

But as my response demonstrates, I have come to see the unhappiness of that ending in a more subtle way, a much better way, I think, thanks to Emerson's critique. I am grateful to him.

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The Narrator in *Heart of Darkness*

To the Editor:

Garrett Stewart, in "Lying as Dying in *Heart of Darkness*" (*PMLA*, 95 [1980], 319–31), like the principal critics whose views he summarizes, does not note that the story is delivered to us by an anonymous frame narrator, who not only reports but also responds to Marlow's account of his quest in search of Kurtz. And Stewart ignores the audience—four nonsailors aboard the *Nellie*—to whom Marlow addresses his story. Hence, Stewart finds that Marlow "protests too much in his brooding reiterations" (p. 321) and overlooks Marlow's feeling of alienation from an audience for whom he must underline everything: "Do you see the story? Do you see anything? . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses [apparently home and office], like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher around one corner, a policeman around another. . . . And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded!" Further, in finding Marlow guilty of a "deep-seated racism" (p. 322), Stewart neglects Marlow's marvelous description of the free black oarsmen who had "bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there [as their white exploiters did]. They were a comfort to look at."

Without an adequate methodology for coping with complex "I" narratives, Stewart draws the erroneous conclusion that Marlow is discredited as "a morally reliable narrator" (p. 327). Conrad's internal clue to Marlow's reliability is the frame narrator, who at first distrusted Marlow ("we were fated to hear one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences") but who in the end concurs with, and thus implicitly endorses, Marlow in seeing the Thames leading "into the heart of an immense darkness." Stewart may not like Marlow, but the story does!

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Mr. Stewart replies:

The objections that John Hagopian raises in his first paragraph rest on the kind of exceptions that

prove rules. Without debating the exculpating merits of that bone-and-brawn passage, I imagine a writer as subtle as Conrad would know that even racism that goes deep can have its apparent intermissions. By the same token(ism), even a narrator not quite up to the burden of his tragic task may at times worry that nothing at all (rather than too much) is getting through.

Marlow appears not at all shy about offering himself as failed example (or does he intend himself as heroic sacrifice?) of his own principle that lying is a kind of dying. Though he hammers home this morality long before he tells his listeners about the notorious fib to Kurtz's fiancée, he is of course speaking even early on from the vantage of retrospect. He does not then expect his listeners to have forgotten his reiterated aversion to lies—how could they?—when he later capitulates to a falsehood but, rather, to have come at last to realize with him that there are some truths in themselves too damnable and killing. In what I argued as a concentric sequence of literal and symbolic deaths, the tragic "gift" of Kurtz's last words is slain and buried in the last words Marlow quotes from himself—when he tells the Intended that Kurtz died with her name on his lips (words anticipated earlier, when Marlow announces that "I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie")—and further violated in its grave by the last words Marlow is quoted as saying to the men on ship, explaining that to tell her the truth "would have been too dark—too dark altogether." Framing this sequence by an auditor turned narrator (a nesting of "I" narratives that I did not explicitly look into but certainly did not intend to overlook) confirms the inordinate and immanent darkness rather than the logic of its earlier white-washing by Marlow.

Marlow is out not to deny his own admitted "unreliability," which was a moral issue long before it became a critical one, but to defend it, to justify his strategic dereliction of a tragic charge; the only "internal clue" offered by the dramatized primary narrator exposes the very unreliability of this specious and timid line of reasoning. The "tranquil waterway" of the Thames, in this outer narrator's own last words to us, suddenly "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" from which Marlow's protective deflection of the truth should not be expected in any sense to defend us. Taking issue with what I assume to be the crux of Hagopian's objection, therefore, I would think this conjecture about the "immense darkness" is designed to imply not that the unnamed narrator "concurr[s] with" Marlow—who has not, as Hagopian seems to claim, made this last remark—but rather that our outer narrator immediately recoils from

