of the crew have in fact arrived safely in the East, and the captain of the Judea himself has no reproaches for the "independent cruiser."

There is another aspect of "Youth" which would appear to legitimize Marlow's narrative authority. As in the three novels, his monologue is framed by an outside voice, or what I shall term the "primary" narrator. But whereas in the novels this device often serves to provide the reader with ideas and attitudes which oppose Marlow's, it is notable that the primary narrator of "Youth" supports Marlow in his

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[7]Conrad, "Youth" and "The End of the Tether," pp.36-37.

idealization of "the youth . . . the strength . . . the romance of illusion."[8] Whatever darker elements may characterize youth, it appears to be assumed by both narrators that they will be forgivable and perhaps insignificant in the face of its glories. The primary narrator also affirms the idea of "the fellowship of the craft,"[9] and perhaps shares Marlow's English chauvinism. Just as the loyalty found in the Judea's crew is said by Marlow to be peculiarly British, so the sense of solidarity that characterizes Marlow's community of listeners can be found, according to the primary narrator, "nowhere but in England."[10]

The ironies of "Youth" are, then, reasonably gentle. The younger Marlow is an obvious romantic, and the "mature" Marlow is not really much different; but there is nothing in the story that suggests an attempt by the implied author to expose the dangers of illusion. Rather, the story emphasizes its beauty and charm. The chapters that follow will attempt to show how Conrad came to practice a much more rigorous exploration of the disturbing discord between the ideal and the real.

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[8] Ibid., p.39

[9] Ibid., p.9.

[10] Ibid., p.28, p.9.

CHAPTER 1

Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"(1899) provides an intriguing challenge for the critic concerned with narrative unreliability. The technique of retrospective autobiography allows us the opportunity to measure the distance between Marlow the protagonist and Marlow the narrator. As with "Youth," we are invited to ask whether experience has contributed significantly to the mature Marlow's powers of perception. Marlow may well be prone to scoff at his own "youthful" follies, but it is important to decide whether his stance is accompanied by real wisdom or whether it is mere posturing. It is my contention that, while the most obvious ironies in "Heart of Darkness" are undoubtedly inherent in the attitude of Marlow the narrator toward his younger self and other characters, there is nonetheless a substantial barrier of irony separating this narrator from the implied author. This irony is present throughout the book, and culminates in Marlow's confused recollections of Kurtz.

To begin a consideration of possible unreliability inherent in Marlow's point of view, it may be useful to focus upon that other narrative voice which encloses the tale. It seems natural to appeal to the primary narrator as a potential source of insight regarding Conrad's own

attitude toward Marlow.

In his opening remarks, the primary narrator uses a metaphor associating the meaning of Marlow's tales with "the spectral illumination of moonshine."[1] The derogatory meaning of the word "moonshine" blends well with the slightly unenthusiastic way in which the narrator introduces this particular tale: "We knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences."[2] The condescending note here raises the possibility that the description of Marlow as "a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower"[3] is intended, not to give Marlow added credibility, but rather to ironically undercut his narrative authority from the start. The primary narrator may be expressing his own reservations about the indecisive ambiguity to which Marlow habitually falls prey. For example, Marlow's initial effort to describe the very subject of his tale -- "the culminating point of my experience"[4] -- is anything but successful.

> It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me -- and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough, too -- and pitiful --

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[1]Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness"(New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), p.5.

[2]Ibid., p.7.

[3]Ibid., p.6.

[4]Ibid., p.7.

> not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light.[5]

One is left with the feeling that, if this unnamed experience was so very significant, Marlow's impressions of it should be renderable in at least slightly more concrete terms. The primary narrator's decision to relate Marlow's story indicates that he must feel it to be of importance, yet in his subtle ridicule of Marlow he may be suggesting that the tale's merits exist in some ways apart from Marlow's bewildered telling of it. With this possible warning, then, the reader comes to Marlow's narrative.

It is plain that Marlow, as he appears in the Congo narrative, is essentially the same character presented in "Youth." In the early portion of the tale, the reader has the same sorts of doubts about Marlow the steamboat captain as he had about Marlow the second mate of the Judea. There is that same element of recklessness that characterized the "independent cruiser."[6] He is determined to gratify his childish desire to go to Africa, and proceeds to do so in the service of the Company in spite of grave warnings and dark omens.[7] Marlow refuses to be put off by the morbid circumstances under which his position becomes available

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Conrad, "Youth" and "The End of the Tether," p.33.

[7] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," pp.9-11.

for him. He discounts the "fateful" presence of the knitters at the Company offices, and apparently does not bother to speculate about the reason for the secretary's tone of "desolation and sympathy." He ignores the indirect warning of the Company clerk, and also the implication of the old doctor's more direct questions.

Marlow selects these details for his narrative, yet the extent to which he understands their import, even in retrospect, remains unknown. This ambiguity makes the actual retrospective distance between Marlow the protagonist and Marlow the narrator difficult to determine. As in Conrad's earlier tale, Marlow speaks about his "youthful" follies with bemused contempt, in this case comparing his younger self with a "silly little bird" fascinated by the snake-like Congo.[8] However, the tendency to disclaim responsibility for past actions by attributing them to "youth" is an all too common human characteristic, and cannot stand alone as evidence of a growth in Marlow's wisdom. Marlow's understanding of those events leading up to his departure for Africa may well have grown astronomically over the years, but it is at least worthwhile noting that there is no conclusive evidence of such a growth. Although the author depicts the Company as the embodiment of evil by means of a symbolism that is almost heavy-handed, Marlow merely

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[8] Ibid., p.8.

provides factual description of his experiences at the offices, with no comment save for the understated "and there was something ominous in the atmosphere."[9]

H. M. Daleski argues that such possible failures of insight on Marlow's part are not evidence of true narrative unreliability. Marlow, in Daleski's characterization of him,

> does not recount his experiences in the light of gained knowledge, as Dickens's Pip does, for instance, in Great Expectations. . . . Since he does not fully understand the meaning of his experience when he begins the narrative, the tale itself becomes not only a reliving of that experience but a progressive attempt to penetrate its significance. . . . Marlow tells his story in the dark, and should consequently be seen not so much as an unreliable narrator as one in search of illumination.[10]

To an extent, Marlow's shortcomings can be seen to stem from the limitations inherent in any individual consciousness. As Ian Watt suggests, Marlow himself is in some ways aware of how far he is from being able to tell "the full story," and his awareness of his own predicament tends to dissipate the irony of his situation in the eyes of the reader.[11] Furthermore, in such noteworthy incidents as the cryptic "shelling of the continent"[12] and the "railroad

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[9] Ibid., p.10.

[10] H. M. Daleski, Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977), p.54.

[11] Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.211.

[12] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.14.

construction,"[13] or in Conrad's masterfully impressionistic depiction of the attack upon the steamer,[14] the reader's consciousness is so tightly pinned to Marlow's that there is little room for irony in the first place. For the moment, Marlow's confusion is the reader's. Yet, I feel that the very essence of "Heart of Darkness" is contained in a basic core of instances where the reader's analysis of the situation does run at least one step ahead of Marlow's, and where Marlow's confused awareness of his own inability to provide lucid and accurate interpretation only serves to highlight the extent and peculiar nature of his inadequacies as narrator. This necessarily renders him an even more unmistakable object of irony. Marlow's failure to identify precisely the real import of his experience at the Company offices may be construed as a simple reluctance on his part to state the obvious, but it may equally be seen as the first in a series of failures to interpret, either clearly or correctly, events the meaning of which cannot be doubted by the reader.

Once Marlow actually begins to describe the progress of his journey, instances occur in which one has greater reason to question the narrator's judgement. For example, it is quite possible to doubt the validity of Marlow's apparently absolute faith in the inherent value of "work."

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[13] Ibid., p.16.

[14] Ibid., p.45.

On the surface, it would appear that Conrad has structured "Heart of Darkness" around the notion of work's saving power. Marlow asserts that it was only through his work that he managed to keep his "hold on the redeeming facts of life" in the atmosphere of the Outer Station.[15] The companionship of the hard-working boiler-maker is seen by Marlow as preferable to that of the more socially respectable members of the Company. Later, as he travels up the river toward Kurtz, Marlow rejects his own class and its norms even further. He claims that the cannibals themselves are "fine fellows . . . in their place . . . men one could work with."[16] Work is championed for its own sake. The word "rivets" becomes a metaphor for salvation. Marlow attempts to elaborate on this practical faith in the following passage.

> No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work -- no man does -- but I like what is in the work -- the chance to find yourself. Your own reality -- for yourself, not for others -- what no man can ever know.[17]

It is this attitude of Marlow's that distinguishes him from the "pilgrims," who have no interest in work themselves, but only in profiting by the work of others.

Yet, in the context of "Heart of Darkness," it is

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[15] Ibid., p.23.

[16] Ibid., p.35.

[17] Ibid., p.29.

finally impossible to share Marlow's enthusiasm for the doctrine of salvation through hard work. There is too much in the story that undermines his position. It seems that Marlow more often loses than "finds" himself in work, and as for the contention that work is a means of discovering "reality," Marlow elsewhere admits that it can be just the opposite -- a way of blotting out an unpleasant reality.[18] During the trip up the Congo, Marlow seems to use his chores aboard the vessel as an excuse to ignore the various implications of what is going on around him: "When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality -- the reality, I tell you -- fades. The inner truth is hidden -- luckily, luckily."[19] Marlow sees the jungle as something alive, something which is trying to tell him some hidden and terrible truth about himself. The exact nature of this truth is unclear in the early stages of Marlow's adventures, but it encroaches upon his consciousness as the thought of some "remote kinship" with the "wild and passionate uproar" of savages.[20]

By concentrating upon the work for its own sake, Marlow not only attempts to avoid self-knowledge, but is also clearly trying to escape the fact that, in doing his job,

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[18] Ibid., p.34.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p.37.

he ultimately serves the ends of the Company -- ends with which no decent or sensitive human being could possibly be in sympathy. Anthony Low outlines the problem inherent in Marlow's myopic industry.

> Although his dedicated repair of the steamboat is speeded by the desire to find and to rescue the mysterious Kurtz -- who proves a tainted goal for the quest -- he brings with him the manager and the trigger-happy pilgrims, and thus aids the evil they represent. From the time that Marlow first signs his contract . . . he has accepted a job corrupted in its purpose.[21]

Marlow's position on work, if not exactly unreliable, is nonetheless one-sided, and cannot be totally shared by the perceptive reader. While Marlow may have managed to preserve some personal sense of morality through dedication to his work, his inner world is disconnected from any broader reality, as is the "beautiful world" of idealism that he contemptuously accuses women of inhabiting.[22]

It is impossible to avoid the subject of Marlow's relationship to Kurtz, even at this relatively early stage in the discussion, for Marlow refers to Kurtz long before his actual appearance in the sequence of the story. Marlow's belief in Kurtz is strongly connected with his belief in work, and with the moral confusion inherent in that belief. His final remark at the end of the book's first installment

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[21]Anthony Low, "'Heart of Darkness:' The Search for an Occupation," English Literature in Transition, 12, No.1 (1969), p.1.

[22]Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.49.

is that he was "curious to see whether this man, who had come equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there."[23] This "curiosity" rapidly becomes an obsession, for Marlow originally envisages Kurtz as a moral touchstone. He imagines him as "a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake,"[24] and he looks to Kurtz for proof that sticking to one's work, and even rising "to the top" in the Company's hierarchy, is not incompatible with humanitarian principles. Surrounded by the faithless pilgrims who, he knows, misapply labels such as "criminal," "enemy," and "scoundrel," Marlow hopes that Kurtz's voice will be that of truth, "the pulsating stream of light."[25] He shudders at the thought that, instead, it might turn out to be "the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness."[26] However, Marlow's dichotomy itself is false. Kurtz's voice, when Marlow finally hears it, is not that of light, nor is it deceitful. Rather, it appears to contain a dark truth, one that is no more compatible with Marlow's beliefs than is the voice of the jungle itself. Much of the narrative is(to borrow the phraseology

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[23] Ibid., p.31.

[24] Ibid., p.32.

[25] Ibid., p.48.

[26] Ibid.

of the later Marlow in describing Jim's behaviour) either an attempt to run away from the "fact" of Kurtz, or else a rather unsuccessful effort to face it.

It has often been remarked that Marlow appears to struggle with an endless stream of hopelessly vague language. The commentary upon Kurtz and his surroundings is filled with expressions such as the following: "inscrutable purpose,"[27] "unspeakable secrets,"[28] "unspeakable rites,"[29] "mysterious frenzy,"[30] "inconceivable mystery,"[31] and "indefinable meaning."[32] Slightly more explicit, but not much more effective in conveying meaning, are the words "lightless region of subtle horrors,"[33] "forgotten and brutal instincts,"[34] or "gratified and monstrous passions."[35] F. R. Leavis, one of the earlier critics to consider this aspect of "Heart of Darkness," interprets it strictly as an artistic failure.

Conrad must here stand convicted of borrowing

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[27] Ibid., p.62.

[28] Ibid., p.63.

[29] Ibid., p.51.

[30] Ibid., p.65.

[31] Ibid., p.68.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p.59.

[34] Ibid., p.67.

[35] Ibid.

> the arts of the magazine-writer(who borrowed his, shall we say, from Kipling or Poe) in order to impose on his readers . . . a "significance" that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce. The insistence betrays the absense, the willed "intensity" the nullity. He is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means.[36]

John A. McClure, on the other hand, sees Marlow's haziness in a more positive light. McClure feels that Conrad is offering, through Marlow, a "rhetoric of restraint" as a desirable alternative to the overblown rhetoric of imperialism.[37] The latter is exemplified for us in Kurtz's report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. If Kurtz "could get himself to believe anything,"[38] Marlow, as his nebulous narrative shows, can get himself to believe nothing. McClure takes issue with Leavis's judgement explicitly and argues that the confusing nature of Marlow's narrative is not the result of artistic sloppiness, but rather Conrad's fully calculated effort to restrain "the desire for comforting solutions, conclusions, certainties."[39] In McClure's view, then, although there is little doubt that Kurtz's rhetoric is superior to Marlow's in terms of the number of people that it is likely to convince, Conrad has

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[36]Leavis, The Great Tradition, p.180.

[37]John A. McClure, "The Rhetoric of Restraint in 'Heart of Darkness,'" Nineteenth Century Fiction, 32(1977), pp.310-26.

[38]Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.74.

[39]McClure, "The Rhetoric of Restraint in 'Heart of Darkness,'" p.314.

chosen to show the reader, through Marlow, the more sane alternative.[40]

This argument is sound as far as it goes. Leavis is perhaps too quick to dismiss Marlow's ambivalence as evidence of a floundering author. Insofar as Marlow argues against the perverse idealism behind imperial expansion and demonstrates his skepticism through cautious speech, he is supporting a position which is born out by the structure of "Heart of Darkness" as a whole. However, the work was obviously not written simply as a critique of imperialism, nor can Kurtz be seen as a mere personification of imperialistic ideals. Kurtz is not associated with any sort of idealism except in the minds of others, and in the brief excerpt given from the Report. What about the Kurtz whom Marlow actually encounters in the flesh? It is when dealing with this Kurtz that Marlow's skeptical narrative stance seems inadequate.

Although Marlow offers no "comforting solutions," his vagueness itself would seem to be an unsatisfactory evasion of the discomforting certainties that readers have found embodied in Kurtz. Is Kurtz, once emptied of his high ideals, simply a "hollow sham" as Marlow once claims?[41] Nothing could be further from the truth. Kurtz is the figure who

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[40] Ibid., p.325.

[41] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.67.

gives the book its broad appeal, for, in forsaking white civilization, he carries to the furthest extremity a radical moral stance on the basis of which the insecure Marlow would never dare to act, even were he to comprehend it fully.

In Lionel Trilling's work of intellectual history, Sincerity and Authenticity, he traces an evolution in moral outlook, the outcome of which, as Trilling himself notes, is well exemplified in the case of Conrad's Mr. Kurtz.[42] The study begins by tracing the idea of "sincerity," which has its origins in the Renaissance concept of being true to one's own self(to paraphrase Polonius) within the context of society. In his constant concern to do his job properly, Marlow, it seems, would be demonstrating the quality of "sincerity," as would the accountant.[43] The other men of the Company, such as the brickmaker, define themselves by a social role that is in fact empty. Ostensibly, they believe in being sincere, but in their parasitic existence, they are neither true to themselves nor to anyone else.

Trilling gradually exposes a problem in this particular moral framework. One can only speak in terms of "sincerity" if individuals are defined as accountants, brickmakers, managers, helmsmen, et cetera. It could be argued that the

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[42]Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p.106.

[43]Trilling does not go into much detail in his discussion of "Heart of Darkness." In the remainder of this paragraph, and in the one that follows, I am attempting to state part of his theory in terms of this one particular novella.

"pilgrims" are all, in fact, "true to themselves" in that they live to satisfy their own greed. In having gratified all those "monstrous passions," Kurtz is truest of all. But what gives Kurtz superior moral status over the pilgrims is not that he has gratified more passions, but that he attempts to abandon the values of sincerity(or society) altogether, and so ceases to be a hypocrite.[44]

Trilling shows how, historically, sincerity was gradually replaced by an alternative way of defining the self. Trilling's own words best serve to describe "authenticity."

> I think that . . . I can rely on its suggesting a more strenuous moral experience than "sincerity" does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life. At the behest of the criterion of authenticity, much that was once thought to make up the very fabric of culture has come to seem of little account, mere fantasy or ritual, or downright falsification. Conversely, much that culture traditionally condemned and sought to exclude is accorded a considerable moral authority by reason of the authenticity claimed for it, for example, disorder, violence, unreason.[45]

Accordingly, it is Kurtz's willingness to abandon all social pretences, and his ability to live and define himself outside

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[44]Note that Kurtz is originally defined by the men of the Company as "chief of the Inner Station," but, in the end, it is not possbile to tell "what he had been." He is beyond the designations of the Company, or any other known scheme of social ranking. In the words of Anthony Low, "He is a man of many occupations and so, finally, of none." Low, "'Heart of Darkness;' The Search for an Occupation,"p.7.

[45]Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity, p.11.

the structure of society, that make him the most heroic, and the most "authentic," figure in the tale. As Trilling states, even the sincere Marlow "accords Kurtz an admiration and loyalty which amount to homage, and not, it would seem, in spite of his deeds but because of them."[46] No doubt Marlow originally admires Kurtz for his high ideals, and may finally admire him for what he perceives as a return to some last vestige of that idealism, but, during Marlow's stay at the Inner Station, his admiration for Kurtz is sustained simply because Kurtz offers "at least a choice of nightmares."[47] The man who has "kicked himself loose of the earth,"[48] the soul that has gone "beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations,"[49] may well appear preferable to the evil of society. Trilling's insights are valuable in the study of narrative unreliability, for it is Marlow's admiration for Kurtz, combined with his refusal to face the fact that his own system of values is at least partially destroyed in the very existence of such an admiration, that accounts for much of his evasiveness and increasing wrong-headedness.

There is indeed a perceptible tension between Marlow's

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[46] Ibid., p.106.

[47] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.63.

[48] Ibid., p.67.

[49] Ibid.

avowed loyalty to Kurtz and his more deeply ingrained commitment to social values which raises the reader's suspicions of his unreliability in that portion of the narrative dealing with Kurtz. A recent biography of Conrad by Zdzislaw Najder seems to reflect an increasing awareness amongst contemporary scholars of the inevitable distance separating Conrad from Marlow.

> Marlow, a model English gentleman, ex-officer of the merchant marine, was the embodiment of all that Conrad would wish to be if he were to become completely anglicized. And since that was not the case, and since he did not quite share his hero's point of view, there was no need to identify himself with Marlow, either emotionally or intellectually [my italics].[50]

Although it is doubtful that Conrad intends us to judge Marlow harshly, he does show us that Marlow's retrospective analysis is not always accurate. In at least one instance, it is almost possible to hear the ironic voice of Conrad himself in the words of the unwitting Marlow.

> The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and -- as he was good enough to say himself -- his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.[51]

While Marlow may have a growing sense of the folly behind Belgian imperialism, there is nothing in his character to suggest that he would be capable of a sarcastic attack on

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[50]Zdzislaw Najder, Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p.231.

[51]Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.50.

his own nation. In the above passage, Marlow simply forgets the atrocities of Kurtz long enough to affirm the "rightness" of England. But the reader must not be similarly forgetful. England too has had a hand in the "making" of Kurtz, and must share his guilt. It is the reader's task to see through Marlow's earlier-mentioned notion that "unselfish belief in the idea"[52] may redeem imperialism, and that "real work" is accomplished in some areas of the colonial map.[53] Kurtz's "sympathies" are obviously not "in the right place," except when viewed from the perspective of one very narrow set of prejudices. Kurtz's own evil is the evil of man, and England, of course, does not stand exempt.

However, the principal irony of "Heart of Darkness" is not directed at Marlow's national prejudices, but, more disturbingly, at his continued commitment to civilization in general. In spite of Marlow's eventual awareness, both of the evil inherent in the Company and of Kurtz's own personal deficiencies, he continues to attribute the man's downfall largely to the uncivilized African enviroment in which his "nerves went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances."[54] The young Marlow's midnight "rescue" of Kurtz from the jungle, for fear he would be

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[52] Ibid., p.7.

[53] Ibid., p.10.

[54] Ibid., p.51.

"utterly lost,"[55] seems a misguided act, but it is apparently one that has the continued sanction of Marlow, the narrator.

Indeed, Marlow evidently retains a saving notion that in retrieving Kurtz he at once scored a moral victory over him, and aided in his final deathbed redemption. This notion is obviously a delusion. Does Marlow really succeed in appealing to this soul that could not be appealed to "in the name of anything high or low?"[56] It seems more likely that, for all Marlow's talk of a "struggle with a soul,"[57] his victory was merely physical -- that of a fairly healthy man over an emaciated and dying one. Of course Kurtz accompanies Marlow back to the Station! Marlow, who had embarked upon his mission with "clenched fists,"[58] had threatened to "throttle" him and "smash" his head if he resisted![59]

I would argue that Marlow performs no service for Kurtz. It is not the jungle that has made Kurtz evil. The jungle merely exposes the evil that is already there, and the fact that Kurtz's dark side comes to be clearly revealed for what it is, rather than existing in a concealed or socially legitimized form, is to be seen, paradoxically, as Kurtz's

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[55] Ibid., p.67.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p.66.

[59] Ibid., p.67.

only remaining virtue. Indeed, the very word "darkness" has ironic overtones of which Marlow is often forgetful. The most striking moral deficiencies lie in the hearts of the white ivory-hunters, and not in the literal darkness of savages or jungle.

Contrary to Marlow's insistence that he "did not betray Mr. Kurtz,"[60] he has in fact betrayed him in reclaiming him for the Company and hence for civilization. The rescue of Kurtz is the act of a responsible member of society, and in performing it Marlow ultimately becomes an apologist for that society and for the evil inherent in it. Marlow's decisive action indicates that for all his talk of having peered "over the edge,"[61] the style of life embraced by Kurtz was never, for him, a real alternative. Marlow remains a product of white civilization. Much as he can admire Kurtz's nihilism, much as he realizes the moral hypocrisy of society, Marlow opts for the more conventional "choice of nightmares."[62]

Marlow's unreliability as narrator originates in the fact that he has obviously never been completely comfortable with this choice. The insistence that he was loyal to Kurtz is a symptom of this discomfort. Marlow also attempts to

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[60] Ibid., p.65.

[61] Ibid., p.72.

[62] Ibid., p.63.

deceive himself by insisting that the dying Kurtz can be reconciled with his former self, and hence with his old ideals. In saying that "the shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham,"[63] Marlow means to indicate that Kurtz's conscience bothered him, yet this seems a questionable analysis given what we know of the psychology of the "unambiguously extreme"[64] Kurtz. As Peter Glassman writes,

> Perhaps Kurtz did relive his life; perhaps he even repented every one of its excesses. Everything in his history, though, suggests that he could not have made such a banal contrition; and nothing about the scene Marlow describes suggests that he did.[65]

Kurtz's ideals were, after all, the ideals upon which civilization is founded, and, in imagining that the dying Kurtz was still haunted by these, Marlow more than anything affirms his own attachment to them. Kurtz does not return to civilization of his own free will, and it is doubtful that he would return to its mode of thinking either. At best, the words "The horror! The horror!" show that there is something in Kurtz that can still render, as Marlow says, "a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth,"[66]

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[63] Ibid., p.69.

[64] Peter J. Glassman, Language and Being: Joseph Conrad and the Literature of Personality (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p.230.

[65] Ibid., p.231.

[66] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.71.

but these castigated "adventures" must inevitably include the pretentions of the imperialistic ideal itself.

Marlow's own struggle with death, then, takes place in "an impalpable greyness . . . without the great desire of victory"[67] because he has seen his moral commitments so tarnished during his African experience. His final lie is an indication, as Ian Watt writes, that "whatever system of belief he may have attained has too dubious and private a status in his own thoughts to be presented as an effective alternative to the illusions of the Intended."[68] The general ambiguity of the narrative can be understood as the outcome of Marlow's uncertain position in life. He admires Kurtz yet cannot subscribe to Kurtz's nihilism. He casts his lot with society, yet cannot ignore the glimpse he has had of its hypocrisy. His language is equivocal because he has no banner to stand firmly behind. His judgments of Kurtz are contradictory because he is torn between the desire for truth and the fear that that truth may be impossible to live with. Marlow's final lie to the Intended is probably not the only instance in which he rejects the truth because it is "too dark altogether."[69]

Critics who have observed a certain measure of unre-

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, p.248.

[69] Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p.79.

liability in Marlow's narration have not always agreed in their speculations as to what overall point Conrad might be making in the use of such a strategy. Trilling, Glassman, and others have generally operated on the premise that the "authentic" Kurtz must necessarily be a more powerful figure than Marlow. However, I feel that the irony Conrad employs contributes to his narrator's humanity, and that Marlow's voice, although undercut, still carries a certain paradoxical authority. For Marlow's evasiveness and uncertainty are perfectly understandable to the reader who, like Marlow, will continue to face the unsettling prospect of living in society under the dark shadow of truth cast by Kurtz. Watt suggests that while the reader must judge "Marlow's overriding moral commitment to civilization" "deluded" and "unsatisfactory" in "its supporting arguments," it is Marlow who finally dominates the work.[70]

> For us, and no doubt for Conrad, Kurtz makes a vivid appeal to the imagination, while Marlow does not, but the contrast between Marlow's undramatic moral posture and the emblematic extremities of Kurtz's career itself enacts one of the ideological lessons of Heart of Darkness: that nothing is more dangerous than man's delusions of autonomy and omnipotence.[71]

Conrad appears to have created in Marlow a narrative psychology that is frustratingly elusive, and at times distorting, but one the weaknesses of which only serve to enlarge the story's theme.

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[70]Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, p.166.

[71]Ibid., pp.167-68.

CHAPTER 2

In Lord Jim(1900) Conrad conducts an experiment in narrative technique which parallels, in many ways, the one that characterizes "Heart of Darkness." Again the narrator's name is Marlow, and again the focus of attention is on the narrator's relationship to the story, and not simply on the story itself. Although Conrad provides us with more information about the sailor Jim than he did about the agent Kurtz, Jim is not particularly compelling in his own right. As in "Heart of Darkness," it is Marlow's continuing efforts to come to terms with the social outcast which give the book its appeal.

Conrad directs this appeal in Lord Jim both at the reader's sympathy and at his sense of irony. For the reader, Jim is a disturbing figure. He is quite naturally all the more disturbing for Marlow, who is of the same occupational group. Yet the very closeness of the relationship that develops between Marlow and Jim renders Marlow an unreliable judge of Jim's character. The Marlow of "Heart of Darkness" tended to boast an identification with Kurtz that did not fully exist, but in Lord Jim it is the very strength of Marlow's identification with the protagonist that leads to narrative distortion.

This distortion is part of a clearly defined narrative

psychology. Although Marlow may desire the truth about Jim, he must at the same time veer away from it when it threatens his own values and beliefs. A negative judgment on Jim could mean a negative judgment on Marlow as well. For this reason, Marlow tends to accept Jim's rationalizations and also offers some of his own. Should the reader blindly accept these, he will receive a "truth" about Jim that is very much a product of Jim's defensiveness and Marlow's insecurities. The real truth about Jim may well be much less flattering than Marlow is willing to acknowledge.

It is through the primary narrator that we catch our first glimpse of Jim's character. We are told that Jim looks upon life with "the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of danger."[1] However, this early allusion to Jim's romantic self-image is closely followed by a stunning demonstration of Jim's inability to confront danger aboard the training ship. After the collision incident, and the rescue in which Jim fails to partake, the reader recognizes the delusive quality of Jim's rationalization that nature had "taken him unawares and checked unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes."[2] The upshot of his failure appears to be that his naive "contempt" for danger is strengthened: "He was rather glad he had not gone into the cutter, since

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[1]Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim(New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968), p.5.

[2]Ibid., p.6.

a lower achievement had served the turn. . . . When all men flinched, then -- he felt sure -- he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas."[3] The reader comes to see that this contempt is arrogant and contemptible in itself. Jim's idealistic conception of himself is directly opposed to life, and his failure to see this fact and to make an attempt at reconciliation with the world is to be seen, even in his youthful days, as a serious weakness.

The primary narrator's tale of Jim's early life continues on to much the same effect. The next thing that we learn of Jim is that "he became chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man."[4] While this passage reinforces the values that we will soon see in Marlow himself, it certainly does not support his indecisive attitude toward Jim. From what we know of Jim, we immediately suspect that he would have failed had he been tested. Later, when Jim lies in hospital after having been hit by a falling spar, the narrator tells us that Jim "did not care what the end would be, and in his lucid moments overvalued his indifference. The danger, when not seen, has the imperfect vagueness of human thought."[5] In other

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[3] Ibid., pp.6-7.

[4] Ibid., p.7.

[5] Ibid., p.8.

words, Jim, in his exhausted state, lacks the courage to hang on to his life, but, if the truth were known, he is not really brave enough to face death either. Jim can fearlessly scorn death in this case, just as he can scorn the dangers of the sea, only so long as it is simply part of his romantic imagination and not fully perceived. Actual physical danger we suspect might be another matter.

After this scene, the primary narrator continues to build a consistent impression of his subject. The tranquility of the sea, we are told, panders to Jim's delusions. It allows him to dream of "valorous deeds" while basking in an "assurance of everlasting security."[6] While one cannot doubt Jim's moral superiority over the other members of the Patna's crew, the narrator's summarized presentation of Jim's consciousness appears to satirize his tolerant indifference to their evil. "He was too pleasurably languid to dislike actively this or any other thing. The quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but he was different."[7] The narrator initially allows us only a brief look at Jim's life aboard the Patna, yet, fleeting as our glimpses are, his character emerges all too clearly. And later, in the courtroom, Jim's self-centered contempt for the world around him remains intact: "They

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[6] Ibid., p.11, p.13.

[7] Ibid., p.16.

wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!"[8] The order of presentation in this disjointed narrative appears to be important here. On the basis of what we know before the time of the inquiry, the initial reaction of the perceptive reader to Jim and his troubles cannot be very sympathetic. Jim's dreams and egotism have deluded him into thinking that he has been made the victim of a conspiracy of the tangible world, and the inquiry itself becomes, in his mind, merely a continuation of the same imagined plot. But the reader is well enough acquainted with Jim to know that his problems stem rather from internal weaknesses. Such is the view presented of Jim before Marlow takes over the narrative.

"As a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct,"[9] Marlow is immediately fascinated by Jim's case. Their common national and occupational heritage, plus a certain elusive element in Jim's appearance, provide the foundations upon which Marlow's feeling for Jim is based. The puzzling and deeply troubling realization for Marlow, on encountering Jim, is that, regardless of his ill-reputed conduct aboard the Patna, Jim is instantly

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[8] Ibid., p.18.

[9] Ibid., p.31.

identifiable as "one of us."[10] This unexplained phenomenon leads Marlow to suffer his first pangs of doubt as to "the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct."[11] Jim's upright appearance may not in fact be a guarantee of his dependability. His lapse in time of crisis seems to indicate that the firmness of his commitment to solidarity cannot really be trusted. A disturbing thought occurs to Marlow: "I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes -- and, by Jove! -- it wouldn't have been safe."[12] Marlow's anxieties over Jim must also inevitably have a more personal dimension, for there is always the question as to whether Marlow himself, in a terrifying situation and with no moral support from the rest of his crew, would have behaved any differently from Jim.

The danger of such speculation for Marlow is suggested by the suicide of another fellow seaman, Big Brierly. Brierly's compulsively defensive attitude toward Jim suggests his recognition that Jim's downfall was partly the result of being caught between two different moral environments. "Cowardice" had no meaning aboard the Patna, where Jim was observed only by the German captain and the engineers. Jim's

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[10] Ibid., p.27.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p.28.

shame is brought about solely by his having been found out, and by his subsequent decision to face the inquiry. What makes Brierly's existence finally unbearable is the realization that if cowardice and disgrace are not intrinsic to the individual, his own "merits and rewards"[13] are equally dependent on the perceptions of others. This much can be gathered from Marlow's account, yet Marlow himself fails to explicitly make the connection between Jim's case and Brierly's suicide. He says to Captain Jones that what killed Brierly "wasn't anything that would have disturbed much either of us two,"[14] and, in retrospect, dismisses Brierly's motives as "secret."[15] Marlow's apparent failure to put two and two together can be seen as a psychological defense, an effort to ignore the implications of Jim's case insofar as they might undermine the premises of his own moral life.

Given the enormity of the moral dilemma posed by Jim for Marlow, it is not surprising that Marlow begins as Jim's advocate. He shares Jim's contempt for the facts, terming the inquiry "as instructive as the tapping with a hammmr on an iron box, were the object to find what's inside."[16] Randall Craig notes Marlow's apparent echoing of the primary

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[13] Ibid., p.36.

[14] Ibid., p.40.

[15] Ibid., p.36.

[16] Ibid., p.35.

narrator and declares that Conrad "could not agree more" with this attitude toward the empirical evidence against Jim.[17] Yet, it seems much more likely that Marlow and the primary narrator are not really in such close agreement, and that Conrad does not in fact support Marlow in this instance. The primary narrator's "denunciation" of the facts is, like much of the other material presented in the first four chapters, an ironic rendering of Jim's own impressions and perceptions. In denying the relevance of "the facts," Jim is in effect denying the objective reality of his betrayal. Even the reader who takes a generally sympathetic view of Jim cannot possibly support him in this instance. As Albert J. Guerard states, although Jim may "exist" for us "by the quality of his feeling and the poignant intensity of his dream," a man also "_is_ what he _does_ [my italics]."[18] The fact that Marlow supports Jim's self-defense may indicate, not that Conrad supports it too, but rather that he is trying to show Marlow's obsessive need to believe in Jim's innocence. Any protestation of blamelessness on Jim's part, no matter how feeble, is, after all, better than his initial "odious"[19] posture of indifference. A protesting Jim would vindicate Marlow's judgment

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[17]Randall Craig, "Swapping Yarns: The Oral Mode of _Lord Jim_," _Conradiana_, 13, No.1(1981), p.183.

[18]Albert J. Guerard, _Conrad the Novelist_(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p.161.

[19]Conrad, _Lord Jim_, p.26.

of character and show the ability of his values to survive the grueling test of experience; an indifferent Jim would tend to indicate that virtuous appearances and moral values are all a sham. The strength of Marlow's identification with Jim may sometimes cause him to interpret his behaviour in a much too flattering light.

Yet the case does not remain simply one of Marlow identifying strongly with Jim and therefore defending him. It becomes evident, for example, that Marlow is unable to maintain this posture once he has actually met Jim and is forced to deal with him in the flesh. It then becomes Marlow's chief concern to try to limit the guilt to Jim alone, lest he himself be threatened by its broader implications. Jim's instinctive defense in the presence of his fellow seaman is to attempt to manipulate the very identification which Marlow inevitably feels. Marlow admits that, in conversation with Jim, he felt as if he were being "bullied" into making "a fatal admission about myself which would have had some bearing on the case."[20] As Ian Watt states, this "admission" would likely be one that would jeopardize "the absolute distinction between right and wrong on which the code of solidarity depends."[21] Jim insists that the situation on the Patna was morally confusing, protesting

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[20] Ibid., p.65.

[21] Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, p.314.

that there was "not the breadth of a hair" or "the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and wrong of this affair."[22] He claims that when he finally made the jump, it was as if the other deserters had "reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over."[23] If Jim's metaphors are accurate, then it may be possible, even for a "gentleman," to fall under a combination of internal and external influences that will deprive him of his freedom to separate right from wrong and act accordingly. Marlow cannot accept this, even as a possibility, and therefore defensively takes refuge in sarcasm when dealing with Jim("It is difficult to see a hair at midnight," "How much more [than the thickness of a sheet of paper] did you want?")

Marlow's original anxiety in encountering Jim may well be matched by a certain amount of retrospective distortion as he tells his story. In the flesh Jim stood as a threat to Marlow's system of values, and there is every indication that the recollection of the story is still, for Marlow, an object of grave concern. I would suggest that the dangers posed for Marlow by his intense identification with Jim paradoxically cause him to fall short of achieving true sympathetic understanding in his narrative. It is increasing-

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[22]Conrad, Lord Jim, p.79.

[23]Ibid., p.76.

ly obvious that Marlow's inquiry into Jim's ongoing case is limited by the two questionable assumptions under which he operates: firstly, that Jim deliberately chose wrong over right aboard the Patna, and, secondly, that he did so as a result of his own peculiar weaknesses. While Marlow's hostility in his encounters with Jim can hardly be missed, most critics have not pointed to the possibility that Marlow, in his narrative, is still retrospectively trying to distance himself from Jim. However, H. M. Daleski, speaking of "Heart of Darkness," accuses Marlow of much the same thing: "defensively resisting the application to himself of his own generalizations," and "implicitly dissociating himself and his listeners from Kurtz."[24] I feel that in Lord Jim, as in "Heart of Darkness," Marlow's anxiety over the relationship between his subject and himself results in a somewhat unreliable presentation of both. As with the earlier work, the reader must sympathize with Marlow and even share his confusion to some extent, yet, once again, it is, I think, possible to achieve an understanding of Marlow's tale that runs beyond that of Marlow himself. That is, although Marlow the narrator is by his own admission "fated to never see him [Jim] clearly,"[25] the novel itself appears to demand that the reader not blindly accept this fate as his own.

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[24]Daleski, Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession, pp.53-54.

[25]Conrad, Lord Jim, p.148.

For example, it seems possible to differ with Marlow's interpretation of Jim's "guilt." Marlow takes Jim to task, retrospectively, for taking "too much to heart the mere consequences of his failure," and for making "so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters."[26] He characterizes Jim as speaking "soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing that might have been the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception."[27] In other words, Jim is strong enough not to betray his profound sense of guilt, or he is impudently ignoring his guilt, or he feels no guilt, or he is unaware of his feelings of guilt, or he has managed to rationalize his guilt out of existence. Marlow is obsessed with the idea of guilt because it is this guilt which is essential in order to show both that the code of solidarity is applicable in extremities such as the Patna affair , and that Jim, although erring, is what he seems -- a man of the code. This obsessive need of Marlow's to portray what he alleges to be Jim's "guilt" may blind the reader to Jim's real nature, for what Marlow once so openly admitted was a selfish desire to see Jim "squirming like an impaled beetle"[28]

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[26] Ibid., p.107.

[27] Ibid., p.48.

[28] Ibid., p.26.

eventually provides the motive for a more revealing and insidious narrative distortion.

The appraisal of Jim, when conducted through a distorting vision, may blur for the reader some of the fundamental truths about Jim that would otherwise be evident simply from his actions and words as related by Marlow. It is quite obvious, judging by Jim's calm demeanor, his willingness to face the inquiry, and the ease with which he brushes off the "yellow dog" affair as "altogether my mistake,"[29] that his conscience is largely void of the sort of guilt that Marlow so desperately desires to find, and the reason for this is fairly clear. In Jim's mind it is not him that has been disproven; it is the code. Jim's experiences have led him to what appears to be a superior knowledge of the code of solidarity's limitations as a determiner of action. However, this posture of Jim's clashes with Marlow's belief in his own superiority, a belief which is grounded in his absolute commitment to the code.

When Jim is seen in this light, much of his behaviour which Marlow finds so bizarre becomes readily explicable. It is not a ghost or "the ghost of a fact"[30] that Jim is running from, but rather, as the primary narrator says in

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[29] Ibid., p.47.

[30] Ibid., p.119.

the first chapter, the "fact" itself.[31] Jim is not, as Marlow would have it, engaged in the ridiculous task of "running away" from his own guilt. Rather, he is pursued by a much more real flesh and blood nemesis. On the one hand are the members of the Patna's crew and other miscreants who would claim kinship with him; on the other are the respectable seamen, such as Marlow himself, who would seek to foist the burden of their own uncertainties on his shoulders. As Jim departs for Patusan, Marlow comments: "He left his earthly failings behind him and what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon."[32] A small part of this is true, in that Jim is obviously trying to leave his reputation behind, but there is never any question of Jim trying to transcend the limitations of his own character, nor, for that matter, is there any evidence that he was "aware of . . .[his guilt] with an intensity that made him touching."[33] To put it plainly, Jim goes to Patusan to get away from those who "remembered -- his -- his misfortunes against him."[34] Marlow concedes that Jim may simply be a victim of misfortune, but also indicates that, regardless, he does

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[31] Ibid., p.4.

[32] Ibid., p.133.

[33] Ibid., p.137.

[34] Ibid., p.147.

hold his part in the Patna affair against him. Perhaps one reason for Marlow's unreliability as narrator is that, in his position as Jim's friend, he was always "undercut" by his own mixed feelings. It is no wonder that Jim is continually seen manifesting feelings of great discomfort, or even "disgrace," in Marlow's presence, but this is not to be confused with true guilt. After all, if Jim really seemed guilty, Marlow would hardly feel compelled to insist so frantically: "It is not I or the world who remember . . . It is you -- you, who remember."[35]

In short, Marlow fails to give anything like full acknowledgment to the closeness of the true bond existing between himself and Jim. Perhaps his compulsion to tell Jim's story arises from his own guilt over never having been able to open his heart fully to his young protegé, and yet the lack of true sympathy continues to affect the telling of the story itself. Marlow's open identification with Jim increasingly gives way to an insistence that Jim abandoned the fixed standard of conduct voluntarily. Marlow even infers that Jim is no different from the other members of the Patna's crew.

> He [Jim] discovered at once a desire that I should not confound him with his partners in -- in crime, let us call it. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort. I gave no sign of dissent. I had no intention, for the sake of the

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[35] Ibid., p.144.

> barren truth, to rob him of the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way.[36]

So Marlow, who initially felt disturbed over Jim's "case" because he recognized him as "one of us," eventually displays the extent of this disturbance in pretending that the "barren truth" is that Jim is "one of them."

Marlow further distances himself from Jim by offering the theory that Jim's disgraceful behaviour was brought about by an overdeveloped imagination.

> His confounded imagination had evoked for him all the horror of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped -- all the appalling incidents of a disaster at sea he had ever heard of.[37]

One might not normally see anything unique in the linking of fear and fancy, but Marlow seems to portray the imagination as a bizarre trait characteristic of only the unfortunate few. He twice denies having one of his own.[38] Marlow is obviously attempting to widen the gap between himself and Jim, but in this defensive ploy he runs the risk of misrepresenting both. The implication that Jim is singularly lacking in courage is just as misleading as Marlow's eventual contention that the truth about Jim, the romantic, is beyond the realm of human discernment. Seen through Marlow's distorting vision, the Patna incident changes from an occurrence

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[36] Ibid., p.49.

[37] Ibid., p.54.

[38] Ibid., p.136, p.137.

of universal significance into one that really only concerns "people like Jim," and those few unfortunates who may chance to place their trust in this "rare breed."

As the Patusan venture approaches, and Marlow has distanced himself from Jim in the reader's eyes, his narrative takes on the deceptive aspect of disinterested pleading -- the attempt "to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow" which he has apparently forgotten was originally undertaken for his "own sake."[39] Marlow's defensiveness regarding Jim manifests itself not only in his increasing indulgence in overt praise of Jim's character, but, also, in his tendency to be extremely(and perhaps unduly) critical of those other characters who may seem to put Jim in an unfavourable light. A case in point is found in Marlow's depiction of the French lieutenant. Although Marlow obviously valued the lieutenant's opinion on Jim's case at the time of their meeting, he refers in retrospect to his "stolid glibness" and likeness to "one of those snuffy, quiet village priests, into whose ears are poured the sins, the sufferings, the remorse of peasant generations."[40] In addition, Marlow terms the lieutenant "as incapable of an emotional display as a sack of meal."[41]

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[39] Ibid., p.32.

[40] Ibid., p.85.

[41] Ibid., p.86.

Given this description of the lieutenant as being somewhat cold and remote, it would not be surprising to find him both uncomprehending of, and unsympathetic to, Jim and his case. In fact, however, he is neither. Firstly, he has no trouble grasping the fact that Jim is different from "the others."[42] Secondly, he admits that, even in his own case, "given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come."[43] Thirdly, he speculates that "one's courage does not come of itself;" rather, one derives it from others who share the same ideals.[44] In other words, the lieutenant feels that, given Jim's moral isolation aboard the Patna, his cowardly behavior is quite understandable. Marlow is initially overjoyed that the lieutenant takes a "lenient view"[45] of Jim's case, but his disappointment comes with the realization that the lieutenant's identification with Jim can never be complete. His own behavior in the Patna affair was impeccable. It is the lack of wine aboard which stands out in his memory; the danger itself was apparently not enough to ruffle him.[46] Although the potential for cowardice may hypothetically exist in the lieutenant, his

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[42] Ibid., p.88.

[43] Ibid., p.89.

[44] Ibid., p.90.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., p.86.

scars and crippled hand seem to stand out as further testimony to the fact that he has indeed passed the tests which have come his way. An actual fall from grace like Jim's is something that the lieutenant can know "nothing of."[47]

Although the lieutenant's words are sympathetic, the very existence of such a man would seem to damn Jim by comparison. Marlow's defense against the lieutenant's powerful presence is to infer, through the "snuffy priest" and "sack of meal" metaphors, that the lieutenant is not fully human, yet the depth of the lieutenant's sympathy and understanding belies Marlow's characterization. The lieutenant is not like Jim, but he is human all the same. His kind are governed, not by an idealized self-image, but by an unreasoned disregard for danger. Far from being obsessed with a sense of his own bravery, the lieutenant, as he searches in vain for wine aboard the Patna, is totally oblivious to the precarious nature of his situation. As with Bob Stanton who battled with a lady's maid on the brink of the Sephora disaster,[48] there is no indication that the lieutenant is conscious of the fate that threatens him. It is this unconsciousness that characterizes his soul; bravery is a thing manufactured by the onlooker.

The next character to comment upon Jim after the

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[47] Ibid., p.90.

[48] Ibid., p.91.

lieutenant is the Australian Chester. Marlow finds the outcome of this meeting equally unsatisfactory, as is shown when he soon afterwards comes to wonder whether he was not too hasty in his refusal to procure Jim for Chester's guano island escapade.[49] Marlow's lingering doubts are significant in that, while Chester's proposed solution to Jim's problems may leave a lot to be desired, his analysis of Jim himself cannot be easily dismissed. In Chester's view, Jim is "no good" because he takes the loss of his certificate "to heart."[50] Chester presents Holy-Terror Robinson, "the cannibal," as a superior alternative: a man who can face public opinion with the indifference it deserves.[51] Marlow does not give Chester full credit for his perceptiveness. Chester recognizes Jim as a man who would jump at the opportunity to escape to somewhere where he could withdraw into an idealized image of his self, somewhere where external circumstances did not pressure him to "see things as they are."[52] In this recognition, Chester sees full well what Marlow only partially glimpses: that Jim's problem is shame and not guilt. More importantly, though, Chester implies that Jim is <u>afraid</u> to face the facts, just as surely as

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[49] <u>Ibid</u>., p.102.

[50] <u>Ibid</u>., p.99.

[51] <u>Ibid</u>.

[52] <u>Ibid</u>.

the very existence of a man such as the lieutenant accuses Jim of cowardice. Thus Jim is condemned by two seemingly opposite standards, but for the same basic flaw.

Marlow eventually seeks consolation from the merchant Stein. It is during the visit with Stein that Marlow is supplied with the term "romantic," which he goes on to use repeatedly in reference to Jim. Critics have expended much energy trying to decipher word by word the meaning of Stein's contribution to the dialogue, especially the line "A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea."[53] In this metaphor, Stein appears to mean that dreams are the "destructive element." To enjoy a full life one must have dreams; but they are potentially destructive if one tries to immerse oneself in them completely, and equally destructive if one tries to climb out of them completely. One drowns either way. From Marlow's description of the problem, Stein conjectures that Jim is one of those who "sees himself as a very fine fellow -- so fine as he can never be."[54] Hence, the dangerous discord between the dream and the reality is present. Just how the Patusan experiment fits in with this view of Jim is unclear, because we are never treated to any explicit explanation by Stein of the reasoning behind it. Jim will be given a chance to

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[53] Ibid., p.130.

[54] Ibid.

build a new reputation, but he will be forced to do so under conditions that will pose a constant test to his courage. Perhaps, like Stein's butterfly in the ambush, Patusan is intended as a situation possessing that essential combination of the ideal and the grimly real.

Whatever Stein's reasoning, Marlow accepts the decision, yet the description of their encounter contains imagery of doubt and despair. The "charming and deceptive light" of Stein's discourse is accompanied by the image of "an abyss full of flames."[55] The ostensible resolution of Marlow's inner turmoil is that Jim is simply "romantic -- romantic," yet these words are juxtaposed with the reference to "a crystalline void."[56] These images represent what is at the very least Marlow's "uneasiness," and such a feeling is quite understandable when one remembers that, although Marlow has attempted to complete the dissociation of himself from Jim by labelling Jim a "romantic" and stressing his own "want of imagination,"[57] Jim's psychology is not so unfathomable, or so different from Marlow's as Marlow makes it out to be. We can take Marlow's earlier hypothesis that it was Jim's imagination that brought about his downfall as reasonably sound, but the relationship between fear and

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[55] Ibid., p.131.

[56] Ibid., p.132.

[57] Ibid., p.137.

the imagination is certainly not peculiar to the "romantic." Indeed, Stein has not really contributed any new insight with his diagnosis of Jim, for there is no indication that the term "romantic" refers to anything other than the willed discrepency between ideals and actions -- the same problem that Marlow and the reader have been aware of from the start. If Jim is a romantic, then his case intrigues Marlow precisely insofar as he himself is also a romantic. Let us not allow Marlow to hide behind his "want of imagination." It is romantic to believe in a fixed and absolute standard of conduct. What is more, the "imagination" that imagines the ideal self and the "imagination" that causes cowardice in the real situation are one and the same. Marlow is well aware that the absolution he seeks for the romantic, should it exist, would also cover the man of the code. As the illusory gap between the two increases and Jim becomes an adventurer in the exotic Patusan, Marlow makes his plea with increasing intensity.

Marlow is undercut more obviously and to a greater extent in the second half of Lord Jim. Just as there is no guilt in Jim, there is no redemption for him. In Patusan, we see Jim as isolated as we originally saw him aboard the training ship, as isolated as he was aboard the Patna. We agree with Marlow that "of all mankind Jim had no dealings

but with himself,"[58] but, unlike Marlow, we see what a severe limitation that kind of egocentricity places upon a human being. The fixed standard of conduct does not guarantee bravery, nor does it bind men together. Jim leaves for Patusan, not from any true feeling of guilt, but because of his egotistical obsession with the way in which others see him. He attains an exaggerated sense of his own self-worth when surrounded by those who know nothing of his past, only to be reduced to his usual stammering when Marlow pays him a visit. Similarly, the men of the code cannot bear to face Jim for the havoc his example plays with their own self-images. "Let him creep twenty feet underground,"[59] Brierly once said. Each one of these men remains trapped in his solitary world of self-delusion, little different from that inhabited by young Jim as we see him in the first chapter.

Marlow goes to great lengths groping for a defense of Jim in the Patusan section, but, by this point, the odds are against the reader finding it convincing. Indeed, Marlow's pronouncements on Jim are often as unclear and unsubstantiated as the vague and questionable statements about Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness." Is there any evidence that in Patusan Jim was "approaching greatness as genuine as

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[58] Ibid., p.206.

[59] Ibid., p.41.

any man ever achieved?"[60] After the lesson of the Patna, could Jim ever have "seemed to have come very near . . . to mastering his fate?"[61] Similarly, Marlow's glowing analysis of the relationship between Jim and Jewel seems unjustified: "Nothing . . . could separate Jim from her. It is my firm conviction now; it was my firm conviction at the time; it was the only possible conclusion from the facts of the case."[62] What facts? Marlow insists upon seeing a significance and spiritual intensity in the relationship that are never born out by actual description. As Bruce Johnson states: "In the end Lord Jim is about the isolation of a human soul, not human community, not even the love between two people."[63] In Jim's marriage with Jewel, he has secured trust, something which he perceives himself as having lost amongst the community of seamen. But this time he is trusted by someone who does not and could not possibly be expected to understand or judge him, and this is but emblematic of the moral isolation which is complete in Patusan.

While Marlow has some sense of this dilemma, he sees Jim, in his solitude, as "a figure set up on a pedestal,

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[60] Ibid., p.149.

[61] Ibid., p.167.

[62] Ibid., p.188.

[63] Bruce Johnson, Conrad's Models of Mind (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p.65.

to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom."[64] Yet Marlow is not successful in convincing the reader that Jim's "loneliness added to his stature,"[65] and indeed he fails to indicate how this could be possible. Marlow's metaphor describing Jim as "a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world"[66] works on a literal level: Jim is indeed one white man in a community of blacks. But it is the chief irony of Lord Jim(best stated in the title itself) that the natives equate a white exterior with spiritual superiority. It is perhaps a less obvious irony that Marlow himself falls prey to this sort of literal-mindedness. Even Jim laughs at the delusion upon which his authority in Patusan is based. He has been found wanting by those of his kind; however, it does not follow that he can be redeemed by surrounding himself with the trust of those who do not understand him. The unselfconscious heroism of the natives themselves ironically provides one of the standards by which Jim will ultimately be judged.

In the Patusan section of the narrative, Marlow has shifted to a basically passive and uncritical recitation

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[64]Conrad, Lord Jim, p.162.

[65]Ibid., p.166.

[66]Ibid., p.204.

of Jim's own account. In doing so, Marlow shows that, in spite of his earlier sarcastic attacks, he ultimately shares Jim's perception of the ideal self, and needs to endorse it. Above all, Marlow insists, as his visit to Patusan comes to an end, that Jim is "true" -- "romantic, but none the less true."[67] Marlow closes his first narrative with the flattering image of Jim as light, which is separated from the epistolary resumption by a short interjection of the primary narrator's.

> The light of his [the "privileged man's"] shaded reading-lamp slept like a sheltered pool, his footfalls made no sound on the carpet, his wandering days were over. No more horizons as boundless as hope, no more twilights within the forests as solemn as temples, in the hot quest of the Ever-undiscovered Country over the hill, across the stream, beyond the wave. The hour was striking! No more! No more! -- but the opened packet under the lamp brought back the sounds, the visions, the very savour of the past -- a multitude of fading faces, a tumult of low voices, dying away upon the shores of distant seas under a passionate and unconsoling sunshine. He sighed and sat down to read.[68]

There appears to be a certain significance in the fact that the conclusion to Marlow's first narrative is juxtaposed with the above passage. The former depicts Jim as a ray of hope; the latter seems to resonate with tones of death -- particularly the death of hope itself. The observation of Royal Roussel in reference to the function of the primary

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[67] Ibid., p.203.

[68] Ibid., p.205.

narrator in "Heart of Darkness" is relevant here too: "This wider vision conditions our entire response to Marlow. . . . We never lose the sense of seeing Marlow and reacting to Marlow's story, from the narrator's point of view."[69] Once again, then, as in the book's beginning, there seems to be a darker outlook which triumphs over Marlow's because it surrounds and encloses it. The scattered interjections of the primary narrator do not allow us to forget the stillness of the "deep dusk"[70] in which Marlow begins his story, and the eventual blackness in the midst of which Marlow's receding cheroot provides the last spark of light.[71] The gloomy tone of the primary narrator may forshadow not just the physical death of Jim, but the death of the idealism embodied in the notion of an absolute standard of conduct -- in effect, the psychic death of Marlow. Note too that the beginning of Marlow's letter finds him fighting for credibility in the face of his "privileged" hopeless reader, who can see no possibility of any good arising from the Patusan venture. As we move into the letter, then, we do so with the suggestion that Jim's end may be a dark one, not only for him but for all those who hold hopes for the

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[69]Royal Roussel, The Metaphysics of Darkness: A Study in the Unity and Development of Conrad's Fiction (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp.76-77.

[70]Conrad, Lord Jim, p.21.

[71]Ibid., p.70.

perfectibility of man.

Jim's end is dark, much darker than Marlow would like to believe. In the conclusion, Marlow stresses Jim's "eternal constancy" and suggests the possibility that, in his final act, Jim "conquered the fated destiny itself" -- an "extraordinary success" indeed![72] The bleakest alternative considered by Marlow is that the true meaning of Jim's life and death may have to remain an insoluble mystery. He does not speculate as to the darkness that may be at the heart of that mystery. The circumstances leading to Jim's death are indeed somewhat ambiguous, yet the possibilities of interpretation seem to range among varying shades of darkness. A look at these circumstances shows that the "success" envisioned by Marlow is nowhere to be found.

The motivation behind Jim's calamitous decision to allow Brown's escape is unclear. On the one hand, there is the "sickening suggestion of common guilt"[73] which weaves its way through Brown's words to Jim. Given that Brown uses such expressions as "jump out of trouble" and "saving one's life in the dark,"[74] it is possible, I suppose, that he manages to manipulate some sense of guilt which remains in Jim from the Patna incident. However, in view of the

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[72] Ibid., p.253.

[73] Ibid., p.235.

[74] Ibid., p.233, p.235.

fact that Jim has displayed little sense of actual guilt in the past, it seems more likely that what Brown appeals to is really Jim's need to keep his ideal self-image untarnished. Jim feels that his own change of abode has given him a clean slate(he actually uses this expression to describe the first job procured for him by Marlow after the inquiry[75]). He will now act benevolently in an effort to achieve the same for Brown by allowing his escape. Jim's actions may even be said to result from a need to deny the identification implied by Brown's words. Ironically, Jim offers Brown the chance which he suspects Brown would deny him were their roles reversed. He fails to take into account that Brown's response to charity will be equally different from what his own would be.

Quite apart from its implications for Jim's idealized self, Brown's appeal is equally aimed at the less noble and less controllable areas of his heart. Brown requests to be allowed passage out of Patusan, but at the same time threatens to "send half your unoffending town to heaven with us in smoke"[76] if the request is not granted. Paradoxically, Brown is both pathetic and frightening. It is perhaps impossible to say in the end which one of these qualities sways Jim the most.

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[75] Ibid., p.113.

[76] Ibid., p.232.

There is, then, some ambiguity as to Jim's motives in agreeing to let Brown return to the sea. His failure in judgement is brought about either by fear, or by the desire to see his ideals triumph in a notably unideal situation, or by a combination of both. The fact remains that Jim has failed. He has allowed other considerations to outweigh what should have been his two top priorities: providing the best possible protection for his subjects, and seeing that justice was done on their behalf after Brown's initial unprovoked attack. The result is further injustice: a strong and brave people are made to pay for Jim's weakness. Jim has once again shown that his appearance of dependability is misleading, and the people of Patusan, who have no reason for cherishing what is only an appearance, prove harsher judges than Brierly and Marlow.

But Jim's suicidal confrontation of Doramin cannot be considered an atonement for his life. Suicide might be justified as a continuation of the terms of trust, had that trust not been so irrevocably betrayed, and were suicide not a betrayal itself in the abandonment of Jewel. When Marlow speaks of Jim's death as an "extraordinary success,"[77] there is every indication that he considers this at least a possible view of the situation, but the reader must "see things as they are" -- dripping with an irony that reflects

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[77] Ibid., p.253.

Marlow's need for hope.

In Lord Jim, then, Marlow recounts a story in which he has too much at stake to provide reliable analysis. His uncertainty is not so much the result of the unfathomable nature of events; it is more a manifestation of the conflict between his desire for truth and his desire for comfort. There is little justification for the leniency which characterizes Marlow's narrative treatment of Jim, whose example seems to demonstrate, not only that trust can be misplaced in a mere appearance of virtue, but also that each man must hope and pray that he will be able to "trust" himself as new tests arise. Cowardice is Jim's flaw, and Marlow's use of the term "romantic" is arguably the most confusing deception played upon the reader. Jim is a romantic, but only in that he prefers imagining an ideal world and an ideal self to assuming responsibility for the real world and the true self. Romanticism in this context is congruent with cowardice. Jim is afraid to face things "as they are," and in this light pronouncements of such unlikely judges as Chester, and even Cornelius and Brown, deserve to be given some credence. Evil is not restricted to the unabashed villain; it is perhaps more dangerous in those who refuse to acknowledge its presence. Paradoxically, the novel seems to say that one must have the nerve to examine one's own potential for cowardice, and to admit that one is sometimes

victimized by it. In attempting to restrict Jim's problem to one particular character type, the "romantic," Marlow demonstrates that he himself lacks the courage to acknowledge the universal implications of Jim's case, and, in his attempt to defend Jim, he reveals his reluctance to face the fact that it is entirely possible for a man of high ideals to possess criminal weaknesses. The error inherent in using a "fixed standard" as a measure of trustworthiness is nowhere more evident than in the account of Jim's death, where, both Marlow, with his talk of "success," and Jim, in his last "proud and unflinching glance,"[78] appear to confuse this cowardly escape with a stalwart adherence to principle.

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[78] Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

"You know how stupid I can be at times."[1] Thus speaks Marlow in the early pages of Chance, the novel which marks Conrad's fourth effort with this particular narrative device. This time, Marlow often appears as a comic figure, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. He is more developed as a character than in the earlier works, and because we get a stronger, more immediate sense of his weaknesses, we are less likely now to accept him, even on first reading, as a thoroughly reliable narrator. Perhaps the central question to our understanding of Chance is not "When can't we trust Marlow?"(for there are really so many instances), but "When can we trust him?" We can, I believe, trust Marlow as the sympathetic voice through which we gain insight into many of Chance's characters. Indeed, the book would appear to have been written at least partially as a tribute to the virtue of sympathetic understanding, as demonstrated in Marlow. Yet Marlow remains potentially unreliable insofar as he is not the mere embodiment of a single virtue, but, once again, a well-developed character whose viewpoint as narrator contains both appropriate and inappropriate attitudes toward the story he tells. The following will be a discussion of the relationship between Marlow's personality

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[1]Joseph Conrad, Chance(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.53.

and his role as narrator.

Marlow's is, as Gary Geddes notes, "the most genuinely sympathetic voice of the novel,"[2] and it is this quality of sympathy which accounts for the frequent success of Marlow's inquiries into the emotional lives of the other characters. Conrad establishes Marlow as a character whose dominant trait is in fact compassion. It is at times an indiscriminate compassion, and extends not only to Flora de Barral but also to the Fyne dog whose plight Marlow feels to be analogous. Whereas Flora is emotionally starved, the dog is physically deprived: "supposed to lead a Spartan existence on a diet of repulsive biscuits with an occasional dry, hygenic bone throne in."[3] They are both victims of the Fynes' lack of "imaginative sympathy." Such a comparison may strike the reader as tastelessly sentimental, but Marlow is elsewhere able to focus his capacity for sympathetic understanding so as to achieve a remarkable depth of insight into character and events. For example, Marlow sees beyond the conventional wisdom that brands Flora's father a criminal deserving imprisonment, if not death. Marlow insists that de Barral, like his clients, is merely a victim of stupidity. His sensitivity to detail in describing the crowd at de Barral's trial memorably conveys the impression that soci-

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[2]Gary Geddes, Conrad's Later Novels(Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), p.34.

[3]Conrad, Chance, p.124.

ety's judgments of character are superficial and hypocritical.

> I . . . [was] greatly incommoded by the pressure of a hulking fellow who was remarking to some of his equally oppressive friends that the "beggar ought to have been pole-axed." I don't know whether he had ever confided his savings to de Barral, but if so, judging from his appearance, they must have been the proceeds of some successful burglary.[4]

Later, it is the sympathetic voice of Marlow that restrains the reader himself from "pole-axing" de Barral outright for his conduct aboard the Ferndale. We hesitate to judge someone who had been unjustly confined in an enviroment where, as Marlow says, "nothing moves except the irrecoverable minutes of your life."[5]

More central to the novel is Marlow's equally sympathetic treatment of Flora de Barral. If the younger Flora appears mercenary in her motives, Marlow draws enough inferences from her history to explain her flawed character as a product of vicious circumstance.

> It was as though Flora had been fated to be always surrounded by treachery and lies stifling every better impulse, every instinctive aspiration of her soul to trust and to love.[6]

Marlow impresses on the reader the undoubted impact of Flora's abuse at the hands of the vengeful governess, noting an incident from his own life in which his self-respect

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[4] Ibid., p.80.

[5] Ibid., p.293.

[6] Ibid., p.150.

became tarnished.

> And yet I was not an impressionable, ignorant young girl. I had taken the exact measure of the fellow's utter worthlessness long before. He [the man who spoke ill of Marlow] had never been for me a person of prestige and power, like that awful governess to Flora de Barral.[7]

Through Marlow's sympathetic identification, Flora's early wound becomes credible, and her subsequent behaviour understandable.

Marlow's imagination is quite capable of going beyond the mental barriers of conventional society. He sympathizes with both de Barrals as victims of that society's hypocrisy. Just as de Barral only becomes an object of indignation once the fools who believed in him can see him clearly, Flora's disgrace with the Fynes originates not from her sins, but from her having confessed to them. "And a confession of whatever sort is always untimely."[8] There seems to be a suspicion implied in Marlow's words as to Mrs. Fyne's motives in entering her own marriage, the point being that the identification of the secret sinner with the confessed sinner is, more often than not, unsympathetic. Marlow is that one "sympathetic soul"[9]("in ten thousand?") and the penetration of his vision is enhanced by his sympathy.

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[7] Ibid., p.222.

[8] Ibid., p.180.

[9] Ibid.

Given that Marlow is established as "the most genuinely sympathetic voice" in Chance, John A. Palmer's conclusion that he is indeed "established as a choral figure"[10] seems to follow. Yet I would argue that one cannot go so far, and that Marlow, while possessing the admirable quality of imaginative sympathy, sometimes evinces other characteristics which have the potential to render him an unreliable narrator. Palmer[11] and Douglas Hewitt[12] both note that Marlow's attitude is at times far away from the ideal of imaginative sympathy, and in other ways inappropriate to the story he tells. If Marlow is taken as a "choral character . . . for all practical purposes the voice of Conrad himself,"[13] then these apparent lapses reflect poorly on the author's own artistic judgment. But, once again, it seems more likely that, far from intending Marlow as the embodiment of his own ideal self, Conrad has created a fully-developed character with both virtues and defects in his own right. It does appear that Conrad has certain ways of warning us against a complacent acceptance of Marlow's point of view.

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[10]John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction: A Study in Literary Growth(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p.202.

[11]Ibid., pp.199-200.

[12]Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment(Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p.99.

[13]Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction: A Study in Literary Growth, p.2.

Consideration of these should pave the way for an exploration of Marlow's personality and the ways in which it may affect his reliability as narrator.

One of the oppositions to Marlow presents itself in the form of Mr. Powell. Marlow's is an obviously contemplative nature, while Powell's demeanor demonstrates what the primary narrator terms "a probably unconscious contempt of general ideas."[14] Marlow himself, while he enjoys Powell's company, is at the same time contemptuous of him.

> He's one of those people who form no theories about facts. Straightforward people seldom do. Neither have they much penetration.[15]

Yet Marlow and Powell are assigned equal status by the primary narrator. Both are men of the sea, and hence apt to have "a turn of mind composed of innocence and skepticism . . . with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives."[16] The presence of the "straightforward" Powell contributes to our perspective on the overly subtle Marlow, and may cause us to become skeptical of him at times, especially of his tendency to dwell in the abstract.

The Fynes too are characters who help to give our overall impression of Marlow an added dimension. Marlow

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[14]Conrad, Chance, p.31.

[15]Ibid., p.220.

[16]Ibid., p.39.

feels that the Fynes are "not intelligent people."[17] He refers contemptuously to "little Fyne," scoffing at his "solemnity," and at his obvious pride in his wife's connection with "the poet." Marlow has slightly more respect for Mrs. Fyne, but thinks that her feminist outlook is blind to the truth about Flora de Barral and her relationship with Captain Anthony.

> There was no fathoming the innocence of a woman like Mrs. Fyne who, venturing as far as possible in theory, would know nothing of the real aspect of things.[18]

However, the structure of Chance is such that, as a general rule, the more sarcastic Marlow becomes toward the Fynes, the more he himself becomes the victim of irony. For example, Marlow's constant allusions to Fyne's stupidity make it especially humiliating when it comes time for him to acknowledge Fyne's abilities in chess.[19] The allegedly naive Mrs. Fyne also has the ability to outmanoeuver Marlow. Marlow urges Fyne to go to London at his wife's request, and even accompanies him, only because he feels that Mrs. Fyne's attempts to meddle in her brother's life will have absolutely no effect. As it turns out, Marlow mistakes Mrs. Fyne's motives. She does not merely want to drive the

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[17] Ibid., p.61.

[18] Ibid., p.165.

[19] Ibid., p.46.

couple out of her life, but also to drive them apart. Marlow does not truly understand the purpose of the mission in which he so willingly partakes, nor does he know the dynamics of Flora and Anthony's relationship, and so fails to forsee that the meeting between Anthony and Fyne cannot help but bring about misery. The triumph of the supposedly unintelligent Fynes over Marlow is another aspect of the novel which causes us to view Marlow with some detachment.

Marlow's credibility is called more directly into question through the device of the primary narrator. One can hardly fail to note this narrator's bold interjections in which he asks Marlow: "Do you expect me to agree with all this?"[20] and "Do you really believe what you have said?"[21] Even if we ourselves agree with Marlow at these times(which seems unlikely), the primary narrator's interjections bring us back to an awareness of Marlow as a character. Marlow interrupts his narrative to anticipate the primary narrator's objections, to address his gasps and laughter, or, at the very end of the story, his "sarcastic grin."[22] The attitude of the primary narrator will at times condition, at times merely support, our own skepticism about Marlow.

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[20] Ibid., p.62.

[21] Ibid., p.86.

[22] Ibid., p.367.

However, we do not have to rely either on the structure of events, or on the gibes of the primary narrator, to reveal Marlow's fallibility. Marlow is quite capable of doing that by himself, for he suffers from strikingly obvious quirks of character that tend to make a reader think twice before accepting his judgment. Marlow's language is often clownish, indicating that he does not take himself wholly seriously and perhaps deserves, in his capacity as narrator, to be taken even less seriously by the reader. Many of Marlow's utterances are characterized by ridiculously complex syntax and extreme verbosity, as in the following.

> And if by the obscure promptings of my composite temperament I beheld him with malicious amusement, yet being in fact, by definition and especially from profound conviction, a man, I could not help sympathizing with him largely.[23]

Equally as striking as this comic outburst are Marlow's apparent fits of gloom. There are references in Marlow's descriptions of setting to "the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe,"[24] "the bespangled, cruel revelation of the Immensity of the Universe."[25] These phrases stand out because they are generally unexpected. As Douglas Hewitt notes: "It is often difficult to see the relevance of . . . [Marlow's] comments either to the facts of the

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[23] Ibid., p.128.

[24] Ibid., p.52.

[25] Ibid., p.60.

story he tells or to any deeper logic of mood."[26]

There are, of course, certain elements in the substance (as well as the style) of Marlow's discourse which tend to distance the reader. Marlow spends much time on the subject of women, in some instances generalizing about them on the basis of one character, in others beginning with a general principle of womankind and attempting to make the characters "fit in." The results can be disastrous for Marlow's credibility. For example, we cannot help but be unsatisfied that the case of the governess proves that "compunction" is "rare in women,"[27] and confused as to how the case of Mrs. Fyne, as presented, illustrates that women are "devoid of decency."[28]

It seems, then, that we are amply warned against trusting Marlow. Both the primary narrator and the plot itself contradict his judgment at crucial times. Furthermore, Marlow's own utterances, by virtue of both their form and their content, make the reader aware of the limitations inherent in his personality. Yet to what purpose are we made aware of these limitations? What are the implications for Marlow's narrative reliability? Rather than attempting to catalogue all his numerous opinions which could poten-

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[26]Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment, p.99.

[27]Conrad, Chance, p.137.

[28]Ibid., p.62.

tially differ from the reader's, I would like to discuss one particular problem evidenced in Marlow's character which is, I believe, central to the question of his authority as narrator.

The key into the mysteries of Marlow's personality is present, once again, in the frequently bizarre language that he uses. On the one hand, we have the frivolous Marlow who attempts to turn the depressing moments of the story into amusing ones. For example, as Marlow and Fyne comb the countryside for what seems at the time will most likely by the corpse of the missing Flora, Marlow speculates that his own slow pace must have been "infinitely irksome to . . .[Fyne's] high pedestrian faculties."[29] Later, when de Barral's philistine cousin comes to take Flora away from the Fynes, Marlow remarks that Mrs. Fyne was "appalled by the personage."[30] Marlow's flippant, sometimes ridiculous way of putting things is pleasingly incongruous when he is dealing with the story of such characters as the serious Fyne and the straightforward Powell. On the other hand, it is this same Marlow(or, should I say, a seemingly <u>different</u> Marlow) who is capable of discerning the darkest shades of gloom in an apparently cheerful setting. For example, he once describes a sunny sky as "the horror of

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[29] <u>Ibid</u>., p.50.

[30] <u>Ibid</u>., p.115.

the Infinite veiled by the splendid tent of blue."[31] A similar metaphor might be used to describe Marlow's own tendencies as narrator, for I feel that he is in effect continually attempting to erect the "splendid tent" of an artificially high-spirited optimism to cover up both his own more genuine pessimism and the darkness inherent in the story he tells.

No matter what theory one entertains about Marlow, one must agree that many of his comments are strangely inappropriate to the situations he describes. Thomas Moser refers to Marlow's apparent "lack of rapport with the story he is hearing and telling."[32] Moser goes so far as to term Marlow's general attitude "inhuman." This label would appear accurate at times, especially when Marlow tells us of his fits of laughter as he and Fyne searched for the suicidal Flora.[33] However, Marlow is not consistent in his "inhumanity." We have already discovered him to be endowed with a large portion of "imaginative sympathy." Would it not be possible to posit a Marlow who, like his predecessors in "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim, has difficulty facing the bleakness that he encounters in life, and who therefore adopts such psychological defenses as his bursts of high

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[31] Ibid., p.63.

[32] Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p.165.

[33] Conrad, Chance, p.55.

spirits seem to suggest? If this is the case, then Marlow's apparent callousness may be, paradoxically, a function of his inherently sympathetic nature. Chance may show that a truly open-hearted man finds it impossible to cope with the tragedy of life and therefore must pretend, as Marlow does, that life is "farce" and not tragedy. The picture I would draw of Marlow is that of a narrator whose story threatens to plunge him into the depths of despair, and who must accordingly try to sustain himself through a humour which is but the most noticeable manifestation of a romantic optimism both naive and forced.

Let us consider, then, the darkness inherent in this story which Marlow apparently ends on such a joyous note, having arranged the perfect match between Flora and Mr. Powell. It begins with the lively anecdote of "Young Powell and his Chance." Even this portion of the novel, though apparently focusing on an instance of good fortune and human kindness, has a darker side to it. When young Powell arrives to board the Ferndale, he finds that the docks are overrun by "night prowlers" that he likens to "a mob of ugly specters."[34] He is rescued by a constable but once aboard discovers the "shadowy wreck" of a shipkeeper who speaks to him in a "faint breathless wheeze."[35] Introduced in

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[34] Ibid., p.34.

[35] Ibid., p.37.

Chance, even at this very early stage, are images of the dying, the derelict, and the homeless.

Soon after Marlow begins his narrative, tragedy moves from background to foreground. We are told of the financier de Barral who lacks both "the brutality of temperament" and "the fineness of mind" typical of "the masterful adventurer."[36] De Barral accumulates money simply because his own foolhardiness coincides so well with that of the masses. He is "innocent" in the only meaningful sense of the word. He exercises no real deception in the pursuit of profit, and reaps no apparent pleasure from his wealth. It is one of the chief darknesses of Chance that an "innocent" man must be spiritually destroyed by seven years of confinement.

But the most prominent tragedy of the work(it is really not a farce, as Marlow claims) is that of the young Flora de Barral. Her father's circumstances reduce her to a degraded condition from which she perceives only two possible escapes: suicide or Anthony. Although Marlow tries to find what humour he can in Flora's contemplated suicide, there is no indication that she herself is anything but serious. By the same token, despite Marlow's evident suspicion that the problems between Flora and Anthony on the eve of their marriage are simply the result of a temporary misunderstanding, there is indication that the matter is really

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[36] Ibid., p.78.

a much more darkly significant one. Flora is initially fond of Anthony, but as their relationship continues, she comes to fear and distrust him. It is not merely the raw passion of his "blood-curdling" laugh that bothers her, but also "the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips as if he were gloating over her misery."[37] Flora feels that Anthony, in his love, takes unfair advantage of her bad luck, and there is much in Chance that points to the notion that, feeling as she does, her decision to accept Anthony's proposal is a form of prostitution. The last chapter before Flora's departure aboard the Ferndale is entitled "On the Pavement," which echoes Marlow's earlier reference to prostitutes as "the drabs of the pavement."[38] The conversation between Marlow and Flora takes place outside the Eastern Hotel, which is located in a dismal run-down section of London. Later, as Marlow talks to Fyne, he catches a glimpse of Flora lingering at the hotel entrance and attracting the stares of "three dismal, sodden loafers. . . . Which was horrible."[39] Fyne is adamant that Anthony's agreement with Flora is nothing "chivalrous and fine," but is instead "a rather pitiless transaction."[40] Thus the novel suggests

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[37] Ibid., p.189.

[38] Ibid., p.71.

[39] Ibid., p.209.

[40] Ibid., p.212.

through inference and imagery that Flora has in fact been forced to become a prositute. The suggestion is later made explicit by de Barral himself who terms his daughter "an unfortunate girl. You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets."[41]

Marlow could not be said to be oblivious to all this darkness in his story, but at the same time, his view, especially with regard to Flora, could not be called a consistently accurate one. It is true that Marlow displays a pessimistic and cynical side, not only in his gloomy descriptions of setting and his diatribes on women, but also in many of his comments upon humanity in general. He believes, for example, that "mediocrity" is the "mark" of man,[42] and that "success has never been found in renunciation and good faith,"[43] indicating a pessimism that in fact goes beyond that which might be said to be supported by the story. But it is perhaps this very tendency to give way to complete and premature despair that renders Marlow unable to face the true horror of Flora's existence. Too often he obscures the truth, not simply through use of the humour mentioned earlier, but through a romantic idealization both of Flora's character and her situation. The reader's understanding

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[41] Ibid., p.317.

[42] Ibid., p.31.

[43] Ibid., p.326.

of the story depends on his seeing through this defense.

Flora's despair is especially difficult for Marlow to come to terms with because of the nature of his involvement with her. And this difficulty makes him the object of Chance's most intense irony. As mentioned, Marlow displays contempt for a number of the book's characters, and amongst these is Captain Anthony. We are told that as he narrates that portion of the story dealing with Anthony Marlow wears a "mocking expression."[44] He scoffs at Anthony's "idiotic" "heroism," and at his "touching illusions as to the frailness of women and their spiritual fragility."[45] Yet in Marlow's own narrative treatment of Flora there is indication that he himself is hardly immune to those "unreasonable complications" of "idealism" at which he is habitually prone to be amused.[46] For Marlow himself idealizes both Anthony's love and the object of that love, and there is reason to suspect that this problem originates partly in the fact that Marlow's own emotions are from the start, in spite of his insistence to the contrary, fully enlisted on Flora's side. The strength of Marlow's feeling for Flora becomes evident in seemingly uncontrolled outbursts like the following.

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[44] Ibid., p.270.

[45] Ibid., p.272, p.276.

[46] Ibid., p.270.

> Yes, that very young girl, almost no more than a child -- this was what was going to happen to her. And if you ask me how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance![47]

And, depending on the nature of Marlow's feelings, it may be difficult for him to maintain his objectivity as he pieces together the history of Anthony's marriage.

> And for a moment I understood the desire of that man to whom the sea and sky of his solitary life had appeared suddenly incomplete.[48]

It is entirely possible too that Marlow not only "understood" but actually <u>experienced</u> some of that same desire. The reader is lead to speculate as to the basis of Marlow's interest in the story. What has motivated Marlow to come ashore in the first place? Note that for all his apparent cynicism regarding women, Marlow protests that he is not "afraid" of getting married, and indeed hopes that he may, "some day . . . Some day."[49]

I would suggest that, although Marlow may appear contemptuous of Anthony's romantic illusions, he is in a way <u>living through</u> Anthony's experience of love, and so runs the risk of having his intellect swayed by emotion. This interpretation could explain the romantic excess in passages

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[47] <u>Ibid</u>., p.91.

[48] <u>Ibid</u>., p.196.

[49] <u>Ibid</u>., p.131.

such as the following.

> He turned to the mental contemplation of the white, delicate, appealing face with great blue eyes which he had seen weep and wonder and look profoundly at him, sometimes with incredulity, sometimes with doubt and pain, but always irresistible in the power to find their way right into his breast, to stir there a deep response which was something more than love -- he said to himself -- as men understand it. More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other. More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms -- all the suffering world -- not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.[50]

This sort of rhetoric is symptomatic, I believe, of Marlow's inability to face the at least partially sordid truth of Anthony and Flora's relationship. "On the pavement," it once occurs to Marlow to question whether Flora's commitment to Anthony is motivated by "hunger or love."[51] He even goes so far as to wonder whether her "smile" is not, in fact, "a ferocious baring of little even teeth."[52] These negative but unavoidable thoughts are suppressed by Marlow's appeal to the general principle that "the dreams of sentiment -- like the consoling mysteries of Faith -- are invincible, that it is never, never, reason which governs men and women."[53] But this principle does not appear to be supported

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[50] Ibid., p.288.

[51] Ibid., p.175.

[52] Ibid., p.172.

[53] Ibid., p.175.

by the specific example of Flora. Although Marlow defends his optimism about Anthony and Flora's love by speculating that Flora did not "understand either the state of her feelings, or the precise nature of what she was doing"[54] at the time of her revealing letter to Mrs. Fyne, the reluctant words of the older Flora seem to undercut this notion. "I really believed I was selling myself,"[55] she admits to Marlow, and since it was herself that was in question, no one else could have known better. If she believed she was, she was. The fact that she may have eventually become warmer toward Anthony is a separate matter.

Freed from Marlow's distortion, Flora's story is no more a love story than is Lord Jim. It is the story of a person who attempts to escape one bad situation by means of another. Flora chooses to enter into a loveless marriage with Anthony, rather than remain dependent on the good will of his sister. She is not strictly speaking an adventuress, but she is guided by the instinct for survival, rather than by love. By poking fun at Anthony's "renunciation" of Flora aboard the Ferndale,[56] Marlow shows his misunderstanding of the situation. If there is anything humourous about Anthony, it is not his reaction upon discovering Flora's

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[54] Ibid., p.221.

[55] Ibid., p.364.

[56] Ibid., p.275.

motives, but rather his inability to see those motives any sooner. This blindness is brought about by his excessive romantic idealism, one of the same problems that plagues Marlow in his role as narrator.

The refusal to take a consistently realistic view of Flora is symptomatic of a larger defect in Marlow's narration. As Royal Roussel notes, Marlow's "optimism" as he draws Chance to a conclusion appears to be "unfounded."[57] Marlow is certain that things will turn out well for Powell and Flora, but "he was equally certain that Fyne's visit would have no effect on Anthony."[58] The book as a whole, then, resounds with hollow optimism, and more is at stake here than just Marlow's ability to predict the future. For Marlow has committed himself to a view of the world as governed by "chance," a force that is "incalcuable,"[59] and one which can be either good or bad. We finish Chance not simply with the suspicion that Marlow is wrong, but with the certainty that he must be. The very unstable nature of chance must exclude any notion of happy endings on this earth.

Worse still, "chance" itself seems mainly a device which Marlow uses to deflect attention away from some of

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[57]Roussel, The Metaphysics of Darkness: A Study in the Unity and Development of Conrad's Fiction, p.179.

[58]Ibid., pp.178-79.

[59]Conrad, Chance, p.91.

the morally dubious conduct of his ostensibly "good" characters. Contrary to what its title suggests, Chance is not so much a story about the whims of fortune as it is one about the ways in which people manipulate each other to attain their own ends. Anthony enjoys the advantage that his money gives him over the destitute Flora, or at least this is the way she perceives it. Flora herself, while in one sense a victim of fate, is also manipulative. She may be dependent, but she is not exactly passive. Marlow makes an effort to show that his tale really deals with the struggle of well-intentioned humanity against the capricious "chance."

> [Flora] had meant well, and I had certainly meant well too. Captain Anthony -- as far as I could gather from little Fyne -- had meant well. As far as such lofty words may be applied to the obscure personages of this story, we were all filled with the noblest sentiments and intentions.[60]

But the intentions of Flora and Anthony are at best mixed. As for Marlow himself, he is after all, somewhat of a meddler. The reader can never agree categorically that these characters all simply "meant well."

To sum up, Marlow's reliability as narrator of Chance is seriously hampered by the limitations of his character. He vacillates between romantic optimism and extreme gloom, with neither of these moods serving to illuminate his

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[60] Ibid., p.258.

material, either for himself or for the reader. However, Marlow's viewpoint also embodies a middle road between these two extremes, one which I feel that we as readers are invited to pursue: that of imaginative sympathy. The book seems to suggest that recognition of the darkness of human existence is not incompatible with sympathy; the two may in fact be complementary. But it also suggests that a man as open-hearted as Marlow appears to be may sometimes be forced to protect himself from despair by means of an optimism that is at root artificial.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to show not only that Marlow is in each work somewhat unreliable, but also that the distortions follow a fairly consistent pattern. "Marlow" appears to be, as I have said, a single "narrative psychology" which remains intact not only within the individual works, but also, to a great extent, from one work to another. This observation would seem to hold true even in the case of the relatively unambitious "Youth."

"Youth" establishes Marlow as a romantic. Just as Bankok provided the elusive goal of his younger days, so "youth" itself is the fleeting object of his reminiscence. We need look to the novels, then, not for a revelation of Marlow's essential character, but for the situations that will expose more fully the seriousness of his limitations. "Heart of Darkness" places Marlow in such a situation. Our uneasiness about Marlow in this instance stems not so much from the irony inherent in his final "choice of nightmares"(community over Kurtz), but from the undeserved complacency that <u>results</u> from this idealistic commitment to social values. Marlow's belief that salvation is attainable through work seems ludicrous given the demonic nature of his employers, and his insistence that it is the darkness of the jungle which

destroys Kurtz is an insult to the reader's intelligence. In Lord Jim Marlow's ideals are again called into question. The closeness of Marlow's identification with Jim, and the strength of his need to believe in a sovereign and fixed standard of conduct, render him partially blind to the element of contingency which Jim's behaviour introduces. Ironically, it is not so much contingency that threatens to evade Marlow's powers of perception in Chance, but rather the phenomenon of self-interest in human relationships, an aspect of existence that is perhaps even more distasteful to the romantic idealist.

Although there appears to be a marked similarity of intention between Conrad's three major efforts with Marlow, I would by no means suggest that they are equally successful. It seems a poor strategy, for example, to allow Marlow to dramatize his uncertainties at such great length in "Heart of Darkness." The use of an unreliable narrator by definition makes extra demands upon the reader, yet, if a particular narrator threatens to become excessively tedious, then it seems reasonable to suggest that the author should have revised his strategy. Conrad appears to have done just that in Lord Jim; Marlow is more tightly controlled here, and the psychological complexity of the work does not suffer for the added discipline.

But both Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" appear as

masterpieces in comparison with Chance. It is this later work which most clearly demonstrates the potential pitfalls of Conrad's chosen narrative strategy. Although critics generally agree that Chance is the lesser of the three novels, its faults are rather difficult to isolate, especially when the use of Marlow here bears such an apparent similarity to that which characterizes the earlier works. What, then, distinguishes Chance from "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim?

I would suggest that Chance's deficiencies can be accounted for principally by the fact that whereas in the other two novels Marlow's narration focuses on the idealists, first Kurtz and then Jim, his preoccupation in Chance is with the "ideal" herself -- Flora de Barral. In the case of "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim Marlow's involvement with his subjects arises out of his close identification with them; but in the case of Flora, Marlow finds himself involved, literally, by "chance." The result is a narrative with very little penetration of character. Marlow simply does not understand Flora well enough to tell her story. While Marlow's unreliability in the first two novels appears to contribute indirectly to the reader's understanding of the principal characters themselves, his romanticizing of Flora and her plight only serves to obscure any sense of depth or development in her personality. Indeed, while

Conrad's exploration of the romantic dilemma is initially triumphant, he brings his experiment with Marlow to a close with a mismatch between narrator and protagonist almost as gross, one might speculate, as if he had chosen the Intended to narrate the story of Mr. Kurtz.

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