The role of the peripheral narrator in Moby-Dick, Heart of darkness and The Great Gatsby

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THE ROLE OF THE PERIPHERAL NARRATOR IN MOBY-DICK, HEART OF DARKNESS AND THE GREAT GATSBY

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the unique role of the peripheral narrator in *Moby-Dick*, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby*. Each narrator's point of view is unique in that, though he is a character within the story, his participation in the action is restricted by his peripheral status which allows him to witness and evaluate the other other characters, particularly the protagonist. The distinguishing characteristic of this narrative frame necessitated by the use of such a narrator is that the author surrenders his omniscience regarding his other characters by letting his narrator tell the reader only what he as an observer legitimately discovers. The reader has available to him the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the witness-narrator who views the story from what may be called the wandering periphery.

In order to reveal the imaginative and analytical functions of the narrator, it is necessary to present him in relation to the author, the reader, the other characters in the story and to himself as a character involved in the tale. From a study of these relationships, the narrator's influence on structure can be shown. Besides exploring the distinctive qualities of his consciousness, we can see how he operates in organizing the author's material into art. The use of a meditative consciousness which performs a dual role as both narrator and character is a
technique which allows the author to discover, explore and develop his subject.

To consider the fictional relevance of the peripheral narrator, one must remember that the author selects him as a means to accomplish a deliberate effect. A novel reveals a created world of values and attitudes. It is with the assistance of a narrator that the author is able to determine his artistic definitions of them. Norman Friedman explains what a writer gains by creating a narrator.

...when an author surrenders in fiction, he does so in order to conceive; he gives up certain privileges and imposes certain limits in order the more effectively to render his story-illusion, which constitutes artistic truth in fiction. 1

In the modern development of the narrator's role, the author selects his interpreter's mind and lives inside it, feeling, seeing and reacting exactly as it would. This internalizing technique allows the author to probe the complexity of the modern spirit, to penetrate the difficulty of personal morality and to perceive the fact of evil in a manner that earlier surface narrative devices denied.

What the modern consciousness method calls for is the narrator's gathering up of his experience, composing a vision of it as it exists in his mind and presenting it to the reader. Thus, the technique is not only internal

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but reflective, based on past experience over which the narrator has meditated.

The technique of meditative consciousness is a tradition that is indebted to many for its development, but in particular to Henry James who first interposed a sensibility between the reader and the felt experience. What Vercors is that the intermediate intelligence presents the subject as what someone felt about what happened, not what happened. Furthermore, the central intelligence presides over everything and compels the story to be seen in terms of its understanding and experience. The result is that the story and characters are viewed indirectly through the personality of the narrator. Consequently, the reader sees through the narrator's eyes. Even though the narrator acts as the reader's seeing eye, the author controls the narrator's vision. Nevertheless, by virtue of his structural function, the narrator, in relating the novel's events, affects the reader's reaction to them.

Thus, the moral and intellectual qualities given the help narrator by his author determine the point of view and the novel's form. Therefore, the vision of the introspective narrator can be explored as a technique that is instrumental in determining the mode. His revelations and impressions guide and shape the story material and the reader's attitude toward it. His judging and reflecting

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consciousness acts as the author's shaping tool in creating the novel's form. The choice of point of view in the writing of fiction is as crucial as the choice of verse form in the composing of a poem. The question is whether the chosen technique is suitable for the narrative material and its desired effect. In order to investigate the possibilities, problems and limitations of the peripheral point of view, Herman Melville's Ishmael, Joseph Conrad's Marlow and F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway will be discussed in detail regarding their respective functions and influences on their narrative structures.

The peripheral narrator is distinguished from other first-person narrators in that he is not restricted to a distance usually necessitated by retrospective first-person narration. He has much greater freedom. He has the ability to withdraw from the events and characters for objective evaluation but is also able to reenter the action as an involved character, giving a sense of immediacy to the action as it impinges on his filtering consciousness.

Although the narrator is personally involved in the story he relates and affected by its events, he is not at the center of the novel's action. Instead, the narration focuses on a protagonist whom he watches undergo a physical and mental struggle which the narrator vicariously and spiritually shares. As a result, the narrator's interpretation of the focal character's behavior becomes personally and empathetically significant. The narrator internalizes the lived experience of the man whom he observes, studies and evaluates.
If the protagonist’s experiences are to be understood, they must be filtered through someone who can reflect and react, for the protagonist is so totally consumed in action that he is unable to evaluate. One way of focusing is to involve a reflective and sensitive man on the sidelines of action, a method particularly congenial to modern novelists who are not so much concerned with showing action as with demonstrating the response to experience and the judgment of it.

To accomplish objectivity, the narrator’s participation in the action is restricted to a necessary detachment. The very nature of his artistic function renders him a somewhat passive character in the course of the novel’s action. His primary role is to tell the story while others enact it. So his function fluctuates alternately within and without the narrative’s events, for he analyzes what he has seen from without but experienced from within. Simultaneously, he is both participant and spectator, a character in the story capable of withdrawing from it to give his impressions.

To pursue a greater understanding of the peripheral narrator’s diverse roles and the resultant effects of his particular consciousness on the narrative, let us review one by one the distinctive frames of mind but similar structural functions of Ishmael, Harlow and Nick.

- ICHMIEL -

One of the early experimenters with the mediating consciousness was Herman Melville. His use of the method

4 Jerome Thole, "The Narrator as Hero," Twentieth Century Literature, III (July 1957), 60.
was inconsistent but nevertheless a pioneer effort to find a way to objectify and control his narrative material and intensify it through the eyes of a sensitive and questioning narrator, Ishmael. Warner Berthoff contends that Melville's triumph in *Moby-Dick* would be unimaginable without his first-person method, adding that Melville's particular application of the first-person narration is a factor that sets him apart from nineteenth-century novel convention. Like his contemporaries, Melville used the personal adventure-chronicle, the recital and confession; but in Melville all these devices have the interposition of the narrator's voice as the chief formal precipitant of interest and significance.

Another similarity with nineteenth-century techniques is that Melville's narrator undergoes the classic experience of that fictional period, the experience of entering the great world and getting an education by it. At first he is the apprentice to life and later the finished man of versatile moral intelligence, which is the proper outcome of the whole process. With Melville, however, that process for his narrator does not happen to be the main theme. The narrator gains his authority by consistently judging things; he does not just encounter the fact and learn the truth, but rather grows into a permanent readiness of imagination, in Ishmael's case, especially for the phantomlike and enigmatic. What makes Melville's narrator unique is that he acts and is acted upon, being a character in his own recital. As he comes to life through his own narrative voice, he recalls, considers, meditates, emphasizes and explains.

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There is another distinction between Ishmael and the other narrators of the time. That is a certain degree of absorbed passivity and reflective detachment that distinguishes the Melvillean narrator from the Romantic hero of passion and energy. The narrator's character, as recording witness, is to remain radically open to experience without being radically changed by it; he is to identify and judge matters without equivocation, yet not show himself too overwhelmingly anxious to impose his outlook upon them. Thus, his role is determined not only by the situation and actions being rendered but by the very job of rendering them. He is able to follow his impulses without surrendering his freedom as observer and interpreter.

One must keep in mind, however, that behind Ishmael, always present, is Melville. The distinction between the author and his alter ego is submerged in their common function as the voyaging mind. At such times Ishmael completely withdraws and merges with his author to tell the story. When Ishmael disappears as a character, Melville remains; and his voice determines the mode.

Basically, Melville does not fully rely on Ishmael as his primary fictional device for delivering and focusing the novel. Because Melville restricts his narrator's authorial responsibilities, Ishmael's range is somewhat limited. Less developed and less involved than the narrators to come, the influence of his consciousness does not have as great a single impact on the narrative structure.

Ibid., p. 126.
Ishmael affects the novel's form but not as a solitary, independent voice but more as an extension of Melville.

Essentially disembodied, Ishmael is not engaged in conflict. His thematic significance is determined and limited by his role. He is seldom seen in physical activity, but spiritually is everywhere and nowhere, observing and comprehending. Though the narrator frames and pervades the story, his role is of a transitory nature; for he takes the form that the narrative moment requires. There is little action in the plot that firmly separates him from Melville. Melville dominates and controls the novel because he fails to give his narrator consistent, distinct and separate powers to render the tale. As a result, there is no doubt that Melville, many-voiced and deliberately ambiguous, presides over the action and characters.

Melville's early experimentation with the undeveloped technique of the meditating consciousness led to many structural difficulties and inconsistencies. For one thing, the close identification of the author's point of view with his narrator's in Moby-Dick is often indistinguishable. Melville keeps shifting Ishmael in and out of chapters fluctuating from Ishmael's consciousness to his own. Thus, they both sound alike. There are times when it is difficult to determine what Ishmael sees and what the author sees on his own account. Melville is inconsistent when he shifts to Ahab, or has Ishmael report things he could not know, or has him

7 Charles Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis, 1966), p. 120.
dissapear altogether, or parrot ideas that are the author's.

One of the problems that the oscillation of indistinguishable points of view creates is the dilution of the relationships between characters. As it is, the characterization in Moby-Dick is partial, intellectual and programmatic with characters entering and exiting when what they stand for is needed. Melville gives them personality for the moments when they are in the foreground. With the exceptions of Ahab and Queequeg the other characters are far less viable and far less present in the book than the narrator. In fact, there are scarcely any other developed characters—only sketches, types, more or less distinctive examples of the life being described. The other characters in the book exist only within the action and are wholly subject to its course of happenings. The narrator, however, exists to tell the whole story out, and therefore moves about it and around it, as well as through it, in relative freedom. Whereas Ishmael is occupied all the time, the others are pulled out at intervals and given stock jobs to do and set speeches to make.

Compared to the others Ishmael remains relatively effective because of his position as observer. As narrator rather than protagonist, his final resolution stems from his need, as fictive author, to absorb all his characters and to transcend them all alike. By assimilating his characters, he manages to control them and to avoid their divisive tendencies.

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9 Walcutt, p. 106.
In order for Ishmael to be able to perceive the characters and events objectively, he must be able to remove himself from them. According to Paul Brodtkorb, the perceiving self is always outside as a spectator. Thus, there is a necessary separation of the narrator and the reader, the narrator and the other characters, and even of the narrator from himself as a character. As a result of Ishmael's unique position within and without the tale, a double focus is established; things appear in their immediacy but also from a detached vantage point.

The double focus gives Ishmael two guises in the novel: he is a character who participates in the Pequod's adventures and a narrator who looks back upon action and integrates it into a coherent philosophical narrative. More than half of what happens is known through his exploration and discussion. He is credible because he tells us what he sees and what he hears that others have seen. As narrator, it is his consciousness which observes and understands the novel's events; for his consciousness is free to search for the meaning and value of the whaling voyage. As a character, Ishmael is a participant, the self the narrator remembers and describes with a richness of understanding and imagination as his sensibility organizes the narrative. In his role as a character, Ishmael grows within the story; and his growth is a significant commentary on the story of Ahab.

Ishmael's double role prevents him from being the center of the novel. Instead he acts as a peripheral filter to our perception. He is not only our perspective but also Melville's. Ishmael sanctions the authority of Melville's observation, while the object of the author's observation, the titanic spectacle of Ahab, remains at the center of our observation. Without at all displacing Ahab as the dramatic center of the novel, Ishmael develops a moral center and defining force, somewhat erratically and unsystematically, but nevertheless the indispensable perspective. He helps us understand the moral mysteries and ironies that Ahab and Moby Dick represent.

During the final chapters, Ishmael's voice is heard only as the distant, knowing consciousness of the author, aware of all subtle ambiguities and sensitive to all the pathetic and tragic implications of Ahab's mad grappling with Moby Dick. In fact, after "The Candles," Ishamnel no longer asserts his presence as a character, or as a remembering spectator, but stays in the background, practically disappearing in his narration until the epilogue of the shipwreck sees him come to the surface again in objective shape, as a survivor on Queequeg's coffin. Throughout the novel, Ishmael literally and symbolically keeps his distance. At the end when the Pequod sinks, he is not near the vortex; his peripheral role keeps him remote and detached to the conclusion.

Ishmael's progressive withdrawal as a distinct character into the impersonal business of narration is a necessary
step. He remains the narrator in his own superintending person, and his tale fits expertly into the larger scheme. His part is to tell the story as it comes down to him, and to explain its details or confirm their probability. But to do this is in fact to renew the story's existence in human consciousness as a story, as a particular formalization of recollected events, and as the agency of their acceptance and continuance.

The fact that the narrator is describing the events of the narrative from retrospect and taking the time he needs to recall them gives him a certain freedom from and equanimity about them. The business of retrospective narration presumes and creates its own detachment and independence. Furthermore, the method of narrative recollection is the means through which prodigious and terrific phenomena are subdued to the logic of human time and human understanding. With the perspective of viewing the past from the present, Ishmael's judgment of his experience is reflective rather than spontaneous. This approach tends to make the strange and incredulous appear more credible. As a result, Ishmael's observations function technically to keep the allegory anchored in reality.

There are other reasons why the author finds a narrator useful. Besides reproducing man's brooding interrogation of nature, Ishmael is a witness to his own thoughts and Ahab's actions. Ishmael begins with a "damp, drizzly

Berthoff, p. 122.

November in (his) soul" that causes him to surrender to the fascination of the sea and the grand idea of the whale. (p. 12)

His sense of injury, his contempt for land conventions and worldly gain, his belief in the dignity of spiritual struggle make him temporarily susceptible to Ahab's quest for vengeance; and he accepts Ahab's "quenchless feud" as his own. (p. 155)

However, the attraction is short-lived, for Ishmael and Ahab hold divergent views of the white whale.

Besides a strong identification with the protagonist, Ishmael also serves Melville's intentions to establish Ahab's greatness and power. Through the author's conception of him and the narrator's reaction to him, Ahab emerges with great strength and magnitude. Moreover, Melville utilizes Ishmael to give meaning to Ahab and his experience, for Ahab's dominance and total obsession in himself and his quest prevent him from evaluating the significance of his experience. Without Ishmael to contemplate and interpret objectively, Ahab would have no relevance for the reader. Ishmael is also a necessary witness to Ahab's heroic madness; Ishmael realizes that Ahab's unswerving intentness in pursuing the whale is the search for the meaning of life.

Besides rendering Ahab's tragic adventure, Ishmael describes many other matters that interest him as a newcomer to whaling: sea, ship, crew, whaling industry, various kinds of whale, and his own thoughts. Ishmael also comments about Moby Dick and the many legends concerning him and devotes a chapter to whiteness as a symbol of terror and evil.

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Throughout the novel, the story is interrupted by scientific information about whales and whaling. The cetology chapters cover everything from a whale's eating habits to the ropes used to capture it. Ishmael's cetological study is an unconscious attempt to exercise Ahab's magic. From Ishmael's own words, we can see that he has the capacity to view the universe and the whale objectively and is able to withstand Ahab's blinding distortion of the physical facts which leads to destruction.

Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice . . . . Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. . . . retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own. (p. 261)

Both narrator and protagonist are fascinated by Moby Dick; but their responses are quite different, for Ishmael's is rumination whereas Ahab's is will. Ahab recognizes the inscrutability of the white whale, and it drives him to alienate himself from humanity. To conquer the mystery becomes his obsession and eventually it drives him mad. As he approaches "the white wall," more and more of the natural world is blotted out of his perception. The arbitrary power of Moby Dick represents for Ahab the malevolence of the gods. His war against the white whale becomes a fanatical crusade against the nature and existence of evil. The gods, the universe, maliciously toy with pathetic man as he struggles desperately to realize himself. Ahab is man constantly threatened by the impersonal power

and blankness from without, a man struggling to assert his own meaningfulness against the mockingly brutal strength of the exterior universe. It is ironic, however, that in striving to assert man's humanity in the midst of the impersonal power, Ahab abandons his own humanity. Unlike Ishmael, Ahab drives to prove not discover; he is unable to rest in the uncertainty modern man must endure. Consequently, he represents the negative view of the destructive and alienated individualist who never achieves the repose or equal eye of Ishmael.

The ultimate difference between Ishmael and Ahab lies in their personal vision, especially in their views of the great whale. Ishmael's view is ambiguous while Ahab reduces all ambiguity to unequivocal evil. Ahab's single-eyed vision lacks depth whereas Ishmael's sense of perspective and proportion combines irony and seriousness, enthusiasm and detachment. Unlike Ahab, Ishmael manages to maintain his spiritual balance and intellectual freedom; for Ishmael rejects isolation for fraternal love and attains an inner harmony unrealized by Ahab.

By preserving a complexity of feeling about the whale, Ishmael preserves himself. Moreover, the narrator is sensitive to all the natural glories of the Pacific, not just to the presence of whales. He, too, looks into the irrational but maintains his human dignity in spite of it and discovers that the one meaningful alternative to a life based on the

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15 Robert Farnsworth, "Ishmael to the Royal Masthead," University of Kansas City Review, XXVIII (Spring 1962), 186.

transcendent horror glimpsed in the "heartless immensity" is mutual interdependence.

In contrast to Ahab's progressive, willful isolation from humanity and humane values is Ishmael's conversion from a defiant outcast to Queequeg's friend. Ishmael is saved by seeing through and pursuing the Ahab within himself and by adopting the embracing brotherhood of Queequeg. However, Ahab is as essential as Queequeg to Ishmael's education, for it is Ahab's defeat as well as Queequeg's friendship that enlightens the narrator. They both lay the groundwork for his spiritual salvation.

From Queequeg, Ishmael learns to sense the relatedness of others and that it is a "mutual joint-stock world in all meridians." (p. 61) Between them grows a communion based on no reference external to itself; for Queequeg's humanity, generosity and selflessness can exist irrespective of any institutionalized ethic. Consequently, Ishmael's initial misanthropy mellows into fraternity under the generous influence of Queequeg; and Ishmael is redeemed from his "splintered heart and maddened hand" by Queequeg's goodness. Their union is symbolized by the monkey-rope which ensures their joint safety or danger. The sperm squeezing and monkey-rope teach Ishmael dependence on the mistakes and misfortunes of others, and a dependency of fraternal emotion prevails.

Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (p. 349)
The bond that Ishmael learns to recognize between men is their common humanity and interdependence, the responsibility of every man for his brother. With the help of Queequeg, the introspective Ishmael gains a psychic balance of feeling and judgment and acquires a conscious and instinctual kinship of belonging to the inner and outer mysteries of life.

Consequently, Ishmael forgets his and the crew's horrible oath, washes his hand and his heart of it in that "inexpressible sperm," and feels divinely free "from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever." (p. 348) In the try-works chapter he sees the symbolic significance of his sleepy inversion at the tiller: "Give not thyself, up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness." (p. 355) Recovering, he achieves that sense of interrelated darkness and light with which the chapter ends.

Thus, Ishmael comes to understand, within the story, his own spiritual recklessness. To avoid Ahab's disillusionment and eventual doom, one must place himself in the scheme of the universe. Ishmael chooses to structure himself positively and is therefore saved literally and symbolically from the catastrophe. He is saved on his own terms for what he becomes. The way he acts in the story demonstrates that he has learned the lesson.

During the novel, the young Ishmael grows to the wisdom of the reminiscent narrator. Almost forty chapters
before the climax of the novel he understands and rejects Ahab's madness. The narrator learns the worst as well as the best from the madness of Ahab and the friendship of Queequeg. In addition, he learns to know the universe for the risky place it is and to be prepared for whatever comes. As a result, he solves his problem of reconciliation to the nature of his world and learns to accept ambiguity and indefiniteness while retaining his identity.

Ishmael's understanding is not amplified or deepened by the narrative that follows 'The Try-Works.' It is assumed Ishmael's problems of spiritual vision are solved relatively early in the book so that the reader has a vantage point from which to view the terrible irony and pathos of Ahab's demonic, but heroic, rage. Following that chapter nothing Ahab does can shock or challenge Ishmael's understanding. Melville establishes the authority of Ishmael by having him see what is wrong with Ahab's spiritual rage, yet acknowledging its fascination and terrible power. Ahab looks on terror and Ishmael looks on Ahab. Ishmael, as narrator, usually maintains an open and direct negative moral estimate of Ahab; but as a character, Ishmael gets caught up in Ahab's purpose. In retelling the story, the narrator partly relives it as a character and cannot disavow what he once was, though, as retrospective narrator, he ethically disapproves.

The force of Ishmael's story is to conclude against conclusions. Ishmael's final inconclusive moral evaluation
of Ahab is not separable from his final inconclusive effort to understand him. He first sees Ahab as an object; then he becomes Ahab in soliloquy; and finally the narrator analyzes what he has seen from without and experienced from within. Ahab cannot be adequately known and therefore cannot be morally judged. The novel does not pronounce him good or evil. By carrying him through his fatae action in all its tensions, paradoxes and ambiguities, the book probes into the mysteries of all moral judgments. As a result, nothing is ever finally settled and decided for Ishmael. All is in doubt; all is in external flux. There are no satisfactory conclusions to anything and no final philosophy is ever possible.

The world for Ishmael remains mysterious and unexplained, and he resembles the mutability and shiftiness he experiences in it. There is nothing on which he can solidly base his existence in a universe of infinite possibility, a world that is both fated and free. What he ultimately confronts is neither benevolent nor malevolent, with neither evident meaning nor purpose. He sees in the world around him an element that is not orderly, a universe surrounded with the irrational and unknowable.

Ishmael's ambiguity can be illustrated in his thoughts about whiteness. He teaches himself and us what whiteness feels like and summons up its compulsive, ambiguous and

18 Brodtkorb, p. 81.
desperate dread. By the time he finishes with the concept of whiteness, the reader begins to feel the terror that Ishmael finds in it. The whiteness awakens Ishmael's instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world. What he finally decides is that the spell of whiteness, with its "appeal to the soul" and its ability to symbolize both what is spiritual and what is appalling, must remain unsolved. The only alternative to Ahab's extremism is the acknowledge ment of the duplicity of whiteness as well as the natural fact and symbolic meaning of the whale.

Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye. (p. 314)

This attitude allows Ishmael to accept intuitions and doubts and all oppositions as coexisting with a sanctioned order, leading to a final acceptance of the natural order and the human condition as fearfully ambiguous.

Melville has his narrator conscious of what he is doing and of the contexts in which he is doing it; for Ishmael possesses a mind of fluid contrarities: uncertainty, contradiction and irony. With no positive beliefs to characterize him, he can hardly be a continuously unified consciousness. The character of Ishmael is sub merged into the ambiguous voice of the narrator whose feelings in relation to his strange world provide analogues for ours.  

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20 Brodkorb, p. 148.
Ishmael goes to sea to create meaning out of emptiness. The only experienced truth is human truth, and that is dependent on each man living out his own vision. Ishmael is given the tasks of narrating and struggling to understand his crucial experience, and it is the humanizing enlightenment cast by him that organizes Moby-Dick as a novel.

The originality of Ishmael's voice is the originality of Melville's style. Although Melville uses his narrator to convey his own thoughts and feelings, the author subjects these to the formal discipline of a narrator. In Moby-Dick Ishmael, the peripheral narrator, was created to function as an indispensable part of a larger aesthetic whole.

The power of the novel lies in Ishmael-Melville's encompassing vision which transcends Ahab's isolation and the self-reliance he thrusts against society and nature. With Ishmael's angle of vision Melville creates an insight transcending Ahab's. It is a view uncommitted to any dogmas, a view tentative and considerate of alternatives, and one that seeks justly to evaluate and arrive at a salvable understanding of the "truth of experience." What emerges is a dynamic, unresolved tension between an experience meaningless and the stubborn will to find meaning in experience.

There is no answer, only a vision of the conditions for the never-ending search in which mankind must forever engage. If there is to be a moral order in the world, man fallible as he is, must forge it himself out of his own human experience.

22 Ibid., 250.
From Melville's experimental but inconsistent use of his narrator, the development of the meditating consciousness is next revolutionized by the innovations of Henry James. Concerned with the psychological study of character and the exploration of human nature as seen from the inside, James implements a rigorous observance of a single point of view and establishes the narrator as the controlling medium of the story. James peers into the head of his observer and presents a selection of what goes on there with every detail confined to the range and capacity of the eye fixed on it.

Following James' innovations, Conrad further develops the internalizing technique of the modern consciousness. Unlike Melville, Conrad lives consistently in the mind of his narrator and always sees through his eyes. Thus, the story appears to be the narrator's rather than the author's. Whereas James' narrator's experience seems immediate and current, Conrad's narrator's consciousness is dependent upon memory, distant in time and place, where it receives further refraction.

Like James, Conrad considers the transformation of experience one of the chief functions of the conscious mind. In addition, Conrad discovers that the true inwardness of a character's moral and psychological problems can be revealed only by removing him from the confines of the story's action in order to meditate the truth of the experience. As a result, the narrator's unraveling and interpreting leads to more than just a probing of character—to the examination of the very process of valuation itself. What the reader sees is a man searching for meaning. Conrad devises a method
and style out of a condition of profound introversion which drains moral situations and demonstrates the pathos of modern skepticism. The nature of illusion is probed; the residue of truth is sublimated; and the operations of intellect and consciousness are tested. A psychological tale is therefore transcribed into terms of art, and modern fiction achieves as its subject the whole of the modern consciousness.

According to Morton Zabel, no writer uses the voice of the narrator as often or complexly as Conrad. Marlow's unifying central intelligence weaves an imaginative and realistic verisimilitude into the narrative. However, the usage is more than a device of oral verisimilitude or a means of virtuosity in wielding point of view. It becomes an instrument of consciousness and a mode that is necessary for Conrad to objectify and form his material. The following discussion of Conrad's use of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* reveals the author's progress with the technique.

From the onset of the story Marlow has two audiences: the other seamen who listen to him recount his experiences in the Congo and the darkness, and the reader who is lead to pursue Marlow's search with him and compelled to make the same ambiguous discoveries on a quest into the darkness of the self.

Marlow is free to move where he wishes in time and therefore free to foreshadow his conclusion. He begins Kurtz's tale as a flashback and frequently interrupts the past by speaking to his comrades. His immediate listeners

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24 Ibid., p. 16.
are necessary to anchor the strange nature of his tale in reality so that it does not appear as mere fantasy. Consequently, the audience, seamen and reader, are more likely to find Marlow a reliable narrator with a plausible story.

In addition to both sets of listeners, there are two men's stories being told. The novel is structured so that Kurtz's and Marlow's stories are interwoven. In telling about Kurtz, Marlow is also revealing himself and what happens to him as a result of what happens to Kurtz. The two tales are meshed, Kurtz's within Marlow's, literally and symbolically.

By utilizing Marlow's profoundly intuitive mind to present his narrative, Conrad is able to take us on an introspective voyage. The narrator's journey into the Congo is also a probe into the recesses of the mind: the actual jungle and its darkness mirror the intricacies and dangers of the internal landscape. Thus, Conrad has Marlow exploit the archetypal experience of the night journey of the descent into the primitive and unconscious sources of being.

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings. . . . We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of the first ages. . . . Leaving hardly a sign -- and no memories. (p. 36) 26

In order to explore human nature from the inside, Conrad created a peripheral narrator. Psychological mysteries are not so much matters of fact in the objective world as matters of interpretation and appreciation.

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Therefore, to get a view of man's inner nature as well as to establish a necessary aesthetic distance between author and narrator, Conrad relinquishes his authorial duties to Marlow to examine the story from his point of view. Thus, the story is told not by the author but by someone closer to it, in fact within it, someone who can be shown in the very process of learning and coming to understand little by little whatever it is that lies at the heart of the mystery.

Marlow functions as a narrating consciousness, an interposed narrator, a screening "marlovian voice," who sees action through eyes not exactly his own. Although Marlow shares some of Conrad's ideas and moral concerns, he is distinct from his creator. Marlow is an embodied point of view with a personality, character limitations, attitude and tone. However, the narrator's voice conspires with his author's for authenticity. Nevertheless, Marlow is singular; his monocural vision implies ideas, biases, principles and obsessions. He ruminates in the manner of a philosopher on the nature of things.

It is Marlow's state of mind that encloses and surrounds us. His experience and intelligence give a plasticity to the novel's form. Conrad intentionally has his narrator's comments celebrate uncertainty, consisting of shifting and ambiguous symbols which conceal as they reveal. Marlow's

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28 Guerard, p. 228.
29 Zabel, p. 13.
response to the situation he is describing is sufficiently tentative and at times bewildered, to suggest its complexity and moral ambiguity to the reader.

Generally, Marlow's conclusions are indefinite and ambiguous. His circuitous and oblique manner permits glimpses at inner truths, and the process of intimations is controlled through his consciousness. Marlow presents a subjective reality composed of mental refractions. His power rests, not on his appeal to our sensor reason, but on the response of our awakened imaginations to his own. Through chance incidents, scraps of speech, interwoven and interpreted, he unveils Kurtz's experience and his own.

As a distant, intermediary character, Marlow is looking back on an experience that is still not wholly clear to him; but its intensity and disturbing quality remain vividly with him. Like the ancient mariner, he must tell his tale; and he forces us to relive it with him. Involving the reader in this manner is a technique that is characteristic of modern fiction. It is an attempt to move fiction closer to life by heightening the reader's sense of the character's isolation. Thus, the reader is forced to face each decision as the narrator does and consequently feels more deeply the value or loss. The more the reader feels the moral dilemma as a personal one, the stronger will be his reaction to the work as a formed, imaginative experience. This is particularly true in works whose primary interest is an intellectual

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31 Frances Cutler, "Why Marlow?" Sewanee Review, XXVI (January 1938), 32.
quest for some kind of truth. The reader shares in the searching and questioning process which has no ending. Thus, the storyteller and the reader are linked in a probe into the unknown and mysterious. This collaboration method is explained by Frances Cutler:

But with Conrad we actually enter into the creative process; we grope with him... we catch at fleeting glimpses and thrill with sudden illuminations. For the art of Conrad is literally a "social" art... 34

Conrad represents Marlow as profoundly involved, almost grappling with the great subject he is trying to reproduce. The organization of the narrative is a matter of intellect: character is dominated, bounded and defined by Marlow's probing intelligence. His mind mulls over events, and an idea takes shape around them, for "to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze..." (p. 5)

Thought represents action and the more so because Marlow himself is the central observer. In that the action is retrospective, it enables the cool light of Marlow's intellect to play over it with his insight guiding us step by step into a deepening moral and intellectual experience. The implications of the action are pursued for meaning through Marlow, and he attempts to find and create appropriate

33 Ibid.
34 Cutler, 37.
35 Walcott, p. 100.
36 Ibid., p. 94.
meanings for the episodes and characters he encircles. His major problem is presenting the significance of Kurtz's actions. Marlow's dilemma of creating, comprehending and communicating meaning are revealed to us as part of the action. His subjective skepticism permeates the action, but it is impossible for him to see well enough to say anything definite and final. He can only attempt to employ his sympathetic imagination in order to discover the meaning of the experience and make it his own.

Marlow's personal involvement in the story enables him to overhear or converse with other characters who give him access to information he needs to unfold the story; and their stories mesh with his, giving credence and validity to the overall narrative. In his encounters with other characters, Marlow proves to be as apt a listener as a raconteur. Their words expose them, and Marlow's attitude towards them is self-revealing. Except for Marlow's insights and ponderings, the actual facts are consistently and realistically acquired. He only knows what it is logically possible for him to know. To that, however, he adds his own meditations.

According to the accountant, Kurtz is a "first-class agent," a "very remarkable person" who sends in "as much ivory as all the others put together," a man who is destined to "go far, very far." (pp. 19-20) Just outside the accountant's office of "correct transactions "lies the grove of death." (p. 20) The darkness is always lurking just

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beyond the superficial facades of civilized men; and in his interpretations of the landscape and men, Marlow illustrates that he is aware of the imminent danger. He has the capacity to guide us into the unrealities but never to linger there too long. This is the pattern structurally and thematically of the entire work: to get a glimpse of the unnatural and unearthly but from a peripheral vantage point.

Although Marlow evinces a distaste for the district manager whose "unconscious smile" insouces nothing but "uneasiness," Marlow finds something great in his person. There is "nothing within him" that can respond to the darkness, and this has particular significance in a place where there are "no external checks" on one's behavior. (p. 22) The manager cannot be tempted, for he has nothing in him to tempt; and that explains his fortitude in the darkness.

All along, Marlow informs the reader that one must use restraint to avoid destruction. Through his analysis of others' methods of overcoming or yielding to darkness, Marlow acquaints the reader with his own morality based on preservation through restraint. For example, Marlow distinguishes between his and the Russian's (Kurtz's disciple) response to Kurtz: for the Russian "had not meditated over it... he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism." (p.56)

Marlow explains that it is "work" that protects him, but he differs from the others in his susceptibility and perception of the darkness which helps him resist its magnetism. Marlow keeps his hold "on the redeeming facts of life" by what he refers to as "work." (p. 23) If other
men are not the answer, and neither is a return to a primitive state that rejects societal norms and values, the only acceptable alternative is a man's "inner strength."

When one starts "getting savage," he must turn to work. (p. 25)

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. (p. 29)

As the story evolves, it becomes evident that Kurtz has a special significance for Marlow. Once again it is Marlow's imagination that is responsible for linking him to a man he has never met but with whom he feels a kinship. The idea of Kurtz, not the man but what he represents, appeals to Marlow. In seeking Kurtz at the center of darkness, Marlow hopes to find himself.

Both men explore the "fascination of the abomination," Kurtz sensually and Marlow intellectually. (p. 6) They are isolated from society and free from the confines of routine, manners and security. In this primitive environment the dark side of man is exposed, and men are forced to test themselves and their values in circumstances that offer little guidance and protection. The darkness threatens Marlow but engulfs Kurtz: "The wilderness... had taken him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own..." (p. 49) In Kurtz, Marlow finds a double not only for himself but others. What Marlow makes of Kurtz is the matter before us. Moreover, Kurtz is the example from which Marlow learns.
It is his extremity that I seemed to have lived through... he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference. (p. 72)

In the Congo Marlow experiences an uncanny self-unfolding adventure through his identity with Kurtz. The nature of Kurtz's greatness and influence is never directly described but only hinted at obliquely through a number of reports from other characters who relate his achievements and reputation to Marlow.

Marlow's method of unfolding his tale and discovering Kurtz is an indirect one which is appropriate for the enigmas and uncertainties that arise from his contact with him. As the peripheral narrator, Marlow is limited in his participation and somewhat handicapped in his understanding as a result. He never makes the commitment Kurtz does and therefore does not suffer the consequences or discover the ultimate truth. From Marlow's vantage point it is not possible to do more than conjecture and sympathize. It follows that his conclusions are naturally somewhat hazy and indefinite. Complete knowledge means self-destruction, a risk Marlow refuses to take. Yet, other than Kurtz, no one comes as close as Marlow to the truth about the darkness. It is he who formulates the meaning of Kurtz's metamorphosis and death, but it is Conrad who gives Marlow's response to the heart of darkness a wide applicability. Conrad transforms the heart of darkness into a symbolic experience of what lies at the heart of man, of the unexplored
and unknown realms of his being.

It is Marlow's primary function to bring the unformed Kurtz into being and then attend the materialization. Kurtz acquires personality as a result of the conceptions read into his experiences by commenting characters. Through his sympathetic allegiance to him, Marlow becomes a voice for Kurtz. As mediator between Kurtz and the reader, Marlow reduces the impact of Kurtz and gives meaning to his brute action. In so doing, Marlow sensitizes us to Kurtz; for we trust Marlow as one of us. Given Kurtz himself we would be repelled. Marlow prevents that; we perceive vicariously through him as he does through Kurtz. As the philosophic inquirer, Marlow is the exclusive means of our understanding the work.

Kurtz sets himself apart from the earth and its morality: "he feared neither God nor devil, let alone any mere man." (pp. 28-29) In a god-like gesture, he discards morality and kicks "the very earth to pieces." (p. 67) By such action, Kurtz illustrates the possibility of moral releases and the possible inadequacy and irrelevance of morality for all men. Marlow, the imaginative moral man, enters the world of danger and enticement and struggles to retain his morality. It is his imagination that renders him vulnerable to the powers of the darkness.

What Marlow discovers is that the darkness must remain hidden if man is to survive morally. The darkness must be

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concealed in order to preserve society and civilized man. Although Marlow is an avowed wanderer, when he confronts the darkness, he chooses order over chaos. His discipline allows survival; whereas Kurtz's lack of restraint to the infinite possibilities of the wilderness destroys him. Marlow remains on the periphery of the darkness while Kurtz penetrates it. Being outside the episode helps the narrator maintain his morality as well as evaluate Kurtz's loss of it. Kurtz reveals to Marlow the horror of the darkness and the results of absolute freedom. Marlow explains the awful consequences of Kurtz's total immersion into the savage wilderness.

But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and . . . . it had gone mad. I had... to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself . . . . I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear... (p. 68)

It is Kurtz's extremism that defines the darkness for Marlow. To preserve his life and sanity, Marlow denies the final realization Kurtz achieves. Kurtz is destroyed in his movement toward and final confrontation of what Marlow views as the ultimate truth. After witnessing man's savage heritage, Marlow accepts society's restrictions as a saving ideal. Though the rules are imperfect, they are necessary.

Marlow comes to know himself by testing his resources and recognizing his own potential vicariously through Kurtz. The narrator's decision symbolizes the choice between internal division or personal coherence. The novel reveals reintegration of personality rather than disintegration,
and a recognition of the necessary order and balance of freedom. The source of Marlow's inner strength and restraint is his healthy practicality and reliance on the things that are explainable, such as rivets.

What I really wanted was rivets, by Heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work—to stop the hole... ...and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it. (pp. 28-29)

Rivets held things together, and for Marlow they represent superficial binders which maintain the balance of civilization. Marlow chooses morally, but the moral criterion remains wordly and pragmatic. The routine details that bind life to itself are the source of Marlow's resistance to extremity. These tie him to life and help him reject extremity. As a result, he is able to compromise, to save what he can.

Marlow has no answers: he cannot even quite dare to ask Kurtz questions. The narrator shows us that we cannot afford the extremity of Kurtz if we are to manage as social beings. Marlow has to learn to live with the Kurtz inside himself, with the darkness lying in wait within. His contact with Kurtz in darkness leads him to light about himself. The narrator is a preserver not a destroyer, who strains to hold things together not out of naive faith in virtues, but from a sophisticated awareness of the treacheries of human nature and the imperfections of society.


Marlow is an agent of civilization opposed to primitivism. To understand the dark side of himself, he plunges into the wilderness but retreats before it becomes too dangerous. By continually making moral judgments about the experiences before him, he maintains his identity. Though he temporarily embraces the inexplicable darkness of life, he preserves his powers of discrimination within it. Aware of the unreal, he tries desperately to find something to hang onto, something with purpose and validity. He finds the physical act of refloating a sunken steamer and the unexpected discovery of a manual of seamanship, preservatives in the jungle. (p. 70; pp. 38-39) Through these links with the civilized world, his moral position is strengthened; for these artifacts can be coped with and understood. Marlow prefers survival to a knowledge that brings only death to a civilized man. As a result, he affirms society's ideals: fidelity, duty, discipline and order: his awareness of Kurtz's degradation corroborates his convictions.

He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land. .. how can you imagine. . . . utter solitude without a policeman, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of obdurate opinion? .. . When they are gone you must fall back on your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (p. 50)

Marlow lives to act upon what he has learned and chooses to maintain the part of civilization worth saying. He accepts the fact that light and darkness exist and affirms that they must be carefully distinguished. That is society's only salvation. Having been made aware of the truth, Marlow establishes an
ethic of his own—the necessity to cloak and conceal the
darkness for the sake of humanity. "The inner truth is
hidden—luckily, luckily." (p. 34) So he spares Kurtz's
intended the truth with a lie, and his decision allows her
to retain her illusion. Deception is necessary to protect
the unknowing; the exposure would be too much to bear.

By lying, Marlow also pays tribute to Kurtz by re-
fusing to destroy his reputation: "I would not have gone
so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near
enough to lie." (p. 27) Though Marlow admires Kurtz's
sacrifice, he will not imitate or follow him. He honors
the man but denies his act. Marlow feels an obligation
to Kurtz whose experience enlightens the narrator, for
it is the revelation of Kurtz that tests and defines
Marlow's innate strength. What Marlow finds in Kurtz brings
self-knowledge. The exploration and magnetism of darkness
drives Marlow to seek it, analyze it, and define it for
himself and for us.

The mind of man is capable of anything

... He must meet that truth with his own
true stuff—with his own inborn strength... You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and
salance? ... I had no time. I had to mess
about with white-lead and string of woollen
... to put bandages on those leaky steam-
pipes. ... I had to watch the steering, and
circumnvent those snags... There was sur-
face truth enough in these things to save a
wiser man. (c. 37)

Marlow aids Conrad in his study of psychic recognition
and recovery, for Marlow is caught in the grip of circum-
stances that compel self-discovery and the revelation of
truth. Through Kurtz's extremity, Marlow is forced out of his isolation; and his existence comes to include the larger workings of moral law, society and justice. Kurtz meets the crisis of moral isolation unprepared, and his destiny is inescapable; but for Marlow the crisis brings recognition of himself and reality. When Marlow faces the crisis, his conscious moral existence begins. He is forced to speak from psychic compulsion. As a result, his soul is compelled out of isolation and personal illusion into the whole organism of life and into a solidarity with mankind.

Conrad's work dramatizes a hostility of forces that exists both in the conditions of practical life and in the constitution of man himself. He explores the inner enemy that lurks in the unfathomed depths of our secret natures, our ignorance, our consciousness and untested selves. Conrad establishes the conditions that bring Marlow to an abrupt realization of his conscious selfhood and a recognition of his ties to the outer world of values. By the device of Marlow, Conrad penetrates human action and conscience.

-- Nick Carraway --

Conrad's deliberate use of the narrator as an indispensable shaping tool in creating the modern psychological novel has become an established tradition for twentieth-century writers. The influence of his contribution can be illustrated by one of his disciples and imitators, F. Scott Fitzgerald; for Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby functions much like Marlow. Arthur Mizener, Fitzgerald's biographer, reports that Fitzgerald read Conrad and adopted the modified first-person form, using the perceptions of an observer for control.

42 Zabel, p. 19
result, Nick's position is comparable to Marlowe's, partially within and without the action: "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life." (p. 36) As a Conradian narrator, he is observer, spectator, critic and interpreter of a story that is centered on Jay Gatsby. Using Nick to control his narrative, Fitzgerald puts him sufficiently near the center of events so that he can know all he needs to know and ties him into the story's action as Daisy's cousin, Jordan's lover and Gatsby's neighbor and confidant.

By means of Nick, Fitzgerald is able to bring certain aspects of his novel into focus. In Conradian fashion, Fitzgerald utilizes Nick's point of view to determine the novel's range; through his eyes and intelligence the story is given. In Nick, Fitzgerald conceives a figure who is to function as a center of moral and compositional activity which fuses both the dramatic action and the values it implies. Douglas Taylor explains the process.

This running concentration of both intellect and emotion in Nick's central intelligence thus allowed Fitzgerald to control and intensify the internal and external proportions of his subject in modes which held its values in distinct but inter-animated states of sympathy and evaluation. . . .

Nick is an ideal filter for Fitzgerald, for the narrator has learned from his father to suspend judgment, has been accustomed to being a confidant, and has sympathy and understanding as well as detachment of vision. (p. 1) As a


result, Nick serves as Fitzgerald's fictional go-between.

In addition, Nick gives a personal tone to the story and allows the author to attain a balance between his representation of character and incident. Nick is the only one defined at the beginning. Incidents and characters are shown as they appear to Nick, and he passes on the information as he receives it.

Nick uses various methods to inform the reader of what is happening or has happened: most frequently he presents his own eye-witness account; often he presents the accounts of other people, sometimes in their words, sometimes in his own; occasionally he reconstructs an event from several sources, the newspapers, servants, his own imagination, but presents his version as connected narrative. When Fitzgerald needs to inform the reader of material about which his narrator can have no first-hand knowledge, he sometimes permits Nick to listen extensively to an individual who has the information. For example, Jordan Baker informs Nick of the brief wartime love affair between Daisy and Gatsby. By this simple device, a past event is represented fully from a point of view other than the narrator's. Sometimes Fitzgerald permits his narrator to reconstruct in his own language what he has been told about some event he has not witnessed.

Citing Gatsby as his source, Nick informs the reader of Gatsby's days with Dan Cody. This method allows Nick to

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interspersed speculation and interpretation with the action. In order to present an account of a scene at which there is no surviving observer, Fitzgerald lets the narrator reconstruct an event rather freely from several sources, unstated but implied. In such a manner, Nick describes the day on which Wilson tracks down and shoots Gatsby and then kills himself. When there are no other available sources, Nick relies on his fertile imagination.

"By giving Nick logical connection with the people he is observing, by always making his presence or absence at the events probable, not accidental, and by allowing him several natural sources of information which he may use freely, Fitzgerald achieves a realism impossible to an omniscient author or even to a limited third-person point of view." In selecting relevant events for dramatic representation and relegating only obliquely related incidents to summary treatment or panoramic narration, Fitzgerald sustains a compelling verisimilitude and avoids looseness in the first-person narration.

Fitzgerald adopts Nick as Conrad does Marlow for the purposes of narrative compression and aesthetic distance between the author and his characters. Such a narrator also serves as a means of placing the reader in direct touch with the action. However, like his fictive predecessors, Nick's participation is restricted in the events he describes and judges. He comments on what he sees and examines and acts.

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Itid., p. 23.
in terms of the situations he describes. Nick acts as an intermediary between himself and the action, remote from what goes on and uninvolved enough to permit him to contemplate and moralize about it, staying near the outer edge to help the reader see in.

Like Conrad, Fitzgerald also depends on his narrator to present the protagonist. Almost always through or in relation to Nick we learn of Gatsby. In a method akin to the earlier narrators' development of their protagonists, Nick discovers and embodies Gatsby who is gradually revealed and defined by the narrator for the reader. As a device for controlling the tone of the narrative, it is the quality of Nick's response to Gatsby that at crucial moments compels our suspension of disbelief.

Gatsby's very existence and relevance rely on Nick who continuously evokes and suggests him. We are much better acquainted with Nick than we ever are with Gatsby, for Gatsby's reality depends on Nick who creates and sustains him. Once stated, Gatsby grows as a result of Nick's understanding. More like Kurtz than Ahab, Gatsby is allowed to say very little in his own person. It is from the order Fitzgerald instills in Nick's mind that Gatsby's person slowly comes to the reader's attention. Fitzgerald does not let us meet Gatsby until he has concretely created the fantastic world of Gatsby's vision. The scale of observation is entrusted

49 Charles E. Shain, E. Scott Fitzgerald (Minneapolis, 1961), p. 34.
to Nick who gradually and speculatively constructs Gatsby until the complete portrait finally emerges. Because of the solidity of Nick's character, Gatsby is able to stand as a character very shadowily created and to gain from that very lack of specification. 51

In the tradition of Ishmael and Marlow, Nick's mind and moral sense give meaning to Gatsby and his romantic illusion. Like the earlier narrators, Nick is drawn to the protagonist but maintains a safe distance that prevents him from making the same fatal error. Gatsby is formed through Nick's eyes which present Gatsby's egoism, lies and absurdity as contrasted with his munificence, courage and love for Daisy. As Nick illustrates the magnificent and sordid spectacle of Gatsby, it becomes apparent that the narrator is necessary as the novel's moral and unifying center. The chaos of Gatsby's world requires some kind of judgment from a set of standards we can accept, or the novel is meaningless. It is Nick's discriminating consciousness that makes the story artistically real to the reader. Like Ishmael and Marlow, Nick is the key to the reader's understanding and the novel's success. Without Nick to give meaning to Gatsby's character, the essentially tragic ending of the novel would probably fail. For the novel to succeed, Gatsby's failure must be experienced through Nick's moral sense.

Nick redeems failed action by endowing it with narrative order. He discredits what is false, explodes wild

rumors and clears away misconceptions. He records what he has directly observed or indirectly acquired. In recounting Gatsby's past and reconstructing Gatsby's death, Nick fulfills two roles, first as a detective and then as an interpreter. It is Nick's triumph to stand within and without the action he narrates as a participant and witness. By suffering within and by understanding and relating the whole of what he sees and its bearing, not simply on his own life, but on all human endeavor, Nick brings rich order to Gatsby's story. Nick does for Gatsby what Ishmael and Marlow do for their protagonists, for Nick completes Gatsby, makes him great and delivers him from mere notoriety. Nick embodies Fitzgerald's character from both inside and out, as both the agent of his experience and the object of analysis, as both seeing and seen. Through Nick's interpretation, Fitzgerald reorders his narrative material into art.

In The Great Gatsby Fitzgerald invests his descriptive detail and dialogue with a double meaning that lends itself to sustained irony and permits his narrator a consistent point of view that keeps the shifting character of Gatsby stable. Even though he is present, Nick's ironic perspective keeps him on the outside looking in. We see through Nick what is shoddy and glamorous in Gatsby and the Buchanans, and this antithetical juxtaposition is the


source of the novel's irony. The ironic relation of the narrator and the narrative gives meaning to the action, for Nick continuously sees and often mis-sees what is happening. His style from extravagance to understatement is completely meaningful. Nick's vocal gestures place him in a dual position: inside the event, pleased or victimized by it, and simultaneously outside the event, emotionally detached and analytical or critical of it. Thus, as ironic narrator, Nick is constantly attracted and repelled by the same experience. However, he is the only character in the novel who puts experience to the scrutiny of an active conscience. At the height of Gatsby's dream, Nick signals doom and the hollow nature of the idyllic moment. The limitations of Gatsby's romanticism are revealed through Nick's constant ironic observations of it.

Nick learns what Gatsby is never able to learn, that illusions have moral consequences. Nick sees obscurely the significance of Gatsby while knowing the content of his dream is corrupt, but Nick's instinct about Gatsby finds him "worth the whole damn bunch put together." (p. 154) For Nick, Gatsby is worthy not because of his goal but because of his fidelity to it. To Nick, Gatsby is a man who achieves heroic stature by the intense life of his imagination. Gradually, Nick discovers the fundamental innocence and measureless vitality of Gatsby's dream and, at the same time, penetrates to the corruption at the heart of the

Ibid.
fabulous life of Tom and Daisy. As the narrator makes the change in his initial judgments regarding Gatsby and the Buchanans, he also guides the reader to a similar moral evaluation of the characters. It is "what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams," the corrupt, fake world of the Buchanans, that Nick rejects. (p. 2)

Though Nick originally disapproves of Gatsby, the narrator eventually finds himself allied to him: "I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone." (p. 165) The bond between Nick and Gatsby reveals they are not opposites but rather complements, opposed together to all the other characters: "I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all." (p. 166)

While Nick is sympathetic, he still has his own distinct identity. His mind is conservative and historical as is his lineage; on the other hand, Gatsby's is radical and apocalyptic as his heritage. While Nick is immersed in time and reality, Gatsby is hopelessly out of it. Nick is saved from Gatsby's fate by his own sense of time, for Nick lives in the temporal as well as the ideal world and is able to mature. In contrast, Gatsby lives outside time in that dream world where past, present and future are all one. He has no sense of the past and, as a result, is never able to come to terms with it. His collision with reality grows out of his uncompromising romantic conception of himself. Consequently,


Gatsby is doomed for having lived too long with a single impossible dream, defeated by social opposition, and trampled down by a world of moral corruption and carelessness. His sensibility is not sufficiently developed for him to realize the full implications of his situation. To him, the possibilities of life are conceived of in material terms. It is Nick who senses the terror and grandeur implicitly in what otherwise might have been only a pathetic anecdote about a bootlegger. Nick's heritage of traditional values, the source of his moral knowledge, spares him from Gatsby's fate.

Nick not only symbathizes with Gatsby but also sees the more ridiculous aspects of his behavior. The whole of Gatsby's story, his dream and absurd plan for realizing it, are redeemed from failure through Nick's effort imaginatively to interpret and render them. Nick is drawn to seek purpose and meaning from Gatsby's problematic fate. The narrator's interpretation of Gatsby's fate involves more than an inquiry into what went wrong in Gatsby's plan. It is necessary for Nick to define what lies behind Gatsby's design, and with that Nick concludes. Only in Nick's interpretation is the fullness of Gatsby's dream recovered.

Moreover, when faced with corruption, Nick chooses morally, falling back on the traditional morals of his childhood. Nick forsakes the cruel East and its values as Marlow does the Congo; and the narrator returns to his moral roots. For Nick the East-West dichotomy objectifies the
contradictory tendencies in himself. Before it is too late, he leaves the East which has a "quality of distortion" for him and returns to the Midwest. (p. 177) Though he gains his experience and maturity in the East, he rejects its moral confusions and returns to the provinces of "fundamental decencies." (p. 1)

Nick ultimately succeeds because he achieves awareness. His experience and growth provide the main continuity in the novel with Gatsby as an important agent in the narrator's movement from innocence to awareness. Nick takes the point of view of the detached moralist, the man who was there but escaped. As the historian who is looking back on an experience he finally understands, Nick still retains his double view of Gatsby: he admires the hope, the romantic naivete and the colossal vitality of Gatsby's illusion; yet he knows Gatsby is a hoodlum and that the fraudulent value system of the East made Gatsby what he was and almost corrupted Nick himself.

Through his narrator, Fitzgerald traces a growth in general moral perception, which will constitute in effect his story, a successful transcendence of a bitter and harrowing set of experiences. In the novel Nick comes to understand the social, moral and mythic implications of his experience. His perspective traces his development from a state of innocence and naive enchantment to a clear moral perspective of the man who goes home again. However, Nick does not

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return as the same man. He has stopped thinking of the Middle West as the "ragged edge of the universe; he has gone beyond enchantment and irony. (p. 3) What Nick gains is a perspective on himself.

Besides understanding himself, Nick can also evaluate Gatsby. "He admires Gatsby's hope, his romantic readiness to dream, his good-will and his spirit. He realizes, however, that Gatsby is a fraud whose values and assumptions are empty and morally wrong." Nick discovers that the power of will without the direction of intelligence is a destructive power and there must be some real end beyond the satisfaction of private desire. Nick returns home with this knowledge; he escases from lies, illusion and moral corruption. However, his return is not a retreat or a flight to safety and comfort—to immaturity. His new perspective prevents that, and Nick returns to commitments and responsibilities. As a result, the novel's counter movement and framing action is a painful journey toward order, meaning and responsibility as Fitzgerald illustrates his interest in awareness as it demonstrates itself in action.

---CONCLUSION---

Ishmael, Marlow and Nick have similar structural importance for Moby-Dick, Heart of Darkness and The Great Gatsby. From the three works discussed, one can see an evolution of a new tradition in the structural role of the narrator. The doubleness of romantic involvement and yet a sense of aesthetic distance requires a new mode of

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58 Ibid., 359.
59 Ibid., 359-360.
narrator. The ambiguity between imagination and analysis demands a narrator who expresses the ambiguity at one remove from the author himself. Through their narrators, Melville, Conrad and Fitzgerald are able to achieve an aesthetic distance that is necessary for control and clarity; and they are also able to express the ambiguity of moral vision, of the narrator's insight into the truth of things. The narrators see the truth that is concealed by appearances, whereas the other characters because of their flaws, refract and distort and are taken in by appearances. Ishmael, Marlow and Nick reveal the moral vision of the novels they narrate which are distinctly conservative and moral. Each is aware of the illusion involved in the romantic imagination; yet he also sees the meaness of life without imagination.

Neither Ishmael, Marlow or Nick is confined to the traditional narrator's role: they are expanded to be both technical devices and part of the subject-matter. In some novels the first-person narrator is a convenience in achieving selectivity, and in others at the opposite extreme the narrator himself is the object of our study; but in Moby-Dick, Heart of Darkness and The Great Gatsby both purposes served. The narrators are too much engaged to be mere fictional conveniences; for they are characters in the stories they tell, rather than translucent mediums for transmitting tales. They are deeply implicated in the stories they are telling, and their attitudes evolve and change as the stories progress. As characters in the novels, they find themselves reluctantly but unavoidably drawn into the lives of the
protagonists; and they observe them with a sense of their having a moral reference to themselves.

Besides a reluctant identification on the part of the narrators with the central characters, there is also a division of sympathy and a conflict between the claims of imagination and the ethics of conduct. The result is a double sense of immediate involvement and of detachment and objectivity. The ambivalence of the narrators toward their protagonists creates much of the play of tension and irony in the novels.

The three novels share several correspondences. Each author seizes upon a well-defined framework of reality and distorts it with his imagination, colors it with nightmare hues and shades and amplifies it to make it a vehicle for larger meanings. The common subjects of the novels are isolation and illusion. Melville metaphysically questions the creation and creator, the joy and terror of man's existence in a universe indifferent to him; Conrad explores the capacity for evil in the inmost heart of man; and Fitzgerald investigates the validity of the American dream, the illusion of financial success bringing happiness.

Melville, Conrad and Fitzgerald accomplish an objective, indirect approach to their material through the use of a narrator involved in the story, one who filters the narrative through his impressions and feelings, thereby internalizing the outer tensions of social and ethical reality. The procedure is a psychological search, a probing of conscience seen and represented in terms of that conscience with the
unifying central intelligence of the narrator as self-conscious and self-analytical. Moreover, the controlling voice of the narrator in his dual role as character and witness gives order and meaning to the novel. As a determining and discovering agent, he functions to reconstruct and evolve morally and intellectually in the narrative.

Involved and detached, Ishmael, Marlow and Nick are men seeking identity and meaning. They find it vicariously from observing protagonists who are destroyed by their total absorption in their visions. Ahab is blinded by the impenetrable white whale; Kurtz by the blackness at the heart of darkness; and Gatsby by the illusion of the green light. Driven and possessed, Ahab and Kurtz lose touch with feeling, whereas Gatsby loses touch with reason. They arrive at the same end: the horror at the center of truth to any consuming vision. The monumental dramas of the protagonists are brought to human dimensions through the perceptions and musings of the narrators. All is comprehended through their life-size abilities for the reader's understanding. Ishmael's voice, however, tends to blend frequently with his author's and loses its distinction.

In all three novels the stories are as much the narrators' as the protagonists': Ahab, Kurtz and Gatsby act as doubles of their recorders. The narrators are highly susceptible and imaginative men easily drawn to their protagonists. All three narrators come in imminent danger of making the same fatal error, but each resists the risk of extremism and survives. Though they can never experience the protagonists'
ecstasy, they will never suffer its consequences. Ishmael has his vision of evil at the tiller; Marlow at the edge of the abyss; and Nick at the Valley of Ashes. Though they refuse to do more than glimpse at the horror, Marlow and Nick loyally defend Kurtz and Gatsby. Ishmael, on the other hand, remains aloof from Ahab in favor of Queequeg.

One of the major differences between Ishmael and the other narrators is that he has two men to influence his moral direction, Ahab and Queequeg. From them Ishmael learns how to survive. Ishmael can see that Ahab's humanity is transfixed and paralyzed by his vindictive hate. Like Kurtz and Gatsby, Ahab is formed and unchanging. While Ishmael comes to terms with his environment, Ahab expands to self-destruction. In contrast to Marlow and Nick, Ishmael rejects and resists his protagonist. Though the narrator reveals an early sympathy for his mad captain, he never excuses or exalts his behavior. In spite of the strong attraction he feels for Ahab, Ishmael remains open to contrary influence. He feels a magnetism but denounces allegiance to Ahab and illustrates his defeat without glorification or redemption. Though the narrator shares Ahab's perceptions, he manages to keep in view the whole circle of life; and, as a result, he refuses the loyalty and commitment the others make. Instead he aligns himself to the symbol of fraternity, Queequeg.

In contrast to Ishmael, Marlow and Nick compromise themselves to protect their protagonists. Both Marlow and
Nick claims to be honest men, but they violate their codes for reasons that bear upon their central themes. Marlow deliberately lies to Kurtz's Intended, and Nick lies at the request. The narrators' overt reasons for deception differ, but both lie to defend or protect their alter-egos. Furthermore, the lies illustrate the narrators' ambivalence toward their protagonists. Kurtz is "hollow at the core," yet Marlow finds him "remarkable" and his defeat a kind of triumph. (p. 59; p. 72) "He had summed up—he had judged ... After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief." (p. 72) Gatsby represents for Nick "everything for which I have an unaffected scorn," yet Nick finds that Gatsby also possesses "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness," and a "heightened sensitivity to the promise of life." (p. 2)

Both narrators remain loyal to their protagonists because the corrupted Kurtz and the corrupted Gatsby are, after all, incorruptible. Marlow remains loyal to Kurtz because of his courage to face the powers of darkness and because of the magnitude of his vision and his unflinching faith in it. Nick, too, remains loyal to Gatsby who trades on time and bargains with the clock but never trades on the dream that possesses him. In spite of his scorn for everything that Gatsby represents, Nick intuitively recognizes Gatsby's unique and heroic stature; and he ends exempting him. What redeems Gatsby is his fidelity to an idea, his faith in the power of dream; and what redeems Nick is his fidelity to
Gatsby. Nick prefers to side with the gaudy fantasy of Gatsby rather than the crude truth of Tom Buchanan. As the man in between, Nick is faithful to the superiority of what Gatsby represents, if incapable of being like him, and ultimately repelled by the Buchanans.

In each novel the narrator's choice is really about his own identity, about reality. At the beginning he does not know enough about the protagonist or himself to make a choice. He can only choose after coming to know the main character and himself. Thus, the knowing of the self and the knowing of the protagonist are coincident. Ishmael, Marlow and Nick come to know themselves through reacting to Ahab, Kurtz and Gatsby.

The authors are employing a technique frequently used in fiction. Characters often come to knowledge about themselves by understanding others. For example, Elizabeth Bennett learns from observing her parents and Charlotte Lucas; Pip, from observing Magwitch, Joe Gargery, Herbert Pocket and the Jaggers. But in these novels the heroes do a good deal on their own; they learn by acting as well as by observing. However, Moby-Dick, Heart of Darkness and The Great Gatsby differ in that the process from which narrators learn about themselves is dependent upon understanding others; and it is that process which structures the stories. The formula is the coming to knowledge of the self through seeing the self in another, though of course, Ahab

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61 Table, p. 95.

62 Thale, 72.
Kurtz and Gatsby are more than projections, each having an existence in his own right. However, the novels reveal the protagonists as formed rather than changing: Thad, Kurtz and Gatsby remain static while Ishmael, Marlow and Nick develop.

What the narrators learn is determined by what kind of men they are, for each narrator's realization gains from the next; and each is more realized by the completion of his comprehension of things. Their development is tied to their protagonists; up to a point, Ishmael, Marlow and Nick's careers parallel and reflect Thad, Kurtz and Gatsby's. It is not simply that the narrators become emotionally involved in their protagonists' affairs but that their own attitudes toward their lives are entirely dependent on their feelings about their protagonists. However, each's discovery is distinctively individual. Nick's is not metaphysical like Ishmael's or horrifying like Marlow's. From Gatsby, Nick learns to objectify and magnify to literally heroic proportions his own romanticism. Thus, Nick learns to criticize and to cherish his own romanticism by discovering it in Gatsby.

There are other differences between the narrators. Nick lacks Ishmael and Marlow's spontaneity. Nick's inherited "provincial squeamishness" sets him off from them; and Nick's mind, though quite as perplexed as theirs, lacks their range and points of curiosity. Marlow's

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63 Ibid., 71.
64 Stallman, 11.
discovery is the most intense of all three, and the self-discovery process is treated more fully in Marlow; for in coming to know Kurtz, Marlow must journey into the center of his own being. His preparation for this involves an awareness of the similarity between himself and Kurtz. Kurtz is presented at the moment when failure overwhelms him, and it is in the development of Marlow that we see the cause of Kurtz's defeat. Marlow feels and explains his awareness of the same decay that overcomes Kurtz, for the weakness in Kurtz reveals a similar but previously unsuspected flaw in Marlow. The fate of Kurtz reveals the same destruction can overcome not only Marlow but any human being. Marlow understands the terror and appeal of existence because he has seen the ambivalence magnified and objectified in Kurtz's experience. The important thing is not the narrator's return to civilization, but the fact that he goes back with a burden of knowledge about himself—and about all men—that makes him uneasy with himself and contemptuous of those who do not know what it means to exist.

Survival for Marlow and Nick is based partially on their former training and deliberate beliefs. Lacking these and being open to all influences, Ishmael chooses Queequeg's moral code as his own. As a result of their quests, the narrators return (Ishmael to land, Marlow to Europe, and Nick to the Midwest) with a greater understanding of themselves and of life. All return to society with altered attitudes. Ishmael, Marlow and Nick endure and intuitively understand their confrontations with the destructive element. However,
in Nick's case it is not clear whether he holds the Buchanans or Gatsby responsible for Gatsby's destruction. Sympathizing with Gatsby's romanticism, Nick tends to blame the Buchanans.

All the narrators benefit from their stories by having lived them, and they recreate the narratives from reminiscent wisdom. The awareness of the qualitative difference between time-present and time-past serves as a source of moral insight. Marlow and Ishmael tend to be more uncertain of their findings, but their subject is such that lends itself to ambiguity; for the meaning of life and of man's inner nature are indefinite and unknown. Their ambivalence is embodied in controlled skepticism. Since Nick is not concerned with mystical problems, his conclusions are more concrete.

Fundamentally, Melville, Conrad and Fitzgerald use their narrators' consciousnesses to limit, compact and control what is told. The authors are not just depending on a point of view, but the consciousness of an introspective and peripheral narrator whose meditating mind forms and orders the narration into a controlled work of art. Thus, the authors' structural use of their narrators is indispensable to their aesthetic creations, for through them the novelists are able to present their moral visions at one step removed, from a necessary aesthetic distance established through the narrator. Consequently, the peripheral narrator is a key factor in aiding the author to construct his raw narrative material into a compact novel. Thus, the imaginative and analytical voice of the peripheral narrator has a distinct and invaluable role in determining the mode.
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