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STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S
HEART OF DARKNESS

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Joseph Conrad's works have been studied extensively for the past 80 years. For each major work there is now a large body of criticism. This is particularly true of Heart of Darkness, which has been viewed both as a major cultural document, an imaginative record of the greed of the white man in the tropics, and as a pioneering work of twentieth century literary technique. Indeed, Heart of Darkness has been called "one of the greatest works in the tradition of modern literature."¹

The modernity of Heart of Darkness is complex and has been interpreted in various lights, though certainly central is Conrad's use of psychology, his epistemological theme, and the pervasive symbolism of the novel. All three

of these aspects of modernity can be seen in the structural devices Conrad uses in the novel. This thesis studies three of these devices--the "frame" story, narrative by conjecture, and foreshadowing. It does not consider at any length the motif of the journey, or quest, or the character and function of Marlow, subjects which have been discussed at length.

The three structural devices studied in this thesis--the frame story, narrative by conjecture, and foreshadowing--are basic elements in the success of the novel, or, more precisely, the success of the novel's structure; and each provides a slightly different definition of structure. The frame story, a traditional element in holding a series of tales together, is here used by Conrad for psychological purposes to suggest the "shape" of a single experience. Narrative by conjecture shows Conrad speculating about the nature of man and what can be known about him; in this "structural" process Conrad's narrator almost seems to invent a Kurtz who is nothing but "a voice" and yet represents so much more than a voice.

The device of foreshadowing, like the frame story a traditional element of fiction, is here made to convey the maximum of suggestiveness, to provide a symbolic context for almost every word, so that the meaning of events is "not inside, like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale...."² Foreshadowing is one means through which

structure is imposed. Anterior and later scenes contain parallel events, suggesting a congruence between past and present, the civilized world of Europe and the heart of darkest Africa.

The method of this study will follow an approach to analysis suggested by Ian Watt:

...there must be enough quotation to enable the reader to see the evidence in the text for the interpretation given; and the primary commitment must be to what may be called the literal imagination--the analytic commentary restricts itself to what the imagination can discover through a literal reading of the work.³

In this study, quotations from Heart of Darkness have been chosen that exemplify the workings of the structural elements within the novel. Analysis of passages and interpretation is based on what can be evidenced in the text.

CHAPTER 1

THE FRAME

Heart of Darkness is in the tradition of the framework story and uses many of the same devices as the classic framework stories--The Arabian Knights, The Decameron, and The Canterbury Tales. These works contain stories within a story and make use of narrative setting. But while these works all contain multiple tales, Heart of Darkness has only one tale and one principal narrator. Conrad's use of the traditional framework, then, is unusual.

A literary frame is essentially a technique or combination of devices that serves to hold the parts of the work together and to contain the whole. The elaborateness of Conrad's frame for the simple narrative he tells suggests that it not only serves as a unifying device but also contributes to meaning. In Heart of Darkness, Conrad seems to have combined older storytelling techniques with a newer, more "modern" emphasis on the psychological understanding of events. In the end, the frame gives us

the "shape" of the experience we have undergone in listening to Marlow, along with the primary narrator and Marlow's four listeners.

Structure in literature is traditionally defined as a series of part-to-part and part-to-whole relationships. This meaning of structure can be seen in the way a sense of wholeness is maintained by the use of a dual narrator. Two settings of past and present intersect and are held together by the two lines of narrative. The 'outside' framework serves the same purpose as a fence surrounding a yard; it marks a boundary and contains what is inside, much like the walls of a house support and connect the rooms.

The unidentified narrator who begins and ends the novel is the builder of the fence or outside frame. It is he who introduces the reader to the setting and the character of the second narrator, Marlow. First, the reader is given both setting and situation--late afternoon, a sailing vessel caught at the mouth of the Thames as the tide changes, becalmed for a period of time. In the first four paragraphs of narration the reader is told about the *Nellie*, what kind of ship she is, where and why she is anchored, the men aboard her and their relationship to each other, the time of day and the weather. In addition, the narrator establishes a mood of "mournful gloom" and "brooding motionlessness" (p. 65). Such elements give

the reader a sense of time and place; they will also connect the present with the past, as well as London and the Congo, in Marlow's narrative.

The unidentified narrator also introduces the reader to Marlow. We are given a short character sketch just before Marlow begins his tale. The narrator establishes Marlow's authority as a seaman, his capacity for deep insight, and his credibility as narrator. The transition is almost complete. The sun sets and the dark silence takes over. The reader is lulled into a dream state and Marlow begins his tale.

Marlow is the experienced storyteller, well qualified to tell the tale of the place and the man he met. He is inquisitive and speculative, hence a great aid to Conrad in probing the ultimate meaning of experience. In relating the story of Kurtz, Marlow ties the past with the present and draws parallels between London and the Congo, between his own experience and that of Kurtz. Two separate worlds and two different time frames are brought into one context.

Marlow begins his narration by drawing parallels between London and the Congo. Similar elements in both worlds give the reader a cultural reference and a moral base that becomes more significant toward the end of the book. The world that Marlow comes from is represented by his aunt and the white men he meets in the Congo. His

aunt's comfortable world of tea in the drawing room and chats by the fireside is later compared to the hot, buggy and disease-ridden environs of the accountant at the Central station. The terms used to describe the Company offices in Brussels parallel the mood of the Central station--"narrow," "deserted," "deep shadow," "dead silence," "arid as a desert" (p. 73).

Parallelism also helps to tie the past with the present and create a sense of timelessness and wholeness. Marlow speaks of ancient Roman explorers who came to Britain, thus linking Kurtz's, his own, and the Nellie's adventure:

Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine--what d'ye call 'em?--trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry;...Imagine him here--the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina--and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages,--precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink....Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay--cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death--death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush (pp. 68-69).

This description of the captain's experience in Roman Britain clearly parallels that of Kurtz and Marlow in the Congo. Both men sail up the Congo in charge of a ship and carrying orders and supplies. They must cross overland to

reach the Inner station. They meet with wild jungle and savages. The "military camp lost in a wilderness" is reflected in the scene of the French boat firing aimlessly into the bush that Marlow encounters. The "diease, exile, and death" is what Marlow finds in the grove of death where the natives go to die. Connections are made between Kurtz and a Roman youth who enters the darkness:

[Or] think of a decent young citizen in a toga--perhaps too much dice, you know--coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him...He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination--you know, imagine the growing regrets the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate (p. 69).

The experience of the young citizen in Roman Britain parallels that of Kurtz in the Congo. Kurtz comes out in the name of capitalism and industrialism to enlighten and civilize the dark continent. He is put in charge of an "inland post" and eventually succumbs to the "utter savagery" that surrounds him. In the third section of the book, Marlow expands on Kurtz's "fascination of the abomination," his regrets, his desire to escape, and his self-disgust and self-hate.

Although already suggested by the first narrator, the parallel reference to the Congo and London is more signi-

ficant coming from Marlow because he is the experienced spokesman for the past and the present. Marlow works within the narrative framework to draw parallels and reinforce the connection between past and present, London and the Congo, himself and Kurtz, the parts and the whole.

The end of the story marks the completion of Marlow's journey and the unidentified narrator's comprehension of the nature of Marlow's experience. A sense of completion is heightened by the coalescence of the dual narratives into a single sensation of thought and feeling that parallels the opening scene of the book. "Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent...." (p. 157). The present scene is now calm and silent as it was in the opening scene of the book. The reader is brought back into the present as if Marlow's tale had never interrupted the scene. The unidentified narrator has come to understand that every civilization is capable of the savagery Marlow encountered in the Congo: "...the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky--seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" (p. 158).

A sense of wholeness and circuitry leaves the reader with the feeling that the unidentified narrator is about to embark on a journey like Marlow's, into a heart of darkness. But he will not go unprepared. The closing frame with reference to the darkening sky suggests, by exten-

sion, that the unidentified narrator and the other four listeners have come to understand Marlow's tale and its bearing on their own individual journeys.

CHAPTER 2

NARRATIVE BY CONJECTURE

One of the major structural devices used in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is narrative by conjecture. Marlow, the inquisitive and speculative narrator, is the reader's only source of insight into Kurtz's character throughout most of the book. Most of Marlow's tale is taken up with speculation on the character of Kurtz because he does not meet Kurtz until three quarters of the way through his tale. The basis or touchstone for Marlow's speculations comes from what he sees and what he hears about Kurtz in the Congo. Marlow considers the surrounding conditions and contrasting opinions and either rejects them or expands upon them.

Marlow first hears about Kurtz from the accountant at the Central station. His reaction is one of disappointment and mild indifference when the accountant describes Kurtz as "a first-class agent ... a very remarkable person" (p. 85). The accountant gives Marlow and the reader a sense of

expectation when he says about Kurtz, "Oh, he will go far, very far" (p. 85). After this announcement, Marlow seems to respect Kurtz. Marlow knows nothing extraordinary yet from which to 'build' a Kurtz. He only knows that Kurtz is in charge of an important trading post in the interior and that he has a promising future.

As Marlow continues his journey he learns more about Kurtz. The manager of the Central station tells Marlow that Mr. Kurtz may be ill and what a tragedy it would be if he were ill. At this point Marlow is tired of hearing about the magnificent Kurtz and is concerned with his own comfort. He lets the manager ramble as he interrupts with his own thoughts: "I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought" (p. 89). Even though Marlow does not yet speculate about Kurtz, the seeds of conjecture are being planted. From the accountant's description Kurtz seemed a powerful, indestructible giant. But the manager allows for some doubt when he stresses that he is "very, very uneasy" (p. 89) about Kurtz's condition. Marlow and the reader can sense that something is definitely wrong.

While at the Central station Marlow learns more about Kurtz and his curiosity is stirred. He now knows Kurtz's situation is so extreme that other agents are thinking of taking over. One night he overhears the manager say to a young agent, "take advantage of this unfortunate accident" (p. 90). When Marlow and the young agent talk later that

evening, Marlow's attention is "arrested" by Kurtz's painting of a blindfolded woman carrying a lighted torch through the darkness. Although Marlow does not reveal much to the reader, it is obvious that his inquisitive nature is contemplating the meaning of the painting and the man who painted it. The painting and Marlow's silent reaction to it only add to the mysteriousness surrounding the unknown Kurtz.

From this point on, Marlow's interest in Kurtz grows. He asks the young agent about Kurtz but the agent is loath to talk about him. The agent allies Marlow and Kurtz with the 'new gang of virtue': "The same people who sent him specifically also recommended you" (p. 92). There is a feeling of forboding in this statement, but Marlow laughs and chides the young man for reading the Company's confidential correspondence.

In this same scene Marlow begins to ally himself with Kurtz against the agents who await Kurtz's downfall. His reply to the agent for reading the correspondence is somewhat stern: "'When Mr. Kurtz,' I continued, severely, 'is General Manager, you won't have the opportunity'" (p. 92). Marlow maintains a pretence of interest with the agent, "letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine" (p. 94). Marlow believes that this will help Kurtz in some way.

Kurtz and the interior have become a fascinating

mystery for Marlow. "What was in there?" he wonders. Marlow knows that Kurtz is "in there" and that he is a part of "it." But he doesn't know quite what to think of the situation: "Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it--no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there" (p. 94). Already we can see that Marlow has begun to think of Kurtz in terms of good and evil. If the reader had any mental vision of Kurtz it has now become hazy and confused. To maintain this sense of ambiguity, Conrad uses Marlow to limit his audience's and the reader's understanding of Kurtz: "I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?" (p. 94). Marlow refuses to take responsibility for Kurtz and admits he only knows as much as the reader.

At the end of section I, Marlow's interest in Kurtz is firmly established: "I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there" (p. 99). The reader is prepared for the rest of the tale and the insights into Kurtz's character that Marlow's sentiments predict.

It is at the beginning of section II that Marlow begins to get a glimpse of the mysterious Kurtz. A conversation between the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition and the station manager reveals that Kurtz is

powerful, influential, egotistical and a prime supplier of ivory. As Marlow overhears them, never is the name Kurtz mentioned, yet Marlow knows they are talking about Kurtz. The two men say that Kurtz had intended to return to Europe but had turned back. Marlow speculates as he sees Kurtz "for the first time" (p. 100):

"It was a distinct glimpse ... the white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home--perhaps....I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake" (p. 101).

Marlow is trying to piece together the character of Kurtz. People refer to him as 'that man' or 'that scoundrel.' Bits of sentences overheard in the night begin to reveal Kurtz and his situation: "'Military post--doctor--two hundred miles--quite alone now--unavoidable delays--nine months--no news--strange rumours'" (p. 101). Marlow acts as an eavesdropper, and his curiosity builds: "Who was it they were talking about now?" (p. 101). The puzzle master is intrigued by his challenge and is "excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon" (p. 102).

As Marlow approaches the Inner Station he clouds once again what mental picture we have of Kurtz. "The essentials of this affair lie deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling" (p. 109). If Marlow is doubtful and confused, so is the reader, and

Kurtz remains a mystery. After the boat is attacked by natives, Marlow suspects that Kurtz is already dead. Marlow is disappointed because he had expected to talk with Kurtz whom he had imagined a discourser, not a man of action. Indeed, Kurtz has become a profound voice to Marlow with the "gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (p. 120).

Marlow has managed to put the pieces of conversation and opinion together and create a vision of a man larger than life, just a voice in fact, but profound, knowledgeable and experienced. Marlow does not know whether light or darkness will flow from Kurtz's lips, but he knows whatever Kurtz says will be significant.

From here on, Marlow does not consider Kurtz in physical detail or material circumstances. He is more interested in the workings of Kurtz's mind. Marlow's preoccupation with Kurtz's psychological condition will add to the mystery of Kurtz as some sort of ethereal spirit or prophetic voice. His spiritual or psychological condition is more interesting to Marlow than the man himself. Ironically, Marlow is justified in his projection of Kurtz as a voice when he steps out of his tale and comments about Kurtz to his listeners:

He was very little more than a voice. And I heard--him--it--this voice--other voices--all of them were so little more than voices--and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense (pp. 120-121).

Marlow asserts that Kurtz is 'just a voice,' but this revelation does not bring him any closer to the meaning of the voice itself. He cannot decide whether to relate the voice directly to the man Kurtz, call the voice an impersonal "it," call it an object in its own right, or to relate it to several voices. Marlow's memory "lingers" around him like a dense cloud the meaning of which could be anything from "silly" to "savage." Marlow seems to have reached the center of Kurtz, but even the center is a mystery.

Still addressing his listeners, Marlow speculates on the reason for Kurtz's moral and physical deterioration and the effect of the savage environment upon him:

The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball--an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and--lo! he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favorite (p. 121).

Marlow's elaborate conjecture on the seduction and corruption of Kurtz is revealed in the flourishes of rhetoric in

this and similar passages.

It is important that this explanation for Kurtz's experience comes even before we meet Kurtz. The reader now has a basic understanding of Kurtz's character and is not so shocked when he meets Kurtz. This might be considered an oversight on Conrad's part--wouldn't a shock be more effective? But Conrad is not emphasizing "shock value." His intent is a psychological investigation of Kurtz. Marlow is the 'doctor' who tries to diagnose his patient's state of mind. The insight Marlow gives us is important to the psychological investigation of Kurtz and would not have the same value if given after Marlow and the reader meet Kurtz. Its position also affects anticipation and moves the reader forward in expectation of meeting Kurtz.

Further on, Marlow gives us a picture of Kurtz as a spoiled child and his position as insignificant among the powers of the universe: "You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh, yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--' everything belonged to him...." (p. 121). But then Marlow returns us to the significant point about Kurtz and his interest in Kurtz's psychological condition: "The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over" (p. 121). Before he draws any conclusions, however, Marlow retreats from responsibility for piecing

together the puzzle of Kurtz, in case the pieces do not fit: "It was impossible--it was not good for one either--trying to imagine" (p. 121). And later, Marlow admits his pathological interest in Kurtz: "Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain--I am trying to account to myself for--for--Mr. Kurtz--for the shade of Mr. Kurtz" (p. 122). Marlow is constantly unsure what exactly to make of Kurtz, what the almost completed puzzle represents.

Always willing to consider Kurtz as above common humanity, Marlow has a great respect for Kurtz. Marlow does not know exactly what it is, but he feels that there is something great and even noble in Kurtz. Marlow conjectures whether it might be his power over others, for good or evil:

He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings (p. 124).

Marlow now returns to his tale and what he learns of Kurtz on the journey. Because Marlow has something of an understanding of Kurtz's character and his situation, he is able to see the harlequin's worship of Kurtz as reflective of the young man's innocence and inexperience and not of Kurtz's 'divinity': "He opened his arms wide, staring at me with his little blue eyes that were perfectly round" (p. 128). Marlow is not fooled by the harlequin's exalta-

tions of Kurtz, and accounts for the youth's enthusiasm as a romantic spirit of adventure. Marlow uses the youth's devotion of Kurtz to comment on, again, the power Kurtz has over others and the danger of seduction by that disembodied voice:

I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far (p. 129).

Here Marlow is also stating his objectivity by his awareness of the danger of unconditional acceptance of Kurtz's philosophy. The reader knows he will not fall under Kurtz's "spell" and can be trusted as a reliable narrator.

Returning to his curious and speculative self, Marlow questions the harlequin and tries to separate the real Kurtz from the fictive, idolized Kurtz. He speculates on Kurtz's egotistical nature in wanting an audience for his sermons: "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" (p. 130). Marlow continues to build upon situations related by the youth and speculates on what really happened in an effort to get a picture of the real Kurtz. Whenever the youth wanders from the facts of the situation and begins to idolize Kurtz, Marlow interrupts his reverie and tries

to get some plain facts about Kurtz:

'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up....Ah, it was worth waiting for!' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked (p. 130).

When the youth answers that Kurtz was searching for ivory, Marlow immediately jumps in with the plain facts: "To speak plainly, he raided the country" (p. 130).

Marlow continues to prod the youth with suggestions: "'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested" (p. 130). Finally the youth blurts out the truth about Kurtz and his irrational and murderous tendencies:

'What can you expect?' he burst out; 'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know--and they had never seen anything like it--and very terrible....I don't mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me, too, one day....He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased' (p. 131).

Marlow's detective work has revealed Kurtz's egotistical and tyrannical nature, and his monomaniacal desire for wealth and power. This view of Kurtz is far from the man who seemed great and noble a little earlier. As Marlow gets below the surface to the 'real' Kurtz, he is showing us different shades of the man. Kurtz is not a typical scientific specimen that can be pinned down and classified. He remains a perplexing study for Marlow and the

reader, even to the end.

Before the group reaches Kurtz's house, Marlow looks through his binoculars and is surprised to see heads on posts turned toward Kurtz's house. In Marlow's opinion, the heads serve no practical purpose and he immediately speculates about Kurtz: "They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him" (p. 133). Marlow is convinced of a "deficiency" in Kurtz's character, and he further speculates how this deficiency caused his ruin:

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--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.... (p. 133).

Through speculation and conclusion, then, Marlow moves from "deficiency" to "hollowness" in his estimation of Kurtz's true nature.

The idea of Kurtz's hollowness is emphasized when Marlow finally sees Kurtz being carried in a stretcher by the natives. He first gives us physical details and then uses analogy to speculate further on what he sees passing before him: "It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with

menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze" (p. 135). The image here is of a meaningless and ludicrous display of power. Marlow describes Kurtz opening his mouth "as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (p. 135). Through these analogies, Kurtz seems larger than life. He has become a statement of the surrender of the soul to pleasures and passions beyond the point of self-control.

In the next scene, Kurtz, so near death, is only a shadow. Marlow speculates on his changed condition when the natives set him down on a bed in the cabin:

I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions (p. 136).

When Marlow finds Kurtz wandering in the dark wilderness, he begins to speculate on what drove Kurtz out into the night:

I tried to break the spell--the heavy mute spell of the wilderness--that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest ... this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations (p. 143).

Here Kurtz is pictured as a victim of powerful forces, tricked into accepting what they had to offer. But Marlow makes it clear that Kurtz is not an innocent victim. It is his deficiency, his hollowness, his "unlawful soul" that has made him vulnerable in the first place. While we can sense that Marlow feels compassion for Kurtz, he does not sympathize with Kurtz because Kurtz was aware of what he was doing. By this, too, Marlow maintains an objectivity by not fully sympathizing with Kurtz.

From here on, Marlow is confident that his speculations on Kurtz are accurate and he feels he is getting closer and closer to the essence of Kurtz's nature. He arrives at his central concern--Kurtz's soul--and speculates with certainty on its degradation:

Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad....I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself (p. 144).

Instead of a straight description of Kurtz's death, Marlow speculates on the thoughts of the dying man as if he could read Kurtz's mind:

Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now--images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression (p. 146).

Marlow proceeds even further to suggest a power struggle within the dying Kurtz:

But both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power (p. 146).

Although Marlow is at the height of confident speculation and seems to be at the brink of some great discovery or truth, he restates his inability to fathom the recesses of Kurtz's mind, and even though he has come to many conclusions, he still cannot encompass the whole of the mysterious Kurtz: "His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines" (p. 147).

No matter how much Marlow tries to uncover the mystery, his speculations can take him only so far. He still cannot reach the central point of psychological understanding that would illuminate the darkness surrounding Kurtz. The mixed looks of pride, power, and terror on Kurtz's face causes Marlow to ask the inexplicable: "Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge?" (p. 147). Marlow admits the limits of knowledge and asserts that Kurtz was a remark-

able man despite the reproach he feels toward him:

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 (pp. 148-149).

Such limited understanding of Kurtz remains in the realm of psychology. Kurtz the professional remains an unknown figure. Marlow admits that he does not know Kurtz's profession or whether he even had one: "I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint--but even the cousin ... could not tell me what he had been--exactly" (p. 151).

There are limits, then, to what Marlow and the reader can learn about Kurtz and the interior workings of his mind. On the other hand, we have learned much more about Kurtz than expected from Marlow, who met the man only briefly. Marlow's ability to speculate about Kurtz leads us to further knowledge. Without Marlow's conjecture, we really do not know much about Kurtz. Indeed, the most interesting and provocative parts of the novel are when Marlow surmises Kurtz's situation and mental condition. To a large extent, Marlow 'creates' Kurtz. His insight is finally limited, however, by Conrad's skepticism that you can never know anything fully, an attitude prevalent in Marlow's admissions that he cannot wholly understand

Kurtz. The narrator's limited understanding of Kurtz's personality and the significance of this are aptly stated by Ian Watt:

Heart of Darkness ... accepts, and indeed in its very form asserts, the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding....Heart of Darkness embodies more thoroughly than any previous fiction the posture of uncertainty and doubt; one of Marlow's functions is to represent how much a man cannot know....⁴

Through conjecture, Marlow creates the portrait of Kurtz. Even after he has met Kurtz, Marlow still speculates on the enigmatic figure. Reasons and conclusions are given but Marlow is never quite able to reach the true and awful essence of Kurtz's soul. The subject of Marlow's study remains a mystery even after Kurtz's death.

CHAPTER 3

FORESHADOWING

Another structural device used in Heart of Darkness is foreshadowing. As it is commonly defined, foreshadowing is a device to prepare the reader for the outcome of the action and is characterized by suggestive language. In the case of Heart of Darkness, foreshadowing (in part) consists of anterior events and scenes that parallel later events and scenes. This mode of foreshadowing provides unity and a basis for further investigation of action, character, and theme. The effect of Conrad's foreshadowing is to pull the reader forward in anticipation, to add intensity to the story, and to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the work.

The beginning paragraphs of the story already foreshadow the action and theme of Heart of Darkness: "The Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway" (p. 65). This line foreshadows the long and arduous journey that Marlow will relate and the psy-

chological theme of the journey into the subconscious.⁵ The line also parallels the last lines of the story. The "interminable" waterway is still interminable; a journey has been taken but the story has come around full circle. The feeling of endlessness is still present as the narrator and the reader are about to embark on another journey: "...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" (p. 158). Here the original description and understanding of the Thames as an "interminable waterway" has been expanded to add greater meaning to the story and to show that the unidentified narrator has been affected by Marlow's story. The river is not just "interminable" but leads "to the uttermost ends of the earth ... into the heart of an immense darkness." The narrator's view has darkened and his perspective has changed. After discovering the heart of darkness in Marlow's tale, the unidentified narrator himself sees before him a heart of darkness.

Once Marlow begins his tale, Conrad again foreshadows the psychological theme of the journey (and the action) and prepares the reader for the 'depths' of Marlow's tale: "It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me--and into my

thoughts" (p. 70). The effect of the passage is to move the reader forward in anticipation and expectation of some momentous discovery. But Marlow also emphasizes that the experience was "not very clear either" (p. 70). The mystery of the experience is enlarged upon throughout the book, especially in the third section. Here Marlow talks about the "inconceivable mystery" (p. 144) of Kurtz's soul and the "indefinable meaning" (p. 145) of his smile. The words between Marlow and Kurtz are only "words heard in dreams" (p. 144).

The two women in black who sit knitting wool in the Company office in Brussels ominously foreshadow Kurtz's fate or at least his mysterious death. A similar figure appears in Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities. Madame Defarge, dressed in black, records the fate of those headed for the guillotine in her knitting wool. The two Brussels women are also recorders of fate. Some critics have even called them the Fates of Greek legend and have proceeded to interpret the novel in terms of the allegorical descent into hell, such as in Virgil's Aeneid and Dante's Inferno. But such an interpretation is too narrow and, as Ian Watt explains, assumes that the symbolic meaning is closed to other possibilities. The symbolism of the Fates also raises many questions as to the exact parallel drawn between the figures of legend and novel. Ian Watt clearly points out the narrowness and ambiguity

of such an interpretation:

One obvious practical objection to this kind of symbolic interpretation is that it alerts our attention too exclusively to a few aspects of the narrative--to those which seem to provide clues that fit the assumed unitary and quasi-allegorical frame of symbolic reference. This leads us to interrogate the text only in those terms, and to ask such questions as: Why does Conrad give us only two fates? Which one is Clotho the spinner? and which Lachesis the weaver? Did the Greeks know about knitting anyway? Where are the shears? What symbolic meaning can there be in the fact that the thin one lets people in to the room and then out again--a birth and death ritual, perhaps?⁶

By dwelling on an allegorical interpretation of the two women and the entire novel, we run the risk of getting tangled up in facts and intricacies of meaning. Such a study closes us to other valid interpretations and meanings of the novel.

Theme is again foreshadowed when Marlow remembers his youthful fascination with the dark continent. He had looked upon a map of the African continent and was fascinated by one river that resembled an uncoiled snake. The river, of course, is the Congo and using the analogy of a snake suggests evil or temptation, such as the temptation to which Kurtz surrenders. The position of the snake is significant, too. Its head is in the sea and its tail is "lost" in the wilderness, suggesting the mysterious and boundless influences of its depths. The snake in its uncoiled position suggests that it will not strike its

victim suddenly, but will win him over by subtle temptation, just as Kurtz is won over by the gratification of "monstrous passions" (p. 143). The snake's mouth is the open sea, ready to swallow its prey.

Marlow draws a further analogy of his fascination with the river to that of a bird fascinated by a snake. The snake is a dangerous threat to the bird and yet the bird feels an attraction just as Marlow is attracted to the Congo and, later to Kurtz: "The snake had charmed me" (p. 71). This episode foreshadows the theme of the "fascination of the abomination" that Marlow later sees in Kurtz and senses in himself. On the ship Marlow watches the coast and feels drawn to it as if it is calling out to him. The opposing qualities of the heart of darkness--the fascination of the abomination--that so attracted Kurtz, now appeal to Marlow. He describes the jungle as "smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage" (p. 77). These images suggest Marlow's ability to understand Kurtz's fascination and also his own participation in Kurtz's experience. The early episodes add structural unity by tying together Marlow's early experiences and his experiences on his journey. In effect, past and present become one. This scene of timelessness helps to universalize the theme of the book into the fascination of man with evil.

Conrad also uses foreshadowing to draw significant

contrasts. Before he begins his tale, Marlow discusses the great explorers of the past in romantic terms:

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 (p. 67).

This description foreshadows and contrasts with the white men whom Marlow meets in his journey through the Congo. The idealistic and romantic view of colonization is paralleled with the view of society at large, represented by Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended. This view is contrasted, however, with what Marlow discovers in the Congo. He finds that the purpose of colonization is not to educate the natives but to enslave them and work them to death. The white men are there only to pull out all the ivory they can from the bowels of the dark continent. There are no heroes battling in the name of truth, but greedy, ambitious, and scheming men who would rather let Kurtz die and take over his prosperous operation.

The same conflict between a romantic and realistic view is seen in the foreshadowing of Kurtz's painting of the "messenger of the night" bearing a torch. The irony here is that the messenger is blindfolded and has a "sinister" glow upon her face. She suggests the blind and

evil ambitions of the white explorers.

In his discussion of the Roman captain, Marlow foreshadows his own journey and what he encounters in the Congo. Marlow imagines what the captain must have found when he explored Britain hundreds of years ago:

Imagine him here--the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina--and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages....Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness ... disease, exile, and death--death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush (p. 68).

Marlow later refers to the Congo as the end of the world and the same sort of gloom pervades his journey. Like the Roman captain, Marlow travels up the river with stores and orders. Death and disease surround Marlow as he passes through the Congo. At the Inner station Marlow finds "nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" and the awful "grove of death" (p. 85). The military camps are ironically paralleled by the French man-of-war that Marlow finds firing purposelessly into the bush, and the delapidation of the Company station. The French ship's insignificance and ineffectiveness makes the situation ludicrous: "In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent" (p. 78). The Company station appears "barrack-

like," structures stand "wallowing in the grass," and a railway truck lies on its back with its wheels in the air looking "as dead as the carcass of some animal" (p. 80). Like the military camps "lost in a wilderness," so the camps that Marlow finds blatantly display their insignificance and decay surrounded by the immense wilderness.

Marlow's experience is further foreshadowed when the agent at the Company station tells Marlow that he and Kurtz belong to the same "gang of virtue" (p. 92) and that the same people who recommended Kurtz also recommended Marlow. The scene suggests that Marlow will go through a similar experience as Kurtz.

The parallel between Europe and the Congo is suggested once again in Marlow's description of the Company offices in Brussels:

A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar (p. 73).

The same gloominess, emptiness, and deterioration appears in Marlow's description of the Company station in the Congo. Marlow's first impression of the station is "inhabited devastation" (p. 79). Objects wallow in the grass, a railway truck lies on its back with its wheels in the air like a dead carcass, and decaying machinery dots the

hillside. The devastated machinery and the dead carcass symbolize the deathly impenetrability of the Congo to the mechanistic devices of civilization and foreshadow Marlow's experience with rivets, the mechanical part he needs to make his steamer function.

Marlow foreshadows Kurtz's situation as he describes a young Roman, "a decent young citizen in a toga," who comes with good intentions but is corrupted by his surroundings:

Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him....He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him--you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate (p. 69).

This history parallels exactly what happens to Kurtz, or, what Marlow later conjectures has happened to Kurtz. References here to the young Roman parallel descriptions of Kurtz in section III. Marlow calls Kurtz "this wandering and tormented thing" caught in the "spell of the wilderness" (p. 143). Kurtz's good intentions are muttered with lost conviction: "'I had immense plans....I was on the threshold of great things'" (p. 143). But the native world had allowed his soul to go "beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" (p. 143). Marlow describes Kurtz's struggle as the two opposing forces of "diabolic love" and

"unearthly hate" fighting for possession of his soul. The struggling mixture of emotions displayed by the Roman are evident in Kurtz's soul as he lies on his deathbed: "I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror--of an intense and hopeless despair" (p. 147). Finally, the disgust and the hate reach an apocalypse in Kurtz's last phrase, "'The horror! The horror!'" (p. 147). The purpose of this foreshadowing is, again, to tie the past with the present and universalize the theme by paralleling the Roman's experience with that of Kurtz. The effect is to move the reader forward in anticipation of exploring Kurtz's situation.

Marlow's method of pursuing meaning and his meeting with Kurtz in section III of the book are foreshadowed in the primary narrator's description of Marlow. The meaning that Marlow finds is explained by the primary narrator:

...to him [Marlow] 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 (p. 68).

Marlow 'builds' Kurtz from pieces of information he receives in the form of opinion, overheard conversations, and implications from the conditions of Kurtz's environment. From these "enveloping" elements, Marlow conjectures about the character of Kurtz and builds the puzzle to form

a somewhat hazy but insightful picture of Kurtz. Discovery of meaning in "the spectral illumination of moonshine" foreshadows the exact situation in which Marlow stumbles upon Kurtz in one of Kurtz's nightly wanderings. Kurtz rises "indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me" (p. 142). Marlow gains insight into Kurtz's situation as he realizes that "the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (p. 143) is what has a hold on Kurtz's soul: "This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest...." (p. 143).

The foreshadowing of Marlow's investigative methods adds unity to the work and helps prepare the reader for Marlow's moment of certainty about Kurtz. The foreshadowed scene of discovery of meaning is here expanded upon to provide insight into Conrad's theme of the limits of knowledge and the consequences of indulging in the deep secrets of the self.

Structural unity in Conrad's Heart of Darkness is achieved by the use of three main devices--the frame story, narrative by conjecture, and foreshadowing. While not inclusive of all structural devices used in the novel, these devices are the major means by which a sense of

wholeness is reached. They demonstrate the importance of structure in the novel, not only in terms of unity but in terms of meaning. While these devices serve to tie together character, action, and theme, they also contribute to meaning in the novel.

The relationship between structure and meaning can be thought of in terms of movement. The three structural devices act as vehicles for the novel's theme and help to expand our understanding as the story unfolds. The frame story provides a foundation for the novel while narrative by conjecture gives the novel direction and substance by "shaping" the experience and by making the modern analytical intelligence the central figure. Foreshadowing, by maximizing suggestiveness, looks forward to events and actions and, in effect, echoes important ideas in the novel.

The richness of Heart of Darkness contributes to its depth of meaning and accounts for the many interpretations of the novel. Standing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Heart of Darkness marks the rise of manipulation of structure that characterizes much of modern literature and its technical innovations.

Notes to the Text

Abstract

¹
Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley and California: University of California Press, 1979), p. 135.

²
Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York: New American Library, Signet Classics, n.d.), p. 68. Subsequent references to this work are noted in the text with page number of the quoted material.

³
Watt, x.

Chapter Two

⁴
Watt, p. 174.

Chapter Three

⁵
For an extended Jungian analysis of the night journey see Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 33-48.

⁶
Watt, p. 191.

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