

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
THE ROLE OF MARLOW IN THE NOVELS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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## AN ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of Marlow in the three major novels in which he appears - Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance - in order to clarify the various ways in which he is used, and to show that basically his function in all three works is consistent.

Chapter I outlines the problems of narration in the modern novel, to show the kind of background in which Conrad was writing and to indicate the importance of Marlow as a technical innovation. Incorporated in this chapter is a discussion of "Impressionism," seen in this literary context.

Chapter II is a discussion of Marlow's role in Heart of Darkness. The argument is that in this novel Conrad is attempting to blend two kinds of narrator - the traditional objective observer, and the biased participant. The work may be seen in two parts, and the shift from one to the other is a shift from one kind of narration to the other. The pivot between these two parts is the moment when Marlow recognises his identification with Kurtz. In the first half Marlow is detached from the story and from Kurtz, and uses an ironic tone to indicate this detachment. In the second half he becomes involved with Kurtz, loses his irony, and himself becomes its victim. Through his manipulation of this complex role, Conrad creates a radically new narrative device. The novel deals with a truth which is ambiguous and elusive, and which can be glimpsed only for an instant. And the manner in which Marlow tells the tale parallels this theme; he conveys the truth in the moment of telling, through an irony established by his own confusion, and then returns to an

enigmatic silence. So the way in which he narrates the tale is indivisible from its theme; Marlow is a means of uniting the two.

Chapter III deals with Lord Jim, a full length novel, in which Marlow's role is far more complex. Again, the novel is based on the relationship between Marlow and his central character, Jim, and again Marlow is given the role of truth seeker and teller. But the story is told through Marlow's account of his conversations with Jim, and his speculations about him, so that the search for truth becomes fused with the telling. Jim's adventures provide a parallel for Marlow's own story, which is the story of his identification with Jim. The irony of the novel is that Marlow, although aware of his affinity with Jim, does not realise the extent of it. For he is a romantic, just as Jim is, he is unaware of this, and therefore his own irony rebounds on to him. Marlow's uncertainty invokes an essential ambiguity in the novel - an ambiguity which is also its central theme. So again, Marlow unites the form and content of the novel.

Chapter IV examines Marlow's role in Chance, a much later novel, whose preoccupations differ markedly from those of the first two books. Once again, Marlow has the role of truth seeker and truth teller, but in Chance it is extended, so that he now assumes the symbolic role of novelist, creating the story with his own imagination. Chance is a complex literary experiment, which is conducted through the narration of Marlow. Whilst the material is borrowed from the nineteenth century, his style is extremely modern, as it is in the previous novels. Marlow presents a melodramatic and potentially sentimental story in his habitual ironic tone,

and through the contrasting of two genres, Conrad is commenting on the societies out of which they emerged. The difference between the two eras is that whilst the nineteenth century was characterised by pathos, the mode of the twentieth century is irony. The loss of certain, absolute beliefs has led to a sharp perception of absurdity, undercutting the awareness of pathos or tragedy. The title "Chance," then, assumes a heightened significance, for Marlow's narration is used to point out the contrast between an age where there was still a belief in order and providence, and the twentieth century where all is dictated by sheer coincidence. "Chance" is also the means by which Marlow tells his tale - an assortment of fragments which he gathers by chance conversations and by coincidences. So again the theme of the novel is embodied by the style, and Marlow unites them through his narration.

In the conclusion it is observed that although the works are very different, Marlow is in all three a device by which Conrad achieves impersonality. The degree of his reliability as a narrator is measured by the use of irony, which is manipulated with increasing ingenuity as the experiment develops. And Marlow's supreme function in each novel is to act as a means of uniting form and content, which was Conrad's foremost artistic goal.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the role of Marlow in the three major novels in which he appears - Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance. Although the three works are very different, and he is used in a variety of ways in each one, it is my contention that he does have a basically consistent function in all of them. He is used as an experiment in the device of first person narration - an experiment which is expanded and developed throughout the three novels. Conrad was concerned with finding a way of achieving impersonality in his writing, of eliminating his own voice in order to present the story without authorial obtrusiveness. In Marlow, he explores the possibilities of telling the story through a narrator who is not to be identified with his author, but whose account of the tale is biased by his own involvement in it. This means that there is no omniscient author or surrogate author to guide the reader through the novel; he must interpret it through the screen of the narrator. The ambiguity which results from this lack of an objective authority is of central importance in modern literature. Writing in a society which is characterised by a loss of previously assumed values, and where moral standards have all become subject to doubt, the modern novelist is no longer able to rely on a community of belief - on what Daiches calls the "public sense of significance."<sup>1</sup> In Marlow, Conrad discovers a new technique

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<sup>1</sup>David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 6.



for dealing with this instability - a technique which identifies him as a "modern" writer. For in the Marlow novels emphasis is placed not so much on the outward story as on the possible ways of viewing it, and on the complexity of the narrating consciousness. Marlow admits of no absolutes, and makes no definite judgments, for the tales he tells are based on moral elusiveness and ambiguity.

This ambiguity is, in part, established by the use of irony, whereby Marlow as narrator uses irony himself to indicate his distance from the story, but is also the butt of irony when he is involved in the story and at a distance from the author. In each novel the degree of his involvement may be determined through this manipulation of irony, and in each, he acts as a link in a chain of qualifying perspectives so that ultimately his own point of view becomes subject to the evaluation of the reader. In my analysis of these three novels I demonstrate the essential uniformity of Marlow's role, and indicate the various ways in which it is developed.

The role of Marlow provides an illuminating subject for study, because it brings into focus a number of important issues concerning the techniques of the modern novel. Conrad was writing at a time when the novel was undergoing considerable redefinition and was beginning to be treated with the seriousness devoted to criticism of other forms of literature. He was deeply involved in this atmosphere of change; his ambition was to find a new form for the novel, and undoubtedly Marlow was introduced to further this aim. I have therefore preceded my discussion of the three works with a survey of the problems of narration in the modern novel, to show the context in which Conrad's work should be seen, and to indicate the kinds of needs which Marlow was to satisfy.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS OF NARRATION

An outstanding characteristic in the development of the novel is that increasing emphasis has been placed on impersonality - the detachment the author achieves in his work. By the time we reach the twentieth century, this detachment has become a matter of major concern. As Joseph Warren Beach has observed, "in a bird's-eye view of the English novel from Fielding to Ford, the one thing that will impress you more than any other is the disappearance of the author."<sup>1</sup>

The root of this transformation lies in the work of the French craftsman Gustave Flaubert, whose influence on later English novelists is inestimable. Wayne C. Booth regards him as a key figure in the movement towards objectivity: "Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that 'objective' or 'impersonal' or 'dramatic' modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearance by the author or his reliable spokesman."<sup>2</sup>

Flaubert believed that the work of art must remain untouched by personal bias, and that to this end the artist must obscure himself, must sacrifice his personality to the work of art. Flaubert always maintained an aloof neutrality in his own writing, and this dedication to impersonality

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York, D. Appleton-Century Co. Inc., 1932), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 8.

has become central to modern critical thought. The most absolute statement of this criterion occurs in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, where the withdrawal of the artist from his work is proposed as a major aspect of Stephen's aesthetic: "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."<sup>3</sup>

This concern with impersonality is partly a result of the trend towards realism in modern writing. Although realism has always been regarded as the proper realm of the novel, there has been a marked acceleration in this country towards the representation of a more total illusion of life. "Fiction," Lubbock tells us, "must look true,"<sup>4</sup> and James defines art as "the reflected field of life."<sup>5</sup> Before any other consideration, the novel must be convincing. E.M. Forster writes, "for me, the whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into formulae but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says."<sup>6</sup> In attaining this truth to life the omniscient author is found to be an undesirable element in fiction; he stands as an obstacle between the reader and the world of the novel. In a novel, nothing should mar the created picture of life. The reader should be engaged in a suspended state, in which he is led to believe what he is reading. Lubbock maintains that "a writer like Flaubert - or like any

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<sup>3</sup>James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York, The Viking Press, 1964), p. 215.

<sup>4</sup>Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London, Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. by R.P. Blackmur (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 65.

<sup>6</sup>E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (Middx, Penguin Books, 1962), p. 86.

novelist whose work supports criticism at all - is so far from telling a story as it might be told in an official report, that we cease to regard him as reporting in any sense. He is making an effect and an impression, by some more or less skilful method."<sup>7</sup>

The elimination of authorial interference has led to a more direct presentation of life, one which can fully involve the reader because, with authorial interference removed, there is no interruption of the illusion. Restating the ideas of James, whom he greatly admired, Lubbock distinguishes between two methods of writing, "telling" and "showing," as the difference between works where the author is present, and those in which the story displays itself without the comments of the author. He writes of Flaubert, "I speak of his 'telling' the story, but of course he has no idea of doing that and no more; the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself."<sup>8</sup> The difference between telling and showing seems to resemble Aristotle's distinction between narrative and dramatic manners. But whereas for Aristotle, both modes were acceptable forms of art, it would appear that for the modern writers in question, the dramatic mode is the only form appropriate to the novel.

Lubbock defines the two techniques of "telling" and "showing" as "panoramic" and "scenic" storytelling, using the terminology of the stage which had previously been applied to the novel by James. James, too, is very much concerned with the need "to make the presented occasion tell

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<sup>7</sup>Percy Lubbock, op.cit., p. 63.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

all its story itself,"<sup>9</sup> and perhaps more than any other novelist, is conscious of himself as a dramatist. In his preface to The Awkward Age - the most dramatic of all his novels - he writes of the importance of seeing the novel in terms of drama: "I revelled in this notion of the Occasion as a thing by itself, really and completely a scenic thing, and could scarce name it, while crouching amid the thick arena of my plan, with a large enough O. The beauty of the conception was in this approximation of the respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play - as to which it was more than ever a case for charmed capitals."<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Warren Beach, an ardent admirer of Henry James, notes the difference between "dramatic" and "undramatic" writing - the difference between plays and novels. When we watch a play we are watching the action first hand, but when we read a novel it is merely described to us, second hand. However, Beach suggests that there is a method of writing whereby the author dramatises his material, giving us the impression that we are actually there, taking part in the events; this device he terms the "dramatic present," and he carefully distinguishes between this, and the undramatic method:

Whenever the author in his own person expatiates upon his characters' states of mind, he is following an undramatic method, since we are then conscious of the author standing beside his characters on the stage, and our attention is divided between them and him. The dramatic method is simply to present, to project the characters' states of mind, without comment or explanation. It is of course the author who is choosing the words which describe the state of mind in question, but his effort is, in so far as he follows the dramatic ideal, to make his words the mere uncolored medium for rendering the mental process. He does not characterise it - that would be undramatic and authorial - he reproduces it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Henry James, op.cit., p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Warren Beach, op.cit., p. 180.

The success of the dramatic mode of presentation is determined by the control which the writer exercises over his narrative through his selection of the point of view - or, as James describes it, the "post of observation" - from which the action is seen. Lubbock writes that "the whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view - the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story."<sup>12</sup> And Henry James asserts that "there is no economy of treatment without an adopted, a related point of view."<sup>13</sup> Strongly under the influence of James, Beach deals at some length with the notion of restricted point of view as a literary device:

The very assumption of a definite point of view implies an ideal of refinement in execution such as is prized in the arts of painting and engraving. It implies an author who is not content to dump his matter down in a heap. It is one pattern of arrangement; it implies a system of presentation. If the intention is successfully realized, that in itself is an artistic merit, like accurate drawing or observance of the laws of perspective.<sup>14</sup>

The device of limiting the point of view gives the novel that hard and definite shape which we associate with other forms of art. It provides a more accurate focus for the action of the story, and provides a means of involving the reader in a direct experience, rather than in a remote one.

The shift from the point of view of the author to that of one of his characters is a shift from external to internal presentation. Instead of viewing the story from the outside, as we do when there is an omniscient

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<sup>12</sup>Percy Lubbock, op.cit., p. 251.

<sup>13</sup>Henry James, op.cit., p. 300.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, op.cit., p. 218.

author guiding us, we view it from within. Beach offers a helpful comment on the implications of using the consciousness of the characters within the novel as the means of narration:

What the author tells us in propria persona is formal and official. It is often necessary, and accepted by us like any other practical necessity. But it is not of a piece with the story. What goes on in the minds of the characters on a given occasion is another matter. That is of the essence of the story itself. And the aim of the author who had chosen this solution for the novelist's problem is so to present what is going on in the mind of his character at a given moment that we shall forget the author and ourselves and have a sense of being actually there. The scene of action has been transferred to the character's mind.<sup>15</sup>

One way of handling this technique is to control the point of view while still retaining the advantages of third person narration. This is the approach perfected by James, with his use of a central consciousness as a key to the action. In The Ambassadors the story of Strether's awakening is seen through Strether's own consciousness, but controlled by the invisible author. In other novels, James will shift the point of view alternately from one character to another. The sophistication of his writing lies in his ability to manipulate these shifting points of view, whilst retaining an absolute mastery over his material as a unit. And his achievement is to make the form of the novel match and complement the content. In The Ambassadors, the point of view is restricted to a single character, because the story is concerned with the consciousness of that character. But in novels like The Wings of the Dove the point of view moves from character to character, because the story is built upon a juxtaposition of views. Beach very accurately describes the Jamesean

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

story: "its peculiarity is its chameleon-like character, as one color after another plays upon it and shows it in a different light; the succession of these colors is its spectrum."<sup>16</sup>

Another way of conducting the story is through the device of first person narration; it is this convention which is favoured by Conrad in the creation of Marlow. However, before I begin to discuss Conrad's use of this technique, I shall examine the ideas and objectives of the Impressionists, in order to show in what ways they may be included in the literary climate I have been discussing.

"Impressionism" is the term applied to the school of novelists to which Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad both belonged, and whose most prolific spokesman was Ford. The aim of these writers was to evoke an impression of life. Ford defines the business of Impressionism as being "to produce an illusion of reality,"<sup>17</sup> and believed that the task of the novelist was to capture the reader in the world of the novel to such an extent that he becomes completely unaware of his surroundings. "The object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious of the fact that the author exists - even of the fact that he is reading a book."<sup>18</sup> Ford explains the significance of the label of "Impressionism": "We saw that Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render . . . Impressions."<sup>19</sup> Conrad himself offers a definition of the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>17</sup>Ford Madox Ford, "On Impressionism," Poetry & Drama II (June, 1914), p. 165.

<sup>18</sup>Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (London, Duckworth & Co., 1924), p. 186.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 182.



aims of the Impressionist: "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."<sup>20</sup> This principle of making the reader see is one of the foremost aims of the Impressionists. Ford is forever repeating his maxim, "you must render; never report,"<sup>21</sup> which recalls Lubbock's insistence on showing rather than telling.

With these objectives in mind, both Ford and Conrad were concerned with discovering a new form for the novel, one which would allow for a more vivid presentation of life. Ford tells us, "we agreed that the writing of novels was the one thing of importance that remained to the world and that what the novel needed was the New Form."<sup>22</sup> Both writers sought a form which would convey an impression of life naturally and convincingly: "we agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind."<sup>23</sup>

Ford wrote a great deal about the specific methods of writing which would enhance these aesthetic goals. He states the problem of chronology as being one of their main concerns. "It became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the Novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straight forward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straight forward."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Conrad, preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, Complete Works, Canterbury Edition, Vol. XXIII (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Ford Madox Ford, "Techniques," The Southern Review I (July, 1935), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

For the Impressionist writer, everything, even the order of time, must be rearranged in the interest of expressiveness, of dramatic effect, and of credibility.

Another very important issue was the question of language. The Impressionist should use a language which is fresh yet usual, without being too colloquial, for this style would be most likely to absorb the reader, and make him forget that he is reading a novel. Ford tells us that he and Conrad tried to keep their language as simple as possible, and he describes the language they used as "a Middle-High-English of as unaffected a sort as would express our thoughts."<sup>25</sup>

Ford was very much concerned that the purity of a novel not be marred by the intrusion of the author's own opinions. Like Flaubert, he believed that the artist should practice a rigid self denial - that he should curb any instinct for didacticism in the higher interest of art. A notorious exaggerator, Ford goes as far as to say, when he is addressing the artist, "it is obviously best if you can contrive to be without views at all: your business with the world is rendering, not alteration."<sup>26</sup>

It was out of such concerns as these that Marlow came into being. Through him, the story can be narrated without a consecutive time sequence, but by association, in the way that anybody would tell a tale. And Marlow - sea-captain, wanderer, adventurer - is an appropriate vehicle for the kind of diction which Conrad felt would most effectively involve the reader. Using the dialogue of natural speech, Marlow appeals directly to the reader,

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

and the experience becomes vividly dramatised.

As well as satisfying these very technical considerations, Marlow is also an effective means by which Conrad achieves impersonality. By transferring the task of narration to his character, he removes himself from the story, and so liberates the narrative from the dangers of authorial comment. Marlow is strictly limited as to what he can know about his stories, and so the light that he sheds on them is always partial; his commentary is not reliable. But the restriction of Marlow's point of view in fact provides many more angles of vision, just because his bias opens up so many alternatives. Beach explains the advantages of Marlow as narrator, in terms of point of view: "Conrad's problem was to secure the advantage of the many points of view without losing that of coherence. It was to make a real composite of these many pictures taken from so many diverse angles, to make a synthesis of material so disparate. And he solved that problem most successfully through the help of Captain Marlow."<sup>27</sup>

But attitudes to this technique are not all favourable. James thought that "the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness,"<sup>28</sup> and described Marlow as "that preposterous master mariner."<sup>29</sup> For there are a number of disadvantages which attend this form of narration. Although theoretically it gives the novel a dramatic form, by allotting one of the characters the role of narrator, its effect is very often

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<sup>27</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, op.cit., p. 353.

<sup>28</sup>Henry James, op.cit., p. 131.

<sup>29</sup>Henry James, in conversation; remembered by Ford Madox Ford, and quoted in Joseph Conrad, p. 160.

undramatic. As Steinmann observes, "technically, of course, this convention is purely dramatic; but, unless it is combined with structural conventions of the sort that Conrad uses or stylistic ones of the sort that Hemingway uses, its effect is quite undramatic. It is simply the substitution of one narrator and narrative for another; the author disappears all right, but an imaginary one takes his place."<sup>30</sup> Booth regards even the term "first person" as being misleading, since in fact it tells us very little about the technique which is being employed. He sees distinctions not in terms of first or third person, but in terms of the relationship of the narrator to his story, and the relationship of his views to those of the author. Thus, the very valuable distinction emerges between reliable and unreliable narrators: "Our terminology for this kind of distance in narrators is almost hopelessly inadequate. For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator 'reliable' when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), and 'unreliable' when he does not....Unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author's norms."<sup>31</sup>

In each of the three major novels in which Marlow appears, a distance is always preserved between him and Conrad. There is never any doubt that it is Marlow who is telling the story, and Marlow's impressions

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Steinmann Jr., "The Old Novel and the New," From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. by Rathburn and Steinmann (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 289.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne C. Booth, op.cit., p. 158.

and judgments that we are receiving. But the extent to which we can trust him fluctuates according to his proximity to the values of the author, and this distance is measured by the tone in which he is treated.

This brings us to the question of irony. A frequent accompaniment of the dramatic mode of narration is the use of an ironic tone, as a medium by which the author, narrator and reader are linked. Irony in the modern novel is a complex, multi-layered affair, essentially a device borrowed from the drama. Dramatic irony on the stage is a technique whereby the audience is given to understand more about the situation than the characters; it is given information in advance, so that the dialogue assumes a heightened significance, of which only the spectators are aware. It is as though the audience is sharing a secret with the author, which is being conveyed across the stage. In the subjective novel, the same process takes place, through the medium of the characters; irony becomes a powerful weapon in the pen of the impassive author. As the characters and situations betray themselves, layers of irony are unfolded by the watchful reader, in league with the author who controls all.

Conrad is a master of this technique; all of his novels are coloured by a forceful ironic tone which is the true commentary on the story. So when Marlow appears as narrator, one of his many functions is to be the tool of this irony and, as I hope to demonstrate, he provides Conrad with a new and effective method of controlling it.

This type of narration involves the reader in the novel in a very vital way. When a novel is viewed subjectively, through the characters

themselves, the reader must play an active part. Since the method of narration is indirect, and the amount which we are told is limited, the reader must actively involve his imagination to fill in the gaps. As Steinmann puts it, "the role of the reader who must shift for himself is greater than that of the one who need not."<sup>32</sup> The reader must himself take part in the novel. A further aspect of Marlow's function is that he acts as a mediator, uniting author and reader, but at a distance from both.

In the following chapters I propose to discuss the various aspects of Marlow's role in the three novels Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance, in order to show how it is developed, and to determine to what extent it may be said to be consistent.

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<sup>32</sup>Martin Steinmann Jr., op.cit., p. 301.

CHAPTER IIHEART OF DARKNESS

Although Marlow first appears in Youth, a short story which, in its technical originality, foreshadows the later Marlow works, it is in Heart of Darkness that the experiment begins to take shape.

In Marlow, Conrad is attempting to combine the advantages of the traditional narrator who reports and interprets the story on behalf of the author, with the kinds of innovations which he was aiming to incorporate into the novel. In the search for a form which would allow for closer realism, and more authentic narration without the barrier of authorial comment, Conrad removes his own voice altogether, and gives the burden of narration to a character within the story. What we receive from Marlow are his own impressions; ours are coloured by our interpretation of him. Instead of the author telling us the story, we are shown an angle of it, through one of the participants.

But the complexity of Marlow's role arises from the fact that during the course of the novel, he moves from one mode of narration to the other. The story is divided into two sections; the first takes the form of a journey in which Marlow travels towards the heart of darkness and towards Kurtz. The second shows the consequences of his meeting with Kurtz. As Marlow progresses from one part to the other, his role shifts from truth seeker to truth teller, and his technical function varies accordingly.

For the first half, he has the role of traditional narrator, whose point of view coincides with that of his author: in the second, he undergoes a radical change in which his position moves away from the author, and towards his subject. At first, his dramatic function is that of chorus; detached from what he is describing, he reports and interprets the story from a distance. Palmer writes that "Marlow must be taken as a choral character in the fullest sense,"<sup>1</sup> but in Heart of Darkness this is true only of the first part, where Marlow's views correspond with his author's. From being a chorus, commenting on events with a certain amount of detachment, he becomes a tragic figure, himself involved in the story, and with this involvement comes a distance between him and his creator.

Marlow's initial detachment from his story is indicated by a series of contrasts between himself and the characters he encounters, and by his use of an ironic tone in his narrative. In his journey towards Kurtz, Marlow assumes the role of pilgrim, travelling towards truth.<sup>2</sup> But although he sees himself in this role, he ironically contrasts himself with the other characters he meets en route, for they regard him not as a pilgrim, but as an apostle, bearing truth from a heavenly centre. He remarks, "I was also one of the workers, with a capital - you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle."<sup>3</sup> The brickmaker

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction (New York, Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Edwards, in his article on the clothes imagery of the novel, shows how Marlow punctuates his journey with a number of gestures symbolizing his role as pilgrim. ("Clothes for the Pilgrimage," Mosaic, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Spring, 1971), pp. 67-74.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, Complete Works, Canterbury Edition, Vol. XVI (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 59.



tells Marlow, "'You are of the new gang - the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him specially also recommended you."<sup>4</sup> For he regards Europe as a heaven; the accountant, too, refers to the administration in Europe as "'they, above....'"<sup>5</sup> For those who worship money regard Europe - the headquarters of the trading company - as heaven. The word 'ivory', denoting wealth, is suggestive of the huge power which binds the Europeans to Africa: "They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it."<sup>6</sup> On another occasion Marlow repeats this impression: "Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange - had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word ivory would ring in the air for a while...."<sup>7</sup> The agents of the trading company are ironically referred to as pilgrims by Marlow, and he tells us the substance of their religion; "The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages."<sup>8</sup>

So Europe is heaven, to the greedy money-seekers in Africa, but to Marlow it is a hell. He sees the obsessive desire for wealth as being

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

the European equivalent of the primitive passions of the Africans. Lust is the connection between the two civilisations. What they have in common is the potential for worshipping what Marlow calls the "flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly."<sup>9</sup> In both Europe and Africa, this worship is characterised by a lack of restraint.

Marlow continually refers to the journey as a journey in time, back into prehistoric ages. He talks of "primeval mud" and the "primeval forest,"<sup>10</sup> and says that "we were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil."<sup>11</sup> For primeval man is our origin, and civilisation is our means of coping with that part of us. The tendency towards folly and excess is an aspect of the darkness of our condition - it is that part of us which has remained primeval, and which is a constant threat to society.

Marlow is distinguished from both the primitive African society, and from those characters who, through their equivalent lust - the lust for money - represent the European counterpart. Unlike them, he does have restraint, and it is shown in terms of his duty to his work. He tells us that his preoccupation with the ship was his saviour. "In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life."<sup>12</sup> His insistence upon the need for rivets, which develops into

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

an obsession, is Marlow's hold upon the concrete world of facts. This is brought out by the juxtaposition of the brickmaker's meaningless flow of cliches, and Marlow's down-to-earth consideration of fact:

"...Yes - I let him run on," Marlow began again, "and think what he pleased about the powers that were behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me! There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled steamboat I was leaning against, while he talked fluently about 'the necessity for every man to get on.' 'And when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze at the moon.' Mr. Kurtz was a 'universal genius,' but even a genius would find it easier to work with 'adequate tools - intelligent men.' He did not make bricks - why, there was a physical impossibility in the way - as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.' Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work - to stop the hole.<sup>13</sup>

Practical considerations impose a discipline upon us, which holds back the darkness.

But unqualified restraint is not always seen as a virtue. The Accountant earns Marlow's respect for preserving a kind of discipline amid the extreme demoralisation of the jungle - but he is presented as an amoral figure, blind to human suffering. With a marked complacence, he does his best to ignore the groans of the man dying in his cabin: "'The groans of this sick person' he said, 'distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.'<sup>14</sup>

Marlow is also distinguished from him, then, despite his restraint, and he distances himself through the use of irony. He presents the Accountant as a representative of a civilisation whose values have no application in

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

the world of the Congo, and yet he insists on applying them. He is one of a host of characters whose "civilised" norms are being held up to ridicule, by being placed in the context of the jungle. There is the Accountant himself, dressed as though he were in a London office, and telling Marlow that Kurtz "'will go far, very far,'"<sup>15</sup> as though there were anywhere he could go. And there are the pilgrims, desperately imitating the behaviour of western society, but in such isolation that they become ridiculous. "They beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course."<sup>16</sup> Marlow regards all these hangovers from western civilisation as meaningless and absurd in this context. What separates him from his story is his ironic vision, his ability to perceive comedy; he notices a series of comic details, culminating in the man trying to put out a fire of burning rubbish with a bucket which has a hole in the bottom. And it is clear that Marlow is aware of this comic perspective, for when he refers to it, he uses terms like "sordid farce" and "lugubrious drollery."

By pointing out this quality of absurdity, Marlow indicates his own distance from what he sees. But another effect of this perception is that there is seen to be a distance not merely between Marlow and the characters in the story, but between him and his own listeners, and hence, the whole of society.

If Marlow is showing our habitual social functions to be absurd

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

out of context, they become questionable in context. This is made clear by the careful selection of Marlow's listeners, who make up the frame of the story. They are all respectable members of society - a Lawyer, an Accountant, and the Director of Companies. They correspond with the "civilised" characters who appear in the story, so that they, too, are made absurd by Marlow. This explains why, in a moment of suspense in the narrative, when Marlow is journeying deeper into the forest, he breaks off to address his audience directly. He equates his preoccupation with his ship, amid the darkness of the forest, with the social functions of his listeners, in their attempt to fend off the darkness. He tells them that as he performed his duties as captain, he could feel the "inner truth," the darkness, surrounding him. "I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tightropes for - what is it? half-a-crown a tumble - "17 For the darkness pervades all societies; if it can render our functions absurd in Africa, this demonstrates their absurdity everywhere. But an ambiguous attitude is held towards civilisation. Marlow is scornful of the civilised way of coping, and yet it is a necessity. For it is in our social functions that we protect ourselves from the darkness which threatens us. As Marlow explains, "When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality - the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily."18

The Accountant, the Manager, and even the pilgrims, are civilised

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-4.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

in the sense that they have found ways to stave off the darkness, but they also depict the great danger of this protection - that it blinds society to its kinship with primeval chaos, the darkness. Marlow is set apart from them because, unlike them, he is aware of his own relationship to the darkness. When he confronts the native Africans, and their barbaric, uncontrolled passions, he admits his own response to them. Acceptance of this kinship is seen by him as a strength. "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 - you so remote from the night of first ages - could comprehend."<sup>19</sup> And what saves him from becoming part of the darkness is his work, acting as a restraint. "You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no - I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments be hanged! I had no time."<sup>20</sup> Civilisation is an effective protection from the darkness only if society is aware of the necessity of this protection. If it loses sight of its origins the darkness will be an eternal threat.

It is in this respect that Marlow may be identified with Kurtz, for both of them, as opposed to all the other characters, respond to the darkness, and recognize their relationship to it. It is the identification of Marlow and Kurtz, and Marlow's recognition of it, that is at the centre of the novel. For the point where this occurs is the turning point, between the first and the second part of the story.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

In the first part, Marlow is continually contrasted with Kurtz. Where Marlow differs from both the Africans, and the European "pilgrims," because he has the quality of restraint, Kurtz is an epitome of both types of evil - the orgiastic passions of the Africans and the European lust for money; for he succumbs to both aspects of darkness. Kurtz is a man given to excess. As the journalist says, "He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party,"<sup>21</sup> for "he was an...extremist."<sup>22</sup> Marlow tells us that the dead helmsman "had no restraint, no restraint - just like Kurtz - a tree swayed by the wind."<sup>23</sup> And when he describes the heads on the stakes, symbols of Kurtz's cannibalism, he says that "they only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him."<sup>24</sup> As he approaches the crisis of his confrontation with Kurtz, Marlow becomes more intense in his declamation of this weakness. He speaks of the spell "that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions."<sup>25</sup> A bizarre feature of Marlow's morality is that he condemns Kurtz's lack of restraint itself, not the cannibalism which is its result. This is implied by his treatment of the cannibals on board the ship. He respects them in an almost amused way, and makes a point of stressing their discipline, in not eating the white passengers. For at this point Marlow can identify with them, as opposed to Kurtz. Like Kurtz they are cannibals, but they do have restraint.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

Kurtz also succumbs to the equivalent western lust - the lust for acquisition. Marlow tells us, "You should have heard him say 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my - ' everything belonged to him."<sup>26</sup> And the Russian relates a revealing anecdote: "'He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country."<sup>27</sup>

So Marlow is contrasted with Kurtz in the early part of the novel, and he maintains an aloof distance from him. Several times he is careful to point out his total lack of involvement with Kurtz. When the manager voices his anxiety about Kurtz's illness, Marlow tells us that his reaction was negative: "I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought."<sup>28</sup> And later, he is careful to tell us again that "now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn't very interested in him."<sup>29</sup> Even when he arrives at the Inner Station, Marlow still maintains both his detachment from Kurtz, and his ironic tone. Reporting his first conversation with the young Russian who is so anxious to defend Kurtz, Marlow remarks, "I suppose it did not occur to him that Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine."<sup>30</sup> In the same episode, Marlow actually directs his irony at Kurtz. When Kurtz appears, he is surrounded by a group of bodyguards who, at a word from him, would kill Marlow and the Russian: "'Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for,' said the Russian at my elbow....

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



'Let us hope that the men who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time.'<sup>31</sup>

When he loses his detachment he abandons the ironic style, for his involvement prevents him from viewing the action in any kind of perspective. And the point at which Marlow's style begins to change is the point at which he commits himself to Kurtz.

Just as Marlow recognises his affinity with the darkness - the primitive barbarism of the Africans, he is also aware of his affinity with Kurtz - the man who is claimed by the darkness. The journey into the heart of darkness is a journey towards Kurtz. Marlow tells us of the steamboat that "for me it crawled towards Kurtz."<sup>32</sup> The journey may be seen as a journey into the unconscious, and Kurtz represents that which resides in the innermost region of the mind, which every man must confront before he can achieve self-knowledge. So Marlow's meeting with Kurtz is in a sense an encounter with himself. His communion with him is a culminating point in the process of self discovery - "It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience."<sup>33</sup> And it marks a crucial turning point in the novel, both in terms of theme and style.

Several critics have noted that Heart of Darkness is composed in two styles. Marvin Mudrick distinguishes between the two as being the "narrative-descriptive," which he regards as being relatively successful, and the "oracular-ruminative," which he complains is inexact and careless.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

Mudrick describes it as a style which "dotes on abstractions, exclamations, unexpressive indirections, pat ironies...."<sup>34</sup> And Leavis also objects to the overworked rhetoric which appears in Marlow's monologue with increasing frequency: "Hadn't he, we find ourselves asking, overworked 'inscrutable,' 'inconceivable,' 'unspeakable,' and that kind of word already? - yet still they recur."<sup>35</sup>

But both of these critics identify the use of two styles without trying to account for it. They regard it merely as a failure on the part of Conrad - an inability to handle his material. I would suggest that it is not Conrad, but Marlow who uses the two narrative styles, and it is Marlow who finds increasing difficulty in presenting his experience. Hoffman, in his discussion of the two tones of the novel, makes the point that "there are changes on the level of style in this novel which may indicate changes on the level of being."<sup>36</sup> It is from this standpoint that I shall proceed to discuss these changes.

From the point at which he commits himself to Kurtz, Marlow undergoes a massive shift of vision. Suddenly involved in his own story, his ironic perspective leaves him, and his style does become increasingly dotted with abstractions, and increasingly eloquent. This is particularly true of his description of Kurtz's death, where Marlow attempts to convey Kurtz's "impenetrable darkness," but can communicate only a string of abstractions: "I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Marvin Mudrick, "The Originality of Conrad," The Hudson Review Vol. XI, No. 4 (Winter 1958-9), p. 549.

<sup>35</sup>F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (New York, New York University Press, 1969), p. 177.

<sup>36</sup>Stanton de Voren Hoffman, Comedy and Form in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1969), p. 42.

<sup>37</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 149.

Kurtz's most outstanding quality is his eloquence. He is characterised by his powerful, high-flown rhetoric, and is above all an orator. "Of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words - the gift of expression ...."<sup>38</sup> Ironically, when Marlow describes this quality, the language he uses is equally elaborate: "He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived - a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities! a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence."<sup>39</sup>

For when Marlow increases his use of what Mudrick calls the "oracular-ruminative" style, he is revealing his identification with Kurtz, and the point of identification is also the point where the style changes. This point is the moment where Marlow takes Kurtz's part, when the Manager criticises his "unsound method." This is the moment when Marlow makes his choice. He tells us "my hour of favour was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe; I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares."<sup>40</sup> And immediately after this admission, Marlow launches into the kind of rhetoric which is hereafter to characterise him: "And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. I felt an intolerable weight

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night...."<sup>41</sup> And it is here that Marlow is revealing his identification with Kurtz: for he is using his voice, and becomes him. So, far from being a technical failure, this kind of language demonstrates an extraordinary accomplishment on the part of Conrad. By endowing Marlow with this eloquence, he is actually applying irony himself, at the moment when Marlow loses his ability to use it. Irony becomes the means by which detachment may be measured. When Marlow is detached from the story, his ironic style identifies him with Conrad. When he becomes involved with Kurtz, he loses both his proximity to Conrad and his irony, and in fact becomes its victim. The way in which this irony operates may be seen through an examination of the nature of Marlow's commitment to Kurtz.

In choosing to be faithful to Kurtz, Marlow is choosing fidelity to an illusion. The nature of illusion is shown to be ambiguous, for, as Graver points out, "the experience that Marlow undergoes in the Congo is marked by an almost unbearable doubleness; every vice has its seductive virtue; every virtue its unsuspected, heartbreaking vice."<sup>42</sup> This is the quality of illusion, not only in Heart of Darkness, but in all of Conrad's writing; as Andreach claims, "for Conrad, illusions are necessary and either destructive or salutary."<sup>43</sup> In Heart of Darkness they are both.

On one hand, illusion is seen to be a lie, and Marlow admits on several occasions how he hates lies. "You know I hate, detest, and can't

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>42</sup>Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>43</sup>Robert J. Andreach, The Slain and Resurrected God (New York, New York University Press, 1970), p. 50.

bear a lie."<sup>44</sup> And Kurtz is a lie. Marlow remarks, "Kurtz - that means short in German - don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life."<sup>45</sup> And he goes on to tell us that Kurtz "looked at least seven feet long."<sup>46</sup> And he sees Kurtz's eloquence as ambiguous: "The most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness."<sup>47</sup>

Kurtz's eloquence embodies the idea of illusion. We are told that he originally came to Africa with the highest of ideals. The brickmaker tells Marlow of Kurtz's declaration of his aims and affirms: "'He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else. We want' he began to declaim suddenly, 'for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose."<sup>48</sup> And Marlow overhears the manager quoting Kurtz's own eloquent account of his ambitions: "'Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing."<sup>49</sup> Always the ideals are expressed in the kind of language which denies their practicality; this distance between holding ideals, and putting them into practice, is a central theme of the novel. It is best expressed by T.S. Eliot, in his very fine poetic interpretation of Heart of Darkness:

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<sup>44</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 113-4.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

Between the idea  
 And the reality  
 Between the motion  
 And the act  
 Falls the Shadow.<sup>50</sup>

The "shadow" points to the essential ambiguity of the notion of illusion. On the one hand it is deceptive and false, but on the other, illusion is both necessary and positive, for our lives are given meaning by the ideals we pursue. Marlow tells us, "what redeems...is the idea only....an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...."<sup>51</sup> Kurtz does betray his ideals, but the important thing, that which distinguishes him from the other agents of the Company, is that he does have ideals. He renders them empty by declaring them without acting on them, but this doesn't devalue the ideals themselves. Illusion, the goal which every society must have, is a reality on its own level.

Marlow, the lover of truth, tells lies on two occasions. This provides an added dimension to the structure of the story. For just as Marlow uses irony when he is at a distance from the story he is telling, so Conrad makes Marlow the victim of irony, to indicate his distance from him. And as Marlow becomes involved, and loses his ironic detachment, we become aware of the added proportion - Conrad's use of irony in relation to Marlow. This device of double irony is used very effectively in Youth, the first Marlow story. As Conrad develops Marlow's potentials as a technical device, from Youth to Chance, the use of the double irony becomes

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<sup>50</sup>T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," Selected Poems (London, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1964), p. 80.

<sup>51</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 51.

more elaborate. In Youth it is a relatively simple process. As Tindall puts it, "while old Marlow exposes young Marlow to sentimental irony, ironic Conrad, aloof, silent, and listening among men of affairs, lets innocent old Marlow show old Marlow up."<sup>52</sup>

The most striking instance of this process in Heart of Darkness is Marlow's lying, in view of his loud proclamations of his love of truth. The lies themselves are an indication of the ambiguous nature of illusion. The first occurs when Marlow tears Kurtz's post-script from his report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. The report is an epitome of Kurtz. Marlow tells us "it was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence,"<sup>53</sup> and that "this was the unbounded power of eloquence - of words - of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand may be regarded as the exposition of a method."<sup>54</sup> The final message, "exterminate all the brutes," undercuts the high-minded eloquence of the rest of the report, and challenges it. It is an intense display of sincerity, in contrast to the abstract theorising of the rest. It is a "practical hint," standing out in the flow of "noble words." Marlow tears off the message because of his fidelity to Kurtz - a fidelity to a lie - and this fidelity is demonstrated by his own use of eloquent rhetoric.

But there is another aspect to this lie. Kurtz's message is a

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<sup>52</sup>W.Y. Tindall, "Apology for Marlow," From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. by Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann Jr. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 278.

<sup>53</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 117.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

truth which defies the emptiness of the rest of the report, but it also destroys the illusion of progress, benevolence and humanity which is proclaimed by the report. And in a sense, this illusion is the truth - for if it were destroyed, life would become meaningless. So Marlow's fidelity to a lie also, paradoxically, preserves a truth - the truth of Kurtz's ideals.

The second lie is to the Intended. Marlow tells here that the last words Kurtz spoke were her name. This is another instance of his fidelity to Kurtz. Like the violent and unadorned imperative "exterminate all the brutes," Kurtz's last words, "the horror, the horror," by their very directness, contradict all of his finer sentiments. They show the other side of the illusion, the stark reality which betrays it. And Marlow hides the truth, in favour of a different kind of truth. Boyle argues that Marlow's falsehood represents the highest type of truth,<sup>55</sup> but the issue is not as clear-cut as this. Marlow's lie is both false and true - for the essence of the story is ambiguity.

A further complexity is that by tearing off Kurtz's post-script, and by lying to the Intended, Marlow is concealing ambiguity. For if the truth he learns is an equivocal one, made up of both fine illusions and their stark contradiction, then this is what he should convey. It is here that another important function of the frame should be noted. We are never allowed to forget that Marlow is telling a story; for if, by his lies, he has concealed the nature of the truth, he is now revealing it,

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<sup>55</sup>Ted E. Boyle, "Marlow's Lie in Heart of Darkness," Studies in Short Fiction 1 (Winter 1964), pp. 159-163.



through the story. Marlow tells everything, and what he had previously hidden is brought to light. If we are aware of this, then the irony of the novel assumes an even deeper significance. When, for example, Marlow assures the Russian that "Mr. Kurtz's reputation is safe with me,"<sup>56</sup> he points out the initial irony of the statement himself. "I did not know how truly I spoke."<sup>57</sup> But if we remember that Marlow is actually telling the story to a group of men, that his narrative is being reported to us by yet another voice, we see that there is an extra irony. Now that he has told the story, Kurtz's reputation is no longer safe. The story itself reveals the truth, and it is kept alive not merely by Marlow, but by the speaker who acts as overall narrator.

The ambiguity inherent in Heart of Darkness is substantiated by the use of light and dark imagery throughout the novel. The manipulation and confusion of light and darkness demonstrates the paradoxical nature of the values of the novel.<sup>58</sup> Light and dark both assume contradictory attributes, each containing elements of truth, and of deception. Each crisis is punctuated by the careful interplay of light and dark imagery, always indicating the duality which is the underlying theme. There is the point where Marlow sees the light in the cabin, the point which leads to his confrontation with Kurtz. At the moment when he sees the light, but realises that Kurtz is not there, he recognises the limitations of this light, its ability to conceal. But at the same time, by recognising this,

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<sup>56</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>This point has been made by many critics, most notably by Stanton de Voren Hoffman, and W.Y. Tindall.

he perceives a kind of truth; that the light can fail. So at this point, the light is both true and false. Similarly, the light and darkness become mingled in the scene with the Intended. Marlow bears light into a house of darkness, and this light - the truth he brings - is a lie. Just as his fidelity to Kurtz is an alliance with both truth and falsehood, so is the Intended's belief in Kurtz; she herself is a light in the midst of darkness. Marlow tells us of "the faith that was in her...that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness."<sup>59</sup> But this light is uncertain, as her black dress indicates, for her light is the light of illusion - the light of darkness.

Perhaps the most startling instance of this use of imagery is in Kurtz's death-scene. No longer able to see any light, unaware of the candle beside him, Kurtz lies enshrouded by darkness. Yet it is at this point that he has the insight, the tragic illumination which comes at the moment of death. His perception of "the horror" is a vision of the light of truth. Marlow believes that "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."<sup>60</sup> For Marlow, this last vision redeems Kurtz: "It was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last."<sup>61</sup> The ultimate paradox is that Marlow finally finds light, in the centre of darkness.

Marlow's experience of Kurtz's tragedy is the experience of katharsis. He has watched the tragic downfall and death of an image of himself. His

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<sup>59</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 159.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

illness after Kurtz's death is evidence of this experience. The exhaustion and fever are an image of Kurtz's death, just as Marlow's language is an image of Kurtz's. But Marlow gains the perception by watching the tragedy, while Kurtz has acted it: "And it is not my own extremity I remember best - a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things - even of this pain itself.

No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot."<sup>62</sup>

Just as Kurtz enacts his tragedy before Marlow, Marlow continues the story by telling it. He returns from the underworld with a truth, comes out of the darkness with a light. His role has shifted from truth-seeker to truth-teller. Like Kurtz he is in a darkness, confused, and uncertain of what he has learned from the experience. Yet despite this, he bears the light of truth, as Kurtz did in his moment of supreme darkness. Both of them are symbolised by Kurtz's sketch, "representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch."<sup>63</sup> The truth of their story can never clearly be seen. It is an elusive, precarious light which is continually melting into darkness; it can be glimpsed, but never grasped. Marlow perceives the light through Kurtz's final insight, but only for a moment. When Kurtz dies, he blows out the candle, for the light has died with him. But by telling the story, Marlow is keeping alive the flame.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

The truth he has learned is the story. The way in which it is told - by chance, in a darkness illuminated only by a candle - is of the very essence of the tale. The flicker of light is both the theme of Heart of Darkness, and the manner in which that theme is conveyed; Marlow acts as an effective means of unifying the two.

CHAPTER IIILORD JIM

There was a gap of nearly two years between the first appearance of Heart of Darkness at the beginning of 1899, and of Lord Jim in 1900. During this time, Conrad had expanded Lord Jim from the original short story into a complete novel, and had explored more thoroughly the potentials of Marlow as a technical innovation. In this, the first full length novel in which Marlow is to appear, Conrad continues the experiment with him, giving him a more complicated and subtle function than he had hitherto attempted.

Marlow's role in Lord Jim is complex, for although he has the technical function of narrator, observing, analysing and recording events, he is an unreliable witness because his judgments are never impartial; they are influenced by his involvement in the story. He acts as a lens, viewing but also distorting what is seen. The central problem of Lord Jim is that there are no objective values by which we can assess the story. Since we see through Marlow's eyes, we are dependent, for our interpretation of it, on our interpretation of him. While Marlow sheds light on Jim through his telling of the tale, the light is reflected back onto himself. There is a dual process of illumination. Marlow acts as a means of viewing Jim, but he is also a central character himself: Jim's story becomes the vehicle by which we encounter Marlow the hero.

From the moment he meets Jim, Marlow feels a deep commitment to him, which prevents him from judging him objectively. Jim takes offence at an imagined insult, and Marlow tells us, "yet I don't know what in these words, or perhaps just the intonation of that phrase, induced me suddenly to make all possible allowances for him. I ceased to be annoyed at my unexpected predicament."<sup>1</sup> From this point onwards, Marlow's inexplicable affinity with Jim determines the course of his narrative, and the judgments he makes. Marlow is forced to extremes: at times he seems harsh, and at others far too lenient. The point is that we lose our bearings because Marlow has lost his. He identifies with Jim, but he has no way of measuring the extent of his identification.

The story of Lord Jim is centred round this relationship between Jim and Marlow, the heroes of the novel. As in Heart of Darkness, the tale Marlow tells is presented as a kind of objective correlative of his own experiences. The adventures of Jim are a mirror of the spiritual progress of Marlow in his search for truth.

The initial crisis of the story, the lever on which the novel rests, is of course Jim's leap from the Patna. When he deserts the ship, he is exposing the weakness which will be his downfall, and will determine the course of his life. This crisis in Jim's story parallels the initial crisis in Marlow's - his identification with Jim. His commitment to Jim is an acknowledgement of the Jim in himself, his own potential for acting as Jim as acted. And Jim's desertion of the Patna, a result of the weakness

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, Complete Works, Canterbury Edition, Vol. XXI (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 72.

which undermines his character, is an image of Marlow's weakness - Jim himself.

The analogy between the two weaknesses, Jim's and Marlow's, is established through the imagery. When faced with their crises, both of them make an effort to detach themselves, and this is characterised by images of stillness and silence, which are broken at the moment of surrender.

When Jim is standing on the Patna, the stillness of the moment is stressed:

How long he stood stock-still by the hatch expecting every moment to feel the ship dip under his feet and the rush of water to take him at the back and toss him like a chip, I cannot say. Not very long - two minutes perhaps. A couple of men he could not make out began to converse drowsily, and also, he could not tell where, he detected a curious noise of shuffling feet. Above these faint sounds there was that awful stillness preceding a catastrophe, that trying silence of the moment before the crash.<sup>2</sup>

The crash is Jim's leap - the break in the silence. His jump is the move which interrupts his stillness, and brings to an end his detachment.

Marlow's equivalent "leap," into identification with Jim, is similarly presented in terms of movement and sound. When Jim is telling him the story, he tries to win his sympathy by presenting him with the decision he had to make. He demands, "What would you have done?"<sup>3</sup> Marlow's reaction is an effort to maintain a complete stillness, to retain his distance from Jim: "I was being bullied now, and it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself which would have had some bearing on the case. I was not disposed to take any risk of that sort."<sup>4</sup> Later, Marlow

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

himself hints at this parallel. Feeling himself tongue-tied in the face of Jim's suffering, he remarks that he "was afraid to speak, in the same way one dares not move for fear of losing a slippery hold."<sup>5</sup> Marlow and Jim both lose the hold; Jim, when he jumps from the ship, and Marlow when he commits himself to Jim. Immobility and silence characterise that detachment which neither of them can sustain.

In contrast, the French lieutenant, who is detached, and preserves a lofty indifference to the Patna incident, is presented in terms of stillness. Twice Marlow remarks on his immobility, and he describes his "imperturbable and mature calmness."<sup>6</sup> He retains his stillness because his own unstained honour removes him from Jim's situation: "'When the honour is gone - ah ca! par exemple - I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion - because - monsieur - I know nothing of it.'"<sup>7</sup> So the imagery substantiates the basic duality of the novel's structure, which is that Jim's actions provide a parallel for Marlow's; what Jim is doing on one level, Marlow is doing on another.

Jim's behaviour in the moment of disaster on the Patna reveals a tragic weakness which pursues him throughout his life. He drifts from job to job endlessly, and is always driven to the next by reminders of his past disgrace, cropping up to challenge his reputation. As we are told when we first meet him, "his incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 148.



at the time and go to another - generally farther east."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Marlow is haunted by Jim. He tells us that "I could never feel I had done with Jim for good."<sup>9</sup> Just as Jim goes to Patusan in a desperate effort to escape his destiny, so Marlow sends him there to be rid of him. He admits, "at the moment I merely wished to achieve his disappearance."<sup>10</sup>

A further complexity emerging from this duality is that Marlow has one kind of function in relation to Jim's story, and quite another in relation to his own. For Jim, he is a choric figure, a mediator between the story and the reader. As he says himself, "he existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you."<sup>11</sup> But the result of this mediation, since Marlow is in fact anything but a detached observer, is that the relationship between Jim and Marlow is paralleled by Marlow's relationship with other characters in the novel, and ultimately with his listeners, (and, by implication, the reader).

To Jim, Marlow is a reliable listener, an objective advisor. Jim turns to him, as if to a priest: "Didn't I tell you he confessed himself before me as though I had the power to bind and to loose?"<sup>12</sup> But while Marlow fulfills this role for Jim, he is also searching for a listener himself - for someone who will provide him with some kind of perspective. And so, in his interview with the French lieutenant, he recalls "I felt as though I were taking professional opinion on the case."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

And when he consults Stein, it is because "he was one the most trustworthy men I had ever known."<sup>14</sup>

Both Marlow and Jim are re-enacting their stories in a kathartic attempt to rid themselves of their burdens. Through repeating the tale, they are trying to distance themselves from it. As in Heart of Darkness, the telling of the tale is an attempt to be released from it, but in Lord Jim, it is not only Marlow, but Jim, too, who seeks this release. He tries to purge himself by telling his story to Marlow. He is, in a sense, re-living it; and at the same time, Marlow is trying to purge himself by re-telling his story, which consists of Jim telling him his.

Jim is searching for someone who will share his guilt. "He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice."<sup>15</sup> He is an Ancient Mariner figure, picking out one listener who will be forced, by the strength of the tale, into involvement. He pleads "'I would like somebody to understand - somebody - one person at least."<sup>16</sup> And he picks on Marlow, for Marlow is prepared to recognise himself in Jim.

But at the same time, Marlow himself is telling the story, and he, too, is searching for someone who will understand: "And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

If Jim, through talking to Marlow, involves him in his guilt, Marlow is in turn involving his listeners and, implicitly, the reader.

So for both Marlow and Jim, the actual telling of the story is crucial. The way we are made aware of the telling is significant. Jim's narrative to Marlow is punctuated by sudden snatches, in which he will direct interest away from himself, and on to Marlow. He challenges Marlow with his own situation, presenting him with those decisions with which he was confronted. And he always returns to the ultimate question, "'do you know what you would have done?'"<sup>18</sup> Marlow finds the question unanswerable. When Jim suddenly demands "'what do you believe?'"<sup>19</sup> Marlow cannot decide: "I felt myself overcome by a profound and hopeless fatigue, as though his voice had startled me out of a dream of wandering through empty spaces whose immensity had harrassed my soul and exhausted my body."<sup>20</sup> Jim himself feels Marlow's inability to detach himself from the situation. He insinuates, "'at bottom...you, yourself....'"<sup>21</sup> At bottom, Marlow himself is uncertain that he, too, would not have jumped.

And like Jim, Marlow, in telling the story, is trying to confront his listeners with his own dilemma. From relating Jim's account of his ordeal on the life-boat, Marlow breaks off, to address his audience: "'Hey, what do you think of it?' he cried with sudden animation. 'Wasn't he true to himself, wasn't he?'"<sup>22</sup> Marlow is trying to make his audience share his weakness - involvement with Jim.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

Jim's appeals to Marlow are appeals to his safety. He is reminding him that he, too, before he jumped, was secure, respected, untouchable. Marlow's security is no protection, just as his wasn't. He suggests, "What would you have done? You are sure of yourself, aren't you? What would you do if you felt now - this minute - the house here move, just move a little under your chair. Leap! By heavens! You would take one spring from where you sit and land in that clump of bushes yonder."<sup>23</sup> The key statement here is Jim's envious and potent "you are sure of yourself, aren't you?" By presenting him with a situation of such immediacy and yet improbability, Jim is forcing his own predicament on Marlow, and proving to him the factitiousness of his security. Marlow confesses that "he exaggerated. I would have landed short by several feet - and that's the only thing of which I am fairly certain."<sup>24</sup>

The juxtaposition of Jim's nightmare situation, and the apparent safety of those around him, is an effective demonstration of the proximity of the two. Civilised society is a veil for the ever-present confrontation with chaos, but it is never an infallible protection.

Jim begins to confide in Marlow when they dine together in a hotel which is full of conventional and predictable guests. Marlow describes them to us as one would describe a cross-section of society: "There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other in the midst of their travels; there were small parties and large parties, and lone

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking, or scowling as was their wont at home; and just as intelligently receptive of new impressions as their trunks upstairs."<sup>25</sup>

These people are like the civilised Europeans of Heart of Darkness, whose very security is objectionable to Marlow, who has seen the emptiness on which it is based: "They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend."<sup>26</sup> Because they do not understand the need for their routine, they are unaware of any threat to it. This point is emphasised when Jim begins to tell of the horror of his ordeal at the inquiry:

He darted his arm across the table-cloth, and clutching my hand by the side of my plate, glared fixedly. I was startled. 'It must be awfully hard,' I stammered, confused by this display of speechless feeling. 'It is - hell,' he burst out in a muffled voice.

This movement and these words cause two well-groomed male globe-trotters at a neighbouring table to look up in alarm from their iced pudding.<sup>27</sup>

The hotel occupants are alarmed at the disturbance of their peace, without realising the cause. Marlow is distinguished from them because he does recognise that Jim "was one of us" - that it might have

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>26</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup>Lord Jim, p. 78.

been himself, or any of them, in Jim's place.

Just as Jim has appealed to Marlow's safety, Marlow in turn reminds his listeners of theirs, implying that it is precarious and uncertain. When Marlow begins his tale he stresses this contrast between Jim's peril and the comfortable safety of the dinner party:

And it's easy enough to talk of Master Jim, after a good spread, two hundred feet above the sea level, with a box of decent cigars handy, on a blessed evening of freshness and starlight that would make the best of us forget we are only on sufferance here and got to pick our way in cross lights, watching every previous minute and every irremediable step, trusting we shall manage yet to go out decently in the end - but not so sure of it after all - and with dashed little help to expect from those we touch elbows with right and left.<sup>28</sup>

And there is a similar passage in Heart of Darkness, when Marlow breaks into his own narrative to address his listeners directly, contrasting his drama with their safety: "'Absurd!' he cried. 'This is the worst of trying to tell....Here you all are each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal - you hear - normal from year's end to year's end.'"<sup>29</sup> In both works, the device has the same purpose - to connect the specific experience with the universal.

Civilised modes of behaviour cover the blank horror which Jim has faced, the horror of naked confrontation with the self, and with that irrational part of the self which lies at the furthest recesses of the unconscious. For Marlow, this confrontation is intricately associated with the sea: "Trust a boat on the high seas

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>29</sup>Heart of Darkness, p. 114.

to bring out the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion."<sup>30</sup> The guests at the dinner party may be two hundred feet above the sea, but nevertheless it exists, just as, beneath the norms and rules of society, lies the threat of blind anarchy.

By transferring this threat to his listeners, Marlow is setting the story in a much wider social framework. He makes the connection between the individual and society, both confronting the lawless element within them. In both, apparent stability is undermined by an essential chaos.

In this dimension, Marlow is himself representative of civilised society. He presents a striking contrast to Jim; he is hardworking, dutiful and trustworthy, whilst Jim has neglected his duty, has shown himself to be irresponsible and unreliable. For Marlow, Jim's crime, like any crime, is a betrayal of social agreement: "The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view he was no mean traitor."<sup>31</sup>

But Marlow's involvement with Jim leads him, too, to neglect his social duty. On the day of the trial, he gives up his usual routine inspection of his ship so that he can see Jim. And he carefully explains exactly why this is a shirking of his duty: that the chief mate is an unreliable substitute, and that by neglecting the visit, Marlow is risking the efficient running of his ship. He exhibits, through his encounter with

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<sup>30</sup> Lord Jim, p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

Jim, his own tendencies to act like him. And so, despite the apparent difference between them, Marlow, because of this recognition, is unable to judge him.

The social implications of this identification of the two figures is indicated by Brierly's suicide. Brierly represents all of Marlow's social virtues, carried to an almost inhuman extreme. Marlow describes him: "he had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust."<sup>32</sup> And Brierly, quite unaccountably, breaks when he is confronted by Jim. Like Marlow, he sees the "Jim" in himself, and, horrified at the comparison, commits suicide.

What has happened is that Marlow and Brierly have, to different degrees, lived in accordance with the appearances of social and moral norms, and believed in their substance; but in Jim, they encounter a situation where the appearances bear no relation to reality.

Jim seems to be the epitome of respectability and youthful promise. Marlow is disarmed by his appearance; "And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 78.



Jim's appearance inspires trust. Marlow says that "he was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been,"<sup>34</sup> and Marlow's friend is likewise deceived: "For my part, I declare I am unable to imagine him guilty of anything much worse than robbing an orchard."<sup>35</sup> But Jim's behaviour bears no relation to his appearance. By recognising this disparity, Marlow and Brierly both see that any assumptions about social behaviour which they had previously possessed have been brought into question by Jim. As Hewitt points out, "Marlow - and...Brierly - cannot cast Jim out as an offender and forget him, and this is not merely because he is a fellow Englishman, but because he seems to cast doubt on the values by which they could condemn him."<sup>36</sup> Society itself, and the principles on which it operates, are brought into question, since its own responsible members are vulnerable in the same way as its offenders. Marlow's confidence in his own powers of discrimination is shattered, when he finds that in appearance Jim resembles all of those men whom he would be most ready to trust.

Not only is Marlow thrown off balance by this challenge to his judgment; he also makes the reader share his confusion. The way he relates the story is impressionistic. He abandons conventional chronology, and instead gives his story an emotional time sequence; his recollections take the form of impressions rather than facts. Marlow tells us what he saw when he first encountered Jim: "This was my first view of Jim. He looked

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>36</sup>Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge, Bowes & Bowes Ltd., 1952), p. 36.

as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on."<sup>37</sup> This description prepares us to be deceived as Marlow was deceived. Through his narrative, he leads us into all the obstacles which impede his judgment, so that we experience Jim as he has done. And he also deliberately holds back the fact that Jim did leave the ship, so that our sympathies are firmly secured before this discovery, and so that we are able to re-live Jim's crisis. The reader is given the heavy burden of Jim's bias, and Marlow's, and he is given no guidance as he pieces his way through the moral fog.

There is a quality of doubt which enshrouds all the moral concerns of the novel, and which is itself a central theme. It is the quality which unites Jim and Marlow: "It seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge."<sup>38</sup>

When Jim leaps from the Patna he is leaping from a world of security, and of safe values, to one of doubt. For he loses confidence in himself. Similarly, Marlow's certainty is destroyed when he commits himself to Jim. His tone becomes increasingly one of doubt; as he tells us, "I am fated never to see him clearly."<sup>39</sup> His very uncertainty about Jim reveals his uncertainty about himself, and this leads to the reader's doubt about both of them. We know, and Marlow knows, that he does bear some resemblance to Jim, that there is an affinity between the two men.

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<sup>37</sup>Lord Jim, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

But Marlow, and hence the reader, is never sure of the extent of this identification. This is the basis of his doubt; the degree of his closeness to Jim determines our interpretation of both.

As in Heart of Darkness, there is a dual irony at work, with Marlow both using irony himself, and becoming its victim. But although basically similar in both works, this device is used rather differently in Lord Jim. Irony depends on the reader's being able to see more than the characters themselves; in Lord Jim, the reader is given extra insight into the extent of Marlow's resemblance to Jim, an identity of which Marlow himself is only partly aware. As this kinship is revealed the judgments that Marlow has made about Jim double back, for they also apply to himself.

Jim's downfall is caused by his imagination; he has created for himself an exalted ideal of heroism, which is incompatible with action. In the incident on the training ship, he escapes from the immediate emergency on board, to his own fantasies of heroic exploits:

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sailing ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men - always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.<sup>40</sup>

His weakness is this tendency to see himself in terms of romantic stories.

On several occasions, Marlow indicates Jim's delight in translating his life into adventure stories. When he tells Marlow of Stein's offer, Jim remarks that, "it's like something you read of in books,"<sup>41</sup> and he says

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

of the inhabitants of Patusan that "they are like people in a book, aren't they."<sup>42</sup> It is Stein who labels Jim a romantic, and who defines the term. For him, to be romantic is "to follow the dream, and again to follow the dream."<sup>43</sup> The "dream" is that ambiguous quality of illusion which haunts the pages of Heart of Darkness, and which recurs here as a central concern. Daniel J. Schneider has pointed out that "the central conflict in Lord Jim... is a conflict between dream and reality;"<sup>44</sup> here, as in Heart of Darkness, illusion is seen to partake of both. The essential ambiguity in the two novels arises from the fact that dream and reality are both kinds of truth. As Schneider writes, "indeed, man's participation in ideality may be far more 'real' to him than his participation in the material world; and so the novel works extensively with the paradox that the real is unreal and dead, whereas the unreal is alone real and alive."<sup>45</sup> It is here that we come to Marlow's over-riding function in the novel; he is to tell the truth. The point is that this truth itself is a paradox, and furthermore can only be viewed through the veils of irony which obscure both Marlow and Jim.

Man is presented in Lord Jim as being torn between two extremes, the ideal and the actual. In his article "Butterflies and Beetles - Conrad's Two Truths,"<sup>46</sup> Tony Tanner shows how the two insects that make up Stein's collection are symbols of the two aspects of man, what Tanner calls the "qualitative extremes of humanity."<sup>47</sup> The butterfly, beautiful and elusive,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel J. Schneider, "Symbolism in Conrad's Lord Jim: The Total Pattern," Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. XII, No. 4 (Winter 1966), p. 428.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Tanner, "Butterflies and Beetles - Conrad's Two Truths," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Lord Jim, ed. by Robert E. Kuehn (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), pp. 53-67.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

and forever flying out of reach, is the ideal to which we aspire. And the sluggish, crawling, inglorious beetle is the reminder of a shabby actuality, which is continually pulling us down. Stein represents the balance we must achieve between these two extremes. His collection comprises both; and the anecdote he tells is significant. He captures his prize butterfly immediately after he has murdered three men.<sup>48</sup> Our most base actions go hand in hand with sublime moments.

Man embodies the two extremes of butterfly and beetle - of the ideal and the real, which are two kinds of truth. And the two extremes are presented as two ways in which we are to see Jim. The beetle is the symbol of all that is base and ignoble in man, and is typified by the villains of the novel, Cornelius, Chester, and Brown. All of them pride themselves on their ability to see clearly. Chester tells Marlow, "you must see things exactly as they are,"<sup>49</sup> and he is absolutely certain of his own judgment of Jim. "He's no good is he?"<sup>50</sup> An even better example of bare reality is Cornelius who, we are told, "resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle."<sup>51</sup> Cornelius, too, has no doubts about Jim: "He's no more than a little child here - like a little child - a little child."<sup>52</sup> And of course there is the opinion of the lowest of these three, Brown, who tells us himself, "I haven't got any wings."<sup>53</sup> Like the others, Brown despises Jim:

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<sup>48</sup>Lord Jim, p. 210.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 383.

"That mean little skunk."<sup>54</sup>

This is one aspect of Jim, and one aspect of truth. For, given the kind of reality that they see, these men are right about Jim. They judge him in terms of facts, which are all they can see. But facts are only one kind of truth.

Just as the villains represent the "beetle" - the base part of man, stripped of his noble aspirations, Jim is trying to become the "butterfly," and to ignore the "beetle" in himself. So his view of himself is an idealised one, because the strength of his illusions blinds him to fact.

The question which is crucial here, however, is the question of Marlow's relationship to the two kinds of truth. He is undoubtedly aware of the conflict between illusion and fact, and recognises that Jim's weakness lies in his inability to reconcile the two. It is Marlow who brings our attention to it: "I kept my eye on his shabby plodding with a sort of notion that it was a punishment for the heroics of his fancy - an expiation for his craving after more glamour than he could carry. He had loved too well to imagine himself a glorious racehorse, and now he was condemned to toil without **honour** like a costermonger's donkey."<sup>55</sup> Marlow knows that heroism is not the exalted and colourful quality that Jim imagines it to be. Since our ideals have to be balanced by the actuality which is equally a part of our condition, our most noble actions are tinged with ridicule. This is brought out by Marlow's introduction

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

of the anecdote of "Little Bob Stanton," who dies while trying to save a woman's life. His efforts contain the essential elements of heroism - courage and endurance, in battle with the elements - but in the telling of the story, Marlow shows that what is tragic is also absurd. "Poor Bob was the shortest chief mate in the merchant service and the woman stood five feet ten in her shoes and was as strong as a horse....One of the hands told me, hiding a smile at the recollection, 'It was for all the world, sir, like a naughty youngster fighting with his mother.'"<sup>56</sup> By stressing the unheroic circumstances of Bob Stanton's valour, Marlow is implying comparison with Jim, who is incapable of this kind of action. For Jim dreams of a heroism which is not hampered by factual circumstances; his ideals are divorced from reality.

Although Marlow is well aware of Jim's weakness, he also asserts that there is a positive value in his ideals. Marlow believes in the truth of illusion; he speaks of "our illusions, which I suspect only to be visions of remote unattainable truth, seen dimly."<sup>57</sup> He explains, "each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life. I don't know how much Jim understood; but I know he felt, he felt confusedly but powerfully, the demand of some such truth or some such illusion."<sup>58</sup> Illusion is that which gives meaning and substance to life.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

Our ideals have the power to inspire our most valuable actions. Marlow says of Jim that "he, on his side, had that faculty of beholding at a hint the face of his desire and the shape of his dream, without which the earth would know no lover and no adventurer."<sup>59</sup>

Marlow cannot condemn Jim totally, because he has regard for the quality of his ideals. "No doubt he was selfish, too, but his selfishness had a higher origin, a more lofty aim."<sup>60</sup> This attitude is strongly reminiscent of Marlow's attitude to Kurtz, in Heart of Darkness. The man's actions contradicted his ideals, yet could not devalue them.

In Heart of Darkness Marlow moves from a world of facts, in which he can be detached from Kurtz, to a world of illusion, where he identifies with him. In Lord Jim the process is more complex; he fluctuates between the two perspectives in a dialectic movement towards his final position of involvement. I have already shown how Jim, in the terms of the novel, is romantic, and that this is his weakness and his destiny. I shall now proceed to show that Marlow's final statements about Jim reveal his ultimate kinship with him. They are both of them romantics, and this is a degree of identity of which Marlow himself is unaware.

Like Stein, Marlow sees Jim as a romantic: "He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic."<sup>61</sup> But Marlow has a hostile attitude to this quality. He is

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 416.



very anxious to appear down-to-earth, factual and practical. It is in this sense that he is continually contrasting himself with Jim. When he tries to help Jim after the trial, he describes the difference between them: "His bearing was that of a naturally taciturn man possessed by an idea. My talk was of the material aspect of his position."<sup>62</sup> Marlow sees the difference between himself and Jim as being the difference between the practical man and the romantic. He assures us that "I at least had no illusions."<sup>63</sup> When he gives a reference to Jim, he contrasts his attitude and Jim's. He feels that he has helped Jim in material terms; he has helped him to find a job. But Jim overlooks this aspect, and thinks only of how Marlow has saved him spiritually; his trust has rescued him from despair. Marlow rather impatiently hints at the difference: "It was ten to one that I had saved him from starvation - of that peculiar sort that is almost invariably associated with drink. This was all. I had not a single illusion on that score, but looking at him, I allowed myself to wonder at the nature of the one he had, within the last three minutes, so evidently taken into his bosom."<sup>64</sup> He prides himself on his own practicality; like the "beetle" characters, he tries to concern himself with facts. And so he professes great exasperation at Jim's romantic qualities: "And what business had he to be romantic?"<sup>65</sup> He is careful to distinguish himself from Jim in this matter: "I suppose you think that I, too, am romantic, but it is a mistake."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

But the mistake is Marlow's; he is wrong about himself, and through his incomprehension, the force of the irony may be understood. If we are aware of the extent of his relationship with Jim, we may see how far his verdict on Jim is directed back at him. And this may be seen through an examination of the final episode of the novel, and of Marlow's response to it.

When Jim goes to Patusan he is seizing the opportunity to expiate his guilt, and to start afresh. He is trying to show that the incident on the Patna is not an inevitable mark of his destiny - that given the chance, he will be able to prove himself a hero. And seemingly, this is what happens. In Patusan he is, as Marlow informs us, "loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess, forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero."<sup>67</sup>

But this prolepsis of Marlow's is a forewarning of the fact that Jim will never escape his fate. His weakness has been the tendency to cast himself into the illusory role of hero, at the cost of the community which, in his imagination only, he is saving. In fact, his situation in Patusan is exactly suited to his illusions. He is fulfilling the role which he has all his life been preparing in his dreams. But when the situation is challenged by an outside force, Jim once more proves his inability to act. The arrival of Brown is a reminder of the "fact" of his life which he has tried to bury. Brown comes from the world outside Patusan, breaking in on Jim's island as, in the Patna episode, a real situation had interrupted

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

his daydreams. Jim can cope with the dream, but not the reality. In Patusan, he has been living the "butterfly" in himself without being troubled by the "beetle." Brown serves as a fatal reminder that he is composed of both: "And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts."<sup>68</sup> Jim's confrontation with Brown - the confrontation of the "beetle" in himself - is a mirror of Marlow's confrontation with Jim. Jim is confused and rendered incapable of action by this reminder of his own condition; similarly, Marlow is made incapable of impartial narrative, by his recognition of Jim.

Through the meeting with Brown, the challenge to his illusions, Jim is led to repeat his original crime; once more, he betrays the community which has been entrusted to him: "He who had been once unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men's confidence."<sup>69</sup> Realising this, Jim also realises that he cannot avoid his fate, so in a final effort to retain his self-image, he offers his life to Doramin.

This final gesture is problematic, because it is both pointless and admirable. True to his own concept of heroism, he surrenders his life in a halo of romantic glory. His death is a heroic one, yet it is as exhibitionistic and egotistical as all the heroic exploits of his fantasies.

In terms of facts, he achieves nothing through his sacrifice. The community doesn't benefit by his death; no-one does. But this view of Jim

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

is only one kind of reality. He himself would regard this last act as heroic and triumphant. As Marlow says, his death is "romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood."<sup>70</sup> Jim sees his suicide as a heroic success because he is a romantic, occupying a world of illusion. Since his romanticism is his weakness, his last gesture only confirms that he cannot escape his destiny; to the end of his life he pursues illusion and ignores the concrete, and this is epitomised by his death.

Jim's desertion of fact for illusion is further illustrated by his relationship with the Jewel. She is a living woman, a concrete reality whom he deserts, in favour of the dream: "He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct."<sup>71</sup>

But although Marlow recognises that this is what Jim has done, he doesn't see his death as a failure. Oddly enough, Marlow adopts a tone of defence in his account of it. At the close of the novel, having placed the evidence before us, he asks for our verdict: "Have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all."<sup>72</sup>

Jim's "eternal constancy" is the quality which Marlow believes in, and would have us believe in. He speaks of his "greatness as genuine as any man ever achieved,"<sup>73</sup> and later he affirms, "I had made up my mind that Jim, for whom alone I cared, had at last mastered his fate."<sup>74</sup> This is the

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

Marlow who, at an earlier point in his narrative, has scorned the idea that this is possible: "As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock."<sup>75</sup>

In reality, Jim has achieved nothing, and has only proved once more his own weakness. But he is successful in his fidelity to his own ideal of heroism, even though at the same time it is this very ideal which has led to his downfall. Marlow, by affirming that Jim finally did find success, is also choosing fidelity to illusion; for he, too, is a romantic, although throughout the novel he has hotly denied it.

So Marlow's involvement with Jim is deeper than he realises, for they are both of them committed to illusion; Jim is committed to his ideal of himself as hero, and Marlow, ultimately, is committed to the ideal of Jim. Jim dies with a final "proud and unflinching glance,"<sup>76</sup> and Marlow is true to the same illusion.

Lord Jim, then, deals with a problem of narration which is basically the same as the problem in Heart of Darkness; the problem is that Marlow is deeply involved with his hero, but that he himself is unaware of the extent of his involvement. His view of him is therefore coloured to a greater extent than he realises. However, in Lord Jim Marlow is given a more complex role, and the manner of execution becomes more sophisticated, and more subtle. In a sense, his role in the novel is to communicate ambiguity, for every statement he makes about Jim must be equivocal, given his basic uncertainty. Lord Jim is a novel concerned with the essential ambiguity of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

truth, and of all moral judgments arising from it. So Marlow, doubtful and uncertain himself, and confusing the reader even more, unites the form and content of the novel, by embodying its theme.

CHAPTER IV

CHANCE

It is fair to say that in Chance Marlow is pushed to his limits. Indeed, in the opinion of a number of critics, he is pushed beyond them. Guerard, who praises the novel as a whole, is critical of its narrative complexity and contrasts it with the success of Conrad's earlier experiments: "The Conrad who conceived the various evocative narrating voices of the early novels fell, at the end, into one of the worst of the realistic traps; to employ narrators or observers who by definition or by profession are unequipped to tell their stories effectively....Even Marlow has been turned into such a casual and uninteresting speaker."<sup>1</sup> And Henry James, whilst acknowledging its technical deftness, criticises the narrative structure of the novel. "It places Mr. Conrad absolutely alone as a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing."<sup>2</sup> But although it is certainly true that Chance has a highly complex construction, the novel is far more than a demonstration of technical skill. Its excellence lies in the fact that this construction is an integral part of the novel - an indispensable method of exposition. Ofcourse, Marlow's narrative task is a superhuman one, but this is essential to the requirements of the novel. From an assortment of fragments, gathered only by coincidence and hearsay, he is to piece together a coherent story, which

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<sup>1</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, Notes on Novelists (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 345.

is united only by the process of narration. But not only does he unify the work; he creates it. His role of truth teller is now extended to its logical extreme - that of novelist. It is in this light that I shall proceed to examine his role in Chance.

The novel was published in 1913, considerably later than the other Marlow works. In accordance with the time lag, he has become middle aged. For throughout the four works, which cover an extensive period from 1898 to 1913, Marlow is given a credible consistency. As his age and position develop, so his point of view matures, and we see a startling transformation from the relatively young and eager Marlow of Youth, to the old and detached philosopher whom we encounter in Chance. The narrator presents Marlow as a quiet and thoughtful character. "He was patient and reflective. He had been at sea many years, and I verily believe he liked sea-life because upon the whole it is favourable to reflection."<sup>3</sup> Marlow has cultivated a philosophic detachment which gives him an ironic perspective of life. At one point the narrator describes his "slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth."<sup>4</sup> It is this ironic vision which distances him from his story, and sets the tone of his narration.

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, Chance, Complete Works, Canterbury Edition, Vol. II (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 325.



Marlow's detachment is confirmed by the fact that he has a very insignificant role in the story he tells. Apart from a very few occasions he is not even present at the major events, and never meets one of the principal characters. But this does not detract from his importance in the novel. For if we bear in mind Conrad's views on the art of the novel, then Marlow's lack of participation in the story may be seen to support his symbolic role of novelist. For his lack of involvement imitates the authorial detachment which Conrad is seeking in his writing. Moreover, the innovation of Marlow was originally intended to allow for this detachment on Conrad's part. Now, ironically, Conrad's spokesman himself mimics this detachment, and in turn seeks participants in the story, as his narrators. And as Conrad modifies Marlow's views in the previous novels, Marlow now modifies those of his informants - Powell, the Fynes - and we see the process taking place. A striking example of this multi-layered effect is Marlow's account of Flora's experience with the governess, which has been reported to him by Mrs. Fyne, who heard it from Flora. And Marlow himself is telling it to the overall narrator, who tells it to us, so that we receive the benefit of all these impressions.

In all this, Marlow is the co-ordinator; he has at his command a number of impressions, and it is his task to make a story of them. And the faculty which is required to do this is the imagination - that which makes connections. What distinguishes Marlow from his twin narrator, Powell, is that while Powell has the necessary information at his disposal, he can do no more than report it, whereas Marlow has the ability to make

theories about it. The narrator himself points out this difference. Marlow, he tells us, "had the habit of pursuing general ideas in a peculiar manner, between jest and earnest,"<sup>5</sup> whilst Powell exhibits "a probably unconscious contempt of general ideas."<sup>6</sup> Marlow describes Powell as "one of those people who form no theories about facts."<sup>7</sup> And Marlow makes a similar observation about another of his principal narrators, Fyne. "General ideas were not to his taste. He mistrusted them."<sup>8</sup> Marlow, who does form general ideas, has the quality of imagination which the other narrators lack, and it is this quality which makes him both philosopher and artist.

In another sense, Marlow's role is analogous to that of a detective. He has to gather his facts, and fill in the gaps between them. As he says, "I am speaking now as an investigator - a man of deductions."<sup>9</sup> And the narrator makes a similar remark. "You are the expert in the psychological wilderness. This is like one of those Redskin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way."<sup>10</sup> For Marlow, the gaps to be filled in are a set of psychological and dramatic moments

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

which he has to create for us, through his imagination. As Geddes puts it, "Marlow is scrupulously faithful to facts, as far as they go; but ultimately, the facts must be supplemented by his own active imagination."<sup>11</sup> Geddes explains that "Marlow cannot adequately penetrate to the essential "truth" of Flora's situation by means of abstract theorising, but must render it in terms of the elements of art."<sup>12</sup> The word "render" is significant here, for it recalls the principles of narration which I discussed earlier - the delineation between telling and showing. What Marlow does in his capacity as novelist is to render the facts that have been reported to him; to show, rather than to tell.

Jocelyn Baines makes the objection that in Chance "Conrad flagrantly violates his self-imposed method when he makes Marlow describe events about which he could never have known."<sup>13</sup> But this objection ignores the fact that it is Marlow who is inventing the story, and that he is consciously making use of his imagination, in order to present his material dramatically. At one point he breaks off from his narrative, in order to point out what he is doing. "As is my habit, or my weakness, or my gift, I don't know which, I visualized the story for himself."<sup>14</sup> On a number of occasions, Marlow makes it quite clear that his story-telling is a form of imaginative guesswork. When he is talking about the private conversation between the

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<sup>11</sup>Gary Geddes, "The Structure of Sympathy: Conrad and the 'Chance' that Wasn't." English Literature in Transition, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1969), p. 183.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>13</sup>Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad, a Critical Biography (London, Pelican Books, 1971), p. 460.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 177.

governess and the young man, he introduces his subject with the admission that he is imagining it. "What they said to each other in private we can imagine."<sup>15</sup> The fact that Marlow's imaginings are a deliberate device is substantiated by the narrator, to whom they are being told. When Marlow accounts for the behaviour of the governess, it is the narrator who reminds us that he is guessing at the truth, rather than reporting fact. "'You have a ghastly imagination' I said with a cheerfully sceptical smile."<sup>16</sup> And when he describes the meeting of Flora and Anthony, he interrupts the story to appeal to the narrator: "Don't you think that I have hit on the psychology of the situation?"<sup>17</sup>

And so through his imagination, Marlow is established as a creative force, lending coherence and unity to the story, and as such, his role is analogous to that of novelist. But it is important not only to realise this, but to determine the kind of novel with which he is concerned. For Chance is a complex literary experiment, based on a subtle manipulation of form. It is quite apparent that the novel owes much to the fiction of the nineteenth century for its construction. As Johnson points out:

The basic plot...is a nineteenth century standby. A proper young heiress is thrown into poverty by the financial reverses of her father; from the noble principle of pity a young gentleman rescues her into marriage; in time the husband dies and the faithful but humble lover, who has waited patiently for years, is rewarded with the heroine's hand.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>18</sup>J.W. Johnson, "Marlow and Chance: A Reappraisal," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 10, No. 1, (Spring, 1968), p. 98.

This archaic setting serves a number of purposes. On one level, it is used as a means of criticising Victorian society, by examining the story in its own context. But also, since it is told with the perspective of several years from the event, it serves as a comment on modern times, through the contrasting of two ages. And at the same time, the genre itself - the romantic novel - is criticised in terms of the modern novel. All these dimensions are brought together by Marlow, who leads us through an extraordinary method of social analysis, rooted in the literary problem of writing a nineteenth century novel in the twentieth century.

Marlow's tone varies a great deal during the course of his narration. At times, it closely resembles that of the Victorian novelist. Johnson traces certain of the techniques of Chance to such writers as Thackeray, Eliot, Hardy and Dickens, and stresses the point that these imitations are quite deliberate.<sup>19</sup> This novel has a more broadly social theme than Lord Jim or Heart of Darkness; that is, it has as one of its major concerns the interaction of individual lives and social institutions. In this, it shows a marked departure from the previous, more purely philosophical works in which Marlow appeared. They implied, in general terms, the relation of the individual to society. Here, this relation is examined more specifically, and the process of analysis follows the precedent of the Victorian social novelists.

In Chance Victorian society is questioned and exposed as savagely as it was by the writers of that period. More specifically, there is a distinct Dickensian flavour in Marlow's social criticism. The novel deals

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

with the victimisation of an isolated individual - Flora de Barrel - by a cruel and stupid society, whose main priority is money. The satire on this society is succinctly embodied by Marlow's venomous indictment of the financier, de Barrel, and of all those who were deceived by him. This attack on economic speculation markedly follows the tradition of Dickens, the master of this mode of writing:

Nobody knew what operations were carried on inside except this - that if you walked in and tendered your money over the counter it would be calmly taken from you by somebody who would give you a printed receipt. That and no more. It appears that such knowledge is irresistible. People went in and tendered; and once it was taken from their hands their money was more irretrievably gone from them than if they had thrown it into the sea. This then, and nothing else, was being carried on in there....<sup>20</sup>

Marlow uses the case of de Barrel to identify the symptoms of an age. De Barrel's rise to fortune from his humble origins in Bethnal Green is a history not merely of one man, but of the English bourgeoisie. The mediocrity which Marlow notices in his character is the mediocrity of an age which has become dominated by a rising moneyed class. He is condemning a society which allows itself to place its values in abstractions:

He was a mere sign, a portent. There was nothing in him. Just about that time the word Thrift was to the fore. You know the power of words. We pass through periods dominated by this or that word - it may be development, or it may be competition, or education, or purity or efficiency or even sanctity. It is the word of the time. Well just then it was the word Thrift which was out in the streets walking arm in arm with righteousness, the inseparable companion and backer up of all such national catch-words, looking everybody in the eye as it were. The very drabs of the pavement, poor things, didn't escape the fascination.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Conrad, Chance, p. 80.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

But Marlow's main reason for depicting this social climate, is to show the effect it has on personal relationships. Flora moves through a series of situations in which she becomes increasingly blighted by her encounters with people, all of whom are motivated by self-interest. In de Barrel's cousin, who has been charged with her care, Marlow gives us a portrait of the new middle class businessman. His manner expresses "a derisive disapproval of everything that was not lower middle class, a profound respect for money, a mean sort of contempt for speculators that fail, and a conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity."<sup>22</sup> And he offers Flora hospitality in the hope that he will be rewarded by her father, and eventually drives her into the streets. Then there is the old lady who cannot tolerate Flora because she "was not naturally cheerful," but who makes no effort to discover why she is not, and the German husband, whose lust Flora mistakes for sympathy. All of these contribute to her total alienation from a society which time after time rejects her.

But the initial trauma is the attack she receives at the hands of the governess, who, disappointed at the collapse of de Barrel's fortune, vents her years of frustration and pain on the luckless girl, who in turn is psychologically paralysed by the experience. The peculiarity of this, and all of the other important relationships in the novel, is that they are undermined by taboos and restrictions which have created sexual disorders. The one supreme value which Marlow celebrates in Chance,

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

is the fulfilled relationship of a man and a woman. "Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the - the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple."<sup>23</sup> And it is the realisation of this destiny that redeems Flora, and brings to an end her isolation. But Marlow recognises that the most damaging and far-reaching effect of Victorian repression, is in its interference with the natural sexual harmony between man and woman. In this perception he follows his Victorian models, and especially Dickens who demonstrates time and again in his novels how society has crippled man's natural instincts. In Chance, the phenomenon is demonstrated more overtly.

The cruelty of the governess is intimately related to her age, her fading looks, her desperation to cling to the young man:

She had seen her youth vanish, her freshness disappear, her hopes die, and now she felt her flaming middle-age slipping away from her. No wonder that with her admirably dressed, abundant hair, thickly sprinkled with white threads and adding to her elegant aspect the piquant distinction of a powdered coiffure - no wonder, I say, that she clung desperately to her last infatuation for that graceless young scamp....<sup>24</sup>

So her greed is mingled with a sexual antagonism to Flora, as Marlow points out when he imagines her retort to the young man: "'You seemed to like it well enough through, playing the fool with that chit of a girl.'"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 426.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 102.



Her relationship with the young man is, of course, based on the money by which she retains her hold over him. This relationship is an implied criticism of a society whose values have been so debased that sexual passion has been sublimated into monetary greed, and where feelings have to be bought.

Another, more comical aspect of the sexual effects of society on the individual is Marlow's portrait of Mrs. Fyne, who takes her place among a host of Dickensian females ranging from the irresponsible Mrs. Jellyby of Bleak House, to the more sinister feminist Miss Wade, in Little Dorritt. Mrs. Fyne is a woman whose theoretical feminism has caused her to lose a vital part of her nature - her femininity. Marlow presents her as a distinctly masculine personality: "She wore a white skirt and coat; a white hat with a large brim reposed on her smoothly arranged hair. The coat was cut something like an army mess-jacket and the style suited her. I dare say there are many youthful subalterns, and not the worst-looking too, who resemble Mrs. Fyne in the type of face, in the sunburnt complexion, down to that something alert in bearing."<sup>26</sup> And her interest in her girlfriends is a markedly sexual one. "She always walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist."<sup>27</sup> While her masculinity is stressed, Marlow gently hints at her husband's lack of it. For he hardly notices the girls as Marlow ironically points out: "I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

Fyne, with his family of girls, has had his masculinity appropriated by his wife, whose obsessive theorising for the cause of women has at its roots a very genuine grievance; it is a response to a society which makes no suitable accommodation for its women. And this is illustrated when she expresses a deep sympathy for Flora, who is completely at the mercy of her uncle: "'She never looked back at us,' said Mrs. Fyne. 'She just followed him out. I've never had such a crushing impression of the miserable dependence of girls - of women. This was an extreme case. But a young man - any man - could have gone to break stones on the roads or something of that kind - or enlisted - or -'"<sup>29</sup> So Mrs. Fyne's feminism is prompted by a true abhorrence of social injustice, but its result is an antipathy to all natural feeling. Marlow explains that her attempted interference in the elopement of Flora and Anthony is motivated by her own distorted nature. "She can't forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman."<sup>30</sup> And he repeats, "it is true that Mrs. Fyne did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into unscrupulous sexless nuisances."<sup>31</sup> So Mrs. Fyne is another example of an individual whose sexuality has been deformed by society.

Finally, there is the triangle on board the Ferndale, where the young couple are prevented from coming together by the paralysing influence of the Victorian father, whose nature combines a perverted jealousy for

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

Flora, with a typical patriarchal repression. The tension reaches its climax in the scene after Powell has watched the poisoning of the drink. He describes to Marlow the appearance of the couple, as a sexual confrontation:

Mrs. Anthony had on a dressing-gown of some grey stuff with red facings and a thick red cord round her waist. Her hair was down. She looked a child; a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth....She looked like a forsaken elf. Captain Anthony had moved towards her to keep her away from my end of the table, where the tray was. I had never seen them so near to each other before, and it made a great contrast. It was wonderful, for, with his beard cut to a point, his swarthy, sunburnt complexion, thin nose and his lean head there was something African, something Moorish in Captain Anthony. His neck was bare; he had taken off his coat and collar and had drawn on his sleeping-jacket in the time that he had been absent from the saloon.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the father "was completely dressed with his very cap still on his head just as when he left me on deck."<sup>33</sup> The grouping of the young, sexually awakened couple, facing the old and forbidding father presents a scene of startling sexual significance, in itself a demonstration of the inhibitions and repressions which are imposed by Victorian society.

But although Marlow depicts this phenomenon with such accuracy, the implications of his analysis are deeper than he realises. For, as in the other Marlow stories, Conrad is employing the device of double irony, by which Marlow becomes his own victim. For there is one area of concern in this novel where Marlow abandons his customary philosophical detachment, and enters into a strongly self-opinionated and extreme position; this subject is, of course, women. Marlow on several occasions

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 424.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

gives vent to his obsessive hatred of the female sex, in quite unreasonable language:

They are devoid of decency. I mean masculine decency. Cautiousness too is foreign to them - the heavy reasonable cautiousness which is our glory. And if they had it they would make of it a thing of passion, so that its own mother - I mean the mother of cautiousness - wouldn't recognize it. Prudence with them is a matter of thrill like the rest of sublunary contrivances. 'Sensation at any cost,' is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; They want also all the crimes for their own.<sup>34</sup>

And he admits, "for myself it's towards women that I feel vindictive mostly, in my small way."<sup>35</sup> On other occasions, he is equally eloquent in his praise of women. "The pluck of women! The optimism of the dear creatures!"<sup>36</sup>

And he is given to making idealistic generalisations about them: "A woman may be a fool, a sleepy fool, an agitated fool, a too awfully noxious fool, and she may even be simply stupid. But she is never dense. She's never made of wood through and through as some men are."<sup>37</sup> The point is that both his idealisation, and his savage condemnation of women, point to the same tendency to conceptualise about them so that they cease to be real. He says himself, "You say I don't know women. Maybe. It's just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of woman."<sup>38</sup> This inability to recognize women as people shows Marlow to be as much a victim of the constraints of society as the characters he is describing.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

He, too, has had his natural appetites and feelings inhibited to such an extent that normal relations with women have become impossible for him. That this is intended to be an ironic view of Marlow is brought out once again by the third narrator, who acts as a neutral observer, modifying Marlow's views, as Marlow modifies those of his sources. And so, after one of Marlow's outbursts, the narrator intervenes. "Do you expect me to agree with all this?"<sup>39</sup> And on another occasion he confides, "I smiled incredulously at Marlow's ferocity; but Marlow, pausing with a whimsically retrospective air, never flinched."<sup>40</sup> The texture of the novel is so fine that there are multiple folds of qualifying perspectives, and ultimately even that of Marlow is kept in place by the voice who is narrating to us.

However, the irony of the novel does not stop at this. Insofar as Marlow is criticising the direct social implications of Victorian society, his tone approximates that of the novels he imitates. But there is more than this going on in the course of the narrative. For there is a point at which imitation of the form becomes parody of that form, and at which Marlow's irony deviates from specific social comment to a more complex, literary comment.

Lord Jim was a study of a man whose romantic ideals were out of place in this age, where tragedy and heroism no longer have any application. Jim's weakness was to picture himself in the context of romantic stories, which proved to bear no relation to reality. In Chance it is the context

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

itself, the genre of romantic literature, which is examined and shown to be incompatible with the twentieth century. This is achieved through the mediation of Marlow, whose dogged realism acts as a foil to the romantic content of his story.

The novel attacks a medley of genres which have their root in the nineteenth century, and which have in common that "romantic" spirit which is of the essence of the Victorian age. The word "romantic" is carefully defined throughout the novel, as being those sentiments which bear no relevance to life. This is shown by Marlow's portrait of Carleon Anthony, who represents the epitome of Victorian poetry. "The late Carleon Anthony, the poet, sang in his time, of the domestic and social amenities of our age with a most felicitous versification, his object being, in his own words, 'to glorify the result of six thousand years' evolution towards' the refinement of thought manners and feelings.'"<sup>41</sup> As Johnson says, "the poet is depicted in a series of sharp details that make him a composite Tennyson, Arnold, and (most pointedly) Meredith."<sup>42</sup> What makes these figures "romantic" for Conrad, is that their ideals and their morality have lost their relation to life. This is made clear, by the contrast between Anthony's private life, and the content of his poems. "In his domestic life that same Carleon Anthony showed traces of the primitive cave-dweller's temperament."<sup>43</sup> So Marlow's handling of him acts as a direct criticism of this kind of poetry, in which sentiment has taken the place of truth. "His poems read like sentimental novels told in

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>42</sup>Johnson, op.cit., p. 100.

<sup>43</sup>Chance, p. 38.

verse of a really superior quality."<sup>44</sup>

The danger of this false sentimentalising is exemplified by Captain Anthony, who tries to live according to the standards his father celebrated in verse. "The inarticulate son had set up a standard for himself with that need for embodying in his conduct the dreams, the passions, the impulses the poet puts into arrangements of verses...."<sup>45</sup> Captain Anthony's mistake, like Jim's, is to try to apply romantic illusions to a reality which cannot contain them. Like Jim, he is a victim of bad art, that which tells lies about life. And Marlow, who tells the truth as the novelist should tell the truth, is particularly aware of the threat. "We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories."<sup>46</sup> Marlow ironically brings out the contrast between Anthony's illusions, and reality. "The idea of the son of the poet, the rescuer of the most forlorn damsel of modern times, the man of violence, gentleness and generosity, plunged up to his neck in ship's accounts amused me."<sup>47</sup> This ironic contrast is a good illustration of how Marlow is manipulating literary form in Chance. What he does is to undermine the stock elements of the romantic story, through his cynical tone. So the traditional noble virtues of courage, generosity, love and sympathy are questioned and explored. The novel is divided into two sections entitled "The Damsel" and "The Knight,"

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

which recalls the nineteenth century fascination with mediaeval romance, and these very titles place the story in the romantic setting which is to be the target of Marlow's irony.

The first indication we have of this process is at the beginning of the novel, when Powell is telling his story. He celebrates the generosity of the elder Powell in finding him a situation, but Marlow is unwilling to allow that the action was prompted by such selfless magnanimity. "He did what he could," Marlow retorted gently, "and on his own showing that was not a very great deal. I cannot help thinking that there was some malice in the way he seized the opportunity to serve you. He managed to make you uncomfortable. You wanted to go to sea, but he jumped at the chance of accommodating your desire with a vengeance."<sup>48</sup> The stuff of romantic literature thrives on extremes. But Marlow will not admit of unqualified absolutes in human behaviour. He expresses the view that "the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition. Mediocrity is our mark."<sup>49</sup>

Marlow exhibits a curious attitude to the common bonds of sympathy and courage that unite human beings. All those who are kind to Flora are shown to be motivated by self-interest; Marlow seems to have most respect for the attention shown her by Mrs. Fyne, and this is because hers is a disinterested attention. "The vigil must have been the more trying because I could see very well that at no time did she think the victim particularly charming or sympathetic. It was a manifestation of pure compassion, of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



compassion in itself, so to speak, not many women would have been capable of displaying with that unflinching steadiness."<sup>50</sup> And so, oddly enough, Marlow admires the behaviour of Mrs. Fyne the more, precisely because it is devoid of emotions, for it is this indifference which shows her to be selfless. In contrast, Captain Anthony's attentions to Flora, which are supposedly fired by love, the purest of passions, are treated with a certain amount of skepticism by Marlow. He recognises the danger of Anthony's power over Flora:

He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him - very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder....<sup>51</sup>

Marlow realises not only that these absolute passions are themselves questionable, but that they are also undesirable. Not only is Anthony's generosity mingled with his own romantic pride - it is also damaging to Flora, who is burdened with an immense gratitude which stuns her:

'I shall live on...feeling a little crushed, nevertheless.'  
'Crushed!' he repeated. 'What's crushing you?'  
'Your magnanimity.'<sup>52</sup>

Love itself, the core of all romantic literature, is brought into doubt by Marlow, who recognises in it an essential egoism.

If Anthony's love had been as egoistic as love generally is, it would have been greater than the egoism of his vanity - or of his generosity, if you like - and all this could not have happened.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

He would not have hit upon that renunciation at which one dies not knowing whether to grin or shudder. It is true too that then his love would not have fastened itself upon the unhappy daughter of de Barral. But it was a love born of that rare pity which is not akin to contempt because rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness - the tenderness of the fiery predatory kind - the tenderness of silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind. At the same time I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous.<sup>53</sup>

And so Marlow is ironically commenting on romantic literature, by questioning those virtues which make up its content. Although the kind of novel I discussed earlier - typified by writers like Dickens and Hardy - can hardly be categorised as "romantic," they do nevertheless come under Marlow's attack, for there is a romantic strain in them which identifies them with the rest of the literature Marlow is satirising in Chance. For the most predominant emotion of Victorian literature is pathos, and it is precisely this pathos which is undercut by Marlow's tone. He does recognise the romantic potential of his story, but he neutralises it by his commentary. The most striking illustration of this is his comment on Mrs. Fyne's account of de Barral's seaside walks with Flora. "I remembered what Mrs. Fyne had told me before of the view she had years ago of de Barrel clinging to the child at the side of his wife's grave and later on of these two walking hand in hand the observed of all eyes by the sea. Figures from Dickens - pregnant with pathos."<sup>54</sup> By making the connection with Dickens, Marlow is pointing out the difference between this and a Dickens novel. The pathos is cancelled, by his remarking on it. He does not ever allow the pathos of the story to gain ascendancy, and

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

he balances its potentially tragic elements with a comic vision, reminiscent of his comic perspective in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim. There are frequent references to the ambiguity of both the story, and life itself. Marlow uses terms like "tragi-comedy"<sup>55</sup> and "sinister farce,"<sup>56</sup> and his narrative is dotted with adjectives like "burlesque" and "grotesque." When he goes with Fyne to search for Flora, he tells us, "I begged sarcastically to know whether he could tell me if we were engaged in a farce or in a tragedy."<sup>57</sup> Marlow, whose vision is a mocking and ironic one, is amused at the gravity of Fyne, who does not share his perception of absurdity. He talks of "his serious view of the sublunary comedy"<sup>58</sup> and at one point tells us that "I looked at his unshaken solemnity with the amused pity we give the victim of a funny if somewhat ill-natured practical joke."<sup>59</sup>

This blending of the comic and the tragic lends the perspective of irony to an essentially sentimental story, and this irony serves as a modern comment on a nineteenth century theme. For irony is as much the mode of the twentieth century as pathos was the touchstone of the nineteenth. It is the role of Marlow, the ironist, to point to this difference, in all the novels in which he appears.

The structure of the Victorian novel, as typified most particularly by Dickens, implies the machinations of a system which is in control of our destiny. The customary happy ending, tied up by a stable, prosperous

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

family, affirms the belief in an ultimately benevolent providence, working towards goodness, and rewarding virtue. But Conrad's world has no such security. Throughout the novel, Marlow has shown life to be dependant on coincidence; for "Chance" is his theme. Why do things happen as they do, he asks at one point. And his own answer states the philosophy of the novel: "Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant: and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances."<sup>60</sup> And Marlow defines "chance" at the beginning of that novel as "that which happens blindly and without intelligent design."<sup>61</sup> This, then is the difference between the world of the Victorian novel, safely bounded by a sense of destiny and order, and our own society, where there is no longer any certainty or communal belief. So irony has come to replace tragedy or pathos as a reflection of our condition, and may be seen to be a suitable mode of expression, in a world where all values are open to doubt, and where we move amid absurdity. Marlow uncovers his story by coincidence - through chance encounters with characters who, by chance, were present at certain events. And so once again, in this novel, the process of his narration may be seen to correspond with the theme. Marlow's role in Chance, as in both Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim, has been to act as a means of uniting form and content. The way in which this is achieved in Chance is through his adoption of the symbolic role of novelist, in his narration.

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

### CONCLUSION

From this study, it may be concluded that despite the differences between the three novels, Marlow does have an essentially similar function in all of them. He is a device by which Conrad can pursue his artistic goal - to create a new form for the novel.

Marlow is a means of achieving the authorial detachment which is such an important part of Conrad's aesthetic credo, and which, as I indicated in the first chapter, identifies him with the movement in modern literature towards impersonality. By making his narrator not merely his own mouthpiece, but a participant in the stories he tells, Conrad is able to obscure his own voice so that the novels are presented dramatically. Having found this impersonality, he uses it with an increasing complexity.

Central to his experiment is the use of the double irony, the device by which Marlow's own irony is directed back at him, and the irony becomes a measure of his distance from the author and from the story. This allows for a more subtle presentation of values, and gives the reader himself an important part to play. For when the point of view is manipulated and modified to the extent which Marlow has made possible, the reader must be continuously alert to possibilities of irony which obscure and complicate the moral perspectives of each novel. This is another sense in which these novels may be described as "modern;" for a characteristic of the modern novel is that it is concerned with a world in which values are no longer fixed and absolute, but where the breakdown of beliefs has led to a questioning of all previously held assumptions.

Of the three works I have discussed, this awareness of a loss of moral security is most prevalent in Lord Jim, where it is the dominant theme. But there is a sense in which all three are pervaded by this atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty. Marlow's vision of the world is tinged with comedy. Faced with situations of potential tragedy, or pathos, or horror, Marlow finds refuge in his sense of humour. This demonstrates a recognition of the absurdity which is a part of our condition. The realisation that life is bordered by an essential futility is primarily a twentieth century one, and Marlow's ironic vision is a response to it. The reaction is succinctly explained by the modern critic and philosopher, Glicksberg:

The spirit of irony is today woven into the fabric of the tragic vision. Refusing to be deluded by romantic utopianism, the cult of progress, the dream of human perfectibility, the tragic vision responded to Nietzsche's call for laughter. It sought to arrive at its own understanding of the unavoidable frustrations and limitations of life: what is possible, and what is forever impossible. Such insights intensified the value of laughter. The tragic view of life was now incorporated with the comic vein, the sense of the absurd.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Marlow's ironic perspective sheds light on the problem of existence corresponds with his dramatic role in all of these novels; for he is a truth-seeker. In Heart of Darkness this is at the basis of the schematic design of the work; Marlow adopts the guise of the pilgrim searching after truth. When he has found it he becomes the truth-teller, through the narration of the story. In Lord Jim the process is more subtle. Marlow is telling the truth as he investigates it, for the process of investigation - his conversations with and speculations about

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<sup>1</sup>Charles I. Glicksberg, The Tragic Vision in Twentieth Century Literature (Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 7.

Jim - is the story; seeking and telling become fused. Once more Marlow becomes an investigator in Chance, where his method resembles that of a detective, following after clues and connecting them. But in Chance his role of truth-teller is elaborated. The imaginative effort involved in narrating the story shows Marlow to be imitating the craft of the novelist. At the risk of begging the question, it might be asserted that here we find Conrad's definition of the novelist's task; like Marlow, he is to tell the truth.

But it is in his preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus that Conrad makes his most powerful statement about the nature of art: "It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music - which is the art of arts."<sup>2</sup> This condition can be achieved "only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance."<sup>3</sup> This is where Marlow fulfills his ultimate purpose, in satisfying Conrad's aesthetic demands; he is a vehicle for uniting form and content. In all three novels, the way in which the story is told is its theme; both are embodied by Marlow, and they are inseparable. This blending of form and content is his supreme function in Conrad's work, and the discovery provides the basis for a new form which was to radically affect the future direction of the modern novel.

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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