

Tracing the narrator: Parenthesis
and point-of-view in Joseph
Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

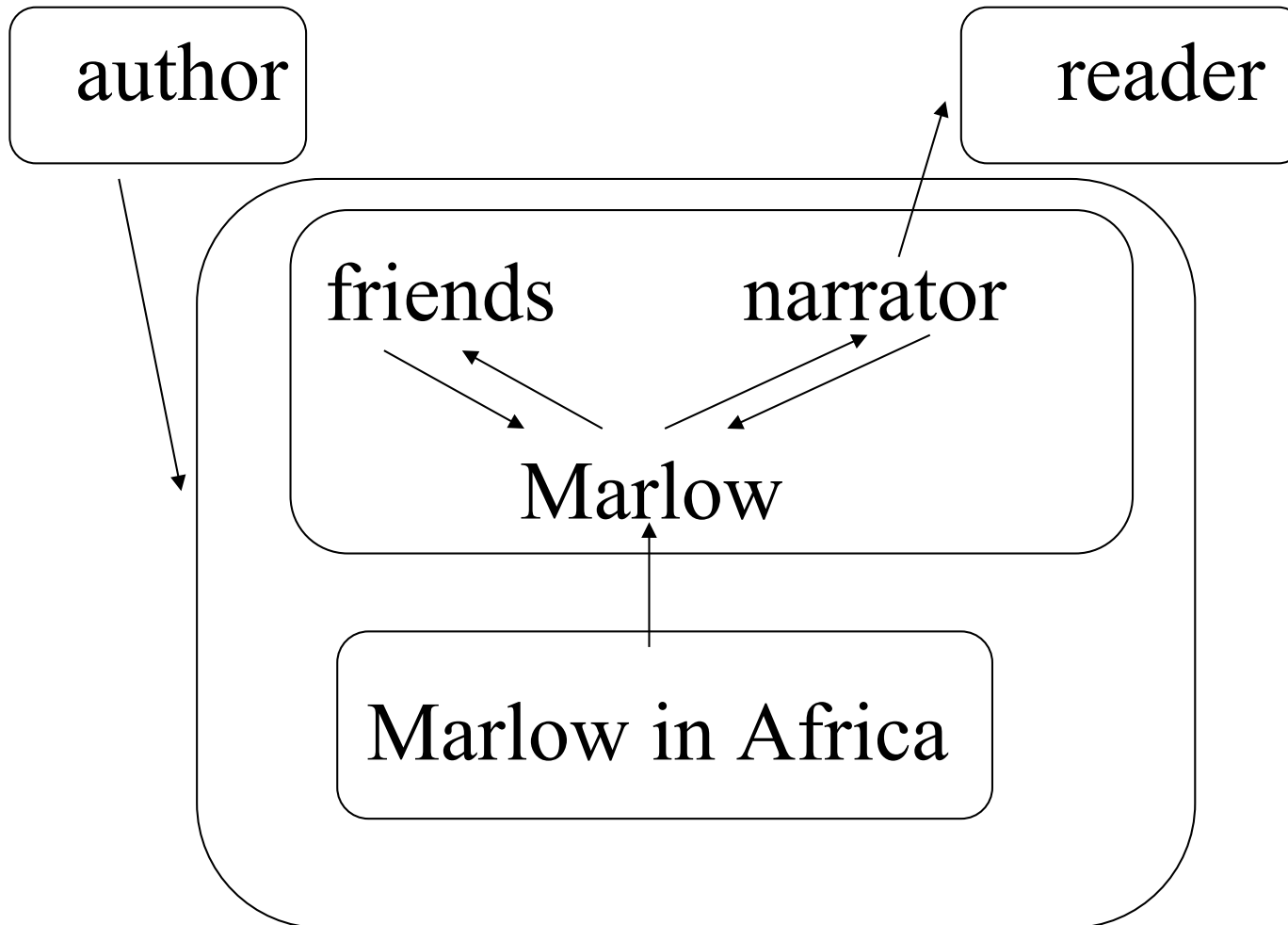
Joseph Conrad

- Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski
- 1857-1924
- *Lord Jim* (1900)
- “An Outpost of Progress” short story
- *Heart of Darkness* (1900)
- see: *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)
- *Nostromo. A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904)
- *The Secret Agent* (1906)
- *Under Western Eyes* (1911)

Heart of Darkness

- river Thames
 - Marlow in Belgium
 - Congo, to the Inner Station
 - Kurtz, the "hollow man" (T.S. Eliot)
 - "The horror! The horror!"
 - "Mistah Kurtz - he dead"
 - Marlow in Belgium
- river Thames

structure of text



textual features

- It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle (**medical comforts**) with the candle stuck in it.
- The retreat, I maintained – **and I was right** – was caused by the screeching of the steam whistle.
- He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. **Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?** It seems to me I am trying to tell you a **dream** – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a **dream** can convey the dream-sensation, [...].

parenthesis

A word, clause, or sentence inserted as an explanation, aside, or afterthought into a passage with which it has not necessarily any grammatical connection, in writing usually marked off by brackets, dashes, or commas; (hence, more generally) an afterthought, an explanatory aside. *OED*

see: digression, hiatus

parenthesis

- parentheses
- dash
- echoes, i.e. repeated words and phrases that frame a digressive passage
- explicit address of the reader
- explicit address of the narrator Marlow
- short questions or answers (one to ten words) + exclamation or question mark

parenthesis

- XXXXX (**XXX**) XXXXX
- XXXXX – **XXX** – XXXXX
- XXXXX – **XXX?** XXXXX
- XXXXX – **XXX!** XXXXX
- XXXXX. **XXX?** XXXXX
- XXXXX. **XXX!** XXXXX
- XXXXX **XXX** XXX ... XXX **XXX** XXXXX

findings

- 38.600 words in 193 paragraphs
- some paragraphs with fewer than ten words, and four with more than 1.000 words; most comprise of 100 to 300 words.
- digression with (parenthesis) 36
- digression with – dash – 166
- thematic digression, no typography 8
- distribution?
- “wrong” findings?
- function?

parenthesis

- textual structure: narrative segments
- interaction narrator/listeners/reader
- process of narration
- meta-fiction: artificiality of literary text
- impression of spoken language
- *dramatic monologue*

dramatic monologue

- single fictional character speaks to audience
- audience silent, has to be deduced (fragments in text)
- critical moment
- speaker reveals inner motives and thoughts without intending to do so
- interaction between speaker and audience
- see: T.S. Eliot
- not a soliloquy but monologue

1 His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow –

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, 5 nineteen hundred years ago – the other day.... Light came out of this river since – **you say Knights?** Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker – may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine – **what** 11 **d'ye call 'em?** – trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries – **a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been, too** – used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here – **the very** 15 **end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina** – and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like.

meta-language

- Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine – **what d'ye call 'em?** – trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; [...].
- He inspired **uneasiness**. That was it! **Uneasiness**. Not a definite mistrust – just **uneasiness** – nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a ... a ... faculty can be.
- [...] and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so – **what shall I say?** – so – unappetizing: [...].

meta-language

- But this must have been before his – **let us say** – nerves, went wrong, [...].
- What made this emotion so overpowering was – **how shall I define it?** – the moral shock I received [...].
- **Rebels!** What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers – and these were **rebels**.

narrator-listener communication

- It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle (**medical comforts**) with the candle stuck in it.
- 'This noxious fool' (**meaning the manager**) 'is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.'
- He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (**he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat**), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest, he said.
- He had been absent for several months – **getting himself adored, I suppose** – and had come down unexpectedly, with the intention to all appearance of making a raid either across the river or down stream.

narrator-listener communication

- The retreat, I maintained – **and I was right** – was caused by the screeching of the steam whistle.
- They had been engaged for six months (**I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time – had no inherited experience to teach them as it were**), and of course [...] it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live.
- I've been telling you what we said – **repeating the phrases we pronounced** – but what's the good?
- He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. **Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?** It seems to me I am trying to tell you a **dream** – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a **dream** can convey the dream-sensation, [...].

Marlow's dramatic monologue

- Light came out of this river since – **you say Knights?** Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain [...].
- His position had come to him – **why?** Perhaps because he was never ill ... He had served three terms of three years out there ... Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself.
- My dear boys, it was no good bothering. **Keep a lookout?** Well, you may guess I watched the fog for the signs of lifting [...].

Marlow's dramatic monologue

- **An appeal to me in this fiendish row – is there?** Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who's that grunting? **You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance?** Well, no – I didn't. **Fine sentiments, you say?** Fine sentiments, be hanged!
- He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. **Ivory?** I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country.

results: parenthesis

- textual structure: narrative segments
- interaction narrator/listeners/reader
- process of narration
- meta-fiction: artificiality of literary text
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conclusion

... the function of this particular type of re-directing perspective as "defamiliarisation". It forms an integral part of the novel's strategy, which constantly undermines any attempts at attributing statements and judgements to a unified point-of-view, at the same time drawing attention to its mode of employing perspective. These occasional glimpses through one or more layers of narrative presentation, each with its own set of values, characteristics and aesthetic norms, reveal to the reader an increasing complexity of distancing on the part of Conrad, who thus manages to direct the reader's attention to fundamental questions of authenticity and reliability in fiction.

(Rommel, conclusion, in: conference abstract on Parenthesis)