

Character of Marlow: Heart of Darkness

A narrator who is carefully individuated and is more distinct from the author than the foregoing figures is Marlowe. The hero who morally and ontologically is the best of Conrad's characters is probably the Marlow of 'Heart of Darkness' followed closely by the Marlow of 'Lord Jim'. The Marlow of 'Heart of Darkness' and 'Lord Jim' is intelligent, sceptical and reflective. He is able to respond bravely to crisis after crisis — he is a survivor. He has not only sympathetic imagination but also moral stability, a human liberalism of outlook; He has something of the crusading adventurousness of the Quixotic type while preserving a self-critical spirit and a cool grasp of realities.

Conrad is like Eliot in 'The Waste Land' needs to don a mask, however transparent, in order to speak most eloquently. In 'Heart of Darkness', many subversive things are said in the course of Marlow's

tale; and Conrad, if criticised for such observations, could always say: "Look again: the opinions are identified as Marlow's; they are not necessarily mine." As Macbeth's nihilism "Life is a tale told by an idiot" is not Shakespeare's, similarly Marlow's observations are his and not his creator's. This means that Marlow is an individual but he also embodies the trend and belief of his creator, like Bluntschli in J. B. Shaw's 'Wives and the Man.'

Secondly, Conrad's attitude of his language is omniform; we can see it as truth-revealing or truth-concealing. Marlow strives to convey the essential: "Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream-making, a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation."

As the art of Conrad is an art of ambush, in his works we see protagonists variously ambushed by circumstances; and by techniques the readers too may be ambushed by the text. In 'Heart of

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Darkness' Marlow is treated as an accomplice of the exploiters by that native who guards the slaves. Marlow reflects, "I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings." The tale is about complicity - Marlow, as an employee of the company and even by simply being a European with a European's acceptance of ivory commodities, is involved in the exploitation he detests. The tale in its structure has cunningly ambushed the reader so that as to make him an accomplice, in addition. It has not had one narrator but two of them. At first, when we begin, we think the patriotic anonymous narrator speaks with authoreal voice but his words are undercut by the entry of Marlow, with his 'And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth! Obviously, Marlow conveys the ethical design of Conrad himself, though he cannot be totally identified with his creator.

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