

Inaccessibility: fiction and miller

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



Inaccessibility Brook Thomas in his essay Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in Heart of Darkness extends J. Hills Miller's "unveiling" (Miller 220) of Conrad's narrative. Miller's essay Heart of Darkness Revisited demonstrates how Heart of Darkness "belongs to the genre of the parabolic apocalypse" (Miller 217). Thomas responds to Miller's unveiling "a lack of decisive unveiling in Heart of darkness" (Miller 220) by reading "historically the narrative that Conrad weaves" (Thomas 239) so that we might be able "to come closer to a truth" (Thomas 239).

Thomas presents the possibilities of decisive unveiling, which Miller claims, Heart of Darkness lacks. Miller's questions what makes Heart of Darkness an apocalyptic parable? Subsequently Miller analyzes Conrad's narrative "in light of these generic classifications" (Miller 207). Thomas is cautious in interpreting Conrad's narrative and questions the possibility of being able to glimpse into an essential truth by placing the text in historical context.

Thomas quotes Miller, to synthesise "Conrad's fiction in the context of the history of ideas" (Thomas 242), and later on takes up Miller's suggestion in the evaluation of The Nigger of the "Narcissus" by Conrad to demonstrate that there can be "decisive unveiling" (Miller 220). Although Thomas does not mention Miller's essay Heart of Darkness Revisited he quotes Miller's The Disappearance of God and Poets of Reality. In addition to Thomas quoting Miller, both critiques adopt similar approaches in their essays.

One of the first passage they quote from Heart of Darkness is Marlow informing us "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made

visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (Heart of Darkness p. 20) both critiques examine Conrad’s writing and his purpose of writing.

Miller’s analysis is that Conrad presents to us the description of “ two kinds of stories: simple tales and parables” (Miller 208) and that Marlow’s stories “ like the meaning of a parable- is outside, not in” (Miller 208) and goes on to say that the parable is inaccessible. Thomas quotes this passage to agree with Miller that “ there is no guarantee that we will penetrate to the essential truth” (Thomas 239) at the same time suggest the possibility to glimpse truth “ if we read historically the narrative that Conrad weaves” (Thomas 239).

I am convinced that Thomas complicates Millers argument. Miller quotes Marx to define a parable like “ the use of real life condition to express another reality or truth not otherwise expressible” he then compares the parable used from the Bible to demonstrate how Conrad’s fiction functions as a parable. Miller proves Heart of Darkness to be a parabolic apocalypse.

In reference to the earlier passage from Heart of Darkness of the haze, Miller compares the image of the haze and illumination Conrad creates, with the “ case of Jesus’ parable of the sower” (Miller 210) as Conrad uses “ realistic and almost universally known facts as the means of expressing indirectly another truth less visible” (Miller 210). Miller further explains that Conrad’s parable becomes not just a way to examine Marlow’s story, consequently to examine Conrad’s narrative itself.

Miller quotes Wallace Stevens that “ there is no such thing as a metaphor of a metaphor” and moves on to use the Bible and Conrad’s The Nigger if the “

Narcissus” to demonstrate inaccessibility of Heart of Darkness. Using the parable of the sower Miller explains: “ If you understand the parable you do not need it. If you need it you cannot possibly understand it” (Miller 210). Likewise Heart of Darkness based on the facts of History and Conrad’s life is used to express “ the evasive and elusive truth underlying both historical and personal experience” (Miller 210) being a parable would fail to illuminate one who does not see the darkness.

Miller picks out the passage of Marlow’s narration of life sensation and the impossibility of communicating life sensation sets it against the image of the halo in the mist to show us that Heart of Darkness “ is a revelation of the impossibility of revelation” (Miller 212). The Nigger of the “ Narcissus” is used by both critiques to examine Conrad’s purpose of writing but interpretations of both critiques differ. They both quote similar passage of Conrad proclaiming his attempt to make his readers see and “ that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask”.

Miller picks out the “ double paradox” of seeing darkness in terms of light and the two sense of see one as physical vision and second the unveiling the invisible truth. Like the parable of the sower Miller states the Heart of Darkness does not accomplish in makes the reader glimpse truth. This analysis differs from Thomas analysis of the same quotation from The Nigger of the “ Narcissus”. Firstly Thomas uses this quotation to synthesis Conrad’s narrative and history, that Conrad re-envision the way nineteenth-century historians that to “ discover truth we had forgotten was to reconstruct it historically” (Thomas 248) linking the reading of the narrative with historical context. Secondly Thomas quotes The Nigger of the “ Narcissus” where “

Conrad explicitly compares his work as an artist to the work of civilization” (Thomas 254) here Thomas links reading Heart of Darkness for the Conrad’s writing and focus on work. While Miller narrows the reading of Heart of Darkness and the inaccessibility of the narrative, Thomas points various ways to allow the narrative to be accessible.

Miller examines the similarity between a parable and apocalypse genre through the notion that both “ is an act of unveiling” (Miller 207). Again Miller uses the Bible to demonstrate how Heart of Darkness follows the genre of the apocalypse. Miller compares Conrad’s narrative structure of how the “ reader of Heart of Darkness learns through the relation of the primary narrator, who learned through Marlow, who learned through Kurtz” (Miller 214) to “ the book of Revelation, God speaks through Jesus, who speaks through a messenger angel, who speaks through John of Patmos, who speaks to us” (Miller 214).

This speaking through one next farther is what characterizes Heart of Darkness as the genre of the apocalypse. Miller synthesis of Heart of Darkness as a parabolic apocalypse is what leads to his conclusion to the lack of decisive unveiling in the novel. The “ ventriloquism” (Miller 214) of having a voice behind a voice and deprives the novel a voice of authority. Miller proves how the novel fits in the generic classification and identifies the writing of Conrad to unveil as deeper truth but points out that the problems of the parable and apocalypse in making the Heart of Darkness inaccessible.

Thomas acknowledges this inaccessibility but presents us with possible accessible reading through the syntheses he suggests. Thomas quotes Conrad’s Notes on Life and Letters and follows through Conrad’s stand that “

fiction is history” and by placing *Heart of Darkness* in the context of history we can attempt to glimpse a truth. Thomas presents that Conrad weaves a story that “that proves to be truer than history” (Thomas 242). Thomas introduces British modernist novelist James Joyce, D.

H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Foster linking them with the “Jacques Lacan’s revision of Hegel” (Thomas 243) and some recent critiques concept of “the other”. By using the modern novelist to illustrate encounter between east and west Thomas synthesises *Heart of Darkness* as an encounter of Europe’s other with the other within itself. Thomas goes on to demystify the Eurocentric history and draws on modern thinkers Friedrich Nietzsche for poststructuralist thought and Sigmund Freud for psychoanalysis.

Thomas states “for critics like Miller trying to cope with the loss of confidence in the Eurocentric view that is dramatized by Conrad’s narrative” (Thomas 244) but Thomas asserts that Conrad’s narrative help identify the condition for poststructuralist thought. And Freud as Thomas states “Conrad’s narrative [of] Africa eludes all attempts of the Western mind—especially a male mind—to understand it”. However Thomas points out the problem of simply accepting this reading denying the encounter with “the other” the non-European, if it is reduced to a function of understanding Europe.

Thomas goes back to close read and from the novel and looks at *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* to examine Conrad’s purpose. How Thomas moves beyond Miller in his analysis is by examining the “breaks and gaps” (Thomas 251) within the narrative. Miller almost alludes to the encounter of the other within Europe “the end of the Western civilization, or of Western imperialism,

the reversal of idealism into savagery” (Miller 218) but goes on to show that the ironies in Marlow’s narrative is impossible to read with a clear meaning.

Miller begins with Marx by using his definition of parable conversely Thomas ends with Marx in examining work and how it is “ work, then, that constructs the lie of civilization” (Thomas 255). Thomas refers back to Conrad’s *The Nigger of the “ Narcisusus”* examines a passage and draws Miller into the discussion pointing to the task of the writer to be a workman of art to provide a glimpse of truth to the man caught in labour. Work then links with Conrad’s narrative and the breaks and gaps from which Thomas suggests to draw a definitive unveiling.

Thomas ends with a more radical envisioning one which allows “ the other” to be represented not one suppressed in an understanding of Europe while Miller ends that his analysis of the novel has made his a witness pushing the truth further away as he adds on to the voices. As compelling as Miller’s close reading and comparison with the Bible, Thomas’s extension of Miller’s discussions makes Thomas argument more convincing as he presents an additional step of not just looking into Conrad’s narrative but also the breaks in it.

Reference Miller, J. Hillis. “ Heart of Darkness Revisited. ” In *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, edited by Ross C. Murfin, pp. 31-50. University: The University of Alabama Press, 1985. Thomas, Brook “ Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in Heart of Darkness. ” In *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, edited by Ross C. Murfin, pp. 31-50. University: The University of Alabama Press, 1985.