

**Narrative Identities: Self-
Construction in Joseph Conrad's
Marlow Fictions**

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

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Declaration of Authorship

I Balázs Csizmadia hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed _____

Dated _____

Abstract

While a lot of previous work has focused on the Marlovian quartet, on questions of narrative method and of identity in Conrad, there has been no full-length study of the close connection between narration and identity in his fiction. The thesis is informed by Paul Ricoeur's philosophical concept of narrative identity, which is usefully summed up in his observation that subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves. Taking this concept as a starting point, I also rely on more recent discussions of narrative identity and different narratological models. Although Conrad's fiction betrays an ongoing concern with the way in which personal as well as collective identities are constructed through storytelling, the Marlovian narratives offer a particularly fruitful ground for an examination. I argue that Marlow as personified narrator not only allows Conrad to dramatize these issues in the fiction; it is also partly through Marlow that Conrad creates his own literary identity. After a brief chapter on some general features of Conradian narrative, I go on to explore Marlow's double function, with each subsequent chapter providing a close reading of one of the Marlovian narratives. As we move from "Youth" (Chapter 2) to "Heart of Darkness" (Chapter 3), Conrad's focus shifts from adjusting his literary identity to the demands of publication in *Blackwood's Magazine* to a dramatization within the text of how the problems of narration and identity are related. *Lord Jim* (Chapter 4) is Conrad's fullest exploration of the compulsion to tell and the desire to have our self-narratives verified by others. *Chance* (Chapter 5) develops the previous novel's insights into the part played by the imagination in self-construction. The thesis concludes by suggesting certain parallels between Conrad's understanding of narrative identity in the Marlow fictions and in some of his non-fiction.

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---. "The State of the Art: Major Currents in Conrad Studies in the New Millennium." *HJEAS: Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 15.2 (2009): 307-320. Print.

---. "'The Tale': A Self-conscious Fictional Artifice." *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 196-223. Print.

Conrad's works

Unless otherwise indicated, I will use the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad in the case of "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, and the Dent Collected Edition of *Chance*. Whenever I refer to the *Blackwood's* serial text, this is clearly stated. See the Bibliography for details of all the editions of Conrad's works and letters used in this study.

Style guidelines

Throughout this thesis, I follow the style guidelines as presented in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009).

Abbreviations

There are two abbreviations I use in this study: *CL*, followed by the volume number, for references to *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* (see the Bibliography for details of this edition) and HOD in reference to “Heart of Darkness” in shortened titles. In accordance with MLA documentation style, I use shortened titles in parenthetical references to one of two or more works by the same author.

Introduction

One of the hallmarks of Joseph Conrad's fiction is a self-conscious and innovative use of narrative technique. In particular, Conrad is noted for frequently employing contemplative personified narrators, many of whom produce recognisably oral narratives to a listener or a group of listeners. The most famous and arguably the most intriguing of these storytellers is Charlie Marlow, whose narratives form the primary subject of this thesis. Conrad also had a fondness for multiple narrators and framed tales, in which frame narrative and embedded narrative both illuminate aspects of the story but at the same time offer competing interpretations of it, leaving it to the reader to decide which interpretation is to be given more credit.¹ As Jeremy Hawthorn has put it, Conrad's use of personified narrators in general, and frame narratives in particular, gives us "that distinctively Conradian sense that we are not perceiving the world and its people in unmediated form, but indirectly, either through one reporting consciousness, or through a chain of linked consciousnesses" ("Half-written Fictions" 155). Another characteristic feature of Conrad's fiction is a preoccupation with questions of identity – a preoccupation that is unsurprising to anyone familiar with the story of his life. Born to Polish parents as Józef Teodor Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski in a town in Russian-occupied Ukraine, formerly a part of the Polish Commonwealth, he went on to become a seaman in French and then English merchant ships. His eventual transition from seaman to writer in his third language involved adopting "Joseph Conrad" as his pen name and the far more complicated process of crafting his English literary identity. Conrad's own understanding of his multiple identities is summed up in his oft-quoted remark, made in a letter of 1903, that "Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning" (CL3 89).

The present study argues that Conrad's interest in the power and uses of narrative and his concern with the problem of identity are intimately related. We often see his self-reflective storytellers engaged in an interpretative (or re-interpretative) enterprise that concerns not only certain events in the past but also themselves. There is a sense that it is only by telling their narratives to their listeners that Conrad's raconteurs can come to a better (although never complete) self-

¹ Examples of non-Marlovian texts that use this technique (in a somewhat different form) include *Under Western Eyes* and "Falk."

understanding. But self-understanding is not a matter of simply discovering a pre-existing and correct interpretation of one's character and actions. Conrad's fiction suggests that such an interpretation does not exist, that there is no such thing as an individual's true identity waiting to be discovered. The imaginative reconstruction of the past through the act of narration involves the *construction* of identities: above all the identity of the narrator, but also that of the characters described in the narrative. Nor does the identity of the listeners remain unaffected. By negotiating their identities with their audience, Conrad's narrators often appeal to as well as challenge the purported values of the community to which they all belong.

Although Conrad's fiction betrays an ongoing concern with the way in which personal as well as collective identities are constructed through storytelling, the Marlovian narratives offer a particularly fruitful ground for an examination. An almost exclusively oral storyteller whose narratives are always introduced by an anonymous narrator at a higher narrative level, Marlow tells the greater part of as many as four of Conrad's works. In all of these texts – "Youth," "Heart of Darkness," *Lord Jim* and *Chance* – Marlow relates to his listener or listeners a narrative in which he himself features as a character. All these factors combined make him the ideal narrator for Conrad to dramatize the close relation between narration and identity. The fact that there is another narrator describing how Marlow addresses an audience (or, in *Chance*, mostly a single listener) draws attention to the act of narration and thus to the process of identity construction. In other words, the Marlovian narratives show identity in the making. That Marlow always tells a tale (at least partly) about himself also means that Conrad can exploit the difference between the narrator and the character; he can thematize the way in which the narrating self relates to the actions and thoughts of his past self. Finally, the fact that Marlow appears in four works encourages us to consider how his identity evolves from text to text. As I shall argue, however, there is no clear continuity between his incarnations because he creates himself anew in each of his narratives.

What makes the figure of Marlow especially interesting is that he not only allows Conrad to dramatize identity-construction in the fiction; it is also partly through Marlow that Conrad creates his own literary identity. In my thesis, I will at times touch on the similarities between the biographical person Joseph Conrad and Marlow, but what distinguishes them is even more important to my purposes. As Michael Greaney has pointed out, it would be tempting to anchor Marlow in

Conrad's own identity, as some critics have done, in order to stabilize his elusive personality (59).² By doing so, however, we would not do justice to Conrad's art. I agree with Greaney's apt characterization of Marlow as "Conrad's passport to the mainstream of British literary culture" as well as "a 'Trojan Horse' figure, smuggling an outlandish literary voice into the conservative pages of *Blackwood's Magazine*" (60). Indeed, with the exception of *Chance*, all the Marlow fictions were written for *Blackwood's*. While *Chance* too reflects its publication context and Conrad's search for a new readership, it is in the fiction of his Blackwood period (1897-1902) that the still fledgling author's artistic engagement with the problem of his own identity was most profound (cf. Simmons, "Art of Englishness" 10, and Davies, "Introduction to *CL2*" xxvii-xxviii). Therefore, the chapters to follow will consider the Conrad-Marlow relationship mainly in the light of Conrad's literary self-fashioning – of how he wished to be perceived by his readership.

The thesis, then, aims to explore Marlow's double function: firstly, and most importantly, as a personified storyteller who allows Conrad to problematize different forms of identity construction through narration, as well as its limits; secondly, as a persona playing a crucial role in Conrad's negotiation of his own literary identity. In the longer Marlovian works (in all except for "Youth"), the readings will also take into account the narratives of some other characters besides Marlow, such as the Russian harlequin in "Heart of Darkness" or Jim in *Lord Jim*. The stories these minor narrators tell shed further light on Conrad's understanding of the problem of identity and narration. The present study is indebted to the great amount of previous work that has focused on the Marlovian quartet, on questions of narrative method and of identity in Conrad. In spite of the vast literature on these subjects, however, there has been no full-length study of the close connection between narration and identity in Conrad's fiction. The thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap. Although I will focus specifically on the Marlovian narratives, occasional comparisons with other texts will enable me to also make more general points about Conradian narrative.

² Alan Warren Friedman, for instance, assumes that Conrad, in his Author's Note to the volume *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*, "identifies Marlow as his *alter ego* from first conception to last farewell" (77). I will discuss the Author's Note in Chapter 2.

The theory of narrative identity

This study takes French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's concept of a narrative identity as its theoretical starting point. Ricoeur defines narrative identity as "the kind of identity which the narrative composition alone, by means of its dynamism, can create" ("Life: A Story" 437). In order to put this proposition in an appropriate context and to clarify its meaning, I will start with a survey of some aspects of Ricoeur's philosophy. One of the great problems posed by personal identity is that, with the passage of time, human beings necessarily change in their biological condition, which renders it counter-intuitive to define the concept as sameness by adopting the meaning of the Latin word *identitas*. Yet identity cannot be understood without at least some degree of constancy or absence of change (Ritivoi 231). Philosophers have devised different solutions to this problem. Ricoeur's own is to distinguish between the two major uses of the concept of identity: identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*) and identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*). Sameness refers to numerical identity, qualitative identity, some sort of permanence in time, or an unbroken continuity that allows others to identify and reidentify a person as the same over time. *Idem*-identity can be understood as an answer to the question "What am I?" Selfhood, on the other hand, implies both a form of permanence in time and self-constancy, two characteristics that correspond to the dialectic of what Ricoeur calls "character" and "keeping one's word," respectively (*Oneself* 118). In Ricoeur's definition, character is similar to a form of *idem*-identity described above but is, in fact, an aspect of the same within selfhood. It is the place where the two attributes of identity, *idem* and *ipse*, come together. In other words, the point at which the self (*ipse*) intersects with the same (*idem*) is permanence in time. Character is comprised of two lasting dispositions, habit and acquired identifications. Habits become character traits by which a person is recognized; as Ricoeur puts it, they give a history to character. Acquired identifications designate the values and ideals in terms of which self-identification and identification by others takes place.³ The concept of

³ Speaking of acquired identifications, Ricoeur notes: "To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, in which the person or the community recognizes itself" (*Oneself* 121). Elsewhere, Ricoeur emphasises the fruitfulness of the notion of narrative identity in that it can be applied to both an individual and a community. "Individual and community," he contends, "are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history" (*Time and Narrative* (vol.3) 247). As I will argue in the chapters to follow, Conrad's works, and the Marlovian narratives in

character answers not only the question “What am I?” but also the question “Who am I?” “Who am I?” is a question that looks for the agent, the “author” of the action; in this respect, it is the question to which the self constitutes a response (Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity” 73-81; *Oneself* 113-39; *Time and Narrative* (vol.3) 244-49; Simms 102-05; David M. Kaplan 89-90).

Ricoeur’s main thesis is that we understand our own identities and that of another person as we would the identity of a character in a fictional or historical narrative. Since character is the place where *idem* and *ipse* are united, the “genuine nature of narrative identity discloses itself . . . only in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness” (*Oneself* 140). The following passages from Ricoeur are also worth quoting at this point because they capture the essence of his thesis:

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her “experiences.” Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (*Oneself* 147-48)

To answer the question “Who?” . . . is to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the “who.” And the identity of this “who” therefore itself must be a narrative identity. Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. (*Time and Narrative* (vol.3) 246)

Subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves. (*Time and Narrative* (vol.3) 247)

The story of a life, then, unfolds like a narrative, in a way that is similar to how the identity of a character unfolds in a narrative. The theory of narrative identity reconciles the two aspects of selfhood referred to above: permanence in time and self-constancy. A good summary of how this reconciliation is achieved is provided by David M. Kaplan: “Because narrative theory articulates our temporal and historic

particular, frequently dramatize the way in which both the example of fictional heroes in books and the values of a community feature in identity construction.

constitution of the world, and because the self has a history, changes over time and yet maintains a constancy of selfhood by keeping promises, a personal identity can only be understood as a narrative identity” (90).

For Ricoeur, as implied above, “characters . . . are themselves plots,” which means that “the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment” (*Oneself* 143). Emplotment refers to the structuring of the diverse and multiple elements of a story into a coherent sequence of actions and events. A story is thus “more than just an enumeration of events in serial order;” emplotment is “the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession” and “brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results” (*Time and Narrative* (vol.1) 65). Narrative identity or “identity on the level of emplotment” can be described in dynamic terms “by the competition between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances which, up to the close of the story, threaten this identity.” By concordance, Ricoeur means “the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls ‘the arrangement of facts,’” and discordances designate “the reversals of fortune that make the plot an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation” (*Oneself* 141). Ricoeur applies the term “configuration” to “this art of composition which mediates between concordance and discordance.” In fact, “discordant concordance,” which Ricoeur defines by the notion of “the synthesis of the heterogeneous,” is characteristic of all narrative configuration or narrative composition (*Oneself* 141). Most importantly, Ricoeur argues that the paradox of emplotment is that it “inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or which might not have happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability” (*Oneself* 142). It is this feature of narrative above all that renders storytelling (or “narrative composition”) so attractive to human beings. What I shall suggest is that some aspects of the Marlow fictions, and of Conrad’s work in general, respond and lend depth to these philosophical concerns.

I have already touched upon the fact that fiction occupies a prominent role in Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity. Indeed, he describes “fiction, particularly narrative fiction” as “an irreducible dimension of *the understanding of the self*.” He argues that fiction “cannot be completed other than in life,” and that life “can not be understood other than through stories we tell about it,” which leads him to say that “a

life *examined*, in the sense borrowed from Socrates, is a life *narrated*.”⁴ In Ricoeur’s view, a narrated life is mainly the play of concord and discord that characterizes a narrative (“Life: A Story” 435). He also stresses that the self of self-knowledge is “not the egotistical and narcissistic ego” but the fruit of such a narrated or examined life (*Time and Narrative* (vol.3) 247). As the very title of Ricoeur’s essay “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator” implies, he holds that human lives are already partly storied, that experience already has some sort of narrative structure. Yet he is aware that equating people with characters of their life stories, thus apparently not differentiating between life and fiction, presents certain problems. These problems as well as Ricoeur’s solutions to them are highly complex and cannot be discussed in detail here. I would like to focus only on two of Ricoeur’s solutions: that the dynamic concept of narrative identity is not simply the story of a past self told from the perspective of the present self; and that we are both the characters and the narrators of our life story but not its authors. According to Ricoeur, narrative identity is never complete. Although he does speak of recovering “*the narrative identity which constitutes us*,” he adds that we never cease to re-interpret that identity “in the light of stories handed down to us by our culture.” In this context, it is also important to remember his observation that there are several possible ways of telling a life story. The process of continuous re-interpretation is a form of constructive activity and partly serves the purpose of reconciling the past self with the present self (“Life: A Story” 436; 437; see also Ricoeur, *Oneself* 140-68; and Ritivoi 232). In this way, Ricoeur argues, we learn to become “the *narrator of our own story* without completely becoming the author of our life.” In novels, for instance, authors usually create a “concert of narrative voices” which can serve as their “many *personae*” whose masks they bear. We cannot author our life in this way, but we can appropriate in the application to ourselves such narrative voices, thus experimenting with “the various roles that the favourite *personae* assume in the stories we love best.” This is how we try to gain a narrative understanding of ourselves “by means of *imaginative variation* of our *ego*” (“Life: A Story” 437). The eponymous hero of *Lord Jim*, among other Conradian characters, demonstrates the validity but also the dangers of such imaginative variation.

⁴ Ricoeur refers to the Socratic maxim according to which “the unexamined life is not worth living,” and applies it to the relation between story and life (“Life: A Story” 425).

There are two specific points in Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity that I find especially suggestive of Conrad. The first is the idea, already mentioned above, that a life examined is a life narrated, and that the unexamined or un-narrated life is not worth living. In the chapters to follow, I will argue that, for many of Conrad's narrators, the act of narration is psychologically of utmost significance. They would suffer from allowing their lives to remain un-narrated. This idea also resonates with Conrad's assertion of his modernity in his famous letter of self-justification to William Blackwood of 31 May 1902. In that letter, he expresses his firm conviction that his work is in its essence "action observed, felt and interpreted," rather than either mere storytelling or "an endless analysis of affected sentiments" (*CL2* 418; see 415-18). Action interpreted again and again by different narrators gives us that distinctively Conradian sense described by Hawthorn.

The second point concerns Ricoeur's notion of narrative intelligence. Relying on the philosophy of Aristotle, he argues that literature develops "a kind of intelligence we could call narrative intelligence, and which is much closer to practical wisdom and moral judgment than it is to science and, more generally, to the theoretical use of reason." Narrative intelligence or "proneic intelligence," as Ricoeur also calls it in Aristotelian terms, "issues from creative imagination" and has to be contrasted with theoretical intelligence. The story clearly belongs to narrative intelligence ("Life: A Story" 428; 429).⁵ These observations, it seems to me, are highly evocative of the biographical person Joseph Conrad as well as of his works. His biography, non-fictional writings and fiction all provide evidence to suggest that Conrad's narrative intelligence was far more developed than his theoretical intelligence. To begin with, we know that he never studied at university, and that even much of the education he had received at school had not been systematic. It is also a fact that he broke off his schooling and left his homeland for Marseilles when he was not yet seventeen in order to become a seaman. At the same time, Conrad had

⁵ The concept of narrative intelligence bears some resemblance to Walter Benjamin's thoughts on wisdom in his essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." Benjamin describes wisdom as "the epic side of truth" and as counsel "woven into the fabric of real life." He claims that every real story contains something useful, which may consist in a moral, some practical advice or a proverb or maxim (87; 86-7). Both Ricoeur and Benjamin, then, stress the moral implications and practical usefulness of stories and storytelling. Benjamin's essay, however, is concerned mainly with the decrease in "the communicability of experience" and the consequent decline of storytelling, which coincides with the rise of the novel (86). Although these ideas are suggestive of Conrad, in Chapter 5 I shall argue against drawing too direct parallels between Benjamin's storyteller and Marlow.

been able to read and write since he was five and was very well read for his age both as a boy and as a young man. His extensive reading already in childhood owes a great deal to the influence of his father, himself a writer and translator of Shakespeare, Dickens and other authors. After the untimely death of his mother in April 1865, the seven-year-old Conrad lived alone with his father for a few months in Russian exile. During this time, he did not have any playmates and buried himself in books. In spite of his young age, however, his early reading did not consist of children's books but Polish romantic poetry, Shakespeare and Victor Hugo. We also know that, already as a child, Conrad produced some literary pieces and had a fondness for telling his friends fantastic stories set at sea (Najder, *Life* 3-47, especially 25-27, 33, 43-47).

Conrad's intelligence, then, appears to have been formed mainly by his extensive reading and found expression particularly in the narratives he produced in childhood and in his adult writing life. Even as a writer, he remained hostile to theories and systems. The criticism he wrote – most of it collected later in *Notes on Life and Letters* and *Last Essays* – is, in Ian Watt's words, "eloquent and perceptive" at its best, but it could hardly be called theoretical in any systematic sense (*Nineteenth Century* 77). This is true even of the famous "Preface" to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* which is often considered Conrad's artistic manifesto. Conrad himself admitted in a letter to his friend Edward Garnett that all he was capable of was "critical wandering" (CL2 350). Richard Ambrosini's *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse*, however, challenges the widely held view that Conrad's comments about his own works are theoretically unsophisticated. Conrad's critical thought, as embodied in his fiction and non-fiction, has not attracted much interest. According to Ambrosini, the main reason for this neglect is that Conrad, unlike other modernist writers such as Henry James, Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, does not use "a readily identifiable theoretical language" (3). Ambrosini's argument may appear to contradict the point I am trying to make, but it is in its essence compatible with it. Whatever status we accord Conrad's critical writings, I would suggest that he had a profound understanding of complex and abstract problems, problems that could be described as theoretical, but that this understanding was not expressed in an openly theoretical idiom because it was more intuitive than learned. It derived from what Ricoeur terms a narrative intelligence, rather than from a theoretical one. In this sense, I agree with Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn and James Phelan, who, in their

introduction to the volume on *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*, describe Conrad as “the major narrative theorist” because his “practice as narrative artist consistently implies an engagement with issues identified by narrative theory” (2). There is no doubt that Conrad’s fiction anticipates many of the preoccupations of narrative theorists. But what I aim to demonstrate above all in the present study is how the Marlovian quartet anticipates in a non-theoretical way many of the recent insights of philosophers and theorists into the close connection between narration and identity. Accordingly, when I say that Conrad thematizes, dramatizes or engages self-consciously with the problem of narrative identity, I do not mean to suggest that he had a theoretical understanding of that problem. It seems to me that some poststructuralist readings posit a Conrad who is far more theoretically oriented than we have reason to believe he was. Occasionally, the implication of such readings is even that Conrad himself was something of a poststructuralist theorist.

At this point, I need to return to the theoretical framework that underlies my study of the Marlovian texts. Ricoeur’s phenomenological hermeneutic approach to narrative and identity has influenced other philosophers such as Anthony Paul Kerby. In his book *Narrative and the Self*, Kerby argues in Ricoeurian terms that self-narration is an interpretative activity, so that “the self in fact arises, in various degrees, out of our linguistic behavior” (6). He also claims that, in the case of our personal narratives, “‘truth’ becomes more a question of a certain adequacy to an implicit meaning of the past than of a historically correct representation or verisimilitude” (7). For Kerby, perhaps even more than for Ricoeur, experience has a prenarrative quality. Narration is thus a secondary process, but “an essential one with respect to human understanding because it places acts in relation to each other” (53). The insights gained from philosophical investigations into the connection between narration and identity have also been successfully applied in various social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics. Most theorists working in these fields place more emphasis than does Ricoeur on the need to negotiate our identities with others. They tend to focus on the everyday practices by which people, as members of a community, make sense of themselves and their environment. Holstein and Gubrium, for instance, speak of the “everyday technology of self construction” (103). At the heart of self-construction lies narrative practice, which they define as a form of “*interpretive practice*” that includes “the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell stories, and the auspices under which stories

are told.” Storytelling is both constrained by “the discourses of particular sites and institutions” and actively shaped by individuals through the “everyday interpretive work done to locally construct who and what we are” (104). In this thesis, I will also make reference to the work of some representatives of narrative psychology, which is an approach towards the study of psychological phenomena heavily influenced by phenomenology and existentialism. It is based on the assumption that human psychology has an essentially narrative structure and was originally formulated as an alternative to dominant quantitative approaches in the field of psychology. Theodore R. Sarbin, for example, has proposed what he terms “the narratory principle: that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (“Root Metaphor” 8; see also Ritivoi 233; Crossley 360-62).

My readings of Conrad’s texts are informed by the work of Ricoeur, Kerby, Holstein and Gubrium, Sarbin and other theorists. I will draw on them to illuminate important aspects of Marlovian narrative. It needs to be stressed, however, that narrative can never cover all aspects of selfhood, and that there are also non-narrative people for whom narrative identity may not work (Neumann and Nünning 4; 10n). Conrad’s fiction too features some reticent and unimaginative, but essentially positive characters, such as Singleton in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* or Captain MacWhirr in “Typhoon.” Accordingly, I do not mean to suggest that Conrad understood identity exclusively in narrative terms, only that he sensed an important connection between narration and identity and dramatized it in his fiction.

Gérard Genette’s and James Phelan’s narrative theories

My method of close reading is also indebted to the narratological models of Gérard Genette and James Phelan, which are easily applicable to the study of literary narratives. Although not the most recent, Genette’s is the most comprehensive and most systematic work on narrative to date and represents one of the central achievements of “classical” or structuralist narratology. For all its limitations, Genette’s theory can add significantly to our understanding of the structures of narrative, particularly fictional narrative. Jonathan Culler, in his foreword to Genette’s influential study *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, describes it as “the most thorough attempt we have to identify, name, and illustrate the basic constituents and techniques of narrative” (7). One of Genette’s greatest innovations lies in drawing the crucial distinction between mood and voice, that is, the question

“*who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* —or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (*Narrative* 186). Genette rechristens “point of view” in this sense of the word as *focalization*, which is slightly more abstract and does not have the too specifically visual connotations of the earlier term. By focalization, Genette means a restriction of field, that is, “a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*.” The instrument of this possible selection is a “*situated focus*” which “allows passage only of information that is authorized by the situation” (*Revisited* 74). Another major field where Genette did pioneering work is that of narrative time. Based on the possible relations existing between the time of the story and that of the narrative, he establishes the categories of order, duration and frequency.⁶ Order refers to connections between the temporal order of succession of the events in the story and the “pseudo-temporal order of their arrangement in the narrative,” duration to connections between the variable duration of these events and the “pseudo-duration (in fact, length of text) of their telling in the narrative;” and frequency denotes relations between the “repetitive capacities of the story and those of the narrative” (*Narrative* 35). The great number of subcategories in these two major areas will allow me to name and consider the implications of the complex narrative phenomena found in the Marlovian narratives.

Genette also developed a useful taxonomy of different types of narrators on the basis of narrative level and person (as a grammatical category). He terms possible narrative levels extradiegetic, intradiegetic, metadiegetic, meta-metadiegetic and so forth. Extradiegetic refers to the first narrative level at which the extradiegetic (or frame) narrator’s act of narrating is carried out; intradiegetic denotes the second narrative level, produced by the extradiegetic narrator’s act of narrating, and every event in the world of this first narrative, including the narrating act of an intradiegetic

⁶ In *Narrative Discourse* (27), Genette differentiates between *story* (the signified or narrative content), *narrative* (the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself) and *narrating* (the producing narrative action and the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place). I will draw on this distinction, especially the difference between *story* and *narrative*, whenever it seems to contribute to a better understanding of the problem discussed. Unless otherwise indicated, however, “story” will be used in a non-technical sense, in which it can refer not only to the narrative content but also to the discourse or narrative text itself – what Genette calls narrative. In this way, I can avoid clumsy repetition of the word “narrative,” while the context will make the intended meaning sufficiently clear. The term *narrating* will be replaced with the more natural narration or act of narration.

narrator.⁷ For obvious reasons, metadiegetic designates the third narrative level, produced by the intradiegetic narrator's act of narrating, and every event in the world of this second narrative, including the narrating act of a metadiegetic narrator – and, theoretically, the line could be continued infinitely (*Narrative* 227-31). In terms of person, Genette distinguishes between homodiegetic, heterodiegetic and autodiegetic narrators. A homodiegetic narrator is one who is present as a character in the story he tells, whilst a heterodiegetic narrator is absent from it. Autodiegetic refers to a type of narrative where the narrator is the hero of the story he tells; therefore, autodiegetic is a variety (or the strong degree) of the homodiegetic (*Narrative* 243-45). In what follows, I will dispense with the expression “personified narrator” that I used at the beginning of this Introduction, and replace it with Genette's more technical and more precise term “homodiegetic.” In fact, the level of a narrator's personification is a much vaguer notion than the degree of presence in the story. In my reading, a heterodiegetic narrator can very well be personified, if only to a certain degree and strictly in his capacity as narrator. This happens especially when a narrator, such as Fielding's in *Tom Jones*, repeatedly addresses the reader or refers to himself as narrator. Indeed, there seems to be a parallel between this confusion of presence in the story with level of personification on the one hand, and the misunderstanding on which the traditional terms “first-person” and “third-person” narrator are based, on the other. As Genette rightly points out, these terms convey the false impression that the narrator can decide “in” which person to write or tell his narrative, whereas in a purely grammatical sense, he can be in his narrative *only* in the first person. Accordingly, Genette says, first-person verbs in a narrative text need not be a sign of homodiegetic narration but can also refer to the situation when the narrator simply designates himself as such (*Narrative* 244). James Phelan, in a recent attempt to combine Genettean precision with more user-friendly terminology, has proposed the expressions “character narration” (for homodiegetic narration) and “noncharacter narration” (for heterodiegetic narration) (*Living to Tell* xi). Much as I appreciate Phelan's effort, I will stick to Genette's terms because they are somewhat more precise and can also be used in combination with his categories derived from narrative level. I will refer to “character narration” or “character narrator” only when drawing on concepts from Phelan's own model.

⁷ In the Marlovian texts, the intradiegetic narrator is always Marlow. However, the situation is somewhat more complicated in *Chance*, which I will explore in Chapter 5.

Phelan's theory of narrative is rhetorically oriented and shows the influence of Wayne C. Booth in its focus on the relations among authors, narrators and audiences. Phelan defines narrative as a rhetorical act: "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened." In fictional narrative, the rhetorical situation is doubled in the sense that the narrator tells his (or her) story to the narratee for his purposes, while the author communicates to his (or her) audience for his own purposes both the narrator's story and the latter's telling of it (*Living to Tell* 18).⁸ Phelan's conception of narrative as rhetoric also assumes that texts are designed by authors "in order to affect readers in particular ways" and that "those designs are conveyed through the language, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them" (*Living to Tell* 18; see also Phelan, "Rhetorical Approaches" 500-04). This view of narrative is compatible with my double focus in the thesis: first, on Conrad's narrators (especially Marlow) engaged in telling a narrative of themselves for a certain purpose, partly in order to create their identities and have them verified by their listeners; second, on Conrad's negotiation of his literary identity with his readership through Marlow.

It should be noted that Phelan has recently expressed scepticism towards the concept of narrative identity. While he does not reject it altogether, he argues that it is "a noteworthy phenomenon within the broader narrative turn because it is an instance of what I call 'narrative imperialism,' the impulse by students of narrative to claim more and more territory, more and more power for our object of study and our ways of studying it" ("Editor's Column" 206). Also, he stresses what he calls the episodic and multiple nature of narratives of the self: that there may not be any continuity between the different episodes of one's life, and that there are many possible narratives one can tell about that life, some of which are incompatible with each other. Interestingly, however, Phelan does not make any reference to Ricoeur. In his focus on the narrative identity thesis as an instance of current narrative imperialism, he engages especially with some more recent work in the field ("Editor's Column" 208-10). Moreover, Phelan's points only partially contradict Ricoeur's theory. As I have already noted, narrative identity for Ricoeur is never complete, and he also acknowledges that there are several possible ways of telling a

⁸ See below for a definition of the term narratee.

life story. The importance both Ricoeur and Phelan place on the ethical implications of narratives also makes their theories more compatible than they might appear based only on Phelan's objections to narrative identity. That Ricoeur himself is not dismissive of narratology is suggested by his characterization of it as "a second-level discourse" that is always preceded by narrative intelligence, but which is "entirely legitimate" in its efforts to "elaborate a true *science* of the narrative" ("Life: A Story" 429, 428).

The most important terms in Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative that I will use in my readings are the following: implied author, authorial audience, narratee, disclosure functions and narrator functions, unreliable narration. Some of these terms have been employed by other narratologists before Phelan, but the definitions provided here describe the specific meanings he attaches to them. The implied author is a contested term in narrative theory, but it is an essential component of Phelan's model and, as redefined by him, seems to me a useful concept: "*the implied author is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text*" (*Living to Tell* 45; emphasis in orig.). The implied author constructs the text for the authorial audience, which is a term synonymous with the implied reader. The authorial audience is the hypothetical, ideal audience who understands the text perfectly. The narratee, on the other hand, is the audience directly addressed by the narrator; the narratee is not always represented as a character. These terms allow Phelan to refine the doubled rhetorical situation described above. Character narration is an art of indirection as the implied author also uses the narrator to communicate with the authorial audience, and the narrator is, of course, unaware of that audience. The narrator thus unwittingly reports all kinds of information to the authorial audience. This sometimes leads to conflicts between what Phelan calls the disclosure functions and the narrator functions. Disclosure functions, then, refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the authorial audience, while narrator functions refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the narratee. In conflicts between the two functions, the disclosure functions typically take precedence over the narrator functions (*Living to Tell* 12, 213-17).

Unreliable narration is defined by Phelan as narration in which "the narrator's reporting, reading (or interpreting), and/or regarding (or evaluating) are not in accord

with the implied author's" (*Living to Tell* 219). The model Phelan proposes is both dynamic and sophisticated, identifying as many as six different types of unreliability in character narration (or homodiegetic narration). However, aware that the borders between the individual types are necessarily blurry, he is less concerned with devising a new and precise taxonomy than with offering clues that will help us decide whether or not a particular instance of narration is unreliable. Phelan's rhetorical model focuses on the relations among authorial agency, narrator, and authorial audience, thus embracing both the norms and assumptions the implied author builds into the text and the reader's response to and ethical engagement with that text. Based on the assumption that narrators perform three main roles (reporting, interpreting/reading, evaluating/regarding), and that the reader can either reject the narrator's words as unreliable or merely feel that his or her account must be supplemented, Phelan proposes the following six types of unreliability: misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreporting, underreading and underregarding. Reporting occurs along the axis of characters, facts, and events; reading along the axis of knowledge and perception; regarding along the axis of ethics and evaluation. Needless to say, the distinction between *mis-* versus *under-* corresponds to rejection versus supplementing as defined above (*Living to Tell* 49-53). I will apply some of these categories to cases of unreliable narration in the Marlovian narratives; when doing so, I will also provide more detailed definitions of them.

Conrad studies

At this point, I need to acknowledge my debt to the vast amount of previous work done on the Marlovian quartet, on Conrad's narrative methods and the problem of identity in his fiction. I will mention only the most pertinent examples of such work because a complete survey would be both impossible and unnecessary. First of all, starting with studies of Marlow, I have found Harold Bloom's volume in the Major Literary Characters series (1992) useful. It collects a number of influential articles and book chapters devoted to Marlow or the works that he narrates. I will engage with some of these essays in the chapters to follow, although it should be noted that the original source will be quoted instead of the reprinted material whenever available. There are also two recent book-length studies of Marlow and the Marlovian narratives: Bernard J. Paris's *Conrad's Charlie Marlow: A New Approach to "Heart of Darkness" and "Lord Jim"* (2005) and Paul Wake's *Conrad's Marlow:*

Narrative and Death in "Youth," "Heart of Darkness," "Lord Jim" and "Chance" (2007). Paris takes a character-based and psychological approach to Marlow, treating him as "a mimetic portrait, an imagined human being whose thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, including his storytelling, are expressions of his personality and experience." He argues that "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim* are illuminated by being considered together because, in these works, Marlow is "a continuously evolving individual, at different stages of his life, whose disturbing experiences and involvements with other characters generate anxieties and inner conflicts from which he seeks relief through his narrations" (viii; see viii-ix). Although I largely agree with the idea that the act of narration brings psychological relief to Marlow, I do not think that he can be considered a fully fledged character or that his different incarnations are continuous with each other in terms of his character traits. I shall discuss this problem, as well as Cedric Watts's view of Marlow as a "transtextual" character, in Chapter 2.

Paul Wake's approach is very different from Paris's, but in some ways it comes close to my own. Wake sets out to offer close readings of the four Marlovian texts through an exploration of the relation between narrative and death (viii). He contends that Marlow's essence consists in his liminality, in his oscillation between the status of a character and that of a narrator, and that only through his act of narration can meaning emerge. He engages in intelligent dialogue with other Conrad scholars, philosophers, and literary theorists, but he seems to me to pay insufficient attention to the Marlow texts themselves. His theoretical framework resembles mine in that he also relies, among others, on Genettean narratology and Ricoeurian philosophy to develop his argument. In addition, the way in which Conrad builds on the difference between Marlow as narrator and Marlow as character will be of significance in my readings as well. However, while Wake adopts the methodology of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, he does not draw on the concept of narrative identity that is so central to my thesis.

My interpretations of the Marlovian narratives owe less to the work of Paris and Wake than to that of Ian Watt, Cedric Watts, Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn, Michael Greaney, Allan H. Simmons and others. These critics have not devoted book-length studies to Marlow, but their chapters or articles on some of the texts in which he features have yielded important insights into Marlovian – and, more generally, Conradian – narrative. In his influential *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*,

Ian Watt has examined techniques of literary impressionism and symbolism in “Youth,” “Heart of Darkness” and *Lord Jim*. One of his greatest contributions to our understanding of the narrative method of *Lord Jim* is his detailed analysis of the roles of time in the novel, which is informed by Genette’s narrative theory. In Chapter 4, I will rely on Genette’s model of narrative time as well in an attempt to extend Watt’s discussion. I will also draw on the work of Cedric Watts at various points of the thesis. Chapter 3, in particular, is indebted to his thought-provoking analysis of the narrative opening in “Heart of Darkness” and what he calls the novella’s “tentacular” effect.

Jakob Lothe’s *Conrad’s Narrative Method* and Jeremy Hawthorn’s *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment* are more theoretically oriented than the work of Watt and Watts, and more firmly grounded in contemporary narratology (such as Genette’s). The value of Lothe’s book lies especially in providing a painstaking analysis of Conrad’s narrative methods, although he also aims to consider the methods in their relationship to the thematics of each work he discusses. He pays particularly detailed attention to the complex narrative discourse of *Lord Jim*, which allows me to refine my own reading of the novel. Hawthorn’s book complements Lothe’s in taking a more careful look at the close connection between form and content, between narrative technique and what he calls ideological commitment. Perhaps even more important to my purposes in this thesis, however, is Hawthorn’s earlier book, *Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness*. As its title suggests, it focuses on the self-referential aspects of Conrad’s great works, including “Heart of Darkness” and *Lord Jim*, and argues that language can translate our subjective experience into objective experience. Hawthorn also touches on questions of personal and social identity in connection with Marlow’s, Kurtz’s and Jim’s use of language, which is an aspect that I aim to explore as well, albeit from a somewhat different perspective. Michael Greaney’s *Conrad, Language, and Narrative* likewise addresses the problem of Conrad’s linguistic self-consciousness when examining tensions between speech and writing in his fiction. Greaney’s view of Marlow’s narratives as “the products of an intricate confrontation between traditional storytelling and modernist reflexivity” produces fine readings that inform my own discussion of these texts (6).

Similarly to Lothe and Hawthorn, Allan H. Simmons has frequently employed concepts from narrative theory in his work on Conrad. In his unpublished PhD thesis,

which argues for an intimate relationship between ambiguity and meaning in Conrad's novels, Simmons acknowledges "a large debt to the work of Gérard Genette" as well as the influence of poststructuralism on his attitude towards literary criticism in general. His thesis is careful not to fall into the trap of using theory for its own sake, of producing a reading that tends "towards philosophical allusion to the point where one loses sight of the text in an endlessly solipsistic 'justification' of the method" ("Ambiguity as Meaning" 22; 21). As I have already implied, I also want to focus on Conradian narrative and use the theories outlined above only when they help shed light on the texts. While Simmons often examines the connections between the formal and the contextual aspects of Conrad's fiction, his more recent work shows a shift of emphasis from the former to the latter. In particular, he has recently explored Conrad's negotiation of his English literary identity, which is also an important aspect of my thesis.

In the context of important new work on Conradian narrative, I should also mention again the volume *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*, edited by Lothe, Hawthorn and Phelan. The essays in this collection concentrate on different aspects of Conradian narrative, and while the focus is on how Conrad studies and narrative theory can always shed new light on each other, an effort is made at some points to give consideration to the historical and political contexts of the fiction as well. The essays by the editors themselves as well as those by Simmons and Zdzisław Najder – some of which I shall quote in this study – seem to me particularly insightful. Christophe Robin's paper in the same volume, entitled "Time, History, Narrative in *Nostramo*," deserves mention here mainly because he also applies Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. However, I think that Richard Niland is right to criticise Robin's essay for its excessive reliance on Derrida, Foucault and Ricoeur. In his review of the collection, Niland argues that "Robin's speculations of the absent-presence in Conrad's work and contemporary philosophy usurp the critic's writing to such an extent that he himself must be found 'elsewhere,' and certainly not in the work bearing his name, with Robin the real absent-presence in this critical jigsaw."

My thesis is also indebted to some previous studies of the problem of identity and self-fashioning in Conrad, although this debt is less direct than in the case of Conradian narrative. In addition to Simmons's investigation of Conrad's negotiation of his Englishness, I will also draw on the work of Edward Said and of biographers

Zdzisław Najder and J. H. Stape. They have all contributed significantly to our understanding of Conrad's construction of a public identity in his Author's Notes and other non-fictional writings. Robert Hampson's *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, on the other hand, is a study focused on Conrad's conception of personal and social identity as embodied in his fiction itself. Hampson's examination of incidents of betrayal and self-betrayal has influenced my thinking about the Marlovian narratives, but while he concentrates on the actions of Conrad's characters, my concern is with how they construct their identities in the act of narration. I have also found Hampson's *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction* useful because it discusses Conrad's understanding of cultural identity. Similarly to Hampson, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, in *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper*, explores the problem of identity in Conrad's fiction mainly from the perspective of the actions of the characters. However, her readings are informed by Alasdair MacIntyre's narrative view of the self as expounded in *After Virtue*, which comes close to Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. In particular, I will build on Erdinast-Vulcan's insights into how some of Conrad's characters derive their identities from fictional models.

In the thesis which follows, I will examine the problem of narrative identity in the Marlovian quartet. Before doing so, however, I will start with a brief chapter on Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and "Freya of the Seven Isles" in order to demonstrate how some of the features of the Marlovian narratives that I will be discussing are also typical more generally of much of Conrad's fiction. In particular, I will introduce the problem of narrative oscillations and ambiguous narrative identities, which are important aspects of Marlow's narrative in both *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. Each subsequent chapter aims to explore Marlow's double function to which I have referred above by providing a close reading of one of the Marlovian narratives. These are explored in chronological order of their first (serial) publication. Yet this structuring is not meant to imply an unbroken continuity between Marlow's different incarnations, but rather to place emphasis on the evolution of Conrad's understanding of the relation between narration and identity. Both Conrad's fiction and his negotiation of his literary identity with his readership reflect this evolution. Chapter 2 argues that, in "Youth," Conrad goes to great lengths to adjust his literary identity to the demands of publication in *Blackwood's*

Magazine, but that this does not preclude a degree of self-consciousness about how identities are constructed through storytelling. Chapter 3 demonstrates how Conrad takes his self-conscious engagement with narrative identity to a new and much higher level in “Heart of Darkness,” in which the focus is on how Marlow’s self-narrative revolves around Kurtz. Chapter 4 discusses *Lord Jim*, a novel that, both in its form and subject matter, dramatizes better than any other work by Conrad the compulsion to tell narratives of the self and the desire to have these narratives verified by others. It also asks the related question of how the failure of one of its members threatens the narrative of the community. Chapter 5 is devoted to *Chance*, which develops the previous novel’s insights into the part played by the imagination in self-construction. I will conclude by suggesting certain parallels between Conrad’s understanding of narrative identity in the Marlow fictions and in some of his non-fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

Ambiguous Narrative Identities: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and "Freya of the Seven Isles"

Before I embark on my analyses of the Marlovian quartet, I would like to take a brief look beyond it to highlight a major feature of Conradian narrative that is directly related to the problem of narrative identity: an oscillation between different narrative modes. In both *Lord Jim* and *Chance*, as I will show, such oscillation is an important aspect of Marlow's narrative, and, in the earlier novel, it extends to the extradiegetic narrator as well. Here I will use the example of Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897) and "Freya of the Seven Isles" (1912) to demonstrate two types of narrative oscillations or "fault-lines" also found in similar form in the two Marlow novels. Erdinast-Vulcan has used the term fault-lines to describe unresolved thematic and structural tensions in the fiction of a writer who was "a modernist at war with modernity" (*Modern Temper* 5). Like Erdinast-Vulcan, I regard fault-lines in Conrad not as mere signs of careless craftsmanship, nor necessarily of unreliable narration, but as focal points in individual texts which are potentially revealing of the idiosyncrasy of his art. However, I want to focus on such fissures as defined in specific narratological terms. What could be called narrative fault-lines can take two basic forms: (1) an ostensibly heterodiegetic, "omniscient" narrator revealing himself or herself to be a human being limited in insight (2) a homodiegetic narrator laying claim to knowledge to which he or she cannot possibly have access, such as the thoughts of certain other characters. The first of these cases will be illustrated on the example of *The Nigger*, the second on the example of "Freya." These works belong to different periods of Conrad's career, but they problematize narratorial identity in similar ways.⁹

Of all Conrad's works, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* seems to lend itself best to a demonstration of the problem of the narrative fault-lines in his fiction. Nowhere else does he oscillate so obtrusively, so irregularly, and with such frequency between different narrative modes, and, correspondingly, there is no other work of his in which the handling of narrative voice itself has invited so much commentary. Even critics who have focused on entirely different aspects of the novella have had to

⁹ My brief discussion of these works is necessarily selective and ignores some important aspects of their narrative method.

confront the central problem posed by the apparent inconsistencies in the narrative voice: are they signs of a budding writer's careless craftsmanship, or did Conrad consciously flout mimetic conventions to achieve certain thematic effects? The question implies a somewhat reductive dichotomy, whereas critical positions on the oscillations are, in fact, much more varied. In what follows, I will discuss some textual examples and also engage with a few previous readings of the novel in order to provide a background against which my own position can be articulated.

In broad outlines, the variations in the novel's narrative voice could be summarised as follows. The first few pages are told by an apparently heterodiegetic narrator who describes the members of the crew of the *Narcissus* mainly from the outside, in what Genette calls external focalization, without commenting on their thoughts and feelings.¹⁰ Soon afterwards, however, the first instance of the plural personal pronoun "we" appears in the narrator's discourse, which identifies him as a member of the crew. The text then goes on to oscillate between this limited perspective and an "omniscient" or Olympian perspective with descriptions of the characters' private thoughts as well as of some simultaneous action. We find examples of both internal focalization through different characters and of nonfocalized narrative. Sometimes, however, the apparent omniscience is more limited even when third-person pronouns are used. At the end, after the voyage has ended, the narrator becomes far more individualized by starting to refer to himself in the first person singular. Fittingly, this ambiguous process of identity construction ends in the birth of an individual, just when the narrator is parting from the crew: "I never saw them again" (172).¹¹

An early critical approach to the oscillations could be termed "mimetic and normative" because Conrad's achievement was judged by the mimetic conventions of realism that he undoubtedly violates. Critics writing in this vein include Marvin

¹⁰ Genette distinguishes between three basic types of focalization: *external*, *internal* and *zero focalization* (or *nonfocalized* narrative). In external focalization, the narrator says less than the character knows, and the focus is situated at a point in the diegetic universe (the universe in which a story takes place) chosen by the narrator, outside every character. In internal focalization, the narrator says only what a given character knows, and the focus coincides with that character. In nonfocalized narrative, the narrator says more than any of the characters knows, and the focus is placed at a point so indefinite, or so remote, with so panoramic a field that it cannot coincide with any character. See Genette, *Narrative* 185-94 and *Revisited* 72-78.

¹¹ In terms of the first basic type of oscillation mentioned above, the ostensibly omniscient narrator of *The Nigger* resembles the extradiegetic narrator of *Lord Jim* rather than Marlow. However, the fact that the narrator eventually identifies himself as a character in the story also allows for the possibility that he is in fact a homodiegetic narrator who was just laying claim to omniscience. In this respect, he is more like the Marlow of *Lord Jim* and *Chance*.

Mudrick and Jocelyn Baines. Mudrick believes that Conrad commits “a gross violation of the point of view” when he has his “seaman-narrator” describe the last exchange between Donkin and Wait which no other character could have overheard (291). In the same context, Baines argues that the device of using a crewmember as narrator leads Conrad into “a number of solecisms” (180). It is conspicuous that these critics assume that the identity of the narrator(s) is unproblematic, with a knowledgeable member of the crew telling the story from a certain distance in the past. In fact, however, there is no critical consensus even on the number of narrators Conrad deploys in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* John Lester speaks of two separate narrators in the manner of Dickens’s *Bleak House* (165), while both Jeremy Hawthorn (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 105) and Jakob Lothe (*Narrative Method* 90) point out that there is only one narrative voice, the variations being more matters of perspective and distance than of voice. In addition, even if we were to accept that there are two narrators, “it would be repeatedly impossible to determine which of [them] was speaking” (Hawthorn, *Conrad: Narrative Technique* 105). My own position comes very close to Hawthorn’s and Lothe’s as I believe that – from a stylistic and narratological perspective – there can only be one narrative voice in the text, while the question of narrative identity is more complex than this statement might imply.

It is the work of Allan H. Simmons that has directed much-needed attention to the specific connection between narration and identity in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* Simmons argues that *The Nigger* is “a self-consciously experimental narrative that offers Conrad’s, often deconstructive, exploration of fictional representation.” The experiences the narrator has lived through, Simmons observes, “have invested him with an identity, which is the story we have just read.” Speaking of the character of James Wait, Simmons also points out that the connection between narration and identity in the novel “argues, first, that identity (like narration itself) is composed of gossip, prejudice, belief, and ideology, and, second, that identity is, in some important sense, always inconclusive since embedded stories are necessarily incomplete” (“Representing” 43; 50). Developing this argument in a subsequent paper, Simmons examines how *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* offers a “maritime myth of national identity” (“History” 141). These are all pertinent issues that resonate with Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity that I have introduced above.

But the question of identity in the novel could be extended to the authorial voice as well.

Brian Richardson's recent work on the novel is especially relevant to mine because it is firmly anchored within modern narrative theory. Richardson, himself one of the major proponents of a new paradigm in the study of narrative that has come to be called "unnatural narratology," argues that in *The Nigger*, Conrad uses a strategy that "selects a narrative voice out of functional rather than realistic motivations" ("Posthumanist" 221). As an example of "we" narration, the novella curiously occupies both first and third person discourses at the same time, transcending "the foundational oppositions set forth in different ways by [classical narratologists such as] Stanzel and Genette." In a Genettean framework, then, Conrad's narrator in *The Nigger* would have to be described as "simultaneously homodiegetic and heterodiegetic." However, instead of following this line of reasoning, Richardson argues that Conrad here transcends "the mimetic conventions of realism," creating "a different discourse situation that cannot be found in actual human communication" – a narrating situation that Richardson also calls "posthumanist" (*Unnatural* 60; 42, 43; "Posthumanist" 220). For Richardson, then, the proper question to ask at any given point in the narrative is not "Who is speaking?" but "What is the narration doing now?" (*Unnatural* 42).

There are certainly many elements in the narrative of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* that make it tempting for the critic to work outside the mimetic conventions of realism. When we are offered insight into the thoughts of certain characters or listen to Wait and Donkin's private conversation, we are indeed dealing with an *unnatural* voice that cannot be understood in a logical sense as issuing from a human agent of enunciation. Yet – stylistically, structurally, temperamentally, as well as rhetorically – this is surely the same voice we have heard before and continue to hear after the intrusion of omniscience. One must acknowledge that the consistency of the authorial voice makes it equally tempting to assume a human narrator behind that voice, however illogical that may be in certain parts of the narrative.¹² Whether the personal pronoun used is "they," "we" or "I," the reader is prompted by many signals to naturalize the narration as spoken in one, recognizably

¹² I will discuss the concept of the authorial voice in Conrad in more detail in Chapter 4.

human, voice. A notable example of such consistency is found in the following passages, one from the beginning and one from the end of the narrative:

The popularity of Bulwer Lytton in the forecastles of Southern-going ships is a wonderful and bizarre phenomenon. What ideas do his polished and so curiously insincere sentences awaken in the simple minds of the big children who people those dark and wandering places of the earth? (6)

But at the corner I stopped to take my last look at the crew of the *Narcissus*. They were swaying irresolute and noisy on the broad flagstones before the Mint. They were bound for the Black Horse, where men, in fur caps with brutal faces and in shirt sleeves, dispense out of varnished barrels the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness; the illusion of splendour and poetry of life, to the paid-off crews of southern-going ships. (171)

The first of these extracts would normally be understood by the reader as heterodiegetic narration since it precedes the appearance of the first “we” in the narrative; in the second extract, on the other hand, the speaker clearly identifies himself as “I.” In spite of these pronominal differences, however, the narrative voice and its preoccupations seem consistent – there are similar generalizations, there is the reference to southern-going ships, and all of this is expressed in a patronizing and elevated tone. In a Ricoeurian sense, then, the act of narration and the consistency of the voice responsible for the narration create some degree of coherence in the identity of the narrator.

In terms of its basic narrative situation, “Freya of the Seven Isles” more closely resembles Marlow’s narrative in *Lord Jim* and *Chance* than does *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* The narrator of “Freya,” like the Marlow of these novels, is introduced as homodiegetic but later sometimes assumes the kind of knowledge available only to heterodiegetic narrators. The first two paragraphs are worth quoting in full because they give the reader a fairly precise notion of the type of homodiegetic narrator Conrad employs up to the end of section III:

One day – and that day was many years ago now – I received a long chatty letter from one of my old chums and fellow-wanderers in Eastern waters. He was still out there but settled down, and middle-

aged, grown portly in figure and domestic in his habits; in short overtaken by that Fate common to all except to those who being specially beloved by the gods get knocked on the head early. The letter was of the reminiscent, “do you remember” kind – a wistful letter of backward glances. And amongst other things – “Surely you remember old Nelson,” he wrote.

Remember old Nelson! Certainly. And, to begin with, his name was not Nelson. The Englishmen in the Archipelago called him Nelson because it was more convenient I suppose, and he never protested. It would have been mere pedantry. The true form of his name was Nielsen. He had come out East, long before the advent of telegraph cables, had served English firms, had married an English girl, had been one of us for years, trading and sailing in all directions through the Eastern Archipelago, across and around, transversely, diagonally, perpendicularly, in semicircles, and zig-zags and figures of eight. For years and years. (123)

The style is informal (note expressions such as “chums” or “get knocked on the head”) and conversational, with many of the redundancies and digressions that characterize speech and, more narrowly, oral narrative. Witness also the awkward attempts at humour, as for instance through the accumulation of adverbs near the end of the second paragraph (“across and around, transversely, diagonally, perpendicularly . . .”). Indeed, the narrator is as chatty as the letter he received “many years ago,” but what is more important here is that his garrulousness reinforces the impression of an orally delivered narrative. The storyteller is apparently trying to win the attention and favour of his listeners, even though they remain undramatized throughout the narrative. At another level, surely, this may be seen as an attempt on Conrad’s part to appeal to his readers. In fact, in sections I-III, the narrator frequently addresses his audience directly as “you,” either in order to keep their attention and interest in the story alive (“For, pray, who was Heemskirk? You shall see at once how unreasonable was this dread of Heemskirk,” p. 131) or when he interrupts the flow of the narrative in anticipation of possible reactions from a group of listeners with whose norms and standards he is perfectly familiar (“She [Freya] knew that she had the more substance of the two – you needn’t try any cheap jokes; I am not

talking of their weights,” p. 137). The latter example in particular shows Conrad going to some length to recreate for the reader, in the medium of the printed book, the spontaneity and interactivity of oral storytelling.

In the long passage quoted above, there is also the typically Conradian expression “one of us,” famously used as an ambiguous but important motif in *Lord Jim*, which situates both narrator and audience as members of a certain community, possibly the British Merchant Service. By using the phrase, the narrator is again appealing to a shared discourse of identity, as Marlow often does in his narratives. It requires no stretch of the imagination to picture the unnamed captain-narrator swapping yarns with his fellow seamen, in the manner of Marlow and his respective audiences in “Youth” or “Heart of Darkness.”¹³ Equally significant is the fact that – at this point in the text – the narrator of “Freya” makes no pretences as to knowing more than he can reasonably be expected to know. The use of “I suppose” in the passage quoted above is only one of the many ways in which the narrator conveys a sense of his modest status as “one of us,” a member of the community who is not necessarily more knowledgeable than his audience but who has something interesting and important to tell them from personal experience. In the few instances when his knowledge in this early phase of the narrative is not based on personal experience, he makes sure to identify the source of his information, as in the following example: “I understood (from Jasper) that she [Freya’s maid Antonia] was in the secret” (145). A comparable attitude is also typical of the Marlow of *Lord Jim* and *Chance* in certain segments of his narratives.

In “Freya,” the change in narratorial attitude occurs at the opening of section IV:

I suppose praiseworthy motives are a sufficient justification almost for anything. What could be more commendable in the abstract than a girl’s determination that “poor papa” should not be worried, and her anxiety that the man of her choice should be kept by any means from every occasion of doing something rash, something which might endanger the whole scheme of their happiness?

Nothing could be more tender and more prudent. We must also remember the girl’s self-reliant temperament and the general

¹³ For an analysis of the more complex situation in *Lord Jim*, see Chapter 4.

unwillingness of women, I mean women of sense, to make a fuss over matters of that sort.

As has been said already Heemskirk turned up the day after Jasper's arrival at Nelson's Cove. The sight of the brig lying right under the bungalow was very offensive to him. He did not fly ashore before his anchor touched the ground as Jasper used to do. On the contrary, he hung about his quarter deck mumbling to himself; and when he ordered his boat to be manned it was in an angry voice. Freya's existence which lifted Jasper out of himself into a blissful elation was for Heemskirk a cause of secret torment, of hours of exasperated brooding. (146-47)

The first two paragraphs read very much like the previous sections, but what follows immediately after is perplexing. Contrary to all reader expectations, it seems to me, there is a sudden intrusion of references to the thoughts and feelings of a character other than the narrator ("The sight of the brig . . . was very offensive to him;" "Freya's existence . . . was for Heemskirk a cause of secret torment . . ."). What is more, that character is the repulsive villain Heemskirk, who up to this point has quite naturally and consistently been viewed from the outside. "Professional" readers in particular are likely to consider the possibility that Conrad at this point, from section IV onwards, has a heterodiegetic, "omniscient" narrator take over the telling. After all, the use of the "I" in the first two paragraphs contains in itself no evidence whatsoever that this part of the text is told by a homodiegetic narrator. All the instances of the first person singular in the first two paragraphs refer to the narrating self. They are examples of an "I" whereby the narrator designates himself as the speaker, but which may in theory just as well belong to an "omniscient" narrator situated outside the world of the story. However, this is just a theoretical possibility because, as I have implied above, there is no break in the general tone of the narration. We find the narrator voicing opinions that we have come to expect from him, opinions that include generalisations about women (compare "the general unwillingness of women . . . to make a fuss over matters of that sort" with "And for the rest Miss Freya could read 'poor dear papa' in the way a woman reads a man, like an open book" from section III, p. 137). Also, we may notice that the style and vocabulary remain similar (compare the "poor dear papa" cited above with "poor

papa” in section IV, paragraph one), and that the use of the expression “As has been said already” weaves these passages seamlessly into the fabric of the whole narrative. In all these various ways, Conrad invokes our anonymous captain-narrator. Apparently, then, we are meant to take the “I” that opens section IV as identical with the “I” that narrates the first three sections, in spite of the fact that the captain’s narrating self now withdraws and the story begins to be told in a way that presupposes “omniscience.” The oscillations affect mostly the *mode* but not the general *tone* of the narration. Again, as in the case of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* the consistency of the authorial voice partly counterbalances the inconsistencies in the narrator’s identity.

CHAPTER TWO

“Youth”: Identity and Audience

Published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in September 1898, “Youth” marks the first appearance of Marlow in the Conrad canon. While it is certainly the least complex of the four Marlow tales, there is a sense in which it is also the most disturbing of all. Nowhere else does Conrad’s best-known narrator resort to the kind of trite rhetoric that we find in this story. Marlow’s nationalist and Orientalist discourse is less palatable even than the misogyny of *Chance*, if only because there Marlow’s views are to some extent problematized and do not carry the same kind of authority that they possess in the earlier tale.¹⁴ “Youth” was Conrad’s first story composed specifically for *Blackwood's Magazine*, the conservative and imperialist monthly known familiarly as “Maga.” As Conrad’s biographers have discovered, the still fledgling author did his best to familiarize himself with the magazine’s ethos and target-audience in the last few months of 1897, before beginning work on “Youth” (Knowles xxix; Knowles and Moore 44). Apparently, he was eager to adopt an authorial attitude that made him seem more British than the British themselves, or, as he himself expressed it later to William Blackwood, “‘plus royaliste que le roi’—more conservative than Maga” (CL2 162). At the same time, “Youth” is more than a concerted attempt on Conrad’s part to find a new and wider readership for his fiction. In this chapter, I shall argue that the use of familiar tropes and narrative patterns in “Youth” entails a degree of self-consciousness about the way in which his own identity, and personal as well as collective identity more generally, are constructed through storytelling.

1. Narrative structure and narrative setting

“Youth” opens with a frame or extradiegetic narrator’s nationalistic generalisations about the role of the sea in the lives of the English (“This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak . . .” [11]). The narrator, who is a dramatized character but remains unnamed throughout the story, then goes on to establish the narrative setting: he and four other friends – a company director, an accountant, a lawyer and Marlow – are “sitting round a

¹⁴ For a discussion of misogyny in *Chance*, see Chapter 5.

mahogany table” that reflects “the bottle, the claret-glasses and [their] faces” (11). Between them, we are told, there is “the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft,” since all of them “began life in the merchant service” (11). These introductory words set the tone of nationalism, male camaraderie and nostalgia for “the good old days” (11) that Marlow’s narrative maintains throughout the tale. In this respect, “Youth” differs markedly from the later “Heart of Darkness,” where the story Marlow tells to the same group of ex-sailors questions the anonymous narrator’s fundamental assumptions about nation and Empire.¹⁵ In neither story, however, does the narrator provide the reader with much information about Marlow. In “Youth,” he comments briefly on the careers of the three passive members of the group but says absolutely nothing about Marlow, other than to express his uncertainty about the spelling of his name: “Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story, or rather the chronicle of a voyage:–” (11).¹⁶

With these words, the narrator immediately gives the floor to Marlow and is not heard again until the very end of the narrative. When he does speak again, it is only to rephrase Marlow’s views in complete agreement with him:

And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love; our 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 romance of illusions. (39)

The fact that Conrad returns to the frame at the end of the tale, and in such a mechanical way, gives the reader a neat sense of closure that is not typical of what Jeremy Hawthorn has termed Conrad’s “half-written fictions” (“Half-written Fictions” 151).¹⁷ It is only in “Heart of Darkness” – to limit the comparison to the

¹⁵ The interrelations between the frame and the embedded narrative in “Heart of Darkness” will be explored in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ I will elaborate on the issue of nationalism as well as on Marlow’s position within the group later in the chapter.

¹⁷ Hawthorn argues that the suggestiveness of Conrad’s fiction requires a creative reader who is able to fill the gaps that the author has deliberately left in the narrative (“Half-written Fictions,” esp. 156-58).

Marlovian narratives – that there is a similar return to the frame at the end of the story, but there the effect is not to give a sense of comfort and closure. What we feel is much rather the bleak atmosphere of Marlow’s tale spilling over into the frame and continuing to hang in the air. Such open-endedness as well as any interference between the frame and the framed story are missing from “Youth,” which is one of Conrad’s early experiments with the tale-within-the-tale form.¹⁸ It is also interesting to note that the frame narrator hardly refers to himself in the first person singular in the course of the story. Instead, he usually uses the first person plural “we,” positioning himself clearly as a member of the group. Although, as a character in the frame story, he can be classified as a homodiegetic narrator in Genettean terms, his personal identity is of little relevance to the story. This is also true of the director of companies, the accountant and the lawyer, the passive listeners whose role is confined to nodding in agreement as Marlow finishes his eulogy to youth and the sea. As opposed to all other texts he features in, Marlow’s narrative in “Youth” is never once interrupted by any members of his audience.

What Conrad is concerned with here above all is Marlow’s identity, and, in particular, the process of identity formation through storytelling. Marlow’s narrative, again in Genettean terms, is autodiegetic because Marlow’s younger self is clearly its hero (Genette, *Narrative* 243-45). This is not to imply, however, that Marlow’s tale of his first and most memorable voyage to the Eastern seas is totally self-centred. In very obvious ways, it has a strong common appeal for his listeners, which is already conspicuous in Marlow’s direct address to them at the beginning of his story: “You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something – and you can’t” (11). As this quotation implies, Marlow will strive after symbolic meaning in his story, with the implication that the symbolism and tropes he will employ will be

¹⁸ Cedric Watts points out that before “Youth,” Conrad had only made tentative experiments with this form, or what he calls the oblique narrative convention, in “The Lagoon” and “Karain.” He argues that the interaction between outer and inner narratives in “Youth” is mainly of “an iteratively mechanical variety” because Marlow from time to time “interrupts his account with an apostrophe like ‘Youth! All youth! The silly, charming, beautiful youth,’” which establishes a simple contrast between “the present nostalgic Marlow and the eager, ambitious, energetic Marlow of the inner narrative.” Of the passage from the end of the story that I have quoted above, Watts remarks that the sentimentality is theoretically that of Marlow and the extradiegetic narrator; yet, “in the absence of any evidence of ironic or critical reserves, it seems to be effectually that of Conrad” (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 20, 21, 22; see 19-23).

easily understandable to his ex-sailor friends. Another point to make about Marlow's narrative is that – again unlike the following three texts he appears in – it unfolds largely in chronological order. The frame narrator's designation of it as a "chronicle" (11) therefore seems apt, except for the fact that Marlow's is an oral and not a written narrative. In fact, the oral nature of Marlow's story, as Paul Wake has reminded us most recently (25-33), is an important aspect of "Youth," and later I shall return to the ways in which Marlow's language masquerades as spontaneous speech. Marlow's tale, then, only becomes a written narrative in its transmission by the anonymous narrator, who does not seem to do more than transcribe it in the form in which it was uttered.

2. Marlow and the question of narrative identity

2.1. "Youth" and narrative typology

"Youth" has been described variously as an epic with a "mock-heroic flavor," a "rhapsody on the glamour of youth and of the East," a "mythical and 'poeticised' chronicle," a mixture of a popular sea-romance à la Captain Frederick Marryat and a "meditative and philosophical sea-elegy" (Renner 311; Baines 210; Knowles xxxvii, xxxviii). While I will touch on issues of genre in the discussion to follow, it is more important to my purposes to examine what kind of image Marlow projects of himself to his audience (and to the reader) by constructing such a narrative. One of the most conspicuous features of this narrative, and one that sets it off from his tales in the other Marlow texts, is a strong emphasis on physical action and adventure as opposed to consciousness and ideas. Quite appropriately, Conrad chose the motto of the *Judea*, the barque on which Marlow serves as second mate, to be "Do or Die." As the tale progresses, this motto can be said to evolve into a leitmotif. It contrasts, as Owen Knowles points out, a youthful "absence of self-consciousness, immersion in present action and the feeling of immortality" with "an awareness of death, . . . inactivity and the making of nostalgic stories about lost youth" typical of the onset of old age (xxxix). The latter qualities can indeed be associated with middle-aged Marlow or Marlow the narrator, but, as I will go on to argue, in much of the text the reader is immersed in young Marlow's adventures.

The best way to approach "Youth" is to look at it as a self-narrative. Kenneth J. and Mary M. Gergen have defined the term self-narrative as "the individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time" (162). In

constructing a self-narrative, the individual attempts to establish connections of coherence among life events in order to be able to understand his or her identity as “a sensible result of a life story” (Gergen and Gergen 162). It is also worth reminding ourselves here of Paul Ricoeur’s similar point that all narrative composition involves “discordant concordance,” which he defines by the notion of the synthesis of the heterogeneous (*Oneself* 141). The Marlow of “Youth” may be telling a relatively straightforward narrative of his voyage of twenty-two years before, but he also does more than that. He is trying to understand and to present a memorable episode from his past as coherent both in itself and with the larger narrative that is the story of his life. In addition, Marlow places his narrative in even larger contexts, such as the narrative of the Nation or the battle between man and nature. (It is in this sense that a case can be made for “Youth” as an epic, or what Gergen and Gergen have termed a “macronarrative,” as opposed to the “micronarrative” of Marlow’s adventures on board the *Judea* as such (171).) His storytelling defines who he is, both to himself and to others. The self that emerges from his narrative is a projection of how he sees himself, and of how he wishes to be perceived by others. Like all tellers of self-narratives, he is keen on having his narrative identity verified by his audience, if only by a silent nod of agreement.

Yet some of the theoretical points made above need to be qualified when applied to Marlow specifically. First of all, one might question whether a short story such as “Youth” could be described as a narrative of self-relevant events “across time.” After all, its *story* or *fabula* is not a matter of decades or even years. Nevertheless, one might calculate that between Marlow’s signing on as second mate and the arrival of the crew by boat in an Eastern port, about eighteen months elapse. This estimate is based not only on the text, but also on Conrad’s own adventures in the *Palestine*, which “Youth” follows fairly closely (Najder, *Life* 89-95; Knowles and Moore xxvi-xxvii). Even more importantly, what really matters is Marlow’s understanding of the relationships between the events or time periods in his life. Ricoeur’s term “discordant concordance” seems particularly apt to describe these connections.¹⁹ As I hope to be able to demonstrate, it is especially middle-aged Marlow’s nostalgic feelings towards his younger self that lend his narrative an air of

¹⁹ I owe this suggestion to Robert Hampson.

concordance or continuity between the narrated I and the narrating I.²⁰ At the same time, there is also some significant discordance between Marlow's two selves, mainly in terms of the temporal distance that separates them.

Secondly, Conrad scholarship is divided on the question of whether Marlow can be considered the same character across all the four works in which he appears. While the majority of critics tend to answer this question in the negative,²¹ Cedric Watts reads the story of Marlow's life as a "vast biographical narrative" or "transtextual" narrative. He sees the transtextual narrative as typical of Conrad's fiction and defines it as "one which exists in, across and between two or more texts." According to Watts, the story of Marlow's life is a sad one because "as Marlow ages we hear him gradually become less intelligent and more garrulous" (*Deceptive* 139, 133, 138). As I noted in the Introduction, Bernard J. Paris has argued for a similar approach to Marlow, treating him as "a mimetic portrait." Unsurprisingly, however, even Paris limits his analysis to "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, and does not consider the Marlow of *Chance* to be reconcilable with his previous incarnations (viii, 5). I would argue that although there certainly is some continuity between the four texts in terms of Marlow's character traits, a larger, transtextual narrative of his life only exists as an implied point of reference for the reader. It may be more accurate to say that in each of these texts, we encounter one possible narrative version of Marlow, the character whom we know almost only through his storytelling. Conrad creates the character by dramatizing the process of his self-construction in each individual text.

However, Conrad's Author's Note to the *Youth* volume (added in 1917) treats Marlow playfully as if he were a real person, with the implication that, if he is not real, he is at least a fully fledged character.

["Youth"] marks the first appearance in the world of the man Marlow, with whom my relations have grown very intimate in the course of years. The origins of that gentleman (nobody so far as I know had ever hinted that he was anything but that) – his origins have been the

²⁰ The terms *narrating I* (*erzählendes Ich*) and *narrated I* (*erzähltes Ich*) are Leo Spitzer's coinage, but I use them as defined by Genette, as the two *actants* of the hero of a narrative in autobiographical form. The narrating I can (but need not) be separated from the narrated I by a difference in age and experience that authorises the former to treat the latter "with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority" (Genette, *Narrative* 252).

²¹ See, for example, Lothe, *Narrative Method* 38; Armstrong, *Challenge of Bewilderment* 114n.

subject of some literary speculation of, I am glad to say, a friendly nature.

One would think that I am the proper person to throw a light on the matter; but in truth I find that it isn't so easy. It is pleasant to remember that nobody had charged him with fraudulent purposes or looked down on him as a charlatan; but apart from that he was supposed to be all sorts of things: a clever screen, a mere device, "a personator," a familiar spirit, a whispering "dæmon." I myself have been suspected of a meditated plan for his capture.

That is not so. I made no plans. The man Marlow and I came together in the casual manner of those health-resort acquaintances which sometimes ripen into friendships. This one has ripened. For all his assertiveness in matters of opinion he is not an intrusive person. He haunts my hours of solitude, when, in silence, we lay our heads together in great comfort and harmony; but as we part at the end of a tale I am never sure that it may not be for the last time. Yet I don't think that either of us would care much to survive the other. In his case, at any rate, his occupation would be gone and he would suffer from that extinction, because I suspect him of some vanity. I don't mean vanity in the Solomonian sense. Of all my people he's the one that has never been a vexation to my spirit. A most discreet, understanding man. . . . (5-6; ellipsis in orig.)

As several critics have noted, these comments are unhelpful in that they yield no clue as to Marlow's origin and literary functions.²² Yet, the passage is worth examining in the context of Conrad's self-fashioning and his relationship with his readership. A "most discreet" and "understanding," if somewhat assertive and vain gentleman, Marlow is presented as someone Conrad came across casually. In spite of their acquaintance having developed into intimate friendship, Conrad hints at the difficulty of characterising with authority someone who leads an existence largely independent of his own. The creator and his creation maintain a democratic relationship, and the Marlovian narratives are thus nothing but the result of their productive cooperation. Conrad is right to suggest that he is not identical with Marlow, and that Marlow is

²² See, for instance, Watt, *Nineteenth Century* 201; Greaney 58.

more than “a mere device.” However, it would be misleading to take his implicit claim for Marlow as a fully fledged character at face value. As Greaney has pointed out, Conrad, by speaking of Marlow as a real person, “exhibits a fidelity to the integrity of his fictional world that most readers share to some extent when they are immersed in that world” (58). Conrad is apparently trying to impose coherence on his oeuvre retrospectively in order, partly, to appeal to his readers. The playfulness and intimacy of his tone reinforce the appeal by fashioning an image of the writer as a very pleasant person. Conrad thus also diverts attention away from his unwillingness to reveal too much about himself. In the next chapter, I will discuss Conrad’s need to create distance between himself and Marlow in “Heart of Darkness.” At several points of this study, I will also comment on some of Conrad’s other Author’s Notes in a similar context.

Returning to “Youth” specifically, I would argue that the emphasis placed in Marlow’s tale on physical action and adventure allows us to subclassify it as what Gergen and Gergen, speaking of temporal form in self-narratives, have called a “romantic saga” narrative (167). Identifying changes in the evaluative character of events over time as an essential means of generating coherence and direction in self-narrative, they go on to distinguish rudimentary narrative types as well as more complex variations on them (164-68).²³ One of these more complex and culturally accepted types is the romantic saga, which is defined as “a series of progressive-regressive phases;” the individual telling such a narrative may see his or her past as “a continuous array of battles against the powers of darkness” (Gergen and Gergen 167-68, 168). And this is exactly how the Marlow of “Youth” presents his turbulent voyage to the East. He describes all the difficulties he encountered – the delays caused by gales and storms, the collision with an incoming steamer, the leak in the hull, the spontaneous combustion, the eventual shipwreck – and how he managed to overcome them. As a young man in the thick of the action, with the water to his neck, he nevertheless exclaims in his thoughts: “By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure” (17). Adventure, as Karl E. Scheibe argues, is vital to a conception of the self – it plays an important role “in the construction and development of life stories,”

²³ The three most basic forms of narrative are the stability narrative, the progressive and the regressive narrative. As their names indicate, these narrative types link incidents in such a way that the individual regards his or her life as unchanged, improving or getting worse, respectively. Although there may in theory be an infinite number of variations on these three forms, the repertoire of possibilities is usually culturally limited (Gergen and Gergen 165-67).

which in turn are “the major supports for human identities” (130). Interestingly, Scheibe also draws a parallel between the figure of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza on the one hand, and the alternation in romantic saga narratives between adventure and repose on the other. It is the sequencing or progression of the states of adventure and repose that “produces the material out of which narrative constructions of the self are developed” (133; see 132-33). There is surely something Quixotic about the young Marlow of “Youth,” while the middle-aged Marlow who narrates the story could be said to bear some resemblance to the practical realist Sancho (cf. Knowles xxxvii-viii).

More interesting, however, is the fact that the kind of sequencing of adventure and repose described by Scheibe can be observed in Marlow’s self-narrative as well. Consider, for example, the narrative sequence that extends from the onset of the gale to the explosion which propels Marlow into the air (16-26). The gale follows a surprisingly calm period of beautiful weather at sea and immediately sends the crew of the *Judea* into a state of restlessness and bewilderment: “The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling. . . . Day after day and night after night there was nothing round the ship but the howl of the wind, the tumult of the sea, the noise of water pouring over her deck. There was no rest for her and no rest for us” (16). Yet, for Marlow, the gale is ultimately an opportunity to prove himself rather than a source of worry and annoyance. At this point, like the eponymous hero of *Lord Jim*, the young Marlow of “Youth” sees himself as a character in an adventure story. Probably drawing inspiration from his reading of Frederick Burnaby and other authors (14), he exclaims in a passage that I have already quoted in part – “By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure – something you read about; and it is my first voyage as second mate – and I am only twenty – and here I am lasting it out as well as any of these men and keeping my chaps up to the mark. I was as pleased as Punch. I would not have given up the experience for worlds” (17). The fact that young Marlow sees himself as having heroically withstood the harsh weather conditions and carried out his duties is obviously central to his conception of self.

Yet it is not long before this adventurous episode in Marlow’s life gives way to a period of delays and inaction. A leak in the hull forces the crew of the *Judea* to stop for repairs in Falmouth, which eventually take several months: “[W]e became a

fixture, a feature, an institution of the place. People pointed us out to visitors as ‘That ’ere barque that’s going to Bangkok – has been here six months – put back three times.’ On holidays the small boys pulling about in boats would hail ‘*Judea* ahoy!’ and if a head showed above the rail shouted ‘Where you bound to? – Bangkok?’ and jeered” (20). The pace of the narrative is significantly faster here than when action is described scenically; Marlow’s summary of the events of several months amounts to no more than two pages of text. This is unsurprising, however, when one considers that the lack of anything memorable is the non-narratable. It is also interesting to note that much of the last quoted segment of narrative is iterative in nature, which lends further emphasis to middle-aged Marlow’s sense of the voyage as a grotesquely prolonged series of delays.²⁴ Even after leaving port, the *Judea*’s progress remains slow for “an interminable procession of days” (22), but a new narrative sequence of adventure soon follows. The crew now have to fight a fire caused by spontaneous combustion, which culminates in Marlow being “blown up” as the coal-dust explodes (25). In spite of these difficulties and dangers, however, he remains enthusiastic about the voyage and proud of his perseverance. Immediately before the explosion, he feels “as pleased and proud as though [he] had helped to win a great naval battle” (24). This kind of sequencing of adventure and repose continues beyond the relatively short segment of narrative that I took as an example (16-26), and it allows us to read “Youth” as Marlow’s “romantic saga” or self-narrative. Yet it is a self-narrative that is in many ways unthinkable without the audience that he addresses and the community to which he feels himself as belonging.

2.2. Community and audience

In the first section of this chapter, I have already introduced the narrative setting and commented briefly on the members of the audience that Marlow addresses. As the frame narrator tells us, they are all united by “the strong bond of the sea” and “the fellowship of the craft,” but it is worth taking a closer look at how he introduces the three other listeners individually:

There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, Marlow and myself. The director had been a *Conway* boy, the accountant had

²⁴ The iterative is an aspect of frequency, defined by Genette as a type of narrative “where a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event (in other words, . . . several events considered only in terms of their analogy)” (Genette, *Narrative* 116).

served four years at sea, the lawyer – a fine crusted Tory, High Churchman, the best of old fellows, the soul of honour – had been chief officer in the P. & O. service in the good old days when mailboats were square rigged at least on two masts and used to come down the China Sea before a fair monsoon with stun'-sails set alow and aloft. (11)

What first strikes the reader in this description is probably the fact that Marlow's listeners are not referred to by their proper names but by their professions. A possible function of this device is suggested in the final paragraph of the text (cited in full in section 1 above), when the anonymous narrator again specifically mentions "the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law" as he evokes the passage of time and a sense of lost youth (39). As Robert Hampson argues of this paragraph, "Conrad exploits the 'vocational convention' to suggest that various activities that might seem productive of value are ultimately valueless" ("Genie" 220).²⁵ However, the narrator's words, as they often do in "Youth," only echo an opinion expressed earlier by Marlow. At the end of *his* narrative, looking back nostalgically upon his youthful experiences, Marlow has already evoked a sense of futility and mortality: "But for me all the East is contained in that vision of my youth. . . . And this is all that is left of it! My God! Only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour – of youth! . . . A flick of sunshine upon a strange shore, the time to remember, the time for a sigh and – good bye! Night! Good bye . . . !" (39; 2nd and 3rd ellipses in orig.). Another possible reason for Conrad's use of profession designations rather than proper names for Marlow's listeners is that – as I have noted before – their personal identities are not particularly relevant to the story.

Even more important here, however, are Conrad's reasons for specifically choosing a company director, an accountant and a lawyer to be among the members of Marlow's audience. As Knowles points out, Conrad supplies Marlow with a group of listeners who "reproduce a typical cross-section of [*Blackwood's Magazine's*] target-audience" – a "fraternity of professional men, all in their middle years" (xxxii). *Blackwood's* was targeted at "an upper-middle-class male audience" that

²⁵ In the same article, Hampson notes that profession designations in Wells's *The Time Machine* serve to authenticate the framed story ("Genie" 221). This could also be one of their additional functions in "Youth," if only a less important one, since Conrad's story, unlike Wells's, remains within the bounds of realism.

included “politicians, other Establishment opinion-makers, the clergy, military personnel and members of the gentlemanly professions;” the magazine had always represented “a High Tory paternalist strand of the conservative movement, resolute in its support for the British imperial endeavour, forward-looking in its economic policy and backward-looking in its respect for traditional authority” (Knowles xxxi; xxxii). Conrad peppers his description of Marlow’s audience with references to the kind of social status and political allegiance that were typical of *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* readership. For instance, the lawyer could represent that readership not only by virtue of his upper-middle-class profession, but also because he is specifically identified as “a fine crusted Tory” and a “High Churchman.” In Conrad’s time, the term “High Churchman” was associated with a political stance which basically involved hostility to anyone “who did not regard the Anglican church, the monarchy, the Tory Party and the landed gentry (Whigs excepted) as the backbone of England” (Knowles 434). In addition, there is mention of the famous naval training ship, the *Conway*, which evokes associations of excellence (cf. Watts, “Notes to HOD (2002)” 196; Lyon, “Notes” 302). Also, in this context, the narrator’s general nostalgia for “the good old days” may be regarded as a conservative quality.

Conrad’s choice of Marlow’s audience in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness” was obviously influenced by personal experience as well. It has long been known that Conrad had a group of friends similar to Marlow’s audience in these two stories, and that, in the early 1890s, they made excursions on the Thames in G. F. W. Hope’s yawl, the *Nellie*. However, as Stape and Knowles have recently discovered, there are more considerable differences between the “real-life” audience and the fictional one than had previously been assumed. They argue that while G. F. W. Hope was indeed a company director and the accountant W. B. Keen also belonged to this group, earlier scholarship mistakenly identified the source of the fictional lawyer as T. L. Mears (a lawyer). In fact, the correct model was almost certainly Edward Gardner Mears, who was a meat salesman (106-12; cf. 104-16, and Knowles 433). Conrad thus “devises a more consistent brotherhood of ‘gentlemanly’ professions higher up the social ladder than the grouping present aboard Hope’s yawl” (Stape and Knowles 114). This new piece of evidence supports the argument that Conrad’s rewriting in fictional form of certain events from his life was heavily influenced by his wish (or, indeed, his need) to appeal to a specific readership. Yet the problem of Conrad’s responsiveness in “Youth” to *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* ethos and of his relationship

to its readership is more complex than this, and I am going to explore it in more detail later in this chapter.

Since Marlow's fictional audience is described as so similar in background and attitude to Marlow himself, he can presuppose a general understanding of the narrative situation. As Gergen and Gergen remark, "personal narratives that have communicative value for certain audiences will be opaque to others" (176). In particular, Marlow can take familiarity with the sea for granted, and I agree with Richard Ambrosini that he does so throughout his tale (80). Marlow's narrative is convincingly presented as addressed to a group of like-minded people of similar background who are likely to respond positively to it. As Michael Greaney puts it, Marlow's tale is "sure to find an appreciative audience in this group of middle-aged veterans of the seafaring life" (64).

At several points in the text, Marlow addresses his audience directly, sometimes even stepping out of his account in the process. He does so not only to hold his listeners' attention, but also to control the way his story is received. James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium note that storytellers often shape the occasion and the circumstances of their narration; more relevantly, they also shape the narrative identities of their listeners by making them adopt their perspective and suggesting how their stories should be understood (107, 113-15). This is what Marlow seems to be doing by asking rhetorical questions such as the following: "Do you know what he [the captain] wanted next? Well, he wanted to trim the yards" (26). This address to the audience occurs just after Marlow has related that the captain's first thought after the explosion of the coal-dust was to look for the cabin table. By asking the rhetorical question, Marlow also asks his audience to share his view of the captain's behaviour as "mad" and "absurd" (26). At other points in the narrative, Marlow appeals to their shared professional background ("You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life . . ." [11]) or the fact that they belong to the same generation ("What could you expect? She was tired – that old ship. Her youth was where mine is – where yours is – you fellows who listen to this yarn. And what friend would throw your years and your weariness in your face?" [21]). This last quotation is also interesting because it displays a degree of fictional self-consciousness: by making Marlow refer to his own narration, Conrad subtly reminds us of the constructed nature of this self-narrative. A more mechanical reminder of the frame and of Marlow's narration is the repetitive use of the

imperative “Pass the bottle” (16, 18, 20, 24, 26). Critics have tried to interpret these continual references to drinking in several ways. Murray Krieger argued that Conrad tried to jar the reader – and Marlow his listeners – “out of the beckoning, tempting grasp of romance” by reminding us that what we are being told is “irrevocably behind us” (276; qtd. in Graver 73). Similarly, William W. Bonney has detected in Marlow’s drinking a wish that he were still young (25), and Paul Wake has suggested that Marlow’s “Pass the bottle” may express his sadness over the passage of time and mortality (31). These interpretations have much to recommend them, yet, as John Lyon has argued before, there is no getting away from the fact that Conrad uses these references to the bottle in a formulaic and rather uninteresting way (xvi-xvii).

Some of Marlow’s addresses to his audience (such as “You fellows”) give a good indication of the casual and conversational style of much of his narrative. Conrad unambiguously sets up Marlow’s narration as oral storytelling, which certainly owes something to William Blackwood’s preference for stories told from a first-person “picturesque point of view” (William Blackwood to Roger Casement, 4 September 1905, qtd. in Knowles xxxii). Conrad’s wish to appeal to the magazine’s readership is also the likely reason behind the use of the markers of genteel exclamation, such as in “By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure” (17; see Knowles xxxii, xxxiii). Nonetheless, Marlow’s style does occasionally turn poetic: “The sky was a miracle of purity, a miracle of azure. The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone, extending on all sides, all round to the horizon – as if the whole terrestrial globe had been one jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet” (23). Some contemporary reviewers objected to the poetic rhetoric in passages such as these; John Masefield, in particular, noted of a similar extract that it was “hardly the sort of thing a raconteur would say across the walnuts” (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 142; see also 136). One could argue that the rhetoric and the poetic style are a feature of what Albert J. Guerard called the Conradian voice (“Conradian Voice” 1-16), but, in “Youth,” they also serve to establish Marlow as somewhat more than a simple mariner.²⁶ This distinction is taken much further in “Heart of Darkness” and, although not evenly, kept up in *Lord Jim* and *Chance* as well.

²⁶ I will discuss the Conradian voice in Chapter 4.

A related issue to be addressed here is the uncertainty surrounding names and naming in “Youth,” both in Marlow’s and in the anonymous narrator’s tales. Marlow does not seem to remember precisely or to consider important some of the names that come up in the course of his narrative: “She [the *Judea*] belonged to a man Wilmer, Wilcox – some name like that” (12); “[t]hey shouted at us some name – a woman’s name, Miranda or Melissa – or some such thing” (15). As has often been noted (see, for example, Baines 212), such deliberate uncertainties serve mainly to emphasise the oral nature and the spontaneity of Marlow’s narrative. I also agree with Wake’s point that the deliberately imprecise use of names is meant to call attention to the narrative act and to the function and uses of language (27-28). The spelling of Marlow’s name too becomes an area of uncertainty when the anonymous narrator tells us at the beginning of the story: “Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story, or rather the chronicle of a voyage:–” (11). One may assume that a considerable temporal distance separates Marlow’s narration from its transcription by the narrator, but this does not fully explain the latter’s doubts about the spelling of his friend’s name. But *are* they friends indeed? Allan H. Simmons has rightly questioned whether Marlow is as integrated within this group as it might appear on first sight, suggesting that his audience perhaps identify more with the maritime tradition than with Marlow as a person and storyteller (“Art of Englishness” 22). It is a curious paradox that while the unnamed narrator apparently fully shares the values conveyed by the narrative, all he says about its teller is that his name is probably spelt Marlow.

Although (or, perhaps, precisely because) Marlow’s relationship with his listeners is not very close, his narrative is clearly designed to appeal to and engage them. I have argued that he succeeds in doing so in spite of the fact that the hero of his narrative is his own younger self. In fact, of all the Marlovian narratives, “Youth” is the only one that can be termed autodiegetic – in none of the others is Marlow such an active participant in the events he recounts, none is concerned to such an extent with what happened to him personally. And yet, in a further paradox, it is also in “Youth” that Marlow uses the first person plural “we” with (by far) the greatest frequency. A careful look at pronominal reference in the short story reveals that around forty per cent of the first-person personal pronouns used by Marlow are plural (“we”), while the remaining sixty per cent are singular (“I”). These data reflect the

importance placed in his tale on the adventures that the crew of the *Judea* go through collectively. Whenever Marlow uses “we,” he is not concerned with his own impressions of the events, but mainly with the events themselves, as they happened to the crew. The frequent use of “we” thus also indicates that he very much wishes to see himself as part of a community: “[T]here we all were, Jermyn, the captain, everyone, hardly able to keep our feet, engaged on that gravedigger’s work and trying to toss shovelfuls of wet sand up to windward. . . . One of the ship’s boys (we had two), impressed by the weirdness of the scene, wept as if his heart would break. We could hear him blubbing somewhere in the shadows” (13). This seems to suggest that the ship’s boys are not regarded as a proper part of the community on board the *Judea*. Yet the question to whom exactly the “we” refers is not as relevant to “Youth” as it is to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* The important point to make here is that even though the Marlow of “Youth” tells a story that is dominantly about his own experiences, he is at the same time the least individualized of all his incarnations in the Conrad canon.²⁷

2.3. Young Marlow and middle-aged Marlow

If the previous section focused on Marlow’s relationship with his audience, the present one aims to explore his attitude towards his former, younger self. I have made reference above to Ricoeur’s term “discordant concordance” to describe Marlow’s understanding of the relationships between the events or time periods in his life. The most important features of the narrative that establish concordance between the young and the middle-aged Marlow, or, technically speaking, between the narrated I and the narrating I, are the latter’s nostalgia for his youth and the fact that his views have apparently not changed significantly ever since. On the other hand, the discordance between Marlow’s two selves is caused by the sheer temporal distance that separates them, as well as by the occasional irony and humour with which Marlow as narrator looks back on his narrated I. Scheibe, referring to Eclea Bosi’s 1979 study,²⁸ notes that old people tend to view their childhood with pleasure and warm nostalgia, however miserable it actually was. The reason for this is probably that youthful perceptions of the world, fresh and full of adventure as they often are, comprise the fundamentals of the life story and are thus “carried forward into

²⁷ I will provide further evidence for this claim in the chapters to follow.

²⁸ Eclea Bosi, *Memoria a sociedade* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1979).

the present as something valuable” (Scheibe 145). The Marlow of “Youth” is not old even as he tells his story, and the story is not about his childhood experiences; yet his nostalgia for his youth parallels that of many old people for their childhood: “O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it! To me she [the *Judea*] was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight – to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret – as you would think of someone dead you have loved. I will never forget her. . . .” (17-18). As we know from the anonymous narrator’s comments in the final paragraph of the text, these nostalgic feelings for youth and the sea are shared by all of Marlow’s listeners.

The quotation above also provides evidence that, in some important respects, Marlow’s character has not changed considerably in the twenty-two years that have passed between the actual events and their telling. He still wishes he were young, calling his voyage in the *Judea* (and, more generally, his youth at sea) “the best time” of his life (39). He admits that he has not learnt much since those days and that he still strongly dislikes Jermyn, the North Sea pilot on board the *Judea*: “It seems to me I knew very little then, and I know not much more now; but I cherish a hate for that Jermyn to this day” (13). Also, Marlow says that he still prefers Frederick Burnaby’s *A Ride to Khiva* (1876) to Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1836), both of which he read for the first time when, still in England, the crew had to wait for a month for the ship to be loaded with cargo (14). As Gergen and Gergen point out, there are progressive-regressive narratives that describe the self as increasing in maturity of judgment, while they also entail “the contrary perception of a reduction in youthful impetuosity” (175). Marlow’s tale in “Youth” displays few of the characteristics of this type of self-narrative, which becomes even more obvious when one examines the use of focalization in the text.

A narratological analysis of “Youth” shows that a considerable part of Marlow’s narrative is told strictly from his younger self’s perspective, that is, the focus coincides with his narrated I. According to Genette’s theory of narrative, the dominant mood here is thus internal focalization,²⁹ which places emphasis on the events of twenty-two years ago and young Marlow’s immediate impressions of those events. Marlow the narrator makes sure that his listeners can put themselves into the

²⁹ For Genette’s definitions of the different types of focalization, see footnote 10 above.

position of his narrated I, that they can perceive the events as he once perceived them, not least because he wants to keep up suspense. Nowhere is this to be observed more clearly than in a passage Ian Watt has quoted as an example of “delayed decoding” – a narrative device he regards as typical of Conrad, one that “combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning” (*Nineteenth Century* 175). The passage in question, of which I only quote the most relevant part here, describes Marlow’s impressions of the explosion of the coal-dust:

I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent up breath released – as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo! – and felt a dull concussion which made my ribs ache suddenly. No doubt about it – I was in the air, and my body was describing a short parabola. But short as it was, I had the time to think several thoughts in, as far as I can remember, the following order: “This can’t be the carpenter – What is it? – Some accident – Submarine volcano? – Coals, gas! – By Jove! we are being blown up – Everybody’s dead – I am falling into the after-hatch – I see fire in it!”
(25)

The last few lines of this excerpt, put in quotation marks, represent the purest form of internal focalization, taking us directly into the young Marlow’s mind as he is trying to make sense of what is happening to him. Watt argues that there is nothing arbitrary in this since we are in Marlow’s mind throughout the story (*Nineteenth Century* 176), but this is not entirely true. As I have pointed out above, Marlow also uses the plural pronoun “we” with some frequency, in which case we are not, strictly speaking, in the mind of his younger self. Focalization in most of these passages may still be classified as internal, but the reader is taken into the consciousness of the crew as a whole, rather than into that of an individual. In addition, there are some extracts – particularly those in which Conrad uses poetic language in descriptions of landscape (see the example above) – where focalization is more accurately characterized as external. Although their style reflects the mature Marlow’s (and Conrad’s) idiom, even such passages do not rely on the narrating I’s subsequent knowledge. The fact that Marlow’s tale, compared to many autodiegetic narratives, draws relatively little on his subsequent knowledge as narrator is a symptom of its

concern with adventure as opposed to abstract ideas. Also, it may take some authority away from the ironic narratorial comments Marlow makes at the expense of his younger self.

The irony and humour with which Marlow sometimes treats his narrated I cause a degree of discordance in the narrative. It is worth calling to mind Genette's point that the difference in age and experience that potentially separates the narrating I from the narrated I can authorise the former to treat the latter with condescending or ironic superiority (*Narrative* 252). In spite of the temporal distance of twenty-two years between the events and their telling, however, this is not the case in "Youth." Middle-aged Marlow's self-irony is always gentle – he is able to smile affectionately at his youthful deeds: "We tried everything. We even made an attempt to dig down to the fire. No good, of course. No man could remain more than a minute below. Mahon, who went first, fainted there . . . Then I leaped down to show how easily it could be done. They had learned wisdom by that time and contented themselves by fishing for me with a chain hook tied to a broom-handle . . ." (24). Occasionally, when directed at others, Marlow's humour can also become wry. In particular, there are those typical Marlovian similes that we find in "Heart of Darkness," *Lord Jim* and *Chance* as well – such as describe the mate of the *Somerville*, the steamer that attempts to tow the burning *Judea* to port, as "[a] little man, dry like a chip and agile like a monkey" (28). Ambrosini suggests that the mature Marlow's ironic commentary "has a greater narrative authority than the young Marlow's impressionistic account," even if the "two narrations" interwoven eventually cannot be separated (82). Certainly, the narrating I's ironic comments are generally more authoritative and can undermine the narrated I's opinions and perceptions, but the important point here is that the two perspectives are hard to separate in "Youth." The narrating I does not distance himself clearly and consistently from the narrated I; Marlow's irony and self-irony are not strong enough to create significant discordance between the perspectives of his two selves. Greaney correctly points out that in spite of Marlow's irony, "there is a degree of sentimental desperation in his rekindling of the spontaneous exuberance of youth" (62). I have argued above that the fact that the young Marlow sees himself as having heroically overcome all difficulties on his voyage is central to his conception of self. But it is also a key element in the narrative identity of the mature Marlow, who would not be what he is now without the experience of twenty-two years ago. The main goal of his narrative is to present

that experience as coherent with the story of his life, and to do so in a way that will appeal to the specific audience he is addressing.

3. The question of identity: Conrad and the reader

3.1. The *Blackwood's* context

Conrad too, as has been mentioned earlier, was aware of addressing a specific audience when writing “Youth.” This short story marks the true beginning of his association with the Blackwood publishing house and its monthly, *Blackwood's Magazine* – an association that must have been desirable for him for several reasons. Writing for *Blackwood's* rather than for the open market, Conrad did not need to worry about placing his stories himself and had access to a wide and well-defined readership. It also provided him with a relatively steady income, which was crucially important for the rather inexperienced professional author who, in 1898, was still entertaining the idea of earning his living as a seaman. In addition, Conrad was at that time trying to gain clarity about who exactly his audience were and to develop his “English” literary identity. He was now able to do so partly because the publishing house, recognizing his talent, granted him unusual freedoms; his choice of subjects and methods was not limited, and, as his stories grew longer than expected, the delays in submitting copy were treated with patience. Furthermore, the Blackwood house and its journal were long-established and renowned, with an appeal that also had a personal and social basis. William Blackwood (1836-1912), the founder's grandson and editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, was a gentleman-publisher who, like a father-figure, presided over the family firm and its circle of authors (Knowles xxviii-xxxiv; Najder, *Life* 240-41, 247; Finkelstein “Decent Company” 29-47). As Donovan, Dryden and Hampson point out, his Blackwood connection also provided Conrad with an “entry into elite literary networks in Britain” (5). Last but not least, Conrad shared some of the values of the Blackwood house, such as solidarity, male camaraderie, loyalty and a certain pride in British traditions (Knowles xxx).

It is not entirely surprising, then, that in his first story written for *Blackwood's Magazine*, Conrad did his best to match the expectations of its editor and readership. As his works both before and after “Youth” make very clear, he was far from being “more conservative than Maga.” In this context, it may suffice to think of the critique he gives of colonialism and imperialism in works such as “An Outpost of Progress”

(1897) and “Heart of Darkness” (1899). Even though most of the criticism in these works seems to be directed at Belgian imperialism rather than imperialism in general, Conrad’s position on these issues here is surely more cosmopolitan and liberal, as well as more complex, than the one he adopts in “Youth.” As Knowles remarks, “Youth” is, of all of Conrad’s *Blackwood’s* tales, “the most responsive to its ethos and target-audience” (xxxii). Conrad’s letters provide evidence that in late 1897, before writing “Youth,” he studied some issues of *Blackwood’s Magazine* and made artificially flattering comments on them to William Blackwood. He even praised beyond all measure the work of Margaret Oliphant, a novelist Zdzisław Najder describes as “mediocre,” and whose official history of the Blackwood publishing house had just appeared in print (*Life* 247; *CL1* 379-80). It is also worth remembering that Conrad changed his original intention of dedicating the *Youth* volume to his friend, the socialist R. B. Cunninghame Graham, out of consideration for Blackwood’s Tory sensibilities, and eventually chose his wife Jessie as dedicatee (Knowles 431; *CL2* 165). The efforts Conrad made to please Blackwood and to conform to the ethos of the magazine in “Youth” are reminiscent of the publication context of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* Serialized just about a year before “Youth” (August-December 1897) in the *New Review*, the novella shows several signs of having been written with the aim to appeal to the editor, W. E. Henley, and to the latter’s literary circle. Peter McDonald has argued that with *The Nigger*, Conrad “made a determined bid to secure what he reckoned to be his ‘natural’ position in the literary field of the 1890s,” producing “an avant-garde, impressionistic novella and a reactionary political allegory oriented to a specific purist literary circle, review, and, above all, editor” (66). One may well disagree with the extent to which McDonald stresses the part played by conscious design or even cold calculation, as opposed to Conrad’s artistic convictions, to account for various aspects of the novella. Yet, from McDonald’s argument and my own, it is clear that both *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and “Youth” are in many ways responsive to the values of the magazine in which they first appeared in print.

In 1911, many years after the publication of “Youth,” Conrad wrote nostalgically about *Blackwood’s Magazine* to his literary agent, J. B. Pinker: “One was in decent company there and had a good sort of public. There isn’t a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn’t its copy of *Maga* . . .” (*CL4* 506). As Conrad’s remarks indicate, “*Maga*” also had a

wide colonial and military readership, which partly explains the editor's preference for essays and stories about British overseas territories. Most welcome were tales told in the first person which combined an exotic quality with a focus on features of the "national character" (Knowles xxxii; see xxxi-xxxii). It is essays and tales of this kind that constitute the "decent company" in which "Youth" first appeared in the September 1898 issue of *Blackwood's*. Immediately following "Youth," for instance, is a long anonymous paper on the principle of individual endeavour in business entitled "The Company and the Individual." The author makes a case against "turning into companies enterprises which, by their nature, are the proper matter for personal labour and achievement" because this threatens "the greatness of England." The English people, the author argues, have attained such greatness because the quality of individual endeavour has always characterised them to a greater extent than it has any other nation: "Indeed this belief that only what he does himself will avail him, and therefore it must be thoroughly done, is so highly developed in the Englishman that some of its manifestations make him a marvel to other peoples" ("Company" 348, 335; see 334-35). Nationalistic sentiments of this kind were frequently expressed on the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Equally typical were stories such as "An Orkney Foray," which also appeared anonymously alongside "Youth" in the September 1898 issue. A short and simple tale of adventure at sea told in the first person, "An Orkney Foray" has, apart from its lack of an exotic setting, everything *Blackwood's* readers may have desired. It is narrated by one of the members of a small group of pirates and describes in a rather cheerful tone how they plunder the local population of the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland: "We were three in a 5-ton yacht when we sailed out of Kirkwall bay to explore the islands of Orkney and prey upon the people. . . . Uninvited plunderers of honest folk as we intended to be, it still seemed to us advisable (since piracy is at best an uncertain profession) to have some provisions of our own aboard" ("Orkney" 375). As slight a story as "An Orkney Foray" is, especially in a magazine that had published most of George Eliot's novels and went on to publish "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, it forms part of the "company" Conrad sought in order to become a Blackwood author.

The fact that *Blackwood's Magazine* published two more of Conrad's Marlow tales after "Youth," both of which challenge many of its cherished values, is

evidence of the freedoms he was given as a house-author.³⁰ In this light, Conrad's attempts to adjust his literary identity to the *Blackwood's* context in "Youth" may seem exaggerated or even unnecessary. Yet the question of literary identity is a complex one, a matter of both external expectations writers have to meet and of their internal needs. As Laurence Davies writes, speaking of Conrad's early works published between 1895 and 1900: "Conrad hoped to make a living; he hoped to write fiction that would live up to his creative desires; he also hoped to become a literary presence. A literary presence grows from self-awareness as much as reputation, from seeing oneself in print. In creating or sustaining a literary presence, authors are neither entirely free agents nor entirely creatures of circumstance" ("Early Stories" 9). The creation of a literary presence in the late nineteenth century in particular, Davies goes on to argue, was "a formidable challenge," deviousness being "a condition of the game" in which "[w]riters, publishers, composers, readers, and all the other actors in the literary world" were locked together. For Conrad, "a literary presence required adopting a repertoire of masks" ("Early Stories" 9, 10). Writing his first story for *Blackwood's Magazine*, Conrad certainly did adopt one of these masks in an attempt to secure all the benefits that came with being a house-author. He even overplayed his role a little, creating an image for himself that was highly compatible with Blackwood values. He may have felt that he needed to do so before he could afford to deviate from that image, as he did very clearly already in his next work for the firm, "Heart of Darkness." In the following section, I will look at more examples of how the narrative of "Youth" reflects its publication context and consider the ways in which Conrad's adopted literary identity affects his relationship with the reader.

3.2. Nationalism, Orientalism and the reader of "Youth"

The nationalistic sentiments so frequently expressed in *Blackwood's Magazine* find an echo in Conrad's "Youth." Speaking of the disciplined work of his fellow English seamen in the face of fire on board, Marlow takes pride in what he believes is the superiority of the English merchant service over that of other nations:

What made them do it – what made them obey me when I, thinking consciously how fine it was, made them drop the bunt of the foresail

³⁰ In this context, see also Watts, *Literary Life* 83-84.

twice to try and do it better? What? They had no professional reputation – no examples, no praise. It wasn't a sense of duty; they all knew well enough how to shirk and laze and dodge – when they had a mind to it – and mostly they had. Was it the two pounds ten a month that sent them there? They didn't think their pay half good enough. No, it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting. 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. (29)

The nationalism and, indeed, the racism of this passage are obviously highly objectionable to most educated readers of today, but would not have been so to contemporary readers of *Blackwood's Magazine*. In 1902, when the *Youth* volume was published, one reviewer declared, immediately after quoting the last few lines of the extract above, that the narrative did “something to enlarge our conceptions of heroism” (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 135). Todd G. Willy goes as far as to say that in “Youth,” Conrad makes Marlow “a narrator with whose politics [William] Blackwood and the majority of his English subscribers could identify without any hesitation whatsoever” (48). Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that the *Blackwood's* serial version of the story is even more politically incorrect than later editions of the text. Where, for instance, the first English book edition as well as the Cambridge Edition cited above simply read “a French or German merchantman,” the *Blackwood's* text has “a vulgar French or German merchantman” (“‘Youth’ in *Blackwood's*” 323; Willy 46n). Interestingly, the manuscript also lacks the attribute “vulgar” (Knowles 334n), which may imply that, at some point between finishing the manuscript and English serial publication, Conrad changed his original intentions to make his text even more congenial to his target-audience. The nationalism of “Youth” is by no means more aggressive than that of the average article or story in *Blackwood's*. Even so, Conrad here acts as a “purveyor of comforting myths,” as Chinua Achebe famously accused him of doing in “Heart of Darkness” (784). In

“Youth,” Conrad’s identification with the ultra-Conservative ethos of the magazine, which was supposedly shared by its readership, produces a simple but effective narrative. However, he achieves this only at the cost of sacrificing his artistic integrity as well as positioning his readers ideologically.

The ideology that “Youth” espouses calls on its readers to identify with it, irrespective of whether this was or was not Conrad’s intention. As Louis Althusser put it in his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” all ideology “*hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (173). I have argued that Marlow’s tale is concerned mainly with adventure as opposed to abstract ideas, but this does not mean that it does not endorse an ideology; ideology in literary texts is rarely made as explicit as in the passage quoted above. According to Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, the literary text, although it appears “as if offered for interpretations, a free choice,” is in fact “the privileged agent of ideological subjection.” It “enables individuals to appropriate ideology and make themselves its ‘free’ bearers and even its ‘free’ creators” (96; cf. Currie 35-40). Conrad’s own search for a literary or narrative identity in “Youth” necessarily entails the manufacture of readers’ identities. Marlow is the main vehicle of identification in the text in more than one sense. First of all, although Marlow cannot with any certainty be taken to represent Conrad’s private views, he *is* a particular narrative version of the author. The character of Marlow, in “Youth” and elsewhere, owes less to Conrad’s personality and more (among other factors) to how he wished to be perceived by his readership. The Marlow of “Youth” is thus a persona, largely the result of Conrad’s temporary identification with particular values for particular purposes. Secondly, because his perspective is dominant and remains unquestioned throughout the narrative, Marlow is the character with whom readers are most likely to sympathise as well as identify. Some readers, as has been mentioned, would have found identification with his views easier than others. Yet, in the sense described by Althusser and Balibar and Macherey, every reader is affected by the ideology of Marlow’s narrative.

There is biographical evidence to support the claim that the Marlow of “Youth” is a narrative version of his creator. The story is largely based on Conrad’s own adventures in the *Palestine*. In his letters, he described “Youth” as a “bit of life—nothing more,” called it “a thing intimately felt,” and said that a “genuine” and “strong” feeling had induced him to write it (CL2 91; 375; 92). However, in the story

Conrad modified several details of his actual voyage, and the way in which he did so is revealing. Some of these changes allowed him to dramatize the real events into the kind of romantic saga narrative I have discussed above. Conrad makes young Marlow's adventures appear more perilous as well as more prolonged than his own, emphasising the fictional character's perseverance, heroism and boldness. For instance, the crew of the *Palestine* made only one attempt, and not several as that of the *Judea*, to leave Falmouth after the repairs. Secondly, in reality, when the crew had to abandon the ship because of the fire, they were already near shore, so that there was no need to "[knock] about in an open boat" for "sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as a cinder," as Marlow says in his narrative (35). Also, young Marlow is around four years younger than Conrad was at the time of his voyage in the *Palestine*, which further emphasises the thematic opposition between youth and middle age (Najder, *Life* 89-95). But, as Najder has shown, the most revealing modification Conrad made concerns the crew. Whereas in "Youth," Marlow describes the crew as exclusively English, consisting of "Liverpool hard cases" who had in them "the right stuff" (27), the crew of the *Palestine* was multinational. There was, in fact, nobody from Liverpool in the ship, but "[f]ive men came from Cornwall, one from Ireland, and the remainder were foreigners—an Australian, a Negro from the Antilles, a Dutchman, and a Norwegian" (Najder, *Life* 94). In this light, the nationalism of the long passage quoted above, where English sailors are praised for possessing "something inborn and subtle and everlasting" that "makes racial difference," appears particularly studied. As Knowles puts it very aptly, the tale thereby "fashions a national and patriotic myth around the sea, men of the sea, the values of seamanship associated with the British Merchant Service and, more obliquely, around the expansion of Empire" (xxxvii).

Marlow's preference – both as a young seaman and as a middle-aged narrator – for Frederick Burnaby's popular and adventurous *A Ride to Khiva* over Thomas Carlyle's philosophical work *Sartor Resartus* also has some important implications. It not only strengthens the tale's emphasis on physical action and adventure as opposed to consciousness and ideas, but it also associates Marlow (and, by implication, Conrad's authorial persona) with a particular political stance. Hugh Epstein has argued that, for both Burnaby and Marlow, "life is fraught with obstructions to be overcome; [*A Ride to Khiva*] too is a story of not being able to get started." Epstein has also suggested that "Burnaby's informed and comparatively

ironic persona can be read back as an oblique commentary upon the naive enthusiasms of young Marlow” (11). Burnaby’s book, then, may have provided a model for Conrad that he self-consciously adapted and transformed for his own purposes. However, Todd G. Willy has argued in a very different vein that “the first English readers of Conrad’s ‘Youth’ . . . were signaled by the text to read it as an endorsement of bellicose Conservative imperialism,” and that the reference to Burnaby was one of these signals (40). Burnaby was an officer in the Royal Horse Guards and a journalist, a Conservative and a supporter of monarchy in general and of the British Empire in particular. *A Ride to Khiva*, which is a travelogue as well as a political tract that outlines Burnaby’s views on several questions of British foreign policy of the time, was certainly familiar to most *Blackwood’s* readers. By making Marlow refer to Burnaby and endorse his views, Conrad might have been trying to appeal to their tastes more than he was voicing his own opinions (Willy 39-50, especially 41-43; Knowles 435n).

Another author the young Marlow (probably) reads is Lord Byron: it is mentioned that he buys “a complete set of Byron’s works” on a trip to London, while the *Judea* is being repaired in Falmouth (20). Theodore R. Sarbin, in his essay “The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology,” comments on how people tend to construct identities and self-narratives for themselves out of their readings as well as “imaginings stirred by orally told tales or by the direct or vicarious witnessing of the actions of role models” (17). Sarbin specifically mentions Byron as somebody who depended not so much on his reading but on “his fertile imagination to create a self-narrative,” and who then sought “ratification of his identity through romantic and heroic exploits” (17). The Marlow of “Youth,” as I have pointed out above, very likely draws inspiration from his readings – which include Burnaby and probably also Byron – to construct his identity and self-narrative. Marlow’s listeners and Conrad’s readers, in their turn, could be argued to construct identities for themselves partly out of the imaginings stirred by Marlow’s oral narrative.

Owing to the influence of Edward Said’s work, professional readers today are also likely to associate Byron’s name with Orientalism. Andrea White, drawing on Said’s insights in *Orientalism* in her discussion of “Youth,” argues that Byron was among those writers who “contributed to building the Orientalist discourse that Marlow appears to have so readily consumed” (*Adventure Tradition* 169). Indeed,

there are several examples of Orientalism in Marlow's narrative, two of the most typical of which are cited below:

There was all the East before me, and all life, and the thought that I had been tried in that ship and came out pretty well. And I thought of men of old who, centuries ago, went that road in ships that sailed no better, to the land of palms, and spices, and yellow sands, and of brown nations ruled by kings more cruel than Nero the Roman and more splendid than Solomon the Jew. (21-22)

And then I saw the men of the East – they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come to them from the sea. Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. . . . This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. And these were the men! (38)

Since several critics before me, especially Todd G. Willy and Christopher GoGwilt, have commented on the imperialist and Orientalist rhetoric of such passages, I do not wish to explore these issues in detail here. GoGwilt calls attention to how Marlow's discourse "reproduces the naming, fixing, and controlling of stereotypes of the East that are entirely characteristic of what Edward Said has called Orientalism" (17). "The" East for Marlow is a homogeneous, unchanging, dangerous but fascinating place. It is interesting to note that there is hardly any difference between his description of the East in the first and the second passages, even though one refers to the time before and the other to the time of and after his first encounter with it. By evoking (in the first extract) the "men of old" who travelled to these exotic lands "centuries ago," Marlow sounds like the less than subtle anonymous frame narrator of "Heart of Darkness," who at the opening of the novella speaks fondly of "all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin" (21, 44). In addition, Willy notes the implication in the same passage from "Youth" that the original rulers "deserved to be displaced by the early European colonists

inasmuch as the native kings were even more evil than a degenerate Roman emperor” (46). Robert Hampson also discusses Marlow’s Orientalist rhetoric in the story but adds that the second passage above, in its reversal of the direction of the imperial gaze (“they were looking at me”), “briefly registers the fact of Asian agency and contains possibilities of critical self-questioning” (*Cross-Cultural Encounters* 8; cf. 7-8).

The simplified Orientalist rhetoric of Marlow’s narrative in “Youth” probably has little to do with Conrad’s own views of Malays and the Malay Archipelago. As GoGwilt has correctly pointed out, such rhetoric reflects “a deliberate adjustment to the literary market of Empire and colonialism” (18). Yet some contemporary reviewers of the *Youth* volume were easily deceived by it, with one of them praising the short story for bringing out “the colour, the atmosphere of the East . . . as in a picture” (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 136). In an attempt to identify with the values of his readership, Conrad made use of what Mark Currie has called “the constitutive role of the Other in the identity of anything” (89). The homogenised East in the story appears as the Other against which Marlow, in the manner of true British imperialists of the late nineteenth century, defines himself. (More accurately, perhaps, Marlow’s Orientalist rhetoric is one of the means whereby Conrad sets him up as a pro-imperialist English Conservative.) While Conrad’s (and Marlow’s) complicity in the imperial enterprise is beyond doubt, the question remains whether it was really necessary for him to adjust his literary identity to *Blackwood’s* values so obtrusively. In the previous section, I have mentioned that in spite of enjoying unusual freedoms with the Blackwood firm, he possibly felt that he needed to establish his reputation with them first before he could make his own critical voice heard. It would appear that just as Marlow’s narrative is designed to appeal to and engage his audience, so “Youth” as a whole is designed to win the favour of Conrad’s *Blackwood’s* readers.

Conrad, as a foreigner and fledgling author, was more obviously separated from his English readership than the English seaman Marlow is from his audience of ex-sailors, but, as I suggested earlier, their relationship does not seem very close either. That is perhaps partly because even the Marlow of “Youth” possesses more subtlety than the members of the community to which he would like to belong. Marlow thus reflects both Conrad’s wish to be accepted and his limited success in finding acceptance. In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that in his first story written for *Blackwood’s Magazine*, Conrad goes to great lengths to adjust his literary

identity to the (perceived and real) demands of publication, producing an ideologically laden text that interpellates contemporary and present-day readers alike. The need to adopt various masks to suit the tastes of different editors and readers must have further complicated Conrad's already complex and uncertain cultural and personal identity. Also, I have attempted to show that although "Youth" is a fairly simple story, it reflects self-consciously on this very process of identity formation through narration. The basic form of the narrative itself – the frame, Marlow's dramatized storytelling – entails possibilities of fictional self-consciousness, but Conrad utilises those possibilities mainly by making the tale follow closely the pattern of a self-narrative of the romantic saga type. In his next and best-known Marlow tale, however, Conrad takes his self-conscious engagement with narrative identity to a new and much higher level.

CHAPTER THREE

Kurtzian Identities in “Heart of Darkness”

To say that “Heart of Darkness” is a highly self-conscious text may seem like stating the obvious. A great number of critical commentaries have focused on its self-referential qualities, its engagement with questions of epistemology, language and narrative. Many of these studies contend that in “Heart of Darkness,” Conrad gives a negative answer to these questions, dramatizing the ultimate unknowability of the Other and even of ourselves, the failure of language, or the impossibility of storytelling. In different ways and with different emphases, such arguments have been put forward perhaps most notably by Tzvetan Todorov, Peter Brooks and J. Hillis Miller.³¹ “Heart of Darkness” certainly lends itself to such interpretations, but it seems to me that they tend to exaggerate its solipsistic and proto-postmodernist implications.³² I will argue that in addition to Conrad’s undoubted distrust of language, the novella also shows his awareness of its value and necessity. More specifically, I will argue that “Heart of Darkness” demonstrates Conrad’s awareness of how narrative can be used to create an at least seemingly coherent identity, which helps Marlow cope with his traumatic experience. Also, Conrad here is interested in how the stories we tell others about ourselves – our self-narratives – can revolve around another human being.

As in the previous chapter, I will also consider the publication of the text under discussion in *Blackwood’s Magazine* and briefly draw on Conrad’s journey to the Congo as its biographical basis. However, these considerations will be less important to my discussion in the present chapter. “Heart of Darkness” is a far more complex and artistically satisfying work than “Youth.” In the novella, Conrad was able to exploit the full potential inherent in his narrator Marlow for exploring the important philosophical issues that preoccupied him in his own life. While both aspects are

³¹ Todorov, “Knowledge in the Void;” Brooks, “Unreadable Report;” Miller, *Poets of Reality* and “Revisited.” It is interesting to note that even Ian Watt makes a similar (although less radical) claim in his detailed appraisal of the novella in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1979). Watt, speaking of the impressionism of “Heart of Darkness,” comments that the novella “embodies more thoroughly than any previous fiction the posture of uncertainty and doubt,” adding that “one of Marlow’s functions is to represent how much a man cannot know” (174).

³² Fine examples of studies that focus on but do not overemphasize the self-consciousness and self-referentiality of the text include Jeremy Hawthorn’s *Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness* and Michael Greaney’s *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*.

relevant to both texts, one might say that Conrad's focus now shifted from adjusting his literary identity to the demands of publication to a dramatization within the text of the general process of identity formation through narrative.³³

1. The narrative structure and dynamics

1.1. The narrative opening

"Heart of Darkness" famously opens with an anonymous extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator's description of the *Nellie*'s anchoring in the Thames Estuary at dusk. As it soon turns out, he is identical with the extradiegetic narrator of "Youth," just as the four other men on board the cruising yawl are those the reader has already encountered in the earlier short story. Cedric Watts has pointed out that the sentence "Between us there was as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea" (Conrad, *Youth* 43) is an instance of the transtextual characterisation of the listeners of the two tales (Watts, *Deceptive* 141).³⁴ There is even grammatical evidence for this. While in "Youth," there were "a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer," in "Heart of Darkness" all of them are referred to by the definite article, as persons already introduced into the discourse (11; emphasis added). In addition, their names are spelt with capital letters (43-44). As a further reminder of the continuity between the two tales, the narrator refers to the "Lawyer" as "the best of old fellows," echoing the phrase he used earlier in "Youth" (43; 11). It is also interesting to note that in "Heart of Darkness," the narrator does not repeat his comments from "Youth" on the careers of the Director, the Accountant and the Lawyer, nor does he add any new information on them. In several ways, then, the opening of Conrad's novella harks back to the earlier short story and presupposes familiarity with it. This is not to place great demands on readers of the *Youth* volume (1902), in which the two stories are reprinted adjacent to each other and can easily be compared.³⁵ However, the original *Blackwood's* texts of both "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness"

³³ When writing about Marlow's self and identity in "Heart of Darkness," most critics focus on his actions as character in the story, whereas my investigation in this chapter, in accordance with the topic of this thesis, centres on his act of narration. See, for example, Todorov, "Knowledge in the Void;" Levenson, *Fate of Individuality* 1-77; Erdinast-Vulcan, *Modern Temper* 91-108; Armstrong, "Reading, Race."

³⁴ All references to "Heart of Darkness" are to the Cambridge Edition of *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether*.

³⁵ Originally, Conrad had planned the volume to include "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, but the latter eventually grew into a novel and had to be published separately (Najder, *Life* 287-88; *CL2* 167, 271n).

show the same textual and orthographic details that I have mentioned above (“‘Youth’ in *Blackwood’s*” 309; “‘The Heart of Darkness’ in *Blackwood’s*” 193). In this context, the fact that five months separate the publication of “Youth” (September 1898) from that of the first instalment of “The Heart of Darkness” (February 1899) raises interesting questions of readership, audience and narratee that I will examine later in this chapter.

In “Youth,” the extradiegetic narrator does not provide any description of Marlow, in spite of the fact that the latter emerges as the central character of that story. We can only infer his personality from his storytelling. As if to make up for this neglect, the narrator of the later novella gives us at least the following short character description: Marlow, sitting “crosslegged right aft, leaning against the mizzen mast,” had “sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol” (43-44).³⁶ A little later, the narrator adds that Marlow was the only one of the group who still “followed the sea,” but that he “did not represent his class,” being both a seaman and a “wanderer” (45). Thus, Marlow, except for his “propensity to spin yarns,” was not typical. But even his storytelling is atypical in that, to him – so runs the oft-quoted passage – “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” (45). If read against the background of “Youth,” this suggestive and generalising description is revealed as (in part) an attempt to gloss over the considerable differences between the Marlow of that story and the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness.” In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that in “Youth,” Marlow’s own narrative is much like that of the seamen described here, with its relatively straightforward meaning being “inside like a kernel” or “within the shell of a cracked nut” (45). Marlow’s narrative in the novella, however, is indeed well served by the anonymous narrator’s proleptic description, which alerts us to the fact that the tale that follows will not be simple and reassuring. Watts notes that, in

³⁶ At the end of the novella, the anonymous narrator remarks in a similar vein that Marlow sat apart “in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (126). Cedric Watts has argued that Conrad’s purposes in comparing Marlow to an idol and to a Buddha are partly ironic since Marlow is a ‘Buddha’ wearing European clothes, lacks a lotus-flower and, as the sceptic he is, “offers no road to Nirvana.” Nonetheless, “like the Buddha Gautama, Marlow teaches by means of paradoxes; he warns of the perils of the appetites; and he indicates the impermanence and possible illusoriness of the phenomenal world” (“Notes to HOD (2002)” 201).

the bare facts of career, the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness” has biographical continuity with the Marlow of “Youth,” but is essentially very different in character. Whereas in the earlier story, Marlow is “a relatively simple fellow: a sociable forty-two-year-old,” in the later novella he “has an enigmatic apartness: he’s *in* the group, but not exactly *of* it; and he seems more intelligent, more intense, more circumspect; a man who has suffered more; homo duplex, the man of contrasting extremes, of paradoxical temperament” (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 27). This is a very fitting characterization of Marlow, but I would suggest, as I have done in the previous chapter, that he is not quite *of* the group in “Youth” either. Yet, as I shall go on to argue, it is certainly true that he is much less so in “Heart of Darkness.”

It is conspicuous that by the time Marlow starts his narrative, the complex symbolic dualism between light and darkness, which many critics have noted, is already established. Conrad cleverly uses the extradiegetic narrator’s discourse to begin to subvert the traditional symbolism, and he does so in a way that suggests that the rather unsubtle narrator is not fully conscious of the implications his words carry.³⁷ Within the framework of James Phelan’s rhetorical theory of narrative, one would have to say that in these passages, the disclosure functions of the extradiegetic narrator are foregrounded as opposed to his narrator functions, and that the implied author of “Heart of Darkness” manages to communicate more complex meanings to the authorial audience indirectly than the narrator can communicate to the narratee directly (cf. *Living to Tell* 1-30, esp. 12-13). The narrator then goes on to indulge in patriotic generalisations, painting an idealized picture of the glorious past of the British Empire, which he associates with the River Thames.

The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled: the great knights errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the *Golden Hind* returning with her round flanks full of treasure,

³⁷ For the light-darkness symbolism, see, for example, Ian Watt, *Nineteenth Century*, esp. 214-17, 249-53; and Cedric Watts, *HOD: Critical Discussion*, esp. 6-15, 31-35. As Watt points out, the traditional meanings associated with black (bad) and white (good) are intermingled already when, for instance, the narrator describes the “torch” of civilisation as coming from “within the land,” which has already been shown to be dark (*Nineteenth Century* 215; cf. Conrad, *Youth* 43-45).

to be visited by the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests – and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith, the adventurers and the settlers . . . Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires. (44-45; 2nd ellipsis in orig.)

This overly enthusiastic account of British imperialism bears some resemblance to the kind of discourse by which Marlow's aunt gets carried away, and which Marlow later describes as the "rot let loose in print and talk just about that time" (53). Also, to some extent, it links the narrator with Kurtz and his eloquent rhetoric.³⁸ But a person reading this passage for the first time may be led to believe that the views expressed therein are representative of the author's. Watts comments that such a reader may thus smile either "approvingly at the romantic tribute to the Thames's past" or with "complacent superiority," depending on whether he or she is sentimental or sceptical; but both of these smiles "will shortly be erased by Conrad" (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 34).

In addition, as Watts points out, the chances that the first-time reader "will be hoodwinked into false security" by these narratorial remarks are increased "by avoiding quotation-marks and by using a pluperfect tense which equivocates between

³⁸ Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that while the anonymous narrator's account represents popular British historical discourse, Marlow's aunt is impressed by the Belgian press. A good example of such historical discourse is found in the work of the British writer Arthur Mee. The following passage on Deptford from Mee's *London: Heart of the Empire and Wonder of the World* (1937) sounds very similar to the anonymous narrator's account cited above, even though the book was published decades after Conrad's novella: "Deptford must have been a lovely place when the Golden Hind came home after sailing round the world, when Queen Elizabeth went on board to knight Sir Francis Drake and dine with him on the ship. Then the banks of the Thames were as green as the great green flags which flew on the Golden Hind that day, the flags that we have seen in Drake's home down in Devon" (833). Marlow's aunt in "Heart of Darkness," on the other hand, echoes the view of imperialism as civilising work expressed in the Belgian papers when she talks about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (53). It should be noted that Kayerts and Carlier in Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress" do very much the same. They find old copies of a "home paper" that speaks in high-flown language of "the rights and duties of civilisation, of the sacredness of the civilising work," extolling the merits of those who go about "bringing light, and faith, and commerce to the dark places of the earth." As a result, the narrator tells us, they begin to "think better of themselves" (*Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* 9).

direct and reported speech.” Watts uses the German term “*erlebte Rede*” to describe this technique (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 34), which is better known today in the English-speaking world as free indirect discourse or FID. We know that this passage is actually a case of speech presentation because, at the beginning of his narrative, Marlow refers back to the anonymous narrator’s use of the word “knights” in the following terms: “Light came out of this river since – you say Knights? Yes, but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds” (46). It should be noted that the extradiegetic narrator’s words represent an unusual case of FID, not only because he is, as it were, quoting himself, but also because they are not recognizable as having been uttered aloud to the group of men on the *Nellie* before we read Marlow’s subsequent comment. In fact, the high-flown style of the passage, and the narrative situation itself, make it very unlikely that the narrator as character pronounced the same words on that particular occasion. All we know is that at least part of his reflections on the River Thames and on “the men of whom the nation is proud,” including the word “knights,” were also uttered aloud in some form.

The anonymous narrator of “Heart of Darkness” cannot be regarded as a reliable guide to the values held by the implied author. His comments on British imperialism cited above are indicative of a type of unreliability that Phelan terms *misreading*, which occurs when the narrator provides a biased or wrong interpretation of an event, character or situation due to lack of knowledge, perceptiveness or sophistication (*Living to Tell* 49-53). There is, however, no reason to suppose that the narrator misrepresents the basic facts of the frame story. I agree with Jakob Lothe’s point that the narrator’s main role in the novella is as “reliable transmitter of Marlow’s narrative.” In addition, as Lothe has argued persuasively, the striking simplicity of the frame narrator’s opening remarks is not generally characteristic of the whole novella. He does qualify his views as a result of Marlow’s narrative and becomes more subtle both in attitude and insight. Conrad dramatizes this learning process, and the reader is “manipulated into a kind of response which resembles, or is at least influenced by, that of the frame narrator” (*Narrative Method* 29; cf. 23-29). An example of the way in which the narrator is affected by Marlow’s narrative is his contrasting characterisation of the latter’s tales and the yarns of seamen, which reveals a certain insight into the sombre African story that follows; another example is provided by the narrator’s concluding remarks, where he employs some of the same imagery that Marlow himself used in his tale: “The offing was

barred by a black bank of clouds and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” (126; cf. Lothe, *Narrative Method* 26-29).

As these examples demonstrate, it is not only Marlow whose incarnations in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness” are different – the anonymous narrator does not seem to be quite the same in the two texts either. By the end of the novella, he has become wiser, less nostalgic and less enthusiastic about imperialism. But while the change in Marlow is very conspicuous and thematically significant, in the anonymous narrator it seems to be merely a function of the text’s greater complexity and darker tone. In both “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness,” the narrator is more of a device for Conrad to manipulate the responses of the reader than a fully formed literary character. His narrative style, especially in “Heart of Darkness,” bears traces of the Conradian voice. This may be another reason why first-time readers, not yet alerted against the dangers of eloquence problematized later on in the novella, can initially take his views to be representative of the author’s. (One might find the narrator’s occasionally poetic and eloquent style unrealistic, arguing that an ex-sailor wouldn’t use such language. However, such criticism needs to be qualified by the fact that his narrative, unlike Marlow’s, is a written one.) The narrator’s personal identity is vague and of no great importance to either text. Yet it is of some significance to Conrad’s concern with narrative identity that whatever we know about the anonymous individual can only be inferred from his own storytelling. There is a sense in which he does not exist outside and independently of his act of narration. In “Heart of Darkness,” he is a voice among other voices (Marlow, Kurtz, Conrad) that are all disembodied in one way or another. The most disembodied voice of all is certainly Conrad’s own. Although one often feels the presence of a human being behind this voice, it remains elusive and cannot be identified with the voice of any of the text’s narrators or characters.

If the anonymous narrator’s personal identity is of little relevance to the novella, his group identity is all the more important. In the previous chapter, I have already noted that his use of personal pronouns in self-reference offers textual evidence for this. In both “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness,” the narrator uses the first person plural “we” much more frequently than the singular “I.” In “Heart of Darkness,” he refers to himself as “I” only three times (excluding cases of speech presentation), as opposed to nine instances of the plural “we.” In addition to being

the transmitter of Marlow's narrative, the anonymous narrator is important mainly in his capacity as a member of the audience, of that fairly homogeneous group of middle-aged ex-sailors with upper-middle-class professions.³⁹ As has also been mentioned in the last chapter, this group represents a cross-section of *Blackwood's Magazine's* typical readership. In this context, the narrator's sentence "Between us there was as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea" acquires an additional layer of meaning. Strictly speaking, the narrator addresses this sentence to the narratee, or, in Genette's terms, the extradiegetic narratee (while the intradiegetic narratee is Marlow's audience on the *Nellie*; cf. *Narrative* 259-60). The clause "as I have already said somewhere" clearly refers to "Youth." However, the reference is not only to the fictional universe described in "Youth," which is largely consistent with that depicted in the novella. It is also, necessarily, to the short story of that name by Joseph Conrad. Because both the extradiegetic narrator and the narratee are part of the fictional narrating situation, the fact that the former evokes the extra-fictional, real world of publication and assumes that the latter is familiar with it could be said to represent a (perhaps atypical and hardly noticeable) case of metalepsis.⁴⁰

Even though Conrad's use of the metalepsis in the example above is inconspicuous, it has several implications. First of all, since only a flesh-and-blood author could be aware of the extra-fictional world of publication, the illusion is created that the anonymous individual is Conrad himself. Non-professional readers, unfamiliar with the distinction between "third-person" (extradiegetic-heterodiegetic) narrators and authors, are particularly likely to give in to this illusion. Some misreadings of the text may in fact result from a failure to distinguish clearly between Conrad the author and the extradiegetic narrator. A likely example of this is an unsigned review of the *Youth* volume in the *Manchester Guardian*, in which the author remarks of "Heart of Darkness": "It must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes attack upon colonisation, expansion, even upon Imperialism" (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 135). The use of the metalepsis suggests that Conrad deliberately encouraged such misreadings, probably in order to make his text, at least on the face

³⁹ Although the narrator's current occupation is not mentioned, his position within the group would seem to suggest that it is similar in social status to that of the Director, the Accountant and the Lawyer.

⁴⁰ Genette provides the following basic definition of what he calls *narrative metalepsis*: ". . . any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse . . . [which] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical . . . or fantastic" (*Narrative* 234-35).

of it, more acceptable to the average reader of *Blackwood's Magazine*. At the same time, the text offers plenty of signs which discourage the more perceptive reader from identifying Conrad with the anonymous narrator. As the novella progresses, the anonymous narrator's unreliability and Marlow's greater subtlety and authority become increasingly evident. For instance, when read against Kurtz's initial idealism (as evidenced in his pamphlet) and his later brutality, the anonymous narrator's romantic account of the Thames's past, and particularly his reference to "the torch" and the "spark from the sacred fire," appear completely out of touch with the truth of the colonizing mission. Also, as Watts has pointed out before, these particular words may, on a second reading, recall Kurtz's painting of the blindfolded woman carrying a torch (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 34-35). But the implication that Conrad and the anonymous narrator are identical has another important consequence: it diverts the reader's attention away from the similarities that exist between Marlow and Conrad. This is an important consequence because, while Conrad is not identical with either the narrator or with Marlow, he shares far more similarities with the latter. As I shall go on to argue, unveiling any direct correspondences between himself and his narrative persona could have been awkward for Conrad because of his involvement in a dubious imperial enterprise in the Congo.⁴¹

A second and related illusion is that the events narrated are real rather than fictional. While this illusion may have made the novella more appealing to a certain readership, it also made it more important for Conrad not to be identified with Marlow. Given what we know about Conrad's Congo experiences, the assumption that "Heart of Darkness" is a factual account is not wholly mistaken.⁴² In the 1917 Author's Note to the *Youth* volume, written many years after the novella's first publication, Conrad acknowledged that it was to some extent based on personal experience, characterising it famously as "experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case" (6). However, one must also remember that in the same Author's Note, Conrad was keen to distance himself from Marlow, countering claims that Marlow was the author's "personator" (5).

Thirdly, contemporary readers, especially of the *Blackwood's* serial text (published as "The Heart of Darkness"), could have felt that they were in good company, that they were being addressed by a fellow *Blackwood's* reader. David

⁴¹ See section 3 below.

⁴² See Najder, *Life* 145-65.

Finkelstein has argued that the Blackwood firm created “a distinctive identity for itself within national and international boundaries,” inviting authors and readers into “this invisible Blackwoodian ‘community’ or ‘ecumene’” (*House of Blackwood* 16). To support his argument, Finkelstein, among others, also quotes Conrad and the Irish man of letters Stephen Gwynn describing what it meant for them to write for *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Conrad, in his letter to Pinker from 1911 that I have also cited in the previous chapter, evoked the “decent company” and the “good sort of public” he had enjoyed as a “Blackwood” author. Gwynn, in a 1923 article for the *Irish Statesman* about the craft of writing, noted that *Blackwood’s Magazine* had an atmosphere of its own that resulted from the combined influence of the editor, the readers and all the writers. He felt “part of a society” and, when writing for that “society,” he knew in a general way what would interest it (Finkelstein, *House of Blackwood* 111-12 and “Decent Company” 29-31). Thus, it is likely that contemporary readers of “The Heart of Darkness” felt addressed by one of their kind and understood the reference (“as I have already said somewhere”) as being to the short story published on the pages of *Blackwood’s Magazine* five months earlier. Readers of the *Youth* volume, in contrast, would have interpreted this remark by the narrator as a reference to the story that immediately preceded “Heart of Darkness” in the same volume. (Self-evidently, both statements are true only if one assumes that these readers were actually familiar with “Youth” – as, for instance, regular readers of *Blackwood’s Magazine* probably were.)

1.2. Senders and receivers

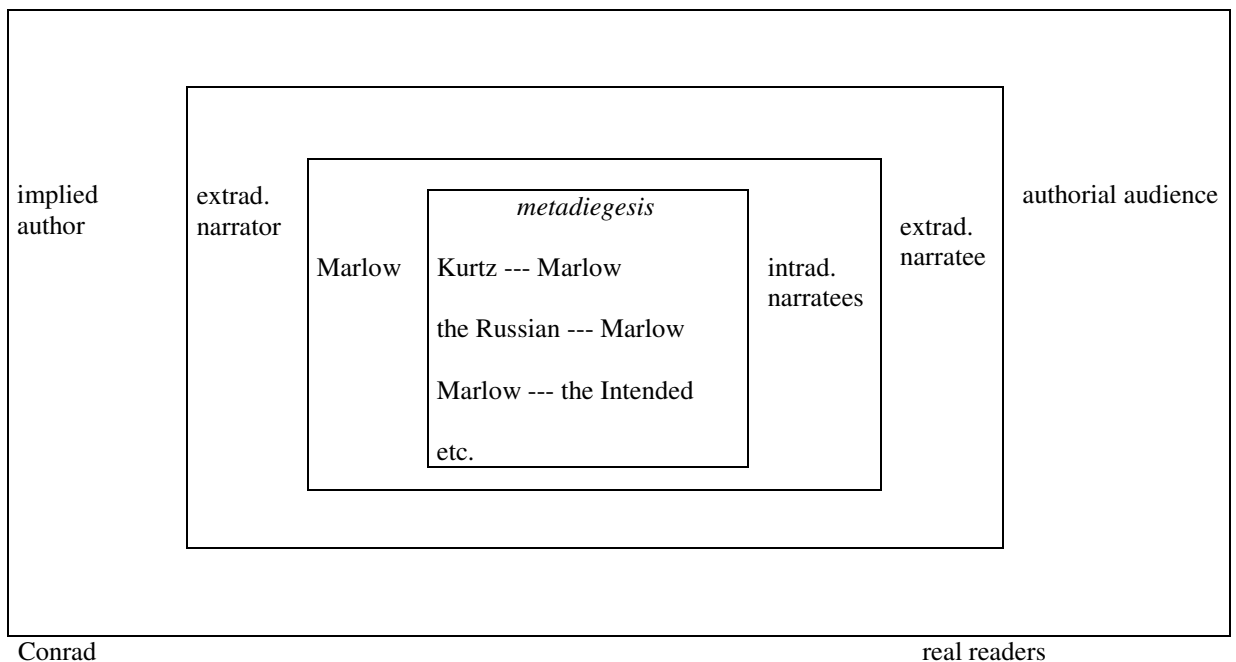
In the previous section, I have made reference to various instances of senders and receivers in “Heart of Darkness,” but at this point it is necessary to devise a communication model that is best suited to my discussion of the text (see diagram below). I am aware of adding my own model to the innumerable others that have been suggested before by different commentators.⁴³ However, most models have focused attention on the senders and the stories within the story, while the receivers or addressees have been insufficiently considered. My own approach is based mainly on James Phelan’s rhetorical theory of narrative, which treats character narration as

⁴³ By “models,” I mean both schematic diagrams of the novella’s narrative structure and less explicit assumptions about the senders and receivers in the text on which critics have based their analyses. See, for example, Peter Brooks, “Unreadable Report” 83, 86n; Lothe, *Narrative Method* 22-24; L. J. Morrissey 141-48.

an art of indirection. The art, as Phelan points out, consists in “the author’s ability to make the single text function effectively for its two audiences (the narrator’s and the author’s, or to use the technical terms, the narratee and the authorial audience) and its two purposes (author’s and character narrator’s)” (*Living to Tell* 1). The fact that “Heart of Darkness” is a framed tale with two character narrators (as well as other characters who briefly become storytellers) complicates the picture. At the most outer, extratextual level, Conrad as flesh-and-blood author wrote the novella, at least in part, with *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* readership in mind. His real or flesh-and-blood readers certainly correspond to some degree to this target-audience, but they also include all kinds of other readers across time. The textual level in this diagram begins with the specific implied author that Conrad used in “Heart of Darkness.” This implied author constructs the text for what Phelan calls the authorial audience, which is a term synonymous with the implied reader. The authorial audience, as I have noted before, is a hypothetical audience who understands the text perfectly. Non-technically and somewhat imprecisely, we could also say here that Conrad wrote the novella not only for a specific, contemporary readership, but also for a more subtle group of readers across time who are best able to understand all its nuances. As Cedric Watts notes, relying on the correspondence with William Blackwood, Conrad not only wrote for a market but also, consciously, for “an attentive posterity” (*Literary Life* 84; see also 74-84). Yet there were attentive contemporary readers too. In the *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Conrad*, Knowles and Moore suggest that Conrad, at key points in the writing of “Heart of Darkness,” may have had his friend Cunninghame Graham in mind as his ideal reader (164). Watts described Graham as Conrad’s “secret sharer,” a man with whom he had more in common, “temperamentally and ethically,” than with any of his other literary correspondents, and “whose conflicting political conclusions derived from similar moral premises within a similar vision” (Introduction to *Conrad’s Letters to Graham* 6).

At the next level, the frame narrator or extradiegetic narrator addresses an extradiegetic narratee. This narratee is not represented as a character and remains unspecified. As a textual construct and as the addressee of the not completely reliable extradiegetic narrator, he is to be distinguished both from the real reader and from the authorial audience. In the same way, and in spite of Conrad’s playful use of metalepsis that I have discussed above, the extradiegetic narrator is different from Conrad as real author as well as from the implied author. This narrator’s tale then

opens up another level, that of the intradiegetic narrative. Marlow as intradiegetic narrator addresses his intradiegetic narratees, his audience on the *Nellie*: the Director, the Accountant, the Lawyer and the anonymous narrator (who, in his function as character, is intradiegetic). In Marlow's narrative, in turn, there are various metadiegetic characters, some of whom – most importantly, the Russian harlequin and Kurtz – may be said to become storytellers themselves. From a purely narratological perspective, they differ in status from the other two narrators (the anonymous individual and Marlow), but thematically they are very important as well. In this broader sense of the word, even Marlow becomes a “narrator” within his own narrative in his conversation with the Intended. All of these short narratives also have a corresponding addressee: the Russian and Kurtz address Marlow, while Marlow addresses the Intended.



As the diagram and my comments above suggest, I consider “Heart of Darkness” to be a highly complex and layered text in which communication takes place at various different levels. This complexity alone, however, cannot fully explain why it is sometimes so difficult to distinguish between the particular instances of senders and receivers. Another reason for the difficulty we encounter is that some of these instances converge in terms of group identity or class. In the previous chapter, I have already noted that *Blackwood's Magazine* was targeted mainly at a conservative,

upper-middle-class male audience, and that Conrad deliberately chose such an audience for Marlow in “Youth.” The same listeners (intradiegetic narratees) appear in “Heart of Darkness,” but they share their social status and political allegiance with other senders and receivers in the communication model. They certainly do so with the extradiegetic narrator, who as a character belongs to this group of listeners. The extradiegetic narrator’s discourse then constructs an extradiegetic narratee of similar background, one who is assumed metaleptically to be a *Blackwood’s* reader familiar with “Youth.” At the extratextual level, Conrad’s immediate target-audience, *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* readership, could also be mentioned in this context. In the diagram above, this group would form a subgroup of what I have called Conrad’s real readers. Representing all these instances of senders and receivers as typical *Blackwood’s* readers seems to serve a double function. By doing so, Conrad was able to appeal to his immediate target-audience while at the same time throwing Marlow’s remarks on imperialism into sharper relief.

A third reason why the individual senders and receivers are at times hard to differentiate could be what Cedric Watts called the principle of entanglement or the “tentacular” effect. Watts seems to be using both terms synonymously to describe the novella’s quality to tempt us into giving specific interpretations of its motifs and themes, only to defy those interpretations by presenting factors that contradict them. In “Heart of Darkness,” Watts argues, there are “curious parallels between events within the fictional realm and events in the realm of reader-response” (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 2). A related aspect of entanglement is the way in which the novella suggests surprising connections between seemingly very different characters, while its “tentacles” also reach out to entangle the reader. To illustrate his point, Watts draws a useful comparison between “Heart of Darkness” and “An Outpost of Progress.” The narrative technique of the earlier short story makes it tempting for the reader to identify with the “superior, sardonic, omniscient narrator” and thus to look down on “the benighted masses” as well as on the mediocre central characters Kayerts and Carlier “from an Olympian height.” In contrast, “Heart of Darkness” truly entangles the reader by making Kurtz a unique and far more talented character than Kayerts and Carlier, a character who, in spite of having been corrupted, entangles in his destiny “the apparently sound and decent” Marlow, who in turn entangles the reader by means of the tale’s “very complex oblique narrative

opening.” Indirectly, then, the reader is eventually entangled with Kurtz (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 30; 31).

Another interesting example of entanglement Watts provides concerns the listeners of Marlow’s tale on board the *Nellie*, especially the Accountant. He argues that on a second reading, the Accountant of the opening will remind the reader that Marlow later encounters a corrupt accountant in the Congo (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 32).⁴⁴ Conrad, Watts says, makes the reader wonder “about the relationship that may exist between the characters of the outer narrative and the inner.” The important word, the signal, is “bones”: The accountant on the yawl had brought out his ivory dominoes, toying with the “bones.” On a second reading, the word “bones” may suggest a “significant degree of complicity between the respectable men of the outer narrative and the corrupt men of the inner.” This is so because bones feature so often in the novella: Fresleven’s bones, the bones of corpses and the bones of dead elephants, that is, the centrally important ivory. Watts asks: “If humans are murdered so that ivory can be exported to make playthings for civilised gentlemen, are not those gentlemen accessories, however remote, after the fact of murder?” (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 32). I would add that, as Watts’s argument seems to suggest, this is also a way of entangling the reader, as he or she – and, especially, readers of *Blackwood’s Magazine* – may well identify with the respectable gentlemen on board. It should also be noted that the “grand piano” (122) in the Intended’s drawing room evokes associations with ivory, even though Conrad does not make the connection explicit. In the nineteenth century, including the time of Conrad’s Congo experience, ivory from elephant tusks was used for several purposes; among others, it was shaped into piano keys (Hochschild 64). It is thus quite likely that the keys of the Intended’s piano were made of ivory, and that Conrad uses this subtle hint to add another facet to her entanglement with Kurtz.

2. Marlow’s narrative identity

In this section, I will examine the role different characters or groups of characters play in Marlow’s narrative identity.

⁴⁴ Surely, we are much more likely to make this association because of Conrad’s use of profession designations instead of proper names for both accountants. In “Heart of Darkness,” then, the vocational convention serves another important function in addition to those I have suggested when discussing the same phenomenon in “Youth.”

2.1. Marlow and his audience: collective and individual identity

Before embarking on his narrative of his African journey, Marlow makes the following disclaimer:

“I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,” he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear, “yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap.” (47)

Marlow’s eagerness not to take centre stage in his narrative is justified to the extent that he is not the hero of his own tale, but, just like Kurtz, one of its main characters. In Genettean terms, one could say that while Marlow’s narrative in “Youth” was autodiegetic, in “Heart of Darkness” it is merely homodiegetic. Also, since Kurtz clearly plays a central role in Marlow’s narrative identity throughout his tale, foregrounding him at this very early stage does make some sense. However, the fact that he sympathetically calls the brutal Kurtz “the poor chap” is an early indication of the contradictions within him that his tale reveals and, partly, explores. The unnamed narrator’s interpretation of Marlow’s disclaimer as “the weakness of many tellers of tales” is misleading. I would argue that Marlow makes a deliberate attempt to stay in the background because he is less than comfortable with his own involvement in the events he goes on to recount. He wishes to talk about the “effect” these events had on him rather than about his own actions, as if he had been no more than an impartial observer. Paradoxically, as I shall go on to argue, his tale can also be read as a confession, a problematic reengagement with an awkward and disturbing past experience.

The extract I have quoted above also offers insights into Marlow’s relationship with his audience. The anonymous narrator considers Marlow an atypical and even weak storyteller, as somebody who tends to recount his “inconclusive experiences,” the meaning of which remains vague like a “misty [halo]” (47; 45). It is evident from the start that Marlow will be telling his tale to listeners who cannot fully understand him, to a group to which he does not quite belong. Watts correctly points out that, in “Heart of Darkness,” Marlow becomes more intelligent than in “Youth” because of “his sense of possibly adverse comment from the group,” while Conrad becomes

more intelligent because of “his readiness to conceive of him [Marlow] as a character within a credibly diverse group of characters” (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 39). In “Youth,” Marlow was able to tell his narrative without any interruptions from his audience, but in “Heart of Darkness,” his relationship with the very same group is somewhat strained. The reason for this is not only that Marlow is presented as a more enigmatic and intelligent character than they are, but also that the tale he tells them undermines many of their deep-seated beliefs and prompts uncomfortable self-examination. The following passages provide examples of how the tale achieves this effect and of the responses this provokes from Marlow’s audience:

“When you have to attend to things of that sort [navigation of the steamboat], to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell you – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same, I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tightropes – for – what is it? – half-a-crown a tumble—”

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice; and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

“. . . I beg your pardon. I forgot the heart ache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter if the trick be well done. You do your tricks very well. . . .” (77-78; 1st ellipsis in orig.)

“The other shoe went flying unto the devil-god of that river. I thought— By Jove! It’s all over. We are too late. He [Kurtz] has vanished . . . I will never hear that chap speak after all . . . I couldn’t have felt more of lonely desolation somehow had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way – somebody? Absurd! Well, absurd. Good Lord! musn’t a man ever— Here, give me some tobacco.”

. . .

“Absurd!” he cried. “This is the worst of trying to tell . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal – you hear – normal from

year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be – exploded!

Absurd!” (92-93; 3rd and 5th ellipses in orig.)

In the first extract, Marlow's reference to “monkey tricks” and “tightropes” questions the value of any profession or human activity, including his own and that of his listeners, in the light of the deeper realities of existence. His remark is certainly tactless, and he basically withdraws it as a result of the comment from the audience. But the comment is probably provoked less by the tone of Marlow's remark than by its unsettling implications. In the second passage, Marlow tells his listeners how, immediately after the natives had attacked the steamboat and killed the helmsman, he flung a pair of shoes overboard out of nervousness and was preoccupied with the thought of not being able to hear Kurtz talk. When someone from the audience calls this behaviour “absurd,” Marlow goes on to challenge their assumptions and complacency in a more radical fashion than in the previous extract. He reflects on the difficulty of telling this tale to people who have not experienced what he has experienced. The well-known reference to the butcher and the policeman calls attention to the fact that rational and civilized behaviour are not underlying qualities of European gentlemen but are socially conditioned and enforced. Both Marlow's listeners and the reader are made to ponder this uncomfortable insight, so that their identities are directly affected by his narrative.

These passages, however, also illustrate the opposite process: how reactions from Marlow's audience to his tale affect his narrative identity. Clearly, the listeners play a more significant and active part in this than they did in “Youth.” The first extract above has shown how Marlow as narrator sometimes has to make concessions to them, whereas the second gives an example of the way in which an adverse comment on their part makes Marlow defend his position and articulate it more precisely. He then turns the tables on them, positioning his listeners in order to control the reception of his story, as narrators often do in oral storytelling (cf. Holstein and Gubrium 115). Marlow's narrative identity, then, is to some extent the result of an exchange between him and his audience. I do not share Paul B. Armstrong's view that there is a lack of reciprocity between Marlow and his listeners, that there is almost only “the bare minimum of exchange necessary to keep Marlow's monologue in motion.” Armstrong's point is all the more surprising because, in terms of reciprocity, he contrasts “Heart of Darkness” unfavourably with

“Youth,” noting that in the latter, Marlow and his audience reach a consensus about the meaning of the tale (“Reading, Race” 443; 442-44). That consensus, however, is too easily reached. A tale that makes the listeners question their complacent world view seems greatly preferable to one which essentially only confirms it. Yet I would argue that, while it is important for Marlow to negotiate his narrative identity with his audience and to have it verified by them (at least partially), it is even more important for him to *tell* his story, whether or not there is an attentive audience to listen and respond to it. This is suggested by the fact that most of his listeners may have fallen asleep during his narrative, and that, as it gets dark, he is not seen any more, just heard (70, 77). All we know for certain is that the anonymous narrator, even though he may not fully understand Marlow’s narrative, is awake and listening attentively, and that he deems it worthy of transmission in writing: “I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative” (70).

An analysis of Marlow’s use of personal (and indefinite) pronouns throws light not only on his relationship with his audience, but also, more generally, on the problem of collective and individual identity in “Heart of Darkness.” In the previous chapter, I noted that the Marlow of “Youth” uses “we” with great frequency, with around forty per cent of the first-person personal pronouns in his narrative being plural, and the rest singular (“I”). In “Heart of Darkness,” the proportion of the two pronouns used by Marlow differs considerably, with almost ninety per cent being singular and only ten per cent plural. This is interesting especially in light of the fact that Marlow’s narrative in the novella is less focused on what happened to him personally than it is in “Youth.” However, his choice of personal pronouns in self-reference is not directly indicative of how important a role he plays as character in the story. It tells us more about whether he sees himself as an individual or as part of a group or community. In “Youth,” Marlow’s narrative was concerned mainly with physical action, with the adventures of the crew; he saw himself above all else as acting as part of the ship’s community. In “Heart of Darkness,” Marlow is less important as character, but as narrator he constantly describes his impressions of what happened to or around him, as well as the thoughts these events evoke in him. When he does use the plural “we,” it is especially in the following cases: when relating his experience of travelling on board a ship or boat, particularly the

steamboat he navigates on the Congo River (“We were going half-speed . . .” [97]);⁴⁵ when speaking as one of the white Europeans to whom the jungle and the Africans appear incomprehensible (“We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth . . . cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings . . .” [79]); when speaking as a man to the men on board the *Nellie* about women in general (“They – the women I mean – are out of it – should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own . . .” [93]); and when making philosophical statements (“We live, as we dream – alone . . .” [70]).⁴⁶

The rare use of the plural “we” suggests that Marlow does not generally feel a sense of community with any group of people whom he encounters in Africa. The examples of “we” belonging to the first two categories show his temporary (and surely only partial) identification with a ship’s or boat’s crew and with white Europeans, respectively. The other instances of “we” do not directly relate to the events of the story but are narratorial comments. In addition to demonstrating Marlow’s tendency to generalise about men and women or about existence, they also tell us something about his relationship with his audience. The indefinite pronoun *one* and the generic *you* have a similar function – they are used by Marlow in generalisations, but with the additional purpose of involving his audience and gaining their sympathy (“You lost your way on that river as in a desert . . . There were moments when one’s past came back to one as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself . . .” [77]). Such generalisations and philosophical statements from Marlow are much more frequent than in “Youth.” As I have suggested above, the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness” is far more thoughtful and self-reflexive than the Marlow of “Youth.” But even more importantly for my argument, what pronominal reference proves is that in the novella Marlow has become a true individual. Michael Levenson has convincingly argued that one of the great questions Conrad asks in “Heart of Darkness” is how an individual human being can “preserve moral autonomy within the collective forms of social life” (*Fate*

⁴⁵ In fact, most instances of the plural “we” used by Marlow fall into this first category.

⁴⁶ An examination of the possibly racist representation of Africans in “Heart of Darkness” would be only marginally relevant to (and is beyond the scope of) this thesis. What is important for the purposes of the present study is to note that Africans generally feature as the unknown and unknowable Other in Marlow’s narrative identity. However positive Marlow’s view of some Africans is, as opposed to most white European characters, his interaction with them is very limited. He can only choose to ally himself with the Manager and the “pilgrims,” on the one hand, or with Kurtz, on the other. Choosing an African to side with does not offer itself as an alternative. There are also parallels between the role of Africans and that of women in Marlow’s narrative that cannot be explored in this study.

of *Individuality* 33). Similarly, Holstein and Gubrium have found that a “shared discourse of identity . . . could work as much to threaten the self as to positively define it” (117). Marlow is well aware of the dangers of a shared discourse of identity, yet he cannot help but identify with the remarkable Kurtz.

2.2. Marlow, Kurtz and “Heart of Darkness” as confessional narrative

Paul Copley argues that Kurtz embodies a tension in imperialism between Christian, civilized, egalitarian impulses and an impulse to commerce, exploitation and annexation of territory. The fragmentation of Kurtz’s identity, Copley adds, dominates “Heart of Darkness” (124-25). The novella, he goes on to argue, dramatizes “the increasing early-twentieth-century concern that human identity is not unified and coherent;” in particular, “the Western repression of ‘primitive’ voices” demonstrates that “belief in the power of narrative to create an unassailable authoritative identity is unfounded” (129, 134). These points are central to my investigation of the problem of narrative identity in the novella. Although it is indeed Kurtz’s identity that is the most fragmented, Marlow too struggles with such fragmentation in the centre of Africa, as well as in his retelling of his experiences on board the *Nellie*. His narrative, which revolves around the figure of Kurtz, is an attempt to come to terms with these experiences, an attempt at creating a unified and coherent identity. Copley’s last point would seem to suggest that such an attempt is doomed to failure. In this sense, I do not agree with Copley because I think that Conrad’s view of the power of narrative is not quite so pessimistic. However, Copley’s argument does not necessarily conflict with mine since his relates especially to grand narratives, such as the narrative of imperialism, rather than personal narratives or self-narratives like Marlow’s. In fact, Ricoeur, whose concept of narrative identity informs my discussion of the Marlovian texts, argues that the coherence a narrative creates is not absolute but dynamic. For him, people ceaselessly re-interpret the narrative identity that constitutes them; a narrative understanding of ourselves is “the only kind of understanding that escapes the pseudo-alternative of pure change and absolute identity” (“Life: A Story” 437). Grand narratives create the illusion of absolute identity, but Marlow’s act of narration, which takes place at a particular time and in a particular location, is no more than a re-interpretation of the narrative identity that constitutes him.

Kurtz's role in Marlow's narrative is so dominant that it is possible to talk about Marlow's "Kurtzian" identity. Indeed, Marlow conceives of his entire journey as a journey towards Kurtz, pointing out that for him, the steamboat "crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively" (78). By extension, his narrative itself can be understood in similar terms, as a journey towards whatever Kurtz may be interpreted as representing. The main reason why Marlow is drawn to Kurtz and chooses him over the Manager and the pilgrims is that he considers Kurtz a remarkable man, remarkable especially for having something to say and for being able to express it so eloquently in speech. He believes that whereas Kurtz's last words – "The horror! The horror!" – represented a summing up, a judgement, he himself would probably have had nothing to say in the face of death (117-18). In this context, it should also be noted that, immediately after the attack on the steamboat, Marlow's greatest worry is that Kurtz may have died already, so that Marlow may never hear him talk, after all: "I was cut up to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes! I heard more than enough. And I was right too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice" (93). This passage must be read against the anonymous narrator's earlier remark that Marlow, in his turn, was no more to his listeners in the darkness "than a voice," and that his narrative "seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river" (70). As several critics have pointed out, Marlow's narration has uneasy affinities with Kurtz's discoursing.⁴⁷

Speaking of the importance of Kurtz for Marlow's narrative, Peter Brooks claims that Marlow's own story has become narratable only in relation to Kurtz's, and that for Marlow to detach his story from Kurtz's would be to admit that "his narrative on board the *Nellie* is radically unmotivated, arbitrary, perhaps meaningless" ("Unreadable Report" 73; 80). I agree with the first part of Brooks's claim but not with the second. Marlow's tale indeed coheres around a "Kurtzian" centre of gravity, yet it would not be completely unmotivated without him. In relating his African experiences to his listeners, Marlow has to reengage not only with his loyalty to Kurtz, but also, more generally, with his involvement in the imperial enterprise and the exploitation of the natives. I would argue that Marlow's

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Todorov, "Knowledge in the Void" 372-73; Bonney 203; Miller, "Revisited" 241.

self-narrative is a covert confession.⁴⁸ The reason for his eagerness to stay in the background and to put Kurtz in the foreground of his narrative is not that otherwise it would be unmotivated and meaningless, but that he is not capable of making an awkward direct confession of his complicity in the events related. In fact, Marlow does not appear to embark on his narrative with the deliberate intention of admitting his complicity in any form, even though it is precisely his problematic experience that compels him to tell his story. Only as he ventures more deeply into the telling does his narrative assume the air of a confession. “Heart of Darkness” presents Marlow’s narration as a process and not as a finished product; we see narrative identity in the making, continuously being interpreted and reinterpreted.

“Heart of Darkness” is certainly not an archetypal confessional narrative but incorporates features of several different genres. Cedric Watts has described it as “a mixture of oblique autobiography, traveller’s yarn, adventure story, psychological odyssey, political satire, symbolic prose-poem, black comedy, spiritual melodrama, and sceptical meditation” (“Heart of Darkness”: *Cambridge Companion* 45). In what sense and to what extent, then, is Marlow’s narrative a confession? In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, Peter Brooks makes a number of important points about confessional narrative. Confession, Brooks argues, implies that the speaker or writer “wishes or even needs to reveal something that is hidden, possibly shameful, and difficult to articulate.” The confessional tradition in fictional narrative often dramatizes a narrator who tells us something “that he or she might in normal social circumstances prefer to keep hidden – and has perhaps hitherto kept hidden.” Brooks also points out that the confessional narrator may be self-deceptive, so that the reader may find that he or she does not confess “the whole or the pertinent truth.” Another problem with confession is that while it is “predicated on self-awareness and the search for self-knowledge,” there is no ultimate truth about the self. The work of Sigmund Freud, Brooks adds, confirms the lessons of both fictional and autobiographical confessions: “that the self is not wholly transparent to itself” and that “the explanatory stories it tells about its condition and self-definition can be lies as well as truths” (“Confessional Narrative”).

⁴⁸ Critics who read Marlow’s narrative in “Heart of Darkness” as confessional in nature include Jerome Meckier and Ermen van Pletzen. While Meckier argues that by confessing his lies to his listeners, Marlow is reinstated as an “utterly reliable” narrator (373), van Pletzen provides a more sophisticated and detailed examination of the role confession and testimony play in Marlow’s tale.

This last point, in particular, chimes in with Ricoeur's narrative interpretation of psychoanalytic theory. As Ricoeur argues, the story of a life arises from untold and repressed stories, and the goal is to discover and tell effective stories for which the subject can be responsible and which "he takes as constitutive of his personal identity" ("Life: A Story" 435). Conrad shows Marlow trying to create such an effective personal story, one he can be responsible for and which is also acceptable to his audience. Thus, it may be argued that, for Marlow, the act of narration is a therapeutic process. Marlow indeed *needs* to reveal something that is hidden and difficult to articulate in order to be able to cope with his experiences. Yet, he does not confess "the whole truth" and, at one point, reflects on the impossibility of reaching complete self-knowledge, saying that the most you can hope from life is "some knowledge of yourself – that comes too late" (117). He does call the moment when Kurtz pronounces his last words "that supreme moment of complete knowledge" (117), but, even for the remarkable man, that knowledge obviously comes too late. The goal of Marlow's narrative is not the complete revelation or confession of his complicity. Instead, it is meant – besides its many other functions – to create a plausible and coherent narrative of his African experience, both for the sake of his audience and for his own, to help him feel better about himself.

It is only after he has told around one third of his narrative that Marlow first hints at having lied about something in the past: "I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz but I went for him near enough to a lie" (69). Then, in a later passage, he proleptically evokes the particular occasion when he lied to the Intended about Kurtz's last words: "I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie . . ." (93). Also, it may be interpreted as a confession that Marlow, reflecting on his decision to show loyalty to Kurtz, more than once speaks of his "choice of nightmares" (109, 115). This phrase suggests criticism of Kurtz's deeds but also a certain complicity in those deeds. Yet, several critics have felt that these admissions of lying or questionable behaviour do not confront the whole truth. Ermien van Pletzen has argued that Marlow's narrative of his lie to the Intended distracts attention from the Congo as political space and from the responsibility of speaking out about conditions there (170). Similarly, Robert Hampson has pointed out that Marlow's focus on lies within the private sphere, such as his lie to the Intended, displaces "the more important question of truth-telling in the public sphere" (*Conrad's Secrets* 67). Even the phrase "choice of nightmares" could be seen as containing an element of self-justification

for Marlow since it implies the necessity of allying himself with either the Manager or with Kurtz. What is more, at one point, Marlow says that this choice was “forced upon [him] in the tenebrous land” (115).

If Marlow’s narrative is a confession, it is important to examine why he addresses it to this particular audience. Van Pletzen claims that he could only have chosen such an audience because, to Marlow, they alone possess the appropriate authority to be its recipients. They are, like Marlow himself, indirectly beneficiaries of the colonial system and imperialist ideology, and they will thus not take any action upon hearing his story. In this context, van Pletzen also stresses Marlow’s choice of a private rather than public space for his confession (168, 170). I agree to the extent that Marlow would not have been able to relate his experiences to any kind of audience and in any circumstances. Brooks’s point about the confessional narrator who tells us something that he or she, “in normal social circumstances,” has so far kept hidden, can be applied to “Heart of Darkness.” The circumstances in which Marlow tells his narrative are not “normal” or ordinary in the sense that he is exclusively among fellow (ex-)seamen, on board a vessel, and at dusk. As it gets darker, he does not even have to face his listeners: he can talk while not being seen. However, in my view, Marlow does not *choose* his audience because he does not even know in advance that he is going to make a confession. It would be more accurate to say that he happens to be in the right company, at the right time and in the right place, which all serve as enabling factors for his storytelling. In other words, the conditions for the telling of this particular narrative are favourable – if not exactly perfect. Van Pletzen seems to underestimate the challenge Marlow’s tale poses to his listeners as well as the differences between them and Marlow as individuals. It is not only that Marlow has been transformed by his African experience, but also that he is more intelligent and perceptive than they are. As I have argued, what is even more important for him psychologically than to negotiate his narrative identity with this audience is to actually tell the story that needed to be told. In addition, Marlow’s guilt is of a moral nature and could not be held against him in a court of law. It is difficult to see how his listeners could take any action upon hearing his story other than contemplate the insights it helped them gain.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ironically, the possibly only illegal action of Marlow’s is at the same time one of his most humane: he withholds Kurtz’s “documents” from the Manager as well as from a Company representative back in the sepulchral city so that he can give them to the Intended. The representative then threatens him

As a confessional narrative, and more generally in its concern with narratorial identity, “Heart of Darkness” in several ways resembles Conrad’s later (and last) short story, “The Tale.” Neither Marlow’s nor the commanding officer’s narratives are typical confessions. Neither narrator declares that he is going to confess something and neither of them may have intended to do so from the outset. When starting their narratives or even at later stages of their respective narratives, they may not be fully aware of how much they will eventually reveal of their guilt. The act of narration seems to carry them forward. “The Tale” opens with an extradiegetic narrator’s description of a gloomy room: a man and a woman remain silent for a moment after what Erdinast-Vulcan describes as a bedroom scene which is “curiously passionless, devoid of erotic suggestion, almost lifeless” (*Strange Short Fiction* 172). The woman finally breaks the silence with the somewhat unusual request: “Tell me something” (Conrad, *Selected Short Stories* 224).⁵⁰ This utterance is the immediate cause of the man’s act of narration (on the intradiegetic level), yet the air of casualness he assumes is misleading. The fact that it does not take him long to fulfil her wish does not primarily testify to his gentlemanly nature. He must have been looking forward to the opportunity to tell not simply “a tale” but the very tale of his guilt about which he probably never had the courage to talk to anyone. As the tale unfolds, it becomes more and more transparent that the commanding officer’s involvement in the events recounted is too personal. His narrative is gradually revealed to be a confession, even though he does not acknowledge openly until the end that it is one of *his* past crimes.

One may wonder why the intradiegetic narrator’s tale should be a confession from the outset when he postpones the all-important revelation of his identity with the commanding officer until the very end. There are two points to be made in connection with this objection. First of all and strictly speaking, we have to distinguish between two entities: the commander as narrator and the commander as character in his own story. The terms narrating I and narrated I could be used to designate the first and the second entity respectively. The narrating I, as in most traditional narratives in autobiographical form, is critical of the narrated I’s conduct,

with “legal proceedings” (120). In this context, Robert Hampson has noted that Conrad was obliged to write “Heart of Darkness” within certain constraints because King Leopold went to great lengths, employing both lawyers and journalists, to prevent the publication of any exposé of the brutalities in the Congo Free State (*Conrad’s Secrets* 71).

⁵⁰ All parenthesised references in the main body of the text are to this edition of “The Tale.”

even if the latter is disguised here under the generic name “a Commanding Officer” (225). Secondly, the intradiegetic narrator probably chooses to tell his tale as if he were talking about someone else because speaking in one’s own defence is less convincing. It is much easier and much more comfortable for a narrator to evoke sympathy for a third person because the relative distance from the events told makes him appear more objective in the listener’s eyes. Lothe points out that the commanding officer’s refusal to refer to himself in the first person singular provides an example of ellipsis, which is supplemented by two distancing devices: “the commander’s use of the conventional fairy-tale opening ‘once upon a time’ and his claim that the actors of his story had no proper names” (*Narrative Method* 77). Yet, in Genette’s terminology, the narrative device used here comes closer to a *paralipsis* than to an ellipsis: the narrator (consciously) neglects to mention that he is identical with the commander in his tale, simply sidestepping a very important element without breaking the narrative continuity.⁵¹ Paralipsis, then, is a narrative trick for which “lie” would be too strong a word.

The intradiegetic narrator’s final revelation that he *is* the commanding officer of his tale is so direct and personal that it leaves no doubt as to the confessional aspect of his whole narration:

He abandoned all pretence.

“Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe – no, I don’t believe. I don’t know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don’t know whether I have done stern retribution – or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don’t know. I shall never know.” (238)

The several instances of the first person singular pronoun *I* point to the fact that this passage is very emotional. The transition from *he* to *I* must be painful and frightening because, as soon as someone else has knowledge of the commander’s guilt, it moves from the realm of subjectivity into objective reality. He cannot foresee the reaction of the woman, he cannot be certain of having earned her sympathy even though he has constructed his narrative in such a manner as to prepare for the revelation. It is also

⁵¹ Genette defines paralipsis as a narrative trope, a gap of a less strictly temporal kind, created by the omission of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does generally cover. In other words, the narrative sidesteps a given element (*Narrative* 51-52).

part of this construction that he has so far consciously failed to supply the missing element of the confession. Only now that his narrative has reached its climax is the commander ready and indeed compelled to “abandon all pretence.” The reason why the extradiegetic narrator has not given the game away by revealing the identity of the intradiegetic narrator with the commander is, surely, that Conrad aimed at keeping his readers in suspense. However, it is less obvious when and how the reader and the narratee can already guess that they could be identical.

Both Marlow’s confession in “Heart of Darkness” and that of the commanding officer in “The Tale” are, then, covert or indirect. Marlow puts Kurtz in the foreground of his narrative and the commander postpones until the very end the revelation that he is identical with the main character of his tale. Their confessions are also incomplete as both narrators lack full insight into the moral implications of their actions: Marlow seems unaware of the extent of his entanglement in the colonial enterprise, while at the end of his narrative the commanding officer, as I have cited above, contemplates the possibility of having done only “stern retribution” by giving the Northman a false course that results in his and his entire crew’s death. It is also important to mention that, in both cases, favourable circumstances allow the narrator to relate an experience that must have occupied his thoughts. In “The Tale,” as mentioned above, the woman’s request for a story is the immediate cause of the commander’s act of narration. Yet, like Marlow, he could not possibly have made up and told any other story. Neither could he have told this tale in a public setting or to any kind of listener. As in “Heart of Darkness,” the private space and the relatively sympathetic audience are perhaps the most important preconditions for storytelling. While Marlow tells his narrative to fellow (ex-)seamen, the commanding officer addresses a woman who is probably his mistress and who, when he has finished his confession, pities and tries to comfort him. But in both cases, the audience cannot fully understand the conditions in which the narrator had to act and make difficult decisions, as they have never experienced anything comparable. To some extent, both stories are concerned with the narrator’s questionable behaviour in extraordinary and, indeed, extenuating circumstances: one is set in the Congo, the other in wartime. For Marlow as well as for the commander, the act of narration is very important psychologically because it is a first step in coping with their traumatic

experiences.⁵² A final interesting similarity between the two narrators is that their guilt is mainly of a moral and not legal nature. Even though the commander may have committed a war crime, the story offers no indication that he has been charged with it.⁵³

The fact that Marlow's confession in "Heart of Darkness" is incomplete and indirect could easily lead to a questioning of his narrative reliability. Bruce Henricksen has gone so far as to claim that the key words "The horror! The horror!" may never have been spoken; instead, he speculates, they could be "a piece of official evaluative discourse transferred into the story to make the story acceptable to its narratees as a sign of Kurtz's repentance" (78; see also 78-80). Yet, such a reading not only impoverishes "Heart of Darkness" but is also insufficiently supported by the text; what is more, it is tantamount to doubting the reliability of literary texts as such. It is important to realise that Marlow is not a narrator who consciously misrepresents the facts of the story. Using Phelan's rhetorical model of unreliable narration, one could more reasonably argue that, while essentially accepting what Marlow says, the authorial audience sometimes needs to supplement his account. This could be because Marlow tells us less than he knows, neglecting to mention something that is salient (*underreporting*); because he provides an insufficient interpretation of an event, character or situation (*underreading*); or because his ethical judgement does not go far enough (*underregarding*; Phelan, *Living to Tell* 49-53).

As I have argued above, Marlow needs to find an effective and coherent story for which he can be responsible and which he accepts as constitutive of his personal identity. In order to do so, he has to rely on language, which he knows can be used to obscure as much as to reveal, and which, in *Lord Jim*, he describes as belonging to "the sheltering conception of light and order" (236).⁵⁴ Allon White has used this idea from *Lord Jim* to make the general claim that, for Conrad, the unconscious is not directly accessible to human beings, and that language very often serves as a refuge from its demands (124). In White's interpretation, this is "part of Conrad's deep

⁵² However, it is impossible to know how successful they eventually are in recovering from their trauma and in easing their conscience because "Heart of Darkness" and "The Tale" end as the narrators finish their stories. In the case of Marlow, we might take *Lord Jim* and *Chance* as evidence of his success. But the commanding officer's crime is much more serious than Marlow's, and the fact that, at the end of the story, he refuses to be comforted by the woman suggests that it takes more to recover than making a confession to her in private.

⁵³ I have discussed these and other related aspects of "The Tale" in more detail in my "'The Tale': A Self-conscious Fictional Artifice."

⁵⁴ All references to *Lord Jim* are to the Cambridge Edition.

suspicion of language” (125). Indeed, “Heart of Darkness” also offers plenty of examples of Conrad’s distrust of language, particularly of Kurtz’s eloquence that is so obviously detached from reality.⁵⁵ Marlow realises that, in addition to its quality of being detachable from reality, language is also an imperfect tool for expressing feelings and rendering experience. In a famous passage, he turns to his listeners in despair: “Do you see him [Kurtz]? Do you see the story? 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 . . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence” (70). The extract may also be interpreted as an expression of Marlow’s (and Conrad’s) doubts about storytelling in general. The question may thus be reformulated as follows: Is it possible to tell a story at all? Such “narrative reflexivity,” as Holstein and Gubrium note, “always lurks about the storytelling process to complicate narrative identity” (112). Yet the very fact that the anonymous narrator is affected by Marlow’s narrative and has transmitted it in writing enables us to answer the question in the affirmative. In a similar passage, Marlow again laments the imperfections of language and narrative:

I’ve been telling you what we [Kurtz and Marlow] said – repeating the phrases we pronounced – but what’s the good. They were common everyday words, the familiar vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life – but what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. *Soul!* If anybody had ever struggled with a soul I am the man. And I wasn’t arguing with a lunatic either – believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear . . . but his soul was mad . . . (113; emphasis added)

It seems to me that with the sudden utterance of the italicised word (*Soul!*), Marlow has surprised himself. This is a characteristic example of how he sometimes interprets certain phenomena in the process of telling, how he formulates them for the first time, both for his audience and for himself. While he is complaining about not being able to “convey the life-sensation” of his encounter with Kurtz, he

⁵⁵ For a detailed and illuminating discussion of the relation of language to truth, and of the benefits as well as dangers of language in “Heart of Darkness,” see Hawthorn’s *Conrad: Fictional Self-Consciousness* (7-36).

unwittingly demonstrates the validity of the Ricoeurian idea that narrative synthesises heterogeneous and contingent elements and thus leads to coherence and understanding. It is only by telling this narrative on this particular occasion that Marlow has understood the nature of Kurtz's madness – and perhaps also something about himself.

In "Heart of Darkness," Conrad suggests that although language cannot render experience faithfully, as narrative it allows us to come to a better understanding of that experience and of ourselves. Hawthorn seems to be making a similar point when he says that "[b]y *talking about* his Congo experiences Marlow proceeds from inarticulate experience to coherent understanding" (*Conrad: Fictional Self-Consciousness* 30). To this I would only add that, in my reading, Marlow is moving towards a coherent understanding of his Congo experiences and of himself, but he does not quite reach it as the novella ends. He may need to retell the story more than once to achieve this goal. The main reason for this is the fact that the particular narrative he tells to his audience on the *Nellie* revolves obsessively around the brutal Kurtz, that his identity is what I have termed "Kurtzian." As the two passages cited above demonstrate, even Marlow's philosophical meditations on language and narrative are related to Kurtz. In so far as he defines and understands himself through and in relation to the remarkable man, Marlow bears an uncomfortable resemblance to another character in "Heart of Darkness" – the Russian harlequin he meets at the Inner Station.

2.3. Marlow and the Russian

In what follows, I will argue that Marlow and the Russian harlequin have more in common than has generally been assumed, and certainly more than Marlow himself would like to admit they do.⁵⁶ Both are sailors with the right attitude to work and,

⁵⁶ Several critics have commented usefully and in various ways on the role of the Russian in "Heart of Darkness." What most of them have in common is that they – implicitly or explicitly – consider him essentially different from Marlow in terms of his attitude to and relationship with Kurtz. Watts sees the Russian's importance in being "the Commedia dell'Arte's harlequin" who is "comic in his blindness to reality" (*HOD: Critical Discussion* 103); Watt in representing "his century's innocent but fateful surrender to that total Faustian unrestraint which believes that everything is justified if it 'enlarges the mind'" (*Nineteenth Century* 228); and Hawthorn in exemplifying "the fatal attraction that pure idealism can present to a particular kind of *man*; one naïve, disinterested and romantic" (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 192). Some commentators have focused on Conrad's resentment towards Russians to account for the improbable presence in the centre of Africa of this foolish and naïve Russian character. Josef Skvorecky, for instance, argues that Conrad uses the harlequin and his relationship with Kurtz to comment on "the Russian political scene" (89). However, there are also

more importantly, both are drawn to and extend care towards Kurtz. In fact, the enthusiastic and adventurous Russian is not unlike the young Marlow of “Youth.” It is certainly true that the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness” is more mature than his younger self in the earlier story as well as much more critical of Kurtz than is the Russian. Yet, for both Marlow and the Russian, the figure of Kurtz is of such crucial importance that even the stories they tell others about themselves – their self-narratives – revolve around him.

When Marlow’s steamboat reaches Kurtz’s Inner Station, the young Russian is very glad about the encounter. In Marlow, he sees a “[b]rother sailor” who can provide him with some much-needed objects, such as a pair of shoes, a few Martini-Henry-cartridges and “the excellent English tobacco” (99). But there is also a more fundamental reason why he is happy about the arrival of Marlow. In the jungle, the Russian has hardly been able to talk to anybody for a long time and is apparently very eager to “make up for lots of silence” (99). Before coming to the interior, the loquacious young man had persuaded a Dutch trader on the coast, named Van Schuyten, to “fit him out with stores and goods” (99). As Marlow remarks, the Russian now “narrated with keen enjoyment” (99) how he had stuck to the Dutchman and, as he put it, “talked and talked till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind leg off his favourite dog” (99-100). Such passages are a clear indication of Conrad’s interest in the psychological importance of storytelling, the human need to “narrate ourselves.” They prefigure Alasdair MacIntyre’s claim in *After Virtue* that “man is . . . essentially a story-telling animal” (216).

Theoretically, the Russian could have talked with Kurtz, but when Marlow raises this possibility, his well-known response is that “You don’t talk with that man – you listen to him” (99). Kurtz himself has a desire to narrate his story, and, indeed, Marlow suggests that this may have played a role in the fact that he tolerated the presence of the Russian at his Inner Station: “They had come together unavoidably, like two ships becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last. I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had talked all night or more probably Kurtz had talked” (101). The reader never learns any details of what Kurtz told the Russian because the latter

some readers, such as Harriet Gilliam, who have proposed closer similarities between Marlow and the harlequin. I think that Gilliam is right to point out that Kurtz “enthalls Marlow himself only slightly less than he does the Russian” (42).

never tells Marlow. All the Russian is willing to say – or perhaps able to remember and articulate – is that Kurtz talked to him of “everything,” even of love “in general,” and that he made him “see things” (101). Later in the story, Marlow too gets the chance to listen to Kurtz discoursing, but he does not reveal to his audience what exactly Kurtz was saying, probably because he does not think it worth mentioning. Kurtz’s monologues are obsessively self-centred, and the fact that he was already seriously ill when he met Marlow can only serve as a partial explanation for this. We should remember that Marlow describes Kurtz’s soul as “mad” but his intelligence as still “perfectly clear.” It is an important aspect of Marlow’s narrative that he considers Kurtz a remarkable man in spite of recognising the hollowness behind “his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression” (115). His opinion that Kurtz had something significant to say merely because he uttered his last words (“The horror! The horror!”) indicates that he is still under his spell when telling his narrative on board the *Nellie*.

From what I have been arguing above, it is clear that Kurtz, just like the Russian, can at times be a loquacious narrator. This fact can easily go unnoticed precisely because very little of what Kurtz actually said ever reaches the reader. In this sense, Robert Hampson is right to suggest that the real absence at the heart of “Heart of Darkness” is Kurtz’s promised tale that isn’t told; there is indeed a deliberate anti-climax in relation to Kurtz as he never tells a tale that would “provide the solution to the moral, psychological and philosophical problems that [Marlow’s] journey has presented” (“Genie” 220). It is possible to reformulate and extend Hampson’s point by saying that although Kurtz does tell stories, even very long ones, these never become part of Marlow’s narrative, either because they remain unknown to him as well or because they fail to provide answers to the questions “Heart of Darkness” raises. I would also add that, in Ricoeurian terms, Kurtz is unable to discover an effective story, he is unable to tell a unified and coherent self-narrative that would prevent the fragmentation of his identity. Marlow, as I have argued, is shown trying to create such a story for himself, and he does this somewhat more successfully than Kurtz. However, he is no less loquacious than either Kurtz or the Russian. Considering that Marlow’s is an oral narrative, its great length would try the patience of any listener. Yet the more important point to make here is that both Marlow’s and the Russian’s urge to tell their stories at length is often related to Kurtz.

At this point, the similarities and differences between their attitudes to Kurtz need to be examined more closely. An interesting similarity, one that I have already mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, is Marlow's and the Russian's care for and loyalty to Kurtz. The Russian is selfless in that he considers it his duty to take good care of Kurtz, proudly informing Marlow that he had "managed to nurse [him] through two illnesses" (101). Similarly, after the sick Kurtz is brought on board the steamboat, Marlow is the only one who listens to him discoursing and who looks after him on the voyage downstream. Also, it should be noted that both the Russian and Kurtz are worried about the latter's reputation and turn to Marlow, asking him for discretion in the matter. Marlow agrees to help and remains loyal to Kurtz even after getting back to Europe – as he puts it, he remains loyal to him "to the last" (118). He goes as far as to lie to the Intended and, as suggested above, to withhold Kurtz's documents from the Manager as well as a Company representative back in the sepulchral city.

An obvious difference between Marlow and the Russian is that while the former is able to view Kurtz from a certain critical distance, the latter is not. As Jeremy Hawthorn, among others, has argued, this has much to do with the fact that the Russian is young, youth being the time of idealism (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 192-93). It is partly his lack of experience that renders him defenceless against Kurtz's eloquent rhetoric. Interestingly, Marlow almost envies the Russian's youthfulness – but not his devotion to Kurtz:

I was seduced into something like admiration – like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. . . . If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, impractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely that even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he – the man before your eyes – who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz though. (100-101)

The expression "consumed all thought of self" is very apt in the context of what I have argued. Marlow rightly recognises that the Russian's self-narrative, indeed his entire existence, revolve around the figure of Kurtz. His urgent need to *talk* rather

than just listen to somebody is perhaps related to an unconscious desire to regain possession of his self. However, even when he has the chance to talk with somebody who is on an equal footing with him, he keeps referring to and defines himself in relation to the man he worships. Kurtz denies the Russian reciprocity, but the young man is willing to accept this because he feels that in Kurtz, he has met an exceptional individual. He mentions twice that Kurtz has “enlarged” his mind, and, just before parting from Marlow, says that he would never meet such a man again (100, 110). The Russian considers himself “a simple man,” insisting self-effacingly that he doesn’t understand the thoughts and behaviour of Mr Kurtz (105, 108, 110). This leads him to turn a blind eye to his idol’s brutality and to declare to Marlow: “You can’t judge Mr Kurtz as you would an ordinary man” (102).

Marlow treats the Russian’s boundless admiration for Kurtz critically, an example of which is found in the following passage, where the Russian’s discourse is filtered through Marlow’s ironic commentary:

The Russian was explaining to me that it was only lately that Mr Kurtz had come down to the river bringing along with him all the fighting men of that lake tribe. He had been absent for several months – *getting himself adored I suppose* – and came down unexpectedly, with the intention to all appearance of making a raid either across the river or down stream. Evidently the appetite for more ivory *got the better of the – what shall I say – less material aspirations.* (103; emphasis added)

Yet, when one examines the kind of language Marlow generally uses to describe the Russian, it turns out that he is somewhat too eager to distance himself from him. Indeed, one may well speak of a Marlovian rhetoric⁵⁷ directed at the Russian, which is all the more telling in the light of what we know about Marlow himself. A typical element in this rhetoric is an emphasis on the improbability and strangeness of the Russian’s presence in the jungle. Using the very same words which led F. R. Leavis

⁵⁷ Andrew Gibson has coined the term “Marlovian discourse” to describe one of two discourses that, in his view, pervade “Heart of Darkness.” Marlovian discourse is characterised by an emphasis on epistemological uncertainty and “might be said to open up an ethical space in which alterity is registered.” It does not destroy, but it “gnaws away at” or deconstructs the other type of discourse, termed “Kurtzian discourse,” which is ontological and totalizing. For Gibson, neither discourse is identifiable with a single character, so that Marlow is also complicit with Kurtzian discourse (“Ethics and Unrepresentability” 131; 113-37). My use of “Marlovian rhetoric,” then, comes closer to aspects of Marlow’s narration that Gibson associates with Kurtzian rather than Marlovian discourse. Indeed, Gibson links Marlow’s rhetoric with his drive to totalization (“Ethics and Unrepresentability” 128).

to criticise Conrad of an “adjectival insistence” in *The Great Tradition* (196), Marlow says of the young man: “His very existence was improbable, inexplicable and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he succeeded in getting so far, how he managed to remain – why he did not instantly disappear” (100). Marlow then goes on to talk about the Russian’s “futile wanderings” and his impression that the young man was “thoughtlessly alive” in this unlikely place (100). However, it is important to remember that Marlow’s reasons for going to Africa are not much more rational than the Russian’s. While the young man says he wanted to “see things, gather experience” and “enlarge the mind” (99), Marlow’s decision to work for the Company (as well as Conrad’s) goes back to childhood dreams of adventure. After a period of “loafing about” on shore and unsuccessful attempts at finding work, Marlow catches sight of a map of the Congo River in a shop window (48). The centre of Africa being one of the places that, as a boy, he wanted to visit, the map now fascinates him “like a snake would a bird – a silly little bird” (48). Then he remembers that there is a big Company for trade on that river and thinks to himself: “Dash it all . . . they can’t trade without using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water – steamboats! Why shouldn’t I try to get charge of one” (48).

A second key aspect of Marlow’s rhetoric is the way he typically criticises the Russian’s worship of Kurtz as if he were completely unaffected by the great man. When he says that he does not envy the Russian his devotion to Kurtz, or when he calls him the “admirer of Mr Kurtz” or “Kurtz’s last disciple” (101, 104, 105), he is trying to gloss over the fact that he himself cannot help feeling a certain admiration for this man. We know this, of course, because Marlow occasionally hints at his problematic relationship with him, and also because he sometimes unwittingly reveals more than he wants to admit. His humble comment that he would probably have had nothing to say in the face of death recalls the Russian’s words about being a simple man who doesn’t understand the complex thoughts of Mr Kurtz. Interestingly, however, Marlow never draws any direct comparison between his and the Russian’s attitudes to the “remarkable man.” It is precisely Marlow’s unsettling realization of how much he has in common with the Russian that leads him to distance himself so eagerly from him.

3. The question of identity: Conrad, the Congo and the *Blackwood's* context

In this brief section, I will place “Heart of Darkness” in its biographical and publication context in order to draw certain parallels between Marlow’s storytelling and Conrad’s composition of the novella. I want to suggest that by writing “Heart of Darkness,” Conrad himself used narrative to reengage indirectly with his complicity in the colonial enterprise in the Congo. As I have argued above, it is because of his sense of complicity that Conrad did not wish to unveil any direct correspondences between himself and Marlow as his narrative persona. There is evidence to suggest that when he took up his job in Africa in 1890, Conrad still shared the belief of most of his European contemporaries that colonisation was justified not only on financial grounds but also as a form of “civilizing” activity (Najder, *Life* 146). It should be noted that in this, Conrad was unlike Marlow, who, already before setting sail for Africa, hints to his aunt that the Company was run for profit, trying to dampen her naïve enthusiasm (53). One could argue that part of the reason why Conrad made Marlow so critical of colonisation already at this early point in the story was to support the illusion in some contemporary readers that it is the anonymous narrator who expresses the author’s views on the subject. This could have served a double function: first, and as already mentioned, to divert initial attention away from the similarities between Conrad and Marlow; second, to make the subsequent realisation that Marlow has more narrative authority than the unnamed narrator even more surprising and powerful.

Whatever the case, we know that Conrad’s Congo experience was transformative. He once told Edward Garnett that before the Congo, he had “not a thought in his head” and was “a perfect animal” (qtd. in Watt, *Nineteenth Century* 146). Although Jocelyn Baines describes this remark as an obvious exaggeration on Conrad’s part, he too argues that “Heart of Darkness” shows how deeply Conrad was affected emotionally by “the sight of such human baseness and degradation” (119). But this was probably not the only reason why, on his return to Europe, Conrad was depressed and embittered and apparently just wanted to forget. Najder provides another possible explanation, namely that Conrad was aware of “having been only a step from himself becoming one of the gang of plunderers” (*Life* 163). “Heart of Darkness” would seem to suggest that even in 1898-1899, when composing the novella, he looked back upon his involvement in the imperial enterprise in the Congo

as at least questionable. In a letter of 24 June 1890, in the early days of Conrad's six-month stay in the Congo, his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski tells him: "You are probably looking around at people and things as well as at the 'civilizing' (confound it) affair in the machinery of which you are a cog—before you feel able to acquire and express your own opinion" (Najder, *Conrad's Polish Background* 128-29). This suggests that Bobrowski's view of the "civilizing" mission was more critical than Conrad's before the latter departed for Africa (cf. Najder, *Life* 146). Interestingly, in "Heart of Darkness," Marlow seems to echo Bobrowski's remark about the "cog" in the machinery of colonisation when he says ironically that the "reclaimed" African must have considered him "a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings" (57). It is thus possible to read this passage as Conrad's imaginative reengagement with his former naïve belief in the colonial enterprise, and as a reference not only to the official phraseology of the time, but also to his uncle's critical words. Indeed, Conrad was so disillusioned with such "great causes" and "just proceedings" that, as Najder points out, his Congo expedition was to be his last attempt "to become a *homo socialis*, a cog in the mechanism of society" (*Life* 164).

Both Conrad's fiction and non-fiction provide evidence that what he found most outrageous about the civilising mission in general, and about the Belgian colonisation of the Congo in particular, was the disparity between the official rhetoric and the truth. As Najder, among others, has argued, the irony of "An Outpost of Progress," "Heart of Darkness" and *The Inheritors* is directed mainly at this disparity (*Life* 146; see also footnote 38 above). In his essay "Geography and Some Explorers" (1924), Conrad famously (and in a way reminiscent of Marlow's words in "Heart of Darkness") describes how, as an enthusiastic schoolboy, he once put his finger "on a blank spot in the very middle of the, then white, heart of Africa" and declared that "some day [he] would go there." Yet, when he actually travelled to the Congo as an adult, he found "only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper stunt and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration. What an end to the idealised realities of a boy's day-dreams!" (*Last Essays* 14). Similarly, in three of his letters from December 1903, he described the administrative methods of the Congo Free State as "in every aspect an enormous and atrocious lie in action" and the Belgians as "worse than the seven plagues of Egypt" and as "our modern Conquistadores" (*CL3* 95, 96, 101). He referred to King Leopold II of Belgium as

“their Pizarro” and as an “African witch-m[a]n” (CL3 101, 96). Najder points out that Conrad displayed a “personal passion” in his attacks on Leopold, treating “no other politician with such venom” (*Life* 146).

Conrad was appalled by what he had seen in the Congo, yet in 1899, when “Heart of Darkness” first appeared in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, the atrocities had still not been sufficiently publicized. There were only a few reports in print of which the British reading public may have been aware. One example is George Washington Williams’s “Open Letter” to King Leopold II, written and published as a pamphlet in 1890 and distributed widely in the United States as well as Europe. Williams was an African American minister, historian, journalist and lawyer who travelled to the Congo in the same year as Conrad, and whose “Open Letter” was the very first systematic exposé of Leopold’s colonial regime (Hochschild 101-14, esp. 109). Another example is E. J. Glave’s report of how a punitive military expedition against some local people in Stanley Falls ended in twenty-one heads being cut off and subsequently used by the Belgian soldier and administrator Captain Léon Rom as a decoration around the flower-bed in front of his house. An edited version of Glave’s report was printed in Britain in the *Saturday Review* of 17 December 1898. Allan Simmons notes that Conrad may well have read the latter and used it in his description of the heads on stakes around Kurtz’s hut in “Heart of Darkness” (“Conrad, Casement” 186-87; cf. Knowles 453). Yet it was only years later, owing especially to the efforts of journalist Edmund Dene Morel and British consul to the Congo Roger Casement, that the abuses committed in Leopold’s African colony were brought to international attention and caused a public outcry. Casement’s 1904 “Congo Report” and Morel’s crusade through the Congo Reform Association were instrumental in eventually forcing Leopold to sell the Congo Free State, his private property, to the Belgian government in 1908 (Hochschild 185-274; Knowles and Moore 82-83).

Thus, readers of the 1899 magazine version of “Heart of Darkness,” or even of the 1902 text in the *Youth* volume, may not have viewed the colonization of the Congo with much suspicion. However, their experience of reading the novella was likely to change this. Even though the Congo is never actually named, Conrad could have expected perceptive contemporary readers to be able to identify where the significant action took place. In addition, as I have argued above, Conrad must also have had a well-informed posterity in mind when composing the novella. This is part

of the reason why he uses Marlow's narrative to make such a covert and indirect confession of his own complicity in the colonisation of the Congo. I have also argued that Conrad, in several ways, uses the metalepsis in the anonymous narrator's opening remarks ("as I have already said somewhere") to make the text more appealing and more acceptable to the average reader of *Blackwood's Magazine*. He does this by suggesting surface similarities between "Heart of Darkness" and the kinds of texts that were typically published in the magazine. In the previous chapter, I have already commented on some of these, but critics have also examined those texts that appeared specifically alongside "The Heart of Darkness" in *Blackwood's Magazine*. However, they have come to very different conclusions about Conrad's critique of imperialism in the novella. While Cedric Watts has compared the effect of seeing "The Heart of Darkness" in the pages of *Blackwood's* to seeing "a shark in a carp-pond or an octopus among minnows," William Atkinson finds that Conrad's novella is "fully a part of the moral and political discourse of *Blackwood's*" (*Literary Life* 81; "Bound in *Blackwood's*" 390). Perhaps Watts's reading implies a Conrad who is somewhat more critical of imperialism (especially British imperialism) than he actually was, but Atkinson's claim is clearly exaggerated. It is based on a detailed examination of the texts that accompanied "The Heart of Darkness" but characterised by a lack of genuine engagement with the complexities of Conrad's text itself. The question of exactly how radical Conrad's critique of imperialism is cannot (and need not) be answered in this study. What is important to my purposes is that, in "Heart of Darkness," Conrad indirectly addresses various kinds of readers, trying to appeal to them while also challenging them. This is certainly a development from "Youth," where he attempted rather unambiguously to adjust his literary identity to the demands of publication. With "Heart of Darkness," however, Conrad produced a novella that is mainly *about* the power of narrative to create identities.

In "Youth," Marlow defines himself mainly in relation to the particular audience he addresses and to the community of seamen on board the *Judea*. In "Heart of Darkness," he becomes far more individualized, yet it is another individual, the figure of Kurtz, who dominates his narrative identity. In one way or another, Kurtz affects the identity of almost every character in the novella, even if they are hostile to him, such as the Manager. But I have focused specifically on Marlow as storyteller and on how the figure of Kurtz affects the way he negotiates and articulates his identity in his narrative. In having a Kurtzian identity, Marlow

resembles the Russian harlequin, but while the latter is unambiguously devoted to Kurtz and fails to see anything problematic in his devotion, Marlow's relationship with him is ambiguous and complex. Paradoxically, Marlow wishes to distance himself from Kurtz morally while at the same time keeping him in the centre of his own narrative. His impulse to confess his loyalty to the remarkable yet brutal man conflicts with his fascination for him. In "Heart of Darkness," Conrad certainly suggests that there is no ultimate truth about the self and that language is an imperfect tool for self-expression and for rendering experience. But the text also demonstrates how language and narrative can help us cope with the past by organising our fragmentary experiences into a coherent whole. Although Marlow will probably need to retell this narrative to find the effective story with which he can fully identify, he is shown to be moving towards a coherent understanding of his Congo experiences. By extension, I have suggested that Conrad may have written "Heart of Darkness" at least partly in order to come to terms with his traumatic experiences as well as with his complicity in what he had seen in the Congo.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lord Jim: Individual and Communal Identities

More explicitly and in a more complex way than any other work by Conrad, *Lord Jim* is *about* the human need to construct a coherent identity by means of narrative. Both in its form and subject matter, the novel dramatizes the compulsion to tell narratives of the self and the desire to have these narratives verified by others. It also asks the related question of how the failure of one of its members threatens the narrative of the community and, more broadly, the narrative of imperialism. Completed about a year and a half after “Heart of Darkness,” *Lord Jim* (1900) takes up and develops many of the issues raised in the earlier novella. But unlike “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness,” *Lord Jim* is not primarily Marlow’s self-narrative. Jim is the main character and his narrative identity the central interest of the novel. Marlow serves as his confidant and the recipient of his confession but recedes ever further into the background of the story he tells. This is not to say, however, that Marlow’s narrative function diminishes in importance, but that it undergoes a profound transformation. As a full-length novel, *Lord Jim* also features various other characters who become storytellers. Criticism has tended to focus on their stories only in so far as they shed light on Jim’s character, yet some of these are also interesting as self-narratives in their own right.⁵⁸ Marlow, in both his oral and his written narrative, offers a balanced interpretation and synthesis of all these varied and partly contradictory stories. Yet, he is far from being an impartial observer. For Marlow too, the act of narration turns out to be a deeply personal undertaking, a means of creating a coherent story of this episode of his life, one that he hopes can invert the effect of the many contingencies with which Jim’s case is fraught. *Lord Jim*, in turn, can be read as a piece of autobiographical fiction, even though it is not based on a single memorable event or period of Conrad’s life, as were the two earlier Marlow tales. While not ignoring relevant biographical information and the publication context, I will focus on the way in which Conrad reformulates the concept of narrative identity in the novel itself.

⁵⁸ An exception to this tendency is Jan Verleun’s *Patna and Patusan Perspectives: A Study of the Function of the Minor Characters in Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim* (1979).

1. The narrative structure and dynamics

Lord Jim differs from all the rest of the Marlovian narratives in that the extradiegetic narrator is not present as a character in the story he tells; he is a heterodiegetic and “omniscient” voice.⁵⁹ It should be noted that while most critics would agree with this observation, Knowles and Moore hold that the extradiegetic (or “frame”) narrator is one of Marlow’s listeners, who converts Marlow’s statements into readable form. In addition, they suggest that the frame narrators of all the four Marlow texts may be identical (248-49). However, the extradiegetic narrator’s information in *Lord Jim* is so extensive, and his narrative often so clearly nonfocalized, that he can only be situated outside the diegetic universe. Accordingly, any kind of identity between the extradiegetic narrator of “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness” on the one hand, and that of *Lord Jim* on the other, can be ruled out.⁶⁰ The first few pages of the novel provide ample evidence of the narrator’s telepathic abilities, which are manifested especially in his handling of time and his descriptions of Jim’s thoughts and feelings. “He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull” (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 9). By employing simple pronominal reference (*He*) in the very first sentence of the book, the narrator assumes familiarity with Jim; we have a sense of being *in medias res*. What follows are timeless meditations on water-clerks, a brief iterative description of Jim’s short stays in various Eastern ports, some information on his upbringing and a few glimpses of his subsequent life in Patusan. Within a few paragraphs, then, the extradiegetic narrator moves freely between several different planes of time. These clearly nonfocalized passages arouse the reader’s interest in Jim’s character, in what made him live incognito and how he became “Lord Jim” (10). The first particular event that is described in some detail is the training ship episode, in which Jim’s failure to act properly foreshadows his jump from the *Patna* some two years later.

⁵⁹ I use “omniscience” in quotation marks because the concept has recently been questioned by narrative theorists. Jonathan Culler has argued that the very idea of omniscient narrative is outrageous because it is based on an inappropriate analogy between God and the author (“Omniscience” 22-34, esp. 23, 32). As an alternative to the idea of omniscience, Nicholas Royle has proposed the notion of “telepathy” because it opens up “possibilities of a humbler, more precise, less religiously freighted conceptuality than does ‘omniscience’, for thinking about the uncanniness of what is going on in narrative fiction.” In particular, it is the uncanniness of the narrator’s ability to report the thoughts and feelings of characters that “telepathy” allows us to capture (*The Uncanny* 261; cf. Culler, “Omniscience” 29).

⁶⁰ For an analysis of the function of the extradiegetic narrator of *Chance*, see the next chapter.

Also, the narrator's report of Jim's thoughts right after his failure is an early indication of Jim's tendency to re-narrate the unpleasant episodes of his life to make them fit his heroic self-image: "The tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils. He would do so – better than anybody. Not a particle of fear was left" (12).

The first four chapters, which are told by the extradiegetic narrator, are concerned mainly with the events leading up to the Inquiry held after Jim's desertion of the *Patna*. Characteristically, the shameful desertion scene itself is not described; there is only a fragmentary passage at the end of Chapter III about the ship striking a submerged object. As Ian Watt has pointed out, this excerpt in some ways recalls that in "Youth" about the explosion on board the *Judea*. However, in the *Patna* scene, decoding is denied, and the fact that we are not told by the "omniscient" observer what made Jim stagger prepares us for the "ultimately inexplicable mystery" of how this incident affected Jim's life (*Nineteenth Century* 272). Watt's discussion of the extradiegetic narrator is well supplemented by Jakob Lothe, who argues that in fact, there are various proleptic elements in the frame narrative which, together with the (in one sense also proleptic) characterisation of Jim, make us "more hesitant as to [Jim's] ability to act promptly and rightly." In addition, Lothe notes, the "authorial narrative" provides essential information that exceeds even that possessed by Marlow, thus making us aware of the limitations of Marlow's knowledge of Jim as well as the possible limitations inherent in his attempts to understand him (*Narrative Method* 143; 150; cf. 133-150).

Interestingly, in spite of his superhuman abilities, the extradiegetic narrator sounds more like a human being (more precisely, a *man*) with a particular knowledge of seamanship and quayside gossip. Already the very first sentence of the novel, which I have cited above, betrays some uncertainty about Jim's physical appearance ("He was an inch, *perhaps* two, under six feet"); also, the narrator's description of Jim in the same sentence suggests the perspective of a fellow human being ("he advanced straight at *you* with a slight stoop of the shoulders"). Taken out of context, these and similar examples in the first four chapters could easily be read as the words of a homodiegetic narrator. Yet, we are meant to read them as the words of the same narrator who gives us access to Jim's thoughts or evokes temporally distant episodes

of his life from an Olympian distance. Such narrative inconsistencies or fault-lines are not rare in Conrad, however, and they are counterbalanced to some extent by the consistency of the authorial voice. Albert J. Guerard argued that the same Conradian voice can be heard in almost all of his works, a grave interior and masculine voice which implies that the prose is the expression of a human being (“Conradian Voice” 1-16). One may disagree with the implication inherent in Guerard’s argument that the same authorial voice is heard irrespective of which of Conrad’s narrators is speaking. But I would agree that many of his extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrators, and certainly that of *Lord Jim*, speak in the same consistent authorial voice throughout, in spite of also having some of the characteristics of homodiegetic narrators. Similarly to Guerard, Zdzisław Najder has also noted a personal or human element in Conrad’s narrative voice. Najder argues persuasively that what he terms the “personal voice” reflects Conrad’s desire to communicate with the reader, to make the reader feel that he or she is being addressed and engaged intellectually as well as emotionally by another human being or other human beings (“Personal Voice” 23-40, esp. 38). *Lord Jim* is concerned especially with how Jim, Marlow and some other characters are trying to make sense of themselves and of others in and through their own narratives. By endowing the extradiegetic narrator with certain human qualities, Conrad makes him also part of the chain of narrative transmission and lends further emphasis to the theme of epistemological uncertainty and subjectivity that the novel explores.

It is conspicuous that in *Lord Jim*, unlike in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness,” Marlow is introduced rather late, only at the end of Chapter IV. In my reading, this calls into question his centrality as character. Although he can still be classified as an intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator in the first part of the novel, he may not even be said to be one of the two main characters. However, as mentioned earlier, no such decrease in importance is observable when one looks at the narrator Marlow. In fact, he not only retains his centrality but we also see him established as the best-known narrator of what appear to be entire communities in a huge geographical area. As Watt puts it, Marlow is “the purveyor and interpreter of materials which have come from a great number of sources,” the spokesman of “diffuse and continuing oral traditions which are current throughout the three-thousand mile circle” where Jim’s scandal does not die out (*Nineteenth Century* 296). Already the transition from the intradiegetic narrative to Marlow’s metadiegetic narrative at the end of Chapter IV gives us an idea of what kind of narrative function he is going to fulfil in this novel:

And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane chair harboured a silent listener. . . . and with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past. (30-31)

Marlow used to tell this story not only once and in a particular setting but “many times” and “in distant parts of the world.” These expressions, just as the examples of the modal auxiliary “would” in the quotation above, are all indicators of the iterative. The opening of Chapter V continues in the same vein: ““Oh yes. I attended the inquiry,’ he would say, ‘and to this day I haven’t left off wondering why I went’” (32). Especially when rereading the novel, however, the reader may rightly feel perplexed and deceived on realising that he or she is to understand Marlow’s entire (and lengthy) oral narrative as only one of several identical or at least similar recountings of Jim’s story. In addition, the end of Marlow’s oral narrative is followed by the necessarily singulative scene of the privileged reader opening Marlow’s packet. Therefore, the narrative mode of Marlow’s tale has to be identified as what Genette calls the “pseudo-iterative,” rather than as the iterative as such.⁶¹ It might be suggested that the pseudo-iterative in *Lord Jim*, as in classical narrative, is a mere literary convention. Nonetheless, I would argue that it also serves to present Marlow as a mature and experienced storyteller who takes pleasure in recounting tales several times. On a second reading, we are also able to interpret the mode of Marlow’s narrative as an expression of his *need* to retell Jim’s story in order to come to a better understanding of him – and of himself. At the same time, Watt correctly points out that what is told to this particular audience is “a new and intensely committed venture by Marlow at understanding and conveying the full meaning of Jim’s story” (*Nineteenth Century* 297).

⁶¹ Scenes that are pseudo-iterative in nature are presented as iterative, whereas “their richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation” (Genette, *Narrative* 121; cf. 121-23; cf. also Knowles and Moore 249).

At the beginning of Chapter XXXVI, the extradiegetic narrator intervenes to describe how Marlow finishes his oral narrative. We see his audience break up and learn that there was only one man of all the listeners “who was ever to hear the last word of the story,” more than two years later (254). Thus, there is an ellipsis of roughly two years at the level of the intradiegetic narrative, which offers Marlow the opportunity to tell the last part of Jim’s story and serves to effect the transition to the scene of the privileged reader opening Marlow’s packet. Because, as I have mentioned above, that scene is necessarily singulative, it would seem logical to assume that the particular version of Jim’s story we have heard from Marlow could only have been the last in a series of recountings. Research has shown that the internal chronology of the novel is keyed into nineteenth-century real time, so that Marlow’s visit to Patusan must be placed in July 1888, his particular oral narrative in November of the same year, and Jim’s death in August 1889 (Purdy, “Chronology” 81-82; Berthoud, *Lord Jim* 315-16).⁶² This would mean that Marlow had only four months at his disposal for telling Jim’s story “many times” and “in distant parts of the world,” or at least for telling it up to the point he reached in his oral narrative of November 1888. However, because the pseudo-iterative places Marlow in a timeless world of perpetual storytelling, the reader may get the impression that there could have been an almost infinite number of recountings.

Marlow’s written narrative raises expectations of closure in the reader for several reasons. As opposed to his oral narrative, it is a single and final account of Jim, the end of which coincides with the end of the novel itself. In addition, the very fact that it is a written document can make it appear more authoritative than an orally told story, especially because it was produced by a narrator who has already demonstrated his trustworthiness. However, in a truly modernist fashion, it thwarts these expectations by suggesting that there is no final word on Jim. Also, as I shall go on to argue, it is precisely Marlow’s written account that, on a certain level, raises the most serious doubts as to his narrative reliability. Most contemporary reviewers praised *Lord Jim* for its vividness, subtlety and richness of characterisation, but many also found its narrative convoluted. One reviewer, for example, regarded the narrative method as “distinctly weakening to the general end and aim of the book.”

⁶² It should be noted that not every critic agrees with this chronology. Watt, for instance, seems to assume that Jim died a decade before Marlow’s telling of his story (*Nineteenth Century* 293). I find Purdy’s and Berthoud’s arguments on the order of events in the story (the *fabula*) more convincing and therefore rely on the chronology they have established.

Another praised the method as “a marvel of workmanship” but added that, if Conrad kept on writing similar books, he might “arrive at the unique distinction of having few readers in his own generation, and a fair chance of several in the next” (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 115; 127; 128). Lothe has also noted the experimental and radical implications of having a privileged reader in the novel. By introducing a reader to whom part of Marlow’s narrative is addressed, Conrad challenges the well-established novelistic convention according to which the narratee is inside the fiction and the reader is outside it (Lothe, “Narrators and Characters” 123).

Although *Lord Jim* is a highly complex novel, it would be less well served than “Heart of Darkness” by a communication model such as I have presented in the previous chapter. This is because there is less tension between some of the instances of senders and receivers than in the earlier novella. The extradiegetic narrator in *Lord Jim*, for instance, is very authorial, which means that distinguishing between him and the implied author is more a matter of technical precision than of a genuine difference in their values. It follows that the same is true of the difference between the unspecified extradiegetic narratee and the authorial audience. There is also a smaller gap here between the judgements and values of the extradiegetic narrator and of Marlow; their narratives qualify but do not contradict each other. It must further be emphasised that, in *Lord Jim*, Marlow is not part of such a narrowly defined group as he was in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness.” In other words, the intradiegetic narratees of his oral narrative cannot be directly related to a typically Blackwoodian readership, not least because Marlow tells Jim’s story “many times,” to different audiences and in different “parts of the world.” One of the listeners of the particular recounting that the extradiegetic narrator presents to us is the man who, as the single intradiegetic narratee of Marlow’s written narrative, earns the epithet “privileged reader.” Subsumed under Marlow’s oral as well as written narrative, there are various other characters who become storytellers. Some of these, such as Stein, Gentleman Brown or Jim himself, could be said to be metadiegetic narrators in their own right, and they all address their narratives to Marlow.⁶³

⁶³ I shall discuss Marlow’s narratees as well as some of the storytellers within his narrative (above all Jim himself) in more detail later.

2. Marlow's narrative identity

2.1. Marlow and his narratees

Marlow begins the particular oral narrative that we are reading in a jovial fashion, after a good meal provided by his host Charley:

Charley, my dear chap, your dinner was extremely good, and in consequence these men here look upon a quiet rubber as a tumultuous occupation. They wallow in your good chairs and think to themselves "Hang exertion. Let that Marlow talk."

Talk! So be it. And it's easy enough to talk of Master Jim, after a good spread, two hundred feet above the sea level, with a box of decent cigars handy, on a blessed evening of freshness and starlight that would make the best of us forget we are only on sufferance here and got to pick our way in cross lights . . . (32)

The tone of Marlow's introductory words is deceptively casual, very likely meant to conceal his compulsion to tell Jim's story over and over again. His listeners, in their turn, apparently just want to pass the time and be the passive recipients of an interesting after-dinner story.⁶⁴ From Marlow's comments, it would seem that they are not prepared for the lengthy and highly sophisticated narrative that is to follow. This is in stark contrast to "Heart of Darkness," where his listeners are perfectly aware of what kind of tales Marlow usually tells, as is obvious from the way in which the anonymous narrator contrasts them with the yarns of seamen. Also, the narrator tells us that, when Marlow began his tale, his listeners knew they were "fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences" (47). In *Lord Jim*, however, the question of how well his audience actually knows Marlow and his storytelling habits is left unanswered. What is certain is that the reader knows even less about the Marlow of this novel than about the Marlow of the earlier novella. As Najder has pointed out, the two Marlows share their seaman's experience and their knowledge of French and German; but while the Marlow of *Lord Jim* displays more of his classical education, we know less about his past than about Stein's or even the French lieutenant's, and his British and/or continental background remains unelaborated ("Personal Voice" 30).

⁶⁴ Later on, Marlow remarks in a similar vein: "and then comes a soft evening; a lot of men too indolent for whist – and a story. . . ." (75; ellipsis in orig.).

Yet the effect of Marlow's narrative is not to make his listeners ask questions or express their dissatisfaction with its inordinate length, but to render them almost wordless. They hardly ever interrupt Marlow and never question his interpretations. What they have to say is so little – and said so reluctantly – that it does not lead to an exchange between audience and narrator: “He paused again to wait for an encouraging remark, perhaps, but nobody spoke; only the host, as if reluctantly performing a duty, murmured – ‘You are so subtle, Marlow’” (76). Near the end of his narrative, there is a similar passage: “Marlow looked at them all [his listeners] with the eyes of a man returning from the excessive remoteness of a dream. A throat was cleared; a calm voice encouraged negligently, ‘Well?’” (241). More frequently, however, Marlow asks rhetorical questions that do not require a response from them; apparently, it is enough for him if they appear to verify his interpretations in silent agreement: “Can you imagine him [Jim], silent and on his feet half the night, his face to the gusts of rain, staring at sombre forms, watchful of vague movements, straining his ears to catch rare low murmurs in the stern-sheets! Firmness of courage or effort of fear? What do you think? And the endurance is undeniable too. Six hours more or less on the defensive . . .” (96). It is only occasionally that Marlow challenges his listeners directly, but even then – quite astonishingly – they do not try to contradict him. The following remarks, for instance, are offensive in spite of Marlow's disclaimer, yet they provoke no reaction at all: “Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions – and safe – and profitable – and dull” (171). It is worth remembering that, in “Heart of Darkness,” a similarly provocative comment by Marlow, where he refers to “monkey tricks” and “tightropes,” is answered by a growl and the words “Try to be civil, Marlow” (77; see also p. 82 of this thesis).

Nonetheless, I would argue that Marlow's listeners in *Lord Jim* are passive for different reasons than they are in “Youth.” In the novel, the near-silence of the audience does not necessarily suggest agreement with Marlow's interpretations. In some cases, it has probably more to do with the subtlety and complexity of the tale, its unsettling implications, as well as with Marlow's almost dreamlike involvement in the narration. When he had finished speaking, the extradiegetic narrator tells us, “Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering

a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret” (254). It is almost as if the audience were eager to escape after Marlow has ended his narrative. He may have exhausted their patience and interest, or they may find it impossible to add anything to this inconclusive story. But perhaps, similarly to “Heart of Darkness,” Marlow’s narratees are also reluctant to reflect on the story’s uncomfortable insights, carrying away their own impressions “like a secret.” The narrative of Jim’s failure is uncomfortable to them because Marlow has described Jim as “one of us” throughout. This notoriously vague refrain is an interpretative crux in the novel, but there is necessarily a reading of it in which the reference of the “us” includes Marlow as well as his listeners. The extradiegetic narrator’s mention of the “incompleteness” of the story and the fact that each listener had “his own impression” of it further emphasise the fragmentation of the shared discourse of identity. Research into the ways of self-construction in a postmodern world has shown that, while the members of a community are usually conscious of being part of a collective identity, they tend to construct its meaning and significance in relation to the particulars of their own lives. In other words, the discourse of the community is far from being stable and uniform (Holstein and Gubrium 116-20). Although Conrad’s novel is set in the late nineteenth century, its radical implications confirm these subsequent findings.

What, then, is the common ground between Marlow and his audience to which he appeals by using the first person pronoun “us”? He may be a well-known narrator “in distant parts of the world,” yet there is no reason to suppose that he is on friendly terms with the audience of this particular reciting, other than with the host Charley. The latter is the only listener whom Marlow ever mentions by name. In addition, his reference to “a lot of men” (as cited above) implies a larger audience than in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness” – it is unlikely that Marlow would know all of them well. At a relatively early point in his narrative, he comments on Jim’s “affair” in the following way: “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 to-night between us? And I am the only seaman here” (107). The quotation is interesting because it offers another example of how Marlow presents his act of narration as

coincidental and spontaneous rather than inevitable. But it also suggests that while Marlow is a seaman, his listeners are not, or not any more. Also, the following comment he makes reinforces this impression: “The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject, and I could tell you instances. . . . However, this is not the place, nor the time, and we are concerned with Jim – who was unmarried” (120; ellipsis in orig.). If his listeners were intimately familiar with the life of a seaman, Marlow would not need to tell them such details. Yet, at other times, Marlow’s narrative seems to be addressed to an audience of sailors or ex-sailors. For example, when speaking of the particularly wide gap between illusion and reality that is characteristic of life at sea, he asks his listeners: “Hadn’t we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation?” (101). It could be argued that Conrad was inconsistent in the way he portrayed Marlow’s audience. But I would suggest that, in accordance with the pseudo-iterative mode of Marlow’s narrative, Conrad deliberately conflates the various audiences that Marlow addresses when telling Jim’s story on different occasions. Unlike in the first two Marlow tales, then, it is not obvious whether or not audience and narrator in *Lord Jim* are united by “the strong bond of the sea” and “the fellowship of the craft.” This only adds to the perception that Marlow is *in* the group, but not exactly *of* it, to borrow the phrase Cedric Watts used to describe the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness” – with whom the Marlow of *Lord Jim* certainly has more continuity than with his earlier incarnation in “Youth.”

In one of its meanings, the recurrent phrase “one of us” denotes something larger than the maritime community, something that certainly includes Marlow as well as his listeners. In fact, several critics have argued this point before. Jeremy Hawthorn, for instance, notes that while the phrase assumes various meanings, one of these is certainly “the solidarity of the colonialists” (*Conrad: Fictional Self-Consciousness* 42). Similarly, Benita Parry makes a case for reading “one of us” as “a term of racial identification distinguishing the colonialists from the alien world of the other,” and suggests that Marlow’s audience shares his experience of “the exiled colonial servant” (89). Mark Conroy too easily assumes that the listeners of Marlow’s oral narrative are members of the merchant service, but he too notes “the social and racial determinants” of the refrain “one of us” (100). Importantly, Christopher GoGwilt calls attention to “the exaggerated exclusion of women” from

the rhetorical appeal of Marlow's phrase, but he also points out that none of its meanings alone can "capture the limits of its claim to a common identity" (104; 104-5). Thus, it seems likely that Conrad's use of the "one of us" – just as his portrayal of Marlow's audience – is deliberately vague. One of the functions of this vagueness is to show how Marlow, who is not fully integrated in the group, is trying to construct a narrative of an imaginary community that is inclusive enough to encompass Jim, his audience as well as himself. Marlow's attempt, in turn, may be seen as an indirect expression of Conrad's own construction of an imaginary community of readers who bring the same values to the reading of his novel. At the same time, Conrad seems to question the possibility of succeeding in this endeavour: Marlow's narrative consistently casts doubt on the validity of such an imagined common identity, undermining his own attempt to turn contingency into coherence.

As I have suggested above, Marlow's audience as well as the narrative setting are much less specified in *Lord Jim* than in "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness." There is no continuity between this novel and the earlier novella in the sense in which there was between the latter and "Youth." However, we know more about the narratee of Marlow's written narrative, the man called the privileged reader, than about all the other listeners. The extradiegetic narrator's reference to his "wandering days" with "horizons as boundless as hope" being over now, as well as Marlow's remark that he has "knocked about the Western Pacific," suggest that the privileged man could be a middle-aged ex-sailor (254; 265). Just as Marlow's narrative in "Youth" evoked his middle-aged audience's nostalgia for the times of adventure gone by, so Marlow's packet in *Lord Jim* reminds the privileged reader of "the sounds, the visions, the very savour of the past – a multitude of fading faces, a tumult of low voices, dying away upon the shores of distant seas" (254-55). The similarities between Jim's youth and that of the privileged man could partly explain why he was the only member of Marlow's audience whose interest in Jim "survived the telling of his story" (255). Yet Marlow's comments also reveal that the privileged reader is sceptical of Jim's "self-appointed task" of helping the local people of Patusan and of the "love sprung from pity and youth" that Jim feels for them (255). As the following passage demonstrates, the privileged man is a firm believer in the *idea* behind the colonial enterprise and also holds strongly racist views:

You said also – I call to mind – that “giving your life up to them” (*them* meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow or black in colour) “was like selling your soul to a brute.” You contended that “that kind of thing” was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. “We want its strength at our backs” you had said. “We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition.” In other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don’t count. Possibly! You ought to know – be it said without malice – you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. (255)

Marlow does not challenge these views very forcefully, his critique being more implicit than explicit. This is at least in part because his whole written narrative is addressed to the privileged reader, the only one of his listeners truly interested in the story. Bruce Henricksen has convincingly argued that, as an implicit form of criticism, Marlow relates the story of Brown in order to give the privileged man a disillusioning example of Western expansionism. Also, Henricksen speculates that the privileged man could represent Conrad’s own typical *Blackwood’s* reader (101; 100). Although there is no way of proving this claim, it is indeed very likely that, through Marlow, Conrad was trying to challenge the views of imperialism and colonialism held by many of his contemporary readers. Nevertheless, Henricksen’s point also provides a partial explanation for the fact that Marlow’s criticism does not go any further. While Marlow does not share the privileged man’s racism and is aware of the potentially destructive effects of colonialism, he does not essentially question the idea behind it. In this, the passage cited above is reminiscent of the following famous extract from “Heart of Darkness”: “The conquest of the earth which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it” (47). The *Blackwood’s* publication context seems less directly relevant to *Lord Jim* than to

“Heart of Darkness” and, especially, to “Youth.” Yet, in the novel too, there are interesting parallels between Marlow’s relationship with his audiences and Conrad’s relationship with his contemporary readership.

2.2. Marlow, Jim and the problem of epistemology

If Jim’s failure is uncomfortable to Marlow’s listeners, it is even more so to Marlow himself, who knows Jim personally and is definitely still a seaman when telling his narrative. In Chapter V, he explains his interest in Jim in the following terms:

Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct I can’t explain. . . . Perhaps unconsciously I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible – for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man’s creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm and more chilling than the certitude of death – the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. . . . Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness – made it a thing of mystery and terror – like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth – in its day – had resembled his youth? (43-44)

This passage leaves the reader in no doubt that Marlow’s interest in Jim’s case is deeply personal: Jim is “one of us,” and if his failure has to be admitted, this will cast doubt on the values shared by the members of the community, including Marlow himself. As is obvious from his use of phrases such as “an obscure body of men,” “inglorious toil” and “fidelity to a certain standard of conduct,” the community to which Marlow alludes, and thus the main reference of the “us” in this extract, is the maritime community. Of the same passage, J. Hillis Miller has commented that “there is something suspect in Marlow’s enterprise of interpretation” because so

much is at stake for him personally that he is likely to find the interpretations he wants to find (*Fiction and Repetition* 29). Marlow's wish to preserve his faith in "the sovereign power" is also apparent in comments such as the following: "I tell you I wanted to see him [Jim] squirm for the honour of the craft" (40); "Don't you see what I mean by the solidarity of the craft? I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me – me! – of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour" (102). But while these passages give us Marlow's personal reasons for inquiring into Jim's case, they do not automatically answer the question why he actually narrates and re-narrates Jim's story, and why he goes to so much trouble as to write down its final part for the privileged reader, more than a year after he learns of Jim's death. Marlow explains his reasons for writing only by reference to the privileged man's interest in Jim's story. However, this remark, as well as Marlow's curiosity and his "propensity to spin yarns" (45), to use the phrase from "Heart of Darkness," are in themselves insufficient to explain the very coming into being of his narratives.

At this point, a comparison with the novella may be useful in grasping the nature of Marlow's storytelling in *Lord Jim*. I have argued that, in "Heart of Darkness," Marlow tells a confessional self-narrative that – paradoxically – revolves obsessively around another person, the enigmatic and brutal Kurtz. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow's narrative is not a confession, but it is mainly the report and interpretation of Jim's confession to him and of other "confidences" relating to Jim. At the start of his oral narrative, Marlow describes himself as an unwitting "receptacle of confessions" who happens to run into a lot of people who know something about Jim's case (32).⁶⁵ As I have already noted, however, the tone of these introductory remarks is deceptively casual, and we know that Marlow also actively seeks out people to find out more about Jim or to help him, such as he does with Stein. Watts argues that Jim becomes Marlow's protégé because Marlow needs to "gratify a frustrated paternal instinct" (*Deceptive* 140). Whether or not this is the case, it is very

⁶⁵ In this context, Michael Greaney has described Marlow as "the lay confessor" and as "the itinerant psychoanalyst" who believes that a talent for listening is a more important quality than "a flair for words." Starting from this observation, Greaney has also summarised the whole process of Marlovian storytelling very aptly as follows: "Marlow hears a disturbing narrative, and copes with his disturbance by telling stories, by translating alien experience into comfortable, familiar words" (86; 87). This way of putting it no doubt comes close to my contention that Marlow's act of narration is a means of creating a coherent story of Jim's life – and of his own as it relates to Jim's.

likely that Marlow identifies with Jim because he detects something of his own younger self in him. Accordingly, while Marlow's narrative in *Lord Jim* is not a confession, it is in part a self-narrative that is preoccupied with the figure of Jim. Suresh Raval has argued in a similar vein: "[Marlow's] narrative, though about Jim, also turns into one about himself, about his own potential transgressions, about the impossibility of pure allegiance to one's values, the impossibility of fulfilling the dream which Jim himself never abandons" (390-91). There are, then, certain similarities in the way in which Marlow's narrative revolves around Jim in this novel and around Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness," in spite of all the differences between the characters of Jim and Kurtz. Marlow is fascinated by Kurtz's eloquence and cannot help but identify with him, even though he wants to dissociate himself from him on moral grounds. Marlow's attitude towards Jim is equally contradictory. While he feels a great affinity with Jim and wants to find extenuating circumstances that would excuse his betrayal of the code of conduct, he is at the same time angry with him because what he did casts doubt on the validity of the code and makes Marlow question the possibility of maintaining one's professional integrity under any circumstances. Both Kurtz and Jim contribute greatly to shattering Marlow's illusions, and his narratives respond to this challenge with only limited success.

However, there is a significant difference between "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim* in terms of how Marlow pieces together a coherent narrative of the events. The experience he relates in the novella is traumatic, but because it is mainly his own experience and also rather limited in scope, his narrative can naturally unfold in a largely chronological order, except for a few (although important) anachronies.⁶⁶ In *Lord Jim*, however, Marlow needs to synthesise and interpret a wealth of information that he has gathered over a long period of time and that comes from a variety of sources. As I noted in the Introduction, Ricoeur understands a story as more than simply an enumeration of events in serial order (*Time and Narrative* (vol.1) 65). It is by emplotment that Marlow can draw a meaningful configuration out of a simple succession and organise otherwise heterogeneous factors into an intelligible whole. Ian Watt argued persuasively that the anachronies in *Lord Jim* give "an effect of

⁶⁶ Genette uses the term *anachrony* to mean "the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story [*fabula*] and narrative [*sjuzet*]." *Prolepsis* and *analepsis* are the two basic types of anachrony; prolepsis denotes "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later;" analepsis refers to "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (*Narrative* 36; 40).

dense impressionist particularity;” and, more importantly, that Conrad’s exceptionally complex handling of time is “essentially a means of representing a progression of moral understanding,” the source of which progression is Marlow’s probing mind (*Nineteenth Century* 300). In what follows, I will draw on Genette’s highly sophisticated account of time in narrative fiction to illustrate the function of temporality in Marlow’s tale. After the yellow cur incident, the narrative soon reaches the key scene of Marlow and Jim’s first conversation at the Malabar House, which ends only with the close of Chapter XIII. One reason why the scene is so extensive is that it is inflated with several small episodes, each of which belongs to a different period of time. It is here that Marlow’s digressions, his jumps backwards and forwards in time, produce the most extreme and complex forms of discordance between *story* and *narrative*.

For reasons of brevity, I will choose only one example that I hope can demonstrate the scale of the complexity of the handling of time in the novel: Marlow’s discussion with the French lieutenant in Chapters XII-XIII. What Genette terms the “first narrative” (and which began only with Marlow’s account of the Inquiry) is interrupted at a point during Marlow and Jim’s first conversation at the Malabar House by the insertion of an external analepsis that describes the scene when the crew of a French gunboat found the *Patna* (with Jim not on board any more).⁶⁷ Instead of rejoining the first narrative, however, the analepsis passes over into yet another point in time: “Two officers came on board . . . They were also very much struck by discovering a white man, dead and curled up peacefully on the bridge. ‘*Fort intrigués par ce cadavre,*’ as I was informed a long time after by an elderly French lieutenant whom I came across one afternoon in Sydney, by the merest chance, in a sort of café, and who remembered the affair perfectly” (107). Marlow here uses an anticipatory recall or proleptic analepsis: He recounts in advance how he will later be informed of further details of the *Patna* incident in the course of his significant discussion with the French lieutenant (which takes place more than three years after the accident). However, the proleptic analepsis is itself subordinate to the earlier external analepsis; thus, it has to be identified as a proleptic

⁶⁷ The narrative into which an anachrony is inserted, the “temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined as such,” is called first narrative. External analepses are those whose entire extent (meaning the duration of story they cover) remains external to the extent of the first narrative. Inversely, the extent of internal analepses is internal to the extent of the first narrative; that is, episodes that constitute internal analepses are later than “the temporal point of departure” of the first narrative (Genette, *Narrative* 48; 48-49; see 33-85).

analepsis on analepsis (or as a second-degree proleptic analepsis).⁶⁸ But the complexities do not end here. Having finished his account of the discussion with the French lieutenant, Marlow says:

I sat down again alone and discouraged – discouraged about Jim’s case. If you wonder that after more than three years it had preserved its actuality, you must know that I had seen him only very lately. I had come straight from Samarang, where I had loaded a cargo for Sydney . . . and in Samarang I had seen something of Jim. He was then working for De Jongh, on my recommendation. Water-clerk. (115)

The brief evocation of Marlow’s stay in Samarang, which had taken place shortly before he met the French lieutenant, is another analepsis. Yet, because it is subordinate to the earlier second-degree proleptic analepsis, the result is nothing less than an exceedingly complex analepsis on second-degree proleptic analepsis (or third-degree analepsis). Nonetheless, this anachrony at least rejoins the French lieutenant episode. Interestingly, Marlow’s comment on Jim’s employment as water-clerk reminds the reader of the outset of the novel. There, the extradiegetic narrator alluded to Jim’s several short stays in different ports of the world, but it is only now that we can piece together the full story of why and how Jim became a water-clerk. To end the discussion of anachronies in the French lieutenant episode, I will demonstrate how the first narrative is finally rejoined:

I sat thinking of him [Jim] after the French lieutenant had left, not, however, in connection with De Jongh’s cool and gloomy back shop, where we had hurriedly shaken hands not very long ago, but as I had seen him years before in the last flickers of the candle, alone with me in the long gallery of the Malabar House, with the chill and the darkness of the night at his back. . . . There was something fine in the wildness of his unexpressed, hardly formulated hope. “Clear out! Couldn’t think of it,” he said with a shake of the head. “I make you an offer for which I neither demand nor expect any sort of gratitude,” I

⁶⁸ An anticipatory recall or proleptic analepsis occurs “each time the narrator explains in advance how he will later, after the event, be informed of a present incident (or of its significance)” (Genette, *Narrative* 81; see 79-85). Genette has also analysed second- and third-degree effects such as second-degree prolepses (anticipation of an event on anticipation of another one), analepses on prolepses (retrospection on the anticipation of an event) and prolepses on analepses (a recall or memory of an anticipation or past plan) (*Narrative* 33-85, esp. 79).

said; “you shall repay the money when convenient, and ...” “Awfully good of you,” he muttered without looking up. (117-18; 2nd ellipsis in orig.)

Just as Marlow’s anachronic escapades were threatening to exhaust his listeners’ (and the reader’s) patience, he relieves them by employing a very fine technique to return to the first narrative: The future memory of his discussion with Jim dissolves into the continuation of this very discussion, almost as if nothing had happened on the previous ten or so pages. However, these highly elaborate anachronies blur temporal relations to such an extent that this part of Marlow’s narrative reaches the threshold of what Genette terms “achrony.”⁶⁹ Neither Marlow’s listeners nor the reader on a first reading can possibly piece together the exact chronology of the events described. What justifies Conrad’s markedly associative and impressionist method is, first of all, that Marlow is an oral storyteller whose narrative is necessarily less carefully constructed than a written account. Secondly, as Lothe formulates it, a quality of dream underlies the whole narrative and is “intimately related to Marlow’s associative narration and to the frequent shifts between different levels of time” (*Narrative Method* 148). I would add that this dreamy quality mirrors Marlow’s uncertainty about how to judge the character and behaviour of the elusive Jim. At the same time, it would be mistaken to compare it too closely with Marlow’s dreamlike narration in “Heart of Darkness,” which is associated with a loss of some narratorial control on his part. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow never seems as unconscious, his syntax never as broken, as in some parts of the earlier novella. The fact that he uses such complex forms of anachrony and eventually finds his way back to the original line of story may even be indicative of some narratorial control and self-awareness.

The great number of anachronies in the long passage about Marlow and Jim’s first conversation at the Malabar House has another immediate consequence. It is inevitable, namely, that Marlow should rely much more on his subsequent knowledge as narrator than in “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness” when presenting his narrative in a thematic rather than chronological order. Internal focalization is not the clearly dominant mood any more; and even if the focus coincides with a character, that character is not necessarily Marlow, which reinforces the impression that he is

⁶⁹ If an anachrony is “deprived of every temporal connection,” it becomes an “achrony”: an event that is “dateless and ageless” (*Narrative* 84; see 79-85). I feel obliged to mention that, in order not to strain the patience of *my* readers any further, I have ignored some anachronies on the micronarrative level in the analysis above.

not the protagonist of the novel. In extracts such as the following from Chapter VII (describing Jim's fear that the *Patna* will sink immediately), Marlow is ready to retreat into the background in favour of Jim: "He stood still looking at these recumbent bodies, a doomed man aware of his fate, surveying the silent company of the dead. They *were* dead! Nothing could save them! There were boats enough for half of them perhaps, but there was no time. No time! No time! It did not seem worth while to open his lips, to stir hand or foot" (69). The quotation demonstrates that Marlow lives through the scene described very vividly, as if he had himself been present.⁷⁰ In my reading, he does not do so consciously to make his narrative more exciting and authentic. Instead, it seems that Marlow naturally identifies with Jim to the extent that he sees the events through his eyes. However, at other points in his long discussion with him, he can also be ironic and less forgiving with his young protégé. Moreover, in the context of focalization, Marlow's moralising and psychologising interruptions, already noted by Guerard (*Novelist* 141-42), need to be touched on as well: as they are not typical of internal focalization but of nonfocalized narrative, they also undermine the status of internal focalization as the dominant mood. Finally yet importantly, it should be noted that Marlow sometimes relies on the information he has from other characters in order to be able to create an intelligible whole out of the story he tells. This tendency becomes increasingly typical as the novel unfolds, reaching its zenith in Marlow's written narrative.

Marlow's written narrative is based almost entirely on second-hand information, which inevitably raises the problem of his reliability. In this respect, the last part of *Lord Jim* prefigures the narrative method of *Chance*. The reader knows that everything Marlow relates in his written account concerns events that took place after he had parted from Jim for the last time. Not having been present to witness the last stage of Jim's life, Marlow needs to build his narrative around the bits of information he has obtained from various sources. These sources include Gentleman Brown, Jewel, Stein, Tamb' Itam, the Malay who brought Jewel and Tamb' Itam to Samarang, and hearsay. To what extent Marlow's informants are to be trusted is an open question, and especially the first-hand information Marlow has from Brown should be taken with reservations. At one point, Marlow himself remarks: "It is impossible to say how much he [Brown] lied to Jim then, how much he lied to me

⁷⁰ Lothe has argued in a similar vein (cf. *Narrative Method* 156).

now – and to himself always” (288). The problem of epistemology that Marlow raises here is one of the major concerns of the novel, but it is mentioned in such an explicit way by Marlow himself only on a few occasions throughout the written narrative. Another example is found in Marlow’s letter to the privileged reader that accompanies his narrative, where he openly admits: “My information was fragmentary” (258).

In the light of Conrad’s thematization of the problem of epistemology, the reader would not need to be particularly surprised at finding in Marlow’s written narrative violations of what James Phelan has called a narrow standard of mimesis. Phelan usefully contrasts “a *narrow* standard of mimesis, one based only on imitation-of-the-real” with “a broader standard of mimesis, one that looks both to the real and to conventions for imitating it” (*Rhetoric* 110). In *Lord Jim*, Conrad usually embraces such a broader standard of mimesis, a manifestation of which is the frequent use of *paralepsis*.⁷¹ Thus, Marlow can write to the privileged reader, for instance:

Beloved, trusted and admired as he was, he [Dain Waris] was still one of them, while Jim was one of *us*. Moreover, the white man, a tower of strength in himself, was invulnerable, while Dain Waris could be killed. Those unexpressed thoughts guided the opinions of the chief men of the town who elected to assemble in Jim’s fort for deliberation upon the emergency as if expecting to find wisdom and courage in the dwelling of the absent white man. (272)

Here and elsewhere, Marlow assumes a panoramic field of vision and feels free to render the thoughts of characters other than himself, moving far beyond the information with which any of his sources could have provided him. Clearly, in some significant passages of his written narrative, the only source on which Marlow may rely is his imaginative faculty, which might at first sight seem to be in line with the epistemological relativism mentioned above. However, what is interesting about Conrad’s modernism, and about *Lord Jim* in particular, is that there is also a refusal to give in to relativism and contingency, a desire to preserve the mimetic illusion and to hang on to some certainties. As Paul B. Armstrong puts it, Conrad is a “novelist of

⁷¹ Genette defines *paralepsis* as a narrative trope that consists of giving more information “than is authorized in principle in the code of focalization governing the whole [narrative]” (*Narrative* 195).

contradictions” who perpetually alternates between “a deep longing to overcome contingency and an intense recognition that this is an impossible dream.” Armstrong is also right to argue that Marlow’s story in *Lord Jim* “preserves the past only as a construct” as it has been assembled from many “incomplete, accidental, and perhaps dubious sources.” However, I disagree with Armstrong’s claim that, by making numerous digressions, Marlow refuses to create coherence in his narrative, and that therefore it is only for the reader to discover consistency (*Challenge of Bewilderment* 111; 125; 121). It would be more accurate to say that while the reader has to work hard to find consistency, Conrad also shows Marlow trying to create coherence by telling (and writing down) Jim’s story. The fact that Marlow does not quite succeed in his attempt only proves Armstrong’s own point that Conrad oscillates between two mutually exclusive positions.

This oscillation clearly manifests itself in the narrative structure of the novel. What I have called a refusal to give in to relativism is observable in Marlow’s attempts to justify his written narrative as based on his wide knowledge of the particulars of Jim’s story – or, at least, of certain parts and aspects of that story. In these cases, Conrad seems temporarily to abandon his adherence to an otherwise broad standard of mimesis and embrace a narrow standard. Even Marlow’s remark that I have already cited, which begins “[m]y information was fragmentary,” turns into an affirmation when he adds: “but I’ve fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture” (258). Frequently, Marlow considers it necessary to account for his unlikely knowledge by explicit references to his sources, as is evidenced by expressions such as “Brown related to me in detail” (268) or “as he [Brown] told me himself” (266). Also typical are passages in which Marlow seems to overwhelm his privileged reader with factual details that he need not have included to advance the story. Why, for instance, would it be important to describe Brown’s previous exploits and adventures in such detail in Chapter XXXVIII? The main function of such passages seems to be to lend an air of reality to Marlow’s story and to present him as an extremely well-informed storyteller. Roland Barthes has called this narrative element the “reality effect” – the function of which, in Jonathan Culler’s words, is to “confirm the mimetic contract and assure the reader that he can interpret the text as about a real world” (*Structuralist Poetics* 193). The start of Chapter XXXVI, where the extradiegetic narrator tells us how the privileged reader receives Marlow’s packet, is another case in point. On opening the packet, he

finds altogether four written documents: Marlow's written narrative, his explanatory letter that accompanies the narrative, Jim's father's letter to his son, as well as a fragment of a letter written by Jim himself. However little Jim's abortive attempt at letter-writing and his father's facile moralizing add to our understanding of the story, Conrad still seems to be playing with an old narrative trope here – one that involves the use of written documents to frame the story that follows and to make it appear more realistic.

To the examples I have cited so far, one might object that if Conrad wished to present Marlow as an unreliable narrator, the attempts at justifying the trustworthiness of his narrative would not be Conrad's own, but would instead reveal Marlow's failure as a storyteller. Such a view, however, does not seem reconcilable with the evidence of the text. A thorough analysis of the novel's narrative structure, such as Lothe's, reveals that Marlow does have considerable textual authority (*Narrative Method* 165-74). Similarly, Phelan has argued that Conrad makes Marlow a reliable reporter and, in his written narrative, even "extends his authority to matters that he does not have any sources for." At the same time, Phelan points out that some of Marlow's interpretations cannot be trusted because they stem from his desire for Jim's success ("Textual Recalcitrance" 53, 50). Indeed, while Marlow's interpretations are not always accurate, few readers would imagine him as consciously misrepresenting the facts of the story. Generally, Conrad seems to suggest that Marlow is reliable in the sense that he attempts to present the "facts" as far as he knows them, while being necessarily subjective in his interpretations. Also, the text implies that, for Marlow, it is more important to create the illusion of wholeness in his narrative by using his imagination than to be aware of and accurate in rendering every single detail of Jim's story. Marlow strives for coherence not only in order to make his account readable, but even more so because his own identity is intertwined with Jim's. Producing a plausible narrative of the events could help Marlow understand and cope with the challenge Jim's case presents.

3. Jim's narrative identity

The title character's attempts throughout *Lord Jim* to construct a heroic identity for himself represent one of the major themes of the novel. My investigation of Jim's identity – similarly to the analysis of Marlow's identity here and in the previous chapter – diverges from most earlier critical commentaries in that it focuses mainly

on his act of narration, rather than his actions as character in the story.⁷² In this section, I will examine Jim's self-narratives in a wide sense of the term, in the order in which they appear in the novel. The first of these is the entirely imaginary narrative of his adventures and heroism that he forges in his mind while serving on the training-ship:

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

(11)

This oft-quoted passage highlights what is the source of Jim's problems in the novel, namely his *Bovarysme* and Quixotism (cf. Stape and Sullivan xxxi). His ideal and heroic self-image cannot be reconciled with reality, an early indication of which is his failure to act in a real emergency situation that is described immediately after this passage (11-13). However, instead of reflecting on his failure after the incident, he confirms the validity of his self-narrative in his imagination, exulting "with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure and in a sense of many-sided courage" (13). His later jump from the *Patna* is directly related to his unwillingness for reflection on this occasion. It should be noted that although Jim does not verbalize (or, at least, does not utter) his imaginary tales of his heroism, they can still be termed self-narratives. Gergen and Gergen have pointed out that the self-narrative need not be a verbal construction: "Although verbalization may be common, a sense of narrative may be imbedded in a more basic experience of fittingness or directionality among events. Dialogue is necessary neither for an appreciation of the propriety with which scenes fit together nor for a sense of mounting tension, climax, and denouement" (181n).

⁷² For two fine examples of studies that explore Jim's identity primarily from the perspective of his actions, see Erdinast-Vulcan, *Modern Temper* 34-47 and Hampson, *Betrayal* 116-36.

It is significant that Jim derives his ideal conception of himself from a reading of literature – a problem that Conrad had already explored in “Youth.” But while in the earlier short story, young Marlow reads Burnaby’s *A Ride to Khiva* and probably also some of Byron’s works, Jim’s reading as a young trainee consists of the “light holiday literature” of life at sea (11). The narrator’s phrase sounds dismissive of the kind of literature that Jim reads, and the passage cited above suggests that he is unable to engage with it critically.⁷³ But even Jim’s notion of great literature turns out to be naïve when he takes a “complete Shakespeare” with him to Patusan and explains his choice to Marlow only by saying that Shakespeare’s works are the best thing “to cheer up a fellow” (180). The fact that Jim sees himself in the role of “a hero in a book” adds another dimension to Conrad’s exploration of the problem of self-construction in the novel. It confirms Neumann’s point that, in order to render ourselves culturally comprehensive, we have to “align our narrative self-presentations with accepted genre conventions” (“Narrating Selves” 66; cf. Sarbin, “Root Metaphor” 17). In addition, it calls to mind Ricoeur’s idea (or, rather, the flip side of his idea) that fiction is “an irreducible dimension of *the understanding of the self*” (“Life: A Story” 435).⁷⁴

Jim’s next self-narrative in the novel is the account he gives in court of the collision of the *Patna*. However, it would be more accurate to describe it as an attempt at producing a self-narrative because questions from the assessors cut him short again and again, not allowing him to convey the complexity of the situation with which he was faced. The extradiegetic narrator renders Jim’s frustrated thoughts about the inquiry in free indirect discourse: “They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him as if facts could explain anything!” (27). Later, Marlow too says that the object of the official inquiry was “not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair” (48). Yet Jim, the narrator tells us, “wanted to go on

⁷³ Hawthorn calls attention to the important fact that Jim’s dreams, such as saving people from sinking ships or confronting “savages” on tropical shores, are all connected with Britain’s imperial position. In Hawthorn’s reading, it is not only a personal defect that renders Jim incapable of controlling his dreams, but also “the pressure of a national ability to escape from the unpleasant realities of the present hour by participation in imperialist ventures” (*Conrad: Fictional Self-Consciousness* 38; 39).

⁷⁴ It should be noted that there are many other examples of fictional and linguistic self-consciousness in *Lord Jim* that cannot be analysed in detail in this chapter. Marlow, for instance, in a manner reminiscent of “Heart of Darkness,” reflects on the difficulty of storytelling when he says twice that Jim’s story gets “dwarfed in the telling” (171, 205). Also, he repeatedly refers to Jim’s “tale” or “story” (172, 225, 258), and, at one point, reminds his listeners that “this is a love-story I am telling you now” (224). These metafictional elements anticipate the narrative of *Chance*.

talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also," which accentuates the importance of self-narration for him at this difficult time of his life (29).

It is only in his subsequent conversation with Marlow at the Malabar House that Jim is allowed to construct his self-narrative in the way in which he prefers. In the course of this private inquiry, he can tell Marlow what "he could not tell the court," and also what he feared his father "wouldn't understand" (69; 65). Marlow lets him be the narrator of his own story, although – as I have noted above – not without occasionally challenging him. For instance, when Jim declares that there was "not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and the wrong of this affair," Marlow retorts: "How much more did you want?" (101). For Jim, it is of utmost importance to have his self-narrative verified by Marlow. As the latter remarks, Jim narrated "with evident anxiety to be believed" (72). By his agitated questioning, Jim tries to challenge Marlow (and Conrad the reader) to consider whether he would have acted differently in his situation: "What would you have done? You are sure of yourself – aren't you? What would you do if you felt now – this minute – the house here move, just move a little under your chair. Leap! By heavens! you would take one spring from where you sit and land in that clump of bushes yonder" (84-85). Gergen and Gergen have argued that "whether a given narrative can be maintained depends importantly on the individual's ability to negotiate successfully with others concerning the meaning of events in relationship with each other," adding that this negotiation need not be public (177). Jim's questioning may go beyond mere negotiation, but it is not unsuccessful. Marlow perceives it as aggressive, noting that he was "being bullied now," but admits that "it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself" (85). Also highly relevant to Marlow's private discussion with Jim is Neumann and Nünning's similar observation that we tend to negotiate our narrative self-construction "in a continuous dialogue with significant others and their (presumed) expectations" (8). Marlow certainly serves as Jim's significant other for reasons discussed earlier in this chapter. In addition, the theme of how narrators negotiate their identities with others establishes a further link between Jim's and Marlow's narratives since, it will be recalled, Marlow too appeals to his listeners to confirm his interpretations by asking rhetorical questions. Conrad explores this theme more fully here than in "Heart of Darkness." The epigraph by Novalis – "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely,

the moment another soul will believe in it" (1) – even establishes it quite explicitly as the novel's major concern.

Another important aspect of the novel, and a conspicuous similarity between Marlow and Jim, is their compulsion to tell. Just as Marlow cannot help but tell Jim's story to his narratees over and over again, so Jim "could no more stop telling now than he could have stopped living by the mere exertion of his will" (80). Although Jim generally needs Marlow to verify his self-narrative, at times he does not seem to care or even be aware of whom he is addressing. In such cases, what really matters to him is to be allowed to speak without being interrupted. As Marlow comments in one instance, "He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence – another possessor of his soul" (74). Hawthorn argues of this and other passages that Jim, as opposed to Marlow, can only use language for naming, but not for real communication. Jim, he points out, has an egoistic attitude towards language and equates his name with his sense of personal identity. Not even his lack of eloquence, which distinguishes him from Kurtz, is a purely positive quality as it testifies to the limits of his language and to his inability to communicate. For Jim, Hawthorn claims, the real truths are internal and pre-verbal, whereas Marlow is a social being and believes that language imposes a certain order on the world (*Conrad: Fictional Self-Consciousness* 45-49). While Jim is certainly self-centred and lacks eloquence, I hope to have demonstrated that there is no such sharp distinction between his and Marlow's narratives. As Greaney notes, Jim's linguistic resources are limited while Marlow's are not, yet both of their narratives might be described in terms of failure because Marlow too cannot convey his full meaning and his rhetoric does not deliver the revelations that it appears to promise (97).

In my reading, their narratives are only partial failures, however, in the sense that the constructive process of telling the narrative seems to be more important for Conrad than the achievement of a coherent self. Indeed, *Lord Jim* questions the possibility of achieving it at all. When speaking of Jim's self-deception, for instance, it is important to keep in mind that self-portrayal "does not imply a mirroring of the past but rather a generation of something that *stands for* the past (or myself in the past)" (Kerby 53). In other words, even the most honest examination of one's past actions and behaviour involves a certain falsification. One cannot do more than revisit the past from the perspective of the present self. Kerby also calls attention to

the fact that our tellings are very often retellings, so that “there is often considerable intertextuality in our remembering – the tale is retold, and relates to little but a prior telling. In fact, much of what we remember is simply a prior remembering, a prior emplotment” (53). In the light of these perceptive comments, the particular oral narrative that Marlow tells in *Lord Jim* may be regarded as no more than a reconstruction of a reconstruction, a remembering of his previous interpretations of a series of events. For Marlow as well as for Jim, the psychologically important and constructive process of telling is an end in itself.

The greatest obstacle in the way of Jim’s construction of a coherent and plausible self-narrative is not Marlow’s occasional criticism, but Jim himself. From the discussions he has with Marlow before going to Patusan, two contrasting narratives emerge that he is trying unsuccessfully to replace with one effective narrative: these might be called the narrative of “I am not good enough” (119) and that of “nothing can touch me” (252). These phrases are repeated several times throughout the novel (in slightly different ways) and represent, respectively, Jim’s low self-esteem and what Marlow calls his “superb egoism” (310). That these narratives implicitly co-exist in Jim’s mind can be inferred already from the famous yellow cur episode in Chapter VI: Jim has overheard the words “Look at that wretched cur” (58), spoken by a stranger to Marlow outside the court in reference to a yellow dog. Yet Jim is not only under the mistaken assumption that the polysemous word “cur” was directed at him as an insult, but he also believes that it came from Marlow’s mouth. Before the misunderstanding is finally cleared up, Jim has already “given himself away” by his threatening behaviour towards Marlow (61). The main reason why he is so offended, and why he misinterprets the reference of the word “cur” at all, is his own belief that he is not good enough. The aggressive way in which he then tries to defend his honour betrays his egoism. In his subsequent discussions with Marlow, Jim continues to grapple with these two self-narratives. He very much wishes to “begin with a clean slate” and to show the world what he is capable of (“I’ll show yet”) in order to revive people’s confidence in him (141). Although he cannot come up with an effective narrative to displace his self-destructive convictions, he still experiences a certain relief after having been allowed to say what was on his mind. As he tells Marlow: “Last night already you have done me no end of good. Listening to me – you know” (141).

In Patusan, Jim is given the chance to begin with a clean slate. He quickly achieves remarkable successes by restoring peace within the community, earning Jewel's trust and love as well as the friendship of the chief's son, Dain Waris. Yet the way in which he narrates his experiences to Marlow when the latter visits him in Patusan reveals that, instead of constructing a new and effective story for which he can be responsible, he has regressed into something that resembles his earlier self-narrative of heroism and adventure. He now feels that he can live the life he wanted and be the person that he imagined himself to be, and the indigenous community plays an important role in confirming his heroic self-image. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, however, has drawn a useful distinction between Jim's self-definition in the *Patna* and Patusan sections of the novel. She introduces the concept of "identi-fiction" to denote "a literary text or genre on which a fictional character construes his or her identity," and argues that while Jim's initial identi-fiction was the Stevensonian adventure story, in the Patusan episode he chooses the heroic epic or heroic mythical narrative. She also points out that Jim easily accepts and even acts upon the myths that evolve around him in Patusan, and that even some of Marlow's comments on Jim are couched in the mythical idiom (*Modern Temper* 39, 39-42). But in addition to his new self-confidence and pride in his achievements, Jim has also retained his fear of the outside world. To Marlow, he admits that "[t]he very thought of the world outside is enough to give me a fright . . . because I have not forgotten why I came here" (229). Both his self-narrative of being untouchable and that of his failure have lived on in his imagination and now render him vulnerable to Brown.

When all is lost, he makes "one more attempt to deliver himself" by writing the letter that consists only of the words "An awful thing has happened . . . I must now at once . . ." (256; 2nd ellipsis in orig.). The letter is headed "The Fort, Patusan," but lacks a date and an addressee (256). Marlow believes that Jim tried to write soon after Tamb' Itam had brought him news of the death of Dain Waris and of Brown's escape (307). This abortive attempt at writing could be read as proof of Jim's inarticulateness, but I would rather focus on it as an example of Conrad's dramatization of the importance of self-narration in times of crisis. As Kerby puts it, questions of identity and self-understanding "arise primarily in crisis situations and at certain turning points in our routine behavior" (6). The fact that Jim's letter has no addressee may suggest that the act of narration itself was more important to him than

to whom he was writing. But his attempt at self-narration failed, and this is not unrelated to his eventual death: had he been able to make sense of his role in the tragic turn of events, he might have chosen to fight instead of having himself killed by Doramin. There is also an interesting parallel between Jim's and Decoud's letter-writing in *Nostromo*. Decoud writes a long letter to his sister before leaving on a dangerous mission with Nostromo to ship the silver away from Sulaco in a lighter. As Decoud interrupts his writing briefly, the narrator remarks: "In the most sceptical heart there lurks at such moments, when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings, like a light by which the action may be seen when personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world" (230). Before leaving on the mission, Decoud hands his pocket-book (with his letter to his sister in it) to Mrs. Gould, and says: "Perhaps my last words to her" (260). Even though Decoud is much more articulate than Jim and specifically addresses his letter to his sister, the reasons that compel both of them to write and the circumstances in which they do so are similar. Both Jim and Decoud are aware of the danger they face and that this letter may be their last chance to "leave a correct impression" of themselves. Jim does not manage to express himself well (if at all), but in this case Conrad seems to be interested more in the effort than in the result of our self-narrations. Irrespective of the impression they have left behind, both Jim and Decoud die soon after completing their letters.

4. Stein, Brown and some minor characters

Lord Jim features a vast array of storytelling characters besides Marlow and Jim, which allowed Conrad to explore the problem of self-construction in greater depth than in any of his previous works. For instance, already at a very early point in the novel, the bowman of the cutter who serves on the training-ship tells a self-narrative of his heroism, which Jim considers "a pitiful display of vanity" (13); when Jim is hospitalized after being disabled by a falling spar, he meets two patients who "told each other the story of their lives" (15); much later on, there is also Cornelius giving Brown "his own version of Jim's character and commenting in his own fashion upon the events of the last three years" (276). In this brief section, I can look at only three further examples in some detail: the narratives told by the men in the lifeboat with Jim, by Stein, and by Gentleman Brown. When Jim jumps from the *Patna*, he lands

in a lifeboat, thus joining the German captain and the white members of the crew. On discovering that the new man in the boat is not the third engineer George, who they had urged to leave with them, they initially abuse Jim and accuse him of killing George. Later, however, they become unnaturally friendly with Jim so that he will verify the version of the events that they have constructed and want to present to the authorities. They call upon Jim to realise that he is literally as well as metaphorically “in the same boat” with them (97). When they are all rescued by a passing steamer, the captain and his men tell their narrative, disclaiming all responsibility for the assumed sinking of the *Patna*: “Shock slight. Stopped the ship. Ascertained the damage. Took measures to get the boats out without creating a panic. As the first boat was lowered ship went down in a squall. Sank like lead” (104). Jim does not say anything at this point, but is determined to stick to the truth of his own impressions. In this context, the fact that the *Patna* did not sink is important only in so far as it throws light on the constructedness of the narrative that the men in the boat have told.

The character of Stein is highly complex and has received a great deal of critical attention. Accordingly, I want to focus only on the short narrative he tells Marlow in his own words, in which he relates how he managed to capture a rare specimen of butterfly. The German Stein had come to the Malay Archipelago with a Dutch naturalist, remained in the area with a Scottish trader he had met, and eventually inherited the latter’s privileged position with the local people. He befriended a Malay queen’s son, Mohammed Bonso, and married Bonso’s sister. Marlow comments that Stein and Mohammed Bonso “became the heroes of innumerable exploits” and “had wonderful adventures” (156). When telling Marlow of how he captured the butterfly, Stein presents himself in a similar light, as a brave and noble adventurer:

There was a great enemy of mine, a great noble – and a great rascal too – roaming with a band in the neighbourhood. I cantered for four or five miles . . . Suddenly somebody fires a volley – twenty shots at least it seemed to me. I hear bullets sing in my ear, and my hat jumps to the back of my head. It was a little intrigue, you understand. They got my poor Mohammed to send for me and then laid that ambush. I see it all in a minute, and I think – This wants a little management. . . .

I get hold of my revolver with my right hand – quiet – quiet. After all, there were only seven of these rascals. They get up from the grass and start running with their sarongs tucked up, waving spears above their heads and yelling to each other to look out and catch the horse because I was dead. I let them come as close as the door here and then bang, bang, bang – take aim each time too. One more shot I fire at a man’s back, but I miss. Too far already. (159)

After successfully defending himself against his attackers and killing three of them, Stein notices a specimen of the butterfly he had been longing to possess. In spite of just having survived a dangerous attack, he keeps his composure and manages to capture the insect. He finishes his account to Marlow by quoting two lines from Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso* that express his sense of having finally achieved his goal, holding the butterfly in his hands: “*So halt’ ich’s endlich denn in meinen Händen, / Und nenn’ es in gewissem Sinne mein*” (160). There is an important similarity between Stein, Jim and the Marlow of “Youth” in terms of the crucial role adventure plays in their self-narratives. But Stein is not only the man of action, he is also the philosophically minded scientist; at once an “archetypal Old Wise Man and father confessor” and “a chastened figure,” “an artist-priest engaged in a lifelong commitment to order and meaningful coherence” and a Romantic “idealist whose adventures, failures, and missed opportunities have taught him the full value as well as the limitations of the practical” (Knowles and Moore 397). Greaney argues that Stein also rescues Jim’s identity from gossip by restoring “sophistication, complexity, and opacity to the Jim-discourses of the novel” (93). In this respect and in terms of his education, Stein also resembles the Marlow of *Lord Jim*.

The example of Gentleman Brown shows Conrad’s interest in what may be described as deathbed narration. When Marlow meets Brown in a hovel in Bangkok, he is already dying, but he is eager to tell his narrative before he expires: “He seemed to fear that I [Marlow] would get tired of waiting and go away, leaving him with his tale untold, with his exultation unexpressed” (260). Marlow describes how Brown was boasting to him of his exploits “in his sordid and repulsive agony,” but remarks that he “did not begrudge him this triumph *in articulo mortis*, this almost posthumous illusion of having trampled all the earth under his feet” (288). Even more than Jim’s and Decoud’s letter-writing, Brown’s act of narration is tainted by

his impending death. Yet this does not endow his narrative with the special kind of authority that Walter Benjamin attributes to the dying in his essay “The Storyteller.” Benjamin argues that “even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him” an authority that is “at the very source of the story,” and goes on to make the more general claim that the storyteller “has borrowed his authority from death” (*Illuminations* 94). As I have already noted, however, the status of the information Marlow has from Brown is questionable. Marlow is well aware that Brown is not only capable of lying but is also a self-deceiver: “The corpse of his mad self-love uprose from rags and destitution as from the dark horrors of a tomb. . . . Vanity plays lurid tricks with our memory, and the truth of every passion wants some pretence to make it live” (288). As Sarbin has argued, the self-deceiver, like everyone else, “lives according to an ongoing plot structure,” telling stories “both to self and to audiences.” However, the self-deceiving narrator “constructs the text so that the self as narrative figure is protected, defended, or enhanced,” taking care to avoid “those contextual features that would render the story inconsistent, unconvincing, or absurd” (“Root Metaphor” 16; 17; 16). But Marlow also realises that, to some degree, self-deception is a universal quality. In a centrally important passage that refers to Jim but could also apply to Brown, Marlow states his belief that “no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge” (65). Brown’s last words, like those of many other Conradian characters, most notably Kurtz’s in “Heart of Darkness,” fail to provide a clue to the work’s central problems.

5. The question of identity: Conrad and his readers

A lot of research has focused on the personal and historical sources that Conrad used in *Lord Jim* (see esp. Sherry, *Eastern World* 41-170). The novel has also given rise to a great deal of fruitful speculation about the ways in which it could be read as a piece of autobiographical fiction. For instance, Jim’s romantic dreams of becoming a model sailor have been compared to Conrad’s own quixotic desire to go to sea as a boy; and Jim’s jump from the *Patna* has been read as an echo of Conrad’s decision to leave his homeland, which led some of his compatriots to accuse him of having betrayed Polish traditions (Knowles and Moore 240). John Batchelor has suggested that *Lord Jim* is “a triple self-portrait” involving Marlow, Stein as well as Jim: Jim represents Conrad’s younger self’s “youthfulness, uncertainty, guilt, ambition and

idealism;” Marlow is “the Englishman that Conrad would have liked to have been; and Stein is, in a sense, Conrad as he actually was. Stein is a projection of the aspects of his social identity that he acknowledged (reluctantly) to be seen in him by his English friends: not ‘one of us’ but an exotic stranger speaking broken English, a wise foreigner with an adventurous past” (*Life of Conrad* 110). Although I do not wish to pursue this line of argumentation, I agree with Batchelor that, through the writing of *Lord Jim*, Conrad was trying to engage with questions of identity on a very personal level.

In the rest of this short section, I would like to focus on some aspects of Conrad’s Author’s Note, written in 1917, seventeen years after the novel’s publication in book form. At the very end of the Note, Conrad assures his readers that Jim “is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He’s not a figure of Northern Mists either” (6). He continues by suggesting that his protagonist is based on a real-life model: “One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead I saw his form pass by me – appealing – significant – under a cloud – perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me with all the sympathy of which I was capable to seek fit words for his meaning. He was ‘one of us’” (6). It is interesting that Conrad repeats this refrain from the novel in the Author’s Note at such a distance of time, while also retaining its vagueness. In addition, he reuses the phrase “under a cloud,” which in the novel refers to Jim’s inscrutability. There is a suggestion of metalepsis here again (as so often in his Author’s Notes) because Conrad treats some elements of the fictional world of the novel in much the same way as he treats his personal experiences in the real world. I have already discussed such playfulness and intimacy of tone in the Author’s Note to the *Youth* volume. In the Note to *Lord Jim*, the reference to “one of us” could also imply that Conrad was appealing not only to a typically Blackwoodian readership: at the time of the Note’s composition, his *Blackwood’s* phase had long come to an end.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ It should be noted that, just before describing Jim as “not the product of coldly perverted thinking,” Conrad relates an anecdote of a lady whom a friend of his met in Italy, and who did not like *Lord Jim*. Conrad comes to the conclusion that she “could not have been an Italian” because “no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour” (6). He then wonders whether the lady “was an European at all” (6). Of this passage, GoGwilt argues that Conrad repeats Marlow’s “excessive misogyny” in the Author’s Note, but claims that “it is after all the heavy-handed national stereotyping that betrays his novel’s underlying concerns” (104). GoGwilt’s criticism may be too sharp, but it demonstrates that, in the Author’s Note, Conrad reactivated many of the potential meanings that he had attached to the phrase “one of us” in the novel itself.

Conrad's claim that *Jim* is based on a real-life model is accompanied by his insistence that Marlow could well have related the whole of his oral narrative in one evening. Reacting to criticism that it was not credible for Marlow to talk for such a long time as he does, Conrad remarks:

Men have been known both in the tropics and in the temperate zone to sit up half the night "swapping yarns." This however is but one yarn yet with interruptions affording some measure of relief; and in regard to the listeners' endurance the postulate must be accepted that the story *was* interesting. . . . As to the mere physical possibility we all know that some speeches in Parliament have taken nearer six than three hours in delivery; whereas all that part of the book which is Marlow's narrative can be read through aloud, I should say, in less than three hours. Besides – though I have kept strictly all such insignificant details out of the tale – we may presume that there must have been refreshments on that night, a glass of mineral water of some sort to help the narrator on. (5)

Although Conrad would like his readers to believe that Marlow needed "less than three hours" for the delivery of his whole oral narrative, the reviewer of the *Academy* was closer to the truth when he calculated that Marlow must in fact have been talking for "eleven solid hours" (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 117). Conrad's patently inaccurate estimate and his rather ludicrous reference to "refreshments" draw attention to themselves and invite consideration of his peculiar authorial attitude. J. H. Stape, speaking of this passage as well as Conrad's highly unreliable comments on the work's genesis, argues that the Author's Note to *Lord Jim* is "less concerned with accurately reconstructing the history of the novel's writing than with fashioning a public image of himself as an author whose work was deliberately planned, relatively untroubled during its conception and development, and for the greater part subject to his conscious and unremitting control" ("Northern Mists" 212). The Author's Note to *Lord Jim*, then, serves as another example of Conrad's retrospective imposition of coherence on his work. The novel itself may be read in a similar context. Just as the act of narration attests to Marlow's desire for reaching certainty about Jim's case, and Jim's confession to Marlow betrays his wish to create

a coherent identity, so the writing of the novel might have been for Conrad a way of overcoming the several contingencies in his own life.

CHAPTER FIVE

Chance: Identity and Imagination

Chance is the only one of Conrad's Marlow fictions not to have been written for *Blackwood's Magazine*. Published about twelve years after Conrad's Blackwood phase had come to an end (1914), it resurrects the famous storyteller of that period but turns him into a garrulous, misogynistic and quarrelsome character. *Chance* is generally regarded as an uneven work whose exceedingly complex narrative method is not justified by the less sophisticated thematics; yet it is also known as the novel that finally brought Conrad popular success. In spite of all the differences between *Chance* and the earlier Marlovian narratives, it has a certain thematic as well as technical continuity with them, particularly with *Lord Jim*. Although in a less complex way than in the latter, in *Chance* too references to the world of the sea represent an appeal to a shared discourse of identity. In terms of narrative technique, *Chance* resembles the Patusan part of *Lord Jim*, especially Marlow's written narrative, because most of what he relates is based on second-hand experience. This narrative situation also enables Conrad to develop the previous novel's insights into the part played by the imagination in self-construction. The various storytelling characters on different narrative levels also partly serve this purpose, but it is Marlow's own narrative that predominates in *Chance*. Unlike Jim's, the voice of Flora de Barral as a narrator is rarely heard, even though she is supposed to be the novel's protagonist.⁷⁶ The reader may at times get the impression that Flora, similarly to many other characters in *Chance*, has no existence other than as a figure in Marlow's narrative. The use of metaliterary expressions too suggests that Conrad here reflects on the writing of fiction itself and thus negotiates his own identity as a novelist. Finally, I will also briefly consider the novel's publication context and the ways in which the text reflects Conrad's attempt to discover a new audience for his fiction.

1. The narrative structure and dynamics

The opening words of *Chance* are, as in "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness," those of an anonymous extradiegetic homodiegetic narrator. A friend of Marlow's, he –

⁷⁶ In the Author's Note to *Chance*, Conrad writes that "it is Flora de Barral who is really responsible for this novel which relates, in fact, the story of her life" (vii).

unlike the frame narrator in those two texts – often enters into dialogue with him in the course of the novel and sometimes openly questions his views, thus fulfilling a more active narratorial role than the member of that small group of ex-sailors. *Chance* begins with a scene set at a riverside inn, where this unnamed individual dines with Marlow and their new acquaintance, Charles Powell, who in turn becomes an intradiegetic narrator when he begins to tell his companions the story of how he obtained his first berth as second mate in the *Ferndale*. Marlow himself, at this point, is in effect a mere listener, his role being confined to making occasional comments on Powell’s narrative. Yet Powell, however likeable he is, turns out to be a naïve, “simple” man, as the unnamed narrator himself remarks, in agreement with Marlow (40). This undermines the authority of Powell’s observations in the reader’s eyes, so that when Marlow himself assumes the role of a second intradiegetic narrator besides Powell immediately afterwards, he is only formally on an equal footing with him. Clearly, Marlow is the more prominent and subtle of the two. This is true even before we reach Part II, where Marlow degrades Powell into his informant, a character in the metadiegetic narrative whose tale he often quotes in direct speech. *Chance* also features a whole range of other narrators (in a wide sense of the term “narrator”) who play only a minor role and whose stories are subsumed under Marlow’s narrative. The following chart outlines the complex Chinese-box structure of the novel:

anonymous narrator

Powell

Marlow

Mr Fyne

Mrs Fyne

Flora de Barral

Powell

Franklin (first mate)

...⁷⁷

In terms of narrative levels, *Chance* is Conrad’s most complex – and, indeed, most perplexing – novel. The several narrative embeddings and the relatively frequent

⁷⁷ The three dots are to indicate that one might make a case for including other minor characters besides Franklin (such as the steward of the *Ferndale*) at this narrative level.

shifts between narrative voices can at times make it difficult to determine whose narrative is in fact being heard at a given moment. Such is the case especially when we are at several removes from the anonymous narrator. We may find, for instance, that we are listening to Franklin's narrative as rendered by Powell to Marlow, as transmitted by Marlow to the anonymous narrator, and as passed on by the latter to us in written form.

The extradiegetic narrator initially subsumes both Powell's and Marlow's narratives under his, but Marlow soon takes over and goes on to tell the bulk of the story. The question of narrative authority is a difficult one in *Chance*, but it seems to me that while Marlow's narration is not authoritative and reliable over the whole course of the novel, he is still the single most important and subtle narrator. It is no coincidence that *Chance*, just like *Lord Jim*, ends with Marlow's and not the extradiegetic narrator's words. Robert N. Hudspeth has argued that no narrator other than Marlow has all the qualities necessary to understand and tell the story of Flora de Barral's life: temporal distance from her (childhood) experiences, a sympathetic imagination, and an extensive knowledge of her life history (361-2). In a similar vein, Robert Hampson claims that "Marlow alone in the novel has sufficient 'sympathetic imagination', and sufficient understanding of Flora, to be able to act consciously and effectively to her advantage" (*Betrayal* 231). Marlow certainly has the benefit of temporal distance from Flora's childhood experiences, but the claims for his knowledge of her life history and his sympathetic imagination need to be qualified. Undoubtedly, Marlow is the only character who has access to a wide range of sources of information on Flora's life, but even so, much of his narrative is necessarily based on conjecture. Similarly, a sympathetic imagination is not universally evidenced by the Marlow of *Chance*, who is a rather disagreeable character. Yet, when it comes to Flora, he does indeed act sympathetically and to her advantage, even though his generosity towards her has been shown to involve an element of "repressed sexual excitement" (Hawthorn, *Conrad: Narrative Technique* 147).⁷⁸

In order to come to a better understanding of Conrad's narrative method in *Chance*, it is important to engage with Henry James's influential contemporary

⁷⁸ The complexity of the narrative method of *Chance* lies especially in its playful use of embeddings and anachrony. The tension between the different instances of senders and receivers is not as fruitfully exploited as in "Heart of Darkness" or even *Lord Jim*. Some of these instances will be discussed later in the chapter, but a schematic diagram of the narrative structure seems unnecessary.

commentary on the novel. First published under the title “The Younger Generation” in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 19 March and 2 April 1914, it was later revised and reprinted as “The New Novel” in *Notes on Novelists* (1914). James’s critique of Conrad’s craftsmanship was far more detailed and devastating than that of any other reviewer, and the only piece of criticism – Conrad claimed – that “affected [him] painfully” (CL5 595).⁷⁹ However, while it has become a matter of routine to cite James in appraisals of *Chance*, the article rarely receives close critical attention.

James begins by calling *Chance* an “extraordinary exhibition of method,” a novel that “places Mr. Conrad absolutely alone as a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing” (202-3). Conrad is directly opposed to other contemporary novelists such as H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, whom James condemns for trying to achieve literary value “by *saturation*,” that is to say, by the accumulation of realistic detail without a consciously chosen method to give their material artistic shape (184). Conrad, given his preoccupation with method, thus gathers up “all sorts of comparative distinction” (203). Yet James’s praise remains qualified even as he acknowledges Conrad’s “refinement of design,” his “grace” and “gallantry,” as well as his “genius” (203, 205, 206). Conrad, James claims, succeeds in this novel to a certain extent only because he is Conrad, because – although he has failed to achieve a “fusion” between “[the] writer’s idea and his machinery” – his genius has still created some sense of unity, a fusion between its own “different parts” (206). Most perplexingly to James, “an inordinate number of common readers” have found *Chance* readable and interesting (205). They have ignored what James variously refers to as a “baffled relation between the subject-matter and its emergence,” “an example of objectivity . . . compromised,” or a “lapse of authenticity;” they have accepted the “bribe of some authenticity other in kind,” which is Conrad’s personality, his genius itself (209, 205). Implicit in these remarks is a confusion on James’s part of commercial success with actual reader responses, as well as a certain contempt for the tastes of what he condescendingly labels “the common reader.” Quite obviously, James was envious of Conrad’s newly-won and (relatively) large readership. *Chance*, for good reason, has been described as

⁷⁹ It should be noted that while most contemporary reviewers sang the praises of the novel as a whole, many of the same did find fault with what they saw as unnecessary complications in the narrative structure. Even his friend Edward Garnett could not help but remark in his unsigned review for the *Nation* (24 January 1914) that Conrad’s method of telling the story, in particular the use of a series of narrative embeddings, was “a trifle artificial” (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 278; see 263-84).

Conrad's most Jamesian novel, and Ian Watt has commented on the irony that this very novel "should have achieved a popular and financial success such as had for thirty years now eluded James" (*Essays on Conrad* 144).

Envy might explain part of James's criticism of *Chance*, which can be summarized in the following terms: Conrad has "elected" to face a particular difficulty that he need not have faced, which is "the claim for method in itself," his whole undertaking being "committed by its very first step either to be 'art' exclusively or to be nothing" (203). In particular, James objects to Conrad's use of multiple "first-person" narrators and the several layers of narrative through which the story reaches us. This, James believes, compromises our sense of the reality of the story and violates the conventions or "laws" of narrative fiction. Commenting on the "course" Conrad has followed, James writes: "It has been the course . . . of his so multiplying his creators . . . as to make them almost more numerous and quite emphatically more material than the creatures and the production itself in whom and which we by the general law of fiction expect such agents to lose themselves" (203-4). There are several observations to make about James's propositions. First of all, as Cedric Watts points out, the criticism that the novel's narrative structure is unnecessarily complicated may well have been made of James's *The Ambassadors* or *The Golden Bowl* too (*Literary Life* 117). Secondly, James must have been unaware of the compositional history of *Chance*, which renders it unlikely that Conrad was determined from the very beginning to produce a self-conscious artifice such as the final product undoubtedly is.⁸⁰

Thirdly and most importantly, James invokes a "law of fiction" that is both restrictive and prescriptive. Even though he does not define it, his comments make it clear that, far from being a "general" law, what he refers to is his own idea of how a work of fiction should be written and organized. We know that at this late stage of his career, James's main preoccupation was to "dramatize" narrative fiction, to *show* rather than *tell* as much of the story as possible, keeping the narrator (or, sometimes, narrators) in the background.⁸¹ In narratological terms, James's method usually amounts to setting up one primary (extradiegetic-heterodiegetic) narrator situated

⁸⁰ I will outline the compositional history of the novel in section 4.

⁸¹ For Percy Lubbock's use of the terms *showing* and *telling*, see section V of his *The Craft of Fiction*, especially p. 62. It should be noted, however, that Lubbock's appropriation of James's ideas on the method of fiction produced an even more prescriptive framework than James's own (see especially Lubbock 149-50; Herman 15).

outside the world of the story, whose narrative is then largely filtered through the consciousness of a central focal character, such as Lambert Strether's in *The Ambassadors*. It is little wonder that, from this vantage point, the complex Chinese-box structure of *Chance* and its frequent shifts between narrative voices must have seemed artistically disastrous. However, what James failed to see – or to accept as legitimate novelistic practice – is that Conrad, on his part, was preoccupied with *telling* in much the same way as James himself was preoccupied with *showing*. And, as Wayne Booth convincingly demonstrated in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) a long time ago, there is no reason to suppose that fiction that relies predominantly on *showing* is in any way superior to that which inclines towards *telling* (see especially Chapter I, pp. 3-22).

In addition, it is worth reminding ourselves that at an earlier stage of his career as a writer and theorist of fiction, James himself had objected to imposing any arbitrary limitations on the art of the novelist. Perhaps most important in this respect is “The Art of Fiction” essay (1884), where James declares that “The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel . . . is that it be interesting. . . . The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result . . . strike me as innumerable, and such as can only suffer from being marked out or fenced in by prescription” (8). By James’s own assessment, readers of *Chance* have found the novel interesting, so that by the logic of “The Art of Fiction” there should be nothing wrong with its execution. Certainly, even in this earlier essay, James does mention that “the air of reality” is “the supreme virtue of a novel” (12), and it is clearly an insufficient degree of this quality that he objects to most of all in *Chance*. Yet, this only proves that James was not ready to endorse a more radical modernity such as Conrad’s. *Chance* does have its faults, to which I will return briefly later in this chapter. Also, it does stand as an extreme example of the Conradian preoccupation with oral storytellers, and it certainly exhibits a literary self-consciousness that few of Conrad’s other works can match. Yet, its basic concerns and narrative method are by no means unique in his oeuvre. As Watt has shown, James failed to recognize Conrad’s aims in this novel and, “impelled by the rhetorical requirements of his polar opposition between Conrad’s concentration on method, and the infatuation with mere matter of the other contemporary novelists,” neglects to mention some of Conrad’s earlier works in which the balance between form and content could be seen as more harmonious (*Essays on Conrad* 147).

Even more importantly, James did not realise that, by setting up several homodiegetic narrators and emphasising *telling* over *showing*, Conrad was able to dramatize the way in which they all construct their narrative identities and attempt to have these verified by their listeners. Also, as I have noted earlier, the narrative method of *Chance* raises important questions about the power of the imagination and its role in self-construction. In fact, when (in “The New Novel”) James famously described Marlow’s omniscience as “a prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case exposed” (204), he might have been unaware how apt his description was. In many cases, Marlow indeed hovers over scenes he has not witnessed, but the idea of hovering could be extended to refer to the narrative oscillations that I shall discuss in the next section.

2. Marlow’s narrative identity

2.1. Marlow and his narratees

Chance is the only Marlow story in which he does not address a group of listeners, the anonymous individual being his single narratee for most of the novel. It is only at the very beginning of his narration that Powell is present to listen. In spite of the differences between Marlow’s and Powell’s intellectual abilities, they soon discover that they have a lot in common as they are united by the bond of the sea. When Marlow tells his narrative, both he and Powell have already “retired from the sea,” but this does not stop them from reminiscing about their maritime experiences (4, 33). As the extradiegetic narrator tells us,

They [Marlow and Powell] agreed that the happiest time in their lives was as youngsters in good ships, with no care in the world but not to lose a watch below when at sea and not a moment’s time in going ashore after work hours when in harbour. They agreed also as to the proudest moment they had known in that calling which is never embraced on rational and practical grounds, because of the glamour of its romantic associations. It was the moment when they had passed successfully their first examination and left the seamanship Examiner with the little precious slip of blue paper in their hands. (4)

This passage is strongly reminiscent of Marlow’s closing words in “Youth,” where he asks his audience of ex-sailors whether they agree that “the best time” of their

lives was when they were “young at sea” (39). The question is answered by a nod of agreement from all the listeners. In *Chance*, the unnamed narrator has never “followed the sea,” but he is, like Marlow and Powell, a yachtsman (4; 3). More importantly, he also participates in the idealization of life at sea that evolves into a leitmotif in the course of the novel. The leitmotif clearly serves to counterbalance the novel’s relativistic tendencies and provides Marlow as well as many other characters with a point of identification. In one way or another, almost every major character has his or her share in the idealization of seamen: not only the unnamed narrator and Marlow, but also Captain Anthony, Powell, and, to some extent, Flora herself. They are all essentially positive figures whose attachment to the sea can be regarded as shared by the author (or the implied author) himself, even without invoking extratextual evidence. The anonymous narrator, speaking of the “excellent understanding” between Marlow and Powell, declares early in the novel: “the service of the sea and the service of a temple are both detached from the vanities and errors of a world which follows no severe rule. . . . A turn of mind composed of innocence and scepticism is common to them all [that is, to seamen], with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game” (32; 32-3). These are high claims to make for seamen in general (they follow an almost sacred profession and way of life, they are innocent, disinterested, as well as insightful), but the claims reflect more than just the anonymous narrator’s opinion. Marlow seems to echo his views when he contrasts life on shore with life at sea in the following terms: “There are on earth no actors too humble and obscure not to have a gallery, that gallery which evenoms the play by stealthy jeers . . . However, the Anthonys were free from all demoralizing influences. At sea, you know, there is no gallery” (326). Captain Anthony himself believes that there is “no rest and peace and security but on the sea” (221). Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves that although Flora de Barral does not idealize the life of seamen, she too has some connection with the sea. A sailor’s granddaughter, she takes an interest in seamanship, and, when the *Ferndale* comes dangerously close to another ship, she helps the confused Powell light the flare to avoid a collision. These qualities also form the basis of the mutual understanding between herself and Powell, which by the end of the novel seems to ripen into a romantic relationship.

The idealization of sea-life is achieved also by way of contrasting it with life on shore, which in turn is generally presented as complicated, burdened with

problems, corrupting and immoral. Mr. Fyne, Mrs. Fyne and old de Barral are, in varying degrees, all hostile to the sea and sailors, but none of them is a character whose views receive much textual authority, so that their examples serve to throw the positive qualities of sea-life into still sharper relief.⁸² Yet, perhaps even more important in this connection is the social setting against which Flora's story unfolds. In the last chapter of Part I, Marlow describes his long conversation with Flora that took place on the pavement close to the Eastern Hotel. This scene, with its shabby figures and dismal surroundings, offers a good example of how Marlow contrasts sea-life with shore-life: "The broad interminable perspective of the East India Dock Road, the great perspective of drab brick walls, of grey pavement, of muddy roadway rumbling dismally with loaded carts and vans lost itself in the distance, imposing and shabby in its spacious meanness of aspect . . ." (204). In addition to demonstrating how shore-life features in Marlow's narrative identity, the passage can also be read as representing the implied author's views. In this latter respect, and because there is a great deal of social criticism in *Chance*, Laurence Davies is right to draw attention to the possibility of reading it as a "condition-of-England novel" ("Women Readers" 75). However, the dichotomy between life at sea and life on shore that the novel sets up seems rather simplistic, especially when contrasted with the way in which "Heart of Darkness" or *Lord Jim* explore the problem of collective identity.

Marlow's relationship with his most important narratee, the anonymous individual, needs to be examined in detail because it is more complex than it may seem at first sight. Early in the novel, the extradiegetic narrator describes Marlow as his "old friend," but their subsequent interaction – particularly Marlow's treatment of the narrator – renders this statement questionable (32). In what follows, I will consider their exchanges in the light of Marlow's misogyny since it is the anonymous narrator's reactions to Marlow's derogative comments on women that best allow us to appreciate the nature of their relationship. Also, it is important for my purposes to consider the problem of misogyny against the background of Conrad's search for a new (female) readership.

⁸² Marlow's description of life on the *Ferndale* appears to contradict the idealization of sea-life elsewhere in the novel. Captain Anthony's marriage and the presence of Flora and her father on board create a lot of tension, and old de Barral even tries to poison the Captain. Yet, Marlow largely attributes this situation to the corrupting influence of shore-life, speaking of "that tension of falsehood, of desperate acting, which tainted the pure sea-atmosphere" (415).

That Marlow makes misogynistic comments throughout the novel cannot be subject to debate. Andrew Michael Roberts, for instance, has talked of Marlow's "anthology of misogynic clichés" (91), and Jeremy Hawthorn of his "anti-feminist and anti-female diatribes" (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 154n). Hawthorn has also explored contradictions in Marlow's opinions, particularly the question how his "over-generalized condemnations of women" clash with his occasional attacks on the traditional view of "women as angels in the house" (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 151, 152; see also 133-55). Laurence Davies has argued along similar lines, describing Marlow as a "cynical windbag" and as "a narrative and conversational opportunist who will grab at any opportunity for a bright remark regardless of what he's said before" ("Women Readers" 86, 87). The real question, then, is whether or to what extent we take Marlow's views to represent Conrad's own – and, in this respect, the force or weakness of the anonymous narrator's challenges to Marlow is an interpretative crux. It should be noted that, apart from these challenges, the unnamed narrator performs a very limited function. Even though he is a dramatized, homodiegetic narrator, he exerts no influence on the life of any of the characters in the story. The challenges to Marlow's views aside, his narratorial role in the book version of the novel consists mainly in recording for the reader in writing (probably faithfully) what Marlow and Powell told him in conversation. (Expressions such as "To those who may be surprised at the statement I will point out that . . ." (23) would seem to support the view that the anonymous narrator produces a written rather than an oral narrative.)

The unnamed narrator usually reacts against Marlow's generalizations about women, yet critics differ widely in their interpretations of the force of these challenges. Robert Hampson (*Betrayal* 196-231), Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan (*Modern Temper* 156-72) and Susan Jones (69-160), for instance, excuse Conrad from the charge of misogyny by interpreting Marlow's sentiments towards women as a symptom of his (and not Conrad's) psychology. Conrad, in their view, is not only fully aware of Marlow's excessive misogyny but also convincingly dramatizes it as Marlow's own, deliberately setting up Marlow as an unreliable narrator. Hampson, in particular, regards both the novel's emphasis on literary self-consciousness and the use of the anonymous narrator as effective means whereby Conrad distances himself from Marlow's narrative interpretations (*Betrayal* 199-202). However, critics such as Hawthorn and Paul B. Armstrong have devoted much more detailed attention to the

problem of Marlow's exchanges with the unnamed narrator, and their views in many ways directly contradict those outlined above. I believe that Hawthorn (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 140-55) and Armstrong ("Misogyny" 151-74) are right to point out that because Marlow's views clearly dominate the novel, and since the exchanges between him and the anonymous narrator are insufficiently contextualized, it is not possible to brush aside the ethical problems involved in Marlow's misogyny.

In an excellent article on the ethics of reading in *Chance*, Armstrong argues convincingly that readers who view Marlow as an unreliable narrator "are willing to credit the text for work they are doing themselves," inasmuch as "the text botches the signals it gives about how to classify Marlow's tone" ("Misogyny" 171n, 163). It would have been interesting, Armstrong notes, if the text had explicitly thematized the problems involved in determining when an ironic reading of Marlow's views is justified, but the text (or Conrad) missed this opportunity. Summarizing his reservations about the novel, Armstrong concludes: "*Chance* is marred, then, by a double violation of the ethics of reading – Marlow's refusal of reciprocity with the Other in his reading of women, which is compounded in turn by the novel's failure to promote playful, reflective exchange about this matter with the reader" ("Misogyny" 155). In addition, he mentions two further obstacles to treating Marlow as an unreliable narrator: first of all, unlike in "Heart of Darkness" or *Lord Jim*, in *Chance* Marlow "does not find his epistemological categories or moral values unsettled by the story he tells;" and secondly, Marlow's exchanges with the anonymous narrator are one-sided – Marlow denies him reciprocity or "hermeneutic equality" by constantly silencing him in a condescending manner ("Misogyny" 163, 159). Here are two examples from the novel:

"But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others," I struck 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? You, for instance, seem—"

"I don't know what I seem," Marlow silenced me, "and surely life must be amused somehow. . . ." (117)

"Do you expect me to agree with all this?" I interrupted.

“No, it isn’t necessary,” said Marlow feeling the check to his eloquence, but with a great effort at amiability. “You need not even understand it. I continue: . . .” (63)

The first of these extracts does not seem to require any further commentary, but the second is interesting in a number of ways. First of all, the anonymous narrator’s “Do you expect me to agree with all this?” and his use of the word “amiability” are deceptive and may have misled some critics into taking this very passage as evidence of Marlow’s unreliability. However, the narrator’s expression of disapproval seems half-hearted and unconvincing, especially when one considers both what immediately precedes and what follows it. What precedes it are some of Marlow’s most outrageously misogynistic remarks – such as that women “never got hold of” honour or that they are “devoid of decency” (63). Marlow’s reaction, too, is anything but amiable; in fact, it is deeply insulting, showing no trace of an “effort at amiability.” As Armstrong puts it, the implication is that when and if the unnamed narrator disagrees, “it must be because he isn’t smart enough to see what Marlow means” (“Misogyny” 159). The passage does not encourage the reader to take the anonymous narrator’s views very seriously, the more so as his own narratorial comment abjectly excuses Marlow’s behaviour. Conrad may have wished to guard himself against the charge of misogyny by having the narrator question Marlow’s views, and he may even have believed that he had succeeded in sufficiently distancing himself from these views. However, the fact remains that most of the signals the text gives prompt us to discount the authority of the anonymous narrator’s opinions. Another such signal, as Hawthorn points out, is that the unnamed narrator is presented as somewhat naive and foolish and also defends women against Marlow’s attacks from a very conventional or “chivalrous” position (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 154n; see 154n-55n).

Several critics have noted that as the novel progresses, Marlow seems to tone down his expression of misogynistic views. As Hawthorn suggests, Marlow probably does so out of regard to his interlocutor (*Conrad: Narrative Technique* 140), which in turn may have something to do with the fact that, in the second part of the novel, the roles are in a sense reversed: whereas in Part I, Marlow is the anonymous narrator’s “host and skipper” (*Chance* 3), in Part II it is Marlow who visits the

narrator in his rooms.⁸³ Yet, while the frequency of Marlow's outbursts against women certainly decreases, he does continue to make misogynistic comments in Part II. It is late in the novel (in Chapters IV and V of Part II) that Marlow declares, for instance: "If women were not a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted" (327); "a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment" (330); "Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life" (352). Therefore, it is misleading to speak, as Erdinast-Vulcan does, of "Marlow's recovery" in the course of the novel (*Modern Temper* 166). In fact, there is no indication of a true and consistent change of opinion in Marlow; he continues to oscillate between partly incompatible views on women in much the same way as the text oscillates between different narrative modes.

It is noticeable that the unnamed narrator is not a fully-fledged character, and neither does he relate in any particular way to the story he transmits – it is no coincidence that he remains unnamed. I have already commented on his ineffectuality, a further sign of which is that he does not in his narratorial comments treat Marlow's morally questionable remarks ironically. What he does is to render his own immediate (and rather powerless) reactions against these remarks, but obviously, all these reactions are those of a character in the story and do not strictly belong to him as narrator. Such a lack of narratorial engagement is surprising since he, simply by virtue of being an extradiegetic narrator and thus the last element in the chain of narrative transmission, has the final word; ultimately, it is his narrative, his version of the events that we are reading. It should be added that, for the same reasons, his being Marlow's guest in Part I of the novel does not in any way explain the lack of narratorial irony. The conclusion is inevitable that Conrad could have done much more to cast doubt on the validity of Marlow's views than he actually did, which is surely one of the novel's weaknesses. Moreover, it remains unclear why the unnamed narrator would find this story worth transmission at all. What is his motivation for telling the story and how does he relate ethically to it? The fact that the text does not enable us to answer these questions is problematic and unusual, given that the unnamed narrator is homodiegetic and thus, to a certain extent, part of the story. The same problems do not apply to the extradiegetic-homodiegetic

⁸³ I owe this suggestion to Robert Hampson.

narrators of “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness.” As I have argued in Chapter 3, the frame narrator of “Heart of Darkness” is less subtle than Marlow, but he is affected by the latter’s story and even seems to modify his views as a result of listening to it. It is worth noting that, in the serial version of *Chance*, the unnamed narrator was portrayed as a writer of fiction, which would explain his interest in transmitting the story and add another dimension to his relationship with Marlow. But Conrad removed all explicit references to him as a writer from the book edition.

In the novel as we read it today, the nature of Marlow and the anonymous individual’s relationship remains even less clear. They certainly share a preference for life at sea over life on shore, but on the whole, their discussions are dominated by their differences rather than the similarities between them. The fact that the Marlow of *Chance* does not address his narrative to a group of listeners but only to one individual means that there is less pressure on him to conform to expectations. But in this particular case, it also means that there is basically no set of values shared by a community that includes Marlow. There is little in which he believes, other than the sanctity of life at sea, but even that is taken for granted rather than explored in discussion with an audience. This is partly the reason why the Marlow of *Chance* differs so significantly from his previous incarnations. His excessive misogyny and his provocative nature are part of his narrative self-construction and self-definition. Indeed, it seems to be very important to Marlow (and perhaps also to Conrad) not to be perceived as too likeable in this novel, to the detriment of the anonymous individual as his narratee.

2.2. Marlow’s narrative authority and the uses of the imagination

Although contemporary reviewers criticized the narrative method of *Chance* in general terms, they do not seem to have been baffled by Marlow’s implausible “omniscience.” It was only more recent criticism that picked up on the specific problem of the narrative oscillations. Jocelyn Baines, for instance, has argued that the narrative of *Chance* is a failure in so far as Conrad violates his self-imposed method at certain points in the novel (however, Baines does not define with precision what Conrad’s self-imposed method might be). Conrad, Baines points out, produces “an impossibility” by having Marlow describe events and thought processes about which he could not possibly have known (383). Indeed, this line of argument is irrefutable, provided that we operate with a narrow standard of mimesis. If, on the other hand,

we embrace a broader standard of mimesis, then Marlow's "omniscience" may not constitute a violation of any alleged "law of fiction," and it certainly does not conflict with Conrad's own artistic principles. As I have already noted, Brian Richardson convincingly argues that in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* – a text with clearly more obtrusive narrative oscillations than *Chance* – Conrad transcends "the mimetic conventions of realism," so that critical approaches that presuppose "an exclusively mimetic conception of the narrator" necessarily prove inappropriate (*Unnatural* 42-3). I agree with Richardson that Conrad's texts generally ask us to take a broader view of mimesis than Baines's, and this seems to be particularly true of *Chance*.

Up until the beginning of Chapter IV of Part I, Marlow's account of the story is largely confined to what he can reasonably be expected to know, based as it is on personal experience, newspaper reports, hearsay, or on what some of the other characters may well have related to him in conversation. On the very first page of Chapter IV, however, we find the following passage:

No rumour or echo of rumour had reached the profane in the West End—let alone in the guileless marine suburb of Hove. The Fynes had no suspicion; the governess, playing with cold, distinguished exclusiveness the part of mother to the fabulously wealthy Miss de Barral, had no suspicion; the masters of music, of drawing, of dancing to Miss de Barral, had no idea; the minds of her medical man, of her dentist, of the servants in the house, of the tradesmen proud of having the name of de Barral on their books, were in a state of absolute serenity. (96)

It is at this point that the novel's narrative fault-line is opened out for the first time. What Marlow feels free to comment on here moves far beyond the information he or any individual character he refers to could possibly have. His panoramic field of vision and apparently unbounded knowledge remind us of authorial (nonfocalized) passages in Victorian novels. At other points in the chapter – and, indeed, this happens with far greater frequency throughout the novel than the use of nonfocalized narrative – internal focalization is used as Marlow grants us direct access to the thoughts and feelings of characters other than himself:

She [Flora's governess] hoped to keep him [her "nephew"] straight with that enormous bribe. She was clearly a woman uncommon

enough to live without illusions—which, of course, does not mean that she was reasonable. She had said to herself, *perhaps* with a fury of self-contempt, ‘In a few years I shall be too old for anybody. Meantime I shall have him—and I shall hold him by throwing to him the money of that ordinary, silly little girl of no account [Flora].’ (104-5; emphasis added)

The fact that Marlow never talks to or even sees either the governess or her “nephew” only adds to the logical impossibility of this segment of the narrative – impossible, that is, if we operate with a narrow standard of mimesis. Both this and the previous extract I have quoted are examples of *paralepsis* because Marlow provides more information than his role as homodiegetic narrator could possibly enable him to do. The use of the word “perhaps,” however, is more significant than it might seem at first glance. As I will go on to argue, such expressions in Marlow’s discourse are signs of Conrad’s fictional self-consciousness and tell us a lot about the use of *paralepses* in *Chance*.

In Part II of the novel, entitled “The Knight,” we find a far greater number of *paralepses* even than in Part I, which is unsurprising given that Marlow’s knowledge of this portion of the story is necessarily limited. He never meets the Knight (Captain Anthony) on whose ship most of the events of this part take place; he only has a fleeting glimpse of Flora’s father, and that too before the collapse of the latter’s financial empire; he is not present on the *Ferndale* when the crucial events take place, and the only member of the crew he ever meets is Powell. Yet, Marlow’s narrative moves far beyond not just what he himself has experienced, but also what his main source Powell and his secondary source Flora have or may have imparted to him. For instance, he describes a conversation between Captain Anthony and the chief mate Mr. Franklin (269-71), adopts Franklin’s (267-71) and the ship-keeper’s (266-7) perspective, grants us access to the thoughts and feelings of Flora, Anthony, Powell and even the old de Barral (360-1). Internal focalization is clearly *variable*,⁸⁴ so much so that the focal character sometimes even changes within a single paragraph, such as from Anthony to Flora in the following passage:

⁸⁴ In Genettean narratology, internal focalization can be *fixed* (the point of view of one and the same character is adopted throughout), *variable* (there is more than one focal character) or *multiple* (the same event is evoked several times according to the point of view of different characters). Genette, *Narrative* 189-90.

Anthony had discovered that he was not the proud master but the chafing captive of his generosity. It rose in front of him like a wall which his respect for himself forbade him to scale. He said to himself: 'Yes, I was a fool—but she has trusted me!' . . . And it must also be said, in order not to make Anthony more stupidly sublime than he was, that the behaviour of Flora kept him at a distance. The girl was afraid to add to the exasperation of her father. . . . And quite unable to understand the extent of Anthony's delicacy, she said to herself that 'he didn't care.' (395-6)

It is doubtful whether, strictly speaking, the Marlow of *Chance* can be considered a homodiegetic narrator. After all, he is from the outset on the periphery of the main plot line, and in the portion of the *fabula* or *story* that corresponds to Part II of the narrative, he is largely absent as a character. Thus it is especially in Part II that Marlow comes close to being a heterodiegetic narrator, about whose existence the reader may temporarily forget when deeply immersed in the unfolding of the story. As I have noted in the previous chapter, Marlow's written narrative at the end of *Lord Jim* prefigures this narrative method. More generally, we can say that as Marlow moves from "Youth" through "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim* to *Chance*, he increasingly adopts the characteristics of a heterodiegetic narrator – or, as Genette would put it, he moves towards "heterodiegeticity." Also, the fact that the two parts of *Chance* are entitled "The Damsel" and "The Knight," besides evoking associations of conventional genres such as the medieval epic, points to the centrality of Flora and Captain Anthony and to the marginal role of Marlow (as character).

As I noted in Chapter 1, Marlow's oscillation between the status of a homodiegetic and a heterodiegetic narrator in *Chance* bears resemblance to the ambiguous narratorial position in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and, especially, "Freya of the Seven Isles." Here I would like to draw attention to the similarities between *Chance* and another Conrad novel, *Nostromo*. The narrator of *Nostromo* may at first sight seem to differ fundamentally from Marlow because he is situated outside the world of the story and is thus naturally assumed to be "omniscient," in which respect he resembles more closely the extradiegetic narrator of *Lord Jim*. Yet there is significant variation in the narrative of this long novel. The opening of *Nostromo* is a panoramic description of the town of Sulaco and its surroundings that

cannot be placed in time with precision. One can assume that even the alert first-time reader is initially made to accept the narrator as *the* authority on the fictional world of the novel. The dislocations of the chronology, and, in particular, the analeptic pattern that runs through the first few chapters, plunge the reader into bewilderment but at the same time may convey the impression that the narrator is self-confidently in command of the story he tells. However, the first paragraph of Chapter VIII in Part First reads very differently from what precedes it:

THOSE of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can remember the steadying effect of the San Tomé mine upon the life of that remote province. The outward appearances had not changed then as they have changed since, as I am told, with cable cars running along the streets of the Constitution, and carriage roads far into the country, to Rincon and other villages, where the foreign merchants and the Ricos generally have their modern villas, and a vast railway goods yard by the harbour, which has a quay-side, a long range of warehouses, and quite serious, organized labour troubles of its own. (95)

There is all the difference in the world between the narrator of the opening lines of the novel and the idea that the reader is likely to form of him on the basis of this paragraph. Although strictly speaking, the narrator does not play any role in the *story* of *Nostramo* and is thus essentially heterodiegetic, here he undoubtedly emerges as a human being rather than a superhuman and impersonal entity. On closer inspection of the passage, it is possible to establish a few facts: the narrator claims to have visited Sulaco before “the first advent of the railway” (that is, the inauguration of the National Central Railway) and to have experienced “the steadying effect of the San Tomé mine” (the reopening of which by Charles Gould precedes the inauguration of the railway by about three years). In order to be able to witness the “steadying,” long-term effect of the mine, the narrator – in the period between these two important events – must either have been a temporary resident of Sulaco or have made several short visits to the town. In addition, the expression “those of us” and the reference to “business or curiosity” suggest that he considers himself to have belonged to a group of merchants or adventurers who visited Sulaco at that time. The words “then” and “since,” in combination with “as I am told,” also make it evident that in the present

moment of narration, the anonymous narrator is no longer in Sulaco (which has become a modern town) and relies on second-hand information concerning more recent developments in that region. Finally, the perspective of the narrator, in this passage and elsewhere, is apparently that of a European male.

With the opening paragraph of Chapter VIII in mind, readers are more likely to notice further signs of the personal voice. They have been alerted to the presence of a human being whose discourse may not be as authoritative as it initially appeared:

PERHAPS it was in the exercise of his calling that he [Decoud] had come to see the troops depart. (160)

Dr. Monygham, disregarding, or *perhaps* fearing to penetrate the meaning of Nostromo's silence, clapped him lightly on the shoulder, and starting off with his smart, lame walk, vanished utterly at the third or fourth hop in the direction of the railway track. (464)

It may be said that Nostromo tasted the dust and ashes of the fruit of life into which he had bitten deeply in his hunger for praise. (416; emphasis added in all quotations)

Sentences such as these are obvious signs of the narrator's uncertainty and pose a challenge to the assumption of his "omniscience." The use of "perhaps," in particular, indicates the limits of the narrator's understanding of the motives behind the characters' actions.⁸⁵ The beginning of the last sentence cited conveys the impression that the speaker is searching for appropriate words to express his meaning, which is an imperfection associated with human beings rather than (quasi-)divine and all-knowing narrative instances. If the above quotations concern the narrator's knowledge and verbal abilities, the following extracts appeal to a common human bond or even a shared human ancestry between him and the reader:

Pedrito Montero surprised *one* at first sight by the vast development of his bald forehead, a shiny yellow expanse between the crinkly coal-black tufts of hair without any lustre, the engaging form of his mouth, and an unexpectedly cultivated voice. (404)

To him [Charles Gould], as to *all of us*, the compromises with his conscience appeared uglier than ever in the light of failure. (364)

⁸⁵ See below for my discussion of Marlow's use of "perhaps" in *Chance*.

Not perhaps that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of to-day, but that they went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality.

We have changed since. The use of intelligence awakens little wonder and less respect. (386; emphasis added in all quotations)

In the first of these extracts, the narrator, as if speaking from personal experience, describes the impression Pedrito Montero makes on someone who first encounters him. The second and third excerpts are faintly reminiscent of the passage from the beginning of Chapter VIII in Part First: there too, the narrator appears to speak in the name of a group of people, using the plural form “us.” The difference is that while in the earlier passage, “us” referred to some merchants or adventurers who visited Sulaco at the time specified, here “all of us” and “[w]e” evoke nothing less than humanity itself. As our fellow human being, the narrator invites us to show sympathy with his own and the characters’ weaknesses and imperfections.

While the narrator’s human limitations are conspicuous, he also continues to lay claim to certain forms of special knowledge that are associated with “omniscient” narrators. Although not frequent, the most noticeable of these cases are the narrator’s reports of the innermost thoughts and feelings of certain characters. For instance, he describes the thoughts and feelings of Decoud when he is marooned on the Great Isabel:

At the end of his first day on the Great Isabel, Decoud, turning in his lair of coarse grass, under the shade of a tree, said to himself—

“I have not seen as much as one single bird all day.”

And he had not heard a sound, either, all day but that one now of his own muttering voice. It had been a day of absolute silence—the first he had known in his life. And he had not slept a wink. Not for all these wakeful nights and the days of fighting, planning, talking; not for all that last night of danger and hard physical toil upon the gulf, had he been able to close his eyes for a moment. And yet from sunrise to sunset he had been lying prone on the ground, either on his back or on his face. (496-97)

Based on such passages, and considering the problems associated with the term “omniscience,” it would be more accurate to talk about the narrator’s telepathic abilities. Irrespective of the terminology used, however, the fact that the narrator is able to describe Decoud’s thoughts while, on other occasions, he seems to be limited in insight, represents a contradiction that is ultimately irresolvable on the purely textual level. As I have demonstrated above, the Marlow of *Chance* similarly oscillates between two mutually exclusive positions. In spite of the fact that the narrator of *Nostramo* is essentially heterodiegetic while Marlow is clearly a character in (at least some parts of) the story he tells, the differences between the ways in which they narrate their respective stories are in many cases hardly noticeable. Both of them sometimes assume a panoramic field of vision and describe the thoughts of different characters, while at other times they draw attention to the limits of their knowledge, for instance by using modalizing locutions such as “perhaps.” In both of these works, Conrad seems to be preoccupied with the ambiguous status of narratorial identities.

To continue my discussion of paralepses in *Chance*, I would like to examine whether and in what sense they make Marlow an unreliable narrator. I have already explored the problem of narrative authority as it relates to Marlow’s misogyny, implying that Armstrong is right to treat Marlow as essentially reliable. However, as recent narrative theory has shown, there are few if any texts to which the neat dichotomy of “reliable” versus “unreliable” can be usefully applied. Phelan points out that “sometimes the reliability of a homodiegetic narrator can fluctuate wildly throughout the progression of a narrative,” and this fluctuation may depend on “the variable distance between the narratorial and the character functions” (*Rhetoric* 112). As Phelan goes on to argue, the question of reliability is unlikely to arise at all – within the framework of a broader standard of mimesis, that is – in cases when the narratorial functions are carried out independently of the character functions (*Rhetoric* 112). Marlow’s reliability in *Chance* certainly varies over the course of the narrative. He seems most reliable when he speaks from personal experience (which is rare), or indeed when his character traits, many of them controversial, remain in the background, allowing the reader to forget about Marlow’s existence at a particular moment in the narrative. As noted, this frequently happens in Part II of the novel, especially when narrative embedding is so complex that we are at several removes from the final narrating instance, the anonymous narrator. When reading passages

such as the following, in which Franklin tells Powell how Flora and her father first came on board the *Ferndale*, is any reader likely to ponder whether Marlow's rendering of what was actually uttered is accurate?

'The first I saw of him was when she brought him alongside in a four-wheeler one morning about half-past eleven. . . . Directly the old cab pointed round the corner of the warehouse I called out to the captain that his lady was coming aboard. He answered me, but as I didn't see him coming, I went down the gangway myself to help her alight. She jumps out excitedly without touching my arm, or as much as saying 'thank you' or 'good morning' or anything, turns back to the cab, and then that old joker comes out slowly. I hadn't noticed him inside. I hadn't expected to see anybody. It gave me a start. She says: 'My father—Mr. Franklin.' He was staring at me like an owl. 'How do you do, sir?' says I. (296-7)

The passage certainly encourages us to recognize how seriously limited Franklin's understanding of the situation is, but I believe it does not cast doubt on Marlow's narrative authority. At this point, Marlow's narratorial functions seem to act independently of his character functions, his character being practically irrelevant. Based on such passages only, it would be easy to classify Marlow as a heterodiegetic narrative voice that passively records what happens or what is uttered, typically in external focalization, such as in the present case. But, of course, at other points in the novel, Marlow's character traits are very much in the foreground. The most obvious cases of interdependence between his character and narratorial functions are his generalizations about various issues, particularly on women. Whenever Marlow generalizes, the text seems to imply that his views should be taken with reservations.

Based on Phelan's dynamic and sophisticated model of unreliable narration (*Living to Tell* 49-53), the best case for Marlow's unreliability can be made by describing it as *misregarding*. One of Phelan's six different types of unreliability in homodiegetic narration (or what he calls character narration), *misregarding* occurs along the axis of ethics and evaluation, referring more specifically to cases when the narrator's judgement of a character, fact or event is ethically mistaken. Marlow would appear to be guilty of *misregarding* when he makes morally questionable statements such as that "It's certainly unwise to admit any sort of responsibility for

our actions, whose consequences we are never able to foresee” (23). As several critics have pointed out, Marlow’s generalizations about women do not actually fit the case of Flora herself, whose story he is telling (see, for example, Hawthorn, *Conrad: Narrative Technique* 150). Such generalizations, then, while offering examples of misregarding, are at the same time cases of what Phelan calls *misreading*, which occurs when the narrator provides a biased or wrong interpretation of an event, character or situation due to lack of knowledge, perceptiveness or sophistication (Phelan, *Living to Tell* 49-53). As already noted, Conrad could hardly have wished Marlow’s views on women to be fully identified as the author’s, so that it is unsurprising that we should find textual signals that ask us to view Marlow from a certain critical distance. The problem is that these signs are weak, and that those signals which prompt us to discount the authority of the anonymous narrator’s views are stronger.

I have argued that Marlow’s paralepses are in many cases unlikely to be perceived as instances of unreliable narration because of the foregrounding of his narratorial functions and the simultaneous effacement of his character functions. However, there are also cases when the text calls attention to the problems involved in Marlow’s paralepses, most obviously when he himself uses modalizing locutions such as “perhaps” to imply that what he says is how things *may* have happened. This amounts to an admission on Marlow’s part that there are serious gaps in his factual knowledge of the story he tells, and that he necessarily relies on conjecture to fill these gaps. One might argue that because of his lack of hard information, Marlow misreports or misrepresents several events in his narrative. *Misreporting* in homodiegetic narration, according to Phelan’s definition, is located on the axis of characters, facts, and events, and involves a misrepresentation of these by the narrator due to lack of knowledge or a mistaken value system (*Living to Tell* 49-53). Yet this does not seem to be the case in *Chance*. Conrad does not provide the reader with an alternative frame of reference which would allow for a questioning of the reliability of Marlow’s version of the events of the story. What is more, the anonymous narrator’s passive transmission of Marlow’s version to the reader reinforces the plausibility of that version. At one point, he even comments admiringly how he was “struck by the absolute verisimilitude” of one of Marlow’s suppositions (102). The only example of his casting doubt on Marlow’s narrative of the events that I am aware of is when he asks him: “How do you know all this?”

(264). But again, the anonymous narrator protests here in his capacity as a character in the diegesis, and as such he is yet again immediately silenced by Marlow: “Marlow interjected an impatient— ‘You shall see by and by. . . .’” (264-5). As narrator, the unnamed individual fails to thematize Marlow’s apparent lack of knowledge. However, unlike his weak reactions against Marlow’s misogyny, this may be no indication of a lack of artistic control on Conrad’s part but a sign of literary self-consciousness. As such, it allows Conrad to question not the authority of Marlow’s narrative in particular but the reliability of *any* narrative or literary text. The deeper significance of Marlow’s use of modalizing locutions is thus to invite us to ponder the arbitrary relation between (objective) fact and (subjective) representation of fact. This notion is certainly no novelty in Conrad’s fiction. *Lord Jim* has already explored the idea that facts alone are insufficient to explain the moral complexity and significance of a “case,” and *Nostromo* dramatizes the inadequacy of historical narratives to reconstruct the past and to represent individual experiences of that past.

Robert Hampson has explored interesting parallels between *Chance* and detective fiction, arguing that Marlow’s task in this novel is akin to that of the detective or investigator who “constructs a narrative by induction from the details presented to him” (*Betrayal* 197; see also “Purloined Brother” 376-86). As Hampson notes, the example of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories seems particularly relevant here: Marlow, like the detective Holmes, reports back to his confidant, the unnamed narrator, who in this constellation occupies the position of Dr Watson. Also, some of the points Tzvetan Todorov makes in his essay “The Typology of Detective Fiction” can be usefully applied to *Chance*. Both the detective-novel and *Chance* contain two stories: the actual story of the crime (in Conrad, this is the story of Flora and Anthony) and the story of the investigation (the narrative of how Marlow has learnt the details of the “case”). The second story is heuristic, explorative, interpretative narration, and, in its concern with explaining how the narrative was constructed, involves a certain literary self-consciousness (*Betrayal* 198; “Purloined Brother” 383-5). In addition, it seems to me that Sherlock Holmes’s emphasis on the value of the imagination in a story such as “Silver Blaze” finds its parallel in Marlow’s remark on a journalist acquaintance of his who wrote about de Barral’s trial. In “Silver Blaze,” Holmes makes two comments to the effect that the only reason why the otherwise very competent Inspector Gregory cannot

become more successful in his profession is that he lacks imagination (9, 20). The implication is, of course, that what makes Holmes himself such an outstanding detective is precisely that he has plenty of that quality. Similarly, Marlow remarks of the journalist: “. . . for him, an accomplished craftsman in his trade, thinking was distinctly ‘bad business.’ His business was to write a readable account. But I, who had nothing to write, permitted myself to use my mind . . .” (87). Implicit in this remark is Marlow’s desire to set himself off from thoughtless journalists who are on the lookout for nothing more than superficial facts. It is as if he were trying to compensate for his lack of hard information by implying that it is less important to have witnessed events personally than to have profound insight and the capacity to create an intelligible whole out of the story one tells.

After finishing his account of his discussion with the journalist, Marlow, speaking of all he knows of de Barral, points out: “Information is something one goes out to seek and puts away when found as you might do a piece of lead: ponderous, useful, unvibrating, dull. Whereas knowledge comes to one, this sort of knowledge, a chance acquisition preserving in its repose a fine resonant quality” (88). The distinction Marlow makes here between the dull and superficial “information” that journalists are looking for and the profound “knowledge” he has acquired as if by chance resembles that made by Walter Benjamin, respectively, between information and intelligence. In his essay “The Storyteller,” Benjamin specifically associates the emergence of information as a new form of communication with the press and argues that it is responsible for the decline of storytelling. He explains the difference between information and intelligence in the following terms: “The intelligence that came from afar—whether the spatial kind from foreign countries or the temporal kind of tradition—possessed an authority which gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verification. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear ‘understandable in itself.’” “The value of information,” Benjamin adds, “does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment” (*Illuminations* 89; 90; see 88-90). In spite of the similarities between the passages just cited, however, it would be mistaken to try to detect too much of Benjamin’s storyteller in Marlow. One of the arguments against doing so is that, for Benjamin, the “chaste compactness” of a good story “precludes psychological analysis” (*Illuminations* 91).

Such analysis is an important part of Marlow's narrative in *Chance*, which is – moreover – anything but compact.⁸⁶

The parallels between Conan Doyle and Conrad are also quickly exhausted. As Hampson puts it, Conrad does not share Conan Doyle's "faith in the power of reason," and what Marlow investigates are not mysteries about events but mysteries about processes (*Betrayal* 199; 198). Whereas Sherlock Holmes, in "Silver Blaze," can remark with confidence to Dr Watson – "We imagined what might have happened, acted upon the supposition, and find ourselves justified." (20) –, Marlow in many cases has no means of reaching certainty about the veracity of his suppositions, and he does not even try to do so. Conrad's point is precisely that it is often impossible to find such confirmation, especially when it comes to complex psychological processes such as those Marlow is concerned with. In fact, Marlow, unlike Holmes, usually does not even differentiate strictly between what is known for a fact and what is conjecture – and, in this, he is much more like a novelist than a detective. Considerable parts of his narrative must rely on more than a detective's knowledge of facts and gift of conjecture; he needs what has been referred to as a "conjectural omniscience" (Knowles and Moore 69; Greaney 112). Marlow too, like Holmes, imagines what might have happened, but instead of "acting upon the supposition" to verify it, he weaves a narrative around this supposition so that the story he tells should acquire the air of wholeness and coherence. The following passage, in which he imagines that Flora, her father and Captain Anthony would have been playing cards now and again on board the *Ferndale*, seems a perfect illustration of Marlow's working method:

What must have been rather appalling were the necessities of daily life, the intercourse of current trifles. That naturally had to go on. They wished good morning to each other, they sat down together to meals—and I believe there would be a game of cards now and then in the evening, especially at first. . . . Anthony with a forced friendly smile as if frozen to his lips seemed only too thankful at not being made to speak. Mr. Smith sometimes forgot himself while studying his hand so long that Flora had to recall him to himself by a murmured

⁸⁶ For a more extensive discussion of the relevance of Benjamin's essay to Conrad in general and to the Marlow works in particular, see especially Conroy 87-98 and Greaney 17-19, 64.

‘Papa—your lead.’ Then he apologized by a faint as if inward ejaculation ‘Beg your pardon, Captain.’ (380-1)

This game of cards (or such games of cards) supposedly took place during Flora and Anthony’s first common voyage, when Marlow’s main informant, Mr Powell, was not yet on board. Flora herself may or may not have told Marlow about having played cards on board. Whatever the case, the passage is interesting because we witness Marlow doing essentially what a novelist does – he transforms a general idea (“I believe there would be a game of cards now and then”) into a description of a particular *scene*.⁸⁷ Clearly, Marlow’s narrative authority, as far as it goes, is not primarily based on his powers of reason, his factual knowledge or personal experience. As Greaney formulates it very aptly, Marlow’s insights into scenes or states of mind to which he cannot have had any access, “owe less to our storyteller’s deductive virtuosity than to the text’s willingness to grant Marlow the insight he desires, the rare gift of producing commentary emancipated from fact, knowledge divorced from information” (111).

It is not only at the narrative level that we find signs of Conrad’s self-conscious engagement with what is usually referred to as textuality, the idea of life as a text.⁸⁸ Different aspects of this problem are also made into an explicit theme in the novel. One of these aspects is a suspicion of language, most apparent in Marlow’s comments on the financier de Barral. De Barral achieves his successes because he unscrupulously exploits the power of advertisement and the credulousness of the people. Marlow tells us, referring to the financier’s use of empty catchwords to designate the institutions he set up: “The fellow had a pretty fancy in names: the ‘Orb’ Deposit Bank, the ‘Sceptre’ Mutual Aid Society, the ‘Thrift and Independence’ Association. Yes, a very pretty taste in names; and nothing else besides—absolutely nothing—no other merit” (69). This description recalls other “hollow men,” such as the real-life King Leopold II, who established the supposedly philanthropic International African Association and the International Association of the Congo, to mention two of his cover organizations (Hochschild 64-65). Even more obvious is the parallel with Kurtz’s misuse of language in “Heart of Darkness” that I have mentioned in Chapter 3 – one may think here of his lofty report to the International

⁸⁷ The fact that this scene is iterative does not seriously compromise its air of particularity.

⁸⁸ For a fuller treatment of the problem of textuality in *Chance*, see Erdinast-Vulcan, *Modern Temper* 156-72.

Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, or, more generally, of his journalistic writings.

As a further aspect of textuality in *Chance*, I would like to mention Conrad's use of metaliterary expressions and his concern with the power of "light literature." Within a single paragraph in Part II, Marlow refers to Flora and Anthony's "joint stories" (309), uses the word "chapter" three times and also describes himself as a character in their story: "The chapter in it he [Powell] was opening to me, the sea-chapter, with such new personages as the sentimental and apoplectic chief-mate and the morose steward, however astounding to him in its detached condition was much more so to me as a member of a series, following the chapter outside the Eastern Hotel in which I myself had played my part" (309). Erdinast-Vulcan goes as far as to say that Marlow's treatment of the characters is "invariably coloured by [his] view of their essential fictionality." She points out that Marlow constantly refers to the story in terms of a theatrical production (such as when he asks Mr Fyne whether they were "engaged in a farce or in a tragedy" [*Chance* 55]) and often ridicules the Fynes' distress by facile literary allusions (for instance, by referring to the "affair of the purloined brother" after the elopement of Flora and Anthony [*Chance* 148]) (*Modern Temper* 158; 161; see 158-62). However, Erdinast-Vulcan's argument needs to be balanced by taking into consideration elements in Marlow's narrative that act counter to its thrust towards self-conscious textuality.

At another point in the novel, Marlow comments of young Powell's naive, fairy-tale-like conception of the situation on the *Ferndale* – "We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected . . ." (288). This remark recalls other Conradian characters, such as Lord Jim or Kayerts and Carlier from "An Outpost of Progress," whose understanding of and ability to cope with reality is adversely affected by their uncritical reading of light literature. In *Chance* and elsewhere, Conrad, like some other novelists before him, seems to give expression to anxieties about the dangers associated with an individual's private reading of the type of print literature whose content Tony E. Jackson has called "*oralistic*" (17). As Jackson points out, "the supernatural or the impossibly perfect" are typically residues of originally oral story, but while in communal forms of storytelling, the listeners' interpretation is guided by the speaker and other factors around them, the "words of written story are experienced as being directly spoken into the mind" (18; 34). This

increases the possibility of the reader taking them as “almost supernaturally authoritative” (34).

I have already touched upon some of the features of the novel that, to a certain extent, counterbalance its focus on textuality, but at this point these features need to be explored in more detail. Reading *Chance* carefully, one soon runs into contradictions. If Marlow frequently cannot help but reveal the gaps in his knowledge and treat the story of Flora and Anthony as a self-conscious fiction, how can he at other times insist on being an insightful storyteller with first-hand experience who, when it matters most, is always in the thick of events? Because, as I hope to have demonstrated, Marlow does have some textual authority, his insistence cannot be dismissed as mere weakness of character. The anonymous narrator yet again substantiates Marlow’s claims about himself by telling their new acquaintance Powell early in the novel that Marlow seems to know something of “every ship” and “every soul that ever went afloat in a sailor’s body” (35; 36). The text attests to an effort on Conrad’s part to present Marlow, in a way reminiscent of (although not equivalent to) *Lord Jim*, as the well-known and knowledgeable storyteller of a maritime community. In *Chance*, however, this effort proves to be much more problematic than it does in the earlier novel, not least because Marlow does not address his narrative to a group of listeners with similar values; also, as already noted, Marlow’s actual involvement in the *story* of *Chance* is slight. Yet it appears that on at least one occasion he exerts considerable influence on the life of Flora – when, at the end of the novel, he helps her and Powell enter into what looks like a promising relationship. Marlow may also have played a part in preventing Flora from committing suicide, even though she denies this (“I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind;” 213). In addition, one might mention that Marlow has lived through the rise and fall of de Barral’s financial empire and, as an ex-sailor, also knows what life is like on board a ship such as the *Ferndale*. More importantly, however, the reason why Marlow is not totally absent from the story he tells is that he converses with several characters and (as in *Lord Jim*) uses these discussions as occasions to fill in the ellipses he has left in his narrative.

One of the ways in which Marlow insists on being a knowledgeable storyteller is his assertiveness about the veracity of his narrative interpretations. When he relates the events immediately following the collapse of de Barral’s concerns, he explicitly presents his meditations on the psychology of the governess and her nephew “not as

a matter of conjecture but of actual fact” (102). He also cuts short the unnamed narrator’s interjection (“So you suppose that . . .”) by an impatient wave of the hand and the emphatic words: “I don’t suppose. It was so” (103; ellipsis in orig.). Similarly, after describing in detail the psychological effects on Anthony of the encounter between him and Flora, Marlow declares: “This is no supposition. It is a fact” (159). It is also interesting to note that Marlow sometimes – especially in the early stages of his narrative – makes an effort to account for his sources, as in the following example: “You may be surprised at my knowledge of these details. Well, I had them ultimately from Mrs. Fyne” (71). I believe that such examples, as well as Marlow’s assertiveness, demonstrate that Conrad cannot fully succumb to a relativistic view of the world as text. Without doubt, there is in *Chance* a certain concern with the realism required of homodiegetic narrators that is strikingly at odds with Marlow’s claim to almost unlimited insight into scenes or states of mind of which he cannot have any knowledge. In other words, the novel oscillates between embracing (generally) a broad standard of mimesis and (occasionally) a narrow standard of mimesis.

This form of oscillation finds its parallel in the implied author’s and Marlow’s problematic attitude to contingency. The fact that Marlow has called the sort of knowledge he possesses “a chance acquisition” has a deeper significance than it might seem at first glance (88). As the very title of the novel indicates, the problem of chance or contingency is a central one, but critics disagree over its precise importance in the plot and the degree of Marlow’s belief in it. The problem cannot be explored in all its complexity here, only as it relates to the question of Marlow’s narrative identity. In a recent essay, John G. Peters has taken up the thread of earlier criticism to argue that there is a crucial difference between the Marlow of *Chance* and the Marlow of the earlier fictions that lies in their perspective on humanity’s relationship to chance and in their scepticism. Even though the earlier Marlow recognised “the absurd nature of the universe” and “the influence of chance on human activity,” he did not simply accept this world but “posited meaning in the struggle – hopeless though it may be.” In *Chance*, however, Marlow’s view of the world is governed by chance happenings, rather than by one’s response to them. In this novel, Peters claims, “human beings cannot escape the effects of chance, and while events are unpredictable that does not imply an absurd universe” (Peters, “Let that Marlow talk” 140; 141; see 139-43). I would agree that the Marlow of *Chance*

makes no pronounced effort to posit meaning in the struggle against absurdity since he appears to lack belief in such a struggle. It is also true that he makes steady references to chance happenings in his narrative. For instance, he points out that he had been allowed to get to know Flora's character "without claim, without merit, simply by chance" (311); of Captain Anthony and Flora, he remarks that "Chance had thrown that girl in his way" (328). Speaking of how and why Flora could have had such a ruthless governess, one who was to have such a terrible impact on her life, Marlow sums up his views of chance as follows: "By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances" (99-100).

Yet, I disagree with the claim that chance plays such a determining role in the novel and that Marlow succumbs completely to a relativistic view of the world. As Bruce Harkness convincingly argued a long time ago, the novel's title should be read ironically in the light of the epigraph as well as the textual evidence. Harkness demonstrates that in spite of the "many peripheral coincidences, accident is not central to the plot of the novel" (211). He discusses the profound impact that the novel's "narrators" (especially Powell and Mr Fyne) as well as the governess exert on Flora's life as examples of "psychological necessity" rather than chance. Even more importantly for my own argument, Harkness notes that although Marlow seems to believe in chance, "his primary role in the book lies in the area of causative relationships between events: he is the 'expert in the psychological wilderness'" (217; 220). However much Marlow's remarks make him appear to believe in a world governed by chance, the events in the novel often prove him wrong. Moreover, Marlow's tendency to rely on his imagination to create a coherent narrative out of mere fragments of information could be interpreted as an effort to overcome contingency. Even though his frequent references to chance reveal him to be more acutely aware than ever of the difficulty (if not impossibility) of succeeding in this effort, he cannot help but strive for coherence in his narrative. For all the differences between *Chance* and the earlier Marlow fictions, this kind of oscillation between two mutually exclusive positions has remained characteristic of his narration. *Chance*, then, also resonates with Ricoeur's idea that, by synthesising heterogeneous and contingent elements, narrative creates coherence. What is new in *Chance* (although

prefigured in similar form in the last part of *Lord Jim*) is the kind of narrative identity that Marlow creates for himself, one that involves an increased reliance on his imaginative faculty. As Neumann points out, imaginative invention of the past is a necessary part of identity construction (“Narrating Selves” 65), but what Marlow does in *Chance* goes beyond that. Rüdiger Heinze has discussed violations of mimetic epistemology that are similar to (and, partly, even more radical than) Marlow’s paralepses as “examples of the human wish to know more than one usually can and the pretense that one does” (125). He argues that narratives with such violations or strange perspectives may “open up new horizons and narrative identities . . . and thus another kind of knowledge of world and self” (125). In *Chance*, it is an important part of Marlow’s narrative identity that he is a knowledgeable and imaginative storyteller whose narrative interpretations are closer to the truth than those of thoughtless journalists or of simple seamen such as Powell (cf. Greaney 107-08).

3. Other narrative identities: Powell and Franklin

Marlow’s narrative in *Chance* is so dominant that the voices of the various storytelling characters are rarely actually heard. Although Marlow’s narrative is based largely on what his informants related to him, he usually subsumes their narratives under his own and reports them in indirect speech or FID. In some cases, as I have pointed out above, representations of dialogues between characters or their trains of thought are entirely the products of Marlow’s imagination. Even when he reports conversations in which one of his informants was personally involved, we cannot be certain whether those precise words were uttered. But because, in such cases, Marlow’s narratorial functions act independently of his character functions, we are encouraged to take these cases of the other characters’ own self-construction seriously. Conrad manages to dramatize the way in which they construct their narrative identities while on a certain level also calling attention to the part played by the imagination in Marlow’s narrative. Of the several minor narrators, I can focus only on two sailors here, Powell and Franklin. In both of their self-narratives, some aspects of their life at sea play as dominant a role as in Marlow’s own, but they are all essentially different characters.

At the opening of the novel, Powell already sets the tone of idealization of sea-life. He refers to all non-sailors commonly as “the shore gang” and points out to

Marlow and the unnamed narrator that “If we at sea . . . went about our work as people ashore high and low go about theirs we should never make a living. No one would employ us. And moreover no ship navigated and sailed in the happy-go-lucky manner people conduct their business on shore would ever arrive into port” (4; 3-4). Also, Powell associates the inefficiency of the “shore gang” with “a sense of security” (4). Describing his excitement and worry at the time when he was preparing to take up his berth on the *Ferndale*, Powell comments: “The composure of the people on the pavements was provoking to a degree, and as to the people in shops, they were benumbed, more than half frozen—imbecile” (25). This description recalls Marlow’s thoughts in “Heart of Darkness” on the ignorance, complacency and sense of perfect safety of the people in the streets of the sepulchral city (118-19). But while in the earlier novella, Marlow’s sense of superiority derives from his Congo experiences, in *Chance* it is partly Powell’s loyalty to and idealization of seamanship as a profession that sets him apart from the people in the streets. It should be noted, however, that Powell’s sense of being different from the people around him also owes something to the fact that he was in a “peculiar state of mind” because he had to hurry to join the *Ferndale* on very short notice (25).⁸⁹

After telling his narrative in Chapter I of how he passed his first Marine Board examination and got his berth as second mate in the *Ferndale*, Powell’s voice is not heard again in direct speech for a long time (except for a few brief exchanges with Marlow and other characters). It is only near the end of the novel that Marlow quotes his account of how he observed old de Barral (now known as Mr Smith) trying to poison Anthony, as well as his narrative of the latter’s death years later. Nonetheless, it is possible to make some inferences about Powell’s self-construction from these passages, and even from Marlow’s indirect reports of Powell’s narrative as related to him. For instance, the reader learns that Powell, when he was getting to know Flora on his first voyage on the *Ferndale*, entertained her – rather predictably – “with anecdotes from the not very distant past when he was a boy, on board various ships,” and that the unhappy Flora “was quite surprised at times to find herself amused”

⁸⁹ There are other interesting (although minor) similarities with “Heart of Darkness” in the first chapter of Part I. Before leaving for the Congo, Marlow in the novella goes to see his aunt to say goodbye, and Powell does the same before joining the ship. Also, they are both slightly annoyed by their aunts: Marlow’s makes him feel “quite uncomfortable” by talking in high-flown language about imperialism as civilising work (53), and Powell describes his aunt as quarrelsome and admits that he used to see her only “for decency’s sake” (24). Yet both women help their nephews. Marlow’s aunt gets him his job as captain of the steam-boat (49), and Powell’s leaves her money to him when she dies (24).

(393). It was also at that time that Powell “discovered in himself an already old-established liking for Captain Anthony” (394). This liking grows so strong with time that, when telling Marlow of the Captain’s death at the end of the novel, Powell bursts into tears. He idealizes his former captain as much as he idealizes life at sea, speaking of “the finest man’s soul that ever left a sailor’s body” and remarking that nobody “could help loving Captain Anthony” (440). It is characteristic of the generally unemotional sailor that he should speak so fondly of a man with whom he used to work, while being unable to express his romantic feelings for Flora. Marlow is amused to hear him say merely that he is “enthusiastic” about her (407).

Marlow repeatedly mentions to the unnamed narrator that Powell is a naïve and simple man whose narrative cannot convey the deeper significance of the events in which he was involved. For instance, when Powell is describing the key scene of how de Barral was discovered tampering with Captain Anthony’s brandy-and-water, as well as the feelings this evoked in the young man, Marlow comments that Powell’s statements about himself were in fact “the least incredible” and “the least interesting” part of the whole event (426). Marlow adds: “The interest was elsewhere, and there of course all he [Powell] could do was to look at the surface. The inwardness of what was passing before his eyes was hidden from him, who had looked on, more impenetrably than from me who at a distance of years was listening to his words” (426). Greaney suggests that Powell is reminiscent of the Marlow of “Youth” as his narrative is rooted in personal experience and shows some “contempt of general ideas” (109; *Chance* 23). (Incidentally, both Powell and the Marlow of “Youth” entertain their listeners with a narrative of their first command as second mate.) The Marlow of *Chance*, on the other hand, often takes Powell’s words as an occasion to indulge in ironic generalizations that are at odds with the apparent lessons of the narrative.⁹⁰ These generalizations, Greaney points out, are “part of Marlow’s bid to establish the superiority of the armchair raconteur over the involved storyteller” Powell (110).

Powell also resembles the Marlow of “Youth” in the sense that both of their self-narratives are influenced by their reading of literature. As already suggested, however, in this respect Powell probably comes closer to Conradian characters such

⁹⁰ An example is the statement I have already cited above as a case of Marlow’s unreliability: “It’s certainly unwise to admit any sort of responsibility for our actions, whose consequences we are never able to foresee” (23).

as Lord Jim, Kayerts or Carlier, based on the kinds of texts they read. In the previous section, my comments on the power of “light literature” concerned mainly Marlow’s view of Powell’s character, but here I would like to focus on Powell’s own references to reading. Unlike Jim’s, Powell’s self-construction on the basis of his reading of light literature is not explored in any detail; but the way in which he does occasionally talk about reading is revealing. It is again in his description of the dramatic scene of the attempted murder of Captain Anthony that we can find his most relevant comments. As Powell looks through the pane of glass into the Captain’s cabin, he notices that he is reading “a history of some kind” and is curious to find out more about the book (413). When Powell describes this scene in his narrative, he tells Marlow that he himself has “a great liking for books. To this day I can’t come near a book but I must know what it is about” (413). Later, after Powell has kept the Captain from drinking the poisoned liquid, Flora joins them in the cabin: “‘Do you know,’ exclaimed Mr. Powell, who clearly must have been, like many seamen, an industrious reader, ‘do you know what she looked like to me with those big eyes and something appealing in her whole expression? She looked like a forsaken elf’” (424). In the same passage, Powell remarks of Captain Anthony that, “with his beard cut to a point, his swarthy, sunburnt complexion, thin nose and his lean head there was something African, something Moorish” in him (424). These quotations seem to confirm Marlow’s suggestion that Powell was an “industrious reader” of light literature. However, as Martin Ray argues, it is possible that Powell here is comparing Flora to Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), who is described as an elf many times in that novel; and Anthony’s “Moorish” appearance could be an allusion to his resemblance to the title character of Shakespeare’s *Othello* (Ray 342n). Whatever the case, Powell’s references to reading and to characters from fiction suggest a naïve conception of literature. As Helen Chambers has recently put it, Powell is “an aspiring but unsophisticated reader” (108).⁹¹ As opposed to Jim, however, the unimaginative and humble Powell does not use his reading to form an idealized conception of himself to which he is then unable to conform. It is rather that his view of the world is coloured by his reading of fiction, and that his behaviour throughout the novel is indeed somewhat too good to be true. He often seems like a character in

⁹¹ There is one more reference to Powell’s reading earlier in Marlow’s narrative. He tells his listener that Powell “tried to read a book he had already read a good many times” (401).

a romance – a romance written by Marlow. A case in point is his behaviour towards Flora: even though he starts to have romantic feelings for her soon after they meet, he only acts on those feelings years after Anthony dies, possibly out of respect for his beloved Captain.

If Powell's narrative shows him to be a simple, honest and humble man, Franklin's tales divide the people on board the *Ferndale* into friends and enemies and distort reality to an alarming degree. His main role in the novel is to demonstrate the power of narrative – or, more particularly, of personal narratives – to misrepresent the Other. A good example of Conrad's thematization of this problem is found in Chapter III of Part II, where young Powell talks to Franklin about why Flora's maid on board the *Ferndale* (the steward's wife, Mrs Brown) had been asked to leave after only one voyage. Powell, at this point unaware of much of what is going on around him, thinks that Flora would have been glad to have had another woman on board to help her. But to this Franklin replies gruffly –

“She! glad! Why it was she who had her fired out. She didn't want anybody around the cabin. Mrs. Brown is certain of it. She told her husband so. You ask the steward and hear what he has to say about it. That's why I don't like it. A capable woman who knew her place. But no. Out she must go. For no fault, mind you. The captain was ashamed to send her away. But that wife of his—aye, the precious pair of them [Flora and her father] have got hold of him.” (307)

The reader already knows at this point that Franklin is a simple and superstitious man who, in his attachment to the Captain, dislikes his having got married and taken his wife's father on board too. Later in the novel, Marlow describes to the unnamed narrator Flora's version of the events, which is radically different from Franklin's. Apparently, Flora perceived her maid's presence as oppressive, not only because it was yet another sign of Anthony's unbearable magnanimity (it was he who wanted a maid to take care of his wife), but also because she detected some hypocrisy behind Mrs Brown's veil of politeness (382, 389-91). Greaney has commented on how Flora's family secrets provoke the formation of a whole little gossiping speech community on board the *Ferndale*, a speech community that includes Franklin, the shipkeeper, the steward, the cook and his wife, as well as the carpenter (107). But the fact that Franklin tries to lend support to his own narrative by reference to two

further narratives (Mrs Brown's version as related to her husband, the husband's version as passed on to Franklin) would also seem to point towards a more general interest in the problematic nature of the chain of narrative transmission.

Yet Conrad shows that there is more to Franklin's personality than passages like the one cited above seem to suggest. Similarly to many other Conradian characters – such as the Russian harlequin from “Heart of Darkness,” Lord Jim, or indeed the Marlow of those two works – Franklin experiences the very human compulsion to tell. After Marlow has “quoted” one of Franklin's tales as related to Powell, he remarks: “It was for him [Franklin] a bitter sort of pleasure to have a fresh pair of ears, a new-comer, to whom he could repeat all these matters of grief and suspicion talked over endlessly by the band of Captain Anthony's faithful subordinates. It was evidently so refreshing to his worried spirit that it made him forget the advisability of a little caution with a complete stranger” (299). It is apparently so important to Franklin to share his self-narrative with somebody to whom he has not yet related it that he speaks freely to Powell without knowing whether he can be trusted. Behind Franklin's resentment towards Flora and her father and his need to talk about it lies his sentimental and obsessive attachment to the Captain. Comparing the good old times when Anthony was not yet married to the present situation on board the *Ferndale*, Franklin remarks to Powell: “Only we two on this poop on which we saw each other first—he a young master—told me that he thought I would suit him very well—we two, and thirty-one days out at sea, and it's no good! It's like talking to a man standing on shore. I can't get him back. I can't get at him. I feel sometimes as if I must shake him by the arm: ‘Wake up! Wake up! You are wanted, sir . . . !’” (303; ellipsis in orig.). Such passages, and the fact that Franklin remains unmarried, have quite legitimately led some critics to suggest that he could have homosexual feelings for Captain Anthony (see Roberts 99; Ruppel 76-77). Whether or not it was Conrad's intention to imply the presence of such feelings, it is certain that Franklin's self-narrative is dominated by his problematic relationship with his Captain.

4. The question of identity: Conrad and his readers

As noted earlier, *Chance* is the novel that brought Conrad popular success. Its enthusiastic reception certainly owes something to several factors: to its being Conrad's most Dickensian or most “English” novel, to its concern with topical issues

such as the women's rights movement, and not least to the strong pre-serialization and pre-publication advertising campaigns by the *New York Herald* and Conrad's American publisher F. N. Doubleday, respectively (see Knowles and Moore 67; Najder, *Life* 450; Baines 379-82; Watts, *Literary Life* 114-22). Jocelyn Baines has also speculated that Conrad's reputation had gradually ripened with every book he had published, "until, like a fruit, it [was] ready to be sold to the public" (380). The advertising campaign launched by the *New York Herald*, the mass-circulation paper that serialized *Chance* from 21 January to 30 June 1912, stressed that Conrad was a major writer, that *Chance* was written especially for the *New York Herald*, and that his new novel would interest female readers. A typical advertisement read: "A sea story that appeals to women is 'Chance,' by Joseph Conrad, the famous English author. It was written especially for the SUNDAY NEW YORK HERALD, and the first instalment begins next Sunday" (14 January 1912, p. 5; qtd. in Watts, *Literary Life* 115; see also 114-22). In all its simplicity, this brief advance notice cleverly builds both on familiar images of Conrad in the public mind (famous author, writer of sea stories) and the force of the unexpected: an appeal to women was something with which few readers had associated Conrad's fiction before. As the editors of the *Herald* and Conrad himself knew well, women constituted the majority of the fiction-reading public.

Conrad may well have had reservations about having his work advertised in papers of mass circulation, especially in the United States, which he in some of his letters and works (notably *Nostramo*) had represented as typically materialistic and vulgar. However, his financial position did not allow him to let such an opportunity pass and seems to a certain extent to have influenced his shaping of the narrative material itself (Watts, *Literary Life* 116; Baines 379-80). In early April 1912, shortly after finishing the first draft of the novel, Conrad sent his agent J. B. Pinker a revised, "fuller" and "nicer" ending because he was, as he put it, "thinking of the public" (*CL5* 48, 49; see also Najder, *Life* 431).⁹² A year later, again writing to Pinker, he expressed his hope that the book edition of *Chance* would be a success, in terms suggesting that the novel had been written with a large readership in mind:

⁹² Baines, however, calls attention to the fact that Conrad also, and honestly, wished to avoid becoming a coterie writer, as he himself points out in the Author's Note to *Chance* (viii-ix) and elsewhere. Accordingly, it was probably for both financial and artistic reasons that he modified the ending of the novel (Baines 382).

“All of it [*Chance*] about a girl and with a steady run of references to women in general all along, some sarcastic, others sentimental, it ought to go down” (CL5 208).

The degree to which Conrad was trying to appeal to a contemporary female readership is impossible to determine. It is equally puzzling to think that women readers could have found the novel so interesting in spite of Marlow’s scathing misogyny.⁹³ As suggested above, Marlow’s misogyny and quarrelsomeness are part of his narrative identity. While Conrad should not be identified with Marlow, these qualities are, to a certain degree, also part of the image he fashions of himself as the author of this particular novel. In other words, Conrad chose an implied author that partly approves of Marlow’s views and behaviour; yet perhaps he does so more than Conrad actually intended. In any case, by thematizing the debate over the women’s rights movement of his day in a provocative way, Conrad forced his readers to enter that debate imaginatively, which certainly contributed to the commercial success of the novel. Laurence Davies notes that contemporary critics had urged Conrad to write books appealing to women. He also points out that some of the features of *Chance* indeed seem designed to appeal to women readers, one example being the failure of the patriarchs, old de Barral and Carleon Anthony. What Davies stresses, however, is simply the difference of *Chance* from both the works before and after it, a difference that suggests “a temporary shift in sensibility,” irrespective of how conscious Conrad was of what he was doing. This shift in sensibility leads to a kind of writing that comes close to what feminists often term female. Important features of such writing found in *Chance* include “the presence of multiple moral perspectives” and the telling of the story in such a complex and web-like way that it turns back upon itself and circles round (“Women Readers” 86; 85; see 76-77, 79-80). The narrative technique, then, besides allowing Conrad to dramatize various forms of self-construction, could also have been part of the novel’s appeal to a female readership.

It should also be noted, however, that Conrad may not have had a large readership in mind from the very beginning. We know that his conception of *Chance* underwent major changes during its composition, a process interrupted several times and eventually extending over at least eight years, from 1904 to March 1912. In a

⁹³ However, the fact that so many copies of *Chance* were sold does not necessarily mean that Conrad’s flesh-and-blood readers actually liked (or even finished) the book. Martin Ray speculates that “*Chance* must have been the most unread bestseller of its day” (xii).

wider sense of the term, the gestation period of *Chance* can be considered significantly longer even, as Conrad mentioned the idea of a story entitled “Dynamite” – which is superficially related to the final form of the novel – already in the late spring of 1898. Also, he continued to work on the text in April-May 1913 as he was preparing the book for publication, making extensive and thematically significant cuts to the serial version (see Knowles and Moore 68; *CL5* xxi; Siegle 83-101; Jones 134-60). In fact, Powell’s double function of both intradiegetic narrator and a character in the metadiegetic narrative is a complication of the novel’s structure that possibly has its origins in Conrad’s initial conception of the “Dynamite” story (cf. Knowles and Moore 68; Jones 138, 145).

Conrad’s openly expressed opinions about the literary value of his new novel are contradictory and thus hard to pin down, although they seem to have been more negative than positive. After finishing the revisions for the book edition, he declared in a letter to Pinker on 1 June 1913 that with *Chance*, he had done a rare “trick,” his best book since *Lord Jim* (*CL5* 229). But the very same letter testifies to Conrad’s awareness of the duality of the story: the beginning, he admitted, “did not belong to that novel—but to some other novel which will never be written now I guess” (*CL5* 229). Conrad may not have realized that there is an apparent contradiction involved in his remarks to Pinker. After all, if one part of the novel does not organically belong to the rest, how can he make such high claims for the whole? (Admittedly, while the quality of *Lord Jim* is rarely questioned, there is a certain incongruity between its *Patna* and *Patusan* sections as well.) However that may be, it is doubtful whether Conrad himself quite believed his own enthusiasm in the letter to Pinker. Najder reminds us that Conrad never confided his doubts in his literary agent, so that the views he expressed to his friends and fellow writers would appear to carry more weight (*Life* 431; 444-5). To Lady Ottoline Morrell and Ford Madox Ford, he complained about his nagging doubts, and he asked the young French writer Henri Ghéon to tell André Gide that he (that is, Conrad) had written “a long (and stupid) novel” (*CL5* 352, 15-16; *CL4* 434, 509; see also Najder, *Life* 431).

In the light of Conrad’s doubts about *Chance*, his reaction to the reviews in the Author’s Note (added to the novel in 1920) is instructive. Here, Conrad, in accordance with the apparent theme of the novel, speaks lightly of the role of “chance” in determining the “direction” he was to take in the early stages of the composition (vii). At the same time, however, he vigorously defends his method,

especially as against the simplistic criticism made in Robert Lynd's review that "if Mr. Conrad had chosen to introduce us to his characters in the ordinary way, he could have told us their story in about 200 pages instead of the 406 pages of the present book" (Sherry, *Critical Heritage* 271). Clearly having Lynd's words in mind, Conrad ironically remarks: "No doubt that by selecting a certain method and taking great pains the whole story might have been written out on a cigarette paper" (viii). More importantly, Conrad adds – as if answering Henry James's criticism as well – that his vision in *Chance* is "indissolubly allied to the style in which it is expressed" (x). This may sound like a writer's unconvincing self-justification, but there is more involved here. As in the Author's Note to *Lord Jim*, Conrad is again trying to fashion a public image of himself as an author who had more control over his work's composition and the method used in telling the story than he appears to have had, based on the biographical evidence. The little self-narrative Conrad presents to the public here also bears some resemblance to Marlow's own self-construction in the novel. Both author and narrator seem to be intent on glossing over the contingencies inherent in their telling of their respective stories, in spite of their simultaneous insistence on chance.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have argued that a preoccupation with the power of narrative to create identities is a defining feature of Conrad's fiction, particularly of his Marlow fictions. After a brief chapter on the problem of narrative oscillations in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and "Freya of the Seven Isles," I have traced the evolution of Marlow's double function from his first appearance in "Youth" to his last in *Chance*: as a homodiegetic narrator who serves Conrad's problematization of various forms of identity construction through narration *and* as a persona who enabled Conrad to negotiate his own literary identity. As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, it is this second function that predominates in "Youth," which is a relatively simple but ideologically laden story and the first that Conrad composed specifically for *Blackwood's Magazine*. His efforts to adapt to the magazine's ethos and target-audience are reflected in (among other aspects) the choice of Marlow's listeners and the way in which he rewrote certain events from his own life in the story. At the same time, already Conrad's first Marlovian narrative can be read as an exploration of the connection between narration and identity. In its concentration on the adventures and heroic deeds of his younger self, the story Marlow tells in "Youth" is best understood as his self-narrative of the romantic saga type. The identity he creates for himself in the process of telling this narrative is not questioned by his audience, partly because he does not depart from their norms and wishes to see himself as part of the community.

In "Heart of Darkness," we encounter a far more thoughtful, self-reflexive and individualized Marlow. Pronominal reference in the novella provides evidence that he has become a true individual, aware of the dangers of a shared discourse of identity. Yet the remarkable but brutal Kurtz, who has an impact on almost every character, dominates Marlow's narrative identity too. In having a "Kurtzian" identity, Marlow most closely resembles the Russian harlequin, even though his relationship with Kurtz is more ambiguous and complex than the Russian's. It is a curious paradox that Marlow wishes to distance himself from Kurtz on moral grounds while at the same time telling a narrative that revolves around him. I have argued that his self-narrative is confessional in an indirect way because he does not start out with the intention of admitting his complicity and puts Kurtz in the foreground. I have also

noted that, as a covert confession (as well as in other respects), Marlow's narrative is similar to that of the commanding officer in Conrad's later short story "The Tale." "Heart of Darkness" suggests that there is no ultimate truth about the self, but also that language and narrative can help us come to terms with the past by organising our fragmentary experiences into a coherent unity. While the balance in the novella shifts from Conrad's negotiation of his literary identity to a dramatization of identity construction within the text itself, Chapter 3 has also touched on some important aspects of the tale's biographical and publication context. It has explored the possibility that the writing of "Heart of Darkness" was for Conrad a means of coping with his traumatic experiences as well as with his complicity in the colonial enterprise in the Congo.

Chapter 4 has argued that *Lord Jim* is Conrad's fullest exploration of the compulsion to tell and the desire to have our self-narratives verified by others. The novel reengages with many of the issues raised in "Heart of Darkness," but unlike the novella and unlike "Youth," it is not primarily Marlow's self-narrative. Jim is the main character and his narrative identity is the central problem posed by the novel. The confessional narrative he tells Marlow betrays his wish to create a coherent identity, and the act of narration certainly provides him with some measure of relief. But he cannot produce an effective narrative to displace his self-destructive convictions, which later renders him vulnerable to Brown. In the first part of the novel, Marlow himself serves mainly as Jim's confidant and the recipient of his confession. In the Patusan part, however, he gradually recedes into the background of the story he tells, which transforms (but does not diminish the importance of) his narrative function. Like the narrator of "Freya of the Seven Isles," Marlow oscillates between limiting himself to the perspective of a homodiegetic narrator and assuming the superhuman knowledge normally available only to heterodiegetic narrators. He also offers a synthesis of several narratives told by other characters, some of which serve Conrad's purpose of dramatizing the connection between narration and identity. Yet, for Marlow too, the act of narration is a deeply personal undertaking because Jim is "one of us," so that admitting his failure would cast doubt on the values shared by Marlow and other members of the community. By extension, I have also suggested that some aspects of *Lord Jim* allow us to read it as a piece of fictional autobiography and thus as Conrad's reengagement with the problem of his own identity.

In *Chance*, completed long after his *Blackwood's* phase had ended, Conrad reused Marlow but turned him into a very different character. Marlow's disagreeable qualities – his garrulousness, misogyny and quarrelsome nature – are inseparable from the novel's unevenness that critics have noted. For all the differences between *Chance* and the earlier Marlow fictions, however, Conrad's basic concerns have not changed. In *Chance* too the world of the sea plays a crucial role in Marlow's narrative identity, and the narrative method of the novel resembles that of the Patusan section of *Lord Jim*, while also inviting comparison with *Nostromo*. In considerable parts of his narrative, the Marlow of *Chance* relies not only on his knowledge of facts and gift of conjecture, but also on his fertile imagination to construct a coherent account of the events. But even in this novel, Conrad cannot succumb completely to a relativistic view of the world, so that there is a tension between the realism required of homodiegetic narrators and Marlow's claim to almost unlimited insight into scenes or states of mind of which he should normally be unaware. As in the previous chapter, I have also examined the self-narratives of some other characters besides Marlow (Powell's and Franklin's), which are important in their own right in spite of the fact that they are subsumed under Marlow's narrative. Finally, Chapter 5 has briefly discussed how Conrad's search for a new female audience may have influenced the composition of the novel, as well as the way in which the Author's Note serves as an example of his self-fashioning.

At this point, I would like to extend my discussion of Conrad's self-fashioning by suggesting certain parallels between the Marlow fictions and some of his non-fiction. As examples of the latter, I shall briefly consider one of Conrad's Author's Notes and one autobiographical work: the Note to *Nostromo* and *A Personal Record*, respectively. Like most of Conrad's Author's Notes, the one to *Nostromo* was written late in his career – in this particular case, not less than thirteen years after the completion of the novel, in 1917. It is one of the more extended and more revealing of his (often hastily composed) Notes, in which we see Conrad imaginatively reengaging with his past work (Knowles and Moore 30). In Genettean terms, Author's Notes could be described as belonging to the realm of the paratext.⁹⁴ The Note to *Nostromo* allows its readers some insight into Conrad's own understanding

⁹⁴ In his foreword to Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Richard Macksey defines the paratext as "all the liminal devices – titles, signs of authorship, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes, intertitles, epilogues, and the like – that mediate the relations between text and reader" (xi).

of his novel and of some of its characters. Thus, it certainly performs the function that Genette has identified as the paratext's most important one: to exert an influence on the public that is (in the author's eyes) at the service of "a more pertinent reading" of the text (*Paratexts* 2). However, it is more important to my purposes to examine how Conrad's Author's Note was designed to project a certain image of himself to the public. Two passages from the Note seem to me especially illuminating in this context:

My principal authority for the history of Costaguana is, of course, my venerated friend, the late Don José Avellanos, Minister to the Courts of England and Spain, etc., etc., in his impartial and eloquent "History of Fifty Years of Misrule." That work was never published—the reader will discover why—and I am in fact the only person in the world possessed of its contents. I have mastered them in not a few hours of earnest meditation, and I hope that my accuracy will be trusted. (x)

If anything could induce me to revisit Sulaco (I should hate to see all these changes) it would be Antonia. (xiii)

Obviously, Conrad here adopts a humorous tone, implying that he himself was once a visitor to Sulaco and knew Don José as well as Antonia Avellanos, both of whom are characters in the novel. He even mentions casually that his book is in large part based on the unpublished work of Don José, who is himself one of the historian figures in *Nostromo*. What we can observe in these passages is a playful use of metalepsis, a crossing of the boundary separating fiction and reality, an implication that the author and his characters inhabit the same diegetic universe. Although one should probably not take the metalepsis all too seriously, the authorial role that Conrad adopts in the Note still shows strong similarities with the position of the narrator in the novel. In the "Those of us" passage from the beginning of Chapter VIII that I have cited in my discussion of *Chance*, there is a similar suggestion that the narrator had visited Sulaco at a certain point in its history but is, in the present moment of narration, no longer there and has no first-hand experience of more recent developments in the country. It is as if Conrad in the Author's Note were modestly inviting us, his readers, to identify him with the anonymous narrator, who knows a

lot about Sulaco but is much rather a historian than an unquestionable authority on the world of the novel.

In general, Conrad seems to have made no sharp distinction between fiction and reality when it suited his purposes. While much of his fiction is based on (and rewrites) his life, many of his autobiographical and other supposedly non-fictional writings tend to fictionalize his past. One might say that the role of the imagination was as important in the construction of his authorial personae as it is in Marlow's self-construction in *Chance*. Edward Said has argued that Conrad created a public voice for his Author's Notes, an evasive and charming persona to whom the difficulties of writing were unknown (*Beginnings* 100-37, esp. 104, 131).⁹⁵ The playful and chatty tone of the Note to *Nostramo* contrasts sharply with what is known about the compositional history of the novel. In fact, Conrad experienced extreme distress during prolonged periods of the composition, which lasted from the end of 1902 to August 1904. By keeping quiet about these difficulties and adopting an intimacy of address in his Author's Notes, Conrad may have tried to appeal to the widest possible audience (Knowles and Moore 29-31; 287-88). The techniques used to achieve this goal are not unlike those I have discussed in the Marlovian narratives and "Freya of the Seven Isles."

A Personal Record is Conrad's only autobiographical work in which he makes a sustained attempt to revisit the key events from his life as both seaman and writer. Yet the reminiscences, which follow a loosely associative, digressive pattern probably influenced by the works of Laurence Sterne, are only partly autobiographical in nature because Conrad engages in an intricate form of self-mythologizing. As Najder and Stape remark in their introduction to the Cambridge Edition of *A Personal Record*, this work is "Conrad's most concerted attempt to discern a pattern in his life, or perhaps to impose one *a posteriori*. It is thus a double document: of presenting the gist of his life to the public and exposing its internal sense to himself – of publicity and self-reflection" (xxii). Conrad himself acknowledges in "A Familiar Preface" (added to the volume in 1911) that "these memories . . . have their hope and their aim. The hope that from the reading of these pages there may emerge at last the vision of a personality, the man behind the books so fundamentally dissimilar as, for instance 'Almayer's Folly' and 'The Secret

⁹⁵ Said's view is echoed by J. H. Stape in his comments on the Author's Note to *Lord Jim* that I cited in Chapter 4.

Agent’ – and yet a coherent justifiable personality both in its origin and in its action” (18).⁹⁶ These words are highly suggestive of Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity or identity on the level of emplotment. As mentioned in the Introduction, the multiple elements of a story are structured by emplotment into a coherent sequence of actions and events. Emplotment inverts the effect of contingency by incorporating it into the effect of necessity or probability. In *A Personal Record*, Conrad not only wished to present himself as a coherent personality but also to discover coherence in his life by writing about it.

In these reminiscences, the creation of coherence often involves departing from reality. Najder and Stape point out that Conrad’s search for consistency and his real need for it are indicated by omitting events that would put the consistency into question, by adducing imagined events and by avoiding the suggestion of any internal tensions or conflicting desires in his life (xlviii). Sometimes, Conrad also avoids talking about himself by simply talking about others. In this respect, he very much resembles Marlow, perhaps especially the Marlow of “Heart of Darkness,” who puts Kurtz into the foreground of his narrative because he cannot make a direct confession of his complicity in the events he relates (cf. Lothe, Hawthorn and Phelan, “Introduction” 16). One of the many examples of how Conrad rewrote his past in *A Personal Record* in order to structure his narrative into a desired pattern is his account of joining the British Merchant Service. He remarks that “if I was to be a seaman then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice” (106). Also, he closes his reminiscences with a highly idealized and sentimental description of how he first encountered the ensign of the British Merchant Service:

The Red Ensign! In the pellucid, colourless atmosphere bathing the drab and grey masses of that southern [Mediterranean] land, the livid islets, the sea of pale glassy blue under the pale glassy sky of that cold sunrise, it was as far as the eye could reach the only spot of ardent colour – flame-like, intense and presently as minute as the tiny red spark the concentrated reflection of a great fire kindles in the clear heart of a globe of crystal. The Red Ensign – the symbolic, protecting

⁹⁶ J. H. Stape notes that the addition of “A Familiar Preface” was also meant to give coherence to the seven separately written autobiographical essays that comprise *A Personal Record* (“Narrating Identity” 218).

warm bit of bunting flung wide upon the seas, and destined for so many years to be the only roof over my head. (121)

In reality, Conrad's joining the British Merchant Service was more a matter of accident than of deliberate choice (Najder, *Life* 69; Najder and Stape xlix). The idealization of the Red Ensign in the passage quoted above is reminiscent of an extract from "Youth" that I have cited in Chapter 2. In that story, Marlow talks about his fellow English seamen in terms that suggest his belief in the superiority of the British Merchant Service over the merchant services of other nations. He insists, it will be recalled, on "that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations" (29). The passage from *A Personal Record* also needs to be read in the context of Conrad's appeal to his English readership.

I shall conclude my brief discussion of *A Personal Record* by focusing on an aspect that has not received much critical attention. What I find especially interesting is how Conrad at certain points transforms his written sources to create a semi-fictional oral storytelling situation. In particular, Conrad, besides relying on his memory of certain episodes from his life, also uses as a major source the posthumously published memoirs of his maternal uncle and guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski.⁹⁷ Najder and Stape argue that Conrad "openly points at his source by placing in inverted commas the story of his uncle's sisters – [Conrad's] own mother and aunt – as told by his uncle, an acknowledgement unique in the whole of his canon" (xxxiv). What this observation ignores, however, is that Conrad merely acknowledges that the information he imparts comes from his uncle. He never mentions Bobrowski's memoirs as his written source. One might say that he "plagiarises" *Pamiętnik* by summarising or even translating certain passages from it without acknowledgement. Even more importantly, Conrad presents the information as if Bobrowski had related it all to him in conversation when he visited him in Ukraine in 1893. Similar discussions relating to family affairs might have taken place between uncle and nephew, but the striking resemblance between some passages from Bobrowski's memoirs and from *A Personal Record* establishes the former as Conrad's immediate source in these cases. An example of Conrad's borrowing is provided below:

⁹⁷ Relevant extracts from Bobrowski's *Pamiętnik* (1900) are usefully reprinted in English translation at the end of the Cambridge Edition of *A Personal Record*. References to *Pamiętnik* are to this volume.

[Conrad's aunt's] outstanding qualities were not so much her education and beauty – in which my elder sister [Conrad's mother] excelled, although she had a pleasant appearance and an adequate education – but her commonsense, sweet disposition, and an adaptability to people and situations. Her death was a great moral loss to us all, for it deprived us of that daily assistance that can be given only by a woman convinced that every occupation in family life is worthwhile as long as it brings satisfaction to someone. I am certain that had she lived she would have brought a blessing to her home as a wife, mother, and mistress of the house . . . (Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik* 191)

She [Conrad's aunt] did not shine so much by personal beauty and a cultivated mind, in which your mother was far superior. It was her good sense, the admirable sweetness of her nature, her exceptional facility and ease in daily relations that endeared her to everybody. Her death was a terrible grief and a serious moral loss for us all. Had she lived she would have brought the greatest blessings to the house it would have been her lot to enter, as wife, mother and mistress of a household. (Conrad, *A Personal Record* 38)

The fact that Conrad fictionalized the circumstances of his learning these details lends justification to Edward Said's point that "Conrad never lets us forget that written narrative transcribes a told narrative that draws attention to itself" (*World, Text, Critic* 96). Even when working from Bobrowski's published memoirs, Conrad chose to dramatize an act of narration. In Phelan's terms, Conrad here focuses on narrative as a rhetorical act: he describes his uncle telling him on that particular occasion and for some purpose that something happened. Or, to return to Hawthorn's phrase cited at the beginning of this study, we are again dealing with a reporting consciousness that is interposed between us and the events and people described in the narrative. In addition, as Ricoeur points out, the telling of a story involves the creation of a narrative identity. In this particular case, Conrad shows his uncle in the act of establishing identities by telling him stories about their family members such as his younger sister, whose death affected him painfully. I would also argue that the creation of an oral storytelling situation adds an important *human* element to

Conrad's reminiscences that reduces the distance between the authorial persona and the reader. In *A Personal Record*, as in his Marlovian and other orally delivered narratives, Conrad could be seen as inviting his readers to become listeners to a personal narrative.

In this study, I have employed terms from narrative theory – such as implied author, extradiegetic narrator and intradiegetic narrator – to distinguish between different narrative instances (or what I have called senders) in Conrad's fictional texts. I have also discussed some examples of Conrad's self-fashioning, of his creation of various authorial personae in his non-fiction. What establishes a link between all these separate instances is Conrad's authorial voice. As I have noted earlier (see Chapter 4), Guerard defined the Conradian voice as grave, interior and masculine, and saw Conrad's prose as the expression of a human being. In a similar fashion, Najder has focused on the personal voice as a sign of the reader being addressed and engaged intellectually and emotionally by another human being. This human element observable in both Conrad's fictional and non-fictional prose lends some coherence to all these various narrative identities. It unites, without conflating, Marlow and some other narrators, the authorial personae in the Author's Notes and *A Personal Record*, as well as Conrad the flesh-and-blood author.

In Chapter 4, I referred to Paul B. Armstrong's view of Conrad as a novelist of contradictions who oscillates between a desire to overcome contingency and the recognition that this is impossible. In this context, Armstrong has also spoken of Conrad's "fear of the disasters contingency can wreak" (*Challenge of Bewilderment* 185). I would like to develop this argument by suggesting that Conrad's fear of contingency and his preoccupation with storytelling are closely related. Based on Ricoeur's idea that emplotment inverts the effect of contingency by incorporating it into the effect of necessity or probability, I would argue that narration is Conrad's answer to the challenge of contingency. In other words, narration in Conrad can often be understood as a means of overcoming a fear of contingency. As my discussion of the Marlovian narratives has demonstrated, Conrad's narrators experience the need to create a coherent identity. They are often shown trying to impose coherence on their lives, but they are never entirely successful because of Conrad's intuitive understanding of the necessary incompleteness of all our self-narratives. His self-mythologizing in his Author's Notes and autobiographical works such as *A Personal Record* can be regarded as an aspect of the same phenomenon. Conrad seems to have

perceived the need to create coherence by telling stories as a very human one, and the attempt at doing so as vital, in spite of the impossibility of it being a complete success. Conrad's fiction and Conrad the man have rightly been described as deeply human without being (in most cases) sentimental.⁹⁸

I think that part of what makes Conrad's fiction so human is that it gives a voice to such a vast array of different characters. It allows us to appreciate not only their thoughts and perspectives through the use of internal focalization, but, in a typically Conradian fashion, also the way in which they narrate their lives to others. This focus on self-understanding and self-construction creates sympathy in the reader – even, to some extent, for self-deceivers such as Lord Jim. As I have pointed out, certain details of Conrad's biography help explain why he seems to have been especially sensitive to the power of narrative and the problem of identity. But the humanity of his fictional as well as non-fictional works has the potential to affect and engage his readers even if they are unaware of the story of his life. The voice that is the most typically Conradian in his whole oeuvre is arguably that of Charlie Marlow. This is at least partly because Marlow's narratives compellingly dramatize the relation between narration and identity while also being vaguely suggestive of the human being behind his voice.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Najder, *Life* 575.

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