

A STUDY OF THE FUNCTION OF SOUND IN THREE OF
JOSEPH CONRAD'S SHORTER NOVELS:
TYphoon, HEART OF DARKNESS, AND ALMAYER'S FOLLY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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October 1968



c1968

ABSTRACT

In Joseph Conrad's Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, he states his artistic credo:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see.¹

In this statement, Conrad puts the emphasis on the phrase "to make you see." It is a phrase that has received much attention from readers and critics of Conrad. Earlier, in the above quotation, however, is the other phrase, "to make you hear." This phrase too expresses a concern of Conrad, yet it, perhaps, has not received the careful attention paid to the phrase "to make you see." Some of Conrad's statements, however, would invite such attention; in the Author's Note to Heart of Darkness, for example, he has spoken of his interest in the function of sound in his fiction. He has this to say about the presentation of his theme:

That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.²

Here he expresses a wish to support through the element of sound his portrayal of his theme. It was the intention in this thesis, therefore, to study through a discussion of several of his shorter novels, Typhoon, Heart of Darkness, and Almayer's Folly, Conrad's references to sound in his fiction.

In the chapter treating Typhoon, references to sound in the story of Macwhirr's victorious struggle against the storm were found to make more

¹Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the "Narcissus", ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924). Vol. XXIII, p. xiv.

²Joseph Conrad, Youth and Two Other Stories, ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1929). Vol. XVI, p. 15.

vivid that story and to contribute to our understanding of the meaning of that struggle. The character of the Captain, himself, was in part revealed through the sounds he uttered and the responses to sounds he made.

In the chapter treating Heart of Darkness, it was noted that Marlow was highly aware of sounds and that what he heard as well as what he saw defined his experience of the journey he undertakes in that story. A study of the sounds Marlow hears and in some cases of his response to them, it was found, is a means whereby one can gain added insight into the nature of Marlow's experience and the kind of man he was.

In the chapter on Almayer's Folly, Kaspar Almayer was judged to be the opposite kind of man to Macwhirr and Marlow, a man broken by life rather than one who can meet its tests. It was found, however, that in the portrayal of this kind of man as in the portrayal of men like Macwhirr and Marlow, Conrad employed references to sounds effectively.

Conrad's revelations of these three men's natures and experiences were all, it was found, made more effective through his careful employment of references to sounds.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In Joseph Conrad's Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, he states his artistic credo:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see.¹

In this statement, Conrad puts the emphasis on the phrase "to make you see." It is a phrase that has received much attention from Conrad readers and critics and is, indeed, central to a discussion of Conrad's approach to writing. Earlier in the above quotation, however, is the other phrase, "to make you hear." This phrase, too, is a part of Conrad's artistic credo. Yet it has not received the careful attention that the phrase "to make you see" has. The relevance of the phrase "to make you hear" to Conrad's writing has not been so much explored. Some of Conrad's statements, however, would invite such exploration; in his Author's Note to Heart of Darkness, for example, he has spoken of his interest in the function of sound in his fiction. He has this to say about the presentation of his theme:

That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.²

Here he expresses a wish to support through an appeal to the ear his portrayal of his theme. It is the intention in this thesis, therefore, to study through a discussion of several of his shorter novels, Typhoon, Heart of Darkness, and Almayer's Folly, Conrad's references to sound in his fiction. Hopefully, it will become apparent that through his references to sound, Conrad brings his story more alive in the mind and supports effectively the meaning of his story.

¹Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the "Narcissus", ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924). Vol. XXIII, p. xiv.

²Joseph Conrad, Youth and Two Other Stories, ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1929). Vol. XVI, p. 15.

CHAPTER II

TYPHOON

One of the methods Conrad employed to convey the meaning of Typhoon is hinted at in his Author's Note to that tale:

I felt that to bring out its [the story's] deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury in its proper place.¹

There is in Typhoon an emphasis on sound which is hinted at in the above reference to noise. Conrad's artistic credo, as we have noted in Chapter I, was centered about his aim to make the reader hear, to make him feel, and to make him see. The prime intention here is to show that one effective artistic device contributing to the communication of meaning to the reader is Conrad's use of sound. Fundamental to the accomplishment of this intention is the necessity of showing that the meaning of the story of Captain Macwhirr's struggle against the storm is presented in part through sound. Macwhirr is a man who can successfully meet the test life presents to him. It is here suggested that by examining the sound of his voice as well as other sounds one can learn some of the characteristics of this rare kind of Conradian protagonist.

The specific structure of this chapter is quite simple. It is preferable to look, by means of an examination of various sounds, first at those elements which challenge Macwhirr and then to look at Macwhirr's character.

¹Joseph Conrad, Typhoon and Other Stories, ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), Vol. XX, p. viii.

It is possible to indicate some of the characteristics of the storm Macwhirr faces by examining its sounds as it presents itself to him. One of these characteristics is visible in the first serious confrontation of the storm by Macwhirr when he rises from sleep and leaves his cabin.

Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud--made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense drum beating the charge of the gale.¹

The sound here is imaged as the roll of a drum calling an army to battle. The storm first presents itself to Macwhirr, then, in this guise, as an opposing force, an army ready to attack.

As Macwhirr moves out into the growing storm more of its traits appear. In the ragged conversation Macwhirr has with Jukes at this time a threat the storm presents is indicated through its sounds:

"Watch--put in--wheelhouse shutters--glass--afraid--blow in."
Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

"This--come--anything--call me."

He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.²

Here clearly the force of chaos is one which stifles or attempts to stifle communication. It tries to keep the captain's mouth closed by an actual physical pressure on his lips. What the storm threatens then is to break down communication, to isolate men. Macwhirr's task, accordingly, as captain of the ship, and leader of the forces that oppose the storm, must be to maintain communications and to join his men into a working unity.

¹Ibid., pp. 36-37.

²Ibid., p. 37.

The men aboard the ship themselves, however, also confront Macwhirr with difficulties, all three groups, the officers, the crew, and the Chinese coolies. The storm may be his chief problem, but the men aboard also pose a significant challenge. In characterising and revealing the problems the men represent for Macwhirr, as in characterising the nature of the storm, sound operates effectively. The crew, for example, emits sounds like the following:

Irritated voices were ascending through the sky-light and through the fiddle of the stokehold in a harsh and resonant uproar, mingled with angry clangs and scrapes of metal, as if men with limbs of iron and throats of bronze had been quarrelling down there.¹

Irritation and anger emerge as "a harsh and resonant uproar." The likeness here of the sounds of the men to the sounds of the storm suggests that Macwhirr is confronted on board his ship as well as without by the possible eruption of the chaotic.

The sounds coming from the officers, too, are disquieting. Irritation disrupts relationships. Although the engineer is addressed by the First mate Mr. Jukes in a "restrained tone"² the former responds with an impatient "Oh, Heavens!"³ and insults Jukes in a "brutal tone" of voice before he impatiently drops back below-deck "with a whoop."⁴ Also, Jukes' vain attempt at friendly conversation with the second mate, who turns out to be quite paranoid and dangerous in his bitterness, is met with "no reply" at first;

¹Ibid., p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Ibid.

then "the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature."¹ Here, then, in the sounds of a brutal tone signifying insult, of an impatient whoop signifying wildness, and of an animalistic growl signifying unfriendliness is expressed the wild antagonism found in the major sounds of the storm.

Most suggestive of chaos of all the sounds emerging from the men aboard the ship, however, are those coming from the Chinese coolies after the storm has upset their trunks and spilled their silver dollars. The fact that there is something wrong below-decks is registered through the sound of "thumps . . . profound, ponderous thumps."² When the meaning of the sound is investigated what is brought to sight is an "inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, pigtails, faces. . . ."³ The sound is now portrayed as "a row like the shouting of a big lot of crazed men,"⁴ as a "gust of hoarse yelling" and as a "tumult of strangled shrieks."⁵ Near insanity characterises this thumping knot of men.

Facing these threats to the safe and orderly progress of his ship, threats characterised by the unpleasantness and noisiness of the sounds they give rise to, is a captain noted for his silence. Let us turn now to a consideration of how a study of sound aids us in understanding Macwhirr. We are told about Macwhirr that "to be silent was natural to him, dark or shine."⁶ This silent manner brings down upon him the patronizing criticism of Jukes:

¹Ibid., p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 56.

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 40.

" . . . As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think that he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be, . . . I believe he hasn't brains enough to enjoy kicking up a row. . . . Outside the routine of duty he doesn't seem to understand more than half of what you tell him . . . but it is dull, too, to be with a man like this--in the long run. Old Sol says he hasn't much conversation. Conversation. O Lord! He never talks. The other day I had been yarning under the bridge with one of the engineers, and he must have heard us. . . . By and by he says, "Was that you talking just now in the port alleyway?" "Yes, sir." . . . Then after a while I hear him getting up. . . . "I can't understand what you can find to talk about," says he. "Two solid hours. . . . I see people ashore at it all day long, and then in the evening. . . . Must be saying the same things over and over again. I can't understand." . . .

" . . . He's too dense to trouble about, and that's the truth."¹

Later, during the extremity of the storm, Jukes's scorn for the captain, here aroused by the latter's conversational deficiency, is absent. Jukes is being hasty in describing MacWhirr as "too dense to trouble about." Macwhirr's reticence, it comes to be seen, goes along with a practicality which proves to be a valuable quality.

Related to Macwhirr's silent manner is another characteristic. After he is awakened by the storm, one of Macwhirr's initial responses to the mass of sound that bears down on him is a muttered "There's a lot of weight in this."² Here he indicates with this mutter a lack of panic. So far then the sea which before "had never put itself out to startle the silent man"³ still has not succeeded in doing so.

A further characteristic related to the man's reticence about speaking is discernible in his response to the storm's power to impair communication.

¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

²Ibid., p. 37.

³Ibid., p. 18.

It was indicated above that the wind-torn conversation between Captain and First mate at the beginning of the typhoon is an instance of the power of the storm to reduce communication between men and thereby to isolate them. It is also true that Conrad uses this conversation to present Macwhirr in a favorable light right at the onset of the storm:

"Watch--put in--wheelhouse shutters--glass--blow in."
 Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.
 "This--come--anything--call me."
 He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.¹

The sound of the uproar reduces the conversation to elemental snatches with all irrelevant words eliminated. This represents the first time Macwhirr's voice is heard in conflict with the storm sounds. Were a man of eloquence placed in this situation he would have no special advantage. Even the words of a man not given to an economy of speech would be lost here and so the lack of conversational niceties places Macwhirr under no handicap in the midst of the storm. For a man like Macwhirr only the relevant words count, the ones which rise above the noise.

Getting words across to others is essential to Macwhirr's being a force of harmony. Communication is vital to his operating the ship as a unified whole against the weather. The ability to communicate by breaking through the storm's uproar is one of Macwhirr's more significant characteristics.

In the following passage this ability is revealed:

And again he [Jukes] heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice--the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution, and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall and justice is done--again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far--"All right."²

¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

²Ibid., p. 44.

Significantly Macwhirr's voice here, as opposed to its struggle with the up-roar before, is now transcending the noise of the storm. It is possible then to consider this audible transcendence as a preface to his final victory. At any rate, the elements of chaos in this scene consist of both an "enormous discord of noise" and the "black wastes of the gale." The element of harmony which opposes this cacophony and dark stormy confusion consists of a "penetrating effect of quietness." Here, in the sound of Macwhirr's voice, the noise of chaotic discord is dispelled by a stronger force, curiously enough a force of quietness. Symbolically, therefore, the watery wasteland of confusion is countered by the thought, resolution, and purposes of Macwhirr, the source of order. Jukes's previous criticism of his captain's quietness appears ironic now as he listens to him. The captain's ability to stand unafraid and with a voice clearly heard produces a spreading effect of calmness which Jukes needs for reassurance.

Later, in a similar confrontation of the sound of Macwhirr's voice with the sound of the storm this characteristic calmness is further perceived:

Jukes yelled "Are you there, sir?" and listened. Nothing. Suddenly the roar of the wind fell straight into his ear, but presently a small voice shoved aside the shouting hurricane quietly.
"You, Jukes?--Well?"¹

The Captain's identity here is presented as a sound which replaces another, supposedly stronger, sound. The noise of the "roar of the wind" which fills Jukes's ear is "shoved aside" by the sound of the quiet "small voice" inquiring: "You, Jukes?--Well?" Again Macwhirr is characterised as having

¹Ibid., p. 72.

the ability to penetrate the storm, the indomitability to be heard over the "shouting hurricane" without his trying to be equally loud. The captain's calmness is further established in contrast to his First mate's speech. Macwhirr, in the wheelhouse, calls down to the engine room by means of the ship's speaking tube and asks for Jukes. Jukes "sent up his words, tripping over each other, crowding the narrow tube" while Macwhirr, not hurriedly piling up sounds, is presented in terms of silence, "a silence of enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with a storm."¹ The unhurried, efficient manner of his voice reinforces one's impression of Macwhirr's strength and calmness. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and as is perhaps clear in this scene, the fact of Macwhirr's voice triumphing over the sound of the storm suggests a larger meaning. One possible interpretation is that Macwhirr is a man set against a fitful world. Here Conrad specifically delineates the test of his protagonist as that of a man within the world of dirty weather. The strength of this man is found in his being "some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes" or "a silence of enlightened comprehension dwelling alone." What is suggested, then, is that man, although frail, is, like the sound of his voice, also indomitable. It is important to point out here that Macwhirr would never identify himself in terms as abstract as "a silence of enlightened comprehension." In fact, it is only through his firm belief in a down-to-earth practical grappling with experience that survival comes. It is Conrad who is preoccupied with the abstract meaning of Macwhirr's value as a man of special ability while Macwhirr, rejecting the uncertain advice of the navigation text, prefers the measured facts of, for example, the falling barometer.

¹Ibid., p. 72.

Despite the captain's down-to-earth practicality Conrad continues to elevate him to the point where Macwhirr's voice assumes godlike attributes. It is when he begins to act that his voice is thus enhanced, characterized with unearthly features as the force of order begins actively to unite the crew around himself. Macwhirr slowly but surely brings the ship's men into harmony with each other. He questions Jukes about the whereabouts of the crew while the stormy sea, as if in a conscious attempt to repress any positive action, pounds the ship to the frightening accompaniment of "one of those wild and appalling shrieks that are heard at times passing mysteriously . . . in the steady roar of a hurricane. . . ."¹ In opposition to the power of this chaotic roar and shriek the sound of Macwhirr's voice penetrates once more to Jukes through the noise of the wind with a "strange effect of quietness: and this time with a kind of quasi-religious power "like the serene glow of a halo."² At this point another scene may be brought into consideration, the one in which Jukes panics when thrown about by the stormy sea. Mentally he has been crying, "My God! My God! My God! My God!"³ in his fear. Then he is washed up against the solid body of his captain whose physical presence, like his voice, is consistently a source of calm. Jukes cries out loud: "Is it you, sir?" Is it you, sir?"⁴ The strained voice of the captain answers like the infinitely distant voice of God. Thus Jukes . . . heard in answer a voice, as if crying far away, as if screaming to him fretfully from a very great distance, the one word "Yes!"⁵

¹Ibid., p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 46.

³Ibid., p. 42.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

The juxtaposition of the cries of ". . . My God!", ". . . Is it you, sir?" with the reply "Yes!" provides support for the idea that Conrad is presenting Macwhirr as a godlike figure. The effect on Jukes of Macwhirr here is such that instead of his participating mentally in a "revolt of misery and despair" Jukes "tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly."¹ It can be stated, then, with reference to the calming effect of Macwhirr's single word, that one way the man establishes order is through the sound of his voice whose effect on others reflects his almost superhuman steadfastness. At this point of his elevating Macwhirr, Conrad describes his voice almost as the reader now thinks of the captain. In answer to a question, his voice is heard in reply:

"Let's hope so!" it cried--small, lonely, and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear.²

Although one does not think of Macwhirr as small he does perceive that, like the sound of his voice, the captain approaches the godlike by being alone, strong, and unmoved. It is as if Conrad is saying that these are the necessary qualities of a man who can survive the audible inroads of destructive or oppressive nature. Although Macwhirr has nothing consciously to do with abstract visions his voice does sound a transcendent note of encouragement.

An important characteristic of the man who can meet life's test is suggested through a consideration of the sounds involved in Macwhirr's more intimate responses to the sea. As a sea-captain Macwhirr's response to the daily, usually uncomplicated information of the oceans he travels has been:

¹Ibid., p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 48.

one which Conrad portrays in the following way:

The China seas north and south are narrow seas. They are seas full of everyday, eloquent facts, such as islands, sandbanks, reefs, swift and changeable currents--tangled facts that nevertheless speak to the seaman in clear and definite language. Their speech appealed to Captain Macwhirr's sense of realities so forcibly that he had given up his state-room below and practically lived all his days on the bridge of his ship, often having his meals sent up, and sleeping at night in the chart-room.¹

Here the sea's daily "facts" are expressed to the captain in a "clear and definite language." Being a man preoccupied with duty, he listens to them and concludes from his interpretation that he must relinquish previous comforts involved in his eating and sleeping in order to be continually on the job. What is being shown here is that the captain listens to his reality, readily comprehending what he hears, and dutifully adjusting or adapting his life to that information. If one looks closely at this listener-speaker relationship it is possible to detect further information concerning the manner in which this type of man responds to his world.

Thus, for example, we discover more about Macwhirr from his next, more complicated response to the speech of the sea. There occurs a lull in the storm just before the onset of its final force. Macwhirr goes below to his cabin and sits down after striking a match and looking at the barometer.

He extended his hand to put back the matchbox in its corner by the shelf. There were always matches there--by his order. . . .

And of course on his side he would be careful to put it back in its place scrupulously. He did so now, but before he removed his hand it occurred to him that perhaps he would never have occasion to use that box any more . . . [H]is fingers closed again on the

¹Ibid., p. 15.

small object as though it had been the symbol of all these little habits that chain us to the weary round of life. He released it at last . . . listened for the first sounds of returning wind.

Not yet. He heard only the wash of water, the heavy splashes, the dull shocks of the confused seas boarding his ship from all sides. . . . But the quietude of the air was startlingly tense and unsafe, like a slender hair holding a sword suspended over his head.¹

Here when the captain listens to the sounds of the sea after relaxing his grip on the matchbox he is somewhat shaken. It was seen above that his response to the greater needs of his duty was immediate. Here he reveals his fidelity to the smaller needs of his regulated life at sea in his respect for the small details included in the system of order he has constructed and which provides part of the basis for his self-reliance. This "silent man whom the sea had never before put itself out to startle" is listening to a sea-language he has never heard. He listens tensely to the oppressive sounds of the "heavy splashes" and "dull shocks" and to the contrasting but antagonistic "quietude of the air." Indeed, having symbolically left himself unsupported by relinquishing the matchbox, Captain Macwhirr responds to these sounds with a faltering and "half aloud": "I shouldn't like to lose her."² The point here is that the sound of his faltering voice reveals his temporary feeling of insecurity as he confronts the storm sounds. The sound of his voice draws the reader's attention to the fact that something is amiss with the captain. Looking closer at the passage above, the reader finds what has been suggested; that Macwhirr's supporting sense of order is weakened. Now, seemingly talking to himself

¹Ibid., pp. 85-86.

²Ibid., p. 86.

and fatigued by his conflict with the storm he reaches for a drying towel:

There should have been a towel there. There was. Good. . . . He towelled himself with energy in the dark, and then remained motionless with the towel on his knees. A moment of stillness so profound that no-one could have guessed there was a man sitting in that cabin. Then a murmur arose.

"She may come out of it yet."¹

Here, his sense of the "fitness of things"² reassured, Macwhirr responds aloud with a more hopeful murmur. The captain with his hands now on "reality", the towel, responds vocally with confidence to his fitful world and again, therefore, "as if addressing another being"³ is in fact answering the sound of the sea. Macwhirr by establishing a pattern on which he can rely is encouraged when he finds his towel where it ought to be. It is the sound of this murmur that draws the reader's attention to the fact that Macwhirr's sense of order has been restored. When the reader wonders why Macwhirr sounds hopeful he then notices how the properly placed towel has effected this restoration. It may be said to be of the Captain's nature for him to rely upon the realities he organizes around himself to be there when needed. This is a man who cares about order; he is careful to create as far as he can a system of order about him; that order which he has himself created in turn sustains him.

From this one can turn for more information about the harmonizing power of Macwhirr to the effect of the sound of his voice on Jukes. For information here it is necessary to examine the scene in which Jukes is reduced to apathetic silence by the storm and to note how he is rescued from it by Macwhirr through the sound of his voice. The boatswain comes aloft to inform the captain about the fighting among the coolies. Jukes, meanwhile,

¹Ibid., p. 86.

²Ibid., p. 85.

³Ibid., p. 86.

has been totally isolated from others, although the captain and the boatswain are next to him:

Jukes to leeward could hear those two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing on a field.¹

His isolation is characterized by a reaction of indifference to what he hears:

Jukes remained indifferent, as if rendered irresponsible by the force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action vain.²

He is in a state of near-death, immobile, and certainly of no use to Macwhirr. This immobility is also one which blocks any interference by sound; he will not or cannot respond; he seeks the dangerous security of quietness. He is suffering that condition of "insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man's breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of earth--even before life itself--aspires to peace."³ Jukes thus presents a problem of communication which his captain must solve. Although the sound of Macwhirr's voice, specifically the "tone of deep concern" in his words "Jukes! Jukes!"⁴ does pierce the "hallucination of swift visions" controlling the mate's attention, he still has not vocalized a response out of his silent pessimism. However, the next reaction he makes to Macwhirr's voice is more positive:

It was the beginning of the end; and the note of busy concern in Captain Macwhirr's voice sickened him like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly.

The spell of the storm had fallen upon Jukes. He was penetrated by it, absorbed by it; he was rooted in it with a rigour of dumb attention. Captain Macwhirr persisted in his cries, but the wind

¹Ibid., p. 51.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 53.

⁴Ibid.

got between them like a solid wedge. He hung around Jukes's neck as heavy as a millstone, and suddenly the sides of their heads knocked together.

"Jukes! Mr. Jukes, I say!"¹

He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner, "Yes, sir."¹

Jukes craves peace but the peace he desires is an escape, the escape yearned for by a heart "corrupted by the storm."² He reacts to the sound of "busy concern" in his captain's voice and is finally forced to reply to its persistent presence. Now Jukes is returned to a more positive relationship with his captain. Thus it seems to be true that Macwhirr has a voice endowed with a practical power of communication. His strength is indicated through the sound of his voice when one considers how far it has reached into another man to bring him back to order.

Despite this improvement of Jukes's state of mind, Captain Macwhirr is still faced with the difficulty of arousing Jukes to activity. One of the more obvious powers of this man with the indomitable voice is the power to encourage or inspire others. Through this power, others are brought into tune with the captain and one of these tuned people is Jukes. In the violence of the storm, the Chinamen's boxes containing their pay money as well as their belongings have been broken apart. As a result of this there is a mad scramble among them for their silver. Now, in another wind-torn sentence Macwhirr orders Jukes to descend below-decks in order to discover what is happening to the Chinamen. His reason is that he "Can't have . . . fighting . . . board ship" although he would "much rather keep you here . . . case . . . I should . . . washed overboard myself. . . ."³

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 60.

Despite this logical reason Jukes is afraid, and surrounded by the noises of the storm, a "deadened screaming . . . at his elbow" and a thunderous "tumult"¹ over his head, he almost does not proceed to carry out what he believes to be an absurd demand. But the voice of the man who gives the First mate his order, encourages Jukes onward:

He had half a mind to scramble out again; but the remembrance of Captain Macwhirr's voice made this impossible. His orders were to go and see.²

Here the echo of Macwhirr's voice overcomes the temptation Jukes feels to weaken and disobey. Instead of giving way to inner chaos, Jukes is kept ordered and disciplined. Jukes is here harmonized by becoming tuned to his captain's desire. The voice of the captain is the unifying and harmonizing force.

As further proof of Macwhirr's ability to bring order through the inspirational power of the sound of his voice, it is helpful to examine how his crew, who have been complaining "like so many sick kids"³ are also brought into tune with him. While Captain Macwhirr is busy aloft in his wheelhouse, Jukes is busy below executing his order. After the establishment of the captain-officer relationship a significant personal strengthening occurs in Jukes. This change is instrumental in establishing a disciplined officer-crew relationship. The frightened below-decks crew has been clustered together and is watching Jukes on his way to and from an investigation of the boatswain's report of the fighting amongst the coolies. Suddenly Jukes orders them to go below to the 'tween decks

¹Ibid., p. 61.

²Ibid., p. 62.

³Ibid., p. 64.

to help him stop this fighting:

They [the crew] had already been excited and startled at all his comings and goings--by the fierceness and rapidity of his movements; and more felt than seen in his rushes, he appeared formidable --busied with matters of life and death that brooked no delay. At his first word he heard them drop into the bunker one after another obediently, with heavy thumps.¹

Fiercely and rapidly busied with "life and death" matters, Jukes exhibits a self-confident efficiency akin to his captain's now that his apathy has been replaced with a fresh inner strength. In the quotation above, at the sound of the "first word" of the encouraged First mate the crew are heard responding to his order with ready obedience. The captain's order is obeyed by Jukes and now the crew obey Jukes.

In studying the captain's ability to restore order on the ship, we may note with interest that one time it is not by paying attention to sound but by ignoring sound that the captain shows himself efficient and practical. The scene referred to here is the one in the wheelhouse, where the distraught helmsman has been caught between the responsibility of paying strict attention to steering the ship and the unnerving remarks of the second mate. When Macwhirr enters the wheelhouse he is confronted by the sounds of the insane ravings of the paranoiac second mate. Huddled in a corner, the self-pitying second mate voices his sorrow and rage while Macwhirr, wary of the effect of this on the helmsman, relieves him:

"Don't you pay any attention to what that man says." And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added, "He isn't on duty."²

The second mate, who has already exhibited his lack of fellowship by his

¹Ibid., p. 76.

²Ibid., p. 65.

unfriendly throaty noise, here has been frightening the dedicated helmsman with his utterances. Macwhirr advises the helmsman to ignore these sounds while at the same time he establishes marine decorum by justifying this move on the grounds of duty. Through his ignoring of irrelevant sound Macwhirr shows his ability to preserve an objective perspective where others cannot. By his ordering of the wheelhouse, Macwhirr's network of coherence grows.

To this point the character traits of Macwhirr have been examined in various areas involving sound. As well, some of the characteristics of his chaotic opposition were discerned by looking at the sounds of the storm and the sounds of the men aboard. It is obvious that the more reassuring traits of Macwhirr stand in opposition to those of the negative force. For example, the irritation and anger of the crew and officers were dissipated by Macwhirr's power to encourage and inspire. The confusion on the Nan-Shan was countered by Macwhirr's ability to keep himself free from panic and by his ability to create functional human relationships in the midst of general malfunction. The potentially demoralising near-insanity of the second mate is made ineffective by the strong-minded Macwhirr who easily ignores his ravings. The storm as an obstacle is met in various ways by Macwhirr. Primarily, its simple but forceful presence is met with an equally simple and forceful practicality, an ability to grapple with this experience of dirty weather directly, and an ability to adapt readily to the new reality of weather never before encountered. The damage done by the storm's tendency to impair communication and to isolate is repaired by the man's persistent determination to communicate despite the storm. The chaotic force of the

weather is met and undone through Macwhirr's inner calmness. This calmness is based partially on his self-structured system of order. Generally, then, Macwhirr is able to ensure survival for others and himself in an environment of great hazard. As Conrad wished, Macwhirr is able to bring peace out of the violence, to "harmonize all these violent noises."

Once the captain-officer and officer-crew relationships are reaffirmed, action is taken to quell the disturbance raised by the Chinamen on the ship. The turmoil below-decks is overcome. The significance of this is suggested in the change that follows in sounds:

When the wash of water rolling on the deck died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes . . . that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow; that a silence had fallen upon the ship. . . .¹

With the bringing of order among the coolies comes a moment when the storm itself seems to have ended. Here, Conrad is relating the storm within the ship to the storm outside and the way he develops the situation is consistent with his philosophy that men must calm their personal turbulence before they can turn to their external problems. Like Captain Macwhirr, men must have inner strength before they can be strong in their action with the rest of the world. It is not until Jukes gains his strength from Macwhirr that this kind of success against the coolies and the weather is possible.

At this point in the story, when the coolies have been subdued and the wind has died down, sounds hitherto drowned out in the uproar are heard again, the "deliberate throbs" of the engines, the "knockings" of fittings broken but still on board.² These are reassuring sounds, sounds of survival,

¹Ibid., p. 79.

²Ibid., p. 82.

of persistence. They are "small sounds" but they are yet heard; they have outlasted the "great uproar."¹ The "small sounds" of the ship remind us of the quietness of Macwhirr and reinforce our impression of how that quietness carries with it steadfastness of purpose and physical tenacity.

The storm has not yet been wholly met. The relative calm referred to above is a lull before the storm unleashes its final fury. Conrad does not describe this last part of the storm. His description, however, of the ship that meets that final fury is worth noting:

She moved slowly, breathing into the still core of the hurricane the excess of her strength in a white cloud of steam--and the deep-toned vibration of the escape was like the defiant trumpeting of a living creature of the sea impatient for the renewal of the contest.²

Before, Conrad has elevated Macwhirr's practicality and steadfastness, as seen through the sound of his voice, to heroic dimensions. Now the ship takes on similar dimensions of heroism in its uttered ability to meet the test. The sounds of the ship organized by Macwhirr to keep afloat become harmonic or musical; we have a reference to a "deep-toned vibration" and to the "defiant trumpeting" of the ship over the disharmony of chaos. Clearly, then, Conrad's use of sound in Typhoon does warrant being described as one of his effective artistic devices.

¹Ibid., p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 83.

CHAPTER III

HEART OF DARKNESS

In Conrad's Heart of Darkness the element of sound is both abundant and functional. Just as in his Typhoon it is possible for one to understand with additional clarity, through a study of the element of sound in the story, the character of the man who successfully meets life's test, it is also possible for one to understand Charlie Marlow in similar terms. The story is in part concerned with the personal experience of Marlow as he journeys to an ivory trading post deep in the African jungle. It is suggested in this chapter that much of Marlow's experience during his jungle pilgrimage is presented artistically to the reader by means of an emphasis on sound. It will become clear, too, it is hoped, that finding and expressing meaning through sound is definitely part of Conrad's design and not merely an idle critical dream. In a passage from his Author's Note to Heart of Darkness, a passage which we have already noted in the Introduction, Conrad expresses his desire to help his readers understand through sound the meaning of his theme:

That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.¹

Marlow, too, makes explicit references to the significance for him of sounds. Referring to the important quality of restraint, he speaks of the earth as "a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too . . . and not be contaminated."² His whole African journey, he tells us at one point, is present in his mind as

¹Joseph Conrad, Youth and Two Other Stories, ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1929), Vol. XVI, p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 117.

sounds, as voices:

He [Kurtz] was very little more than a voice. And I heard--him--it--this voice--other voices--all of them were so little more than voices--and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices--even the girl herself--now--.¹

Let us, to begin with, look at some sounds which operate at a simple level in the story, sounds whose meaning for Marlow is immediate and obvious, but which contribute to the characterisation of his experience in Africa. Marlow talks of hearing the jungle whisper: "Come and find out."² This whisper of this enigmatic continent is the sound of temptation. So too is the sound of drums, the sound of temptation. Marlow hears them while on his two hundred mile tramp to the Central Station, a "sinking swelling"sound, a "tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive and wild. . . ."³ This is the sound that drew Kurtz back on his hands and knees to his jungle world. It is a sound, too, that is heard over and over again in the story, one of the sounds whereby Conrad realized his intention to give his theme "a sinister resonance . . . a continued vibration that . . . would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck."

In addition to these recurring sounds there are other sounds which Conrad used that contribute to the characterization of Marlow's experience. Marlow is very aware of the empty explosive sound of the Company's blasting at the first station. His description of this sound and its

¹Ibid., p. 115.

²Ibid., p. 60.

³Ibid., p. 71.

effect on the immediate area strongly suggests the feelings it aroused in him:

A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.¹

There is misdirection present because a cliff suffers an explosion when it is not an obstacle. There is fruitlessness involved because although a horn toots and people run as a heavy detonation rumbles through the land no change appears on what is being blasted. For Marlow there is also a feeling of confusion in these empty, loud, destructive sounds which make a lot of noise yet seem to result in no direct accomplishment.

Marlow's experience is also partly characterized by what he hears from the mouths of the Central Station "pilgrims". Although conversational material is possibly not valid material to include there are certain utterances of the pilgrims which can safely be examined as distinct sounds. For example, one sound coming from the pilgrims expresses a kind of primitive adulation of material gain. Basically lacking a sense of direction the pilgrims, "strolling aimlessly about"² reveal their primitive greed in their worshipful talk of ivory:

The word "ivory" rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all. . . .³

The ringing tones of the sound reveal the intensity with which it is uttered. The whispered tone lends an air of awe and a sense of mystery to its articulation while the sighing modulation affirms the pilgrims' love for the

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Ibid., p. 76.

³Ibid.

ivory. Another setting is provided for the sounds of the pilgrims where Marlow, attempting to re-establish order on board his steamer after a native attack, hygienically rolls the body of his dead helmsman overboard:

All the pilgrims and the manager were then congregated on the awning-deck about the pilot-house, chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies, and there was a scandalized murmur at my heartless promptitude.¹

These sounds of the pilgrims indicate their inclination to panic as well as their inability to comprehend practicality. Their inclination to panic, and their excitement or fear are suggested by their chattering bird-like tones. Their inability to comprehend Marlow's practicality is conveyed by the self-righteous tone of their "scandalized murmur." In yet another sound heard by Marlow from the pilgrims their love of destruction is found. When Marlow has forced the attacking natives to retreat the pilgrims voice their disappointment at not being credited with bringing about their withdrawal:

The retreat, I maintained . . . was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.²

The pilgrims' primitive or animalistic response to admonishment is indicated by the howling sound of their protest. The fact that this howling protestation is also of an indignant nature reveals their obvious frustration at being rebuked. Marlow's dislike of the pilgrims is both confirmed and further aroused by the sounds of their magpie-like chattering, of their "scandalized murmur", and of their "howls" of "indignant protests."

¹Ibid., p. 120.

²Ibid., p. 121.

A very interesting cluster of sounds which are included as part of Marlow's experience arise at the Central Station. They range in tones from an unharmonic screech of pain to the low sound of suffering. The immediate setting for these sounds is the unexplained fire in the Station and its aftermath. At the end of this scene Marlow experiences a feeling of being threatened by sounds, a feeling which is carefully built up to by the sounds of the Station which Marlow hears:

Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart--its mystery. . . .¹

The silence is disquieting, but so are the sounds originating from an apparently mystifying fire:

A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly.² Nearby, "black figures" are strolling about "listlessly", pouring water on the fire, "whence proceeded a sound of hissing."³ The sibilant sound of hissing with its snake-like association arouses a feeling of evil. The beaten native is heard from again:

The hurt nigger moaned feebly . . . and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there.⁴

Marlow quits the scene. He leaves because both the negro's moan and his "deep sigh" are sounds that threaten Marlow who moves from them. Although it is inconsistent for a man of Marlow's humaneness to move from a sighing

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Ibid., p. 76.

³Ibid., p. 80

⁴Ibid.

sound . . . if that sigh is a plea for aid, it is not inconsistent with his character for Marlow to remove himself from what registers as threatening. Sound here is dangerous because it threatens to undo a man. Sound here, then, acts as a force itself.

It is interesting at this point to digress briefly to what may be a possible insight concerning a similar quality appearing in two different sounds. Conrad has presented the brickmaker of the Central Station in a way such that his speech is reminiscent of the sound of the rapids of the first station. The first time Marlow hears the sound of these rapids it is associated with devastation:

A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation.¹

But more importantly Marlow senses in this sound a lack of control:

The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove . . . with a mysterious sound--as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.²

His second reference to the sound of the rapids suggests an uncontrolled, potentially destructive energy. Lack of control is also indicated here in the feeling of great speed which is articulated by the rapids' "headlong rushing" sound, a sound which arouses the startling idea that it is as if one could hear the "tearing pace of the launched earth." Now, when Marlow meets the brickmaker he seems to be reminded by the brickmaker's speech of the sound of the rapids. The lack of control he sensed before is reflected

¹Ibid., p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 66.

in the brickmaker's speech. The brickmaker, he says, "talked precipitately" while Marlow "let him run on."¹ Just as Marlow was aware before of a force out of control, so he senses a confusion about this man who incoherently "jabbered about himself."² The "papier-mache Mephistopheles"³ "talked fluently"⁴ in a continuous rush of energy which, unlike the energy of the native paddlers Marlow encountered earlier, is not directed.

Before the discussion turns to the larger issues which confront Marlow deep in the jungle it is timely, perhaps, to consider here briefly an ironic use of sound we find in Heart of Darkness. This use of sound is significant because it conveys very subtly and intriguingly the feeling of sinister and ludicrous unreality which is part of Marlow's experience on his voyage. It is by creating a feeling of irony between sound and expected sound or expected meaning that Conrad conveys to the reader Marlow's sensation of encountering the unexpected.

The first occasion of the use of sound for ironical effect arises in Marlow's interview with the Company's president. One would imagine that a company president, especially one with his "grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions"⁵ would present an imposing figure in terms of speech

¹Ibid., p. 81.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 83.

⁵Ibid., p. 56.

and physical bearing. Yet instead of hearing the clear and forceful tones of a magnate's voice the reader is told that the "great man himself" "murmured vaguely."¹ Ironically the sound of this president denotes vagueness where there ought instead to be the volume of hearty encouragement. Conrad backs this ironical sound presentation up with an equally ironical physical presentation of the great man as a "pale plumpness in a frock coat."² This voice tone of the Company's president is an unpromising presage at the start of Marlow's intercourse with the Company. This presage is borne out in other ironical sounds of Company members. Above, the irony stems from the disparity between the sound heard and the sound expected to be heard. Later, when Marlow is disconcerted by his conversation with and examination by the old doctor of the Company, the ironic use of sound originates in the disparity between the voice tones of the doctor and the meaning of what he is saying. On being examined by the doctor, Marlow is at first "rather surprised"³ at what the doctor says and how he says it:

"Good, good for there," he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head.⁴

The doctor mumbles after the ominous hint in his reference "for there." He speaks with a strange but "certain eagerness" in his curious desire to measure Marlow's head. Then, Marlow feels "very annoyed" when the doctor asks in a "matter-of-fact tone" of voice the hardly matter-of-fact

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 57.

⁴Ibid.

question: "Ever had any madness in your family?"¹ This imperturbable voice tone in juxtaposition to a very perturbing question is a source of irony which contributes to Marlow's feeling about the strangeness of what confronts him.

While on his way to his job Marlow's contact with reality, his sense of belonging "to a world of straightforward facts"² is disturbed by the ironical scene of a French man-of-war boat shelling the bush of the coastline for no apparent reason. The visual irony is reinforced by an irony of unexpected sound:

. . . [T]he muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull. . . . In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech--and nothing happened. . . . There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding. . . ."3

It is the irony of the "Pop" and the "feeble screech" sounds which contributes to Marlow's overall characterization of this scene as incomprehensible and insane. Certainly one expects more than a playful "pop" out of a gun on a man-of-war. This sound points to an emptiness or unexpected void where one feels there might have been some kind of stuff. This weak sound is appropriately accompanied by the ironical "feeble screech" of the gun's shell. The shell does not streak away in a fierce roar, as one might expect. The sound it makes is merely a "feeble" screech. Later Marlow mentally equates the

¹Ibid., p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 61.

³Ibid., pp. 61-62.

sound of this firing ship with the sound of objectless blasting:

Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen. . . . It was the same kind of ominous voice. . . .¹

This "ominous voice" speaks of the presence of something very wrong in both the report and the firing. The emptiness involved in the "pop" and "feeble screech" sounds can be linked with a feeling Marlow comes to have about the men who have come to Africa. He feels that they are hollow, as hollow, for example, as the "papier-mache" brickmaker. Some of the sounds he hears, as these above, seem to reflect this emptiness or lack of substance.

When Marlow hears the ironical sound of the "rhythmical clinking" of the chain holding the native "criminals"² together one senses again Marlow's reaction to something wrong below the surface, in this case to a kind of extremism:

. . . [E]ach [native] had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.³

This sound of a measured beat creates irony through its suggestion of an attempt at discipline or order that is pushed too far. The clinking may be musically in time but in light of the fact that the men who are held prisoners by the chain are oppressed and collared victims of so-called civilization the beat's timing is more funereal than anything else. The sound of clinking metal is a heavy one and suggestive of oppressiveness. Simply, discipline is pushed too far and thus where there is rhythm in the sound

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

there is also the binding clinking of the bights. This kind of excess is parallel to other examples of extremism which Marlow is to come across in his journey. On this note, let us terminate this brief consideration of how Conrad's ironic use of sound contributes to one's understanding of Marlow's experience.

Marlow's prolonged stay at the Central Station is a very uneasy one for him. Although he has the work on his boat to busy himself with, the brooding presence of the silent jungle is always sensed. The very silence of the jungle is felt as a threat by Marlow. The sounds which occur at the moment of mutual elation that Marlow and his boiler-maker experience at their thought of obtaining the rivets needed to complete the boat repairs are set against the silence of the jungle:

We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station.¹

What these sounds are keeping away is the sound of silence, a silence ever ready to take over:

We stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land.²

Thus it is as if the silence is awed by a "frightful clatter" whose strength is denoted by its "thundering" volume. Both the loud crashes of personal industry and the "reasonable"³ voice tone of the boiler-maker are useful in preventing the return of the silence. The strength of the sounds here is reflecting the deep-seated elation which these dancing men who believe in work and time experience. The silence cannot be eliminated by these sounds

¹Ibid., p. 86.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

forever but they do keep it at bay. Marlow and his mechanic literally drown out the wave of silence in order not to be drowned by it.

Other sounds which are worth while studying for their contribution to the reader's understanding of Marlow's jungle experience are those emitted by his boat. For example, there is the sound of the beat of the stern-wheel of his steamer:

The word ivory would ring in the air for a while--and on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern-wheel.¹

Marlow encounters conflict on his way to pick up Kurtz. Yet it is as if he were being assisted by certain sounds in maintaining his progress. Here the wheel's sound is indicative of strength. The sound of the "ponderous beat" of the wheel is in conflict both with the ringing of the word "ivory" in the air and the high jungle walls' hollow echo of the beat. The durability of this sound is seen in comparison to the brevity of the ringing of the word "ivory", which only lasts "for a while." It is also presented in contrast to the "hollow clap" sound which the river banks return. His mention of hollowness of sound is related to Marlow's awareness and disapproval of the inner emptiness of certain men he encounters. The strength of the stern-wheel sound originates in what this sound stands for. The beat is ponderous yet weighty in its laboured efforts to forward the steamer's progress into the jungle. The next boat-sound to be examined in its conflict with other sounds shares this kind of strength. This is the sound of the ship's stem

¹Ibid., p. 95.

whistle which despite its apparent disharmony is nevertheless a helpful sound. Kurtz's native followers launch an attack against Marlow's steamer. The air is filled with yelling, with the spears and arrows of the natives, and with the bullets of the pilgrims' rifles. When the scene reaches its high point of confusion Marlow brings to his assistance the sound of the steam-whistle:

. . . I felt above my head for the line of the steam-whistle, and jerked out screech after screech hurriedly. The tumult of angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then . . . went out . . . a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair. . . .¹

Obviously the screech of the steam-whistle is not an harmonic sound. However, like the sound of the stern-wheel, it too comes from Marlow's boat. To the natives the sound of the screech is fearful or awesome and their sounds of "angry and warlike yells" are silenced by what is strange to them. Realizing their imminent loss of Kurtz, the natives vocalize their fear and despair in a "prolonged wail." Soon all sounds of attack cease after the screeching and the only sound left is the steady beat of the stern-wheel as a suggestion of the determination to progress that is part of Marlow's strength:

There was a great commotion in the bush; the shower of arrows stopped, a few dropping shots rang out sharply--then silence, in which the languid beat of the stern-wheel came plainly to my ears.²

The sound of the progress of the ship into the jungle suggests a slowness of physical movement, as indeed Marlow's progress is painstakingly laborious, but a movement which is also steady and constant. The sound of the steam-whistle whose harsh screech registers strength in its instantaneous silencing

¹Ibid., p. 112.

²Ibid.

of the yells of anger constitutes, along with the determined and steady beat of the wheel, the victory for Marlow. Proof of the strength of the stern-wheel sound is also suggested in the fear of the natives at the steamer and its beating sounds as a powerful force:

I steamed up a bit, when swung downstream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce, river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail. . . . [The natives] shouted periodically strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany.¹

Conrad portrays the natives' fear by revealing their interpretation of the steamer as a "river demon," a god to be feared, who possess a "terrible tail." Their anger and fear are vocalized into sounds which Marlow cannot understand but which he nevertheless senses as "satanic." When Kurtz's native lover appears and excites this evil protest against the demon that is taking him away, the murmur rises to a loud and hurried protestation:

She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterances.²

Against these sounds and also to prevent the pilgrims on board from spreading destruction Marlow uses the strength of the screech of the steam-whistle:

I pulled the string of the whistle, and I did this because I saw the pilgrims on deck getting out their rifles. . . . At the sudden screech there was a movement of abject terror through that wedged mass of bodies. . . . I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound.³

¹Ibid., pp. 145-146.

²Ibid., p. 146.

³Ibid.

The fearful screech breaks up the threatening mass of natives and prevents any killing. This reinforces the idea that the sound of the steam-whistle is a helpful instrument on Marlow's boat, a boat whose sounds contribute to Marlow's success against various obstacles to his progress.

Turning from the sounds of Marlow's boat, we find sounds emanating from the object of his journey, Kurtz himself. The sound of Marlow's voice is heard in argument with that of Kurtz. Marlow has slipped into the jungle night after Kurtz, cut him off in a wide semi-circle, and confronted him:

"Go away--hide yourself," he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. . . . "Do you know what you are doing?" I whispered.

"Perfectly," he answered, raising his voice for that single word; it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking trumpet. . . . "You will be lost," I said--"utterly lost." I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost. . . .

"I had immense plans," he muttered irresolutely. . . . [H]e pleaded, in a voice of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. . . . "Your success in Europe is assured in any case," I affirmed steadily.¹

Kurtz is one of the men suffering from inner emptiness, an inability to help himself from participating in a life of obedience to impulse. He has not the strength to resist. While his "profound tone" here dwindle to the faintness of a distant hail, gradually to an irresolute mutter, and finally to a longing or wistful sound, Marlow's voice registers in a tone of steady affirmation. The strength signified by this firm voice sound originates in Marlow's belief in a morality which has been greatly shocked by Kurtz, who has no such belief, a lack signified in his irresolute voice sound. Also, perhaps, the steadiness of Marlow's voice reminds one of the steadiness of

¹Ibid., pp. 143-144.

of the beat of the stern-wheel whose constant presence reflects Marlow's determination to keep progressing.

A very important point to note in a discussion of the relation of the use of sound to the meaning of Marlow's experience in Heart of Darkness is that even the portrayal of Kurtz, one of the hollow men, involves sound. It is especially clear here how a study of sound facilitates one's understanding of what Conrad is portraying. The fundamental sound dealt with here is that of a whisper:

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude. . . .¹

Here the whisper is the vocalization of the wilderness. The vengeful whisper which echoes deep within Kurtz shows his internal emptiness. Kurtz is vulnerable because he is hollow:

They [the shrunken heads in front of Kurtz's hut] only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him, some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. . . and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core . . . [second ellipses Conrad's].²

Kurtz cannot help being fascinated or tempted by the sound of the whisper because his inner emptiness allows the whisper to become a loud echo. As was briefly noted above, hollowness of sound is related to personal or inner emptiness. Here it is felt that since Kurtz, being "hollow at the core",

¹Ibid., p. 131.

²Ibid.

lacks the inner strength necessary to catch and muffle the tempting sound of the whisper, the echo is produced.

The whispered truths Marlow is referring to here include those of Kurtz's primeval humanity, his basic lusts and impulses which he shares with all men and which all men must recognize and resist if they are to be more than savages. These are the sounds of truths which were noted at the beginning of this chapter, truths that must be responded to and met without one's becoming contaminated. But Kurtz does not have enough in-born strength "under his magnificent eloquence" to resist contamination, and his distance from the solidity of a man like Marlow is measured by the volume of the echo reverberating within him.

It is also the sound of Kurtz's whisper of "The horror! The horror!"¹ that comes back to Marlow twice while he is with the Intended, Kurtz's fiancee:

It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush. . . . And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there . . . those broken phrases came back to me, were heard again in their ominous and terrifying simplicity. . . . I seemed to hear the whispered cry, "The horror! The horror!"²

And later Marlow unwittingly tells the Intended that he was with Kurtz at his death:

... "I heard his very last words. . . ." I stopped in a fright [second ellipses Conrad's].
... I was on the point of crying to her, "Don't you hear them?" The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us in a whisper that seemed to dwell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. "The horror! The horror!"³

¹Ibid., p. 149.

²Ibid., p. 156.

³Ibid., p. 161.

As the wilderness threatens, the whispered cry sounds in Marlow's memory. While the tension increases for Marlow the surrounding atmosphere seems to vocalize the menace of the horror in a "persistent whisper." Moreover, this sound contributes to the sinister resonance Conrad wanted his theme to have. The sound of the whispered cry is distinct and sinister and is remembered by the reader as the more or less outstanding vibrating note of the tale. Along this line of thought it is interesting to know that Ford Madox Ford in his book on Conrad shows Conrad's interest in both the sound and meaning of the phrase:

Conrad moreover had for long intended to end the story with the words: "The horror! The horror!" "L'horreur" having been the last words of Kurtz; but he gave that up. The accentuation of the English word was different from the French; the shade of meaning too.¹

Although Conrad did not strike the final note of the story with the sound of this whispered cry this does not prevent the imaginative reader from hearing its echo in his memory as it is heard in Marlow's.

Another sound which has significance for Marlow as part of his jungle world experience is the sound of drums which was mentioned before. This sound besides sharing with the whisper sound in the establishment of the theme's sinister resonance also gives rise to a feeling of uncertainty in Marlow. Listening to the sound of drums Marlow is prompted to consider the threatening ambiguity it signifies:

At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering high over our heads. . . . Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell.²

¹Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, (London: Duckworth and Company, 1924), p. 159.

²Conrad, p. 95.

For a man like Marlow who prefers to know the exact reality in things this uncertainty of meaning contributes to his general distrust of his environment and thereby to the foreboding quality of the tale. But later this sound becomes a sound of temptation, although not for Marlow. When Kurtz attempts to escape back to his natives the sound of drums fills the night:

The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration.¹

Yet, for Marlow the steady, muffled sound of this drum signifies no temptation or danger. Aided by the "steady droning sound" of the natives, a sound like the "humming of bees"² this monotonous sound relaxes Marlow. But while Marlow is relaxed, Kurtz, lying dying in the flickering candle-light has his "brutal instincts" and his "monstrous passions"³ re-awakened and is tempted by the throb of the drums that beat out the wilderness rhythm. Marlow's response is instead to a test whereby he must go out into the jungle night to fulfill loyally his responsibility to this "nightmare of [his] choice",⁴ thereby to save both Kurtz and himself from the former's return to his world of immorality.

Finally, when Marlow goes to his interview with the Intended this sound of drums is echoed in his mind as part of his vision of his past experience:

The vision seemed to enter the house with me--the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends,

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Ibid., pp. 140-141.

³Ibid., p. 144.

⁴Ibid., p. 141.

the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart--the heart of a conquering darkness.¹

Here the sound of drums becomes the sound of the heartbeat of the wilderness, the throb to which Kurtz responded. Thus from Marlow's responses and from Kurtz's as well it can be seen how the drum sound contributes to the tale through its roles as a threat and a tempter; it is, too, the central sound of the wilderness. Like the whispered cry of "The horror! The horror!" this sound of drums lingers in the reader's mind, carrying with it that "sinister resonance" Conrad sought.

Now that it has been seen that sound is one medium through which some of the message of the story is communicated it is time to complete this discussion with a closer look at Marlow's character using the help of references to sound. It is possible to see in Marlow's responses to sound aspects of his character. There are not many sounds to turn to for this information in Heart of Darkness but those that are present are straightforward and significant.

As the steamer is going slowly down the river the sounds of the natives on shore have a significance for Marlow. Listening to the sounds of these natives Marlow admits to the evidence of his basic humanity:

Well, you know, that was the worst of it--this suspicion of their not being inhuman. . . . They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.²

¹Ibid., pp. 155-156.

²Ibid., p. 96.

What Marlow is thrilling to, is admitting quite candidly to himself, is the common bond of humanity between himself and the on-shore natives whose way of life is reflected in the sound of "this wild and passionate uproar." By responding frankly to this truth Marlow is admitting his own potential for wildness. Because of his concern for self-knowledge the psychologically sound man arrives at the knowledge of his reality as a human being, his personal truth. Further on in this passage it is found that not only does Marlow admit that there is truth in the sound of the uproar, he also asserts the need to respond to what it means about his nature:

Ugly. Yes it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you . . . could comprehend.¹

If a man has strength enough he must admit to himself that he is hearing in this sound an awful truth. The reason that Marlow sees this need, beyond the desire to prove he has the strength, is that there is a meaning to be heard in this terribly frank sound. As shall be seen below, Marlow seeks meaning for its own value. Continuing on again in this passage one finds that a man's honesty in meeting the truth of the sound must be allied with a comment upon what he hears. Just as the truth must be heard so must be heard a statement of criticism which stems from a man's personal strength:

But he must at least be as much of a man as those on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn strength. . . . [Y]ou want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row--is there? Very well; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 97.

Marlow hears a meaning or appeal in the sound of a fiendish row, admits to the fiendish truth of that sound, and finally comments about what he hears. His is a personal articulation whose sound cannot be silenced. Marlow is not the kind of man to look on and make no sound. Thus the sound of the uncivilized natives, their "wild and passionate uproar", their noise of "terrible frankness", their "fiendish row" is central to a discovery of the need of a man of Marlow's stature to know his human reality; that is, the reader is made aware of Marlow's manly honesty in admitting the truth and of his inner strength which supports him in the face of good or evil.

Closely related to Marlow's response to the wild uproar is his awareness of the threat of absolute silence:

. . . [H]ow can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude--utter solitude without a policeman--by the way of silence--utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back on your own innate strength. . . .¹

The sound of the silence of illimitable freedom where one cannot hear the sound of a neighbourly warning voice and where one cannot hear the whisper of the public voice is the sound of solitude. It was shown above that the sound of the jungle silence must be kept at bay with the sounds of personal effort. This sound of solitude must be countered by a man's inner strength, the same strength shown in Marlow's response to the sound of truth in the howl of the natives. Thus ultimately Marlow may have no one's voice to listen to and rely upon but his own.

¹Ibid., p. 116.

While most of the sounds of the jungle are threatening, for example that of the wild uproar of the natives or the sound of silence, Marlow does detect a few sounds that are reassuring. The nature of these sounds and Marlow's response to them again provide a measure of insight into both the kind of man he is and his needs. There is, for example, Marlow's response to the sound of the surf when he is en route to Africa and is describing its coastline:

The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning.¹

Clearly Marlow experiences solitude being cut off from his fellow men though among them and being at a distance from the "truth of things." What dispels this feeling of solitude is the "positive" sound of the surf. Fundamentally appealing to Marlow in this sound of the surf is its obviousness of reason and of meaning. Reason and meaning are important to him. In a state of solitude, then, a state in which he is threatened by a sense of unreality, Marlow is able to preserve himself in part by turning to the voice of the surf, a voice "like the speech of a brother." Part of the appeal to Marlow in the sound of the surf would be its regularity of beat. To a man who stands for certainty and who shuns ambivalence any sound must be appealing that approaches the measured reality of time such as the naturally regular rhythm of the ocean surf.

¹Ibid., p. 61.

From the moment he has begun his journey, Marlow has been placed in situations that have been jarring to his imagination. His response to the native paddlers is similar to his response to the steady voice of the surf:

Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang . . . they had faces like grotesque masks--these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, . . . an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. . . . They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts. . . .¹

For Marlow here the shouting and singing represent a brief return to reality. Just as out of the steady rhythm of the surf came a comforting sound, so too out of the "intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf" comes the comforting sound of the voices of the native paddlers, sounds which represent their meaningful work in life. What Marlow thus approves of in what he hears is a directed energy of movement, a movement which parallels that of the regular surf whose voice is a "positive pleasure." For Marlow then as he hears in the sound of the natives something of reality, something of energetic direction there is meaning in the singing, shouting sounds; they participate in the harmony of the order he prefers in that they are a musical expression of real life.

This brings the discussion of Heart of Darkness to sounds which at first glance do not seem fundamentally meaningful but are, nevertheless, functional in revealing more of Marlow's character. Delayed by a lack of rivets with which to make final repairs on his boat and feeling very uncomfortable under

¹Ibid.

the influence of the Central Station environment, Marlow turns to his dry-docked boat for solace:

It was a great comfort to turn . . . to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steam-boat. I clambered on board. She rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin kicked along a gutter. . . . I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her.¹

Marlow walks on his boat creating a sound that resembles a carefree youth's kicking of an empty tin can down a street. What Conrad is pointing to with these sounds is Marlow's happiness. Happiness for Marlow is derived very specifically here out of the work he is doing on his boat. Just as the frightful clatter of the dance of elation represented the sounds of personal industry keeping back the sound of jungle silence and just as the singing and shouting of the native paddlers represented the sounds of their meaningful work in life so too does the ringing sound of his boat under his feet represent the pleasure Marlow finds in doing a job whereby he can find himself. Happy in that he has this opportunity to find out about himself his sounds are carefree.

If a sound is associated with happiness in work it is also possible for Conrad to use a sound in order to embody the failure of a seaman to carry out his job well:

After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that's supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump--eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it--years after--and go hot and cold all over.²

¹Ibid., p. 85.

²Ibid., p. 94.

It is the sound of this thump that means both a scraped boat-keel and failure as a captain. The sound of the thump echoes in one's conscience puncturing an almost happy self-confidence with memories of a single failure. Thus Marlow seeks to be continually efficient in his work or he will suffer terribly.

These then are most of the sounds and Marlow's responses to them whose examination enables one to gain insight into some of the fundamental characteristics of the man. They include: the sound of the native uproar, the wild and passionate honesty of which revealed the need of Marlow to be equally honest about admitting his primeval humanity and whose terrible and fiendish power was met by his inner strength; the sound of solitude; the sound of the voice of the surf which pointed to Marlow's preference for reason and meaning; the sound of the native paddlers whose singing and shouting denoted primarily his love of directed energy and of the reality of life; and the sounds of Marlow's walking on his boat which suggested how efficient work brought him contentment.

Through a look at another sound, that of the whispered cry of the judgement of Kurtz, it is found that one is given insight into the nature of the values Marlow seeks in Kurtz's judgement-statement:

This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. . . . He had summed up, he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth. . . .¹

¹Ibid., p. 151.

The varying levels of tones in the sound of Kurtz's cry reveal what Marlow values. The sound has candour or frankness, possibly the same strength of frankness as the sound of the native uproar. It has a "vibrating note of revolt", the same kind of insistence on being heard despite the presence of evil which Marlow has already revealed. The sound of this cry reveals the truth, the reality which Marlow longs to hear. Thus the sound of the whispered cry of "The horror!" "The horror!" is meaningful to Marlow because he hears what he holds dear in its varying tonal modulations. Marlow's interest in this vibrating whispered revolt shows his belief that what is true must be recognized even if the truth is a frightening horror. It is with this ability to meet and tolerate life's conditions that the self-sufficient man survives. A man who is strong in himself can meet the test of the truth or of temptation and not fail. He has inner stuff, restraint, and among other things can put up "with sounds."

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, . . . and not be contaminated.¹

This completes the discussion through a focus on sound, of some of Marlow's experience in Heart of Darkness. It has been shown how Conrad's theme has been given a "sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration" in the context of the story. An attempt has been made to understand the nature of Marlow's experience through an examination of some of the sounds which affect him. Finally, the character of Conrad's

¹Ibid., p. 117.

central figure here was partially defined with the help of a study of relevant sounds. By means of various sounds, then, Conrad is assisted in bringing the story of Marlow's voyage to life in the reader's imagination. With these things in mind it is possible to conclude exactly as was premissed, that the element of sound is both abundant and functional in Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

CHAPTER IV

ALMAYER'S FOLLY

In turning to Almayer's Folly, we are reminded that just as a study of sound was helpful in delineating the characters of dependable men like Captain Macwhirr and Marlow, so it is helpful in a study of a man who fails the tests life brings to him. A study of the use of sound in the presentation of an unheroic Conradian protagonist, Kaspar Almayer, shows again how effective this use of sound is as an artistic tool.

Almayer's Folly is the story of a man who is basically a dreamer and ultimately a failure. The story focusses mostly on the last half of Almayer's life while information about his youth is provided through flashbacks. The reader is informed that Almayer has been given ownership of an unsuccessful trading post and been married to a Malay woman whom he dislikes and who in turns looks upon him with derision as the unwilling partner in a forced marriage arranged by one Tom Lingard, a trader and treasure hunter who has long since disappeared. Lingard had promised great riches for Almayer through the marriage, but with the exception of his half-caste daughter Nina whom he truly loves and includes in his daydreams of wealth, no riches have ever come to Almayer. Nina, however, meets and loves Dain Maroola, a Malay trader of noble blood, whom Almayer has helped and from whom he expects help in an expedition to find Lingard's gold. When Dain gets into trouble with the Dutch authority for smuggling gunpowder, his death by drowning is staged by Mrs. Almayer and Nina to protect his life. Almayer, however, believes him dead. Dain and Nina run away. Almayer,

informed by Taminah, a slave girl who is in love with Dain and jealous of Nina, frantically attempts to salvage his fading dreams of gold and of having Nina always with him by chasing the couple. When he confronts them his failure as a father is affirmed and he is left a broken man whose life constitutes a series of dreams turned nightmares.

Right from the opening paragraph of Chapter One, sound is used by Conrad in presenting his story. Leaning on the balustrade of his verandah at sunset, Almayer is abruptly brought out of his dream of gold by his wife as she calls to him:

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of a splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon.¹

The outstanding characteristic of the sound of Mrs. Almayer's voice is its shrillness which alone would make it repulsive to Almayer's ears. But besides this the shrillness of sound supports the fact that being jarred back to the "unpleasant realities" of the present is painful for him. Almayer is a dreamer and we see that for a dreamer like him this encroachment of reality is hard to bear.

Almayer's dream is the dream of gold and his whole life has become oriented about it:

. . . gold he had failed to secure; . . . gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He

¹Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly, ("Canterbury Edition of Complete Works"; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), Vol. XI, p. 3.

absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power . . . in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. . . . All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return.¹

This particular dream is the product of a lifetime of visions and quickened fancies. It is useful, then, to examine Almayer's youth before proceeding to a study of him as he is exposed to his losses. By understanding something of what excited him as a young man his later conduct becomes clearer. As a young man he worked in Macassar in one of the merchant Hudig's warehouses. Almayer at this time was an optimist "ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would."² At Hudig's he worked in a pleasant environment where money and goods were abundant. The gaining of gold is already the basis of his absorbing dream, and it is interesting to note the appearance of the sound of money in a scene from his younger days in the warehouse:

At the upper end, . . . there was a larger space railed off, well lighted; there the noise was subdued by distance, and above it rose the soft and continuous clink of silver guilders which other discreet Chinamen were counting and piling up. . . .

In that clear space Almayer worked at his table. . . .³

The sound of the money is pleasantly "soft" and its abundance is revealed in the sound of its "continuous clink." This money sound contributed to his optimism at that time. His optimism, however, was not accompanied by a down-to-earth perception of the way things are. That he lacked the practical approach to life is suggested by the way he interpreted other sounds in the

¹Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²Ibid., p. 5.

³Ibid., pp. 5-6.

warehouse:

Often of an evening, in the silence of the thin deserted warehouse, Almayer putting away his papers before driving home with Mr. Vinck, . . . would pause listening to the noise of a hot discussion in the private office, would hear the deep and monotonous growl of the Master [old Hudig], and the roared-out interruptions of Lingard-- two mastiffs fighting over a marrowy bone. But to Almayer's ears it sounded like a quarrel of Titans--a battle of the gods.¹

Almayer, easily awed by Lingard's boldness and amazed at his familiarity with the Master, had previously let his imagination run carefree over the knowledge of Lingard's supposed huge profits. Thus he translates in his imagination the almost bestial sounds of Hudig's "deep and monotonous growl" and of Lingard's "roared-out interruptions" into the sounds of a divine quarrel, "a battle of the gods." His lack of practical foresight is indicated in his distorted perception of these men as "Titans while old Hudig was eventually to go bankrupt and Lingard, the "Rajah-Laut" or "King of the Sea" and fierce master of the brig Flash, was to disappear in Europe as an old man in a scrambling search for money with which to finance the realization of his dream of unearthed wealth, the dream Almayer inherits.

As Almayer ages he becomes inflexible about his dream and his plans for obtaining wealth. Both his inflexibility and his alienation from his wife are revealed in his self-willed deafness to her attempts to change his plans:

The white man himself was impenetrable--impenetrable to persuasion, coaxing, abuse; to soft words and shrill revilings; to desperate beseechings or murderous threats. . . .²

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 39.

He is deaf to the whole range of her pleas from the sound of her "soft words" to the sound of her "shrill revilings" as well as to the various voice tone modulations in her "desperate beseechings" and "murderous threats."

Almayer is trapped in the wall of his dreams, a wall so thick that not even the piercing sound of Mrs. Almayer's "shrill volubility"¹ in depicting the advantages of union with other traders is permanently effective against it. Although Almayer listens primarily to his own voice, he, unlike a man such as Marlow who also pays attention to his own voice, hears it when he is older to the unfortunate exclusion of those sounds unrelated to his dream.

His dream reinforced by the long awaited return of Dain on the first night of the story, Almayer is elated, goes to bed and sleeps soundly. He is, of course, ignorant of the fact that Dain's return is the signal that his dream is soon to be shattered. His obliviousness as a daydreamer to the unfortunate realities which are to shatter his dream is represented by his unconsciousness of the storm sounds that night:

. . . Nina could hear afar off the driving roar, and hiss of heavy rain, the wash of waves on the tormented river. It came nearer and nearer, with the loud thunder-claps. . . . When the storm reached the low point dividing the river, the whole house shook while the rain pattered loudly on the palm leaf roof. The thunder spoke in one prolonged roll.

Undisturbed by the nightly event of the rainy monsoon, the father slept quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends and his enemies. . . .²

At this point Nina has already declared her love to Dain and her anxious

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

concern for him is translated into her anxious attention to the sounds of the gathering storm. Her feeling of oppression is reflected in the oppressive sounds of the "driving roar" and of the "hiss of the heavy rain." She has good reason to be anxious, for Dain, involved in gunpowder smuggling, has returned, barely escaping with his life from the Dutch military. He returns, however, only for Nina. Not only is he not willing to help Almayer realize his dream, he is also going to take his daughter from him. But to Almayer who is ignorant of their affair and who is ironically relieved over Dain's return, the fierce sounds of the threatening storm are as if non-existent. Oblivious to the sound of the "loud thunderclaps", to the whole house shaking, to the loudly pattering rain, and to the "prolonged roll" of the thunder, Almayer is equally oblivious to "his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends and his enemies." It is almost as if the monsoon's thunder-claps and house-shaking were a vain attempt to awaken and warn Almayer of the pain that is approaching him, like the oppressive storm, "nearer and nearer."

A second day elapses. But between the first and second nights of the story the above mentioned unfortunate realities which are to shatter Almayer's oblivion occur. Although Dain has returned at last, Almayer has seen him briefly only once since his return. Meanwhile, Dain's life is in danger because he is sought by the Dutch authority for smuggling gunpowder and for killing two men in a successful escape attempt when they tried to apprehend him. Mrs. Almayer, who is determined to see Nina and Dain united in marriage, creates a scheme to throw Dain's pursuers off the track by making it appear as if Dain has drowned accidentally. Almayer is kept uninformed about this

scheme, both because he needs Dain to realize his gold expedition and because he would be against any liaison between his beloved daughter and Dain. It is during the second day that Almayer is exposed to the unexpected blow of Dain's supposed death and to a visit by the Dutch legal authority, during which visit Almayer seeks solace in his gin. That night, while Almayer is in a drunken sleep he is left by his family. When he finally does awaken to what has happened it is too late, for Nina and Dain are on their way to a new life. Taminah, out of her jealous frustration at the loss of Dain, awakens Almayer. Now Almayer the dreamer is once more jarred back to reality and his reactions here exhibit fundamental characteristics of his nature. Earlier when he had been duped into believing the false story of Dain's drowning, Almayer helplessly receded into himself with the help of gin. Now the sound of Taminah's voice disrupts more and more of his gin-filled, dream-like existence as she attempts to explain what has happened to him:

. . . Almayer stirred uneasily with a sigh: slowly out of the senseless annihilation of drunken sleep, he was returning, through the land of dreams, to waking consciousness. . . . Stars above, stars all around him; and from the stars under his feet rose a whisper full of entreaties and tears. . . . How escape from the importunity of lamentable cries? . . . If he attempted to move he would step off into nothing, and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support. And what were the voices saying? Urging him to move! . . . And ages passed . . . in the plaintive murmur of sorrowful voices urging him to desist before it was too late. . . . [T]he chorus of voices swelled louder into an agonized prayer to go, go before it was too late. . . . With a faint cry he glided out of the anguish of perishing creation into an imperfect waking. . . .¹

¹Ibid., pp. 158-159.

His distance from the reality of the fact of Taminah's voice is indicated in his lengthy "fall" to semi-consciousness during which her voice assumes various guises. The first appearance of her voice is the very unreal sound of the star-whisper, "a whisper full of entreaties and tears." His nightmare dilemma consists of his being chased by the sound of "lamentable cries" yet unable to run away lest he destroy himself in the sound of the "crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support." Truly his universe is his dream for he is left alone to support a fantasy that ironically requires his absent daughter's presence. Finally the sound rises to that of a "plaintive murmur of sorrowful voices" and eventually to an inescapably voluble "chorus of voices" that "swelled louder into an agonized prayer to go." Almayer moves in his nightmare while responding to this pleading sound with a fearful and "faint cry." Quite unlike the clearheaded Marlow and the perceptive Captain Macwhirr who is almost instantaneously awake when he rises from sleep, Kaspar Almayer is only at this stage roused to a state of imperceptive and foggy-headed stupor, an "imperfect waking." Sounds play a role here in further definition of his nature:

The figure of a woman standing in the steely light, her hands stretched forth in a suppliant gesture, confronted him from the far-off end of the verandah; and in the space between him and the obstinate phantom floated the murmur of words that fell on his ears in a jumble of torturing sentences, the meaning of which escaped the utmost efforts of his brain.¹

Almayer, imperfectly awake, experiences a painful confusion hearing the

¹Ibid., pp. 159-160.

meaningless sound of a "murmur of words" which are to him as a "jumble of torturing sentences." It is painful to him because it is the sound of reality, how painful shall soon be seen. Almayer prefers to ignore this sound.

Also, at this point of crisis, Almayer reveals his fundamental lack of restraint and patience by succumbing to the exasperation he feels over a sound he cannot figure out. Taminah, from the darkened bungalow's verandah, tries to explain what has happened but Almayer, unable to recognize her, seeks only to silence her:

To the left, to the right they dodged, . . . she sending out shriek after shriek at every feint, and he growling meaningless curses through his hard-set teeth. Oh! The fiendish noise that split his head and seemed to choke his breath--It would kill him--It must be stopped! An insane desire to crush that yelling thing induced him to cast himself recklessly over the chair with a desperate grab, and they came down together.

. . . The last shriek died out under him in a faint gurgle, and he had secured the relief of absolute silence.¹

Almayer's unrestrained seeking for the "relief of absolute silence" is consistent with his preference for ignoring the sounds of reality as they attempt to encroach upon his private world. His wild manner of obtaining this relief is hardly the technique of a gentleman. It is more indicative of animalism and this animality of Almayer is articulated in the sound of his growled "meaningless curses." He is wild and uncontrolled here, causing the frightened sounds of Taminah's "shriek after shriek" to fill the air. The quality of restraint, so important to a man such as Marlow, is absent in a man who easily gives himself up to his "insane desire to crush that

¹Ibid., p. 160.

"yelling thing" and who throws himself about recklessly. Also, interestingly, where Marlow seeks to hear the truth in the "fiendish row" of the howling natives of the jungle, Almayer is not at all curious about what truths this "fiendish noise" might hold for him. Almayer's lack of restraint is also evident in his microscopic span of tolerance to the sound of this "fiendish noise." He is easily carried away in his anxiety, desperate to the point of resorting to brute force. The extent of his violence is revealed in the sound of Taminah's "faint gurgle" as she is crushed under his flying weight. The fact that this striking pursuit scene is highly sound-oriented shows how artistically effective Conrad's use of sound can be.

It is at this point that Almayer recognizes Taminah. She tells him the truth about his daughter's absence. In Almayer's response to this reality couched in painful sounds is discovered another important characteristic of the man who is a failure, his lack of inner strength:

In a rush of words which broke out after a short struggle from her trembling lips she told him the tale of Nina's love and her own jealousy. Several times he looked angrily into her face and told her to be silent; but he could not stop the sounds that seemed to run out in a hot stream, swirl about his feet, touching his lips with a feel of molten lead, blotting out his sight in scorching vapour, closing over his head, merciless and deadly.¹

Almayer's dream is truly destroyed, swept aside, and shattered in a wave of force against which the weak man can offer no resistance. He tries to resist by telling Taminah to be silent but Almayer "could not stop the sounds." His distance from reality to this point has resulted in a disbelief of what he hears such that these sounds of truth are painful to him.

¹Ibid., p. 162.

Moreover, Almayer's powerlessness here is portrayed as a drowning. The sounds "swirl about his feet", keep his mouth closed by burning his lips "with a feel of molten lead", blind him in a "scorching vapour", and finally drown him by "closing over his head, merciless and deadly." What he hears is fatal to him because, unlike Marlow who recognizes the need for one to "put up . . . with sounds" on earth, Almayer has not the strength to do so.

Another basic characteristic of Almayer, one which is related to this lack of inner strength, is obvious in this moment of personal crisis. Where a man such as Captain Macwhirr is a source of stability in the moments of extremity, Almayer, as a lesser man, begins to exhibit a kind of instability. As soon as he is exposed to reality he withdraws or tries to escape from the situation. This is evident where instead of responding with immediate action to what he hears Almayer lets his attention drift to the sound of the nearby river:

Ah! The river. His old friend and his old enemy, speaking always with the same voice as he runs from year to year bringing fortune or disappointment, happiness or pain. . . . And now to the accompaniment of that [river's] murmur he listened to the slow and painful beating of his heart.¹

He first listens to an external sound, the voice of the river that in its neutral capacity of friend and enemy can offer him no advice, and then to an inner sound. Driven into himself he hears a sound which indicates his self-pitying preoccupation with his suffering, the sound of the "slow and painful beating of his heart." He becomes absorbed with the sound:

¹Ibid.

He listened attentively, wondering at the regularity of its beats. He began to count mechanically. One, two. Why count? At the next beat it must stop. No heart could suffer so and beat so steadily for long. Those regular strokes as of a muffled hammer that rang in his ears must stop soon.¹

Almayer's withdrawal is affirmed in this further inner drift to the accompanying sound of the regular beats of his heart, a regularity which to him is in perplexing indifference to his suffering. His lack of endurance is indicated in his response to the painful sounds, those "strokes as of a muffled hammer that rang in his ears." Finally emerging partially from his withdrawal, Almayer exhibits none of the forceful direction of the psychologically secure man. His ambivalence or inability to make up his mind as to what position to take is heard in the sound of his voice:

"Oh! Nina!" whispered Almayer, in a voice in which reproach and love spoke together in pained tenderness.

"Oh! Nina! I do not believe."²

Torn between emotions of anger and love Almayer stands confused, lacking direction because he still cannot endure the truth.

Before this crisis occurs for Almayer the groundwork for his instability and withdrawal is established by evidence that the easily stimulated imagination of his youth is still present. There is suggestion of this during the visit of the Dutch authority to his bungalow on the occasion of the Sambir celebration:

. . . [T]hey filled the little bungalow with the unusual sounds of European languages, with noise and laughter produced by naval

¹Ibid., p. 163.

²Ibid., p. 164.

witticisms at the expense of the fat Lakamba. . . . The younger men in an access of good fellowship made their host talk, and Almayer, excited by the sight of European faces, by the sound of European voices, opened his heart . . . unaware of the amusement the recital of his many misfortunes caused to those future admirals.¹

Europe is the ultimate geographical goal of his monied dreams and Almayer's hope-starved imagination is affected by these "unusual sounds of European languages." Carried away he reacts by being too frank in his speech and his only reward for indulging unrestrainedly in his dreams is the sound of more laughter and naval witticisms, this time in the form of "ringing laughter"² at his expense.

With this excitability in mind plus the knowledge of Almayer's lack of restraint the reader is not surprised at a greater exhibition of his wildness. This occurs during a second visit by the Dutch military when they have come in search of Dain whose supposed drowning has reinforced Almayer's frustration and cynicism:

Again the sound of Almayer's voice was heard, and again interrupting their talk, they listened to the confused but loud utterance coming in bursts of unequal strength, with unexpected pauses and noisy repetitions that made some words and silences fall clear and distinct on their ears out of the meaningless jumble of excited shoutings emphasized by the thumping of Almayer's fist upon the table.³

The sound of the frustrated Almayer's voice gives away his nature to the reader here quite clearly. Lacking the all-important self-restraint Almayer is heard "interrupting" the talk of his dinner guests. Instead of being

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²Ibid., p. 36.

³Ibid., p. 136.

orderly and forceful in order to be heard clearly and distinctly his excited utterances are described rather as "confused" and "loud . . . bursts of unequal strength." He has become an inner shambles and his inner chaos is articulated in his "meaningless jumble of excited shoutings." His impatient and childish frustration at the world's dirty tricks is asserted in the "thumping" sound of his fist striking the table. Interestingly, the sounds which are heard resulting from the thumping reinforce this characterization of him:

On the short intervals of silence, the high complaining note of tumblers, standing close together and vibrating to the shock, lingered, growing fainter, till it leapt up again into words and brought down the heavy hand again. At last the quarrelsome shouting ceased, and the thin plaint of disturbed glass died away into reluctant quietude.¹

Almayer's complaining and frustration are translated into the whining sound of the "high complaining note" of the tumblers vibrating because of his impatience and his inclination towards violence. Its "thin plaint" sound parallels his emotional weakness, its unstable rise and fall. When the sound of his "quarrelsome shouting" stops so does this sound, but equally reluctantly.

Once Almayer is left alone with his "Folly" to call his own, his inner ruin is completed. But this collapse wherein Almayer tries desperately to forget Nina has been carefully prepared for artistically by previous underminings of the structure of his sanity. One of the events which pushes a prop out from under him is his being duped into believing Dain has drowned. The body of the drowned boatswain is disguised so as to resemble Dain; Almayer's hopes for gold are drowned with Dain, he believes, and exposed

¹Ibid., pp. 136-37.

to this strain of grief he loses his grip on himself. His tiring descent into hopelessness here is pictured in his suffering brain as a fall into a deep precipice, "a smooth, round, black thing" whose "black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity," and there was a "great rush the noise of which he fancied he could hear yet; and now with an awful shock, he had reached the bottom, . . . Dain was dead. . . .¹

The sound of his inner fall or of the beginning of his mental collapse is that of the "great rush" whose noise fills his ears. But the noise of his descent stops and in the silence Dain is revealed lying dead. Totally lacking in resilience and wishing himself dead, Almayer groans:

He groaned aloud unconsciously and started with a fright at the sound of his own voice.²

The man has come to the point in his losing struggle with his world where he is even afraid of the sound of his own voice. The fact that he unconsciously "groaned aloud" is indicative of his lack of self-control in this moment of crisis. Trying to calm himself with a glass of gin, he reveals more of his lack of self-control:

He took the tumbler with a shaking hand, and as he drank his teeth chattered against the glass which he drained and set down against the table.³

The sounds of his teeth against the glass and of the glass set down carelessly tell how much the man is shaken, how minimal is the control he has over his own muscles in the face of this particular test.

¹Ibid., p. 99

²Ibid., p. 100.

³Ibid.

Almayer is a man fated to be disappointed and thwarted at every turn. He had hopes of his property being annexed by the London Borneo Company, hopes which gave rise to his furtive activity in the building of "Almayer's Folly" for the residence of engineers, agents, and settlers of the expected company. But he is disappointed here, as well; the annexation falls through leaving the land around Sambir under Dutch auspices. His lonely distance from any kind of happiness is indicated in the sounds of the Malays of Sambir greeting the Dutch:

Almayer from his verandah watched across the river the festive proceedings, heard the report of brass guns saluting the new flag to Lakamba, and the deep murmur of the crowd of spectators. . . .¹

His isolation from any festivity is portrayed by his hearing these sounds of salutation and approval from a distance. Again Conrad places emphasis on Almayer's hearing, not seeing, these proceedings. Like Captain Macwhirr, Almayer is exposed to isolation and to a communication barrier but, unlike the captain, he is never successful in transcending this barrier. Because of a lack of communication between Almayer and his daughter, he experiences isolation. Even with the one person whom he loves in the world he has not the ability to communicate:

". . . No two human beings understand each other. They can understand but their own voices. . . . But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still, there was only the murmur of his love. . . ."²

This is Nina telling her father that he has no place in her life. Instead of hearing what should have been the penetrating voice of her father,

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 179.

the sound of "the voice of [her] own self" blocked its passage to her ears. Acting as a further soundproofing against the passage of Almayer's voice was the new voice of Dain, the sound of the "murmur of his love." Almayer's power to communicate through the sound of his voice is therefore quite absent, and as a result of this deficiency Nina has no difficulty hearing and obeying the voice of her own impulses. Almayer is isolated, therefore, from his daughter and, of course, Dain, while his distance from their love is also presented through sound:

"In time," she went on, "both our voices, that man's and mine, spoke together in a sweetness that was intelligible to our ears only. You were speaking of gold then, but our ears were filled with the song of our love, and we did not hear you."¹

The love relationship becomes a mingling of Nina's and Dain's voices, the sound of voices speaking in a manner "intelligible to [their] ears only." The sound of Almayer's dream of gold fell on ears deaf to what he was raving about. They heard only the sound of the "song of [their] love." They did not hear him because his was not the effective voice of a man such as Captain Macwhirr to be heard despite any obstacle.

Almayer has come upon Dain and Nina where Dain has been hiding, waiting in the jungle for Nina. Dain and Almayer argue briefly, the former disarming Almayer who has come with a gun to stop his daughter's flight. Nina, crying under the emotional distress created between her love for her father and her stronger love for Dain, lies on the ground. Almayer crouches

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 192-93.

momentarily, touched by her tears. Hopes shattered and his beloved daughter at the point of disappearing forever, he briefly dreams of selflessly allowing himself to love her despite her preference for Dain. But he cannot forgive, for he has become too inflexible to bend for others. He refuses to bend and so he breaks:

"I will never forgive you, Nina!" he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream.

This was the last time in his life that he was heard to raise his voice. Henceforth he spoke always in a monotonous whisper like an instrument of which all the strings but one are broken in a last ringing clamour under a heavy blow.¹

He is a broken man and his reduction to this collapsed state is presented in terms of the sound of a "monotonous whisper" of a broken instrument. Unlike a voice such as Marlow's which "for good or evil cannot be silenced" poor Almayer's voice has been quite silenced. The "ringing clamour" of the heavy blow of misfortune strikes him as unexpectedly as did the shrieking uproar of the typhoon strike Macwhirr but Almayer's voice will never be heard above it for he has given up.

Alone and old Almayer is haunted by another sound:

For all his firmness he looked very dejected and feeble as he dragged his feet slowly through the sand on the beach: and by his side . . . stalked that particular fiend whose mission it is to jog the memories of men. He whispered into Almayer's ear a childish prattle of many years ago.²

Perhaps he hears the sound of this "childish prattle" as the immature voice of his youthful dreams. Or, perhaps, and more likely he is reminded of his daughter as a little girl in the knowledge that he attempted to

¹Ibid., pp. 192-93.

²Ibid., p. 196.

communicate with her too late in life. In the end he realises the extent of his folly in a late awareness of the only goodness in his life of failure:

He stood thinking mournfully of his past life till he heard distinctly the clear voice of a child speaking amongst all this wreck, ruin and waste.¹

It is a sound Almayer hears, the "clear voice" of Nina rising above the dust-covered mementoes of his past and telling him that what he has made of his life is what he is left with, "wreck, ruin and waste." For the man who fails life's trials as for the man who meets them successfully the world is an antagonistic or fitful place but while the latter has himself to rely upon the other is left with nothing.

In conclusion then it appears that Conrad's use of sound has functioned as an effective artistic device in the portrayal of Almayer. Where a man such as Marlow is concerned with reality, Almayer is a dreamer lost in unreal visions of gold and splendour. Where a man of Macwhirr's stature is perceptive and adaptable, Almayer is both imperceptive and inflexible. His lack of restraint or self-control is a characteristic of the hollow men, not the men of temperance or inner stuff. Lacking basic inner strength, Almayer weakens with each disappointment, submits to his frustration, and crumbles away mentally, dying a broken man and a rejected father and husband. Isolated, his isolation is worse than that of Macwhirr or of Marlow in that he cannot even live with himself. A study of sound has helped to reveal these characteristics of Almayer and of his response to life. Thus, the skill with which Conrad uses sound in his fiction has been affirmed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this thesis the presence of many descriptions of sounds has been noted in the three works of Conrad chosen, and the function of this element in his fiction studied.

In the chapter treating Typhoon, the figure of Captain Macwhirr was focussed upon. The references to sound in the story of this captain's victorious struggle against the typhoon were found to make more vivid that story and to contribute to our understanding of the meaning of that struggle. The character of the Captain, himself, was in part revealed through the sounds he uttered and the responses to sounds he made.

In the discussion of Heart of Darkness, the figure of Marlow was of central interest. Marlow was judged to be, like Macwhirr, one of those men in Conrad's fiction who successfully meet life's tests. It was noted that Marlow was highly aware of sounds and that what he heard as well as what he saw defined his experience of the journey he undertakes in that story. A study of the sounds Marlow hears and in some cases of his responses to them, it was found, is a means whereby one can gain added insight into the nature of Marlow's experience and the kind of man he was.

In the chapter on Almayer's Folly, Kaspar Almayer was the figure of chief attention. He was judged to be the opposite kind of man to Macwhirr and Marlow, a man broken by life rather than one who could meet its tests. It was found, however, that in the portrayal of this kind of man, as in the portrayal of men like Macwhirr and Marlow, Conrad employed references

to sounds effectively. A study of references to sounds helped to reveal Almayer as a man who could not, as Macwhirr so well could, communicate effectively with the world about him. A study of references to sounds, too, clarified how he contrasted with Marlow. Marlow was capable of standing up to the sounds he heard; Almayer was submerged by the sounds of his reality. Whereas Marlow had a voice that would not be silenced, Almayer was described at the end of his life as a man whose voice resembled the low scrape of a broken instrument.

Conrad's revelations of these three men's natures and experiences were all, it was found, made more effective through his careful employment of references to sounds.

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