CHAPTER II

Looking into the Soul: The Role of Marlow in the Selected Novels of Joseph Conrad

Conrad’s novels exhibit the idea of personal honour, essential to man’s existence where a character defends himself through his actions. He took recourse to the character of Marlow in order to voice his own feelings, whether sceptical or otherwise. His early experiences set the pattern of his life and provided him with themes that often occurred in the books he later wrote. He identified with many of his heroes in their loneliness and their fight for independence.

Conrad adopted British citizenship as well as the life and ways of England: “Conrad was a Polish mariner who wrote in English. Hence most of his tales have a surface structure of telling a tale of exploration and voyage” (Peters 105). Edward Said feels that Conrad, who was a seaman by profession, and also a novelist earned the appreciation of readers as well as critics:

Both in his fiction and in his autobiographical writing Conrad was trying to do something that his experience as a writer everywhere revealed to be impossible. This makes him interesting as the case of a writer whose working reality, his practical and even theoretical competence as a writer, was far in advance of what he was saying (Norton Critical Edition 454).
Conrad faced difficulties with expression while writing *The Rescue* and made use of Marlow as narrator for the first time in *Youth* in order to facilitate the telling of his story:

‘Youth’ introduces Captain Charles Marlow as narrator: he will appear as a narrator of ‘Heart of Darkness’, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. As a civilized, philosophically-minded, and much travelled Englishman who recounts his past experiences, he proved to be an ideal ‘surrogate author’...Conrad could now enjoy an exceptional freedom in commentary, since cynical or skeptical ideas could thus be ascribed (however nominally) to the narrating character rather than to the author; so Marlow served, in part as a mask through which Conrad could speak more fluently and diversely. Cumulatively, Marlow was to become the fullest, most sophisticated, and most convincing character in the whole of Conrad’s literary work, and one implying a generous tribute from the Polish-born author to the value of British civilization at its best (Watts xii, xiii).

His stories of the sea, the jungle, and the social and political instability of mankind, even the innermost workings of the human heart are commentaries on and reflections of his own life and of varied experiences:

Conrad uses fiction to analyze the macrocosm (world at large) by presenting objectively and scientifically a microcosm such as a ship's crew. As a young merchant sailor Conrad had been cut off from family, friends, and country; this essential loneliness he conveys in his tales set on the sea and in exotic locales. His sense of isolation stems from the fundamental differences that existed
between himself and his fellow seamen--in age, culture, language, education, and experience (Allingham Web N.pag).

Conrad’s early experiences set the pattern of his life and provided themes which often occurred in the books he later wrote:

The circumstances of Conrad’s sea career, and how they shaped his writing, have continued to interest critics. Their work has usually focused on the biographical facts of Conrad’s sea years and the historical and psychological effects of life in a merchant sailing ship (Larabee 47, 48).

His father’s life taught him to make hard decisions and take risks for the things that one believed in, and to understand that heroism often leads to tragedy and death. The emotional estrangement of man in an alien surrounding whether self-imposed or circumstantial recurs in Conrad’s novels. His fiction abounds in solitaries – the loner, the outcast and the exile which is an important aspect of modern fiction. Terry Eagleton in “Exiles and Émigré’s: Studies in Modern Literature” is of the opinion that “The heights of modern English Literature have been dominated by foreigners and émigré’s: Conrad, James, Eliot, Pound, Yeats and Joyce” (9). He ascribes Conrad’s deep understanding of man’s essential loneliness to the fact that he had experienced social alienation and political exile. At the beginning of his career as a
novelist, Conrad is seen as a lonely man, yet confident of achieving success:

Conrad, struggling to establish himself as a serious literary man and desperately holding on to his faith amidst all kinds of temptations. He is virtually alone, isolated from other practitioners of his craft, the solitary writer working in his rented room or attic, supported not by funds or even expectations but by an obscure faith in his own powers (Karl 1051).

The reader apparently, sees these contradictory traits of loneliness and self confidence in the protagonist of each novel discussed. Several characters in his stories sacrifice their happiness or even their lives for their ideals.

Once Conrad decided to go to sea, he did not turn back. He admired the adventurous nature of the British sea-farers and was proud to be a British and to be associated with such a profession. As quoted by Ian Watt, Conrad said: “Both at sea and on land my point of view is English” (5). He cut off his ties with Poland, the country which was his home in order to adopt British citizenship.

Joseph Conrad uses his life at sea as a backdrop to human nature and action. His art of story-telling is also influenced by his roots which lay in Poland: “Poland’s oral tradition was part of his unique and complex inheritance” (White 165). He would gather his fellow sailors around him, on the deck of a ship and have one of them narrate a
personal experience: “Marlow was one of those born observers who are happiest in retirement. Marlow liked nothing better than to sit on deck, in some obscure creek of the Thames” (Woolf 231, 232). In order to maintain distance from the narrative and to be able to comment on the situation and the characters without interfering into the narrative, Conrad created the all-important character of Marlow who not only narrated, but also commented on the action and situation in the narrative, subsequently acting as Conrad’s spokesperson. “Thus a rough-and-ready distinction would make us say that it is Marlow who comments, Conrad who creates” (Woolf Web N.pag).

However, by the time the curtain falls on Marlow as narrator in Conrad’s fiction, Conrad gives him a more definite role to play. He does not remain as mere narrator who simply expresses the author’s opinion. He is made to play increasingly complex roles beginning with the simple role in Youth, to that of a character in the dramatis personae in Chance. Marlow as narrator has been able to shed light on the different characters in the scheme of the narrative and also provide valuable insight into the situation and the subsequent reaction of the characters to it. The organisation of Conrad’s novels and tales is intricate. Virginia Woolf continues in the same essay:
For the vision of a novelist is both complex and specialized; complex, because behind his characters and apart from them must stand something stable to which he relates them; specialized because since he is a single person with one sensibility the aspects of life in which he can believe with conviction are strictly limited (Web N.pag).

The reader finds that sometimes, the characters in the fiction of Conrad are sometimes disoriented as seen in the case of Kurtz, Jim and Flora. Thus their actions sometimes appear illogical to the reader.

Philip M. Weinstein in his essay “Nothing Can Touch Me” says: “Conrad’s best work awakens…a state of disorientation…which he portrays in his characters” (Norton Critical Edition 459). This is seen besides others, in Kurtz who is disoriented and deviates from his goal and concentrates all his efforts on collecting ivory.

Conrad’s Youth was written in 1898 and published in 1902 under the title Youth, A Narrative, and Two Other Stories (these being Heart of Darkness, 1899 and The end of the Tether, 1902). Youth is a story about Conrad’s early voyage as second mate on the ‘Palestine’ in 1881–82. An old leaky ship named ‘Judea’ is rammed by a steamship in Newcastle harbour and further damaged by storms in the English Channel. It is put into the harbour at Falmouth for repairs which seem to be endless. After the ship sets out for Bangkok the cargo of coal soon catches fire. A long, but fruitless struggle ensues in order to
control the fire but the ship explodes off Sumatra and the crew has to abandon it, taking to their boats. Conrad uses the third person narrator for the first time in *Youth*. Marlow gets the charge of a boat and relates memories of his first command. To him everything appears adventurous and he takes delight in commanding the small boat. Marlow navigates to a little tropical port and wakes up the next morning to have his first view of the east: “This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and somber, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise” (131). *Youth* is a recreation of Conrad’s life at sea, an evocation and a recollection of a mood, and of an attitude that he recaptures. It voices Conrad’s memorable vision of the east:

And this is how, I see the East. I have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of the mountains, blue and afar in the morning; like faint mist at noon; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of a scorching blue sea in my eyes. And I see a bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm. We drag at the oars with aching arms, and suddenly a puff faint and tepid and laden with strange odours of blossoms, of aromatic woods come out of the still night – the first sight of the East on my face. That I can never forget. It was impalpable and enslaving, like a charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight (127).
Marlow, whom we see in *Youth*, is part of the group that travels to the East. This gives the narration its authenticity. When Conrad adopted British citizenship he was consciously proud of the sea-faring activities of the Englishmen. Marlow voices this pride in *Youth*:

> This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak - the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea, in the way of amusement, of travel, or of bread-winning (91).

The Marlow who sailed on the ‘Judea’ was four years younger than the Conrad who sailed on the ‘Palestine’ in 1881–82, overjoyed with his promotion: “It was one of the happiest days of my life. Fancy! Second mate for the first time – a really responsible officer!” (94, 95). We see a young, romantic Marlow, who is attracted to the ship with the motto “Do or die” (108) and like all young men, is ecstatic about the voyage he is about to set upon: “I remember it took my fancy immensely. There was touch of romance in it, something that made me love the old thing – that appealed to my youth” (95).

Marlow reminisces about the comedy and misadventure that he encounters during the voyage. Old Beard, Marlow recollects, displays none of the dignity or command expected of a skipper. When the ‘Judea’ is damaged by a collision in the dock Beard’s immediate and highly unprofessional concern is for his wife’s safety. He gets her into
the ship’s boat which has no oars and the old couple drifts helplessly about the dock. Mrs. Beard’s concern for her husband’s health is engaging, but it undermines the old man’s authority as she asks the young Marlow to look after her husband and keep “his throat well wrapped up” (99).

At the beginning of the voyage Marlow is a young man who is ready to take on the world with his determination to achieve and prove his worth to it:

I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation. Whenever the old dismantled craft pitched heavily with her counter high in the air, she seemed to me to throw up, like an appeal, like defiance, like a cry to the clouds without mercy, the words written on her stern: ‘Judea, London. Do or Die’ (102).

The adult Marlow who narrates the story is telling the tale of a leaky old ship which is in the hands of an incompetent captain in a way that is as naive as he was when he first sailed on the ‘Judea’. *Youth* reveals a young, optimistic and innocent Marlow, looking forward to the adventure of the unknown:

The old bark lumbered on, heavy with her age and the burden of her cargo, while I lived the life of youth in ignorance and hope. She lumbered on through an interminable procession of days; and the fresh gilding flashed back at the setting sun, seemed to cry over the darkening sea the words painted on her stern, ‘*Judea*, London. Do or Die’ (102).
Towards the end the young Marlow undergoes a process of maturation from which he emerges a more self-possessed and fully-formed person than he appeared to be at the beginning of the narrative, an indivisible component of Conrad’s narration. Marlow’s realistic narration is informed by all that he goes through till the Judea blows up and he is given command of the new vessel.

Marlow is also the narrator in *Heart of Darkness*. He is the common link that connects four of the novels that have been taken up for discussion. He says at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*: “Between us there was the bond of the sea...it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other’s yarns – and even convictions (HD135, 136) and this statement is the yarn that helps them to bond. It also connects Marlow to *Youth* which marks his introduction as the narrator in Conrad’s fiction. Marlow is introduced to the readers at the very outset of the novel:

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol (136).

*Heart of Darkness* is the artistic projection of Conrad’s personal journey to the Congo in 1890. It marks the beginning of a major
creative phase in the literary journey of Conrad. Once again, he uses Marlow as the narrator, because he was not only concerned with the events described, but with their impression on the readers: “The journey is a journey into darkness…He was preoccupied with the mystery and problem of Evil in life. He tended to focus on man’s predicament which often forces him into the unknown” (Sethuraman et al. 104,105). Conrad wanted to impress upon the readers the seriousness of the situation in which the reader faces the reality of the goings-on at Africa. It is apparent that this novel is Conrad’s criticism of European imperialism and the senseless exploitation of the Congo basin in an effort to quench the insatiable greed for wealth of the European. John G. Peters writes in the Introduction to A Historical Guide to Joseph Conrad:

Conrad consistently questions the value of disseminating Western civilization to the non-Western world…In “Heart of Darkness”, Conrad goes even further, demonstrating at each appearance of Western civilization in the African wilderness that it is either out of place, absurd, or actually detrimental (8, 9).

Conrad breaks the story into three sections: in the first section, Marlow travels from Europe to the Central Station; in the second section, he travels from the Central Station to the Inner Station and in the third section he travels back to Europe. On a personal level too, the
Congo journey is the prime influence that determines the transformation from Conrad the sailor to Conrad the novelist. For Conrad, the expedition to the Congo becomes a journey within, a journey through darkness into the self. It records a journey into the darkness within, which at the actual experience of the Congo throws up the sense of confusion, fascination, guilt and nightmare: “It seemed to throw a kind of light upon everything about me – and into my thoughts” (HD 141). Conrad’s aim in taking the reader on a journey to the Congo is to raise a number of questions related to the scenes described. Referring to Heart of Darkness Jocelyn Baines quotes Conrad himself:

Heart of Darkness is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case for the purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers...that somber theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a continued vibration that I hoped would hang on the ear after the last note had been struck (272).

In order to achieve this Conrad once again uses Marlow as the narrator who is effectively able to create the “resonance” that would impress the reader. Marlow is seen here, as a self expressive character: “Marlow recollects events happening in real time and real space, in historical sequence” (Ward 6-20). Conrad’s experience in the Congo served as a backdrop to his novel. It is “based upon Conrad’s traumatic
journey through the Congo in 1890” (Watts 29). Thus, Marlow presents a true to life account of his journey as well as his experiences.

The setting used is similar to that used in *Youth*: the same group of people drawn together by the “bond of the sea” (*HD*135). The people are sitting on the deck of the ‘Nellie’ and Marlow narrates his experience in “one of the dark places of the earth” (138). The episodes on board the ‘Nellie’ are minor and the frame narrator introduces Marlow and the events which he later describes by drawing parallels between their present situation and what is to follow later. Marlow too, does the same and what follows is not a simple account of his experience in the Congo basin, but a thought-provoking narration on his journey within himself. Marlow is not only a go-between as a voice, but as Conrad says: “He was a seaman but he was a wanderer too” (138).

Marlow’s listeners have nothing to do before the flood recedes, and when Marlow, hesitatingly says, “I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,” they know that they are about to hear “about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (141). Marlow terms his experience as “seeming to throw a kind of light on everything about me – and into my thoughts. It was somber enough,
too – and pitiful – not extraordinary in any way not very clear either” (141).

On the level of the narrative *Heart of Darkness* is a story of man’s adventure. To make this kind of tale entertaining Conrad used certain ingredients to make adventure more appealing – danger, mystery, suspense, escape, exotic background, plots and intrigues, and unexpected attack. However, Conrad’s purpose is not merely to entertain, but also to instruct. Conrad’s art addresses the senses and tells the reader more than what appears to us superficially. Marlow, Conrad’s all-important narrator, says:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But ...to him the meaning of an episode was not inside it like the kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it only as a glow brings out a haze (138).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow recalls the period of his initiation from innocence to the world of experience – from a world of light into one of darkness. In this world Marlow confronts the various evils that man in his ‘civilised state’ in Europe would not consider possible. While humankind in Europe lives in a seeming state of illusion, Marlow comes face to face with the ‘heart of darkness’, the reality of existence that lies at the heart of life in Africa. Conrad is sceptical
about the so-called missionaries of civilisation who operate in Africa and he terms them as:

The dark ‘interlopers’ of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned ‘generals’ of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! The dreams of men, the seeds of commonwealths, the germs of empires (137).

It is this scepticism that is voiced by Marlow. He discovers that man, the embodiment of this civilization, is essentially both evil and good man. Marlow observes thus:

The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage – who can tell? - truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder – the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own stuff – with his own inborn strength .Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags- rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row- is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced (186, 187).

Marlow sees the meaningless destruction that continues in the Congo in the name of civilization. He is completely disillusioned by the so called agents of civilization and so, comments:
But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others (140).

The indigenous culture that existed in Africa was destroyed by the Whites and the Africans were subjected to untold misery and suffering. Conrad is not all in favour of the methods adopted by the Europeans to educate the natives of Africa. He feels that an artist must highlight that part of human nature which is hidden behind the human ego and the more basic qualities of humanity. It is this belief that prompts him to use the settings of Africa as a background to the situation faced by Marlow in this novel. The behavior of the white man in Africa which is symbolized by the character of Kurtz becomes worse than any human creature. The European, on the other hand, being unable to identify with the African environment and lacking the self-restraint which Marlow possesses, becomes a hollow man and unnaturally savage. Instead of exemplifying the progress and light of their civilization, the actions of the white men, Marlow feels, destroy rather than construct and their conduct appears even more absurd because they engage in blind destruction. Kurtz had gone to Africa with grand ideals but he loses them to the wilderness surrounding him
“But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion” (221). In the Introduction to the novel, Cedric Watts comments:

Heart of Darkness can seem a fiercely pessimistic narrative. Its positive values lie partly in the quality of civilisation represented by Marlow, who usually preserves a vigilant humanity; they lie largely in the authorial indignation at man’s inhumanity to man and, indeed, at the despoliation of the earth in the name of ‘progress’; and they are richly implicit in the articulate intelligence, sensitivity, and exuberance of the text (xvi).

Kurtz begins his journey to the Congo as an emissary of light but ironically, unable to conquer the darkness within, becomes a part of the very system he had set out to dominate. The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the responsibility of making a report for its future guidance. He does it. But strangely enough, at the end of his report, he writes “Exterminate all the brutes!” He had perhaps felt the horror of the cruelty perpetrated and surrenders his goal to the senseless exploitation prevailing around him to such an extent that, “He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour” (209).

Marlow frequently interrupts his narrative to take a drink, a smoke or to interpolate a remark. As a person who follows life wherever it leads, rather than one who tries to change it, Marlow fits
into Conrad’s view that life develops upon a series of illogical experiences which are largely determined by chance or fate. Conrad, through his narrator Marlow, tells us “I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally...yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap” (141).

Through Marlow, Conrad throws light on his own experience, without of course, intruding into the narrative. The novelist himself is among the group of listeners on board the yawl that night on the Thames, listening to Marlow.

Marlow hears of Kurtz almost immediately after he arrives in Africa. The chief accountant of the company is the first to mention him: “one day… in the interior you will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz… a first-class agent… a very remarkable person” (159). From this time onwards Marlow hears of Kurtz and we find that his interest in Kurtz grows. As he hears more about Kurtz, he is excited at the prospect of meeting him. But, ironically, when he meets Kurtz, he sees:

The lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz: they say the hair grows on growing sometimes, but this – ah – specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him and – lo! – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to his own by the
inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite (159).

Kurtz had gone to Africa with the aim of civilizing the natives and was well known among all those who were connected to Africa and the apparent attempt to civilize the natives. But Kurtz’s ideals degenerated in an atmosphere that seemed opaque and unknown to Europeans; consequently, he changed. To him, the acquisition of ivory became more important than anything else and he adopts the ways of the very same people to whom he was supposed to show the torch of civilisation. He presides at certain midnight dances which end with unspeakable rites and even succeeds in getting the tribe to follow him. He enters into a liaison with a woman of the tribe:

At the threshold of the twentieth century, when exploitation of colonies was still widely spread and the problem of abuse of natural resources and native inhabitants was largely ignored, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* invites us to reflect on and ask ourselves when does progress and expansion become rape. Joseph Conrad presents us with this, unfortunately, ageless book. It sheds a bright light onto the inherit darkness of our human inclinations, stripped of pretense, in the middle of the jungle where those savage tendencies are provided with a fertile ground.

The combination of greed, climate and the demoralizing effect of frontier life brought out the worst in people. They were raping the land, practically stealing the ivory from the natives, whom they were treating like slaves (Berezowski Web N.pag).
Marlow too, like Kurtz is subjected to the test of the wilderness and feels its power when confronted with the people of the jungle. However, he manages to hold on to his sanity in spite of the fact that he had to face the wilderness through Kurtz. It is however to be noted that Marlow was affected by Kurtz whose influence remains upon him even after his death. Marlow refuses to hand over Kurtz’s papers to the company and he visits Kurtz’s intended to return her letters and portrait.

Marlow was with Kurtz before he died and heard his last words: “The horror! The horror!” (239) which Marlow says “was the expression of some sort of belief, it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth” (169). Kurtz’s last words undermine the grand ideals with which he came to Africa.

As Marlow assimilates the experiences and impressions, he does not remain a mere narrator-observer. His role constantly develops. As he is associated with Kurtz in his own way and having felt the attraction of the wilderness, Marlow is forced into a partnership with him. Because of the affinity that Marlow develops for Kurtz, he is concerned about the fate of Kurtz and like Kurtz, the wilderness does not spare him either. He hears the last words uttered by Kurtz but does
not disclose them to his Intended. Instead, he lies to her saying: “The last word he pronounced was – your name” (251). This marks his final identification with the heart of darkness.

Isolation and struggle. Man against Fate. These have been the common terms of descriptions of Conrad. And of course they are relevant. The novels raise those issues...There is isolation in Conrad of course. There is Man and there is Fate: the abstractions and others like them are a critical part of his style. And of course there is struggle of an intense kind: more intense, more practical, for many reasons than in most other novelists in the language (Williams 199).

Kurtz had plundered the environment and in turn, he was not spared. The wilderness avenges itself upon him and proves that man’s miniscule power is reduced to nothing when contrasted with the might of the wilderness. Marlow’s involvement with Kurtz teaches him that the wilderness is all powerful. Kurtz may be likened to Captain Ahab who tries to kill the white whale and instead loses his life.

In the author’s note to *Lord Jim* Conrad wrote: “This, however, is but one yarn, yet with interruptions affording some measures of relief; and in regard to the listeners’ endurance, the postulate must be accepted that the story was interesting” (7). The novel was expanded beyond Conrad’s original intention of it being a short story, dealing
only with the pilgrim-ship episode. In the Author’s note to *Lord Jim*, the novelist says:

> When this novel appeared in a book form...some reviewers maintained that the work starting as a short story had got beyond the writer’s control...they pointed out the limitations of the narrative form. They argued that no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long. It was not, they said, very credible (7).

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad is concerned with the analysis of motives. The central character is Jim and Conrad uses Marlow as an essential counterpart to Jim. The central character is Jim, who is a simple and sensitive man. Jim is culpable of an act of cowardice. Marlow again appears in the novel as the narrator. This novel is, in fact, a psychological tale about Jim’s moral lapse aboard the ‘Patna’: “I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting-point for a free and wandering tale; that it was an event too, which could conceivably colour the whole ‘sentiment of existence’ in a simple and sensitive character” (7). The first striking feature of the novel is the shift in the point of view, seen at the end of Chapter four. The first four chapters are presented by an omniscient narrator but Chapter 5 to Chapter 35 present Marlow’s narrative to an unspecified group of listeners. From the very outset he alludes to incidents that are of great importance in Jim’s story, but about which the readers know nothing,
referring to a fact that is known by many of the other characters. This is the abandonment of the ship ‘Patna’ by its white crew. The additional information that he has is that the ship has not sunk, as Jim and the other members of the crew believe, but has been rescued. Without these two vital pieces of information, the reader cannot begin to comprehend what Marlow is talking about, though he continuously alludes to these facts. Marlow’s narrative seems designed to draw our attention to the hidden facts. It is through the narrative, that we share Marlow’s knowledge and imagine his feelings: the horror he feels during his interview with the dying Gentleman Brown which reveals that Brown himself was responsible for the death of Jim.

Jim’s entire story could have been related in a few pages, but in this book…the author’s strategy includes exhibiting the processes by which other people learn this story, and their reactions to it (Najder 82 Web).

Jim had to run away to realize himself and to escape the censure of the civilized world, into the savage world of Patusan. However we see that there is no peace for Jim and just when he begins to feel safe with the epithet ‘Tuan’ prefixed to his name as a sign of success, his world is torn apart and he is called a pirate by a party led by ‘Gentleman’ Brown leading to his near suicidal death. As the anecdote of Jim opens, we are told about the ‘Patna.’
The ‘Patna’ is carrying a large number of pilgrims to their destination and during the voyage she strikes something below the surface which damages her badly. Only the officers know about the disaster and they, with the exception of Jim, decide to secretly abandon the ship. It is the duty of the captain and the other officers of the ship to take responsibility of the ship and the passengers during the hour of crisis. But the captain orders the two engineers to lower a life boat into the sea and all three jump into the life-boat, saving themselves. Jim does not jump into the life-boat immediately but stands dazed. Eventually he concludes that if he raises the alarm and awakens the pilgrims who are asleep he will only make them panic. It is only then that Jim jumps in order to save himself. However, the ship does not sink and is towed to port by a French gunboat.

Marlow’s allusions in the course of the story are important, since without them, the reader cannot comprehend what the story is about. *Lord Jim* is a story which is not formed out of a series of logically connected incidents, but is based on impressions that are emotionally and psychologically connected. Marlow sights Jim during his trial:

The third was an upstanding, broad-shouldered youth with his hands in his pockets turning his back on the other two who appeared to be talking together earnestly …This was my first view of him (36).
Following the inquiry, the certificates of Jim and the other officers are cancelled: “The court...Gustav so and so–and–so master...native of Germany... James so–and–so...mate...certificates cancelled” (36). Marlow hears Brierly’s opinion of Jim “a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales” (56). He is told of Jim’s father who “seemed to fancy his sailor son” (57). Marlow, unable to forget his conversation with Brierly, attends court the next day, having both Jim and Brierly under his observation. Thus, he secures an advantageous position for himself and critically observes Jim during the trial and simultaneously creates distance between himself and his narration in order to gain critical advantage. It is in the course of this trial that Marlow meets him and from then onwards he develops a liking for Jim and assumes the role of his guardian. “My eyes met his for the first time at that inquiry” (57). Thereafter, Marlow sympathizes with Jim and does his utmost to bail him out of the situation, though he says:

I don’t pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog –bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of the country. They fed one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. That’s how I summed him up to myself after he left me late in the evening (62, 63).
Despite his position, Marlow takes genuine interest in Jim who recounts the ‘Patna’ episode and the circumstances leading to his jumping from the ship:

I had jumped – … “It seems”…I knew nothing about it till I looked up… I wished I could die”. There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well – into an everlasting deep hole…” It caused Marlow to comment: “Nothing could be more true: he had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole. He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again (88).

Marlow is cynical about the trial and remarks:”They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!” (27) He develops not only an increasing understanding of Jim but also sympathises with him. Jim admits to Marlow that he would not be able to face his father for what he had done:

I had jumped – hadn’t I?” he asked, dismayed. “That’s what I had to live down. The story didn’t matter…. Jim is helpless and knows that he is doomed to his fate and will never be able to face people with his head held high. Speaking of his father, Jim told Marlow: “He has seen it all in the home papers by this time. I can never face the poor old chap (38).

Since the trial Marlow who begins to understand Jim, procures jobs for him, first with De Jongh, then with Engstrom and Blake, then with the Yucker brothers and finally with Stein in Patusan, which proves to be the turning point in his life. “I knew his appearance; he
came from the right place; he was one of us” (38). Jim senses Marlow’s concern for him and so tells him “I don’t want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain—I would like someone to understand—somebody—one person at least! You! Why not you? (66). Thus, Jim works first for De Jongh, then for Blake and Engstrom, then for the Yucker brothers and wherever he is employed Jim tries to remain incognito, but when his past surfaces, he abandons the job and moves further east, seeking personal rehabilitation, “to begin with a clean slate”(142). This is repeated several times. At length, Marlow's friend Stein suggests placing Jim as his factory in Patusan, a remote inland settlement with a mixed Malay and Bugis population, where Jim's past can remain hidden. Here, Jim wins the respect of the people and becomes their leader by relieving them from the menace of the bandit Sherif Ali and protecting them from the corrupt local Malay chief, Rajah Tunku Allang. Jim wins the love of Jewel, a woman of mixed race. The end comes a few years later, when the town is attacked by "Gentleman" Brown. Although Brown and his gang are driven off, Dain Waris, the son of the leader of the Bugis community, is slain. Jim, by taking responsibility, fulfills his destiny at last, though he dies at the end from a gunshot to the heart.
Marlow feels that with his death, Jim left behind all his earthly failings. Jim had lived up to his ideals, earning the title ‘Tuan’ or Lord Jim and eventually meets his death at the hands of Doramin. Marlow’s comment on Jim and his fate is “He is one of us – and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy?” (167) He says “My last words about Jim shall be few. I affirm he had achieved greatness”. He feels that in death Jim had at last achieved the greatness he longed for all his life finally making up for his cowardly jump:

And that’s the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest dreams of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extra-ordinary success! For it may well be that in the short moment of his proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side (313).

Jim is highly imaginative and his imagination magnified the danger of a given situation filling him with terror. It also makes him see himself as being superior and different from those around him. But, ironically, he fails to rise to the occasion whenever the need arose. However, the essential nobility of his character cannot be ignored and by the end of the novel, he is seen to successfully conquer his imaginative fears and
face Doramin unflinchingly and die, however mistakenly, a hero’s death:

Although his behavior is uncommon and the course of his life complex, his character itself is not complicated or obscure. Jim’s personality stands out primarily because of his dogged obstinacy and his obsessive and even desperate consistency, after the Patna disaster, in pursuing his goal (Najder 84 Web).

Marlow’s vivid portrayal of Jim is significant because of his understanding and concern for Jim’s welfare: “Marlow’s sense of spiritual affinity with Jim, however, is spontaneous, instinctive and unrelated to his problems with understanding him” (Najder 84 Web).

Marlow plays an active role in analysing Jim’s state of mind while playing the role of Jim’s benefactor. He has a definite part to play in the sequence of events described and so we can conclude that the novelist provides ample opportunity for the development of the character of Marlow as well.

Chance is the last of Conrad’s novels featuring Marlow as the narrator. It “also marks Conrad’s first full-length novel extensively treating life at sea since Lord Jim (1900)” (Bronstein Web N.pag). Of all his novels Chance is perhaps the least dependent on a source in his experience or in his reading. “Conrad addresses several social issues closer to the experience of his reading public: feminism and financial
speculation” (Bronstein Web N.pag). In the Author’s Note to the novel Conrad wrote:

*Chance* is one of my novels that shortly after having been begun was laid aside for a few months…it is a mighty force that of mere chance; absolutely irresistible yet manifesting itself often in delicate forms such for instance as the charm, true or illusory, of a human being. It is very difficult to put one’s finger on the imponderable, but I may venture to say that it is Flora de Barral who really is responsible for this novel which relates, in fact, the story of her life (9).

This is a tale told in two parts labelled “The Damsel” and “The Knight”. The first part takes place ashore and the second, aboard the ship. It was the first of Conrad's novels to achieve a wide commercial success, and one of the few to have a happy ending:

*Chance* is Conrad’s problem novel. Published in 1914, it occupies an ambiguous position between his most celebrated creative phase, which culminated with under Western Eyes (1911), and the comparatively neglected work of his decline. *Chance* is his most systematic attempt to engage with female experience (Greaney 98, 99 Web).

As with Conrad’s other “Marlow narratives this story is presented by an unnamed narrator who presents Marlow’s oral narrative in readable form, including in his narrative the scene of its original transmission” (Wake Web N.pag). It tells the story of Flora de Barral, the abandoned daughter of a bankrupt tycoon, and her long struggle to find happiness
and dignity. The narrator Marlow is piecing together the story from a mixture of personal experience and conversations with others: that summer Marlow meets one of his protégés: Flora de Barral. She is an innocent girl faced with adverse circumstances. She has immense faith in her governess, Eliza who takes care of the young girl only for selfish reasons. Her immediate cause of anger is the discovery of fraud in the girl’s father, whereas, she, herself has been practicing fraud on the girl. The governess has been making use of the innocence of the girl to further her own sexual and financial designs with a very attractive man. The failure to meet her goal unleashes inexplicable anger against Flora and she deserts the defenseless girl who goes to Mrs. Fyne in search of solace. Even there Flora is not happy. When Marlow first meets her, she is walking dangerously close to the edge of a quarry. Marlow, sure that she is about to commit suicide, accompanies her back to the Fyne cottage, her dog at her heels. Marlow is called to London that night, and upon his return several weeks later discovers that Captain Antony had been there on a whirlwind visit, and that he and Flora had eloped. He also meets Captain Antony’s sister and hears her reaction to the incident. He narrates the story to an anonymous author who interrupts the narrative from time to time to comment or to
criticize. Here the interruptions are usually protests against Marlow’s misogyny:

> Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life (291).

Marlow has several sources of information: the Fynes, Powell and Flora herself. These characters tell him what they have been told and Marlow becomes their confidant. The main reason for Marlow’s newly acquired status is that he is no longer a mere narrator but an active participant with a definite view of his own:

> You say I don’t know women. May be. It’s just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of women. In all of them, termagant, flirt, crank, washerwoman, bluestocking, outcast and even in the ordinary commerce there is something left, if only a spark. And when there is a spark there always is a flame (292).

Marlow meets the two female characters Mrs. Fyne and Flora on separate occasions, but fails to establish rapport with Mrs. Fyne. He is cynical about the girlfriends she has. Even Mr. Fyne does not seem to protest against it. Mrs.Fyne dislikes the subordinate position given by society to women and is indignant when Flora elopes with her brother:

> In other words, that she can’t forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman. And yet this is not only reasonable and natural, but it is her only chance (161).
Though he does not meet Mrs. Fyne after Flora’s elopement, he does not think much of her and voices his dislike for feminine self-assertion through her:

I learned the true nature of Mrs. Fyne’s feminist doctrine. It was not political, it was not social. It was a knock–me–down doctrine – a practical individualistic doctrine… it was something like this: that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex was the predestined victim of conditions created by men’s selfish passion, their vices and their abominable tyranny)… from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence. She had even the right to go out of existence without considering any one’s feelings or convenience, since some women’s existences were made impossible by the short-sighted baseness of men (59).

While talking to the anonymous author, Marlow says:

Today I have simply been trying to be spacious and I perceive I’ve managed to hurt your susceptibilities which are consecrated to women. When you sit alone and silent you are defending in your mind the poor women from attacks which possibly cannot touch them. I wonder what can touch them. But to soothe your uneasiness I will point out again that an Irrelevant world would be very amusing, if the women would take care to make as charming as they alone can, by preserving for us certain well-known, well-established, I’ll almost say hackneyed, illusions, without which the average male creature cannot get on. And that condition is very important (87).

Marlow’s attitude may be attributed to the fact that he was more at home in a world that was, or rather still is, patriarchal. At sea, a woman
has virtually, no role to play. This is why Flora is not seen to play a major role while on the ship. She simply accompanies her husband in his wanderings.

Marlow’s relationship with Flora is different from that of Mrs. Fyne. He knows her story, prevents her from committing suicide and, to a certain extent understands her, causing him to comment: “Nothing is truer than that, in this world, the luckless have no right to their opportunities – as if misfortune were a legal disqualification” (163). Marlow points out the importance of the part played by chance, which serves to create an awareness of evil. The first crisis in Flora’s life comes as a result of chance; the disaster occurs because of the collapse of her father De Barral’s fortunes, an event in which Flora has no role to play. She is actually alone, miserable and in reality wants to protect her father who, she feels has suffered at the hands of the cruel world. She reminisces about the past and wants to steer clear of the painful memories it holds. Marlow takes part in the action, although he never sees the hero Captain Anthony, he has a brief talk with the heroine, Flora, and he have a brief glimpse of De Barral in a friend’s office. He does not meet the Fynes after Flora’s elopement. Marlow here is seen not as a mere narrator, but as an active participant in the action with a definite view of his own: “Marlow is talking and listening to Flora de
Barral…she has confided in him something of the events surrounding her abruptly contracted intimacy with Captain Anthony” (Poole Web N.pag). It may be said that though Flora does not seem to be assertive she seems to prove her own identity through her actions. Marlow too, develops into a character that has an assertive role to play in the course of the events described.

In *Youth* Conrad presents the eagerness and the enthusiasm of a young man who is in charge of a small ship. In the course of *Heart of Darkness*, through Marlow’s journey to the Congo basin, he focuses on the darkness that exists within man. In *Lord Jim* through the narration of Marlow we see Jim being forced to escape into a savage world in order to find respectability.

“Charlie Marlow … is one of the most celebrated of Joseph Conrad’s creations. Narrator and character in four texts, “Youth”, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*, he has often been regarded as Conrad’s autobiographical alter-ego” (Wake Web N.pag) Marlow’s narration puts life into Conrad’s narrative since he successfully provides a realistic description of the situation, characters and their states of mind as each reacts to different situations. He is observant and analytical. “Marlow’s role as storyteller increases as the narrative goes on, but his narration remains more dialogic than is
typical for him” (Bronstein. Web N.pag) Conrad’s choice of Marlow as his narrator gives force to his novels, making his tales convincing and thought provoking. Marlow has provided the novelist with an excellent means to present his experience at sea in a realistic manner: “If his novels make a tragic point, it is that man seems capable of discovering the reality of his own values only through their defeat or contradiction” (Berthoud 189). Thus his narration and his role effectively voices Conrad’s point of view without making the novelist’s presence felt during the course of the narration.
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