The Character of Marlow

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THE CHARACTER OF MARLOW

A Thesis

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Master of Arts

by

Paula James Gilley

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ABSTRACT

Charlie Marlow is the principal narrator of four of Joseph Conrad's works. In "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness" he speaks of events in his own life; in Lord Jim and Chance he tells stories about other people. Throughout these tales the reader learns about Marlow's "life story" and his character development.

Marlow begins as an idealistic young man who is confident of his abilities and power to direct his own destiny. From Kurtz and Jim he comes to know that all men, including himself, have a capacity for weakness and evil. Eventually, Marlow comes to have a somewhat fatalistic attitude but never loses his moral ideals or his sympathy for people.

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THE CHARACTER OF MARLOW
Charlie Marlow is the principal narrator in four of Joseph Conrad's works: "Youth" (1898), "Heart of Darkness" (1899), Lord Jim (1900), and Chance (1912). In the first two stories Marlow is the protagonist; in the last two another person is the main character and Marlow's role is that of interacting with someone else's story. But in each work one gets a picture of Marlow as an individual and sees how he changes at each stage of his life while still retaining certain traits.

Judging by the preface to the volume containing "Youth and "Heart of Darkness", Marlow had a continuous existence in Conrad's mind:

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.

Further proof of Conrad's conception of Marlow as one character is seen in the themes which appear in Marlow's "life story" throughout the tales he narrates. The confrontation of idealism versus realism that Kurtz and Jim must face is also Marlow's chief concern. In "Youth" he is a middle-aged man looking back nostalgically on his idealistic, adventure-loving youth; in "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim he encounters experiences and people which change his outlook and finally in Chance, he appears as a realistic, middle-aged man. In these stories Marlow is an essentially capable person who must learn about the potential for
weakness and destruction from others. His recognition of human falli-

bility is also a process of self-discovery as he realizes he too is capable of moral regression.

In "Youth" one meets two Marlows: the forty-two-year-old Marlow, who looks back on events of his youth with a mixture of nostalgia and realism, and the twenty-year-old Marlow to whom all happenings are a glorious, exciting adventure. As John Howard Wills points out, "Throughout Marlow's narrative we often see the same events from the vantage point of both youth and age, illusion and reality, hope and fatality." A double perspective is invaluable, as it enables one not only to understand Marlow as a young man but also to obtain some indication of how his views have developed over the years.

Young Marlow regards all the disasters which happen to the Judea as exciting adventures. A good indication of his basic attitude occurs after the gale has struck:

And there was somewhere in me the thought: 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 pleased. I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation.

Such comments are certainly a strong expression of Marlow's youthful idealism and sense of adventure. But they are more than that. Here in an emergency one sees Marlow's resources of intelligence and capability. His statement about lasting it out is no idle boast, as can be seen by his prior conduct:
And while we pumped the ship was going from us piece-meal: the bulwarks went, the stanchions were torn out, the ventilators smashed, the cabin door burst in. There was not a dry spot in the ship. She was being gutted bit by bit. The longboat changed, as if by magic, into matchwood where she stood in her gripes. I had lashed her myself, and was rather proud of my handiwork, which had withstood so long the malice of the sea. (Y, p. 185)

Marlow is not merely an idealist but an able young man who takes the right action in an emergency. As V.J. Emmett states, "At this point in the story, the struggle with wind and sea which constitutes the ordeal allows young Marlow to prove his endurance and his qualities of leadership."

Marlow's capability is also a clue to his sense of idealism and adventure which continues throughout "Youth." Because he can handle the misfortunes which come his way so well, he is able to keep thinking of them as adventures rather than catastrophes. A good example of his optimism is Marlow's reaction after the Judea has been blown up. Is he discouraged or frightened? Not a bit! On the contrary, it is the start of a new adventure:

And then I knew that I would see the East first as commander of a small boat. I thought it fine; and the fidelity to the old ship was fine. We should see the last of her. Oh, the glamor of youth! Oh, the fire of it, more dazzling than the flames of the burning ship, throwing a magic light on the wide earth, leaping audaciously to the sky, presently to be quenched by time, more cruel, more pitiless, more bitter than the sea--and like the flames of the burning ship surrounded by an impenetrable night. (Y, p. 198)

Any thought of future difficulties is completely forgotten as Marlow joyfully thinks of exploring the East. His confidence in his abilities
is further shown when he encounters problems of heat and the "deluge of
rain-squalls that kept us baling for dear life" (Y, p. 202). His previ-
ous assurance is confirmed when he remarks, "I did not know how good a
man I was till then" (Y, p. 202).

But the remarks right after the blowup also show the two sides of
the mature Marlow: one who speaks of the "fire" and "glamor" of youth
and appears as an "old sentimental escapist" as Wills says, and one who
speaks of these qualities as being "quenched by time" (Y, p. 198). As
this last statement indicates, Marlow has sadly learned through the years
that the feelings and attitudes of youth cannot last. Both sides of the
forty-two-year-old Marlow appear in the story frequently, giving the
reader an indication of how his character has developed.

It appears that Marlow became more fatalistic over the years, as
shown in the opening sentences of his narrative:

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. Not from any fault of yours. You simply
can do nothing, neither great nor little--not a
thing in the world--not even marry an old maid,
or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its
port of destination. (Y, p. 179)

This is in striking contrast to the twenty-year-old Marlow who could
weather a disaster and come out of it fully confident that he would
soon be involved in a new adventure and having the time of his life.

This youthful attitude apparently underwent a drastic change. In fact,
Marlow presents such change as being inevitable: "Youth, strength,
genius, thoughts, achievements, simple hearts—all dies. . . No
matter" (Y, p. 182).

Marlow's attitude towards such a loss is more sorrowful than bitter or cynical. If he were a genuine cynic it is unlikely that his narrat-
tive would contain expressions of nostalgia such as the following:

But for me all the East is contained in that vision of my youth. It is all in that moment when I opened my young eyes on it. I came upon it from a tussle with the sea—and I was young—and I saw it looking at me. And this is all that is left of it! 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 by! --Night--Good-by . . . ! (Y, p. 206)

In saying good-by to what he was Marlow's primary emotion is that of regret. As Gerald Levin states, "In 'Youth' Marlow sadly looks back to his romantic youth when his idealism was still intact, and recognizes that youth must inevitably give way to disillusioned maturity."6

In "Youth" one meets two Marlows. There is the young Marlow who is idealistic and ready for adventure and proves himself to be very capable in a crisis. Then there is the Marlow who is older by twenty-two years and has come to realize that idealism is inevitably replaced by a more realistic outlook. However, this realization has not made him cynical and he still retains a strong nostalgic streak. Thus the reader obtains a good picture of what Marlow used to be and what he is now. At this point the question is not so much how did Marlow change but why did he change? The two Marlows are so far apart in attitude that one cannot help wondering how they got that way. No good clues are given in the story. Young Marlow is very confident of his capabilities but the
older Marlow has clearly found out that people often fail. Likewise, the twenty-year-old Marlow feels he can direct his own destiny but his older self is well aware that there are circumstances that are beyond one's control and that people's efforts don't always get them what they want. From what is learned of Marlow in "Youth" it seems unlikely that he could have experienced a great failure but might this have happened anyway? If not, did he learn of weakness and defeat from the experiences of someone else? As will be seen, this question is partly answered in "Heart of Darkness."

In "Heart of Darkness" Marlow relates how after the events in "Youth" he traveled the Orient and got "a regular dose of the East--six years or so." At the time of his adventures in the Congo he must have been in his late twenties. His age at the time of the telling of his tale on the Nellie is not specifically stated. However, J. W. Johnson argues that, "since his Congo venture preyed on his mind strongly, he probably was not more than five or six years away from it." This speculation seems probable. Thus one does not find the wide gap between participant and narrator that is present in "Youth." This is important in our understanding of the formation of Marlow's character. In "Youth" a gap between youth and age kindles curiosity as to what happened in the interval; in "Heart of Darkness," the closeness of the narrator to the time in his story helps to answer questions about what events had shaped his attitudes and how they did so.

The question of what has made Marlow the man he is occurs right at the beginning of "Heart of Darkness." The unnamed narrator says of
Marlow that he "had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower" (HD, p. 6). Since the Buddha is regarded as "the enlightened one" this immediately raises some questions. Just what is it that Marlow is enlightened about? And how did he come to be that way?

The very title of "Heart of Darkness" indicates that a confrontation with evil will take place. The idea of a young and relatively innocent man facing evil is also suggested by the description of Marlow looking at a map of Africa with a snake-shaped river. He remarks: "as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird--a silly little bird" (HD, p. 8). This would tend to impress most people as an ominous sign. At this point, everything in the narration clearly suggests that Marlow will reach new levels of maturity by a disturbing and possibly terrifying experience. Such indications greatly increase curiosity as to Marlow's fate. The suspense is further heightened when Marlow goes to the European city and is examined by the company's doctor. The doctor mysteriously says, "the changes take place inside, you know" (HD, p. 11).

The uneasiness the reader must surely be feeling by now does not lessen. Indeed it becomes more intense as Marlow embarks on his journey. While on the steamer, going up the Congo River, the captain tells Marlow about a passenger on the boat the other day who hanged himself. Later, at the company station, Marlow sees a chain gang of blacks at labor. They are a strong indication of the terror and hopelessness of the jungle. Afterwards Marlow truly senses how the jungle can destroy man. But he
also realizes that its terrors can be overcome:

You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes—that's only one way of resisting—without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hill-side, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. (HD, pp. 16-17)

This is a significant passage in several respects. It indicates that Marlow has had experiences before this in dealing with difficult situations. It has been seen in "Youth" that he managed very well in a series of disasters but hardly anything had been said of his experiences between that time and his Congo journey. Apparently in the several years' interval he has encountered dangers which forced him to "strike and to fend off." Ideas formed about Marlow's strong capabilities in "Youth" are further confirmed. This indicates that Marlow's chances of surviving in the jungle are very good.

The most horrifying thing that the jungle has to teach is that there is a capacity for savagery in all men:

Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their [the natives] not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (HD, pp. 36-37)
Marlow shows his keen understanding by identification with the natives. In uncivilized country, man is usually brought to the realization of his capacity for savagery sooner or later.

Kurtz, the great ivory merchant, is a prime example of the moral regression of civilized man. Like him, many know of the potential for weakness and evil after numerous terrifying experiences and at last sink to the depths of degeneration. Others, like Marlow, understand this capacity very soon and avoid being destroyed. Marlow states, "He must meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn strength" (HD, p. 37). It is just this sort of strength which Marlow has and Kurtz lacks and so Kurtz is ruined by the "devil."

Marlow, even though a capable and civilized man, clearly recognizes his own capacity for evil. In contrast, Kurtz, according to Marlow, lacks such self-knowledge. This is evident in Marlow's comments on Kurtz while Marlow contemplates the heads on the stakes:

They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last--only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude. (HD, pp. 58-59)

Kurtz had almost no self-knowledge before coming to the wilderness and so did not understand his capacity for weakness and evil. Unlike Marlow, he didn't have enough "inborn strength" to keep this capacity from
quickly growing and overwhelming him. To conquer a weakness one must first know what needs to be fought. Such knowledge Kurtz was ignorant of and believed that his exterior accomplishments and virtues, his "magnificent eloquence," constituted all he truly was. This delusion and his essential feebleness of character kept Kurtz from meeting "truth with his own true stuff" (HD, p. 37). His accomplishments and high ideals were not enough to survive the jungle. He needed knowledge of his own capacity for degeneration and the strength with which to fight.

These are just the two virtues that Marlow has. Thus it is all the more remarkable he could so clearly understand and identify with the tragic disintegration of Kurtz, who lacked the strength to fight his weakness and evil. Having spent time in the jungle deepened Marlow's understanding:

Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. (HD, p. 72)

Just because Marlow succeeded in surviving and Kurtz did not doesn't mean that Marlow is unaware that he could have met the same fate. Rather than priding himself on his ability to survive, Marlow identifies with Kurtz and honors him for the knowledge he finally did achieve, even though it came too late: "He had summed up--he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man" (HD, p. 72). This deathbed cry is a confirmation of Marlow's previous knowledge of man's capacity for evil as "a universal possibility."
The Marlow in "Heart of Darkness" is in some respects the same as young Marlow in "Youth." He shows the same ability to do the right thing in a difficult situation and on the whole has confidence in himself. The great difference in the two is shown in the older Marlow's great understanding of the universal capacity for weakness and evil. Although it is strongly indicated that he has had previous experiences, other than those in "Youth," that have tried his capabilities, none of them has brought to him the understanding that he acquired in his Congo journey. Marlow gains much insight into the savagery of man during his time in the jungle. But it is Kurtz who most fully reveals to him the capacity for evil in all men. This is because the contrast between what Kurtz appears to be as a cultured, civilized man and his final degeneration is so great. Had he never met Kurtz, Marlow would never have understood evil so fully since Marlow is too strong to be destroyed completely. True, Marlow senses the universal capacity for savagery in the natives he sees. But it is through his knowledge of Kurtz's fate that he realizes this most fully. If Kurtz, who is regarded by everyone as the epitome of a civilized man, can be destroyed by his own savagery, then it truly seems possible for just about anyone.

One sees Marlow survive numerous difficult times in both "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness." Being intelligent and capable, he manages to survive the incidents that happened to the Judea with youthful idealism intact. But this idealism is quickly shattered by his experiences in the Congo, particularly his encounter with Kurtz. By identifying with Kurtz, a man with no "inner restraint" as Jocelyn Baines says, Marlow
comes to see the possibility for evil in anyone. Marlow's deepest knowledge of human nature comes from his involvement with the experiences of others so that to a great extent they become his own experiences, therefore enlarging his perceptions. This same process of identification with others and a subsequent enrichment of insight into the human condition is also found in Lord Jim.

Lord Jim is different from "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness" since Marlow's role in this work is that of narrator and confidant while the main actions of the story center on Jim. In relating Jim's story Marlow reveals a great deal of his skill as a narrator and his understanding of people. As has been seen in "Heart of Darkness" Marlow takes much interest in reflecting upon others' thoughts and motives. He takes a specific interest in Jim because Jim's actions in deserting his ship are in such contrast with what he appears to be. This is particularly revealed by Marlow's thoughts when he sees Jim for the first time:

He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; and, looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself—well, if this sort can go wrong like that . . .

Marlow often indicates his surprise that someone like Jim, who seems to have so many advantages, should behave so badly. He later says of Jim, "I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place . . . He stood there for all the parentage of his kind. whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct
of courage" (LJ, p. 27).

The same contrast between appearance and reality is also found in "Heart of Darkness." Kurtz, with his many gifts and high ideals, seemed to be almost a perfect person. But he was not strong enough to endure the hardships of the jungle and so he degenerated into a wreck of a man. At that time Marlow was astute enough to realize the potential for destruction in even the best of people. But even while recognizing this, in Lord Jim he cannot help wondering that such destructiveness should show up in one who appears as promising as Jim. This in no way detracts from Marlow's perceptiveness; he is only human to feel such surprise. Indeed, Marlow's encounter with Jim continues the lesson begun in "Heart of Darkness," that of realizing the often great distance between what seems to be and what actually is. In this way Marlow learns that his judgment of people is not infallible.

It is no surprise that Marlow should take a great interest in Jim, whose actions seem so out of character. But it would be a mistake to think that Marlow's interest in Jim, however keen it might be, is entirely impersonal. Marlow's attitude is not one of detachment; he doesn't regard Jim's predicament as being completely removed from his own situation. He identifies with Jim, as he did with Kurtz, and becomes a "participant in Jim's fate" as Neville Newhouse observes. 14 This identification is apparent in the explanation Marlow gives for his interest in Jim:

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? I fear that such was the secret motive of my prying. (LJ, p. 32)

Here is seen how Marlow's reaction to Jim's conduct goes beyond that of simple curiosity or surprise. While he has these feelings he also identifies with Jim and sees his weakness as a potential weakness of his own.

Marlow has two basic reasons for his interest in Jim's case. In the first place he is curious as to why anyone as promising as Jim seems to be could behave so badly in an emergency. This further emphasizes the lesson Marlow encountered in "Heart of Darkness," namely that even the most seemingly perfect of people can be overwhelmed by forces of destruction and weakness. But Marlow's interest goes further since he identifies with Jim and knows that what happened to Jim could also happen to him or to almost anyone. Dale Kramer says Marlow is interested "in the ramifications that Jim's case has for his own conception of the nature of man and for his own idea that man is confronted by evil both internal and external."15

While Marlow identifies with Jim quite strongly and therefore is led to understand him at first, at least to a certain extent, he later realizes that he will always find Jim incomprehensible to a large degree. He can see how Jim's weakness caused him to fail in an emergency; he cannot see why Jim becomes obsessed with his attempts to justify himself and with his failure to do so. The idealism which weakened Jim's ability to take effective action during his apprenticeship and on the Patna
causes him to be tormented for the rest of his life since he fell so far short of his high standards. Marlow describes Jim as speaking before "me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence--another possessor of his soul" (LJ, p. 57). Jim's shame and guilt have become so strong as to be almost another person who controls him. As Marlow has befriended Jim he is appealed to as an "accomplice" in Jim's case but he realizes the impossibility of bringing the matter to a satisfactory conclusion:

I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession--to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies. I can't explain to you who haven't seen him and who hear his words only at second hand the mixed nature of my feelings. It seemed to me I was being made to comprehend the Inconceivable--and I know of nothing to compare with the discomfort of such a sensation. (LJ, p. 57)

Marlow's reaction to Jim shows how different Jim is, not only for his actions on the *Patna* but in his attitude towards them. While the shame Jim feels is very understandable it is unusual in that it so completely rules his life afterwards as to severly hamper him in his efforts to become better. When Gentleman Brown pleads for a chance to escape, Jim lets him go because he is so guilt-stricken by Gentleman Brown's question about having a second chance in life. The *Patna* incident didn't ruin Jim's life; the real tragedy lies in Jim's soul-destroying feelings of guilt and shame. In allowing these feelings to dominate his life and control his crucial moments, Jim becomes incomprehensible to most, including Marlow.
It is understandable that Marlow complains of "being made to comprehend the Inconceivable." As he is a practical sort who has always done what is necessary he cannot truly see and comprehend Jim: "I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog--bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country" (LJ, p. 47). Marlow has the sensitivity to identify with people's faults and recognize their universality but even Marlow's perceptiveness has its limits. The very characteristic which makes Jim a tragic hero--his dominating shame and guilt--makes him essentially incomprehensible. The more perceptive observer, like Marlow, can identify with Jim to a degree but Jim can never be fully understood. In *Lord Jim* Marlow learns of his limitations in comprehending others.

J. W. Johnson has suggested that the Marlow in Jim's story may be "placed in his late thirties." Evidently he is quite close in age to the mature Marlow of "Youth," who was forty-two. The fatalism of the older Marlow in "Youth" is also to be found in *Lord Jim*, particularly in Marlow's statements to Jewel about Jim:

"At the time I was animated by an inexplicable ardour, as if before some great and necessary task--the influence of the moment upon my mental and emotional state. There are in all our lives such moments, such influences, coming from the outside, as it were, irresistible, incomprehensible--as if brought about by the mysterious conjunction of the planets. (LJ, p. 193)"

These remarks are certainly in marked contrast to the young Marlow who felt such confidence in himself and his ability to determine his own destiny. Having met such people as Kurtz and Jim, Marlow cannot totally
banish from his mind the nagging doubt that it was solely fate that their catastrophes did not happen to him. The mature Marlow has reflected on what he has learned of the weaknesses and limitations of various individuals and has come to have quite a strong belief in fate. He speaks of "the working of the implacable destiny of which we are the victims--and the tools" (LJ, p. 195). His beliefs have greatly changed since he was twenty.

The last work in which Marlow appears is *Chance*. This book was completed a dozen years after "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, which were written from 1898-1900. In *Chance* Marlow is seen in a situation completely different from those of the other three works--he stands outside much of the main action and is largely unacquainted with the main characters. In both "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness" Marlow is the protagonist. In addition, Marlow forms a strong relationship with Kurtz, the other important character in "Heart of Darkness." In *Lord Jim* Marlow's friendship with Jim causes him to be drawn into a considerable portion of the action. However, in *Chance* Marlow never even meets Roderick Anthony, one of the main characters. To a certain extent, he does get to know Flora de Barral, the other principal character. He says of her that he "had a look in." But this knowledge is hardly of the same quality as that which he obtained of Kurtz and Jim. In *Chance* Marlow is much more of an observer than a participant in the main story.

Anthony's conflicts concerning his marriage are what primarily interest Marlow. Marlow's analysis is positive and clear, unlike the attitude he takes in *Lord Jim*. There he is much less sure of himself,
saying of Jim that "upon the whole he was misleading" (LJ, p. 47).

No such uncertainty appears in Marlow's discussion of Roderick Anthony. Marlow is certain about him even to the point of stating what his thoughts are. A good example is Marlow's telling of Anthony's thoughts about Flora:

He upbraided himself. What else could he have expected? He had rushed in like a ruffian; he had dragged the poor defenceless thing by the hair of her head, as it were, on board that ship. It was really atrocious. Nothing assured him that his person could be attractive to this or any other woman. And his proceedings were enough in themselves to make any one odious. He must have been bereft of his senses. She must fatally detest and fear him. Nothing could make up for such brutality. And yet somehow he resented this very attitude which seemed to him completely justifiable. (C, pp. 396-397)

In Chance Marlow shows his clearest insight into the workings of another's mind. Even without meeting Anthony, Marlow can imagine how he would feel and think in a particular set of circumstances.

One finds a side of Marlow's personality in Chance that is not so obvious in the other works, namely the ability to see the comic side of a situation. It is worth noting, however, that some of this ability is present in Lord Jim. An illustration of his humor occurs when Marlow speaks of the accident that happened to the Patna and Jim's position:

He enjoyed the privilege of witnessing scenes—as far as I can judge—as of low comedy. They were still at that bolt. The skipper was ordering. 'Get under and try to lift'; and the others naturally shirked. You understand that to be squeezed flat under the keel of a boat wasn't a desirable position to be caught in if the ship went down suddenly. 'Why don't you—you the strongest?' whined the little engineer. 'Gott-for-dam! I am too thick,' spluttered the skipper in despair. It was funny enough to make angels weep. (LJ, p. 62)
Thus Marlow sees the comic in a tragic situation before Chance. But the view of life as tragic-comedy is habitual only in Chance.

Such a view is found in Marlow's telling of the story of Flora's disappearance. She has run away from the Fynes, and Marlow and Mr. Fyne are looking for her. Marlow states that "Fyne fussing in a knickerbocker suit before the hosts of heaven, on a shadowy earth, about a transient, phantom-like girl, seemed too ridiculous to associate with. On the other hand there was something fascinating in the very absurdity" (C, p. 50). Later Marlow describes Fyne's voice as being "uplifted in grave distress" and sounding "more than usually rich, solemn and profound" (C, p. 53). He then remarks "This was the comic relief of an absurdly dramatic situation" (C, p. 53). Marlow shows much the same reaction when Flora tells him of a meeting she had with Captain Anthony. She had left the Fyne's cottage with the intention of committing suicide. She then meets Captain Anthony, which prevents her from carrying out her intentions. As she is telling Marlow of this he thinks, "There was something prettily comical in her attitude and her tone, while I pictured to myself a poor white-faced girl walking to her death with an unconscious man striding by her side" (C, pp. 216-217).

This ability to see the comic side of a serious situation seems appropriate for Chance. After all, it is surely easier to see comedy in a situation when not intensely involved in it. But still one might wonder if the ability to be detached and see comedy is primarily a result of being removed from the main story. Might this view be customary on Marlow's part?
There is some indication in the book that such is the case. Early in the story reference is made to Marlow's speaking with "his usual non-chalance" (C, p. 7). Evidently he has developed the ability to stand back from a situation and consider the different aspects of it. Also Marlow is described as pursuing "general ideas in a peculiar manner, between jest and earnest" (C, p. 23). He can find comedy in many things, not just the specific events and characters in Chance.

Even with a more finely developed sense of the comic Marlow remains largely the same person in Chance that he was in the other three works. He exhibits many of the same qualities that he did earlier but they are not so intense owing to his being detached from the main story.

One of these characteristics is Marlow's sympathy for people and his ability to identify with them. This is seen in his attitude toward Flora de Barral. He knows her very little and has only spoken to her twice, once on a walk and once outside the hotel in London. Most of her story had been related to him by the Fynes. Yet he is able to remark with genuine sympathy that Flora has "had a mighty bad time of it" (C, p. 162). Also noteworthy is Marlow's remark when he speaks of his meeting with Flora outside the hotel:

> It so happened that in their wanderings to and fro our glances met. There was something comic in the whole situation, in the poor girl and myself waiting together on the broad pavement at a corner public-house for issue of Fyne's ridiculous mission. But the comic when it is human becomes quickly painful. (C, p. 206)

That last statement shows sympathy not only for Flora's particular situation but for anyone who might be in painful circumstances. In speaking
of the human condition, Marlow demonstrates that he knows that all people, including himself, could be involved in events both comic and tragic.

Marlow retains his sensitivity and skill in identifying with people throughout all four works in which he narrates. Obviously anyone with these qualities takes a keen interest in anyone he meets or even hears about. It is this characteristic which makes him a fascinating narrator of a story concerning people whom he has met briefly like Flora or not at all, like Roderick Anthony. Marlow is eager to hear what happens to Flora as is shown by his behavior upon meeting Powell, whose narration begins the book and the story of Flora and Anthony. Marlow states that he didn't want Powell "to talk at all except for the purpose of setting him going" (C, p. 261). Later he comments "I brought him to talk about that voyage, which, by the by, was not the first voyage of Flora de Barral" (C, p. 261). Certainly Marlow is anxious to get right to the story of Flora and what happened to her after her marriage. In displaying such keen interest in someone he knows slightly Marlow shows how fascinated he is with people and their situations. Such interest can lead to a strong relationship as it did with Kurtz and Jim or it can lead to learning more about little-known people such as Flora and Anthony through the narration of someone else. This is the main reason Marlow can tell an intriguing story about people he hardly knows and make it convincing as he does in Chance.

Besides his sympathy for and interest in people, another trait of Marlow's is seen in Chance as well as the other three works, namely
idealism. In learning about evil and weakness Marlow has not become so disillusioned as to lose his standards of excellence and take an amoral attitude towards both his conduct and the conduct of others. His concern for standards is brought out most vividly in a conversation with Mrs. Fyne. She has just asked why a girl should be more considerate than anyone else and Marlow responds:

Of course I exclaimed at this, not very loudly it is true, but forcibly. Were, then, the feelings of friends, relations, and even of strangers, to be disregarded? I asked Mrs. Fyne if she did not think it was a sort of duty to show elementary consideration, not only for the natural feelings, but even for the prejudices of one's fellow-creatures. (C, p. 58)

Once Marlow proved that he could do the right thing, and do it well, in crisis situations, such as those on the Judea. Now he shows that although the time when he has to deal with a crisis may be past, he still strongly believes in and acts according to high standards of behavior. This same concern is shown in his conversation with Flora de Barral about Anthony when Marlow admonishes her, "Remember, Miss de Barral, that to be fair you must trust a man altogether--or not at all" (C, p. 232). In spite of all he has seen of the unfairness of life and people he believes that one should try to make fairness prevail as much as possible. This point of view also comes out strongly at the end of the novel where we hear Marlow's last words. He remarks, "Hang it all, for all my belief in Chance I am not exactly a pagan" (C, p. 447). Here he is saying that although he is aware that Chance rules the lives of men, he still believes in something higher than it. The word "pagan"
usually has a derogatory connotation as denoting an unenlightened person, as opposed to a Christian who believes in higher and better things. Thus, Marlow asserts that he still has belief in an ideal of right that is higher than Chance. Marlow retains some idealism in spite of the problems of people he has learned so much of. This is entirely possible as Marlow himself has had a good life and has been capable enough to save himself from destruction; he has learned of evil and weakness primarily through others.

Marlow begins as an idealistic twenty-year-old in "Youth" who is confident of his capabilities and ability to direct his own destiny. In "Heart of Darkness" he narrates some of the events that changed him into a somewhat fatalistic man in his forties. On his Congo journey he comes to realize the universal capacity for evil from the events and people he encounters. But it is Kurtz and his fate that bring Marlow to the fullest realization of this fact. In Lord Jim Marlow meets Jim, another man overcome by faults of character. From these two men Marlow comes to know that all men, including himself, have a capacity for weakness and evil. Had he not met such men, he might have remained largely unaware of this, since he never experienced a crisis great enough to destroy his own strength of character and sharply reveal his possible weakness. Such knowledge changes Marlow's attitude considerably and he comes to believe that fate controls men to a large extent. But he does not entirely lose his idealism, as seen in Chance. In portraying Marlow, Conrad gives a vivid depiction of one character's progress from idealism to a more realistic outlook on life.
NOTES


5. Wills, p. 594.


16 Johnson, p. 93.

Bibliography


Vita

Paula James Gilley