

THE STRUCTURE OF FEAR AND HORROR

IN "BENITO CERENO," "HEART  
OF DARKNESS," AND "THE  
TURN OF THE SCREW"

By

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## PREFACE

On reading Melville's "Benito Cereno," Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," and James's "The Turn of the Screw," one notes and experiences a similar occult feeling of fear and horror. When discussing these works, critics have usually attempted to make credible the characters and through this credibility to justify the horror. In this respect the fear and horror are realized only if the characters are "real." I think that the fear and horror are more complex than these critics propose, for they fail to consider "reader participation." Since the reader experiences the same or possibly greater fear than do the characters, and thus the experiences transcend the printed matter, the critics must deal with the author's attempt to involve the reader. The purpose of this paper is to examine the structure, including characterization and technique, of the works aforementioned to determine its function in relation to the reader.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Seldom in American literature have any works elicited as much controversial criticism as have "Benito Cereno,"<sup>1</sup> "Heart of Darkness,"<sup>2</sup> and "The Turn of the Screw."<sup>3</sup> While this controversy is mainly concerned with interpretation, e.g., the Edmund Wilson and Robert Heilman dispute,<sup>4</sup> most critics agree that the stories are "horror tales" in the true sense of the word.<sup>5</sup> With such overwhelming criticism in support of the "horror" in each story, it is appropriate to determine just what makes these

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in The Piazza Tales (New York, 1963), pp. 66-170. Subsequent references to "Benito Cereno" (BC) will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," in Youth (New York, 1903), pp. 45-162. Subsequent references to "Heart of Darkness" (HD) will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw," in The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York, 1908), pp. 147-308. Subsequent references to "The Turn of the Screw" (TS) will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," in The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1948). Wilson expands Edna Kenton's thesis that the governess suffers from "a neurotic case of sex repression," and that the "ghosts are not real ghosts but hallucinations of the governess."

The most outstanding opponent to this theory is Robert Heilman whose article "The Freudian Reading of 'The Turn of the Screw,'" MLN, LXII, No. 7, 1947, is now classic as a rebuttal to Wilson. These two critics have thus founded critical "camps" that divide the scholarly criticism of this story. Each view is rigorously defended.

<sup>5</sup>Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton, 1962), pp. 149-158; C. F. Burgess, "Conrad's Pesky Russian," NCF, XVIII, pp. 189-193; and the aforementioned Wilson and Heilman (see Footnote 4) are some of the critics who support these stories as "horror tales."

works horrifying, and to note if any similarities are evident in the manner in which the horrors are discerned. Such a study should enable one to better understand the works; yet, to date no such study has been made.

The structures of "Benito Cereno," "Heart of Darkness," and "The Turn of the Screw" are similar in that each employs a narrator alien to the reader and in one case alien to the story being related. In "Benito Cereno," the narrator introduces first the setting and Captain Delano, and then the incidents that occur. Next, in a matter-of-fact manner, the deposition is given. The narrators in "Heart of Darkness" and "The Turn of the Screw" are more closely aligned, for they introduce characters who in turn relate the story. In "The Turn of the Screw" actually a third dimension is added, for the narrator introduces Douglas who in turn introduces the governess who relates the story. While in "Heart of Darkness" the story is Marlow's as well as Kurtz's, in "The Turn of the Screw" one is not completely sure whether or not Douglas is part of the story. He swears that he is not, but James leaves room for doubt. A closer look at the structure of each story will reveal other similarities and complexities; "Benito Cereno" makes a good starting point.

It is not enough to say that Babo is evil, Captain Delano is good, and thus the horror is the dread of evil being triumphant. This simple idea may define the fear in "Benito Cereno," but the horror is the reader's realization that he cannot distinguish between the evil and the good, or even worse, the realization that what he thought was evil or good is actually the reverse. This realization presents an ambiguous world with which the reader must contend, a world "... where seeming and



being interreflect in an endless series, where suggestive ambiguities are as close as man can come to truth, and where the wisest man must admit he sees only a little more than the fool."<sup>6</sup> The reversal therefore is not as simple as it seems, for it constitutes a reversal of ambiguities, which greatly intensify the horror when the ambiguities become a reality.

In "Heart of Darkness" Marlow functions as a wise man who gains "wisdom" only when Kurtz cries "The Horror! The Horror!" Though Marlow thinks he knows the significance of the cry, as the "wisest man," he admits knowing even less than the fool, and like the reader he is unable to contend with the ambiguity. Marlow's response is the same as that of Captain Delano's, who hears a similar cry, "The Negro!"--there is only silence and withdrawal indicating the inability to face or accept the horror. The governess in "The Turn of the Screw" experiences the same dilemma when she too faces her ambiguous world, seemingly dictated by the children and her feelings toward them:

They had the bloom of health and happiness; and yet, as if I had been in charge of a pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood, for whom everything, to be right, would have to be fenced about and ordered and arranged, the only form that in my fancy the after-years could take for them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park. It may be of course above all that what suddenly broke into this gives the previous time a charm of stillness--that hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast.

(BC, 173-174)

The governess provides the key words to the ambiguous "worlds" that the

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<sup>6</sup>Max Putzel, "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XXXIV, p. 191.

main characters face in all three stories. Neither the children, Kurtz's nor Don Benito's world can be "fenced about and ordered and arranged," and it is the governess', Marlow's, and Captain Delano's dilemma that they try. Why do they try? They attempt to so arrange these "worlds," which by their involvement becomes their own, first of all because of the diabolical appeal of the occult--an occult which is real, not imaginary; but more importantly because of their search for this "real." But it takes more than these characters to give credence to the occultism. There are other characters who help create these ambiguous "worlds" and yet serve as testimonials to them. In "Benito Cereno," it is Babo; in "Heart of Darkness,"--Kurtz; and in "The Turn of the Screw," even more than the children, the ghosts.

It should be especially noted that while these characters give credence to the occultism, they all embody traits of the unreal in that paradoxically one tries to discredit them. At the conclusion of "Benito Cereno," Don Benito refuses to look at Babo and thus attempts to deny the reality of the horror; Marlow will not attend to Kurtz's burial, and thinks of him only as "something in the mud"; and the reality of the ghosts is constantly in question to both the governess and the reader.

It is these occult worlds full of confusion and unreality that give rise to the fear and horror in the stories, and the ones into which the reader is drawn. One should note then that in each story the horror is two dimensional; one dimension relates the horror that the characters experience, and the other one the horror that the reader experiences, usually in response to the characters and their actions. Since the reader's horror is relative to the character's experiences, the fear and horror transcend the printed matter and result from techniques each



author uses to involve the reader in the narration. Few critics today have dealt with the idea of reader participation. Indeed, in "Benito Cereno" no definite statement of this participation exists, although some allusion to the reader is made.

Barry Phillips states that Melville's problem was in depicting the "reality of the natural world." He further states:

Perception has to be the central problem (and symbolism the subsequent central perceptual mode) in positing a naturalistic world. But Melville was faced with two tangential problems for thematic consideration. He had to show, first of all, what the world was not, to show that meaning and value were not absolute.... Secondly if he wanted to be more than a realist or a nihilist, he had to post from his epistemology a morality. If man had to live in a relative, indifferent universe, he had to know how to live.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of the perception mentioned above should include Melville's concern for the reader, for the degree to which he involves the reader will determine if Melville is successful in depicting this natural world.

Max Putzel gets closer to the idea of reader participation when he describes an emotional response to the shaving scene in the ship's "cuddy."

One is in the hands of a lethal enemy disguised as the soul of gentleness and tender consideration. One is held down in a chair of black Malacca cane that is "like some engine of torment." One watches paralyzed as the razor is drawn and honed and brought with deadly menace to a delicate spot "low down under the throat." And the stupid bystander imagines that what he is seeing is all commonplace, indifferent, everyday domestic ritual. One wants to cry out and

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<sup>7</sup>"The Good Captain: A Reading of 'Benito Cereno,'" TSSL, IV, pp. 194-195.

cannot utter a sound. One longs to spring up and is motionless bound like a slave....<sup>8</sup>

Putzel's use of "one" instead of the characters' names is representative of the reader's participation in the action Melville describes. The emotional response, therefore, is more the reader's than anyone involved in the scene itself. Thus, as Don Benito is "motionless bound," so is the reader; and like Benito, he cannot cry out; he dares not cry out, for by being fully aware of Captain Delano's stupidity and his "unsuspicious nature," the reader's horror--greater than Don Benito's--is the inability of anyone to act in such a diabolical situation. Considering the two comments together therefore, namely, man is stupid and does not know how to live, the reader becomes aware of the difficulty man faces in his attempt to live in the natural world that Melville sees and describes, a difficulty not unlike his own. A close examination of "Benito Cereno" will show that Melville wants to keep the reader as detached as possible, to give him an objective view, so that he will confront the world as it really is.

Conrad affords the reader no such detachment. From the time he is introduced to Marlow, an "idol," who affords faint hope to "that gloom brooding over a crowd of men" (HD, 46), the reader is caught up in the magic spell cast by Conrad. We, like Marlow, step into Fresleven's shoes; we, like Marlow, slip "through one of the cracks" of the large double doors; and finally we, like Marlow, enter the valley of darkness in search of the secret to the darkness. Conrad never wants the reader to be detached. He wants to draw him deeper into the heart of darkness

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<sup>8</sup>Putzel, p. 204.

until the horror that he finally sees is even greater than Kurtz's. It is to Conrad's credit, as further study will show, that the reader has no choice but to be so drawn.

Of these three works, however, "The Turn of the Screw" affords the occult world that is the most difficult to deal with. This mystery and confusion results from the inability of the reader to keep the two worlds straight--one real, one apparent. As Edmund Wilson states: "We decide that there are two separate stories to be kept distinct: a romance which the narrator is spinning and a reality which we are supposed to divine from what he tells us about what actually happens."<sup>9</sup> The difficulty in detection, or more precisely--distinction, is increased by the uncertainty of just what one is "supposed to divine." Unlike "Benito Cereno," in "The Turn of the Screw" there is a seeming and being in both worlds, and the reader is unable to distinguish between them. Evans states:

The problem of appearance versus reality, which to my mind constitutes the primary theme of the story, James logically expresses in the form of a paradox. Whether consciously or intuitively, he realized the artistic importance of selecting a situation wherein the apparent should be innocuous, and the real overwhelming in its horror. The horror of the real world would, indeed, be in exact proportion to the charm of the apparent....<sup>10</sup>

The resulting confusion and ambivalence, therefore, is understandable: two worlds--one apparent and harmless--the other, real and horrifying--both equally charming--and there is no way to determine which world one

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<sup>9</sup>The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1948), p. 98.

<sup>10</sup>Oliver Evans, "James' Air of Evil: 'The Turn of the Screw,'" Partisan Review, XVI, pp. 175-187.

is in since James skillfully "plunges" the reader in both worlds at will. Thus in "The Turn of the Screw" there is a combination of the "detachment" motif in "Benito Cereno," and the "immersion" motif in "Heart of Darkness." The worlds thus presented are those that the reader must face; and whether they are a combination of seeming and being, meaning and value, or appearance and reality, they all give rise to the same emotional response. The degree of this response is best understood by closely examining the technique each writer employs in his attempt to involve the reader in the narration. A careful examination of the structures of these works, including the elements of characterization and technique, will reveal that while in "Benito Cereno" the author's intent is to leave the reader detached, and in "Heart of Darkness" the intent is to completely involve the reader, in "The Turn of the Screw" there is a combination of these intents which in demanding reader participation all give rise to similar occult feelings of fear and horror.

## CHAPTER II

### "BENITO CERENO"

In "Benito Cereno" the reader's involvement begins with the disparaging mood painted by Melville.

The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapours among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.

(BC, 66)

The reader notices the mood of despair, the mood which signifies some prevailing evil. Captain Delano expresses surprise that "the stranger" shows no colors. But then the reader is given the true response.

Considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.

(BC, 66-67)

Melville wastes no time in determining the reader's world--his point of view--for he lets him see things, recognize moods and feelings that Delano cannot and never will see. It is as though Melville keeps Delano "masked" while he blows back the "troubled gray vapors" of reality for the reader. Melville achieves this unmasking by "the inversion of sacred images in which allusions to religious and hallowed objects are juxtaposed with references to decay, ruin, and death."<sup>1</sup> The ship's "matin light," which streamed equivocally enough, is "much like the sun ...which, wimpled by the same low, creeping clouds, showed not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye" (BC, 67); the wind "which had breezed up a little during the night" was now extremely "light and baffling"; the ship itself "appeared like a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm" (BC, 68).

This unmasking of the ship, however, is coupled with ambiguity. The "baffling" wind intensifies the "apparent uncertainty of her movements" (BC, 68), and "Ere long it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no--what she wanted, or what she was about" (BC, 67). It is an ambiguity that Captain Delano can share in, but never for long. A "less remote" view of the ship "almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him"; "...revealed through the open portholes" were "dark moving figures...as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters" (BC, 68). As Delano gets closer, however, "the true character of the vessel was plain--a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another" (BC, 68-69). Thus in just four pages,

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<sup>1</sup>J. Thomas Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces of Evil" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1959), p. 275.



the contrasting worlds of appearance versus reality are established and becomes evident as a primary technique in Melville. The reader faces what he discerns to be the real world, and he watches as Delano fluctuates between his real and apparent world. Delano's apparent world is associated primarily with Don Benito's actions, his real world with Babo's actions. The reader's fear for Delano in the apparent world changes to horror as Delano approaches his real world. Since each character in turn functions and reacts to other characters in the story, i.e., he functions in one world and reacts to another, one can note how complex is the structure of fear and horror. To uncover these ideas, one must look at all three worlds--Delano's, Babo's, and Don Benito's. From the reader's objective point of view he is able to participate in all three worlds, and therefore it is necessary to observe his point of view as each world is encountered. First Delano's.

As suggested in the preceding passage, Melville has already outlined the technique through which he projects Captain Delano into his different "worlds." Note that Delano first saw "the stranger" some distance away. As he approached closer he took different looks, and the ship appeared differently each time until its true nature was discerned. Thus Melville establishes a pattern, a motif in which Delano first has one impression--a suspicion, and then he takes a closer look which usually satisfies. It is to Delano's discredit that his second look is also suspect--a motif that is prevalent throughout the story.

Before Delano boards the ship, Melville gives more description of her. The symbolism of the "white washed monastery" is continued as the reader notes that "her keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones" (BC, 69); and even further

when noting that the "tops hung overhead like three ruinous aviaries, in one of which was seen perched, on a rattlin, a white noddy, a strange fowl" (BC, 69; italics mine). The most significant detail of Melville's description, however, is the medallioned shield of Castile and Leon upon which was pictured a figure of "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (BC, 70). As Ward points out: "This is a fit symbol for the ambiguity of appearances which was to confront and bewilder Captain Delano after he boarded the San Dominick."<sup>2</sup> The reader also confronts this ambiguity, for it is "not quite certain" if "the ship had a figure-head, or only a plain bleak...owing to canvas wrapped about that part, either to protect it while undergoing a refurbishing, or else decently to hide its decay" (BC, 70). Below this canvas rudely "painted or chalked...was the sentence, 'Seguid vuestro jefe' (follow your leader)"; and nearby "the ship's name, 'San Dominick,' over which swept dark festoons of sea-grass...with every hearse-like roll of the hull" (BC, 70). Confronted with this diabolical description, the reader watches Captain Delano as he finally boards the ship.

When Delano glances around at the chaos on board--"the clamorous throng of whites and blacks," the results of the "scurvy, together with the fever"; and the lips which at "that moment were baked," yet still "as with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering; in which the negresses of whom there were not a few, exceeded the others in their dolorous vehemence" (BC, 70-71)--Melville remarks that all of this decadent life "in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it" has

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

"something of the effect of enchantment," and that perhaps "it was some influence...which in Captain Delano's mind, heightened whatever, upon a staid scrutiny, might have seemed unusual..." (BC, 71). As Delano observes more closely, a great deal of detail is given concerning the Africans. There are "four elderly grizzled negroes, their heads like, black, doddered willow-tops," who "each had bits of unstranded old junk in their hands, and, with a sort of stoical self-content, were picking the junk into oakum"; also "six other blacks; each with a rusty hatchet in his hand, which, with a bit of brick and a rag, he was engaged like a scullion in scouring..." The four oakum pickers spoke occasionally; the six hatchet polishers never did, but "clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din" (BC, 72). But Delano can waste no time on these "unsophisticated Africans" and "that first comprehensive glance which took in those few figures, with scores less conspicuous, rested but an instant upon them" (BC, 72). It becomes apparent, therefore, that the detailed description is for the benefit of the reader who has been warned that "The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave" (BC, 71). The reader, therefore, though not at this point suspicious of things he sees, is at least warned that things may not be as they seem.

Delano receives the same warning, and thus has the same chance as the reader to "blow back the mask" of the ambiguous world of the San Dominick, which Robin Magowan calls the world of the "floating coffin." But instead of unmasking, Delano "sugar-coats" the mask, and in reality "sets" it, for each time Delano confronts something suspicious, he immediately qualifies it. Note that after Delano confronts the confusion of

board, even the ship's "enchantment" does not keep him from concluding that "this is a strange craft; a strange history, too, and strange folks on board" (BC, 113). He qualifies all of this disorder, however--perplexed though he may be--through his belief in the supposed incompetence of Don Benito, whom he assumes to be "the involuntary victim of mental disorder" (BC, 78).

This evidence is enough to characterize Delano as one who has a stupid good nature and rationalizing spirit--not necessarily admirable traits--but equally not damning ones considering the situations that Delano has faced; yet, one cannot but feel that the indictments against Delano become more severe as the intensity of the situations increase, and Delano, though perhaps more ill at ease, still exemplifies the same lack of insight. As Delano stays at the same level of reality, Melville skillfully raises the reader to a much higher level of reality and thus obtains the detachment he desires in order to let the reader experience the "whole" of the real world. Melville, therefore, puts the reader in a dilemma, for he "draws" him into the plot by making him function as Delano does--judge of his fellow man; yet, in order for the reader to be a proper judge, he must necessarily "quit" the plot. It is at this point--the reader's inability to function in both worlds at once--that he himself has trouble understanding the ambiguity, and it is in this light that the complexity and the power of "Benito Cereno" rests. A closer look at the structure of Delano's world will support these ideas.

Delano feels that Don Benito's incompetence is thoroughly equalled by his inhospitality. He is perturbed by Don Benito's "unfriendly indifference toward himself." But immediately afterward, this unfriendliness Delano "in charity ascribed to the harassing effects of sickness"

(BC, 75). Delano states that Benito's "mind appeared unstrung, if not more seriously affected"; he moved slowly about "like some hypochondriac abbot"; his manner "conveyed a sort of sour and gloomy disdain, which he seemed at no pains to disguise" (BC, 74-75). The reader knows by now that Don Benito needs no mask; Delano will provide one, for as he looks out over the afflicted ship "Captain Delano bethought him that, indulgent as he was at the first, in judging the Spaniard, he might not, after all, have exercised charity enough" (BC, 76). One can note how adept Melville is in keeping Delano at the same level of reality, for he skillfully pairs Delano's first reaction--a suspicion, with his second--a qualification. It is as though Delano is an infant who sees everything "growing" around him, but qualifies it, therefore denies it, because he himself does not "grow."

Delano's chances at growth are as numerous as the reader's. It is to Delano's discredit that he is unable to take advantage of them. And more than the reader's perception, it is to Melville's credit that he affords the reader no alternative but to grow. As he grows, he has less and less difficulty separating Delano's world from his own. Delano's world is an accumulation of things he sees--constantly qualified incidents and situations, objects without meanings, circumstances coupled with false causes, and most importantly, ambiguities that he thinks he solves. The reader's world is a combination of things he sees for himself, and things he perceives through insight provided by Melville--unqualified incidents and situations, symbols and symbolic meanings, circumstances coupled with discernible causes, though not easily so, and ambiguities that he finally realizes he cannot solve but must accept. At this point in the story, the reader's level of reality--his world--is

still not sufficiently greater than Delano's for the serious indictment that he eventually places on Delano--complete lack of insight and ability to grow and live in the real world. It is when Delano confronts other characters in the story--in effect other worlds--and converses with them, and still misses his chance at growth, when the reader starts unravelling the occultism, and when he begins to experience fear and the full effects of the horror and notes Delano's insensitive actions--that the gap between the different levels widens and the indictment becomes a judgment. No better comment on these ideas exists than the conversation between Delano and Don Benito, juxtaposed with "the noisy confusion of the San Dominick's suffering host" which "repeatedly challenged [Delano's] eye" (BC, 77).

Don Benito, after being hard-pressed by Delano, is in the process of relating the story of the ship's misfortune to Delano--the first conversation of length between the two men. When Delano asks Benito to "favour him with the whole story," Benito falters. Delano becomes disgusted and goes "to accost one of the Spanish seamen for the desired information" (BC, 78). Benito seemingly regains control, calls Delano back, and again starts relating the tale. He gives a few insignificant details, but as he begins telling what "eventually brought about our chief causes of suffering," he again goes into a "sudden fainting attack of his cough." Again he is somewhat revived, but he continues "brokenly and obscurely, as one in a dream" (BC, 79). Don Benito actually is in a state of panic:

--"Oh, my God! rather than pass through what I have,  
with joy I would have hailed the most terrible gales;  
but--



His cough returned and with increased violence;  
this subsiding, with reddened lips and closed eyes  
he fell heavily against his supporter.

(BC, 80)

These actions by Don Benito establish a motif that becomes symbolic to the reader. As long as Don Benito simply gives descriptive detail of what happened, he is able to continue; however, when he attempts to qualify what happened, he falters or goes into a coughing attack, which, not unlike Delano's rationalizations, is another element of the occult which increases the reader's suspicions. Melville thus draws the reader's attention to Don Benito's actions since both Don Benito and Delano attempt to "qualify" them, and the reader's involvement in the plot is established.

It is no accident that Delano's and Don Benito's attempts at qualification are juxtaposed with each other. In this way, Melville offsets Benito's attempts at qualifications with Delano's. From Delano's point of view the qualifications have a cancelling effect and he is never able to see the ship in its true light; from Don Benito's point of view tempered by his reserve nature, Delano's qualifications are unacceptable; he is left, therefore, with his own "passive" qualifications, and is thus unable to communicate to anyone his knowledge of the ship; from the reader's point of view, Delano's "active-positive" action coupled with Don Benito's "passive-negative" action serve as a "charge" which so increases the reader's suspicions that he begins to observe more closely Delano's and Don Benito's actions. We do not know Babo's point of view. As Delano suspects and qualifies Benito's world, thus the reader qualifies Delano's and suspects Benito's. He qualifies Delano's because he begins to recognize his lack of insight; he suspects Don Benito's because

of his suspicious actions. The reader now suspects that indeed something is amiss on the ship.

Coupled with Don Benito's mysterious actions is Delano's inability to concentrate on them--or at least any one action--for any length of time. These digressions in pursuit are functional in the structure of Delano's world, and in the structure of the fear and horror; for each time Delano has such lapses, he encounters those incidents and objects that afford him a chance to "grow"; however, he never does. Delano listens as Don Benito concludes his story of the ship's misfortune with praise of the negro slaves who "conducted themselves with less of restlessness than even their owner could have thought possible" (BC, 81). Special praise is awarded his personal servant, Babo. Delano responds as though he himself is coming out of a dream and takes a bold look at them both for the first time.

As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other. The scene was heightened by the contrast in dress, denoting their relative positions.

(BC, 82)

As Delano observes Don Benito's dress--"chili jacket of dark velvet; white small clothes and stockings...silver buckles...high-crowned sombrero...a slender sword, silver mounted...more for utility than ornament"--and then upon learning of "the ship's so long drifting about," he "easily inferred that the young captain had not got into command at the hawse-hole, but the cabin window; and if so why wonder at the incompetence, in youth, sickness and gentility united"(BC, 82-83)? The reader, however, cannot dismiss the ostentatious dress of Don Benito, which,

though not necessarily in "the style of the day," is not in keeping with the conditions on board the ship. Note that Delano has already dismissed the suspected coughs and fainting spells of Don Benito, but the reader has not. He uses these impressions as a foundation on which all other impressions of Don Benito's actions are made. In this way, hopefully he can arrive at a fair judgment; but he fears that Delano never will, for even now Delano has dismissed Don Benito's dress, and "starts at the occasional cymballing of the hatchet-polishers" and wonders why "such an interruption should be allowed" (BC, 84). Before he gets an answer he is distracted by another "one of those instances of insubordination" (BC, 85). Three black boys with two Spanish boys are sitting together when "one of the black boys, enraged at a word dropped by one of his white companions, seized a knife and...struck the lad over the head." When asked for an explanation, Don Benito mutters that it is "merely the sport of the lad." Delano tells how differently he would handle the situation, and finally concludes that he knows "no sadder sight than a commander who has little of command but the name" (BC, 85). Drawing courage from this exchange, Delano proceeds to question Don Benito further until he reaches another stage of panic--when Delano inquires about the owner of the slaves.

As Benito mentions the name Alexandro Aranda, "his air was heart-broken; his knees shook; his servant supported him" (BC, 87). Delano, feeling that he has "divined the cause of such unusual emotion" attempts to console Benito by relating what he thinks is a similar tale of affliction. Delano mentions that in such cases just the mention of a name is as painful as if "your frield's remains" were "now on board this ship." "On Board this ship:" echoed the Spaniard. Then with horrified

gestures, as directed against some spectre, he unconsciously fell into the ready arms of his attendant" (BC, 87). Delano's thoughts which follow this action are worth repeating:

This poor fellow now, thought the pained American, is the victim of that sad superstition which associates goblins with the deserted body of man, as ghosts with an abandoned house. How unlike are we made! What to me, in like case, would have been a solemn satisfaction, the bare suggestion, even, terrifies the Spaniard into this trance. Poor Alexandro Aranda! what would you say could you here see your friend--who, on former voyages, when you, for months, were left behind, has I dare say, often longed, and longed, for one peep at you--now transported with terror at the least thought of having you any way nigh him.

(BC, 88)

This monologue by Delano has a two-fold significance. It is the first time that Delano imposes a judgment on Don Benito that is not qualified by his suspect actions. And it increases the "gap" between Delano and the reader. He may not know what caused Don Benito's "trance," but keeping in mind Benito's other actions, the reader is almost certain that the causes are not as simple as Delano proposes. The reader's former dilemma to function in both worlds--his and Delano's--is almost non-existent, for the reader can no longer bridge the gap between them, and he has less desire to do so. He cannot completely neglect Delano, however, for all three worlds--Delano's, Don Benito's, and Babo's--interact, and if he is ever to know the "real," he must deal with all three. His attention is turned more toward Don Benito and Babo in an attempt to define their worlds and thus to define the "real world" of the "floating coffin."

Don Benito presents a special and very difficult problem for the reader. His world, more than what he sees, is what he knows and what he

thinks. And at this point in the story, the reader has no idea what his thoughts are. Added to this difficulty is the knowledge that he cannot isolate Don Benito's world from Babo's, for their worlds are no less bound together than the men are physically. This is not to say that their worlds are not different, only that more than any others, theirs interact and are so clouded by "ambiguity of appearances" that the reader has difficulty making a proper distinction between them. And as will be pointed out, when the reader gets close to some definition of their worlds, Delano intrudes with a qualification and reclouds the issue.

As stated previously the reader so suspects Don Benito's actions that he starts looking for clues to solve the occultism that begins to emerge. These clues Melville presents in two forms: in symbols linked with symbolic meaning, and more importantly in Don Benito's responses--which in themselves are symbolic--to Captain Delano and Babo. To look at Don Benito's world, therefore, is to look at Delano's and Babo's, but also to observe the symbols to which all three respond. Through this juxtaposition of symbols and responses, Melville achieves the complexity and ambiguity that gives "Benito Cereno" its power. The reader then must look at all three worlds at once in order to discern the true meaning, which Melville purposefully hides in ambiguity; it is the ambiguous world that holds the fear and horror that the reader experiences. Melville uses Babo as the personified ambiguity and thus constructs a triangle of relationships in which Delano functions as the "apparent world," Don Benito as the "real world," and Babo as the ambiguous one which makes all three worlds indistinguishable at times--more Benito's than Delano's--more Babo's than the other two--and, since the reader must

look at all worlds from their point of view, and since he cannot define his own world until he has made a "united whole" of these different worlds from his own point of view--more his than them all. It is necessary to look now at the clues as the reader views them to determine if Melville has made the "troubled gray vapours" less gray.

Delano is shocked out of his monologue by the ship's bell which in being "smote by one of the grizzled oakum-pickers" rings "with a dreary graveyard toll," as if in comment on Delano's more easily detectable lack of insight. His attention is then "caught by the moving figure of a gigantic black," Atufal. Don Benito's lips turn white "as with the sudden memory of bootless rage" (BC, 88). He demands a pardon from Atufal, gets none, and lets him go. Benito cannot answer when questioned about the meaning of Atufal's actions. Delano ceases questioning, however, because he notices "for the first, that suspended by a slender silken cord from Don Benito's neck, hung a key" (BC, 90). Babo calls attention to the padlock on Atufal's neck. Delano smiles and says, "'So, Don Benito--padlock and key--significant symbols, truly.'" The irony in Delano's making this statement is obvious to the reader even though he has not solved the mystery and cannot know the full irony in the statement itself. The padlock and key can hold no symbolism for Delano. These are merely hollow words. To Delano the meaning of the whole incident is that Don Benito as master holds the key to the lock of a slave. From Delano's point of view, this meaning is less a significant symbol than a condition of his mind to stereotype such situations. This idea is borne out by his feelings when he looks at the negress with breasts bared nursing her child, and when he comments on the European appearances of the mulatto steward.



Atufal appears two other times, once when Delano questions the old man tying knots, and again in a very important scene below deck. All scenes are accompanied by fear on Delano's part which he immediately qualifies. Actually, the first time Delano expresses fear is when he accompanies Don Benito to the poop just before Atufal appears. To get to the poop, he must pass between the hatchet polishers.

Gingerly enough stepped good Captain Delano between them, and in the instant of leaving them behind, like one running the gauntlet, he felt an apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs.

(BC, 84)

But then in the next instant when "facing about, he saw the whole file, like so many organ-grinders, still stupidly intent on their work, unmindful of everything besides, he could not but smile at his late fidgety panic" (BC, 85). After Atufal leaves Delano's fear is increased, for he feels that Benito's actions in this matter show either "innocent lunacy, or wicked imposture" (BC, 92).

Atufal's second appearance climaxes what constitutes the greatest "gap" between the reader and Delano. Delano has questioned Don Benito over and over again about the conditions on the ship and how they came about. A sailor on deck has confirmed the report. Delano seems satisfied, though his fears are intensified at different times. He has seen another sailor four times, who each time acts suspicious. The first time the sailor has a "coil of rope in his hand" and he continually shifts his eyes from Delano to Don Benito and Babo, "The two whisperers" (BC, 91); the second time the sailor appears he is descending the rigging:

In act of stooping over to spring inboard to the deck, his voluminous, unconfined frock, or shirt, of coarse wollen, much spotted with tar, opened out far down the chest, revealing a soiled under-garment of what seemed the finest linen, edged, about the neck, with a narrow blue ribbon, sadly faded and worn. At this moment the young sailor's eye was again fixed on the whisperers, and Captain Delano thought he observed a lurking significance in it, as if silent signs, of some Freemason sort, had that instant been interchanged.

(BC, 95)

Delano's conclusion is that Benito and Babo do have "the air of conspirators" (BC, 96). After Delano descends the poop, he sees something moving in the "dark hatchway." He sees the same sailor "hurriedly placing his hand in the bosom of his frock, as if hiding something" (BC, 96). Captain Delano cannot understand the significance of these movements. He thinks that there was a "secret sign [he] saw passing between this suspicious fellow and his captain a while since," and because of this idea he begins to "feel a ghostly dread of Don Benito" (BC, 97). He feels that in Benito "the most savage energies might be crouched" (BC, 93), and that likewise the San Dominick might approach his ship, Rover, and "like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid." (BC, 98). Delano tries to gather his thoughts, to recollect what has happened, but each time he does "the black wizards of Ashantee would strike up with their hatchets, as in ominous comment on the white stranger's thought" (BC, 97). The fourth time Delano sees the sailor, instead of a rope he has a "marling-spike in his hand." He gestures toward the balcony on which stand "the two whisperers," and then vanishes "into the recesses of the hempen forest, like a poacher" (BC, 107). Delano does think that the sailor is trying to communicate, but he is unable to cement these thoughts in his mind because of the interruptions--twice by the hatchet-polishers. The other interruption is the aforementioned

episode of the "slumbering negress" who constitutes "pure tenderness and love" (BC, 105). One other "interlude" should be mentioned, for it establishes the somewhat hollow romantic tendencies of Delano. Just before the sailor's last appearance, Delano reposes on a "Venetian-looking water-balcon[y]--one of those "retreats cut off from the deck."

As his foot pressed the half-damp, half-dry sea-mosses matting the place, and a chance phantom cat's paw--an islet of breeze, unheralded, unfollowed--as this ghostly cat's-paw came fanning his cheek; as his glance fell upon the row of small, round dead-lights--all closed like coppered eyes of the confined--and the state-cabin door, once connecting with the gallery, even as the dead-lights had once looked out upon it, but now caulked fast like a sarcophagus lid; and to a purple-black, tarred-over panel, threshold, and post; and he bethought him of the time, when that state-cabin and this state-balcony had heard the voices of the Spanish king's officers, and the forms of the Lima viceroy's daughters had perhaps leaned where he stood--as these and other images flitted through his mind, as the cat's paw through the calm, gradually he felt rising a dreamy inquietude, like that of one who alone on the prairie feels unrest from the repose of the noon.

(BC, 106).

The irony of Delano responding so favorable to such symbols of "death, ruin, and decay" should be enough comment on his total lack of insight. They are not symbols to Delano, only objects; the only symbolic meanings they possess are the ones he imposes on them, not ones he divines from them.

As these images "flit" through Delano's mind, all of the incidents and confrontations just mentioned impress the reader's mind, the most important of which is Delano's meeting with the old man tying knots. This meeting represents the only recorded dialogue between Delano and anyone else on ship other than Benito and Babo. "The knot seemed a combination of double-bowling-knot, treble-crown-knot, back-handed-

well-knot, knot-in-and-out-knot, and jamming-knot."

At last, puzzled to comprehend the meaning of such a knot, Captain Delano addressed the knoter:--

"What are you knotting there, my man?"

"The knot," was the brief reply, without looking up.

"So it seems; but what is it for?"

"For someone else to undo," muttered back the old man, plying his fingers harder than ever, the knot being now nearly completed.

While Captain Delano stood watching him, suddenly the old man threw the knot toward him, saying in broken English--the first heard in the ship--something to this effect: "Undo it, cut it, quick." It was said lowly, but with such condensation of rapidity that the long, slow words in Spanish, which had preceded and followed, almost operated as covers to the brief English between.

For a moment, knot in hand, and knot in head, Captain Delano stood mute; while, without further heeding him, the old man was now intent upon other ropes. Presently there was a slight stir behind Captain Delano. Turning, he saw the chained negro, Atufal, standing quietly there. The next moment the old sailor rose, muttering, and followed by his subordinate negroes, removed to the forward part of the ship, where in the crowd he disappeared.

(BC, 110)

It is with this episode, climaxed by the second meeting with Atufal, that the breach between Delano's world and the reader's is widest. From his point of view, Delano will forever be with "knot in head." And the reader, like the old man, can only go "forward" relegating to Delano the "backward" position. Captain Delano will never grow; the reader now knows this. He likewise knows that growth--a desired level of awareness--is essential if one is to solve the mystery on board ship, the mystery which the reader is now certain exists. Delano, still an infant, watches with wonder at the happenings of the "floating coffin," and he will never decrease the wonder, for as Melville so aptly states concerning Delano: "Trying to break one charm, he was but becharmed anew" (BC, 107).



Since the third appearance of Atufal will be observed later, it is appropriate to consider other clues Melville presents to Delano and the reader. To get to the other clues is to confront Babo's world, and thus in some way to expand Don Benito's. The one comment now worthy of consideration, as the reader is now able to discern, is that at best Benito's world is one of hesitance, and uncertainty, and at worst it is one of hatred, love, fear, and bravery--hatred for Delano, love for Babo, fear of the mystery being wrongly unveiled, and bravery enough to face it. Benito's individual actions seem credible; but quite obviously a combination of them leads to ambiguity. And with this idea we confront Babo. Ward states that "it is through the characterization of Babo, the true villain of the story, that Melville portrays in their fullest possibilities the virulence and ambiguity of evil."<sup>3</sup> Melville records the first actions of the Negro, Babo.

Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body-servant in the world; one, too, whom master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust; less a servant than a devoted companion.

(BC, 75)

Since Delano and the reader are not divided at this point, he accepts this view of Babo, but as the two worlds--the reader's versus Delano's--begin to divide, as the reader becomes more suspicious of Delano's ability to properly assess a situation, the reader in turn becomes suspicious

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

of the Negro, Babo, and eventually of his own evaluation of Babo, for Delano's view of Babo seldom changes. Through Delano's eyes, Babo is the good, trusty slave. To Don Benito he exclaims, "I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him" (BC, 82).

Don Benito also contributes to Babo's ambiguity, for he attests to Babo's worth through his comments which one can contrast with his actions. In relating his tale to Delano, Benito says that "it is Babo here to whom, under God, I owe not only my own preservation, but likewise to him chiefly, the merit is due, of pacifying his more ignorant brethren, when at intervals tempted to murmurings" (BC, 81-82). The reader would undoubtedly accept this statement without qualification if Benito had not gone into a fainting spell before he made the comment. The reader now suspects the truthfulness of the statements, but he has nothing on which to base his suspicions; he must examine Babo further in order to get the symbolic meaning of Don Benito's actions and of the symbols, and thus to experience the fear and horror.

At the beginning of the story, Delano, as previously mentioned, thought that "nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him"; but then he sees the "true character of the ship" and is satisfied. The reader notes Babo's dress and Delano's response to it:

The servant wore nothing but wide trowsers, [sic] apparently, from their coarseness and patches, made out of some old topsail; they were clean, and confined at the waist by a bit of unstranded rope, which, with his composed, deprecatory air at times, made him look something like a begging friar of St. Francis.

(BC, 82)

Delano's "response" is to completely disregard Babo's dress and instead to turn his attention to Don Benito's about which he makes one of the

qualifying statements previously mentioned. It is as though Delano expects Babo to look like a "begging friar," but not Benito Cereno a "hypochondriac Abbot."

Babo has no less hand in his own ambiguity than Benito. In answer to Delano's praise, Babo remarks, "Ah, master...don't speak of me; Babo is nothing; what Babo has done was but duty." But Delano knows and has commented that Babo does his "duty" very well. Babo thus in his affected modesty assures Delano and the reader of his worth. This idea of reassurance is very important, for it encompasses one aspect of Melville's technique in keeping the reader detached. Each time Don Benito faints, Babo assures Delano of Don Benito's ability to recover; he assures Delano that "master wouldn't part with Babo for a thousand doubloons." In effect, Babo makes Delano have faith in this "naked nature" that he observes, this "pure tenderness and love," by allowing Delano to see nothing else. Babo, not unlike Delano, also "sugar-coats" his role, and "sets" in Delano's mind the Negro stereotype. This idea is supported by the knowledge that at one time Delano thought that Don Benito might be conspiring with the Negroes. Delano concludes, however, that the Negroes are too stupid. "Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguin in against it with negroes" (BC, 109). Since Babo presents such a "stable" role, he forces Delano into qualifying Don Benito's actions. Babo's actions have still a greater significance.

When Babo assures Delano, there is fear; when he assures Don Benito, all in irony, there is horror. Through Babo, therefore, the reader gets the meaning that the world is ambiguous; and the more one is assured of its definitiveness, the greater is the fear and horror. The fear and

horror is created by "the disparity between what seems real and what is real"<sup>4</sup>--a disparity best depicted through symbols. It is worthwhile therefore to re-examine and introduce some symbols that lead to the fear and horror, and to discern how they are structured.

Mention has been made of the "shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come." This shadow, the blackness, is again picked up in the ship-load of Black Friars, and then finally in the one Black Friar--Babo. The reader's first suspicions are thus heightened. These shadows afford little or no sunlight; and as Delano confronts the blackness, the reader is made aware that Delano will never, like Don Benito, experience the horror.

From no train of thought did these fancies come; not from within, but from without; suddenly, too, and in one throng, like hoar frost; yet as soon to vanish as the mild sun of Captain Delano's good-nature regained its meridian.

(BC, 93)

The "mild sun" of Captain Delano indeed gets milder, though it approaches closer and closer to the "equator." And symbolically, the more his sun is exposed, the deeper are the shadows cast. Delano's "equator" ironically is the "floating coffin" and as he breaks from the other "heavenly bodies" (Babo and Don Benito), he approaches all the symbols Melville employed in structuring the horror; yet he never completely recognizes them; to him they are objects; the reader sees them as symbols. Babo sees the "shield-like stern-piece...uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Levine, "Joseph Conrad's Blackness," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXIII, 1964, p. 199.



writhing figure, likewise masked" (BC, 70), and it means nothing to him. The reader, however, is prepared for this symbol even before Delano boards ship.

Whether the ship had a figure-head, or only a plain beak, was not quite certain, owing to canvas wrapped about that part, either to protect it while undergoing a refurbishing, or else decently to hide its decay. Rudely painted or chalked, as in a sailor freak, along the forward side of a sort of pedestal below the canvas, was the sentence, 'Seguid vuestro jefe' (follow your leader); while upon the tarnished head-boards, near by, appeared, in stately capitals, once gilt, the ship's name, 'SAN DOMINICK,' each letter streakingly corroded with tricklings of copper-spike rust; while, like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the hull.

(BC, 70)

Thus Melville invites the reader to partake of the occult that Delano is not aware of and indeed will hardly become aware of; yet, there is something almost dream-like in the manner in which Delano goes about the ship, confronting object after object, and still not recognizing any of them as significant. He is given the knot by the old man; he sees the jewel sparkling on the youthful sailor's chest; he is confronted several times by the young sailor, first on deck, and then below deck; still, even though he suspects, he does not respond. As Putzel says, he is somewhat of a tragic hero "who catches a glint of reality...and sees nothing more."<sup>5</sup> But Delano's tragedy, his immersion into the shadows, is much deeper than the idea that Putzel states. It is his fate never to know the truth, never to see the light; yet, it is his tragedy that if he ever does, he will automatically be killed, for he will attempt to

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<sup>5</sup>Putzel, p. 193.

act through his confirmed beliefs, and they are not valid for the ship's "crew." I agree with Magowan who, in speaking of Delano and the other two characters, notes that "none of the personages in 'Benito Cereno' undergoes a substantial change."

If for the sake of an action they have been compelled to assume a role, it is no less true that in the course of that action they have become that role as if born to it and always destined to have played it. The only change possible, therefore, is a ceremonial change, of a rite successfully undergone. Thus, for Captain Delano the action is a testing of his taste. He only becomes endangered through his occasional lapses of taste, those moments when he forgets himself and treats the Negroes not as fellow human beings but as the slaves they nominally are, and thus departs from that standard of good taste and human decency which it is his role as knight of Civilization to uphold.<sup>6</sup>

Delano's greatest "lapse of taste" occurs when casks from the Rover are being hoisted onto the San Dominick. Delano is "accidentally jostled" by a few Negroes. Unmindful of Don Benito, "he bade the blacks stand back," enforcing his words with a "half-mirthful, half-menacing gesture" (BC, 114). The blacks immediately pause and encircle Delano. As the hatchet polishers half-rise, "a rapid cry came from Don Benito." Delano's horrifying reaction is that he is "about to be massacred" (BC, 114). One look at the weak and feeble Benito, however, assures Delano of his safety. Ironically enough, and for the reason Magowan states, Delano was never closer to the truth.

Accepting Magowan's thesis, therefore, that none of the characters undergo a substantial change, then:

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<sup>6</sup>Robin Magowan, "Masque and Symbol in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" College English, XXIII, p. 381.

Each of the three sees the reality in a different light--the narrator giving it a subtle twist whose irony is alien to all of them. Delano is the credulous, good-natured, optimistic commander of a ship redolent of newness, prosperity, and order. The Spaniard is the victim of illness, disorder, disillusionment, and malign force. The Negro is a sinister and primitive conundrum.<sup>7</sup>

This idea is conceived when one notes how the characters respond to the figure-head. The narrator has already given his ironic and sarcastic comment to the reader. Delano speaks of Don Benito having his friend's "remains now on board this ship." Benito faints and is caught by Babo "who, with a silent appeal toward Captain Delano, seemed beseeching him not again to broach a theme so unspeakably distressing to his master" (BC, 87-88). All three characters have a response and see the reality in a different light. Don Benito's reality is that Delano has ironically hit upon the truth, and one so horrible that Benito faints; Babo's is a warning to Delano not to continue this line of conversation, and he hurriedly resumes his role of "pacifying" Benito; and Delano's is his stupid romantic notion of man's love of brotherhood--a "notion" which gives "birth" to Delano's monologue. The reader's fear and reality is that this romantic notion will triumph, a fear only intensified by Delano's occasional lapses. These "lapses" are more significant than merely being departures of good taste; they signify the extent and the validity of the terror.

If one is to get to the true fear and horror in the story, not only for the reader but for Don Benito and Delano as well, one must examine the two climactic scenes in the story. In the first scene, fear and

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<sup>7</sup>Putzel, p. 138.

horror are accompanied by the occult reassurance of Babo--in the second, "terror is succeeded by easy reassurance that all is well--reassurances that we later know to be all illusionary."<sup>8</sup> The top incidents are the scenes wherein Delano watches Babo shave Don Benito, and wherein he himself passes through the dark corridor whose exit is guarded by the chained Atufal--his third appearance.

The structure of this first scene is indeed classic. As the reader enters--as Melville draws him in--he is given the broad scope of the room: four or five old muskets; a dented cutlass or two; two long sharp-ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age; a flag locker; a washstand; and finally, a torn hammock. Don Benito finally sits in the chair and Babo starts to prepare him for shaving. And what is Delano's response?--"...in the cuddy, relieved from his former uneasiness, and, for various reasons, more sociably inclined than at any previous period of the day, and seeing the coloured servant, napkin on arm, so debonnaire about his master, in a business so familiar as that of shaving, too, all his old weakness for negroes returned" (BC, 121). Delano only sees the "surface" reality and Melville wastes no time with him, but draws the reader even further in the room by pointing out its individuality: the flag locker contains the shaving apron; the barber's basin with one side scooped out receives the barber's chin lathered "low down under the throat." Babo hesitates and lifts the "gleaming steel" as he dabbles "among the bubbling suds on the Spaniard's lank neck." Delano thinking things "somewhat peculiar" could not "resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block." "But

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 138.



this was one of those antic conceits, appearing and vanishing in a breath, from which, perhaps, the best regulated mind is not always free" (BC, 122). The reader now discerns Don Benito's true horror--the horror of death at the hand of the Negro; his fear is two-fold--his inability to cope with the situation and the fear that Captain Delano in his ignorance will precipitate the act. Delano at this point has fear, but he will not give in to it because of his "qualifications." He is indeed tragic.

In this scene the skill in which Melville structured the fear and horror is easily discernible, for all symbols, all traits previously mentioned, are intertwined. The reader has the symbolic responses of Benito and Delano. He has the symbolic meaning supplied by Babo as he uses the Spanish flag for an apron. Babo holding Don Benito down, rubbing his neck, brings back to mind the writhing figure being held by the dark satyr depicted in the stern piece. The jewel of the Spanish youth is reflected in the gleaming steel. And as the conundrum Babo "reassures" the master that "you must not shake" as he knows "I never yet have drawn blood, though it's true, if master will shake so, I may some of these times" and entices Delano to "please go on with your talk about the gale, and all that" (BC, 124), the reader has fear that both Don Benito and Delano might "Seguid vuestro jefe." In this instance, instead of there being a reassurance by Babo preceding or succeeding the horror, the assurance is given simultaneous with the horror so that the reader has no clues to go on and the whole scene is horrifying. Ironically enough, it is in this scene in which Captain Delano is not assured of the good intentions of Don Benito.

Why was the Spaniard, so superfluously punctilious at times, now heedless of common propriety in not accompanying to the side his departing guest? Did indisposition forbid?...He had risen to his feet, grasped his guest's hand, motioned toward his hat; then, in an instant, all was eclipsed in sinister muteness and gloom. Did this imply one brief, repentant relenting at the final moment, from some iniquitous plot, followed by remorseless return to it?...Why decline the invitation to visit the sealer that evening? Or was the Spaniard less hardened than the Jew, who refrained not from supping at the board of him whom the same night he meant to betray? What imported all those day-long enigmas and contradictions, except they were intended to mystify, preliminary to some stealthy blow? Atufal, the pretended rebel, but punctual shadow, that moment lurked by the threshold without. He seemed a sentry, and more. Who, by his own confession, had stationed him there? Was the negro now lying in wait?

(BC, 138-139)

This is the moment of reality for Delano. He is not able to properly orient his world. And his dilemma is that without any clues to define his own world, without any assurance that either world is good, he must decide through his own initiative to pass from one "world" to another. "The Spaniard behind--his creature before: to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary choice" (BC, 139). And Delano rushes blindly forth "with clenched jaw and hand" and stands "unharmd in the light." Perhaps what keeps Delano from being a complete tragic hero is his ability to impose his concept of the world which is false upon the real world--the one he confronts on deck. It is this "quality" that saves him. Had he been unable to so impose his will, he would have succumbed to the ever-present gloom, in the deeper shadows. But as he observes the oakum-pickers, the hatchet-polishers, and "more than all, as he saw the benign aspect of nature, taking her innocent repose in the evening... as charmed eye and ear took in all these, with the chained figure of the black, clenched jaw and hand relaxed" (BC, 139). Delano thus is

reassured. He is in his "imposed world," his feet firmly planted on deck, with his power of command--his "ship lying peacefully at anchor, and almost within ordinary call." The reader, however, does not have Delano's assurance. He knows what the world on deck, the "floating coffin," represents, masked fear; he knows what the world below wherein still lies Don Benito represents, naked horror. He knows that from the point of view of Delano the worlds are different; from the point of view of Don Benito the worlds are the same; from Babo's point of view, there is no "natural" world; and he fears that from his own point of view it matters not what the world is; that if man is to live in the natural world, he must accept the possibility of his not knowing how; his horror is that if he learns how, he will only be left with Babo's point of view. The reader thus fears Delano's world, for he knows that if one is immersed in it he will never be able to see any reality in the natural world or to see any world other than his own. He is repulsed and thus horrified of Don Benito's world, for knowledge of it will only lead to death, and one seemingly self-willed. In support of this idea, Putzel states:

His fainting spells, his readiness to throw himself into the arms of the hypocritical body servant he knows to be his deadliest enemy, his unwillingness to retaliate when he has the opportunity--all these traits somehow spell a death wish even beyond the limits of Don Benito's withdrawal. They are not in the least explained by his no doubt traumatic experience in the uprising and thereafter.<sup>12</sup>

They are explained, however, by his inability to accept the world into which he has been subjected, and ironically enough his inability to

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<sup>12</sup>Putzel, p. 201.

impose on this world one to his acceptance. Don Benito cannot rid himself of this paradox, this world, and his leap into Delano's boat, falling at his feet, is not his saving grace; for he can now no longer accept Delano's world. Keeping Putzel's thesis in mind, therefore, one sees that Don Benito's leap is symbolic of his desire to fulfill his death wish, and in doing so he ironically saves Delano's life. Babo also "leaped" into the boat, and one must consider whether his leap constitutes a death wish. I think not. Though Babo can hardly expect to get out of the situation alive, his leap has a greater significance in connection with the structure of the story, and with the ideas that Melville is trying to convey. Putzel states:

Like, Conrad, Melville explores the problems of force as an evil rather than the problem of abstract evil: not so much why evil exists in a world whose benevolence is ostensibly omnipotent, but how moral values can survive at all in a universe where both man and nature are subject to blind, amoral forces essential to their very being.<sup>13</sup>

Babo's leap is symbolic of this "blind, amoral force" that confronts moral values on all levels and where it appears to triumph. Even the chase following Babo's "revealing leap," even the complete victory over the blacks cannot smother the idea that this evil had some measure of triumph. This idea is supported by the deposition. Babo's body is burned to ashes,

but for many days the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda; and across the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 192.



Rimac bridge looked toward the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader.

(BC, 170)

Who is the leader? Who is the follower? Are Don Benito's and Babo's roles reversed at the end? No answer is forthcoming; Melville does not provide one. The answer is supposedly in the deposition, but with the addition of the "bare" facts, the three questions above still cannot be adequately answered. In this ambiguity, in this irony rests the power of "Benito Cereno."

The deposition itself is a testament to Melville's skill, for nowhere is the reader more detached than when he reads the deposition, which has three purposes. First, it serves to make credible the physical actions of each major character: Don Benito's passivity; Delano's stupid actions through lack of perception; and Babo's ambiguous actions. Second, it serves as a testimony in support of the real actions that happened; and then third, it serves as a "documented Babo" in that it forces the "Delano" reader to face the world as it is and to force him to realize that whether one sees the good, the evil, or both, he has no way to control which force will triumph; for in a natural world none has an absolute value; all are mutable. And the minute we assign a value to it, we are in trouble; for we will automatically respond to the assigned value, and when it changes, we may not be able to cope with it. This idea adds to the reader's horror, which is intensified even more when Delano questions Babo about his feelings now that his physical life is no longer threatened. "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you!'" (BC, 169). Don Benito's answer "The negro" has meanings that

are not at first easily discerned; for the reader realizes now the full extent of Don Benito's horror, and it is a horror that the reader shares. Melville in dealing with "force as evil" deals not so much with physical force, but mental, intelligent, thriving force; for as Melville points out, it is not with his body but with his brain that Babo "had schemed and led the revolt" and that he does it so effectively that the appearance it gives, the apparent world, looks like the real, and it looks natural. Paul Levine sums up Don Benito's feelings of fear and horror expressed in his cry "The negro."

The good-natured American, Amaso Delano, who sees only the surface of things, fails to recognize that the black slaves have turned the tables on their white masters just as he can never understand what has cast such a shadow upon Benito Cereno. Don Benito, on the other hand, feels not only the immediate truth of the real reversal of roles between blacks and whites but the immutable truth of their symbolic reversal as well. To Captain Delano the Negro will always be slave; to Benito Cereno the white man can never be master.<sup>14</sup>

This slave-master relationship has more importance than Levine gives it, for Melville is dealing with all relationships between mankind that may lead to a slave-master relationship, and more importantly perhaps to those that already are, i.e., God-man, church-society relationships--an idea well supported by the abundance of religious images in the story, the most important of which is the old man tying knots who "looked like an Egyptian priest, making Gordian knots for the temple of Ammon" (BC, 109)--likewise called Amen. The old man presents the "key" to Delano who can only stand there, completely dumb and immobile, holding it in his hand. Finally the knot is tossed into the sea. Though

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<sup>14</sup>Levine, p. 198.

Delano's dumb and immobile actions constitute a sanctification, an "amen" to the proceedings, the real tragedy in the story is the fact that nobody on the "floating coffin" can improve on Delano's actions. They are as dead men. Therefore, to the reader, slave and master are the same. The fear is that one day he may be slave; the horror is that, in the natural world, possibly he already is.

### CHAPTER III

#### "HEART OF DARKNESS"

From Benito Cereno's exclamation, "The Negro," it is not far to Kurtz's outcry, "The horror! The horror!" As Levine points out, "The lines of symbolic blackness and white guilt join most clearly in the sea stories of Conrad and Melville where they are freed of regional commitments and linked to an inherently metaphysical vision."<sup>1</sup> While I am somewhat in agreement with Levine concerning the "symbolic blackness," I think that Conrad even more than depicting "white guilt" is depicting universal guilt. If white guilt and universal guilt are synonymous, it is only through accident that it is so. And symbolic blackness is more than the Negro; it is more than the heart of the jungle; it represents the unknown and man's attempt to find it in the natural and real world. Thus in "Heart of Darkness" man must invade this darkness to find not only the truth, but to find himself. Marlow takes such a trip and Conrad demands that the reader take the trip with him. The reader takes this trip because he is able to sympathize with Marlow. When one first sees Marlow he "sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzenmast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol" (HD, 46). This idol imagery is continued as Marlow

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

begins to speak of the conquerors of the unknown land--"he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower..." (HD, 50). As Marlow continues his speech, the physical description becomes almost ironic:

"They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force--nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind--as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slighter flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up [like an idol] (insert mine), and bow down before, and offer sacrifice to...."

(HD, 50-51)

Here Marlow is pictured as an idealist and one who will support his ideas with actions--an admirable trait. The reader now not only sympathizes with Marlow, but he identifies with him. Thus as Marlow proceeds into the "Heart of Darkness," so does the reader.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, Conrad lets the reader identify with Marlow because he wants to draw him into the narration. I think, however, that Conrad's technique is more complex than a reader-Marlow identification. Conrad must entice the reader in some other way, <sup>with the carcass</sup> for he may sometimes along the journey cease the identification. Indeed, such a crisis is reached in the story; the reader, therefore, must have some motivation to proceed on his own. Here, I think Florence H. Ridley has the answer. She states that:

Conrad uses a method of communicating which both increases the significance of his comment and renders it more difficult of precise restatement. As F. R. Leavis points out, he is using the "objective correlative" defined by T. S. Eliot. The author does not explain, he communicates over a bridge of emotional response to a given object, a response which he for- sees and controls. The river which fascinates Marlow as a snake does a silly little bird, the human heads which ornament Kurtz's stockade, the black figure which moves across the glow of a jungle fire, figure with horns on its head; a heap of drainage pipes, all broken; the grove of death filled with broken black men--to these and many other objects the reader reacts [*italics mine*] and as he does so, gradually attains comprehension of Conrad's central meaning, which in large part he may feel before he understands.<sup>21</sup>

Closer examination will reveal that when the reader feels or senses the meaning Conrad is trying to convey, fear ensues; the closer the reader comes to understanding the meaning, the greater becomes the horror. In this respect as well as many others that will be pointed out, "Heart of Darkness" is similar to "Benito Cereno" in structure, or structured meaning, for the more Don Benito understood, the greater was his horror; the difference is that in "Heart of Darkness," the feeling and understanding are simultaneous.

Like Melville, Conrad immediately paints a gloomy picture.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway --a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

(HD, 47-48)

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<sup>2</sup>"The Ultimate Meaning of 'Heart of Darkness,'" NCF, XVIII (June, 1963), pp. 43-44.



Unlike Delano who did not note his "shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come," Marlow responds to the "brooding gloom" and notes that "this also...has been one of the dark places on the earth" (HD, 48). Thus Conrad, by having Marlow comment with the narration, and by complementing it, draws him as well as the reader into the narration. The reader's world, Marlow's, and Conrad's are as one; and Conrad, in control of all three, hauntingly teases the reader and Marlow forward. Ironically enough, it seems as if Conrad is at the same time cautioning the reader to beware of taking the trip, to make certain that he is able to distinguish his world, for he has Marlow begin the story in such a "fairy-tale" manner that one almost doubts Marlow's sincerity. Conrad accomplishes this technique through Marlow's use of superlatives--"the hardest work on earth,...the biggest, the most blank, so to speak--that I had a hankering after...a might big river"--all serve to warn the reader, while at the same time they entrance him as the river does Marlow--"it fascinated me as a snake would a bird--a silly little bird" (HD, 50). This ambivalence created in the reader gives rise to the occult feelings and leads to the initial feelings of fear.

One other characteristic should be noted, and this is Marlow's storytelling technique, which has an enchantment all its own. He speaks of the death of Fresleven, who, when in dispute over some hens with a native, "whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man--I was told the chief's son--in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man--and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder blades" (HD, 52). This method combines a sort of factualness with a wry humor which entrances the reader. It is when the reader

responds to this enchantment, however, that he should be most acute; for immediately after this passage [Conrad, through Marlow, presents what I think to be the dominant symbol in the story--one of the primary motivations of fear and horror that is structured in the story. This symbol, not heretofore acknowledged, I call the "carcass" symbol. Marlow remarks:

I couldn't let it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell.

(HD, 54)

Fresleven's carcass, symbolized by the tall "grass growing through the ribs," presents the reader with the occult--first of all because of the way in which Marlow tells the story, but more importantly, because of Marlow's description of Fresleven as the "gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs" (HD, 54). When one notes, however, that Marlow "stepped into his [Fresleven's] shoes," the reader fears that Marlow will suffer the same useless death. This fear is created by Conrad's effective integration of symbolisms [not unlike Melville's--religious symbols linked with decadent ones, the combination creating ambiguity.] The difference between Conrad's and Melville's use of symbolism is that Conrad integrates symbol and symbolic meaning much earlier in "Heart of Darkness" than Melville does in "Benito Cereno." Actually, in "Heart of Darkness," symbol and symbolic meaning are interwoven from the start; and whereas in both stories the reader must keep symbol and symbolic meaning separate, i.e., he should be able to distinguish between the two in certain situations, especially those giving rise to fear and horror, it is more difficult to do so in "Heart of Darkness." The



difficulty is enhanced by the emotional appeal--symbolized by the reader's desire to be drawn into the narration, but more so because of Conrad's skill to so appeal. A close look at the carcass symbol will bear these ideas out.

Delano's thought progresses from the "whitewashed monastery" to the "dark moving figures." Marlow progresses from the city, "the whited sepulchre," to the Company's offices within--the frame of the dead carcass. The description leading up to the offices is significant:

"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. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to."

(HD, 55)

Marlow, now assuming the full role of being in Fresleven's shoes, has "slipped" into the carcass in preparation for his journey. And as one recalls the "bones," the domino game Marlow mentioned at the beginning of the story but which was never started, and the "ribbed" staircase as "arid as a desert," one can only think that this Company, as the San Dominick, is indeed "launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones" (BC, 69). It is within the winding frame of the carcass that Marlow will confront the darkness. The reader only wonders if he will be able to slip into the ponderous heart and "hear" the meaning of the darkness.

The idea of the carcass with a "beating heart" presents a paradox, and one that is symbolic of the unknown and of the occult embodied in the story. Conrad plays on this emotion, symbolized not by descriptive words, but through colors, "all the colours of a rainbow" (HD, 55).

These colors are on the large shining map that Marlow observes in the Company's offices. And it is no accident that Marlow's color on the map is yellow--"Dead in the centre" (HD, 56). This scene involving the colors on the map is very important and will gain greater significance as one progresses into the story--as one progresses farther into the darkness losing the colors and the ability to perceive them, and finally picking up the colors of the Russian's dress only to lose them on the return trip. It is no less important than the "color" scene in the hole of the San Dominick. As Marlow goes into the jungle, he can only see the gray shoreline. Finally he is left with the blackness of night and the blind-white-morning-fog. Delano sees the colors in the Spanish flag, but they have no significance for him. So in effect both men--Marlow and Delano--are blinded, one by external forces suggesting evil, another by internal ones.

Marlow, like Delano, feels "slightly weary" as he is interviewed by the company; and he, likewise, is as though in a trance. He feels glad to be back in the outer room and he refers to the menagerie of characters in the outer room as the fat one, the slim one, the younger one, the older one, the youths. But, unlike Delano, Marlow sees the significance of the moving figures.

"Often far away there I thought of these two [fat one and slim one--secretaries] (insert mine), guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes."

(HD, 57)

It is impossible not to think of the oakum-pickers that Delano confronts, who, sitting face to face, guard the poop as the secretaries do "the

door of Darkness." [One other motif should be gained from this passage, and this is the idea that Marlow feels better in the outer office than in the inner; he feels better outside the carcass than in Fresleven's shoes. [The way he described the characters in the outer room is significant of this, e.g., he responds only to their superficial traits. To go into detail about the secretaries would remove what Haugh calls the "surface truths."<sup>3</sup> It is these truths that Marlow wants to shed; and the farther he goes into the jungle, the more he loses them. Marlow's dilemma is his knowledge that the surface truths are much safer than those that are beneath the surface, yet he feels compelled to go beneath it.

One should now be familiar with the dominant motifs, symbols, and structures that Conrad will employ to project the reader into the narration, into the heart of darkness. Mention has been made of the carcass symbolism, the exterior-interior motif, the color which usually functions negatively, and of the structure or use of the language. [James Guetti points out how the structure of the language supports the exterior-interior motif:

Language has meaning, in "Heart of Darkness," in terms of the exteriors of experience--the coast of a wilderness, the surface of a river, a man's appearance and his voice--and this meaning can exist as a reality so long as one remains ignorant, deliberately or otherwise, of all that lies beyond these exteriors, of what language cannot penetrate. For with the intimation that there is something beyond the verbal and, indeed, the intellectual capacities comes the realization that language is fiction. And if we desire to discover a reality greater than that of words, we are confronted

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<sup>3</sup>Robert F. Haugh, Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design (Norman, 1957).

not with the truth within, but with the real disparity between the gimmickry of the human mind and this truth. Because Marlow wishes to know more than surfaces, the reality of surfaces is destroyed. His knowledge of reality may now exist only as his knowledge of the unbridgeable separation between the world of man's disciplined imagination and that something or nothing to which this world is assumed to relate.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, Marlow like the reader must in his journey look beyond the surface of reality in the "black face" of another of a darker reality, in order to know the truth. Marlow fears, like the reader, that he will not have enough epistemological powers to open the door which, ironically enough, stands "ponderously ajar." The horror is that upon confrontation with the truth one will not be able to recognize it.

It is in the carcass imagery, however, that one should look for Conrad's true meaning; for all other aspects of Conrad's techniques are embodied herein, and they are repeated again and again until the reader, like Marlow, is charmed "as a snake would a bird--a silly little bird." Haugh comments that this technique makes "Heart of Darkness" an "epiphany" story. The term which as used here is more Freudian than Christian, simply "describes the use of successive images in a non-causal, and non-dramatic relationship; rather in a free associational appearance."<sup>5</sup> The agent for the epiphanies in "Heart of Darkness" which produces or supports the structure is, as Haugh points out, Marlow. It is through his eyes that we see them. Instead of this term, however, which could become confusing, I prefer to say simply that Conrad affords the reader and

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<sup>4</sup>"Heart of Darkness' and The Failure of the Imagination," Sewanee Review, LXXIII, 1965, pp. 500-501.

<sup>5</sup>Haugh, p. 39.



Marlow clues that draw the reader farther into the narration and causes the "situation to move and grow."

The idea of the exterior-interior motif is contrived by the doctor whom Marlow must visit before beginning the journey. The doctor wants to measure Marlow's head. Marlow agrees and then asks the doctor whether he measures them when the explorers come back. The doctor replies that he never sees them "and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know" (HD, 58). Marlow then departs to visit his "excellent aunt," but not before the doctor gives him a final warning--"Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun...In the tropics one must before everything keep calm--He lifted a warning finger....'Du Calme, du calme Adieu.'" The reader, therefore, like Marlow, is confronted with the idea of restraint, and the idea of restraint is present throughout the story. One of Marlow's tests is his ability or inability to be so restrained. When Marlow visits his aunt, he makes desparaging remarks about the company. He receives from her a "surface answer" upon which Marlow comments:

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

(HD, 59)

Though Marlow can detect the contradictions, the rationalizations in this surface world, he hesitates to go beneath the surface; and like Delano, he feels like an "imposter." Then as he begins to leave the shore, the colors, again as in the company office, work an hypnotic

spell on him, through which he reveals the surface meaning. He notes the "edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black," then the "white surf," the "blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist"; the "fierce sun" (HD, 60). One can note the "trance" motif as Marlow, somewhat in random fashion in relating the events slowly loses contact with the coast, for "every day the coast looked the same," and finally with the passengers: "these men with whom I had no point of contact...." The inability to associate with anything distresses Marlow; he feels as though these things "seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion." His once-in-a-while contact with reality is a boat from shore "paddled by black fellows." Marlow's response to the Negroes is very similar to the nostalgic response Delano had. Marlow feels that the Negroes are "a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts..." (HD, 61). The two responses have much different meanings, however. Whereas Delano's response is a romantic stereotype, Marlow's response is the result of apprehension when facing the truth. The illusion does not last long, however; for just as Marlow thinks that he is confronted with straight facts, a somewhat symbolic "man-of-war" scares the illusive feeling away. The external emptiness cannot be depicted more clearly than in the description of the action:

"In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech--and nothing happened. Nothing could happen."

(HD, 61-62)

But for Marlow something must happen if he is to solve the secret of the darkness. Marlow is again intrigued by the formless coast, and the "vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me" until "It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares." Marlow's one personal contact on the voyage to the Company's station is the captain of the "sea-going steamer," a Swede. He confirms the doctor's warning to Marlow by stating that a man had "hanged himself on the road" probably from too much sun. And then as Marlow reaches the station, Conrad again notes the colors and the absence of them--"a lot of people, mostly black and naked," the river, and again the "blinding sunlight" that "drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare" (HD, 62-63). However, instead of the hallucinatory trance following this symbolism, Marlow is shocked by the carcass imagery:

"I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal."

(HD, 63)

The carcass imagery becomes even more significant as Marlow progresses up the hill but hears "a slight clinking" which makes him turn his head, and he notices six black men in a file "toiling up the path." They "rhythmically clink" and are not at all unlike the six hatchet-polishers that Delano encounters. Then Marlow notes that "I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them...." Then as he notes the guard who is in charge of "this raw matter" wearing "a uniform jacket with one button

off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity" (HD, 64-65), the reader becomes aware that this "raw material" with its "by-product of a guard" are indeed walking carcasses and that it is inside these carcasses, similar to his own, that Marlow must walk if he is to find the truth.

One should now be able to determine the pattern that Conrad uses in the structure of "Heart of Darkness." There is a vacillation between color, hallucinatory, and symbolic motifs and patterns that constitute the structure, and this structure, by creating an emotional response, pulls the reader deeper into the narration, thus developing a technique which Conrad varies at will. These variations are important, however, for at times they are unexpected, and it is these unexpected variations that take Marlow from the exterior to the interior, and thus give rise to occult feelings of fear and horror. Marlow confronts one variation as he symbolically "descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen," and within this variation he is made aware of the ambiguity of the occultism of reality; from this ambiguity comes fear.

"I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don't know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn't one that was not broken. It was a wanton smash-up. At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within that it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound--as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible."

(HD, 65-66)



Then like the rushing noise of the rapids, all the symbols combine with Marlow's fear and increase it to horror. And though he avoided the artificial hole, he has unknowingly descended into one even more real and more horrifying. He notes the black shadows of disease and starvation; then he picks up the colors as the unfathomable coast is brought to mind; and then glancing down he confronts for the first time the "black face" of his horror as he sees a "face near my hand."

The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly."

(HD, 66)

Marlow attempts to communicate with this "key" to the inner truth, but he is unable to. He notices "a bit of white worsted" around the black's neck, and like Delano who sees the jewel on the young sailor's kerchief, Marlow also sees a "glint of reality and nothing else":

"Where did he get it? Was it a badge--an ornament--a charm--a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas."

(HD, 67)

As Marlow stares now "horror struck" at this and other phantoms, they "stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner." Marlow runs out in haste, unable now to accept reality, straight into a vision, a visionary world; "a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up .... high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots" (HD, 67). This vision is the accountant, and note that it is a "blind amoral force," such as Babo

represented, which drives Marlow to him. The difference is that one force is active, the other passive.

The accountant is important to the structure of the story in that he first mentions Kurtz--"a very remarkable person, to Marlow." And from the moment Marlow is given a little information about Kurtz, he is intrigued. The accountant is also the personification of the man-of-war, methodically making entries; yet the accountant is possible worse, for he can see the so-called "enemy," and still he persists in not recognizing it. He is an intelligent Delano. And Marlow is so appalled at the inhumanity of the man that upon leaving this temporary station his mind is clouded by the symbols in which the carcass imagery prevails--the "still tree-tops of the grove of death," the "...paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut," and "now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side," and finally "the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on"--killed by "a white man in an unbuttoned uniform" (HD, 70-71).

One can note from these impressions how skillfully Conrad draws the reader into the narration. In a series of "epiphanies" he plays the theme over again and again and different variants of it. And since the dominant symbol--the carcass--has symbolic meaning for both the countryside and the people, the reader knows that only deep within the nucleus of both will he find the truth. His fear is that the inside may be as

hollow as the outside, for as evidenced above Conrad is skillful in giving the external features and at the same time commenting on the internal chaos.]

As Marlow proceeds on his journey and confronts the manager of the company station, his responses are not unlike Delano's as he confronts Don Benito. The manager "inspired uneasiness, ... he had no genius for organizing... he allowed his 'boy'--an overfed young negro from the coast--to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence"; and Marlow, like Delano, has ambivalent feelings about the manager. Once he thinks him great, the next a chattering idiot--and Marlow cannot understand "what could control such a man" (HD, 73-74).

[B] The manager is important in the story for several reasons. First, he again introduces Marlow to Kurtz. And it is at this stage that Kurtz becomes almost a myth. All the manager can say about him, all that the accountant--the first to introduce Kurtz to Marlow--could say is that Kurtz is "an exceptional man." No wonder Marlow is at this point getting confused and depressed. Second, and most important, the manager is significant because he affords the occasion for the occult in the story. He is the one who provides the mystery that pushes both the reader and Marlow into the heart of darkness. And all along in the background of this perpetuation is the motivating corpse, and it achieves an ambiguity; for at the station Marlow confronts not blacks but whites with "long staves in their hands"--the grass sticking through the ribs of the carcass like a "lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence." And as in comment on the white corpses, Marlow hears the word "ivory" which "rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse" (HD, 76). ] I

"By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion."

(HD, 76)

Marlow again experiences the occult when walking behind the manager and "a first-class agent" he "heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take advantage of this unfortunate accident'" (HD, 77). Then as he is approached by the agent, and as he thinks back on the black and white carcasses, Marlow feels that there is something unreal about the station--"as unreal as everything else--as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work." These feelings are then fused as Marlow in parrying the agent's questions notices "a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre--almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister" (HD, 78-79). The tempo leading up to this revelation by Marlow is such to enchant the reader; and indeed Conrad so thoroughly integrates the two that it seems as though the "structure," like Delano's negroes, is "set to some tune." The staves become the lighted torch, and its uselessness is discerned when one notes that the woman is blind; thus are the whites with staves, and the blacks with weapons, and the reader knows that Marlow must look into this sinister face and remove the blindfold if he is to know the truth. The fear is that he will not be able to. The horror is that if he does her eyes will be closed. . . . .

One cannot help but ask, however--why a woman? Does she function as simply one of the two women in Kurtz's life? Structurally, she is,

but symbolically I think she is much more. I think she represents a blinded-love, a passion that man is unable to overcome. As has been pointed out, there is a sort of madness that overcomes the men when they go to these regions. A madness for wealth coupled with a passion for raw nature which consumes them makes them impotent and thus unable to fulfill their desires, because they are a trap to the passion. One only need to recall the "long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; as the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts," or note how one would go "pop...a small flame would dart and vanish...a big projectile would give a feeble screech and nothing happened," to discern the impotency of man's passion in this heart of darkness. Like the big guns, man is full of power, but in the untamed regions of the jungle, and in the arms of primitive woman, man's passion is perhaps even less than a "small flame"--more likely a smoldering heat which the woman smothers. And when one realizes that the guns have become the weapons of the blacks, and finally the staves of the whites, which Marlow might "verily believe they took...to bed with them" (HD, 80), the theme of impotency is confirmed, as symbolized by the woman who carries her own torch--the men hidden in the background. The woman's role in the story, though subtle and subdued, should not be overlooked. A woman is the last person Marlow confronts before beginning the journey and the last one he encounters in the story after the journey, and it is only through the first one that he gets the job. And as one progresses in the story and notes the role of Kurtz with "The Intended"--and the non-intended, the role of the woman and the truth of man's, universal man's impotency is revealed. This idea will come to light as we follow Marlow after he confronted the painting.

The dominant imagery is again picked up as Marlow hauls up his sunken steamer—"hailed up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal" (HD, 81). Then as Marlow stands outside the great "immensity," the agent jabbering in one ear, the menacing silence in another, he wonders if he will be able to understand, to know the "Kurtz" inside. Marlow realizes as he continues to work on his steamer that he can find the reality of Kurtz only by acknowledging the reality of himself:

"I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work,--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means."

(HD, 85)

The reader can only note the irony in the statement, for he knows that at present Marlow does know "what it really means." In a series of symbolic instances--the invasion of caravans--the overheard conversation of the manager and an older man who "seemed to be tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade"--Marlow finally arrives at the bank below Kurtz's station. It is here in going up the river that "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (HD, 92), that Marlow attempts to confront reality and here that he confronts his surface reality.

"When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality--the reality, I tell you--fades. The inner truth is hidden--luckily."

(HD, 93)

This idea puts Marlow in his dilemma. It is somewhat of a paradox because one must deal with the surface--the "sly old snags," the hippos



and the alligators, if one is ever able to get to the heart--to what is beneath the surface. Marlow's fear is that in dealing with surface reality one loses touch with the inner reality; and when the surface is peeled away, the inner reality has no meaning; thus it is as another surface. And as Marlow struggles with the surface, as he "penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness," he felt as a "blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road." (The staves now become trees, "millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high," forming a massive "carcass" in which man "like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico" became lost and afraid" (HD, 94-95). Marlow was afraid not because of the suddenness with which he sometimes happened upon whole villages buried in this jungle; his fear and indeed his thrill was

the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you--you so remote from the night of first ages--could comprehend.

(HD, 96)

It is Don Benito's downfall that he was not man enough. It may be Marlow's tragedy that he is too man enough.

As he approaches the Inner Station from fifty miles below, Marlow again picks up the occult and is drawn further in the darkness by a note found on a stack of firewood which beckons him to "Hurry Up--Approach Cautiously." No comment need be made on the irony and paradox implied. As a testament to Marlow's confusion is the trance which follows; and he comes out of it only "dimly aware." "When I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was

shouting at me from the river-side." Marlow is drawn deeper into the wilderness, and he can no longer hold to surface existences. He would pick out a tree to measure progress, but "lost it invariably before we got abreast" (HD, 100). And then as Marlow pulled up in mid-stream eight miles from the Inner Station, he is warned about the hazards of trying to know what is within oneself, of what is within man. All the symbols and motifs are joined in the description of what Marlow first saw, and then what he did not see. "Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf." Marlow is amazed and is deafened by the silence, and "then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well" (HD, 101). Then instead of the morning sun providing the light with which to proceed, there is only a white fog. Conrad's description is significant:

It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid. At eight or nine, perhaps, it lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of sun hanging over it--all perfectly still--and then the white shutter came down again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves.

(HD, 101)

The colors are now only a combination of black and white--grays--and it symbolizes Marlow's fear of not being able to get through the black night or the white morning to get to the truth. Even the trees--the outside world--seem to take on the quality of Marlow as the sun hangs over them.

The living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth might have been changed into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest leaf. It was not sleep--it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance (italics mine).

(HD, 101)

The surface of reality no longer exists, and Marlow's fears are echoed in the mysterious screams which "soared slowly in the opaque air"; the sudden silence which follows is even more horrifying. Marlow now stands alone: "The rest of the world was nowhere, ... gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind" (HD, 102).

Marlow's reassessment is noted as he takes a second look at his passengers and crew, the whites "greatly discomposed," the others "essentially quiet" (HD, 103). And then as he notes that these cannibals had not had much to eat in the past month, and yet they practiced restraint, Marlow is amazed; he is again shocked by the humanity of them. And as Marlow is confronted with this fact that was facing him--"the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma," with the possibility that he will not ever be able to solve this enigma, he has a death wish not unlike Delano's and Don Benito's.

"I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest --not because it occurred to me I might be eaten by them before very long, though I own to you that just then I perceived--in a new light, as it were--how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so--what shall I say?--so--unappetizing: a touch of fantastic vanity which fitted well with the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time."

(HD, 104-105)

It is important to speak somewhat of the dream pattern that exists that Marlow is enveloped in. The structure of the story supports the idea of the dream pattern, in that there is a vacillation between light and dark, real and unreal, and most important of all, in the realization that Marlow's most serious confrontations occur, not after, but in this maze pattern. As Marlow approaches the maze he has fear; when he is

fully immersed in it, he experiences horror. He meets the doctor as in a daze, after being afraid in the inner office, then is horrified in the outer one. He meets the accountant "seemingly in a vision" after the fear in the "grave pit"; afterward he is horrified by the inhumanity of the accountant. He meets himself in the dream-like pattern after being frightened by the immensity and stone-like presence of the trees; then he is horrified by the screams. And the key to this dream, the pulsating force that drives him on and on, is the winding river, the unfathomable river that goes deeper and deeper into the unknown wilderness. And then it is ironic that just as Marlow begins to know the real, just as he begins to recognize the humanity of the blacks, he loses one--his helmsman.

"Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool....The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane."

(HD, 111-112)

It is as though Marlow in wishing for his own death is oddly enough wishing for the death of the helmsman. But the carcass symbolism has a very definite meaning now. And as Marlow stands with his feet which "felt so very warm and wet" from the helmsman's blood, the reader comes to realize that the carcass has life; but ironically enough, the more we come to know it, and the more we come to grips with it, then the more life we take away from it. This is the reader's fear. Marlow's fear is

that with this death "Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time" (HD, 113). Then Marlow, while throwing his wet shoes overboard, experiences remorse, because now he will not be able to hear Kurtz. It is at this point that I think Conrad's symbolism is weakest. It almost seems contrived. I will grant that Marlow has only heard about Kurtz and thus would, possibly due to some need brought on by the death of Kurtz, want to hear Kurtz speak; but the idea appears too suddenly. It is quite possible that Kurtz could serve as a "Father Confessor," but the religious aspect is not too dominant in the story. I think, and most critics have not dealt with this problem, that a more logical explanation would be the irony involved. Marlow can only know the heart of Kurtz, and thus the heart of darkness, by listening to Kurtz speak; but ironically enough, he still will not know, for he, like Kurtz, must live in the darkness, walk in the darkness in order to know. Marlow thus by throwing away his shoes will not be able to know as does Kurtz. And I think this idea is supported by the most significant and ambiguous dream pattern in the story--when he meets the Russian.

"His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow,--patches on the back, patches on the front, patches on elbows, on knees; coloured binding around his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done."

(HD, 122)

One should note that just prior to this description Marlow sights another carcass symbolism--"A long decaying building on the summit...large holes in the peaked roof" and near the house "half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with

round carved balls" (HD, 121). The description of the Russians clothes is not unlike the description of Benito's clothes and his Spanish flag, but much more importantly it is like the description of the map in the Company's office. If Marlow, unlike Delano, can see the colors for what they are--surface coatings of a deepening underlying meaning--he has a chance to know the secret of the darkness. The decaying building, however, is an ominous note that Marlow will be unable to "peel" back this coating.

The Russian plays a unique role in the story. He is Marlow's final introduction to Kurtz. With his bright clothes and youthful appearance, he seems a misfit in the wilderness. And ironically enough, it is in him that all the other symbols are embodied. It is possible that he is the only one in the story who will be able to know the truth. He does the talking, not Kurtz. He has the undying faith in Kurtz even though he knows him for the sick person he is. And it is to him that Kurtz has spoken more to and more about. They have talked about "things" and about "love." He saw things that Marlow will never be able to see, for as Marlow now takes a second look at the land "...never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness" (HD, 127). And Marlow, not knowing why, "was seduced into something like admiration--like envy" (HD, 126), at the Russian's knowledge of Kurtz. His seduction is much more than envy of the Russian; it is an acceptance of the heads on the staves that he thought were made of wood.

"I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being



something that had a right to exist--obviously--in the sunshine." (HD, 132)

The Russian then would be the key to Marlow's knowing the truth, for the "pure uncomplicated savagery" is the one thing that Marlow can understand, and to which the Russian in his pure innocence can lead him. Marlow's dilemma is such that anything unclouded is acceptable. It is his fear that this will be the only thing that any man can know in a world of "utter solitude without a policeman--by the way of silence--utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion" (HD, 116). What then does uninhibited man do? He becomes savage; he becomes knowledgeable, but his knowledge results in brutal death. And as a "key" to the knowledge, the Russian adds to Marlow's dilemma; for after opening the door to the darkness, he leaves, his bright red pocket bulging with cartridges, the other one (dark blue) stuffed with a diary, Marlow's old shoes tucked under his arm, and disappears into the night. Marlow is so amazed that he still is not sure he has seen the man; he wonders "whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon" (HD, 140).

Marlow does meet such a phenomenon in Kurtz who himself is the personification of the voiceless warning, for as Marlow looks out over the plain at the heads, a group of men appeared "as though they had come up from the ground." Among them is Kurtz. As Marlow looks through his glasses, he remarks:

"I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks."

(HD, 133-134)

Then as Marlow notes the "bones of his arm waving," he again remarks: "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" (HD, 134). The truly "live carcass" is more horrifying than the dead one. And though the voice within is very deep and strong, the reader now knows that Marlow will not hear it, and even when he does he will not be able to understand.

Marlow is thus somewhat like Delano, for Delano cannot apprehend the decay behind the canvas on the stern of the ship. As symbolized by the canvas, Delano is shielded from the decaying world; Marlow is able to see the decayed world, but he cannot decipher the meaning. And it should be noted that both characters take second looks. When Delano takes second looks, he, through rationalization, is satisfied, but his satisfaction is false. He is at peace, the reader is in fear. When Marlow takes the second look at his world, he can see the meaning, but he cannot understand. His fear is his inability to get rid of surfaces; the reader's fear is that he will. And all of this comes about because Marlow has been cautioned to keep calm. He has restraint, and it is a restraint in Marlow's dream pattern that causes him anxiety and fear. As Ridley points out:

Indeed, throughout "Heart of Darkness" evil, for white man and for black, is lack of restraint; not apathy or passivity, and not temptation itself, but the succumbing thereto....The helmsman, who brings his own death, is explicitly akin to Kurtz, "He had no restraint, no restraint--just like Kurtz--a tree swayed by the wind"; and like Kurtz, at the moment of death he seems to see into the horror of his condition.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Ridley, pp. 46-47.

Then Ridley goes on to point out the following: "That lack of restraint arises from the lack of an inner core of faith emerges from Conrad's continual linking of evil with hollowness and of goodness with devotion to or belief in something."<sup>7</sup> I agree with Ridley to a point, but I do not agree with his idea that "In 'Heart of Darkness,' when the restraints of civilization are gone, work can constitute a saving grace."<sup>8</sup> I do not see any saving grace in the story. The fear and horror as Marlow so eloquently expressed is that when the restraints of civilization are gone, one will be in a "nightmare." Thus the world with restraints, and the world without restraints present at most "a choice of nightmares" (HD, 138). Marlow feels linked with Kurtz, who is "forever buried," and also linked with the wilderness which presents "a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets" (HD, 138). But his horror is not yet complete. This horror is a physical horror. Marlow has yet to face the moral horror. And as the following passage will point out, it is when Marlow experiences this moral horror that the death wish becomes complete. Marlow has finally talked Kurtz into going back with him, into taking the return trip. Kurtz is now on the steamer, and after the crew has had its "fun" shooting at the natives, all is quiet; it is night. Marlow goes to check on Kurtz and finds him gone.

Upon finding out that Kurtz has disappeared from the steamer, Marlow remarks:

"I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

first--the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was--how shall I define it?--the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm."

(HD, 141)

Marlow is confronted with this horror within himself but also with the horror of Kurtz. The reader notes one man, Marlow, who has experienced both physical and moral horror, and who is now so intrigued with the thought of death that he no longer fears the darkness. He is confronting another man, Kurtz, who has lost all morals, all fears of pain and death. Marlow's greatest horror is that he cannot appeal to Kurtz "in the name of anything high or low" (HD, 144). Obviously in such a situation "with no policeman available," only brute force wins out and Marlow feels inadequate even in this respect; for as he debates with Kurtz to return, he threatens to throttle him, but "there was not a stick or stone near"; and the true irony of the situation is that even the thought of a throttle poses no threat, for Kurtz has no fear. Marlow contributes to his own downfall; he brings Kurtz back to the steamer. And as they go back to the boat, they both struggle within themselves and become as one. Marlow has made a choice. He has chosen the nightmare of Kurtz. As he points out later in the symbolic journey back upstream--"It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land invaded

by these men and greedy phantoms" (HD, 147). With this choice, Marlow chooses his surface realities. He "lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spannings, hammers, ratchet-drills--things I abominate....I tended the little forge....I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap..." (HD, 149). He now no longer has time for Kurtz; he no longer has time to look into reality; he must go about the business of getting the ship back to homebase. However, as Marlow pilots the ship down to the sea, Kurtz's life is running out swiftly; and Marlow's life slowly reverts back to its original one. But what about the reader now? Does he still identify with Marlow? Can he detect any moral awareness that Marlow is now aware of? There may be some awareness, but I do not think it is enough for the reader. Marlow's unwillingness to pacify Kurtz in his last few hours has more to do than with surface realities. He is too busy! The unwillingness also underscores his lack of desire to confront what is behind the mask, what is behind the horror. He can no longer look for the heart. He can no longer search for the truth. And thus it is no accident that the carcass symbol does not appear on the return trip. There is no need now for symbols. The reality--the carcass--is on board, but Marlow loses his chance to understand it.

Kurtz in his loneliness, in his despair, just prior to his death "cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath--'The horror! The horror!'" Marlow immediately withdraws and is silent, for he thinks he understands the meaning of this saying. But the ambiguity in the story is that Marlow will never truly understand because he "had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot," whereas Kurtz "had stepped over the edge" (HD, 151). Marlow can only understand that Kurtz had summed up "all the hearts that beat in the darkness." He cannot know

what the summary is. ] The answer to the questions above, therefore, is that the reader can no longer identify with Marlow, and what is worse, I think, is that Conrad leaves the reader in the wilderness. He is unable to accept Marlow's coldness as the ("pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole") (HD, 150). And symbolic of Marlow's inability to comprehend completely is the "return of the grayness," of the combination of colors that form a shield which Marlow in his shallowness cannot penetrate. I think Marlow grows, but his growth is simply an acceptance and an understanding of the shallowness; for Marlow is never able to rid himself of the delusions, of the dreams. And this idea is the story's greatness! As Levine says: "The power of Heart of Darkness, which some critics fail to find, rests not in the clarity of its symbols but in their obscurity, not in the light they shed but in the shadows they cast."<sup>9</sup> ] And though, as Levine points out, Marlow is in the deluded worlds, he cannot recognize it for the good or the bad that it is. Marlow comments, "...it is not my own extremity I remember best--a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things--even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through" (HD, 151). Marlow suggests that he has learned through Kurtz's experiences. And possibly he has, but not to any great depth. This idea can be supported by observing the last scene in the story.

Marlow has decided to return the letters and portrait to Kurtz's supposed Intended. In this scene all the symbols begin to merge. One should note that the external-internal motif is now as one, signified by

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<sup>9</sup>Levine, p. 202.



Marlow's looking out the window. And as he looks out of the glassy panel of her home, he hears only the whispered cry, "The horror! The horror!" The dream pattern is picked up in the description of the Intended: "She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk" (HD, 156-157). As the reader notes these patterns, he begins to suspect that Marlow will not be able to "step over the edge." And as they engage in conversation, seemingly "in tune," but not in accord, Marlow again reaches out; and I think in a way he also has a death wish. It is Marlow who confesses to hearing Kurtz's last word, and this confession prompts the Intended to ask Marlow: "...I want--I want--something--something--to--to live with." Marlow immediately is frightened and morose. He hears the words "in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind" (HD, 161). He is offered one more chance to act alone--to tell the truth about Kurtz's words. Instead, Marlow lies and states that the last word Kurtz said was her name. I am of the opinion, however, that Marlow's answer provides a great deal of irony. The Intended is part of the horror. She is the "policeman," the one who walks on solid ground with sidewalks of cement. Thus, the Intended is part of the surface realities that kept Kurtz and that keeps Marlow from knowing the truth. The fear is that she has survived, while Kurtz has died. She represents Marlow's and Kurtz's downfall--restraint. The horror is that for all her selfishness, her hollowness, she might be a better person than Kurtz. The reader's dilemma goes farther than this. He recognizes that already Marlow has made things "too dark altogether." The narrator again picks up the story; and with Marlow now quiet, indifferent, and "in the pose of a meditating Buddha," the narrator remarks:

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky-- seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

(HD, 162)

With this enveloping line Conrad has fully projected the reader's thoughts and emotions into the narration. The reader's fear is that he, in following Marlow, has simply made a complete circle of emotional experience. His horror is that for all the time it took to make the circular trip, he has just started his search for the truth.

Conrad like Melville is dealing with a universal problem--man's ability and inability to know himself. Leonard F. Dean says: "Essentially the problem is the relation and the disparity between appearance and reality, and hence the nature, the need, and the value of illusion."<sup>10</sup> The illusion has value, however, only as it enables one to cope with the disparity between appearance and reality. At best, from both Marlow's and the reader's points of view, the illusion gives rise to an "inconclusive experience," "inconclusive...in the sense that it is perhaps finally 'impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's experience--that which makes its truth, its meaning'; but also inconclusive...in the more important sense that it embodies a central problem which all men must face and which is therefore never concluded." The problem is never concluded, because, as Marlow says, "the reality fades." Reality can be thought of in two ways:

...the primary reality is the suggested essence of the wilderness, the darkness that must remain hidden

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<sup>10</sup> Dean, "Tragic Patterns in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" CE, VI, p. 100.

if a man is to survive morally, while the secondary reality is a figurative reality like work, an artificial reality by which the truly real is concealed or even replaced.<sup>11</sup>

One can thus discern Marlow's ambivalence about these two realities. He admits that the reality of the second sort is "simply a deluding activity, a fictitious play over the surface of things."<sup>12</sup> He cannot escape this surface fictitiousness. And while he wants to probe into the wilderness, he is convinced by Kurtz's cry that no man can so penetrate the darkness and "survive morally." His end result like Kurtz's will be to "kick loose of the earth, to kick the earth to pieces" and thus "all faiths, any faith" may possess him. Marlow's fear is that he will be unable to "kick loose of the earth"; his horror is that were he able to kick, he might get loose, or even worse, there would be no earth. The reader's fear is that man will be unable to discover the truth; his horror is that even with truth present, at best the world is ambiguous and unfathomable.

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<sup>11</sup> Guetti, p. 494.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### "THE TURN OF THE SCREW"

In "Heart of Darkness" the reader must be careful in critical situations to distinguish between the symbol and its referents--symbolic meaning. In "The Turn of the Screw" the reader must be careful to leave the symbols and symbolic meaning intact. Only in this way will the reader be able to keep the stories distinct, for as has been pointed out previously, there are two separate stories--"a romance which the narrator is spinning, and a reality which we are supposed to divine from what he tells us about what actually happens."<sup>1</sup> It is this divination that holds the key to understanding the stories, both of them. And though what we divine gives rise to occult feelings of fear and horror, we must not lose cognizance of the idea that the divination only resulted, only exists in conjunction with the narrator's tale--a technique which allows James to be in control of the divination. One problem must be dealt with, however, before this structural technique can be adequately examined--the problem of the two major themes concerning this work. Two critical camps exist. One is led by Edmund Wilson in which the ghosts are said to be not true ghosts but projections of the governess's sex-starved imagination. The other philosophy proposed by Robert Heilman is that the apparitions are real and that as Fagin says in support of this

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund Wilson, p. 98.

view, "The governess, the parson's daughter, is a sort of Guardian Angel, hovering protectingly over the two innocent children placed in her charge."<sup>2</sup> Read in the latter manner, "The Turn of the Screw" is simply "an allegory which dramatizes the conflict between good and evil. The apparitions are the personifications of evil."<sup>3</sup> It seems somewhat ironic, however, that as a guardian angel the governess fails. One must, therefore, ask is it because the children were too corrupt to be saved, or is it because the governess is ironically destroying as well as guarding? Whether or not evil works through her is not as important as the fact that the children seemingly desire to be evil in her presence. If one is to solve the mystery, one should read the story with this idea in mind. Then one can determine just who--the children, the governess, or the ghosts--is the source of evil. Perhaps the evil results from the combined efforts of all three. Both Heilman and Fagin feel that too much has been made of the ambiguity of the story. As Heilman states in support of this idea:

Actually most of it is a by-product of James's method: his indirection; his refusal, in his fear of anti-climax, to define the evil; his rigid adherence to point of view; his refusal, amused perhaps?--to break that point of view for a reassuring comment on those uncomfortable characters, the apparitions.<sup>4</sup>

Heilman's fault is that he makes too little of the ambiguity in the story. Whereas in "Benito Cereno" and "Heart of Darkness" with the

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<sup>2</sup>N. Bryllion Fagin, "Another Reading of 'The Turn of the Screw,'" MCN, LVI, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Heilman, p. 441.

reader being detached and fully immersed, respectively, in the narration, and thus from each point of view being aware of the ambiguity in the story, in "The Turn of the Screw" with the reader being both detached and immersed simultaneously, at times he is not even sure if what he sees is ambiguous--it is almost impossible for him to separate the apparent from the real, thus he simply applies a value and hopes that it is the right one. Therefore, the ambiguity plays a very important part, for the fear and horror in "The Turn of the Screw" is determined by the characters and the reader's acceptance and oddly enough the rejection of this ambiguity. To take the ambiguity slightly is to deny the complexity with which the occult fear and horror is structured.

The major argument against Wilson's theory is that the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, is able to identify the valet, Peter Quint, strictly from the governess's description of the ghost she has seen. How then can the ghosts be mere projections? Did not the governess have to see a real ghost in order to give such an explicit description? The only answer has to be that the governess had prior knowledge of Peter Quint. Note that when Mrs. Grose asks the governess whether the ghost was anyone about the place, or anybody from the village, the governess replies, "Nobody--nobody. I didn't tell you, but I made sure" (TS, 189). The only way the governess could have "made sure" would have been to question the members of the household and the inhabitants of the village. It is not inconceivable that she could receive a great deal of information about the master and his household. And if the episode concerning Mrs. Grose's identification is read in this light, then one can see that the governess is actually prodding Mrs. Grose to continue. The governess constantly repeats: "You know him then?...you know him; you do know him.



then? And upon noting, when she mentions that the ghost wears no hat, that Mrs. Grose "found a touch of picture...", the governess "quickly added stroke to stroke" by listing details (TS, 191)! Thus she paints a picture, but it is one that she already knows.

There is really no need to discuss the theories or different views any farther. Regardless of the side one takes, "The Turn of the Screw" is indeed a tale of horror. Therefore, in both views the occult feelings of fear and horror must necessarily arise. If the ghosts are projections of the sex-starved Puritan governess, then the fear is the governess's inability to handle them; the horror is her imposition of these ghosts upon the children. If the ghosts are real, then again by appearing before the governess they chose to work on a weak subject in hopes of triumph. The horror is that for all of the governess's saving grace she will allow the ghost to destroy the children. The reader's fear in both cases is concern for the plight in which the children are found. The horror is his knowledge that the governess with or without real ghosts will be unable to save them. A closer look at the structure will reveal these points.

"The Turn of the Screw" opens with a prologue in which the narrator introduces Douglas, who in turn will relate the governess's story. The prologue serves three important functions. First, it sets the tone of the story--one of occultism. In speaking of the story, Douglas says: "Nobody but me, till now, has ever heard. It's quite too horrible.... It's beyond everything. Nothing at all that I know touches it" (TS, 148). "For sheer terror?" the narrator asks. And Douglas answers "For dreadful--dreadfulness!" Thus in the prologue the seeds of suspicion, terror, and dread are planted in the reader's mind; and throughout

the rest of the story, he will look for things which give rise to these emotions. The prologue in effect prejudices the audience. Marlow's "prologue" in "Heart of Darkness" serves the same purpose, for it forces the reader to accept Marlow's point of view since he identifies with Marlow. There is no prologue in "Benito Cereno," but the gloomy picture that Melville paints prejudices the audience against all he sees. Second, and possibly more important, the prologue "suggests elements which will be found in the narrative itself"--a foreshadowing effectively used in stories just mentioned. "The effect is to give the governess's story something of another dimension."<sup>5</sup> And it is through or because of this dimension that the ambiguity exists. One notes in the prologue her affection toward Douglas, e.g., sending him the manuscript. This information is reinforced for the reader when in the story he notes the governess's feelings for Miles. Douglas has a sister; so does Miles. There are other similarities. The age differences between Douglas and the governess and Miles and the governess are the same. I do not want one to think that Douglas's and Miles's stories are the same. If they were, it, of course, would provide the story with one more turn of the screw. That idea, however, is not as important as the knowledge that the ambiguity does not begin with the governess's tale but with the prologue. The reader, therefore, is immersed in the narration when he notes the similarities and thus the ambiguities in the story. Ironically enough, the reader also experiences a feeling of detachment, for he, like James, "has dissociated himself from the events recorded by the governess" by simply being a part of Douglas's audience. "No one is

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<sup>5</sup>A. W. Thompson, "'The Turn of the Screw': Some Points on the Hallucination Theory," Review of English Literature, VI, No. 4, p. 26.

left on the 'outside' of the story, and the reader is made to feel that he and James are members of the circle around the fire" (TS, 150). As a result, he, like the listeners, sits in judgment of the governess. I think, however, that the prologue serves a third function--to make credible the governess. When asked if the "experience in question had been his own," Douglas replied, "Oh thank God, no!" "And is the record yours?" the narrator asks further. "Nothing but the impression. I took that here'--he tapped his heart. 'I've never lost it'" (TS, 149). Then Douglas seemingly goes into great pains to authenticate the governess:

"She was a most charming person, but she was ten years older than I. She was my sister's governess," he quietly said. "She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she'd have been worthy of any whatever. It was long ago, and this episode was long before. I was at Trinity, and I found her at home on my coming down the second summer I was much there that year--it was a beautiful one; and we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden--talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice."

(TS, 149-150)

Douglas almost overdoes the authentication; and while the reader has no cause to disbelieve Douglas, he is suspicious. The rest of the prologue, while serving to increase the reader's suspicions, allows the narrator to give the background for the story very quickly. We learn that the governess is young and impressionable. Miles's and Flora's guardian is their uncle; the governess succumbs to his charms. We learn that the first governess had died, mysteriously in her youth, and that the governess is in love, but we do not know with whom. Then the reader's suspense is brought to its peak when he learns of the stipulation that the uncle placed on the governess when she took the job:

"That she should never trouble him--but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet all questions herself, receive all moneys from his solicitor, take the whole thing over and let him alone."

(TS, 156)

This stipulation has much more significance than most critics give it, for without the stipulation, there would be no story. When the governess sensed, either rightly or wrongly, that something was wrong, she only had to call in the uncle to correct the difficulties. With this avenue closed, however, the governess must deal with all situations herself. The story, therefore, concerns the manner in which she solves the problems and her reactions to them, the combination of which gives rise to the occult feelings of fear and horror.

When the governess begins her tale, she immediately validates the things said about her in the prologue. She is "too much excited." She is so much impressed by the spaciousness of the house, so impressed by its grandeur, that it "all struck me--like the wonderful appeal of my small charge--as so many things thrown in" (TS, 159). Then as the young girl, Flora, leads the governess through the large house, the governess "...had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales" (TS, 163). Finally, being somewhat ambivalent about the house, somewhat climactically as the governess looks at the "big ugly antique but convenient house" she remarks, "...I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship. Well, I was strangely at the helm" (TS, 163-164)! No one need be a Freudian scholar to detect the fantasy in which the governess is completely enveloped. With no motivation

other than her imagination, the governess has set herself up as the "saving grace" of the lost passengers. In "Benito Cereno," Amaso Arando, now a skeleton, was at the helm; and one can only fear that the governess will be as effective as was he.

Once again, the reader is confronted with the world of the character, but this world, unlike the worlds in "Benito Cereno" and "Heart of Darkness," is a fanciful world--a world that thrives on the imagination. What creates the dilemma both for the governess and the reader is the way in which the imagination causes the governess to probe deeper and deeper into the mystery surrounding the house at Bly; the deeper she probes, the more profound is the fear and horror, for it is through the governess that fear and horror and the occult is discerned.

As Donald P. Costello states:

This double effect of The Turn of the Screw is a product of its structure, which is basically a double one: scenes in which the governess represents the action usually result in horror; scenes in which the governess interprets the action usually result in mystification.<sup>6</sup>

Costello further states:

When the governess reports the phenomena she had observed, the effect on the reader is one of horror--horror at the very reality of the ghosts. When she comments on these observed phenomena, the effect on the reader is one of mystification--mystification concerning the purpose of the ghosts, and, more, concerning the reliability of the governess. She becomes, in James' words, "challengeable."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>"The Structure of 'The Turn of the Screw,'" MCN, LXXII, p. 313.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

As can be noted, while in "Benito Cereno" and "Heart of Darkness" the horror resulted from the ambiguity of the real and the apparent, and seeming and being, in "The Turn of the Screw" the horror is discerned through the ambiguity of representation and interpretation. Although I agree with Costello's delineation, I think the reader is more horrified at the reality the ghosts have for the governess before he is able to accept the reality of the ghosts for himself, which leads to his horror. In other words, the horror is relative to the situations in which the ghosts appear--relative in that the more the governess involves the children in the action the greater is the horror. Second, I think a greater horror exists for the reader. He is unable to tell distinctively at what point the governess's imagination stops and the reality begins. Thus the ghosts appear real sometime and unreal sometime.

The occult in the story, the mystery, begins with a letter from Miles's head-master, enclosed in one from the uncle. The uncle again reinforces the governess's dilemma when he instructs her to "Read him, please; deal with him; but mind you don't report. Not a word. I'm off" (TS, 165). The governess spends another sleepless night; and finally in the morning, she "opened" herself to Mrs. Grose. Actually, this confession establishes a pattern that Costello, among other critics, fails to mention--suspicion or dismay on the part of the governess, confession to Mrs. Grose, and finally reassurance by Mrs. Grose and herself. The pattern is evident primarily in or after five critical scenes: the one just mentioned; her suspicion of Miles's and Flora's desire to deceive her; her disbelief in Miles after his "night out"--(and this time she reassures herself); her fear for the children after the ghosts have been established; and finally, her fear for herself when she is confronted by

Miles about returning to school. In all but one of these incidents she is reassured by the governess. When the governess is reassured, the reader's reaction is fear--fear that the assurance is false; when the governess acts after this reassurance, there is horror--horror at her inability to act effectively. So in connection with the representation and interpretation, there is what Fagin calls an "undercurrent of suggestion and implication."<sup>8</sup> The dialogue between the governess and Mrs. Grose provides this undercurrent. Note the dialogue as the governess confronts Mrs. Grose about the last governess:

"The last governess? She was also young and pretty--almost as young and almost as pretty, Miss, even as you."

"...He seems to like us young and pretty!"

"Oh he did," Mrs. Grose assented: "it was the way he liked every one!" She had no sooner spoken indeed than she caught herself up. "I mean that's his way--the master's."

I was struck. "But of whom did you speak first?"

She looked blank, but she coloured. "Why of him."

"Of the master?"

"Of who else?"

(TS, 169)

As one can readily see, this dialogue implies that the master did like women young and pretty; at the same time, it suggests that indeed Miles or someone else did too. And the implications and suggestions James never solves. He presents them to the reader, who in turn must search for a clue to solve them. It is the reader's misfortune that he is unable to.

Already in just two chapters the reader has reason to question the uncle's, governess's, Miles's, and Mrs. Grose's integrity. Ironically

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<sup>8</sup>MCN, LVI, pp. 196-197.



enough, at this stage Flora is not under suspicion. She is passive and unaccounted for. The fact that Flora is unaccounted for is part of James's skillful technique which revolves around the point of view--the first-person point of view of the governess. Of the three stories mentioned, only in "The Turn of the Screw" is this point of view so effective. In "Benito Cereno," the reader never really enters any of the characters' minds with the result that the story is at one time either Delano's, Babo's, or Don Benito's. The reader is unable to become too involved; instead, he reacts to the exterior horror while the protagonist, Don Benito, experiences an inner horror. In "Heart of Darkness," Marlow is telling the story; but it is not so much his story as it is Kurtz's. And though it is quite ambiguous, and full of the occult, as soon as Kurtz is disposed of the occult begins to diminish and the reader is better able to orient himself to Marlow's actions, though he does not identify with him. But in "The Turn of the Screw," the story is the governess's, and hers alone. And since her point of view is limited, she can only deal with circumstances and people in her immediate presence. Even though she may conjecture as to their whereabouts and actions, she still has the fear of not knowing for sure. Alexander Jones states this idea well when he says:

By allowing the little governess to relate her own experiences, James gives the tale added interest. For the first-person point of view contributes more than the vividness of an eye-witness report: in addition, it produces suspense. As she gradually pieces together the sinister facts, the governess is increasingly horrified by what they suggest; also she realizes in despair that she cannot be in two places at once--with the result that one of her little

charges can serve as decoy while the other slips off to some infernal rendezvous.<sup>9</sup>

The only thing Jones fails to mention is that the suspense and horror is two dimensional. The reader experiences those emotions of the governess and those of himself as well. He asks himself as the governess searches her mind, "Are the ghosts real; are the children actually evil; do they go out to secret and infernal rendezvous?" And unlike Melville in "Benito Cereno," James never does actually satisfy the curiosity of the reader, who, not being satisfied, questions the validity of the governess's assurance in the end which leads to the death of little Miles, and all because her belief in her point of view that Miles is evil and must repent. Thus as Jones states further:

Unlike the third person omniscient narrator who knows exactly what is happening and is therefore obligated to furnish "specifications" the governess can only guess and hope and fear... Thus the story is fundamentally a study in tone--"the tone of suspected and felt trouble... of tragic, yet exquisite mystification." This, then is the "turn of the screw"--the agonizing and steadily increasing pressure of uncertainty, helplessness, and terror.<sup>10</sup>

No doubt can be left that this "uncertainty, helplessness, and terror" are a direct result of the governess's point of view. And since "we can know the children and the apparitions only through the governess, and we can know the governess only through her own words: her observations and actions and conclusions,"<sup>11</sup> the validity of the governess as commentator

<sup>9</sup>"Point of View in 'The Turn of the Screw,'" PMLA, LXXIV, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>11</sup>John Lydenberg, "The Governess Turns the Screws," NCF, XII, p. 41.

--the validity of her point of view--is quite important. The only way to establish such validity is to look at the actions of the governess, and no better place to start exists than when she confronts the ghost of Peter Quint for the first time. Note that the children are "tucked away" and Mrs. Grose is employed in house chores; thus the governess is alone. She is out for a stroll and reminisces that "it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet some one" (TS, 175). Then continuing in her reverie:

"What arrested me on the spot--and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for--was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!--but high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me."

(TS, 175)

Then in her "fright" the governess goes into explicit detail about the tower, which was "one of a pair:"--"architectural absurdities, redeemed...by not being...of a height too pretentious, dating, in their ginger-bread ambiguity--, from a romantic revival..." She goes back to the ghost; realizes that she does not know him--"I had not seen him in Harley Street"--and thus she stares until "he turned away" (TS, 175-176). According to Costello, the reporting of this incident should result in horror to the reader. While one might concede that the governess experiences a tremendous shock, one might also conclude that the horror results from the matter-of-fact manner in which the governess does the reporting of her shock. She neither screams, nor runs, nor faints; she merely stares until the ghost himself turns away. She does not even mention the apparition to Mrs. Grose until she has seen it for a second time. The reader cannot help but realize that the governess is one to

be reckoned with. A look at the governess during this second confrontation will support the idea.

The governess is preparing for a walk to the late church service. She forgot her gloves and "turned in to recover them." As she steps into the room she confronts the apparition again, looking through the window.

The person looking straight in was the person who had already appeared to me. He appeared thus again with I won't say greater distinctness, for that was impossible, but with a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse and made me, as I met him, catch my breath and turn cold.

(TS, 184)

Then in her "cold" state, she recognizes that "he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up." Noticing that the ghost's stare did "fix successively several other things," the governess immediately decides that "He had come for some one else." Gathering herself now with a "sudden vibration of duty and courage," she "bounded straight out of the door again" to confront the ghost, which had vanished (TS, 184-185). She boldly reconstructs the scene for herself, and in doing so frightens Mrs. Grose, who by now has taken her former stand. What follows is the dialogue in which Mrs. Grose identifies the governess's description of the apparition as Peter Quint, the dead valet. In the following chapter, the governess, after going "over and over every feature of what I had seen," decides that the ghost "was looking for little Miles. . . . Heaven forbid! The man. He wants to appear to them" (TS, 194-195).

The governess at this point has apparently collected some damaging evidence in support of the reality of at least one ghost, but each

"revelation" confrontation involved only her and the ghost. She was active while all others in the household, especially Flora, were passive. James skillfully, in presenting the second ghost, makes certain that the governess has a witness, but one that will not see. This witness, ironically enough, is the passive Flora. As the governess and Flora stroll along the edge of the lake, the governess suddenly "became aware that on the side of the Sea of Azof we had an interested spectator." For a moment, she cannot look at it and "with an effort that was already sharp enough, I transferred my eyes straight to little Flora, who, at the moment, was about ten yards away." She watches as Flora with her back now to the lake picks up a "small flat piece of wood which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat." This gesture by Flora gives the governess strength, for as she says: "...I felt I was ready for more." Then I again shifted my eyes--I faced what I had to face" (TS, 201-202). The pattern previously established is again repeated as she goes back to Mrs. Grose for assurance, but this time with an indictment against the children: "They know --it's too monstrous: they know, they know!" Mrs. Grose questions the governess further who in turn relates the incident at the lake. The horror that is the governess's is brought to bear now as the reader recognizes the ambiguous world that she faces. The ambiguity is somewhat paradoxical, however, for just before confronting Mrs. Grose, the governess remarks: "There was no ambiguity in anything; none whatever at least in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes" (TS, 201). But when Mrs. Grose questions

her convictions; the governess answers: "The more I go over it the more I see in it, and the more I see in it the more I fear. I don't know what I don't see, what I don't fear" (TS, 204).

One should note at this point that unlike the physical description that preceded the identification of Peter Quint, there is no such description preceding the identification of the former governess, Miss Jessel. The governess simply remarks that "...I had thought it all out." She becomes more convinced of her reasonings as Mrs. Grose provides her with the intimate details of Miss Jessel's relations with Peter Quint. Thoroughly convinced of the children's complicity with the ghosts, the governess's "power to resist broke down.... 'I don't do it!'...I don't save or shield them! It's far worse than I dreamed. They're lost" (TS, 208)! Her lamentation only lasts a short while, however, and actually she fortifies herself by means of it. She questions Mrs. Grose again and discovers that Miss Jessel and Flora, and Miles and Peter Quint spent several hours together; and although no illicit relations are stated, they are implied. Mrs. Grose attempts to defend the boy when she says, "Surely you don't accuse him"--"Of carrying on an intercourse that he conceals from me? Ah remember that, until further evidence, I now accuse nobody." The governess then continues, "I must just wait."

The following scenes are very important and will be adequately dealt with; but since most of them are variations on the pre-established theme, I think it would be worthwhile to reassess the governess's reliability as commentator, a first-person commentator. As has been pointed out, James showed skill in choosing a first-person narrator, for in this manner he could build up suspense since the protagonist could only be in one place at a time. At the same time, a first-person point of view

should provide a "...sense of credibility"; for is not an eye-witness account usually the most authentic report possible?<sup>12</sup> But this idea is not produced automatically in "The Turn of the Screw," for the authenticity of the reporting depends on "the reliability of the governess' observations."<sup>13</sup> And since, quite obviously, the observations depend on the point of view, nothing but ambiguity could result. To resolve the problem in this manner, however, is to evade the issue. The fact is that the governess does believe in the reality of her observations, both of the ghosts and of the children's responses. So whether the ghosts are real or whether they are projections of the governess's "sex-starved" imagination, the horror and dread that she experiences is real; and while one might put up a good argument that the degree of horror in the first instance is greater than in the second, one must also realize that to speak of degrees of horror is indeed paradoxical and of little value. The question as to whether the governess is a reliable commentator is still left unanswered. John Lydenberg is of the opinion that the governess cannot give worthwhile testimony. He feels that she is "hysterical, compulsive, overly possessive, tense, excitable, nervous, lacking in wisdom, and prone to make faulty judgments." Continuing, he says:

What is happening to the children is what the governess says is happening, and more than that what is happening to them is clearly and terribly, the governess herself....I find myself basically suspicious of her, not of her good will and certainly not of her "firmness," but of her coolness, her judgment, her wisdom, and above all her ability to cope with human beings.

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<sup>12</sup>Jones, p. 118.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.



who as human beings are inevitably a mixture of good and evil.<sup>14</sup>

Lydenberg perhaps presents the key that casts doubt on the reliability of the governess's view. She has a fault similar to Marlow's in that she deals in and believes in absolute evil and good and as long as she can so label something she is free of fear. Thus she does not fear the ghosts, because to her they are absolute evil. Neither is she afraid of her powers, for she considers herself absolutely good. But her fears are expressed in connection with the children. And while some of the fear is what the ghosts might do to the children, an equal amount results from her inability to be positive as to whether the children are evil or good. She is overwhelmed by the beauty of the children, and upon being convinced of their corruption, she considers them evil; and though their beauty now serves as a reminder of their evilness, she is never able to master the affection she feels for them, which Lydenberg feels is actually affection for herself. The inevitable result is for the reader to suspect her; and in suspecting her, he suspects the ghosts. One question, therefore, has to be answered: Does the reliability of the governess as commentator rest on the reality of the ghost? It is only fair that the ghosts be observed from both the Freudian and anti-Freudian points of view before this question can be answered, and before, eventually, the reliability of the governess is established.

A. W. Thompson states:

The two ghosts appear differently to the governess.  
The difference indicates that, if Quint was the

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<sup>14</sup> Lydenberg, p. 41.

product of a repression of which she was unaware and which declared itself with some violence, that of Miss Jessel is in part the result of something quite conscious, the desire for confrontation of her first fears in order to save her reason.<sup>15</sup>

Oscar Cargill also supports the original thesis of Wilson when he states that the governess is suffering from "conversion hysteria," which, in order to exist, must have evolved from two things: "a memory too painful to be retained in the consciousness," and an actual traumatic moment at which the incompatibility forces itself upon the ego with the result that the incompatibility is repressed into the subconscious.<sup>16</sup> Thus, from these points of view, one can discern that the appearance of the ghosts is relative to the needs of the governess. Quite obviously, therefore, the needs of the children are only incidental, and the selfishness of the governess is established. If the children are evil, her selfishness will simply make them more so, for she constantly presents the idea of evil to them. If the children are good, then the governess will corrupt them, for her presence is a continuous evil. Does this same theory hold true if the ghosts are real?

If the ghosts are real, that is, existing independent of the governess's imagination, then they must act on their own impulse. Why, therefore, do the ghosts appear before the governess and only to her? If they desire to corrupt the children, would it not be better to confront them? If one answers that the children are already corrupt,--(one must also note that the thesis is already established by the governess that the children are "to be corrupted")--then if the ghosts seek to

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<sup>15</sup>p. 26.

<sup>16</sup>"Henry James as Freudian Pioneer," Chicago Review, X, pp. 13-29.

corrupt them even further, the same question applies. The answer, quite obviously, is that they seek to corrupt them through the governess.

This answer has special significance for those such as Heilman and Krook<sup>17</sup> who simply see in the story a battle of good versus evil: The evil (ghost) confronts the good (governess) in hopes of "winning her over." The "winning her over" is the eventual corruption of the children; thus she becomes the instrument of the ghost's evil, and the more innocent she is, the better instrument she makes. No value judgment need be placed on the governess. It is enough to the structure and meaning of the story for her to think herself good, and the children corrupt. And what is this corruption? The reader is never sure, but is able to conjecture from the evidence. Mrs. Grose has implied that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel were "both infamous," and that Quint did not only with Miss Jessel but "with them all" whatever he wished (TS, 206-207). Then when the governess convinces herself that Miles and Flora "knew what was between the two wretches" (TS, 214), the basis for corruption is established. In this respect, the corruption has to be in the form of giving some knowledge to the children, more likely sexual, that they would not be able to adequately handle at their age. And since the governess is now an instrument to this corruption, she must bring this sexual experience to mind. Evidence for this idea is seen in the meeting between the governess and Miles in his bedroom. Miles has slipped outside to, from the governess's point of view, meet Quint. She now confronts him with the evidence and Miles states that he did so "just exactly in order that you should do this." "Do what?" she replies. And

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<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 106-134.

Miles answers, "Think me--for a change--bad!" Note the governess's response:

"I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety with which he brought out the word, nor how, on top of it, he bent forward and kissed me. It was practically the end of everything. I met his kiss and I had to make, while I folded him for a minute in my arms, the most stupendous effort not to cry."

(TS, 234)

Thus when the governess fondles the boy, she adds or brings to mind the relation between Miss Jessel and Quint. In respect to the girl, the governess functions as a good "Miss Jessel" reminding her, ironically enough, of the evil one. It is no accident that James never lets the girl see the ghosts. There is no need to, for she sees the real one, has the real "thing" close at hand. Thus, like Marlow (who has his "carcass" on board), Flora grasps more firmly the "surface realities" the closer she gets to the corrupting force, and she, like Marlow, is "saved" by her refusal to acknowledge it. The boy is not so fortunate. He is forced not only to recognize the situation, the corrupting force, but to participate in it. He, in effect, is forced into the role of Peter Quint, and as will be seen later, suffers the same consequence as Quint. Again, thinking of the ghosts as fantasies; if the children are evil, the governess as instrument will make them more so, for she is constantly reminding them of the undesirable relationship between Quint and Miss Jessel, and even more so, between Quint, Miss Jessel, and themselves; if the children are good, then the governess will save them from goodness by ironically making them evil. Thus whether the ghosts are real or unreal, or the children evil or good is of no consequence. What matters is what the governess thinks these things to be; so how can one

definitely establish the reliability of the governess as commentator? The answer, as the reader fears, is that one can never be absolutely sure; one at most can only suspect. The reader is therefore mystified, fully immersed in the occult feelings--"mystification concerning the purpose of the ghosts, and, more, concerning the reliability of the governess,"<sup>18</sup> and James intends for him to remain so.

Since "James so built his tale as to make it both puzzle the reader and to horrify him," and since "both these elements are planted in the very structure of the story," "any interpretation which takes away the ghosts weakens the story's ability to horrify; any interpretation which takes away the reader's uncertainty weakens the story's ability to mystify."<sup>19</sup> As has been stated, the ghosts cannot be "taken away"; they are the governess's. But Costello does suggest one idea that Krook expands, and that is important in understanding the structure of the horror. The fault of most critics of "The Turn of the Screw," like the fault of the governess, is that they attempt to place a definite label of good or evil on the children, unaware of the possibility that a "co-presence of elements exists." Miss Krook explains it:

I believe that what James is seeking to portray in and through them is a prime fact about the moral constitution of young children, which many have recognized but few have grasped with James' fullness and intensity of understanding. This, stated badly, is the coexistence of innocence with corruption in the young child. The corruption takes the form, especially in children of more than average intelligence and imagination, of a knowledge or knowingness, that too evidently--and very strangely--exceeds any they could possibly have derived

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Costello, pp. 312-313.

from their own experience of the world; and because this happens as often as not to be a knowledge of "forbidden" things, disturbing (so it seems) intimate and first-hand, it argues the presence of a corrupt element.

This, it appears, is the principal psychological insight (which is also a moral insight) that James is concerned to dramatize through the children.... The children's innocence is really innocent and their corruption really corrupt--of this James convinces us by his masterly rendering of both; and it is this real indisputable co-presence of elements so grossly incompatible that accounts for the peculiar mystery and horror of the phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

A close look at two of the most trying scenes for the governess will lend support to this "co-presence" of evil and good. The governess has confronted Quint for a third time--this time on the staircase. She has "no terror" of him now, but rather "It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that gave the whole horror, huge as it was, its only note of the unnatural." She again triumphs over the ghost and he turns "into the darkness" (TS, 223). Upon returning to her room, the governess discovers that "Flora's little bed was empty." She panics momentarily; and then upon noticing Flora who being once behind the window blind now "emerged rosily from the other side of it," she contemplates:

She stood there in so much of her candour and so little of her night-gown, with her pink bare feet and the golden glow of her curls. She looked intensely grave, and I never had such a sense of losing an advantage acquired (the thrill of which had just been so prodigious) as on my consciousness that she addressed me with a reproach--"You naughty: where have you been?"

(TS, 224)

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<sup>20</sup>Krook, p. 109.

The governess is immediately put on the defensive, and before she can collect her thoughts she finds herself "arraigned and explaining."

Flora then begins her own explanation: she knew the governess was out and wondered what had become of her; no, she wasn't looking for her "walking in the grounds," but thought that someone was; but "Ah no!" she didn't see anyone (TS, 224-225). Even though the governess "absolutely believed she lied," she could not force herself to challenge the child of the suspected evil: a rendezvous with Miss Jessel. Feeling faint, the governess drops into her chair as Flora gives herself "to be held with the flame of the candle full in the wonderful little face that was still flushed with sleep" (TS, 225). If one accepts the governess's point of view, then Flora did lie and is in this respect corrupt; yet the manner in which she embraces the governess with that "something beautiful that shone out of the blue of her gown" is almost angelic (TS, 225). One can note the governess's dilemma since both "elements" are valid and genuine.

Miles likewise typifies the same ambiguous world, hence the "co-presence of elements." Once again the governess notices Flora "hidden, protected, absorbed," as she looks out the window. She "knows" Flora to be watching the apparition they had seen at the lake; but this time, she likewise suspects Miles of participating in the deception. She attempts to enter his bedroom and she remarks:

I preternaturally listened; I figured to myself what might portentously be; I wondered if his bed were also empty and he also secretly at watch. It was a deep soundless minute, at the end of which my impulse failed. He was quiet; he might be innocent; the risk was hideous; I turned away.

(TS, 228)



The governess does suspect Miles, but his "innocence" overwhelms her. Then as she slips into another room to observe the apparition, she observes "something more"--"a person, diminished by distance, who stood there motionless and as if fascinated, looking up to where I had appeared --looking, that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was apparently above me." To her dismay, she recognizes the figure on the lawn, not what she had "confidently hurried to meet. The presence on the lawn...was poor little Miles himself" (TS, 229). The scene that follows is the one previously related in which she folds Miles in her arms as she questions him in the bedroom, making "the most stupendous effort not to cry." One can note the similar actions of Miles and Flora as they fluctuate between corruption and innocence. The governess's ambiguous world is only doubled.

And the mystery is only heightened from the reader's point of view. As the governess confronts the innocence and evil in the children, the reader experiences the evil in the ghosts, the supposedly innocence in the governess, and the ambiguity of the two elements in the children. So he, like the children, fluctuates between the realities of innocence and corruption; and as with Babo, he is not sure which is the real. This idea is especially significant when one notes the other trying scene for the governess. The governess, with Miles to her side, Flora and Mrs. Grose up ahead, is walking to church one Sunday morning. She has fears as she reconstructs the past events that "Miles' whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom I should have had nothing to say" (TS, 248). Miles suddenly strikes: "'Look here, my dear, you know,' he charmingly said, 'when in the world, please, am I

going back to school?" The governess is so shocked not only at the speech but at the intonations that he "threw off...as if he were tossing roses" that she "stopped as short as if one of the trees of the park had fallen across the road" (TS, 249). As she is unable to speak, Miles continues: "'You know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady always--!'" and then he cuts off his speech. The governess recovers enough to reply: "And always with the same lady?" The dialogue which follows greatly increases the tension: Miles concedes her to be a perfect lady but "...after all I'm a fellow...who's--well, getting on;.... And you can't say I've not been awfully good....Then when am I going back?...Well--I want to see more of life....I want my own sort"

(TS, 249-251). Dorothy Krook interprets the boy's actions as his desire to "be free to communicate as often and as fully as he desires with his evil genius Peter Quint. Here again the horror is in the implied depths of cynical depravity in the boy--that he should be able to put this loathsome plan to the governess with a candor and a self-possession so charming and seemingly guileless."<sup>21</sup> The governess feels that the boy is in effect saying to her: "Either you clear up with my guardian the mystery of this interruption of my studies, or you cease to expect me to lead with you a life that's so unnatural for a boy." The governess feels that "What was so unnatural for the particular boy...was this sudden revelation of a consciousness and a plan". (TS, 254-255).

The reader has still another response. He must ask himself what is the "nameless terror inspired by these passages"?; what is so unnatural about the governess's and the boy's relationship? The "nameless terror"

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-116.

has to be more than the boy's desire to communicate with Quint. As implied in his desire to "see more life," the terror must be Miles's desire for more knowledge of the kind received from Quint's and Miss Jessel's relationship; or even worse from Quint's and Miles's relationship. The horror is Miles's uncanny way of suggesting that he and the governess now have such a relationship. The ambiguity results from the knowledge that all these evil ideas are simply implied; no specific details are given, yet the reader experiences the horror as much as if they were stated. These occult feelings of fear and horror received from the ambiguity of implied evils I feel to be the genius of James's technique; and when one realizes that in addition to the vacillation of the children between the "co-presence of elements" the governess is likewise fluctuating and responding between her observations and interpretations of them, and that the reader being in a position to observe both phenomenon is horrified at the ambiguity of them, then one can discern how complex is the structure of "The Turn of the Screw."

The structural pattern in which the governess is horrified by an incident or observation, she goes to Mrs. Grose for reassurance, and then she reassesses the situation, usually mystifying the reader; and the activeness and passiveness of the characters--the active characters usually supporting the horror, the passive ones the mystification should be considered in the previous scenes. When the governess confronts Miles and Flora individually about their misbehavior, the reported conversation gives rise to horror--the children's complicity in the evils of the ghost; when the governess stands outside the "passive" Miles's door, and later observes the "passive" Flora from behind as she walks to church with Miles, mystification concerning the horror is evidenced.

James; however, goes a step further in this structural web. He creates a scene in which the governess is unable to stick to her pattern.

The governess is very upset after her conversation with Miles. She cannot enter the church, and "For the first minute since his arrival I wanted to get away from him." Like Delano trapped in the long passageway of the ship, like Marlow when he hears the drum beats, the governess panics: "Here was my chance; there was no one to stop me; I could give the whole thing up--turn my back and bolt" (TS, 255). She turns and goes back to the house; and as she stands in her "passageway"--"tormented, in the hall, with difficulties and obstacles," she recalls "...with a revulsion" that it was here she had "seen the spectre of the most horrible of women"--Miss Jessel (TS, 256). Since the governess no longer has Mrs. Grose to reassure her, the reader might suspect that her initial fear will increase. She goes up the stairs into the school-room and is shocked by the presence of the apparition of Miss Jessel. Miss Jessel seems so much at ease that the governess "had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder." The governess then relates the action of Miss Jessel:

She rose, not as if she had heard me, but with an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment, and, within a dozen feet of me, stood there as my vile predecessor.... Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers.

(TS, 257)

This indifference and detachment calls to mind Mrs. Grose's reaction when first confronted by the governess: "Mrs. Grose listened with dumb emotion; she forbore to ask me what this meaning might be....Mrs. Grose

was aware, I could judge, of what she had produced in me, and she followed it up with assurance" (TS, 166-167). The ghost of Miss Jessel, therefore, now occupies the role formerly reserved for Mrs. Grose; and instead of assurance, the governess experiences only despair.

From this point on in the story, the governess no longer goes to Mrs. Grose for assurance either of the rightness of her actions or of the children's innocence. Her conversations with Mrs. Grose are now means of gathering information about the children and of reporting her course of action in relation to them. This switch in her actions is functional in the story; for it gives the governess characteristic dimensions and enables the reader to observe the "active" wrath of the governess. What creates dread in the reader is the knowledge that the governess acts on implied evils rather than specific ones, and in one case she actually lies in order to make her point.

She relates to Mrs. Grose that she came home from church "for a talk with Miss Jessel." "A talk!" Mrs. Grose exclaims, "Do you mean she spoke?" The governess replies, "It came to that. I found her, on my return, in the schoolroom" (TS, 259). The reader is aware that the governess came home because she had "made up my mind to cynical flight," and that Miss Jessel never spoke a word.

One can only wonder exactly as to why the governess bends the facts to her will. The reader gets the answer as he notes the conversation that develops further between the two. The governess has made up her mind "...to sending for their uncle," and, further accepting Miles's idea, telling him of Miles's dismissal from school. When Mrs. Grose demands to know for what reason she will tell the uncle that Miles has been dismissed, the governess replies: "For wickedness. For what else--

when he's so clever and beautiful and perfect? Is he stupid? Is he untidy? Is he infirm? Is he ill-natured? He's exquisite--so it can be only that; and that would open up the whole thing" (TS, 260-261). The reader is now convinced that in the governess's near hysterical state she will do anything to have her way. In this respect she is potentially a tragic character. Unlike Delano who sees a "glint of reality and nothing more," the governess sees an apparent reality and too much more. One cannot necessarily condemn her for acting on implied evils, but when she herself implies evils,--e.g., she states that Miss Jessel told of suffering the torments of the best of the children's companionship--and acts to correct them, then her case does indeed approach tragedy, for the things she says are not true. Thus the reader now faced with the reality of the governess's course of action, yet still fluctuating between the innocence and corruption of the children, is alternately detached from and drawn into the narration. And from this crisis to the end of the story, James so structures this response that the reader, at the end, like Miles is lost.

The end of the story is foreshadowed in the scene immediately following the conversation between Mrs. Grose and the governess. The governess in her "endless obsession" goes again to Miles's bedroom, to confront him about his school. Flora and Mrs. Grose are asleep. The governess begins the conversation by suggesting to Miles that until that morning he had never mentioned anything about school. "You seemed so perfectly to accept the present." Miles's answer to this charge does not satisfy the governess, and she pursues this line of inquiry until she finally has nerve to ask him what happened "Before you came back. And before you went away" (TS, 264, 267). Miles merely repeats the

question, and then the governess goes too far. Dropping on her knees trying to "seize once more the chance of possessing him," she remarks: "I just want you to help me to save you."

The answer to my appeal was instantaneous, but it came in the form of an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in. The boy gave a loud shriek which, lost in the rest of the shock of sound, might have seemed, indistinctly, though I was so close to him, a note either of jubilation or of terror. I jumped to my feet again and was conscious of darkness.

(TS, 267)

The reader cannot help but feel the wrath of the governess overpowering the boy. And still before he can cement this impression in his mind, James casts a cloud of ambiguity over it. The governess remarks that the candle's out--thus the darkness she noticed. And what is Miles's reply? "It was I who blew it, dear" (TS, 267)! The reader, therefore, is still unable to form a valid opinion of Miles. James skillfully reconstructed a similar scene with Flora--the one previously related in which Flora is caught looking out the window. The governess also grabbed Flora "with a spasm that, wonderfully, she submitted to without a cry or a sign of fright" (TS, 277). Recognizing that Flora is possibly the stronger of the two children, one must observe how she responds when she too is confronted by the governess to recognize the past. Does she also "perfectly accept the present?" The reader has his answer after observing the final confrontation between the governess and Flora.

The next day after the conversation with Miles, the governess consents to let Miles play for her. The governess is so charmed by his playing that she forgets about the time and falls asleep at her post. She wakes with the terror that Flora has been absent all that time. She



searches the house but cannot find her. Her immediate response is that Flora is with her--Miss Jessel. With Mrs. Grose, the governess goes to the lake and eventually finds Flora. The governess waits for Flora to speak: "Where are your things....And where's Miles?" The governess replies, "I'll tell you if you'll tell me--...Where my pet, is Miss Jessel" (TS, 277)? When Flora doesn't answer, the governess "seized my colleague's arm. 'She's there, she's there!'....'She's there, you little unhappy thing--there, there, there, and you know it as well as you know me!'" But neither Mrs. Grose nor the child acknowledges the ghost, and Mrs. Grose is so angered that she berates the governess and consoles the child not to heed the governess's accusations:

"She isn't there, little lady, and nobody's there--and you never see nothing, my sweet! How can poor Miss Jessel--when poor Miss Jessel's dead and buried? We know, don't we, love?"--and she appealed, blundering in, to the child. "It's all a mere mistake and a worry and a joke--and we'll go home as fast as we can!"

(TS, 281)

The governess is now in complete dismay, and as Flora petitions Mrs. Grose to "Take me away, take me away--oh take me away from her!", the governess senses defeat:

"If I had ever doubted all my doubt would at present have gone. I've been living with the miserable truth, and now it has only too much closed round me. Of course I've lost you: I've interfered, and you've seen, under her dictation"--with which I faced, over the pool again, our infernal witness--"the easy and perfect way to meet it. I've done my best, but I've lost you. Goodbye."

(TS, 282)

The easy manner in which the governess gives up Flora to the elements, so to speak, is at first hard for the reader to understand, and James

provides no immediate answer. The governess never ceases her duel with the apparitions, so why does she give in to Flora? And since both times that Miss Jessel appears the governess seemingly rids herself of her at will, one can only wonder if the governess at last sees nothing worth saving in Flora. This idea may be supported by the fact that Mrs. Grose eventually "heard"... "from that child--horrors" (TS, 289)! Thus with Mrs. Grose's indictment against Flora, the governess's action might seem justified; but as is typical of James in this story, no one knows for certain.

While the governess has given up Flora, and even consents to the governess taking her away, she has no such intentions toward Miles. And when she realizes through the implication by Mrs. Grose that Miles possibly took a letter she had written to his uncle, she simply becomes more determined to "save him." "I'll get it out of him. He'll meet me. He'll confess. If he confesses he's saved. And if he's saved--" (TS, 292).

One should note that now the governess has neither Mrs. Grose nor the ghost of Miss Jessel as a "springboard" for her actions. She, like Marlow in his search for truth in the darkness, must seek to establish the truth from the heart of Miles. And it is this unknown truth that now gives rise to the mystery in the story. Though Flora and Mrs. Grose being absent from the action serves as a mystifying factor, it is not as strong as the "active" mystifying element that the governess approaches in Miles.

Once alone with Miles, the governess wastes little time in seeking the truth: "Tell me--...if, yesterday afternoon, from the table in the hall, you took, you know, my letter." So overcome is she with Miles's

reaction that she was reduced "to the mere blind movement of getting hold of him, drawing him close and...instinctively keeping him with his back to the window" (TS, 302). Immediately the governess notices Quint who "had come into full view like a sentinel before a prison." The governess's response "in the very horror of the immediate presence" decides to "keep the boy himself unaware" (TS, 303). The boy replies, "Yes--I took it," and though the governess is still aware of the "thing" before the window, she "moans with joy...". Her relation is so great that she pursues her questioning: "What did you take it for?"; "You opened the letter?"; "And you found nothing!"; "So what have you done with it?"; "Is that what you did at school" (TS, 304-305)? Miles, his forehead now "drenched" with perspiration, has no recourse except to answer the barrage of questions, still unaware of the ghost of Peter Quint. Miles relates that in school the things that he said caused his dismissal more than things he took; and though neither the reader nor the governess is given the answer, James has so structured the mystery that one expects the "said things" to be no less horrible than Flora's. The governess is relentless in her pursuit of the truth. She sternly asks, "What were these things?", and in doing so she gives herself away:

My sternness was all for his judge, his executioner; yet it made him avert himself again, and that movement made me, with a single bound and an irrepressible cry, spring straight upon him. For there again, against the glass, as if to blight his confession and stay his answer, was the hideous author of our woe--the white face of damnation. I felt a sick swim at the drop of my victory and all the return of my battle, so that the wildness of my veritable leap only served as a great betrayal. I saw him, from the midst of my act, meet it with a divination, and on the perception that even now he only guessed, and that the window was still to his own eyes free, I let the impulse flame up to convert the climax of his dismay into the very proof of his liberation.

(TS, 308)

The governess shrieked to the apparition, "No more, no more, no more!" Miles asks, "Is she here?", and as the governess recovers from the shock of "she," she strives to show him "the coward horror, there for the last time!" Miles now thoroughly confused looks, but can see nothing. In desperation, he asks, "It's he?" "Whom do you mean by 'he,'" the governess replies. And Miles, profoundly, ambiguously answers, "Peter Quint--you devil" (TS, 308-309)!

I think it is worthwhile to pause at this juncture and comment on the significance of the action just presented, for at no other point in the story is the horror and the mystification so entwined and so ambiguous. James's skill in constructing this scene is noted from the level at which he lets the reader have knowledge of it. The reader, formerly detached because of his inability to accept completely the authenticity of the governess's line of action, is now drawn into the room with Miles in sympathy with the dilemma that he now faces. And as the governess attacks with question upon question, the room gets smaller and smaller until the disparaging mood, like the ghost, "filled the room like the taste of poison" (TS, 309). The reader is placed in the line of vision of Peter Quint and the governess; and although the governess has intentions of keeping Miles unaware of Quint, the reader is aware that with each question the governess is ironically enough pushing him closer and closer to a confrontation.

The ambiguity is so skillfully done that the reader is completely caught up in the mood developed by the governess and Peter Quint: The boy did not take letters; he took "other things"; he did not "steal"; he "said things"; he said things to those he liked who in turn repeated them to those they liked, who reported the "things" to the headmaster (TS, 305-308). He was not expecting to confront a "he," but a "she"--

had Flora been misrepresented?; he looks out the window; but in each instance, he was "bewildered, glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly..." (TS, 309). The reader must then ask himself if "you devil!" applies to the ghost of Quint or to the governess. If he is addressing Peter Quint, then he acknowledges his presence and justifies the governess's actions. But if he is speaking to the governess, then he, like Flora, is also damning her for the evil she has brought to the house. Again, James lets no one know for sure; and as the reader, now overwhelmed by this occult phenomenon, now in the "cuddy" watching the proceedings but unable to speak, watches the governess force Miles to face Peter Quint; he has no need to be optimistic about the outcome:

But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him--it may be imagined with what a passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.

(TS, 309)

Though the ending seems abrupt and "up in the air," the effect it creates is functional and significant. Ignace Feuerlicht says that if James had drawn the story more complete--having the governess comment on Miles's death--he would have "deadened Miles' death."<sup>22</sup> In other words, Feuerlicht is comparing James's story to a painting, a painting which starts a frame but never completes it; thus "his painting looms not only stronger and wider but also becomes more open to different angles of

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<sup>22</sup>"'Erlkonig' and 'The Turn of the Screw,'" Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LVIII, p. 68.

vision."<sup>23</sup> Even more important, the ending so created continues the ambiguity structured in the story. The ambiguity is similar to the one in "Heart of Darkness"--inability to recognize the truth. And when this idea of non-recognition is applied to life and death, the resulting chaos is at best paradoxical; for the governess saved Miles from a "fate worse than death" by giving him a new life--death.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The structures of "Benito Cereno," "Heart of Darkness," and "The Turn of the Screw" form a trilogy in commenting on the occult phenomenon of fear and horror; yet true to the trilogy idea, each comments in different ways. And what is even more important is that each story involves the reader in different ways. From the detachment one encounters in "Benito Cereno," to the immense involvement in "Heart of Darkness," and finally to a combination of the two techniques in "The Turn of the Screw," the reader seems to go through a stage of metamorphosis; but at the end of the development, he simply breaks out of one "cocoon" into a bigger one. Since, however, one is simply dealing in figures of speech which, though appropriate, serve little purpose in defining the occult relationships, it is necessary to state that as the reader digests each story he is confronted with fear and horror from different points of view. To his dilemma, in neither point of view is he successful in controlling his emotional response. The skill with which each author structured his work accounts for this dilemma, for each time the reader believes himself to have mastered a situation, he is either presented another one or the same one from a different point of view.

Captain Delano, after looking at the San Dominick through his point of view, must then observe it through Don Benito's. The reader must look at it through all points of view. Marlow, likewise, looks at the

"darkness" through his vantage point; but a time comes when he must look at it through Kurtz's, and he is unable to. The governess can only see things through her point of view; the reader's dread is that her point of view is not reliable.

The obvious question that one attempts to answer, after examining such stories as these, is whether or not one story gives vent to a greater horror than another. Each writer is dealing with human emotions, and since they cannot be measured or controlled, the degree of horror is unascertainable. It seems to me that the most important element of these stories is to determine if some statement can be made about what creates fear and horror, and what part the occult plays in relation to these feelings. This reader feels that such a statement can be made.

There is not much argument against the thesis that man becomes afraid when he is placed in unnatural surroundings, e.g., Delano, Marlow, and the governess; but these works progress one step further: Man cannot even be certain about the surroundings or the "world" in which he now lives; at best, he comes to realize that it is ambiguous. It is ambiguous because of the mystery--the occult phenomenon that "clouds" it; it is horrible because of the evil forces that go to make it up. And when one has the evils categorized, as did Delano and Marlow, the author presents a situation in which the character and likewise the reader must act using his "certified evil" as a basis for action. In support of this idea is Delano's attempt to subdue Don Benito--the suspected evil, and Marlow's complete misjudgment of Kurtz--a judgment no less wrong than the governess's of the children. Then when one reverses his idea of what is evil, i.e., the "true revelation of Benito," he still is not certain of his decision. He is constantly in a dilemma.



These ideas concerning the dilemma that man faces in his attempt to know the truths in the natural world are not necessarily new, but it is unusual to find them structured differently in three works; and yet the similar feelings emerge. It is as though after Melville, Conrad and James simply wrote variations on the theme; and while the chronology makes this idea possible, the reader thinks it unlikely. The answer must be that man can never really know the truth of the universe, except possibly only for a split second; and even in that second, the values are changing.

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