THE TRIAL OF LIFE: NARRATIVE, JUDGMENT, AND SUBJECTIVITY IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S MARLOW TALES

by

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(Under the Direction of Adam Parkes)

ABSTRACT

In this study, I propose that Joseph Conrad's four Marlow narratives—"Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Chance*—are metaphorical trials for their respective protagonists, the narratives' subjects. I argue that Marlow, the recurring narrator in these stories, acts as a defense attorney to the subject's defendant and defends him before an audience of sailors that represent a larger Victorian society. Marlow employs a narrative strategy of deferring judgment on these subjects: he emphasizes the subjectivity of interpreting their story over the evidence and witnesses he inevitably must produce. I argue that Marlow ultimately needs the audience to represent a more coherent community so that he may question their standards, particularly their materialism, lack of imagination, and unquestioning commitment to their imperialist duties. I conclude by looking at *Chance*, examining its complications as a Marlow narrative, and discussing how my readings contribute to literary criticism of Joseph Conrad's works.

INDEX WORDS: Joseph Conrad, Marlow, "Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Chance*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the nineteenth century, Joseph Conrad wrote three seminal stories that feature perhaps his most famous character: the verbose sailor Marlow. In "Youth" (1898), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and *Lord Jim* (1899-1900), the veteran seaman Marlow weaves esoteric narratives that address the blurry boundaries—between success and failure, condemnation and redemption, the private ego and the public collective will—pervading his protagonists' colonial adventures. As Marlow grows older between these narratives his style and subject matter become denser, more obscure, and more elaborate.[1] In *Chance* (1913), Marlow's final narrative, he turns away from and toys with the conventions of his previous narratives, attempting a more psychological portrait of the isolated Flora de Barral.

Why does Marlow tell these stories? Essentially, he is a raconteur by nature, and he holds a reputation for his "propensity to spin yarns" of "inconclusive experiences" (*Heart of Darkness* 20, 21). The first (quasi-omniscient) narrator in *Lord Jim* also notes this habit, saying, "And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember [Jim] at length, in detail and audibly" (24). The transient sailor grows fonder of his storytelling role, for his narratives grow progressively in length and detail. He also enjoys being the center of attention to some degree, often testing his audience's patience with equivocal details and by casting doubt on the listener's imagination. While Marlow never completely antagonizes his

[1] In his essay "Conrad's Covert Plots and Transtextual Narratives," Cedric Watts comments that Marlow's "is a sad story, for as Marlow ages we hear him gradually become less intelligent and more garrulous; in the later part of *Jim* and for much of *Chance* he is too facile and waffling as philosopher-raconteur, and we regret his ageing" (76).

listeners, he does make good on Conrad's declared artistic intention to make the audience "*see*"—to make them view his subjects by means both tedious and provocative, as Conrad states in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (xiv).[2]

Marlow also tries vividly to portray his narrative subjects because he sees them as subject to the standards of his audience's community— a community of fellow sea-traders who have faced the "trial of life" ("Youth" 12). This trial refers specifically to the worker's faithful performance of his imperialist duties, resulting in his attainment of worldly wisdom and the private and public confirmation of his identity. In these narratives, Kurtz and Jim face another trial: the story itself. Marlow presents his "inconclusive experiences" to an audience that is seemingly more comfortable with their community's standards than he himself is. Their comfort indicates security and the resolve to reach a verdict, so Marlow assumes the role of storyteller both to portray and to defend his subjects before an audience of fellow sea-travelers; through his very need to apply their standards to his subjects, he provides the nautical listeners with an opportunity to function briefly as a community.

As the narrator, Marlow's centralized and living presence establishes an immediate relationship between the speaker and the hearer; thus, the oral narrative seems intended to establish a pre-modern community where the role of "author" doesn't obscure knowledge but promotes and clarifies it.[3] Despite the inevitable and essential obscurity of his tales, Marlow initially manages to establish camaraderie (if not complete trust) between himself and the

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[2] Conrad critics and scholars often address this passage in discussions of Conrad's stylistic emphasis on vision and sight, particularly in the Marlow narratives. In the Preface, Conrad exhorts artists to reveal "truth" by appealing "primarily to the senses," and his imagistic fragmentation and distortion stem from a belief in art to "[endow] passing events with their true meaning, [creating] the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time" (xiii).

[3] In the first chapter of *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*, Michael Greaney writes, "Storytelling is idealized as dialogue between equals that transcends all cultural boundaries in an intimate communion of souls. Except that, in Conrad's version, the modern decline of storytelling might well be traced to the fatal moment when tellers were differentiated from listeners, or specialist storytellers set apart from passive auditors" (16). Walter Benjamin

listeners because he recognizes a kinship among them, as seen in "Youth" (though the community ultimately shrinks down to one reader in *Lord Jim*). These men have formed a loosely bound community and firm belief-system based on their experiences, which are rooted in colonial work, and this system entails pre-modern, traditional values like fraternity, friendship, honor, and decency. It also challenges sailors to apply these principles to their imperialist duties. The sailors ultimately rely on unspoken core values attained through their experiences (Najder 23).[4] Marlow's first three stories occur in this world of colonial work, and his protagonists endure their own personal trials while performing such colonialist duties.[5]

By trying to make his audience understand these subjects, Marlow tries to understand them himself. Marlow must balance the personal and the public in his renditions of Kurtz and Jim: he feels dually obligated to the community of sea-travelers and to the two men who abandoned or disappointed that community, for he knows how Kurtz and Jim met their fates. Marlow's nautical identity conflicts with his personal relationships with the two men because he sees them as outstanding products of European imperialism. He tells his audience aboard the

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thoroughly discusses this narrative distancing caused by modernization, specialization, and differentiation in his essay, "The Storyteller."

[4]Zdzisław Najder argues in "Conrad in His Historical Perspective" that Conrad derives his romantic heroes and their "movement from alienation towards [specifically social] commitment" from traditional Polish literature (21). Viewing Conrad's work as a continuation of traditional Polish Romantic literature, Najder outlines three levels of "understanding and appreciating" the works in this cultural context: first, "the most obvious level of famous 'simple principles': fidelity, honor, friendship, obeying the sailor's code, etc."; second, the "pitiless confrontation of simple principles with their actual working in life"; third, "the level of understanding" achieved through this confrontation (23). Some critics see Conrad's own personal alienation from Poland, his homeland, as inspiration for his many isolated protagonists, both in the Marlow and non-Marlow works. In *One of Us: The Mastery of Joseph Conrad*, Geoffrey Galt Harpham further examines how Conrad's identities as an estranged Pole, a dedicated sailor, and a writer of English (his third language) influenced and shaped his writing. While Marlow himself is definitely an English character, Conrad's own multinational and multicultural heritage presents problems to the critical argument that Marlow simply defends or rationalizes imperialism. A conscious awareness of traditional Polish literature and its influence on his own work would indicate Conrad's own desire to portray or just address the problems of multicultural interaction in his writing, including the Marlow narratives.

[5] Conrad originally wrote the first three Marlow narratives as intended short stories for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (*Maga*), a publication that became "very conservative and masculine in tone" in order to appeal to readers such as Marlow's nautical audience. Ian Watt comments that publisher William Blackwood's personal tastes and this prospective "masculine" audience "accounts for the bluff heartiness which occasionally injects a jarring note into Marlow's storytelling; there is no real parallel to it in Conrad's previous fiction" (131).

Nellie that "[all] Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (*Heart of Darkness* 66). In *Lord Jim*, he repeatedly claims that Jim is "one of us." By establishing that Kurtz and Jim are products of imperialist nineteenth-century Europe, Marlow can hold them accountable to the standards of the sea-traders, standards derived from imperialist toil.[6] After he repositions these characters within the community, the one that rejects Jim and the one that Kurtz rejects, Marlow proceeds with his stories, and he enables the listeners to identify with their fellow imperial subjects. The listeners may now judge their peers.

Several Conrad critics see Marlow's tales themselves as indications, if not outright indictments, of the corrupt materialism that sustains the nautical community. In "Modernism and Imperialism," Frederic Jameson writes that modernist writing, including Conrad's, doesn't represent a "turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism" (45); instead, "any general theory of the modern [. . .] would also wish to register the informing presence of a range of other historically novel phenomena" (44). These other phenomena include "modernization and technology; commodity reification; monetary abstraction and its effects on the sign system; the social dialectic of reading publics; the emergence of mass culture," and "the embodiment of new forms of the psychic subject on the physical sensorium" (44). Jameson relates these factors to Conrad's stylistic and formal practices, but other critics, such as Padmini Mongia, Meg Samuelson, and Merry Pawlowski, consider these factors as they examine Conrad's *content*—the dimensions of nationalism, racism, sexism, and socially-derived egoism in Jim's and Kurtz's fantasies and adventures of colonial domination. Marlow's stories cannot be fully understood outside of this modernist-imperialist context, particularly when his jury exists primarily to maintain this imperialism.

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[6] For an extensive study of Conrad's early life, three seminal works—*The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*, and Victorian society (147-68), see Ian Watt's *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*.

Other critics acknowledge this material context while focusing on Conrad's unique literary style. Edward Said writes, "Matter for Conrad's heroes becomes a system of exchange underlying language. The self, which is the source of utterance, attempts the reconciliation of intention with actuality; words are really being bypassed as a direct embodiment in material sought by the imagination, at the same time that the ego reports its adventures and its disappointments" (45). Here Said acknowledges the subjective imagination that seeks to employ language, sometimes futilely, in the hopes of communicating ideas. Geoffrey Galt Harpham and Zdzisław Najder also examine the social and biographical factors that shape Conrad's writing, and Michael Greaney analyzes Conrad's peculiar use of languages and orality. J. Hillis Miller claims that Conrad actually makes "seeing" impossible with his language: "All Conrad's work turns on this double paradox: first the paradox of the two senses of seeing, seeing as physical vision and seeing as seeing through, as penetrating to or unveiling the hidden invisible truth, and second the paradox of seeing the darkness in terms of the light." Thus, "the goal of tearing the veil of familiarity from the world and making us *see* cannot be accomplished," because only those readers who already "see" without Conrad's work will see within his work ("*Heart of Darkness* Revisited" 210). These observations focus on Conrad's ability to conflate and obscure definite, understandable meanings, as opposed to criticisms that view Conrad, his content, and his style as products of the time.

To understand Marlow's narratives as trials, one must apply both critical focuses. Marlow employs both physical evidence—facts, results, and lucid points—and the testimony of dubious witnesses to portray complex subjects who are at once bound to the community's values and yet somehow autonomous and transcendent of them. Specifically, Marlow turns Kurtz and Jim into narrative subjects to emphasize both their subjectivity and their subjection to the

community. This duality must be understood as a complication for *Chance*, for in this novel Marlow addresses a subject—the disinherited Flora de Barral—who doesn't fit into the same sea-trader community as Kurtz and Jim. If Flora doesn't exist within the same imperialist (and exclusively masculine) world of Marlow, Kurtz, Jim, and the audience, then how can this narrative effectively work as a trial? Does she undergo a trial comprehensible to the members of the nautical community? These distinctions between the last novel and Marlow's previous narratives render the story-as-trial model problematic for *Chance*, but they also indicate how Marlow's final tale focuses not on the individual's social responsibilities but on her almost complete isolation. While *Chance* doesn't enjoy the same critical attention or even praise as the Marlow's other narratives,[7] it represents Conrad's attempt to render a more psychologically internalized subject in Flora de Barral. *Chance* exhibits Marlow's deepening emphasis on the subjective.

Even though they share Flora's thorough isolation, Jim and Kurtz differ from Flora by bearing exclusively masculine social responsibilities, so Marlow must emphasize these two men's subjectivity to a community aware of only these responsibilities. The community holds this trial to determine whether the subject effectively reconciles the private self with his public role; in theory, the community will determine whether or not Marlow's subject fulfills his

[7] While R. A. Gekoski admits that *Chance* was a financial success for Conrad, he argues that the novel simply doesn't match the "moral drama" of his previous Marlow tales because it portrays isolation as another obstacle instead of an "ambiguous metaphysical condition" (176). He also sees Conrad's employment of Marlow as having "the creaky feel of someone brought out of retirement to do a command performance: all the motives are familiar, but none work" (173), and he argues that Conrad himself is defensive about the novel. Conrad ambiguously confesses that although *Chance* lacks a "particular moral complexion," it doesn't have any "evil intention" ("Author's Note," *Chance* 11). Twelve years separate this work and *Lord Jim*, the last Marlow narrative, so critics tend to group it stylistically with Conrad's later novels, such as *Victory* (1915), *The Shadow-Line* (1917), *The Arrow of Gold* (1919), and his later short stories. Despite perceived stylistic flaws, the novel was one of Conrad's first financial successes, and Adam Gillon cites several factors for its public reception: "its serialization in the *New York Herald*; a clever and energetic promotion by Alfred Knopf . . . a simple and popular title, catchy headlines for chapters (not used before or again) and the two parts; an ample dose of sentimentality and pseudo-philosophy, mostly on the subject of women; and of course, mere chance" (139). Ironically, the usually elusive and confusing

obligations even in his personal adventures. Marlow tries to sway the audience-jury to exonerate the subject by showing that Kurtz and Jim serve instead of threaten the community. In order to defend them, their defense must provide necessary evidence and witnesses. However, throughout his defenses, Marlow exposes pure facts as superficial and uses overlapping narrative voices to emphasize the subjectivity of perception; he shows moreover how this subjectivity complicates apparently simple facts. First, the audience lives off materialistic service, lacks imagination, and requires unambiguous facts for consideration. Second, these facts blur as the listeners realize that they privately and subjectively interpret facts, testimonies, experiences, and thus the verdict, to establish public standards. Finally, the subjective authority culminates in *Chance*, where Flora belongs to neither the nautical nor any other community. In his narrative performances before the nautical community, Marlow allows his imagination to roam freely within an imperialist context; these stories excite his imagination and prompt him to examine the subjective characters. The trial motif in Marlow's narratives not only stresses their subjective nature but also enables Marlow to question imperialist society and its authority over his subjects. Ultimately, Marlow uses the trial motif not to establish society's authority but to question its legitimacy.

Marlow seems finally to catch the attention and imagination of a widespread audience in *this* novel, a work not as critically lauded as its predecessors.

CHAPTER 2

MATERIAL EVIDENCE AND THE NAUTICAL COMMUNITY

The trial-before-the-nautical community motif appears most explicitly in *Lord Jim*, where the disgraced sailor Jim undergoes not only the narrative trial but also literal trials in both the European and non-European worlds. By himself, Jim seems simple: neither brilliant nor primarily concerned with the civilizing mission like Kurtz, he lives his final years anonymously on a once profitable island in the pepper trade, an island not yet "ripe for interference" by European powers (176). However, one infamous moment haunts the young man: his leap from the cargo ship *Patna*, a dereliction of duty that leads to Jim's first trial, the official Inquiry, and the revocation of his sailor's certificate. Years later, the collective memory of the *Patna* scandal still astounds Marlow:

> Indeed this affair, I may notice in passing, had an extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time: it seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues. I've had the questionable pleasure of meeting it often, years afterwards, thousands of miles away, emerging from the remotest possible talk, coming to the surface of the most distant allusions. Has it not turned up tonight between us? And I am the only seaman here. I am the only one to whom it is a memory. (*Lord Jim* 103)

This passage reveals three important elements of Marlow's narrative. First, Jim never escapes the ubiquitous wordplay and gossip about his "chance missed" (81), and Marlow, acting on behalf of his defense, can never fully mollify the international community of European

traders. Second, Marlow relates Jim's tale to a community that *does not* consist of sailors. Jim may fail as a sailor, but Marlow can simultaneously appeal to the sympathy of European colonial expatriates and challenge their preconceived notions of seamanship because he and Jim share an exclusive, professional bond (tarnished as Jim's reputation is). Ironically, actual sailors, such as crusty Captain O'Brien, may be even more mindful and perhaps more unforgiving of Jim's transgression (145). Third, Marlow distances himself from this audience as a storyteller and as a sailor. Understanding that only psychological stability and resolve enables men to perform their duties, he uses his exclusive understanding of Jim's failure to provide the psychological insight that a mere comprehension of the facts cannot allow. Marlow steers the narrative away from the seemingly omniscient yet superficial narrator of the first four chapters because Jim feels that the focus on facts prevents an articulation of his defense: "They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" (20) To defend Jim, Marlow must look beyond the facts and ask why Jim's transgression renders him irredeemable.[1]

However, Marlow's audience only wants firm evidence—the surface details, the hard facts. Unlike the "wanderer" Marlow, "most seaman lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea"; most seamen view the world with a "disdainful ignorance" (*Heart of Darkness* 19). These men require unequivocal evidence because they lack imagination; their duty requires consistent, unquestioning commitment. In fact, Captain Brierly, one of the three judges presiding over the Inquiry, denounces Jim strictly from a professional seaman's standpoint: a true sailor wouldn't abandon even a "full cargo of old rags in bales" as Jim

[1] Benita Parry notes that Marlow's "narration, in contradistinction to the official Inquiry which wants only facts, takes the form of an investigation into the credentials of those meanings and values morally binding on members of his social order"; because these findings "discredit the postures of [Marlow's] complaisant interlocutors and imperil

abandoned the *Patna*, its Malaysian crew, and the pilgrims (50). For him, Jim simply abandons duty, and this individual's weakness threatens the whole social order by exposing its ideals of honor and decency as insufficient. "We aren't an organized body of men," says Brierly, "and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of [professional] decency" (50). The nautical community remains cohesive only through the individual members' unwavering dedication and militant efficiency.[2] Jim's jump may endanger human life, but the community only sees the non-Western pilgrims and lascars as cargo; Jim's dereliction really endangers the materialistic *efficiency* that the code upholds, and he fails like an inefficient part of a machine.[3] Materialism drives these community members in their profession and creates an imperialist basis for the subject's identity. The members need certainty and tangible facts, and the verdicts that Marlow seeks from them reflect the community's own materialist and imperialist nature.

Marlow introduces this nautical community as his central audience in "Youth." Their imperialist labor allows ambitious young men to seek out adventure. Marlow remembers how young men's ambition and imagination fuel the drive for colonial adventure as he remembers his first charge, a small boat he pilots to Bangkok after the *Judea*'s explosion: "[I desired] to part company as soon as I could. I wanted to have my first command all to myself. I wasn't going to sail in a squadron if there were a chance for independent cruising. [. . .] The silly, charming, beautiful youth" (34). For the young Marlow, the *Judea*'s journey isn't a disaster, but "a deuce of

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the tenets of his own persuasion," Marlow confesses that he never actually saw Jim clearly, presenting an "oxymoron to communicate the sense of dislocation at finding no fixed and invariable points of reference" (132).

[2] Mark Conroy notices a duality of the nautical profession: "The code of conduct to which Marlow and Jim both have recourse is essentially aristocratic in origin; the seamanship invoked implies a military model that is preindustrial. Yet the function of the merchant marine at this time was very much a part of industrial society: to ship men from port to port" (149). Dedication to the seaman's code becomes even more revered if its adherents view the nautical community as an elite fraternity, like a military.

[3] Beth Sharon Ash argues that the *Patna* scandal "reveals to Marlow that his ideal of allegiance is overdetermined by being itself a regulatory rule of power" in an "inequitable system." Thus, "Marlow understands that Jim is regarded as a faulty cog in the imperial machinery, and that he has been conveniently tossed away in the interests of the system's 'efficiency'" (106).

an adventure . . . the endeavor, the test, the trial of life" (12),[4] and he strives to fulfill the logo on the boat's stern: "*Judea*, London. Do or Die."[5]

The "trial of life" provides young men like Marlow a chance to "feel [their] strength" through "hard knocks" (42) as they preserve an enclosed society, their ship and home, against nature's ravages.[6] Like the audience in *Heart of Darkness*, this group of listeners consists of former seamen: the director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, and the nameless narrator (himself no longer a seaman). Despite their settling into less physically rigorous professions, the narrator nevertheless takes pride in the long British tradition of seamanship they once observed: "[The gathering] 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" ("Youth" 3). Already, their common background arouses a sense of pride and camaraderie in the men; Marlow himself engages his audience more in this story than in his later narratives as he constantly asks them to "pass the bottle." After Marlow's tale, they "all [nod] at him . . . [their] weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romantic illusions" (42). Marlow's humorous and rather innocuous

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[4] Kenneth Simons discusses Marlow's ambiguous irony and imaginative reinterpretation of the *Judea*'s demise in "The Ludic Imagination: 'Youth.'" He writes, "What Marlow seeks to recover, or recreate, is not just strength but the psychological absence of any independent opposing force to it, the absence of real negation, the insensitivity to death and ironically to the meaning of his own story, since it is the energy of his headlong rush to the East that singles him out, and not Beard, as 'death's fool'" (171). Essentially, Conrad establishes Marlow as a completely independent character and not merely a mouthpiece by showing that the narrator's nostalgia affects both the details and Marlow's imagination, thus affecting the narrative's central themes.

[5] Conrad biographer Roger Tennant notes that Conrad actually based "Youth" on one of his own delayed journeys to Bangkok in 1881 aboard the dilapidated *Palestine* (renamed the *Judea* in "Youth"). Conrad also had his sailor's certificate revoked in Singapore pending an inquiry, as in *Lord Jim*; however, Conrad didn't lose his certificate (Tennant 37).

[6] Jacques Berthoud lists the three factors of the nautical profession that link the "trial of life" primarily to physical action: "the sea itself, of which the rigours have to be faced; the ship, of which the demands have to be met; and the tradition of service, of which the requirements have to be observed" (81).

tale not only allows them to contemplate their own youth but it also reminds them of the profession's fraternity. Marlow recounts that while pumping the water out as the *Judea* becomes flooded, "Everyone took his turn, captain included. There was equality, and if not exactly fraternity, then a deal of good feeling" (21). Marlow takes solace not only in the trial but the cooperation and intimacy of the workers; both reflect his nostalgia for the initiation into this brotherhood.

The solidarity and efficiency of nautical communities depends on the supposed superiority of races and nations, and vice versa. Marlow praises the superior seamanship of British sailors when they continue dutifully to their tasks after the *Judea*'s explosion:

> I don't say positively that the crew of a French or German merchantman wouldn't have done it, but I doubt whether it would have been done in the same way. There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct—a disclosure of something secret—of that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations. (28)

This passage reveals not only Marlow's nationalism (or at least a sense of national pride), but it also introduces the theme of racial destiny, particularly that of the European race(s) contrasted with the colonial natives. Marlow implies that the "fate of nations" rests within the internal strength of its colonial adventurers. This same strength enables them to perform duty in the face of all adversity; this "trial of life" emanates directly from duty devoted to capitalism and international trade, so Marlow links proof of the sailor's personal strength with imperial dominance. The listener can even detect materialistic desire in Marlow's descriptive language. "The sea was polished," he says, "was blue, was pellucid, was *sparkling like a precious stone*, extending on all sides, all round the horizon—as if the whole terrestrial globe had been *one*

jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet" (20; my emphases). Marlow implies that the young seaman covets the world, and his imagery directly connects the sailor's thrill of adventure to the imperialism upon which it is based. Capitalism, the need for trade, pervades the fantastic experience of youth, a recurring theme in Marlow's narratives.[7] Success in capitalist imperialism determines the worth of races and nations and thus of the individuals who comprise them; the seaman's success in the trial of life and thus narrative trial depends on his fulfillment of capitalist duties.

Marlow contrasts the egocentric enthusiasm of such men with the hostility of conquered peoples. When Marlow's crew encounters the *Somerville*, he notices the "unconcern" of the Malaysian shipmen toward their plight and complains, "I thought people who had been blown up deserved more attention" (27). Marlow expresses surprise at their indifference to (and perhaps contempt for) the familiar sight of Europeans, even shipwrecked ones. In one surreal moment, Marlow again indicates a chaotic Eastern hostility towards Western merchants:

> And then, before I could open my lips, the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice. A torrent of words was poured into the enigmatical, the fateful silence; the outlandish, angry words, mixed with words and even whole sentences of good English, less strange but more surprising. The voice swore and cursed violently; it riddled the solemn peace of the bay with a volley of abuse. (39)

The seamen try to prove their own personal worth by essentially conquering other races and nations, and an omnipresent and ominous backlash resists them in their trials; it fragments the

[7] In "Modernism and Imperialism," Frederic Jameson argues that modernist writers such as Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce utilize geographical maps to define a "modernist *style* as one in which an appearance of meaning is pressed into the service of the notation of physical perception" (54), and the existential crisis of modernism renders literature incomplete because writers ignore modernism's imperialist basis. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow confesses to a lifelong fascination with maps and the conquered lands of Africa (22); his curiosity drives him to eventually perform imperialist duties in the Congo, where he encounters Kurtz and existential crisis. However, both here and in his

conqueror's own language and serenity, turning his picturesque prize into a truly alien land. Marlow foreshadows Kurtz's and Jim's demise in such alien lands when he tells the audience, "I have known [the East's] fascination since; I have seen the mysterious shores, the still water, the lands of brown nations, where a stealthy Nemesis lies in wait, pursues, overtakes so many of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength" (41). Marlow implies that, in their eagerness to conquer the world, young, ambitious and imaginative men forget that the world can conquer them, too.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz, as one of these adventurers, interferes in the Congo for Europe's gain and glory, acting as an advocate of material and moral conquest but finally succumbing to spiritual deterioration. However, before his demise, he secures his legacy and fame through two displays of evidence: first, his own brilliance, expressed in his artwork, music, political rhetoric, and writings, specifically the report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs and "gang of virtue"; second, through his profitable services to the Belgian Trading Company, notably his immense harvests of ivory—"as much ivory as all the [other agents] put together" (*Heart of Darkness* 34). Kurtz ostensibly embodies the "unselfish belief in the idea" that redeems imperialism and the "devotion to efficiency" that "saves" colonists from being latter-day Roman conquerors, according to Marlow (21). He paradoxically embodies the traits that both redeem empire for Marlow (idealism and efficiency) and ultimately condemn it (rampant materialism, corruption, and brutality).[8]

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description of the sea in "Youth," Marlow indicates that even direct encounters with imperialism render modernist storytelling none the more clear or complete.

[8] Abdulla al-Dabbagh notes that Conrad's narrative strategy in *Heart of Darkness* makes "cultural Eurocentrism ('All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz') the primary target, thus denying the economic and political foundations of the system (capitalism) that gives rise to the conditions of (neo)colonialism" (81). Like Jameson, al-Dabbagh sees Conrad's emphasis on existentialism in European society (manifested in Kurtz) as a denial of the commercial and cultural imperialism that serve as this society's foundation.

Marlow remarks that Kurtz's name—"German for short" – indicates the essential contradiction of his character, for the misnomer doesn't coincide with his elongated appearance (76). Instead, the one word sums up the paradoxical Kurtz: a man dwarfed by pre-industrial Africa and aggrandized as an intellectual giant by Modern Europe. Neither is Kurtz alone in having an inappropriate name. The names of characters in *Heart of Darkness* and other Marlow narratives tend to be incomplete, artificial, and symbolic: the Harlequin, the Station Manager, the Aunt, the Intended, the Mistress—these function more as labels than as names. Every character becomes a nominal cipher, disconnected from society and, to some extent, disconnected from its laws. Even Marlow is actually Charley Marlow, but his fellow seamen address him simply as Marlow, sometimes not even sure how to spell *this* name ("Youth" 3). While the sailors recognize each other as sailors, "substantive relationships" between them and other people give way to "[nominal] relations between names or labels and reality"; as the frame narrator shows by identifying the *Nellie*'s crew by their professions, these characters operate in a "fully bureaucratic society in which social role subsumes individual identity" (Lord 133).[9] While the person's name clearly signifies his role in the greater community, it both perverts legal relationships and constrains his complete individuality. In Kurtz's case, people can only understand him through the evidence of his productivity, and this understanding effaces the individual by positioning him as a mere servant of imperialism's socioeconomic demands.

Marlow juxtaposes Kurtz's artificial society against the jungle, an organically intense wilderness that seduces Kurtz by offering a fantastic alternative to Europe's detached laws and arbitrary constraints. Marlow feminizes the wilderness by similarly reducing Kurtz's mistress to

[9] In *Solitude versus Solidarity in the Novels of Joseph Conrad: Political and Epistemological Implications of Narrative Innovation*, Ursula Lord thoroughly examines Conrad's modernist context and how the emergence of philosophical and intellectual movements such as Darwinism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism fit into this context.

a symbol of pre-industrial Africa. "[In] the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land," he recalls, "the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it has been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul" (77). Marlow depicts a femininized and victimized Congo, plundered and brutally raped by colonialism, but he also paradoxically associates the land with birth and death.[10] Like the machinery on shore, the emaciated natives, and the ivory skeletons plundered for sale, Kurtz ultimately dies in this apparently "fecund" land. Initially, Kurtz sees not only opportunity but also symbiosis with a nurturing, maternal wilderness.[11] The lure is so overwhelming that Marlow must wrest the feeble Kurtz from the Congo, and even then Kurtz plans to return: "'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness" (85). Kurtz completely surrenders to the jungle, the feminine, Freudian unconsciousness: he lives as a European god in a dream world. Now one with his fantasy, he regresses to a symbolic childhood, dependent on the maternal, feminine land.

Marlow expects women (specifically Western women) to retreat from material facts and duty: "We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse" (64). However, he defines a "man" by his community's standards: a hard worker, embedded in the community, who toils to hold together Victorian society. He values work and service not only for

[10] Merry M. Pawlowski argues that Conrad consciously plays with the literary tradition of portraying nature as feminine by "[depicting] a Nature brutalized and raped by colonialist desire, subject to senseless attack" (124). As Marlow ventures into central Africa he enters "the territory of the unconscious" (125), a landscape littered with feminine icons form Kurtz's painting to the African Mistress, and he bases his experience in terms of gender and sexual polarization (male versus female).

[11] In "Lifting the Veil of Romance, A Reading of *Lord Jim*," Meg Samuelson also notes Conrad's technique of feminizing pre-industrial lands such as Africa and Patusan, but she doesn't see the land as passive: "While the virgin land provides an opportunity for penetration and conquest, the land-as-mother threatens engulfment . . . Highlighting the more active side of the female gendered land is, I suggest, a ploy by which Conrad is able to erase difference between Jim and the native Patusanians and momentarily set aside the binary divide between empowered colonizer and disempowered colonised" (348).

material gain but also as a base for psychological stability and social ethics.[12] Threatened with incessantly examining the most occult regions of his soul, Marlow salvages his sanity by working on the broken steamer and obsessing over rivets. He explains, "I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for the others—what no other man can ever know" (44). Later, when he finds the Russian Harlequin's book, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*, he takes comfort in its technical banality: "Not a very enthralling book [. . . but the] simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real" (53). For Marlow, European men immerse themselves in the mundane and the superficial features that, like so many rivets, intricately hold together their materialistic society.

For Marlow, Kurtz's rejection of social constraints in favor of imaginative, vague "plans" nearly condemns him; the rejection leads to a collapse in his identity as a "man," an identity privately attained but nevertheless based in a social network. This collapse leads in turn to Kurtz's excessive crimes and exclusion from imperialist work, the public domain of adult men in the material world. By neglecting the social factor of these values and losing focus on his "work," Kurtz succumbs to a childlike moral incontinence. At this level, Kurtz fails the public and thus private standards applied to him in the narrative-trial. Whatever his revelation—"The horror! The horror!" (86)—Kurtz's neglect of the community testifies against him.[13] Still, he

[12] Noting the influence of Thomas Carlyle's writing, Watt writes, "Work can give the individual a stable psychological base; it can also give him a social ethic, a reaching out to the 'Not-me' which may render him a useful member of the 'Family of Man.'" Watt also notes that the values espoused in Victorian society "were often placed in the context of a defence against temptation, hedonism, and loss of faith. Thus, work was a defence against the powers of evil; renunciation saved man from the self-absorbed despair which resulted from the vain pursuit of happiness; while duty was humanity's last stay against the demoralizing loss of Christian faith" (150).

[13] Conrad critics routinely comment on Kurtz's cry and what it means; there are too many explanations to fully consider here. Keeping in mind the fact that Kurtz is a writer, Stephen Donovan views the phrase as a journalistic cliché in his essay "Prosaic Newspaper Stunts: Conrad, Modernity, and the Press," in which he examines Conrad's

never faces an official trial for his crimes; all known evidence only reveals his efficiency in trade and his high ideals about the civilizing mission. Though his crimes include mass murder, extended insubordination and abandonment of his post, infidelity, and presiding over "certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites"—implicitly, human sacrifices (66)—he still remains posthumously famous in Europe and exalted in the Congo, loved by both his African Mistress and his benighted Intended.

Instead, Marlow associates Kurtz's "justice" not with any public community standard but ultimately with the private disclosure of his dying words to the Intended (94). However, because Marlow doesn't disclose this secret, he implicates himself as Kurtz's accomplice and shares his guilt, willfully keeping one more woman "out of it" (64). Marlow, then, must portray his subject as "remarkable" for having "something to say" and saying it (87); to alleviate his own guilt, he espouses the Harlequin's claim that one "can't judge Kurtz as [one] would an ordinary man" (72). Marlow defers his own judgment of Kurtz by diluting the damning facts with the vague descriptions of these facts—the "unspeakable rites," for instance, with impressionism that portrays Africa as a dream-world where Western laws do not apply, ambiguous praise (Marlow's concession that Kurtz is "remarkable"), and sympathy for Kurtz through a near-death experience.

If Marlow uses Kurtz merely to symbolize European civilization, he risks implicating both himself and this world in Kurtz's crimes. Fearing negation of his own public and private identities, Marlow cannot fully condemn his society.[14] At one point, he insults the audience by accusing them of retreating from introspection into their professions, or "respective tightropes,"

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disgust with commercially mass-produced journalism. Kurtz's existentialist cry could then be nothing more than the psychological product of a man conditioned by the continuous sensationalist reporting of surface details.

[14] In the same fashion as Chinua Achebe's trenchant criticism of *Heart of Darkness*, Ash doesn't believe that either Conrad or Marlow can seriously question their society because imperialism is a "psychological matrix—indeed, a culture built around narcissistic fantasy and maintained through the weird logic of misdirection, denial, and disavowal." Marlow's "'critical' and 'loyal' positions involve ambivalent emotional commitments, and hence

where they perform for "half a crown a tumble" (50). When a growl interrupts this accusation—"Try to be civil, Marlow"—he immediately retreats and includes himself as one of them, reaffirming his identities and excusing the crew because they "do [their] tricks very well" (50). Unlike the "remarkable" Kurtz, the sea-traders must shun imagination to perform their duties. They rely on simplicity and straightforward facts, and they cannot deviate into abstraction; they cannot grasp the elusive meaning of the tale. Marlow himself understands their dedication to duty and need for simplicity, yet he provides no straightforward answers for fear of exposing his society's corruption and materialism. Therefore, despite the facts, he receives no verdict and only evokes general silence until the frame narrator's eventual, equivocal recital.

Marlow openly questions the validity of material evidence in *Lord Jim* by wondering whether or not Jim, who "of all mankind . . . had no dealings but with himself," finally "[confesses] to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress" (258). The fact that Jim abandons his duty aboard the *Patna* doesn't fully explain his character; Marlow must complete the story not only to describe the facts about Jim's success but also to relate Jim's desire for acceptance in the nautical community. He jumps with the other three European crewmen on the *Patna*, and he never forgets his shame among the nautical community, even amidst his brief success in Patusan. "But all the same," he says to Marlow, "you wouldn't like to have me aboard your ship—hey?" (232). Jim's regret indicates his internalization of Western civilization's laws and values.[15] As a sailor, Jim can only confirm his private identity through the fulfillment of a public duty that also demands racial and national loyalty. According to the Privileged Reader,

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cannot be understood exclusively in terms of ideological contradiction and mystification," so neither he nor Conrad can "carry off an integrated critique of imperialism" (80).

[15] R.A. Gekoski argues that Jim manages to unite what seemed to be "incompatible demands of his fierce egoism and his social responsibilities. In 'following his dream' he remained at the level of consciousness that destroyed Mr Kurtz [sic], but fortunately his dream was not incompatible with ordinary moral conventions, as was Kurtz's. Quite the opposite: Jim is 'one of us,' his egoism is firmly grounded in accepted moral standards, his dreams of glory are not only not incompatible with the fulfilment of his moral duties, they absolutely demand it" (106).

European traders must "fight in the ranks or [their] lives don't count," especially if they give up their lives to "mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour" (258). Unlike the productive Kurtz, Jim's jump and subsequent adventure in Patusan threaten to erase any external confirmation of his identity.

To prevent Jim's complete disappearance, Marlow must provide evidence of his European identity. One fact is Jim's title of "tuan"—the Patusan term for "lord." Jim's dubbing of "tuan" both distances him from and maintains his connection to his world's laws. In the beginning, Jim has only his first name. It effaces any full identity, like the names of characters from *Heart of Darkness* and this story (Stein, the French Captain, Jewel, etc.); like Kurtz, Jim reintegrates himself into a partially colonized community, signified by his adoption of "tuan." The novel's title translates his revered status as the community's protector into "lord," a title of European nobility. This translation appeals to Jim's ego by nominally attesting to his temporary control over fate in Patusan, yet it still carries irony: Jim's splendid appearance and title betray his flawed nature (represented by his desertion of the *Patna*). Unfortunately, titles not assigned by European society prove unreliable for Jim, as the narrative contrasts him with the vicious buccaneer Gentleman Brown. Both men's titles deceptively redefine them and betray their status as outcasts.[16] The titles of "gentleman" and "lord" also mark specifically masculine positions of power, and both Europeans exercise potentially destructive power over Patusan. Brown merely represents the colonial rapist—greedy, desperate, and obsessed with controlling Patusan. Jim himself subscribes to the Victorian fantasy of male explorers not only conquering foreign lands

[16] Stephen K. Land notes the absurdity of Brown's and Jim's titles: though both men call themselves "gentleman," they are "fugitive outcasts from the world where the style might be meaningful" (89). Land also points out that Jim's name reflects his paradoxical nature, as "Lord Jim" is "the juxtaposition of a common diminutive with the style of nobility" (80).

but also uplifting their peoples through their masculine deeds.[17] Indeed, Marlow tells the audience how Jim miraculously leads an assault on Sherif Ali, tames the Rajah, usurps Cornelius domestically and professionally, and secures the island as a trading post. Marlow illustrates these deeds as evidence of how European imperialism (manifested in Jim) can simultaneously dominate and save colonial territories. In perhaps his most masculine display of imperialist power, Jim actually remakes his lover Jewel in his own image: "[Jewel] had learned a good bit of English from Jim, and she spoke it most amusingly, with his own clipping, boyish intonation [. . .] She lived so completely in his contemplation that she had acquired something of his outward aspect, something that recalled him in her movements" (214). Like Marlow's description of the sea in "Youth," Jewel's very name reduces her, at least on a symbolic level, to Jim's possession and treasure. Patusan acts as the feminine object of Jim's conquest fantasies, as the gateway to a feminized destiny: Marlow describes Jim's opportunity to prove himself once and for all here as an "Eastern bride [coming] veiled to his side" (318).[18] However, like Kurtz, Jim also faces the threat of assimilation by an aggressive, maternal self-made paradise:

> He was jealously loved, but why [Jewel] should be jealous, and of what, I could not tell. The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery, of invincible possession.

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[17] In "Re-reading Conrad's 'Complete Man:' Constructions of Masculine Subjectivity in 'Heart of Darkness' and *Lord Jim*," Tim Middleton explains that "empire was both a place where one could be 'a real man' and a place in which the Englishman was supposed to offer a shining example of 'how to be' to the empire's subject races" (264). Middleton explains that the demands of empire create a mutable masculine subject, as seen in Kurtz: "skilled trader, emissary of 'enlightenment;' white man gone native; populist politician, visionary, artist, to name but a few of his incarnations" (266).

[18] Padmini Mongia mentions that "Jim's destiny (and dreams of it) is dependant upon a global, imperialist sense of *male* possibility" (181; my emphasis). Drawing on Mongia's argument, Merry M. Pawlowski sees Marlow's sensing of male possibility in his feminization of both land and space: "I would like to suggest that even a Conradian 'thickening' of space through the use of hazes, mists, and fog invites comparisons to veiled women whose cloaked apparel both invites and repels penetration. The very word 'dis-covery,' Padmini Mongia reminds us, points to the unveiling fantasies which have energized male explorers. Even the nature of meaning in Marlow's tales invites comparison to veiling or cloaking and the feminization of space" because "Marlow's meaning lies outside in the veil with which the tale is draped"(122-23).

> There was no appeal, as it were; he was imprisoned within the very freedom of his power, and she, though ready to make a footstool of her head for his feet, guarded her conquest inflexibly—as though he were hard to keep. (215)

This passage implies that Jim risks succumbing to same fantasies that ensnared Kurtz; still, Jim remains compromised by both worlds, forcibly restrained, it seems, by his dual responsibilities to the community and Patusan.[19] Jim's nemesis, Gentleman Brown, exploits his national and racial loyalty to massacre the natives and escape, forcing Jim to choose among the options of private and public codes of honor, war for his paradise, or flight with Jewel. Jim fully embraces a second trial, death, and his social duties, indeed remaining "faithful" as he claims (254) and abandoning a living woman's love.[20] Because he deserts Jewel out of faithfulness to the sailor's notion of duty, Marlow associates Jim more closely with his audience's community.

Unfortunately, Jim embodies the community's ideals to a fatal extreme: masculine commitment to materialistic labor, efficiency in his heroic exploits, and unwavering dedication to duty, even in the face of doom. Despite Jim's sacrifice for private beliefs based on these public standards, Marlow only ambiguously claims him as "one of us," contrasting to both Stein's verdict that he is "true" and Jewel's verdict that he is "false" (267). Marlow also tries to present Jim as his most severe judge. "It is not I or the world who remember," he shouts before Jim departs for Patusan. "It is you—you who remember" (179). Jim even joins the community in

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[19] Abdulla al-Dabbagh writes, "Paradoxically, the imperialist must maintain an identification with his own people while he serves the interests of another culture; thus, the imperialist must be a 'homo duplex'" (75). Conrad's term indicates a split subjectivity: by serving two different cultures, the imperialist effectively divides his identity and even consciousness, and he must either reconcile or juggle the conflicting identities. This conflict contributes to the existential crises of Marlow's narratives.

[20] Martin Price argues that Jim's masculine egoism can only be satisfied by abandoning Jewel: "Conrad has forced apart the heroic and the authentic; the shadowy ideal becomes the successful rival of the living woman [. . .] The heroic, finally, seems childish and wistful, the bluster of the straggler who wants nothing more than to be taken into the ranks" (195). Belonging in the male community of sea-traders seems derived from the notion that "water is the site of an aboriginal homosociality" in Conrad, and "forms of homosociality including the homoerotic appear to be primary and primordial," overshadowed not by women but by the ever-present, ever-changing sea (Harpham 132).

condemning his actions on the *Patna*. Despite the continued gossip of Jim's jump from the *Patna*, Marlow presents his audience and the Privileged Reader with destructive possibilities of the subject's unwavering loyalty to masculine, nationalist, and racial codes: "Is [Jim] satisfied—quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us—and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all?" (318).

In Jim's case, Marlow introduces evidence that shows how well he served the community. Unlike his portrayal of Kurtz, Marlow presents Jim as remaining true while having another world under his control, but he emphasizes that he can neither know Jim completely nor affirm whether or not his final decision was right. As in Kurtz's case, Marlow always repeats the story (through another narrator in *Heart of Darkness*) and never settles on a final word. The material evidence alone won't suffice; though the audience desires facts, they do not have enough evidence to validate preconceived verdicts—Kurtz was great and profitable while Jim jumped ship, lost his title, and vanished. However, Marlow cannot negate the bonds of profession, nation, or even race for fear of implicating society and thus himself in his subjects' crimes. Instead, he shows the jury that their obsession with facts only reveals superficial knowledge and not truth, like Marlow's own fascination with Jim's splendid appearance; he dilutes new evidence by emphasizing his own subjectivity and the subjectivity of the witnesses. As a speaker, he offers the audience his voice: the awareness of subjectivity—narrative, communal, and private—and of how this awareness provides the insight necessary for judgment.

CHAPTER 3

WITNESSES AND MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

After establishing Kurtz and Jim in the audience's community of European sea-merchants, Marlow portrays these subjects of the community as individuals by turning them into narrative subjects; the stories' facts cannot escape the individual subjective interpretation. Marlow ultimately stresses the dominance of the individual's private self over the public's perception of this subject, no matter how much the individual internalizes his society's values. Marlow counteracts the audience's dependence on incomplete facts by presenting the testimony of witnesses—both his own testimony and that of other characters. In this integration of various (and sometimes conflicting) subjective testimonies, Conrad, through Marlow, employs and at times fuses speech and writing to manipulate the narrative and its effects on his audiences, at times frustrating the expectations his listeners hold for both mediums. By Marlow's summoning of the witness-testimonies through recollection, Conrad also plays with the notion of Marlow as a "medium," or necromancer, and he indicates such an esoteric quality in these elusive stories through the narrator's repeated use of supernatural imagery and language. Acting as a metaphorical medium for his subjects complicates Marlow's narratives; he bears witness on their behalf, or they bear witness *through* him. The supernatural imagery indicates that while this technique blends together multiple subjects and offers no conclusive evidence, it nevertheless can enchant the listener's imagination. By using this kind of imagery, Marlow tries to appeal to the audience's imagination and blurs the boundaries between different witnesses, speech and writing, and the real (previously defined by the "facts") and the unreal.

Heart of Darkness is more Marlow's story than it is Kurtz's, so Marlow himself serves as the primary witness to Kurtz's activities of colonial exploitation. Everything Marlow depicts in his narrative he sees himself, but he can only relate some details partially. Sometimes Marlow provides only fragments of conversations, such as these snippets of dialogue involving the Station Manager and his uncle: "'Make rain and fine weather—one man—the Council—by the nose'—and bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness" (47). At other times, Marlow refrains from directly describing details. He only mentions the "unspeakable rites" performed at Kurtz's ceremonies and asks the audience whether they "understand" the rites "offered up to [Kurtz]" (66). Not only does Marlow subjectively distort the actual facts but he also requires the audience's subjectivity in interpreting facts such as the "unspeakable rites." He also admits to lying and withholding information in his meeting with Kurtz's Intended, and the witnesses' testimony in *Heart of Darkness* remains incomplete and distorted in places. The frame narrator provides this explanatory simile of Marlow's narrative and its overlapping subjectivities:

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (19)

"Spectral illumination" appropriately illustrates the narrative's ambiguity, for the story features a witness's voice, like that of the Harlequin's or Station Manager's, over Marlow's own voice over

the frame narrator's voice in recollection. The retellings diminish the metaphorical light of reality and leave the listener with impressions of impressions.[1]

Despite the inherent unreliability of Marlow's narration, he nonetheless emphasizes the importance of voice by claiming that Kurtz is "very little more than a voice" to him; faced with the possibility of Kurtz's demise, Marlow feels "cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz" (64). Kurtz's voice takes primacy over his image, even his physical presence. The insubstantial voice powerfully affects even the most dutiful nautical servants in the Congo, an unreal world for the narrator and his subject. Impressions overwhelm both men and take precedence over facts, which they interpret subjectively. Thus, because even the voice's source seems insubstantial to Marlow,[2] the voice's echoes attest to the obfuscation of any substantial fact or witness, which culminates in Marlow's fading from the audience's sight. Marlow can sympathize with Kurtz's surrender to this seemingly insubstantial world, and he reveals this in two statements. First, Marlow admits to feeling a common "humanity" between himself and the natives, even as they engage in wild dances similar to those that Kurtz oversees (51). Second, Marlow faces an "unexciting contest" with death after Kurtz dies and fears that he may have no final pronouncement, and he admires Kurtz because he *did* say "something" (87). Marlow's repetition of Kurtz's story within his own attests to his own lack of conviction; instead, he must echo the dead Kurtz's words and

[1] Studies of *Heart of Darkness* often cite this passage to emphasize the elusive nature of Marlow's tale(s). J. Hillis Miller dissects this simile of "twice-reflected light" only to discover "that the halo gives the spectator indirect knowledge that the darkness is there." Facts are moonlight diluted through the "halo" of the listener's perceived meaning of the tale: "The glow brings out the haze, the story brings out the its meaning, by magically generating knowledge that something is there, the haze in one case, the meaning of the story, inarticulate and impossible to be articulated, in any direct way at least, in the other. The expression of the meaning of the story is never the plain statement of that meaning but is always no more than a parabolic 'likeness' of the meaning" ("*Heart of Darkness* Revisited" 212).

[2] Michael Seidel distinguishes Kurtz as "the generative source for narrative voice" for Marlow and Jim as "the generative source for narrative performance" (81), indicating that while Marlow turns Jim into a story, he cannot help but transmit (subjectively) Kurtz's original voice; the two men ultimately share one voice and one story.

superimpose Kurtz's story on his own narrative of traversing the Congo.[3] The frame narrator also repeats another person's story in place of his own.

If Marlow portrays the voice as contagious and self-effacing in *Heart of Darkness*, then he simultaneously finds privacy and consolation in the Harlequin's sailor's manual, *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*, for it provides "unmistakably real" facts—technical details of seamanship (53). By recounting his comfort in the manual, Marlow expresses sympathy with his matter-of-fact jury and perhaps even gains *their* sympathy. He confirms that he needs materials—something produced and verified through sight or touch—to maintain his own socio-psychological stability, and the English writing provides him with that anchor, that materialist sustenance. Writing's capacity for manifesting information restructures consciousness by implementing "production of still more exquisite structures and references [of language], far surpassing the potentials of oral utterance. Writing [. . .] was and is the most momentous of all human technological inventions" because by moving "speech from the oral-aural world to a new sensory world, that of vision, it transforms speech and thought as well" (Ong 85).[4] Marlow sees the manual's technical writing as representing the technology and materialism that drive

[3] In "A Voice Without a Body: The Phonographic Logic of *Heart of Darkness*," Ivan Kreilkamp compares Marlow's repetition of Kurtz's words to the phonograph's potential for mechanically detaching a voice from its speaker and mass-reproducing it. Kreilkamp notes that the phonograph began to attain much public notice at the same time Conrad composed *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad himself even experiences the device at this time and expresses disgust at the suggestion that all art and culture "are essentially no more than configurations of sound vibrations and waves of electricity" (224). Kreilkamp also explains the seemingly supernatural technology of the phonograph and its resemblance to Kurtz's degradation: "Last words were no longer the end of voice but the beginning of its reproduction as voice alone. Kurtz is, in a sense, a test case for the Edisonian project of recording and passing on the last words of 'great men,' a social practice that relies on the faith that the meaning of such words, which has its source in human origin, can be successfully transmitted. Such optimism is ruled out by Conrad's representation of speech as sound which, once spoken, acquires the status of the authorless 'vibrations' of an impersonal universe" (234).

[4] Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* details the transformation of human consciousness through the transition from an oral culture to a literate one, specifically focusing on the capacity for technological development writing provides. Contrasted against words that "are alone in a text," he describes the living presence of orality: "Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another real, living person or real, living persons, at a specific time in a real setting which includes always much more than mere words. Spoken words are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words" (101).

Eurocentric imperialism and thus necessitate his professional community. Writing is more substantial to the audience/jury, even though they initially congregate for Marlow's *spoken* narratives. However, by gathering together in a manner reminiscent of pre-literate tribal gatherings, the materialistic community essentially relies on Marlow's insubstantial voice, and it risks enthrallment with that voice, best exemplified by the frame narrator's subjective retelling. To fall under a voice's power could lead to an abandonment of duty and thus identity (just as Kurtz abandons duty); the worker needs stability. Writing's physical embodiment of knowledge, its tangibility, and its visibility give Marlow not only material comfort but also stability in lands where Kurtz's detached voice, not visible presence, exercises power over him.

Even though Marlow takes comfort in the manual, Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs transmits his written voice, "vibrating with eloquence," and its "magic current of phrases" makes Marlow "tingle with enthusiasm" (*Heart of Darkness* 66). Instead of providing the tangible sense of reality Marlow finds in the sailor's manual, Kurtz's written rhetoric excites Marlow without providing any "practical hints [on how] to interpret" it. Kurtz's genius transmogrifies writing into effective speech that casts a spell over Marlow. Kurtz even emphasizes magic's importance in his report. Marlow summarizes its opening argument: the white colonists "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity," and that through sheer will they "can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (66). Kurtz's egoism leads him to view the colonizers as benevolent gods in their quest to supposedly civilize colonized peoples.

Marlow also uses supernatural imagery in *Heart of Darkness* to describe this world in a Christian context. He repeatedly calls Kurtz and the other pilgrims "devils" because of their barbarity and greed; however, he only conflates them with the non-Christian Africans,

particularly in Kurtz's transformation into a tribal god. What Marlow sees of Africa he equates with Dante's description of Hell: he describes the labor pit on the shore as a "gloomy circle of some Inferno" with men who are "nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation" (31, 32).[5] By viewing Africa as hell-on-earth, Marlow places brutal colonialism in a Christian context and familiarizes the horrifically surreal experience to his audience on the *Nellie*. Because the narrative functions as a trial for Kurtz, Marlow uses the *Inferno* allusion not only to contextualize suffering but also to emphasize the need for justice and punishment for Kurtz's sins. Kurtz's final cry of "The horror!" thus acts as both a legal and religious confession.[6] Even though a confession indicates the subject's acknowledgment of guilt, Marlow's renders Kurtz's cry as a religious and spiritual confession: Kurtz's soul "had looked within itself, and [. . .] it had gone mad" (83). He reminds his audience/jury that any human judgment on his subject ultimately only substitutes for divine judgment. They cannot know Kurtz as God does.

Kurtz remains a mystery for the audience partly because Marlow never knows him as anything else. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow becomes more intimately acquainted with the disgraced Jim. Marlow acts as a private confessor for Jim, a role juxtaposed with the public Inquiry. Perhaps referring back to Kurtz, the seaman claims that any insignificant thing through "devious,

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[5] Jakob Lothe thoroughly discusses Marlow's evocation of the classical epic (181), specifically the archetypal hero's descent into hell and attainment of knowledge in *Heart of Darkness* (as immortalized in *Inferno* and the *Aeneid*), in his essay "Cumulative Intertextuality in 'Heart of Darkness': Virgil, Dante, and Goethe's *Faust*."

[6] Vincent Pecora argues that Marlow essentially bases his journey on the traditional pilgrim's journey: "Like an Adam after the fall, in a garden that has become a jungle, Kurtz appears to Marlow through the lens of the most basic paradigm of human moral development—or decay—in Christian Europe: the progress of a Christian pilgrim. Kurtz is in fact the innermost company pilgrim, a term Marlow bestows freely on the other white men in this jungle; and at his death, Kurtz's recognition of his surrender to temptation becomes for Marlow a moral rectification of Kurtz's will. Kurtz's voice, though severely reduced, in the end *does* reaffirm for Marlow a living presence and moral strength—it is 'no more than a breath,' but it is a 'breath' above all that signifies the transcendental word, the word made flesh . . . As if to seal and confirm the 'truth' of the interpretive act Marlow has played on Kurtz's face, and with Kurtz's words, Marlow answers Kurtz's breath with his own, a secular communion that is enacted after Kurtz's unspoken confession" (1003).

unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes [him] to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots [. . .] and loosens their tongues at the sight of [him] for their infernal confidences" (25). Marlow attributes supernatural power (implicitly an accursed power) to his recurring role as a witness and confidant; Jim's tale becomes even more ominous through Marlow's tale, starting with their apparently fated encounter over the yellow cur. Jim almost assaults Marlow after mishearing his companion's reference to a yellow dog on the courthouse steps; Jim thinks that *Marlow* called *him* a "wretched cur" (52). This episode marks the beginning of Jim's inescapable plight: constant reminders of his abandonment from the *Patna* hidden in the narrative's wordplay. The "wretched cur" episode emphasizes the subject's and thus the individual's subjective (mis)interpretation of speech, and this example points out another problem Marlow has as both defender and witness: much of what he tells he hears from other witnesses, whereas in *Heart of Darkness* he directly experiences every surreal moment. Marlow recounts conversations and events he never saw. The fact that Marlow tells Jim's story from not only his own experiences but also Jim's, Brown's, Stein's, and Jewel's accounts (among others) indicates that he refashions several subjective accounts into his own subjective account. His story acts more as a public hearing than an essentially personal experience.[7]

Unlike *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* features an official public hearing for the protagonist (or two hearings, considering Jim's eventual demise in Patusan). The Inquiry reflects the European nautical community's reliance on verifiable facts (20), and its penalty for Jim's abandonment pertains solely to writing: the destruction of his sailor's certificate, merely a "bit of ass's skin" according to Chester (122). The Inquiry employs the same oral debate that

[7] Regarding the overlapping of multiple witnesses, Miller writes, "*Lord Jim* is like a dictionary in which the entry under one word refers the reader to another word which refers him to another and then back to the first word again, in an endless circling" ("*Lord Jim*: Repetition as Subversion of Organic Form" 178).

characterizes Marlow's narrative, but it only concerns superficial facts and official positions. When Jim loses his certificate, he effectively loses his public identity. He has nowhere to go but to obscure positions as a water-clerk and dark recesses of the colonial world, like Chester's guano pits or Stein's civilly fractured Patusan. Jim fails his own personal beliefs in heroic duty because he fails the official standards that give these beliefs their foundation; writing signifies at once these public standards and his personal beliefs.

According to the first omniscient narrator, Jim has always defined his personal identity in terms of writing—or, more specifically, the "light holiday literature." He reads adventure stories about sailors and colonial explorers and imagines himself performing incredible feats, "always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book" (3). Not only do the books provide public examples of personal heroism, but they also afford Jim the privacy to imagine such acts rather than to perform monotonous duties and have his opportunity. When the opportunity does come to "heroically" drown with the *Patna* (as far as Jim can comprehend), his imagination—which can be "the enemy of men, the father of all terrors" (7)—floods him with every horrible scenario he's ever read about concerning drowning ships, and it effectively paralyzes him until the jump.[8] Writing highlights Jim's personal and private isolation in a vast and materialistic society, yet it also appeals to the individual by providing possible stabilization of the private identity.[9] In an inversion of the scene in *Heart of Darkness* where Marlow relishes

[8] C.B. Cox even compares Jim to Hamlet in his paralysis: "among [Conrad's] tragic heroes Jim is closest to Hamlet, and it is appropriate that Stein should quote from that play in his famous scene with Marlow. Jim's imagination paralyzes his ability to act, and like Hamlet he seems at times trapped in a universe whose salient characteristics are those of comic burlesque rather than tragedy" (26).

[9] Watt writes, "Jim and Marlow belong to a society whose scale and diversity are of a vastly greater magnitude, and where personal relations therefore tend to a much greater individual autonomy, and have very little continuity with the activities and values of the social order in general" (336). Friendship no longer binds communities together, as seen in the community's unfamiliarity with Marlow; Jim can only comfort his ego in the imagined worlds of books. Even friendship with Marlow acts as a form of escapism: "[Marlow's and Jim's] friendship is really a special case of a very general tendency in modern society for personal relations to begin on the basis of educational and occupational likeness, but to be transformed into a private intimacy which functions as an escape, an alternative, or even as a counterforce, to the public attitudes of their own group, and of society in general" (336).

the sailor's manual, Jim's consumption of commercial literature provides him with intangible fantasies and relief from commercial labor.

The privacy afforded by writing sways Marlow's final testimony of Jim, enclosed in the thick packet he sends to the Privileged Reader. As the recipient's name implies, he is the only one in Marlow's audience to hear the whole tale—privileged with the final knowledge of Jim's demise. Marlow accommodates the Privileged Reader by responding to his condemnation of Jim's services for Patusan, writing, "I affirm nothing. . . . It is impossible to see him clearly—especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him" (258). Marlow admits that the Reader cannot really understand Jim if he himself cannot understand Jim fully; his flawed testimony can only produce an even more flawed understanding. However, Marlow produces the packet for individual reflection instead of public consumption; the packet serves as a testament, a combination of tangible, visual writing and Marlow's subjective rendering of events he never witnessed. Like Kurtz's report, it exerts an almost magical influence as in spoken incantations, but the packet (with a letter from Jim as evidence) attests to the reality of Jim's adventures. While Marlow can never be certain of what he saw, he knows he saw *something* in Jim.

Marlow tries to make Jim a substantial presence in his veranda narratives, too: "He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you" (170). Not only does Marlow act as a defender and witness for Jim but, as with Kurtz, he becomes as much a medium for Jim's presence as his speech and writing are. Only through Marlow does Jim's humanity seem real.[10] However, by elusively

[10] Robert L. Caserio argues for the reality of Jim's specter: "The spectral moment thus carries a conviction that overcomes indeterminacy; in relation to itself it makes the world of apparent fact trivial and gross. It is in the latter world that Marlow has other moments, when Jim seems only unreal. But in the end for Conrad and Marlow Jim is a shade because of the overwhelming reality of his solidarity with others, and Jim is real because he is a shade" (343).

presenting Jim's humanity as real, Marlow paradoxically transforms Jim into a spirit, something not completely human. Jim becomes one of the spectral embodiments of guilt that forever haunt him. Marlow actually demonizes Jim's guilt in the narrative by referring to the subject's internal struggle as "shirking his ghost or facing him out" and as being unable to "wink at [his] familiar shades" (148). As in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow uses supernatural imagery to emphasize the difficulty of providing certain evidence pertaining to Jim. He also connects the malevolent presence of these spectral beings to both public and private desires for justice, both Jim's and the community's: "If his imaginative conscience or his pride; if all the extravagant ghosts and austere shades that were the disastrous familiars of his youth would not let him run away from the [Inquiry's chopping] block, I, who of course can't be suspected of such familiars, was irresistibly impelled to go and see his head roll off" (118). Manifesting Jim's guilt in "extravagant ghosts and austere shades" externalizes and to some degree visualizes this internal conflict; Marlow appeals to the community's imagination through semi-visual references, for a ghost is only semi-physical, realized through the imagination but not the senses.

Despite the overwhelming presence of such demons, Marlow nevertheless implies that these shades emanate from Jim's own subjective imagination and personal pride. To appease both his imagination and pride, Marlow and Stein set Jim up in Patusan, which serves as the fulfillment of his childish fantasy (similar to Kurtz's treatment of the Congo). Marlow describes how, after Jim lands in a preliterate culture, the natives begin to view him as a magical being after the miraculous siege on Ali's fort: "There was something occult in this, no doubt; for what is the strength of rope and of men's arms? There is a rebellious soul in things which must be overcome by powerful charms and incantations" (201). This oral culture ascribes supernatural traits to Jim that not only bolster his pride but appeal to his imagination (and, through Marlow,

the audience's imagination).[11] Without writing and the technological development made possible through writing, the natives of Patusan easily attribute amazing actions to magic or some other unknowable power, and Jim, from an unknown world, serves as the perfect conduit for such unknown powers. Marlow turns the second half of his narrative into an episode resembling one of Jim's pieces of "light holiday literature": Jim becomes the central colonialist hero with a cast of supporting stock characters—the half-white lover Jewel, the cruel stepfather Cornelius, the loyal servant Tamb Itam, the partially civilized best friend Dain Waris, the silent and looming chief Doramin, and his motherly "witch-like" wife (197). Jim even "triumphantly" remarks to Marlow that his tribal hosts "are like people in a book, aren't they?" (198). Marlow relates to his audience by presenting both Jim's personal triumph and the triumph of Eurocentric imperialism in terms of commercial literature: *Lord Jim* transforms from an existential examination of duty and identity into one of Jim's generic adventure stories. Here Marlow reverses his stance and substitutes *facts*—the details of Jim's adventures—for his analysis of Jim's plight; he further delays the verdict, diluting the damning first half with a campfire yarn of conquest. He appeals to the listener's imagination, but now he doesn't do so with ambiguity. Just as he begins to represent his subject, he draws away from him only to present evidence that Jim triumphed briefly; he saves the final revelation for a one-on-one correspondence with the Privileged Reader, afraid that such a revelation to the community would only re-condemn the man he wants to

[11] Michael Greaney uses the Malays in Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* as an example of orality's preference for mysticism: "This [Malay] community of storytellers is remarkable above all for its lack of divisions. It is not subdivided into tellers and listeners; nor has experience been hived off into the institutional subdivisions of poetry, painting, and so forth. There is no strict division between imaginative and informational narrative—*or even between the living and the dead* [my emphases]. That the voices of the dead are audible is given for the Malay characters in this novel; they retain a vital organic connection with an ancestral past from which the Europeans have cut themselves off" (13). Greaney also contrasts the nautical community's reliance on fact with the Malays' eagerness to view Jim as supernatural: "Whereas in the world of the *Patna* textual constructs are cruelly mocked by experience, in Patusan imagination magically coincides with reality. In the *Patna* section a community ponders the obscure implications of an undisputed fact; in Patusan we are shown a community quite happily modifying facts to square with a preconceived hypothesis about Jim's supernatural powers" (93).

redeem as "one of us" (Kurtz, who receives no such second half, already has other people's admiration before he departs for Africa). Instead, Marlow shows that *this* imperialist accomplishes the dreams of boys, and this success appeals to the once-youthful imaginations of the verandah audience, who also began their careers with lofty ambitions and dreams.[12]

Actually, Marlow remains hesitant about appealing to the audience's imagination, teasing them by saying, "I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imagination to feed your bodies" (170). Like the French Lieutenant who cannot pass judgment on Jim and tells Marlow the *Patna* scandal "is too fine for me—much above me—I don't think about it" (112), or Captain Brierly, who commits suicide after realizing what the scandal means for the community's honor (it "destroys one's confidence" [51]), the audience of sea-traders lack in analytical and imaginative capacity what they possess in the capacity for action. In contrast to Jim's paralysis on the *Patna*, they control their imaginations in order to perform duty, thereby getting paid and fed. Marlow's comment, then, foreshadows Jim's demise because the end doesn't follow the typical plot of "light holiday literature." Jim allows Gentleman Brown to escape and fails to prevent the carnage, and Doramin kills Jim after he confesses his guilt. The seemingly static landscape and people emerge from an adventure novel's contrived structure to maintain their society and punish perceived betrayal. They no longer worship Jim nor cower before him, but he becomes a subject once again. Like Jim, Patusan's reality eludes the traders in Marlow's audience because they do not imagine anything beyond their own sense of duty. Just as they cannot understand Jim as an individual, they don't perceive the Patusan natives as people, and even the Priviliged Reader's racist comments reflect the persistence of such thinking.

[12] Even after his fall from grace and power in Patusan, Jim still conveniently exudes a "benign" power over the colonized peoples: "Jim's splendid isolation in the East, the deep respect verging on adulation that he inspires in the people of Patusan, and his intuitive ability to impose order to make him a recognizable type of the conquering

Marlow argues that subjects like Kurtz and Jim become mysteries partially because neither he nor his audience can fully understand them as individuals. Thus, they never comprehend the subjects' victories and defeats in foreign lands. Instead, Marlow only connects them to their original society and transforms them into transcendent narrative subjects, not proving their innocence (or guilt) through facts but providing a sense of their subjectivity through story.[13] Marlow defers judgment in favor of presentation; he wants his audience to acknowledge the reality of his subjects and the ambiguity of their stories. Marlow's defenses of Kurtz and Jim ultimately consist of an extended attempt to exhaust the imaginations of men who want a clear verdict on the subjects imagined before them.

European, another in a long line of Crusoes, who, after settling and defending their islands, become the lords of 'their' people. Even his failure confirms this, and Patusan presumably falls back into chaos" (Ruppel 54).

[13] As Charles Eric Reeves writes, the "layering of voices throughout ensures that we never rest comfortably with a sense of direct access to persons or events [. . .] Everywhere we are reminded that the prism of language, and language recalled, has intruded between past and present; memory for Marlow is not passive recollection but a searching interpretive enactment" (289).

CHAPTER 4

CHANCE: THE PROBLEMATIC TRIAL OF A FEMININE SUBJECT?

In *Chance*, Marlow uses an obligatory trial, the trial of de Barral (father of Flora, the heroine), to establish his story's drama. De Barral plays on his society's greed through advertisements extolling "Thrift," exploiting this "word of the time" (71); his Orb Bank and Sceptre Trust, seemingly established for "advertising purposes" (74), attract both eager depositors and "all sorts of swindlers, adventurers, visionaries, and even lunatics" (76). When de Barral loses exorbitant amounts of money out of mere incompetence, rather than through corruption, he simultaneously becomes a laughing-stock and a reviled scapegoat for a materialistic society, his sentence "pronounced by artificial light in a stifling poisonous atmosphere" (79). Marlow even notes the vengeful audience waiting outside the courtroom: "A small mob composed mainly of people who themselves did not look particularly clever and scrupulous, amused itself by cheering in the most penetrating, abominable cold drizzle that I remember" (80). Like Jim, de Barral faces an official punishment not only for his own crimes but because he exposes his own society's weakness: a shallow obsession with appearances and materialism. Unlike Jim, however, de Barral doesn't undergo a crucial journey, the nautical "trial of life." Instead, he only plays the antagonist to his daughter's self-discovery aboard the *Ferndale*.

Chance resembles *Lord Jim* mainly in Marlow's method of presentation: he collects the testimony of others and from them composes a coherent narrative. However, *Chance* represents a formal departure for Marlow because as he relates the tale of Flora de Barral, a young woman cut

off from both her family and society, he only speaks to one anonymous person who doesn't belong to the nautical community. The legalistic structure of Marlow's narratives primarily depends on the positioning of his protagonist within the nautical community and applying their standards to the man's story. If Flora doesn't belong to this community, then does her story qualify as a "trial of life"? No, but Marlow's role as the narrator does accentuate a recurring theme in his narratives: isolation. Flora's increasing isolation in *Chance* marks a new level of subjectivity in the Marlow narratives as the heroine distances herself further and further from a society to which she never really belonged. Several factors distinguish *Chance* from Marlow's previous narratives: he speaks to only one person, who isn't a sailor; Marlow relies heavily on secondary witnesses without any first-hand accounts; Flora is a woman; Marlow indulges his imagination more because of his distance from the story.

Marlow's single-person audience in *Chance* continues the shrinking of audience witnessed in *Lord Jim*. In that novel he speaks first to a public but indistinct audience (as opposed to the listed audience members in "Youth" and *Heart of Darkness*) and then composes the packet for the Privileged Reader's private indulgence. Apparently, Marlow's audience never fully appreciates his tales; only singular, selected listeners do. In "Youth" and *Heart of Darkness*, a single narrator recounts Marlow's narrative; in *Lord Jim*, only one person may learn of Jim's demise. Either Marlow's tales simply don't interest many people or Conrad is suggesting that the meanings (even if they are obscure) appeal to the private, subjective individual. At least one person cares enough about his story to recount it; Marlow's effect seems to reach a private level deeper than communal standards. The frame-narrator in *Chance* likewise retells Marlow's story, at least as he remembers it. Either way, Marlow's attempts to render

stories that can be understood according to communal standards fail, and he now tells Flora's story only to one person.

Moreover, the anonymous listener of *Chance* isn't even a sea-trader. Marlow indicates that this man calls the land his home, always residing in the stable society Marlow resents at the end of *Heart of Darkness*. When Marlow first meets the sailor Powell, the narrator comments: "From this point the conversation took a special turn relating exclusively to sea-life. On that subject [Powell] got quickly in touch with Marlow who in his time had followed the sea. They kept up a lively exchange of reminiscences while I listened" (16). His passive position as listener implies a lacking of nautical knowledge. Instead, the listener lives in a sociable world, and Marlow comments on his sociability at one point: "'You know more women than I do,' retorted the unabashed Marlow. 'You make it your business to know them—don't you? You go about a lot amongst all sorts of people. You are a tolerably honest observer'" (137). Unlike the novel's socially isolated seamen Marlow, Powell, and Captain Anthony, the narrator belongs to a leisurely set of land laborers, comfortable with the many intricacies of Victorian society. Powell chides this society's "universal inefficiency," "want of responsibility," and "sense of security": "'If we at sea,' he declared, 'went about our work as people ashore high and low go about theirs we should never make a living. No one would employ us" (15). According to these sailors, the narrator lives in a slack, inefficient world that completely trusts its own stability. Thus, Marlow addresses a listener who does *not* undergo the sea-trader's crucial trial of life.

This listener also appears to be more sociable than Marlow's previous audiences do because he questions the narrator's claims. Marlow suffers more interruptions from him than from his other listeners, sometimes regarding his misogynist views. "Do you really believe what you have said?" he replies to Marlow's assertion that women substitute the "Irrelevant" for

aspiration and the masculine, "sober humdrum Imaginative" (86).[1] The narrator also raises questions regarding Marlow's general social philosophy of humanity: "'But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others,' I stuck in. 'Or at least some of us seem to. Is that too a provision of nature? And what is it for? Is it that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other's affairs?" (105). Even though Marlow cuts him off, the listener directly addresses an issue that his continual questioning and interruptions raise: Marlow faces a more critical audience in *Chance* than he did in the previous narratives.[2] While Marlow's own subjectivity infuses each story and shapes his telling, here the audience of one directly challenges this subjectivity; he questions how Marlow's prejudices influence events that he never witnesses.

As in *Lord Jim*, only to an even greater degree, Marlow must rely on secondary witnesses for information. In "Youth" and *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow undergoes the journey himself; in *Lord Jim*, he hears the testimonies of people who witnessed the events themselves, such as Jim, Jewel, the French Captain, and Brown. In *Chance*, he never hears direct testimony from the primary players—Flora, her father, Captain Anthony, or the Governess. He first relies on the testimony of the Fynes, who have their own agendas (especially the radical feminist Mrs. Fyne), and, like the listener, Marlow openly questions these agendas. In the second half, Marlow simply recounts what Powell told him about the newly-wed Anthonys aboard the *Ferndale*;

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[1] C.B. Cox feels that such interruptions never sufficiently offer a counterpoint to Marlow, "but the interruptions of this featureless personage are invariably superficial, and only draw attention to Marlow's extraordinary misogyny"; he also blames Conrad's technique in *Chance* for this: "In other Conrad stories we respond to the richness of multiple perspectives. Here there is often too no reason for the third-hand narrative, and the total effect is to leave the action blurred. Marlow himself is sometimes dull. His diatribes against women, which draw forth protests from the anonymous narrator, are tedious, and sanctimoniously on the side of males [. . .] His misogyny is simply unpleasant" (123).

[2] Ian Watt defends Marlow's use of the technique (albeit in other works) by arguing that it enables him to relate to his audience: "What Marlow says is not lucidly pondered but random and often puzzled, leaving contradictions unresolved and allowing the less conscious elements of the mind, including those of reverie and dream, to find expression. Conrad's version of the Jamesian registering consciousness, in short, does not, as it does in James,

unfortunately, Powell doesn't see or hear all of the exchanges that Marlow dramatizes. Henry James comments on Conrad's extravagant yet vague method: "The residuum has accordingly the form not of such and such a number of images discharged and ordered, but that rather of a wandering, circling, yearning, imaginative *faculty*, encountered in its habit as it lives and diffusing itself as a presence or a tide, a noble sociability of vision" (350). James views *Chance* ultimately as an example of "the automatic working of a scheme unfavourable to that [organized] treatment of the colloquy by endless dangling strings which makes the current 'story' in general so figure to us a porcupine of extravagant yet abnormally relaxed bristles" (353).[3]

Marlow takes more liberties with his imagination in *Chance* than he did in his previous narratives precisely because he doesn't witness much of the story; he must recount crucial parts based on the unreliable testimony of the Fynes, Flora, and Powell. The governess's verbal assault on Flora, the catalyst for the heroine's transformation, remains unobserved by either the Fynes or Marlow, yet he still provides the dialogue as related to him by the Fynes, who heard the story from Flora years later.[4] Even though the narrator admits to being "struck by the absolute verisimilitude of this suggestion," he says to Marlow, "You have a ghastly imagination" (93), acknowledging the narrator's subjective revisionism. Marlow has the opportunity to amuse both himself and the narrator with this tale, and he remains distant enough to render a theatrical

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induce the reader to zero in from every point within the story to view its centre more clearly; and this lack of any authorised objective clarity is one reason why we see Conrad as decisively closer to us than James" (209).

[3] Several Conrad critics, such as Ian Watt, E.E. Duncan-Jones, and Susan Jones, point out the blatant stylizing of *Chance* after James' works: "Its story of matrimonial prospects of a vulnerable young woman, and its vision of the placid rituals of middle-class life being disturbed by tremors of financial scandal and sexual impropriety, are unmistakeably Jamesian; indeed, the echoes of James are so clearly audible that Conrad's novel has been dismissed by Frederic Jameson as a 'mediocre imitation' of the Master" (Greaney 101). Greaney suggests that Conrad's encroachment onto Jamesian territory may have influenced James's public criticisms of *Chance* and its style.

[4] Gekoski challenges Marlow's logic regarding Flora's supposedly chance humiliation by the Governess: "But this is simply nonsense; de Barral may have hired the governess through chance, but it is his thoughtless egoism and inadequate judgment that allow her to stay in her position. Certainly the notion of the 'accidental' nature of things—like the idea that 'all we are responsible for is our intentions'—cuts the very ground from under any concept of human responsibility" (175). *Chance* seems to lack the dramatic import of the other Marlow narratives because of

account of the events.[5] After Flora's elopement with Anthony, Marlow helps Fyne search for what could be her corpse and wonders whether the story is a "tragedy" or a "farce" (56). Deciding it is neither, Marlow merely dismisses it as a "performance" (60) until the Fynes divulge Flora's past.

Marlow derives a higher level of amusement from this tale than he did from the previous tales, perhaps because he plays no other significant role. He doesn't bear the responsibility of recounting Flora's demise (for she survives her ordeal) as he does with Jim and Kurtz, nor does he alter her destiny; at least he retrieves Kurtz and introduces Jim to Stein. He credits himself with preventing Flora's suicide at their first meeting, but she then reveals the "absurd" truth that she didn't jump from the cliff because she feared that the Fyne's dog would jump after her (172). *Chance* relegates Marlow merely to the roles of listener and narrator instead of a primary actor.[6] Marlow has no vested personal interest in Flora's family or personal troubles when he meets her, and he only knows the tale because his "holiday acquaintance" Fyne, Mrs. Fyne, and his new-found acquaintance Powell tell him their own accounts. Marlow remains isolated from almost all principal action.

Marlow's lazy attribution of almost everything primarily to happenstance, and even his subject Flora lacks the responsibility that Marlow, Kurtz, and Jim had.

[5] According to Paul B. Armstrong in *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding in James, Conrad, and Ford*, the artist must render the ordinary as extraordinary: "We can assimilate the new and the strange only by grafting them onto what we already know, but the unfamiliar also thereby discloses and criticizes the limits of our previous experience. Understanding is a most familiar activity because we practice it all the time, yet it is also a most unfamiliar one, since we hardly ever notice it. Urging us to recognize that the ordinary extraordinary, James, Conrad, and Ford unsettle our complacency about the process of understanding and call for wonder about the mysteries of meaning. Whether with anguished urgency or playful expansiveness, the novels of the literary impressionists ask us not to take interpretation for granted" (25).

[6] Land argues that Marlow as a narrator actually lends "dramatic immediacy to long sections of the stories, which would inevitably read dully if narrated impersonally," and he unifies "what would otherwise be a broad and far-ranging story . . . The inclusion of Marlow as collector and narrator of most of this information within the frame of Powell's two-part story of his own association with Anthony's ship results in a well-polished formal unity." Land even argues that "Marlow is, in addition, allowed to play an integral part in Flora's life within the story as, first, her saviour from attempted suicide [Flora actually denies this charge] and, later, the agent who negotiates her marriage to Powell" (190).

Indeed, all of the characters in *Chance* remain isolated from each other to some extent. Captain Anthony confides in Flora that his emotionally removed sister, Mrs. Fyne, is his best friend, showing how lonely "life ashore" is for sailors (188). Anthony later becomes removed from his own loyal crew after he brings Flora, his seemingly frigid new bride, aboard the *Ferndale* and becomes strongly distracted, preoccupied by his awkward marital arrangement. In fact, Marlow speculates that Mrs. Fyne herself may not be protective of her brother or Flora in her attempts to stop their marriage: either she is "afraid of having a sister-in-law to look after during the husband's long absences," or she dreads her brother's settling "on shore, bringing to her very door this undesirable, this embarrassing connection (166). Families tend to be distant and estranged in *Chance*. Flora's father never takes an active role in raising Flora, even after her mother's death; instead, he relinquishes all authority to the malicious governess. He torments Flora on the *Ferndale* when he tries to compensate for lost time, forcing her to choose loyalty to either him or her husband. Marlow portrays Flora's relatives as "vulgar people," according to Mrs. Fyne (140), who only want any money Mr. de Barral may have hidden, according to Mr. Fyne (149). Even the German family with whom Flora stays rejects her after the father tries to seduce her (156), and Marlow claims that he knows firsthand how the Fynes' own daughters are "at the same time solemn and malicious, and [nurse] a secret contempt for all the world" (134). Not even the family unit, the most fundamental unit of this society, proves to be a reliable community; in fact, it only exacerbates the characters' isolation.

Marlow neither tells a story to his own surrogate family, the nautical community, nor does he tell a story regarding a member of this community. The fact that Flora is a woman—more specifically, a formerly wealthy woman who is now disinherited—cuts her off from the world of imperial work in which Marlow bases his previous narratives. Marlow admits that Flora, despite

her desperation, cannot disappear in the rigorous work that provides young men like Jim the opportunities to define themselves: "Women can't go forth on the high roads and by-ways to pick up a living even when dignity, independence or existence itself are at stake" (149). Furthermore, Flora's isolated existence in de Barral's fortress-like mansion, the Priory, leaves her unprepared for typical Victorian women's work such as "a factory hand, a pathetic seamstress, or even a barmaid. She wouldn't have known how to begin" (151). In Marlow's other stories, Kurtz, Jim, and Marlow himself must prove that they have passed the trial of life through successfully performing their duties; Flora doesn't have this option. Essentially, her story doesn't function as a trial or a trial of life, at least not in the way Marlow's previous narratives portray it. Flora undergoes a terrible ordeal after she's deprived of both her fortune and father, but she does not endure Marlow's "trial of life," and he cannot possibly treat her story as he treats Kurtz's and Jim's stories.[7]

Instead of proving her own identity by the nautical community's standards, Flora relies on men throughout *Chance*. After her father's financial collapse and conviction, Flora temporarily depends upon uncaring patrons and even the Fynes until she accompanies Captain Anthony on the *Ferndale*. Judging by the letter Flora writes after running off with Anthony, Mrs. Fyne concludes that Flora doesn't love her brother but only wants an escape from destitution and her infamous reputation as de Barral's daughter (Fyne and Marlow can only give Mrs. Fyne the

[7] Flora's struggle may or may not qualify as a purely existential one, judging from her external if not emotional reliance on these various men, for to exist "is to be faced with the choice of gaining existence in the fuller sense or letting true selfhood slip away. Allowing oneself to be dominated unduly by external forces [such as chance] rather than fostering what one considers best for one's own individual self leads to what we might call a 'false' existence"; even though "exactly how one avoids being dominated by such external influences is not clear," it does "involve eschewing the human tendency to become absorbed in the multiplicity of everyday affairs, which distracts the individual from the project of becoming himself and abets his evasion of ascertaining what he truly desires for himself" (Bohlmann 50). Flora's temporary life at sea could give her refuge from those distracting "everyday affairs" in land society which Marlow and Powell criticize.

benefit of the doubt, for they never see the evidence).[8] Flora wants to "disregard the feelings of the world" (167). Presumably, she only acts upon Mrs. Fyne's own philosophy:

> [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 passions, 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)

However, Flora doesn't merely disregard the world: she becomes emotionally dependent upon her father. Completely devoted to her father after his release, she becomes convinced of his legal innocence (168) and loves him because he "has nobody to think of him but [her]" (192).[9] She also refuses to depart from Anthony when he offers to release her and de Barral from the *Ferndale*, crying, "But I don't want to be let off" (353). She ultimately needs her father's and Anthony's love to confirm her worth. Instead of confirming her identity through trials, Flora survives by depending on men who have undergone both literal and metaphorical trials, and the ensuing struggle between her father and her husband indicates how they view her as a prize to be won, similar to Jim's and Kurtz's views on their adoptive, feminized colonial lands.

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[8] Elsa Nettels explains the dramatic effect of unread letters in Conrad's works, arguing that "the presence of unread letters intensifies the effect of worlds where mysteries are not solved, where moral dilemmas cannot be resolved by written words. Whether the letter is written by a character or withheld from him, the effect is to isolate him in his burdened consciousness from other characters. At the same time, letters bind characters to readers when we are the only readers of his letters and when we confront him with the unread letter pregnant with undisclosed meaning" (78).

[9] Hampson writes, "It is significant that Flora's attitude towards her father is dominated by a concern for others' views of him. Her assertion of his innocence in the face of the world's judgment of his guilt, and her sense of shame rather than guilt in relation to her own position, are directly comparable to Jim's assertion of his self-ideal in *Lord Jim*, but with the important difference that what took place there *within* Jim is now divided between two characters—and that, where Jim rescued his self-ideal at both the expense of both himself and others, in *Chance*, the self-ideal is relinquished in the pursuit of psychological integration and psycho-sexual maturity" (215).

The trial of life for Marlow's previous subjects represents a consideration of how the egoistic individual, driven by masculine fantasies of colonial domination, serves and represents his European society. The subject's transgression or transcendence of this role threatens the nautical community (and thus European society) as a whole; they need social unity to survive their adventures (for selfish excess and isolation destroys them), yet their society needs them as examples to gauge its own efficiency as well as serve its materialistic needs. Flora, on the other hand, doesn't have the option of serving society in the same capacity, and she ultimately depends on this male-dominated society without any reciprocation. Even her name reflects her essential dependence on others in its several changes.[10] First she bears her father's name of de Barral, and then she must change her name to Mrs. Smith, an anonymous friend of the Fynes, to conceal the disgrace (which causes the economically and socially impotent de Barral to conform and change his name to Smith, effacing his pride aboard the *Ferndale*). At the end, Flora's financial and emotional dependence on Captain Anthony becomes complete after she takes his name, and Marlow implies that she will soon take Powell's name, too. Despite Marlow's portrait of Flora's internal turmoil, her dependence on men confines her identity to the role of either a daughter or wife. Her femininity overshadows her experience in the narrative, and Marlow cannot translate her tribulations into a narrative-as-trial because, unlike Jim and Kurtz, Flora never transgresses or transcends the social definitions of her position—a woman as wife or daughter, the feminine as a possession.

Even Marlow becomes taken with Flora's femininity, but his attraction to her elicits an imaginative description of the girl. He finds Flora "desirable" in her "tenderness and anger"

[10] Worth noting in *Chance* is that for the first time Marlow gives his characters complete names; even though he still reverts to labels—the Governess, Mrs. Fyne, Captain Anthony, Fyne—he gives them full or at least first names—Eliza, Zoe Anthony, Roderick, and John. While still adhering to labels for assistance in portraying a character or even an embodiment of a theme, Marlow seems to adjust this technique for the more domesticated life on land,

(172), noting in his second meeting with her "the slightness of her figure [which] went well in its suggestion of half mourning with the white face in which the unsmiling red lips alone seemed warm with the rich blood of life and passion" (175). Marlow's imagination applies morbid characteristics to Flora to make her attractive, combining her youth, beauty, and obsession with isolation and death. She says when she first meets Marlow, with "infinite contempt": "[When] one [is] dead, what horrid people thought of one [does] not matter" (48). He admits to a morbid attraction to Flora, an attraction based on their shared secret—her contemplation of suicide. "The origin of our intimacy was too gruesome," he recalls, "it was as if listening to her I had taken advantage of having seen her poor, bewildered, scared soul without its veils" (195). However, Marlow's own curiosity overwhelms his guilt, and he must pursue Flora's story. His personal attraction to her rests in this intimate knowledge, not the actions of individuals which threaten his community; he feels a private desire to discover Flora's fate, but more out of amusement than obligation.

Marlow actually takes interest in characters who come to ambiguous, problematic conclusions, such as Jim and Kurtz. In their trials, these two men follow their ambitions, serve their community, and ultimately encounter stark fates that raise troubling questions about the individual's place in his society. The fulfillment of their dreams ultimately destroys them precisely *because* they transgress their social roles, as portrayed in the narratives. Marlow's interest in Flora indicates something other than the individual's transgressions of social conventions: Flora's social position as a woman doesn't allow her the chance to fulfill egotistical fantasies, so Marlow cannot use her tale to portray the same troubling ambiguities. Flora doesn't come to a tragic end. Instead of seeking glory and succumbing to destruction, she must survive

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showing how characters' identities change through marriage and familial interlocking (particularly in Flora and Mrs. Fyne).

tribulations thrust upon her by her father's mistakes; if she experiences a tragic end, she is only a dehumanized victim, reduced to despair without the possibility of redemption. Her transformation from a child (105) to the stoic "adventuress" (365), who endures her father's suicide after he tries to poison Anthony (she never discovers this attempted murder), Anthony's death, and the *Ferndale's* destruction, impresses Marlow, not just her initial morbidity and despair.[11] This transformation excites Marlow's imagination and captures his interest.

Marlow imagines new possibilities through Flora's story. He realizes both his hidden desire to marry someday (131) and his own femininity: "But there is enough of the woman in my nature to free my judgment of women from glamorous reticency. And then, why should I upset myself? A woman is not necessarily either a doll or an angel to me. She is a human being, very much like myself" (54). Marlow does concede that women are as human and equal to him in this respect, but he cannot seriously imagine Flora's story as a dramatic trial because she remains confined to her social role; Marlow's legalistic narratives depend on the colonialist adventures of men with more social mobility than Flora. Even though Flora remains Marlow's most complex portrait of a woman, he doesn't feel the need to confide in his nautical community, he never knows her intimately, and he uses her story as an anecdote for the anonymous acquaintance. Instead, he exercises an imagination that is itself confined to pondering the masculine, imperialist subjects of Kurtz and Jim. Like his audience in the previous narratives, he relies on the evidence of this work to tell his stories. The facts and first-hand witnesses of *Chance* are sparse and unreliable, so Marlow tries to compensate with more imaginative liberty. However, he only understands imperial work as the "trial of life"; thus, he uses this work as the basis for his

[11] In "Teaching Henry James and Joseph Conrad," Richard Hocks recalls a lecture in which he cites Herbert Klein's argument that "Marlow had so evolved in his understanding of women from 'Heart of Darkness' through 'Youth' and *Lord Jim* and *Chance* that his last viewpoint arguably reversed that of 'Heart of Darkness.' This idea very much

trial-narratives. This drastically weaker attempt to conjure up Flora's tale almost entirely from imagination proves that he relies upon the nautical community and its object-oriented nature for narrative material. Despite his exemplifying an early Modernist "descent into the disorienting world of a new psychology" (Graham 212), Marlow derives his artistic imagination from the tension between the imperialist subject and his Victorian society. This tension rests on the subject's and society's need to dominate: imperialism creates in both of them the psychological need to dominate lands, people, and possessions. In Marlow's tales, the subject and society ultimately try to claim dominion over the subject himself, and, through the narrative-trial, society tries to reclaim and control the rebellious subject. Marlow's imagination flourishes by using the nautical community, a microcosm of this society, as both a foundation and a barrier for his subjects. However, as seen in his earlier tales, Marlow views women themselves as dominated by this masculine world; although Marlow humanizes Flora, he believes that society unquestionably dominates her, successfully preventing any individual transgression. Paradoxically, because of her secure confinement to women's assigned social roles, she mostly eludes Marlow's imagination.

Conrad highlights the insufficiency of the narrative-as-trial model in *Chance* through the sailors' discomfort on land, Mrs. Fyne's dominance over her husband and pupils, and the critical audience: these details indicate that Flora's story is beyond the nautical community's jurisdiction. The battle for domination between the imperialist subject and his society doesn't adequately apply to *Chance*. In Marlow's complicated attempts to focus exclusively on Flora's subjectivity, Conrad recognizes that his nautical narrator can only defend subjects capable of communal transgression. Flora must be able to gratify her own egoism as Kurtz and Jim do; she

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interested [the] students; it even allowed them to recall Marlow's encounter with Jewel in *Lord Jim* from a somewhat different perspective," presumably a more empathetic one (179).

must possess greater autonomy than someone subjugated by the whims of men and chance, and only then can the imperialist narrative-as-trial apply to her story. Marlow's previous narratives show that masculine egoism and the need for domination drive imperialism: Kurtz's and Jim's desire for conquest and adventure instigates their stories and trials, not the domestically sanctioned idealism of Marlow's Aunt or Kurtz's Intended. Like the colonial lands and its peoples, women in Marlow's narratives remain subordinate to the masculine workers, even in *Chance*. Flora's story may be entertaining, thoughtful, or even artistic, but it does not represent the trial of life because society doesn't provide Flora with enough social responsibility, liberty, or control. As long as imperialists view women as secured territory, the heroine remains a non-subject for Marlow, for his narrative model only applies to challenging subjects—not people perceived as dominated and domesticated territory. To Marlow, Flora isn't self-sufficient enough to act independently of society. However, Conrad shows through the narrator's strained attempts to apply his narrative model to Flora's story that Marlow cannot eschew his own society; he remains a psychologically (if not physically) permanent fixture within the nautical community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The trial-structure of Marlow's narratives presupposes a communal law and thus a community that attempts to judge the subject according to this law; by passing a verdict on Marlow's defendant, the nautical community asserts authority over the subject. However, the imperialism that sustains the community also nourishes the subject's ego. The community can't control Jim and Kurtz for the very reason that it *wants* to control them: the subject's egoism reflects his society's desire to dominate him. An unmitigated compulsion to consume everything drives the subject and his society into conflict with each other, and the narrative-as-trial provides the opportunity for a resolution. Marlow may reflect upon the romantic possibilities of transcendent individualism, but he ultimately needs to reconcile the subjective imagination with materialism. He means to evoke his listeners' consideration of the subjective imagination through the trial motif; he portrays the private self and the public standards meant to govern that self as inextricably bound to and dependent upon one another, for through each other both the individual and community determine each other's identities. The subject's guilt could also implicate society in his crimes.[1]

[1] In the chapter entitled "Circumstantial Evidence" from *George Eliot and Blackmail*, Alexander Welsh investigates the replacement of paid informants with formal law enforcement in nineteenth-century Victorian society and how this shift contributed to the vilification of blackmailers in literature at the time. Welsh notes how the application of scientific objectivity (particularly in circumstantial evidence) to subjective trial hearings dramatically affects society as a whole: "Such [popular literary genres as sensation novels and detective fiction] stir anxiety about circumstantial evidence and imply that a good many persons are guilty of one thing or another. Then they proceed to show that the evidence points to only one secret, or that crimes have been committed by criminals after all. To put it another way, they find psychological guilt quite general in the population and then make criminal guilt satisfyingly specific—a narrative procedure that has much in common with psychoanalysis" (102). The subject, even a criminal one, can provide society with a reflection of its own identity because he embodies its mass guilt (which even may have lead to his own personal guilt).

Marlow's defense of his subjects—a conscious narrative strategy intended to obscure the facts and instill his own sense of bewilderment and uncertainty in the audience—partially protects his society from such condemnation. Because Marlow shields his society from shared guilt, critics such as Frederic Jameson and Padmini Mongia rightfully position Marlow and the narratives within a Victorian imperialist context: the primarily masculine desire both to map out occluded lands and to unveil new worlds for conquest motivates society's surface attempts to finally understand the subjects, but Marlow does protect this society in the end. These narratives depend on their imperialist contexts for facts to collect as much as Marlow's audience depends on the narratives for facts to render a verdict. However, as Beth Sharon Ash argues, Marlow's failure to evaluate and judge society for creating his subjects displays the shared social need to defer absolute judgment; in the narratives, Marlow and his society refuse to officially recognize their core purpose: to consume whatever they can—materials, lands, people. In their consideration of the subjects, the audience allows Marlow to push Kurtz and Jim beyond understanding and to disguise the nautical community's consumptive nature with noble ideals and intentions.

Nonetheless, critics generally don't consider the full extent of Marlow's internalization of imperialist egoism: by obscuring the subjects, he protects them. By allowing Kurtz and Jim to defy definition, Marlow imbues them with the power to resist conquest, even posthumously, extending the notion of imperialist magnification to a romantic ideal of an undefined, unconfined individualism. He reminds the nautical community that sometimes even firsthand experience of the facts yields no desired answers. If he can call into question the most central elements of his tales—his experiences, his protagonists, and his world, he can effectively challenge the society

he serves and its very foundation.[2] Even when his narratives most strongly embody the fragmented and distorted impressions and expressions characteristic of Modernism, Marlow's presence as a narrator (which requires an audience and the community) reaffirms the need for social bonds and duties that maintain his world because, regardless of conflict or confirmation, Marlow and his subjects need the community. They need it to provide the opportunity for a struggle, either against the colonial world, themselves, or the community itself. Its laws provide some external verification of their identity, even if that verification antagonizes the subject. Thus, Michael Greaney views Marlow's oral renditions as an attempt to establish firmly an intimate, trustful community resembling pre-literate societies, but Edward Said notes how this very orality prevents visual certainty and verdicts on the defendants. The narratives produce a paradox: like the late-Victorian science of psychoanalysis, Marlow renders the unfamiliar subjects in dramatically imagined "terms of the familiar" (Welsh 340), but he reverses these renderings by making those familiar terms *unfamiliar*. This Modernist technique of incorporating familiar works, styles, and literary genres into unfamiliar art—the classical epics in *Heart of Darkness* (as discussed by Jakob Lothe) or the adventure novel in *Lord Jim*, for instance—produces the disorienting effect both Marlow and Conrad desire.

As Marlow and Conrad both consciously employ this literary strategy to realize the individual's subjective existence outside of a social context, the crucial question arises: does Marlow represent Conrad? While Marlow appears to be a reclusive, if somewhat garrulous, imperialist servant, Conrad worked as a British naval officer but was born to Polish nationalist parents under Russian rule; to some extent, the author understands both the conquering and the

[2] "As an early modern, [Conrad] sensed the current of a world-wide disruption of peoples and ideas, of exiles and rootlessness, but while his writing acknowledges and even participates in the decentering of monolithic unities and traditional hierarchies, it also expresses his sense of loss and anxiety in response to the perceived disorder"; furthermore, his fiction "destabilized the authority of that exclusive European telling of the world's story, even

conquered peoples. Geoffrey Galt Harpham's biographical criticism of Conrad discusses how the author himself turned first to seamanship and then to writing for solace from complicated national identities, so he also extols the ideal of transcendent individualism, to some extent. However, the attempt to discriminate Conrad's own claims from Marlow's ignores the narratives' intention to fuse the separate voices, narrators, and authorities together. This merger of voices preserves the nautical community as anonymous seamen always retell Marlow's tales, hoping for a final answer.[3] According to both J. Hillis Miller and Ivan Kreilkamp, this eternal transmission separates the authorial voice and its tale from its origins, forever undermining the story's objective certainty and clarity with subjectivity. Alexander Welsh traces this growing uncertainty and subjectivity, prevalent in Modernism, to the culmination of information-production in the Victorian age: "The silence of the print culture has contributed to increased private consciousness, and increased consciousness to the impression of a silencing within. Most of what is out there is unknown to the senses or unread, and by analogy most of what is inside is unknown or unread" (350). Conrad's writing becomes Marlow's voice: they unite individuals in telling and retelling the tales by simultaneously keeping them indecipherable, ensuring an endless, proliferative cycle of narration.

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before it was challenged by the independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s, before the colonized themselves started 'writing back'" (White 197).

[3] In a letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, Conrad takes the despairing view that nothing matters or endures except his endless "string of platitudes." He writes, "The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness, and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement for virtue, for knowledge, and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men. Life knows us not and we do not know it—we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of to-morrow—only the string of my platitudes seems to have no end. As our peasants say: 'Pray, brother, forgive me for the love of God.' And we don't know what forgiveness is, nor what is love, nor where God is" (*Letters*, 2: 17).

Neither the narrator nor the writer ignores, rationalizes, or necessarily defends the socioeconomic realities of these stories (even if they do not outright condemn or vindicate them) because they study these realities and their effects on their subjects—immediately accessible, available, and tangible subjects. In the central characters they find examples of how their society operates. Jim and Kurtz are not merely synecdoches of or mechanisms for society but studies of individuals dominated and determined by social forces, similar to Stein's pinned and labeled butterflies. The individual needs his social system to produce standards for him to exceed, and Marlow needs to challenge these laws imaginatively. Marlow's imaginative narratives signify a strategy designed both to accommodate and to challenge a materialistically oriented Victorian society. Marlow serves as Conrad's Trojan horse: he sneaks into the community and abides by its standards only so that he may forever question them. As an incessant wanderer, he wonders aloud and piques enough curiosity to ensure the survival of his stories. His texts not only resound with overlapping voices but they also infinitely replicate those voices; his questions only multiply into more questions. Marlow's tales feature the modernized repeating, reworking, and reproduction of a text to the extent that it becomes a shared story. Marlow transforms his community into individuals with subjective interpretations of his tales; through their own retellings, they preserve the community and their individuality even as they tell of the evanescence of both. He never receives a verdict; his cases never close. In turn, Marlow's community forever lives in its endless discourse over his stories.

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