The Secret Sharer Study Guide

The Secret Sharer by Joseph Conrad

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Introduction

Joseph Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" was written in only two weeks In 1909. This story and two others make up the book *Twixt Land and Sea* which was first published in 1912. Conrad considered three other titles for his story about identity: "The Second Self," "The Secret Self," and "The Other Self." The tale is based on a true story about a murder on the ship *Cutty Sark* in 1880 by a sailor with a wicked reputation. The murderer jumped ship and was captured; he was eventually acquitted of murder but found guilty of manslaughter. Conrad's story varies from the real tale in that the real crime was deliberate and committed by a vicious man. In the fictional version, Leggatt is attempting to save his ship from a sailor who will not obey orders. "The Secret Sharer" is considered to be both a psychological and autobiographical piece of writing, and is largely considered one of Conrad's finest short works.

Author Biography

Joseph Conrad was born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski on December 3,1857, in Berdichev, Poland. Conrad's parents were exiled to Northern Russia in 1862 and both of them died before Conrad was eleven. He was then supported and raised by various relatives, including his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, a prosperous lawyer who provided financial aid until Conrad was in his thirties. Conrad received sporadic and irregular schooling and was often ill. He Joined the British merchant marines in 1878 and traveled to Africa, Australia, India, and the Orient. These experiences would later aid and inform his writing. Due to poor health, Conrad was forced to retire from the merchant marines, and in 1894 he began a career as a writer. It was not until 1913, with the publication of *Chance,* that Conrad became an acclaimed writer.

Most of Conrad's stories were inspired by his experiences at sea: *Lord Jim* was a story that he had heard about the ship the *Jeddah; The Nigger of the Narcissus* was based on his adventures from Bombay to England; "The Secret Sharer" was taken from an actual incident aboard the *Gutty Sark* in 1880; and *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad's most famous work, is a fictional account of the author's own experience in the Belgian Congo. On August 3, 1924, Joseph Conrad died at the age of 66 and was buried in Canterbury, England.

Plot Summary

"The Secret Sharer," one of Polish-born Conrad's more widely read sea stories, is a psychological tale narrated by a young ship captain who finds himself harboring a fugitive from another ship. As the story opens, the narrator has just taken command of his first ship, which is anchored in the Gulf of Slam. The captain reveals the extent of his insecurity at the beginning of this long voyage, comparing himself to the ship itself: "we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out" Recognizing that tins journey will be the opportunity he needs to test himself, he assumes an uneasy command of a considerably older and more experienced crew.

Much to the astonishment of his crew, the captain decides to take a five-hour watch himself the first night while they remain at anchor waiting for enough wind to begin sailing. Although another ship, the *Sephora* is anchored not far away, the captain revels in the solitude and peacefulness of walking the decks alone.

Soon, however, his mood is shattered by a startling discovery. Pausing to pull up a ladder he believes someone carelessly left over the side, he is astonished to see "something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder." The shape turns out to be "the naked body of a man," clutching the bottom rung of the ladder with one hand. The two men begin a whispered conversation, which establishes the "mysterious communication" between them that drives the remainder of the plot.

The mysterious swimming man introduces himself as Leggatt and explains that he has escaped from the *Sephora* because he has been imprisoned awaiting trial for killing a man. Later, Leggatt further explains that the man he killed had refused to follow orders in the midst of an awful storm and that his actions may have saved the ship and the rest of the crew. Because the young captain believes the fugitive's story, and because he sees so much of himself in Leggatt, he decides to hide him in his quarters.

The two men are bound together by the secret they share, and the captain becomes an accomplice to Leggatt's crime because he must deceive his own crew in order to hide the fugitive. The relationship becomes more complicated when the old captain from the *Sephora* boards the ship to search for and inquire about the missing man. Though he escapes detection, Leggatt now knows that he will not be treated justly if he surrenders, declaring, "It would never do for me to come to life again." And so the two sharers of the secret devise a plan to allow Leggatt to escape to land, though he is doomed to a life of wandering.

The untested young captain commands his crew to sail dangerously close to land in order to allow Leggatt to slip out undetected. He is fully aware that he is risking not just his career but also the safety of his ship and crew. Telling his crew he is looking for "land wind," he takes the ship so close that "the great black mass [is] brooding over [the] very mastheads." Finally he gives the order to turn away, but he is so unfamiliar with the feel of the ship that he cannot tell in the dark if he is successful. At last he sees a marker

drifting astern and he knows that he has successfully avoided losing his ship. He also knows that Leggatt has slipped away undetected; the marker is the captain's own white hat that he thrust upon Leggatt before he left him.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The story is told in first person from the point of view of the ship's captain, although his name is never stated. As the story opens, he is aboard the ship, looking around and describing the scenery. To one side, he sees small pieces of land or islets and to the other side, nothing but the stable, crisp, clear ocean. The tug that had brought the boat to its present location is now leaving, and there is a sense of a new beginning, of embarking on a new journey.

The captain briefly introduces his main officers who are the chief mate and second mate. The chief mate is described as having an abundant amount of whiskers and is characterized as a rather comical character; a person who finds it necessary to find a logical reason for every single occurrence that ever comes his way. For example, he attempts to explain the logical reason how a scorpion could have found its way into the inkwell of his writing desk. This caused him much mental anguish, as it was a task that strained him a great deal; he wouldn't let it go, but just had to find an answer. The second mate is described as young and round-cheeked, quiet and serious. He's wise beyond his years.

The captain informs the reader that he had been appointed captain only two weeks before this day. Therefore being new to the position, he was the "odd ball" or the one who had to learn how to effectively manage his crew. You see, the rest of the crew had been together for about eighteen months already so the captain feels like he's a definite stranger on board - odd man out. What makes it even more difficult for the captain is that he is the youngest of the crew. A young captain delegating and giving orders to elders can sometimes signify tension and frustration on both parts - the delegator and those being delegated to. The second mate is the next youngest aboard.

The three officers have a short meeting together where they discuss the presence of a nearby ship that is approaching dangerously close. What in the world do they want? After the chief mate makes his attempt at figuring out its size and purpose, the second mate tells them that the skipper of the tugboat informs him that the name of the ship is *Sephora;* it is carrying a cargo of coal.

After their informal meeting, the captain mentions his awareness at how hard the crew has been working, which is practically non-stop for the past two days. Each has had very little sleep the night before, so the captain directed his chief mate "to let all hands turn in without setting an anchor watch." At the same time, the captain acknowledges that he is well aware of the fact that he was doing something rather unusual. Regardless, the captain still insisted upon complete obedience with this request. In turn, the captain, himself, volunteers to remain on deck 'til about one o'clock, at which time the second mate insisted that he would relieve him. The chief mate and the rest of the crew seemed astonished at the captain's request as well.

The strangeness of both himself and his arrangement kept the captain wide-awake and totally sleepless as he walked along the deck that night. He watched the nearby ship he had discussed earlier with his officers and came to the conclusion that it was like other ships; its men were like other men, and he relaxed in the fact that the sea would most likely not hold any discomforting surprises. With this thought, he went below to get himself a cigar, noticing all around him the loud snoring sounds of his crew sleeping soundly.

As the captain arrives back up to the top deck, he seems to take in the encompassment of his situation in the middle of the ocean. He emphasizes the stillness of the atmosphere: profoundly silent and completely calm. To him this brings with it a complete sense of security. Peace. The captain continues to methodically pace the deck. Without thinking much about it, the captain comes upon the rope ladder, located on the side of the ship. It had been left hanging over the outside of the ship.

When the captain wholeheartedly attempts to pull the ladder back into the ship, expecting it to be an easy task since the ladder is not a heavy one, he is very surprised to find that it is too heavy to pull over. Astonished at his inability to complete his task, the captain impatiently looks over the side of the ship and to his amazement, he sees something long and pale floating very close to the ladder. Upon closer inspection, the captain is able to identify the floating object as the naked body of a man. Astonished at the gruesome sight, at first the captain thinks his eyes are playing games with him. He must be hallucinating for he sees a headless corpse. But then with swiftness, the captain's eyes focus clearly, and he is able to make out a black-haired head on a seemingly lifeless body.

In an ordinary tone the captain barks to the stranger, "What's the matter?" The lifeless body replies simply, "Cramp," and then adds, a little bit anxiously that there is no need to call anyone. The captain assures him he has no plans of calling anyone. Next, the stranger boldly asks if the captain has turned in. "Might you call him out quietly, sir?" The captain informs the man that he is, in fact, the captain. This statement completely surprises the man. My, my, he didn't look like a captain - so young, friendly and astute, the stranger thought to himself.

The stranger identifies himself as "Legatt," in a firm yet calm voice. Legatt informs the captain that he has been swimming since nine o'clock. His question is whether he will let go of the ladder and swim till exhaustion or is he able and welcome to come aboard the ship? Upoon conclusion of their conversation, Legatt begins to climb up the ladder. Just has he does, the captain departs quickly to get him some clothes, making sure his crew is still sleeping as soundly as before. The captain kindly brings Legatt of his sleeping suits from his room. And now that he is aboard the ship, the captain takes in his full features and determines all is calm. Legatt can be described as: no older than twenty-five, with regular features, light eyes, heavy, dark eyebrows, and a small, brown moustache. The captain's sleeping suit fit him perfectly.

Legatt informs the captain that he has escaped from the nearby ship, the *Sephora.* When the captain asks why, Legatt says he killed a man, and goes on to tell his

fascinating story. The man he killed, he explains, was someone who has no business to live at all; he wouldn't do his job nor would he allow other people to do theirs. The murder took place during a huge storm. Legatt had taken the man by the neck and had gripped him so tightly that when the ship was hit by a large wave, and the water had finally washed away, he was still holding the man by the neck. The crew found them underneath a pile of debris. When they were found, the man was black in the face, and the crew went wild yelling, "Murderer!"

With this bold declaration and no ability to defend himself, Legatt was informed that since had killed a man, he could no longer act as chief mate of the ship, which had, until then, been his position.

After his story, the captain remained calm. He politely informed Legatt that he'd better head down to his stateroom for rest. The captain's room was laid out in the shape of an "L." It had a good amount of privacy as anyone who opened the door had no view of the long part of the "L." Before Legatt headed down to the stateroom, the captain remarked that Legatt's face was awfully thin; his sunburn was faded as if he had been ill. Legatt then informed the captain that this was the result of being kept under arrest in his cabin for almost seven weeks. There was, however, nothing sickly in his eyes or in his expression, the captain noted.

Legatt then went on to share the story of his arrest, and of his escape, which occurred one night when his room door was left unlocked. He had wandered up to the main deck and as he looked down into the water, he found he'd jumped off the side, acting mostly on impulse. It was too quick a reaction versus a conscious decision to jump, that's for sure, Legatt informed the captain. The crew aboard the *Sephora* heard the splash and began to yell, "Suicide!"

But as Legatt explains, it is very difficult for a swimmer as well versed he is with the water, to actually succeed at committing suicide by drowning. Legatt swam and swam. Eventually he took of his clothing, tied it to a stone and let it sink into the sea so that it may never be found. This way, he figured, the *Sephora* crew could continue to believe he had committed suicide.

Legatt had continued to swim day and night, on and on, and then he experienced a great sense of relief upon spotting the riding light on the captain's ship. He had been about to panic, but instead swam straight for the light, happy to finally having a destination to swim toward. "And that is how you found me, hanging on the ladder," Legatt replied..

Upon completion of his tale of woe, the captain gives the exhausted man a lift into his bed and draws the curtain around it. He then dozes off to sleep himself on his couch. All of a sudden, the captain is awakened by the steward who is knocking on his door. The captain calls for him to enter. He is very careful, however, not to allow the steward to see Legatt, his sleeping companion. Trying to skirt around the awkwardness of the situation, the captain does indeed acknowledge his awareness that the steward must be suspicious as to why the captain chose to draw the curtain around his bed before falling

asleep on the couch. Whew! The captain makes it through the awkward situation and dismisses the steward.

The captain then makes his appearance on deck. Upon his arrival on deck, the captain notices his chief mate has sort of a curiosity in his eye which both perplexed and angered him. In order to avoid speaking to him, the captain immediately gave him an order as he approached.

At the end of Part 1, the captain has just received news that there is a boat heading their way. The captain orders the crew to get the ladder over, and they all head up on deck. Is it the *Sephora?*

Part 1 Analysis

At the opening of the story, the author uses extensive imagery to convey a feeling of stability and calm. The captain is all alone on the deck of the ship, a fact that is made even more apparent by the silence surrounding him. The mention of the tug leaving the boat alone in this stillness gives the atmosphere or sense of a new beginning. The ship is now alone along with the captain on its deck, and they are both about to set off on unchartered territory and a new journey together.

After the captain has sent his crew to bed and is keeping the anchor watch himself on deck, the author emphasizes the silence and calm of the night, and also makes a point to mention the ship's riding light. "The riding light in the fore rigging burned with a clear, untroubled, as if symbolic, flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night." He makes a point to emphasize the symbolic flame, but does so in passing and then moves on to the captain's discovery of the rope ladder where he soon finds Legatt. It is not until later on when Legatt shares with the captain the story of his escape from the *Sephora* that the riding light comes up again.

Not only, however, is the captain alone on deck for most of Part I, but he is also alone in the sense that he is the newest member of the crew and therefore a virtual stranger. This comes into play particularly when he discovers Legatt. From the beginning when the captain first fetches Legatt his sleeping suit, which fits him perfectly, the captain begins to refer to Legatt as his double or his other self. He identifies the fact that he is almost as much a stranger on this ship as is Legatt. Although their physical features may compare slightly, the captain admits, "He was not a bit like me, really..."

Why then does the captain continue, from the moment he boards the ship, to refer to Legatt as his other self. Clearly, the two men share a sort of bond from the very beginning. Legatt speaks to the captain as if he understands his sentiments when describing the man he killed, and the captain follows along. The quickly form a mutual admiration society, so to speak.

The author creates numerous images of the two men standing next to one another, similar in stature, coloring and wearing identical clothing. These images emphasize the

similarities between Legatt and the captain, who clearly relate to one another from their first conversation on. A special bond has been formed, almost instantaneously.

Legatt's recantation of his water journey escape is described in great detail by Conrad. After his escape, Legatt had begun to swim on and on, removing his clothing and continuing to swim. Legatt had almost given up hope. He had made the conscious decision to swim on until he was too exhausted to swim any longer. At this point he was heading out for a small island; it was from there that he saw the riding light from the captain's ship. It was something for him to swim to, a destination and reference point for freedom and hopefully rest, relaxation and restitution. Determined against all odds, Legatt continued to swim with all his might for the riding light. In the end, it was this bright, symbolic, confident flame that probably saved the man's life.

The main character is fully developed in that the reader can feel his paranoia upon meeting Legatt and allowing him to sleep in his stateroom. After leaving his stateroom in the morning and making his appearance on deck, the captain is consumed with thoughts of his sleeping companion. He imagines the curious thoughts of the steward and of his chief and second mate when he sees them, assuming their expressions are those of curiosity, mistrust and a sense of something awry, even though it is all part of the captain's vivid imagination.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Part 2 opens with a description of the skipper from the *Sephora*. The captain describes him as having a thin red whisker scratchily located all over his face, and he has the kind of complexion to match his red hair and blue eyes. The skipper has high shoulders but wasn't particularly tall, and one of his legs was more crooked than the other. When he came on board the ship, he shook hands and then vaguely looked around.

Without reservation the captain pointed out that the skipper's main characteristic was "spiritless tenacity," and although the captain treated him with politeness, this seemed to slightly disturb him. It seemed every time the captain spoke to the skipper, his reply was mumbled, as if he were ashamed of what he was saying. Maybe he is just shy, the captain then thought. Trying to get more information out of him, the captain kindly brought the skipper down to his stateroom for a drink and conversation. Yet still, the skipper continued to mumble; his garbled speech was barely distinguishable. Since the captain wanted Legatt, who was still in the room to hear their conversation, he told the skipper he was hard of hearing, in an attempt to get him to speak louder.

The skipper begins to very boldly share the story of Legatt and the murder that took place on his ship, the *Sephora.* Upon completion of his tale, the captain asks him if it could be possible that the wave that hit the boat might have killed the man instead of Legatt. The skipper was shocked at this suggestion. He replied, "That's impossible!" and then brought his head closer to the captain's and stuck his tongue out at him so swiftly that the captain was taken aback. The skipper then continued with his story, adding that he did not hire Legatt himself, but was forced to take him on as part of his crew and never liked him from the beginning.

At the end of the skipper's story, the captain states that he must report a suicide. The skipper questions the captain's authority and expertise on the subject involved, but the captain replies that this is what he will have to report to his owners as soon as he gets in, unless the skipper manages to recover Legatt alive. The captain had remained unexcitable throughout his entire discourse with the skipper. Why? For fear he would not be able to fake his curiosity. But now, the captain's behavior, his lack of surprise, excitement, and curiosity in the matter, was beginning to arouse the distrust of the skipper. The captain feared the skipper would begin to question him further, and in an attempt to sway his concentration, the captain began to show him around his stateroom...showing him everything from his pantry to the tiny bathroom. Finally, the skipper had had enough, and said he must be on his way and left.

After the skipper departs and the captain is standing on deck with his crew, he mentions that, "with my double down there, it was most trying to be on deck. And it was almost as trying to be below. Altogether a nerve-trying situation. But on the whole I felt less torn when I was with him." He had been informed that his crew now knew the whole story of

Legatt and the murder on the *Sephora*, and it was now more important than ever that he keep the man secretly hidden, because if Legatt were to be discovered, there would be no mistaking his identity. Everyone on the ship now new of Legatt and his woe.

The captain went down to his room and, whispering like always, discussed with Legatt his conversation with the skipper. The skipper had pointed out that after the wave had crashed onto the *Sephora,* he had called for a "reefed foresail," a nautical term that in their case, probably saved their ship and the lives of his crewmembers. Legatt, however, points out that it was not the skipper who called for the "reefed foresail," but Legatt himself, as he had described when he originally told the story of the murder to the captain the night before.

In the midst of their intense conversation, the captain is advised there is finally enough wind to get underway so he heads up onto the deck to begin giving orders to move the ship forward.

Later on, the captain complains to the reader how he and Legatt must maneuver around the stateroom very carefully at night and throughout the day, in order to avoid the accidental discovery of Legatt, the stowaway. Since it was only the steward who entered the captain's room, to bring his breakfast in the morning, and for cleaning, etc., the captain states that he had begun to hate the mere sight of the man, and hate the sound of his voice, although the captain admits the man himself was harmless. He felt that, if anyone, it would be the steward who would accidentally discover Legatt, and this threat "hung like a sword over our heads."

About four days into the journey, the steward came very close to finding Legatt. The incident occurred when the steward brings the captain's coat down from the deck into his room to dry. He places it in the captain's bathroom, which is where Legatt hides during the day, but rather than entering the bathroom, luckily, the steward merely sticks his arm in and deposits the coat. Both men are very startled at the near-discovery.

Later that same night, Legatt informs the captain that he feels it is necessary for him to escape from the ship. He asks the captain to maroon him among the nearby islands. The captain, initially disagrees with the idea, but when Legatt carefully explains the risk he is taking -- either going to prison or to the gallows if he is caught, the captain understands and agrees with the plan.

At midnight, the captain goes up on deck, changes the ship's course, and this greatly surprises his mate. His actions being so out of the ordinary, his crew was totally befuddled as to why they were now heading toward the islands. What was their captain doing? He gives the excuse that he must get closer to land in order to find the land breezes and catch them to gain up speed.

The captain informs he is following Legatt's request to get as close to land as possible. He then informs Legatt that he will have to get overboard through the open quarter-deck port and lower himself into the water with a rope to avoid a splash, which, as he points

out, could cause some "beastly complication." Legatt takes in the directions from the captain and assures him he understands and will follow them closely to the "T."

Finally the time came for them to say goodbye, to exchange their last whispers, since neither of them had ever heard the other's natural voice. The captain gave him three gold sovereigns (coins), explaining that he would've given him all six in his possession, but he had to keep a few to buy some food later for his crew. Legatt was touched by the captain's kind gesture. The captain also gave him his floppy straw hat at the last moment to protect the man's head from the sun on his journey. When it came time for them to part ways, the captain described it like this: "Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second...No word was breathed by either of us when they separated."

Once the captain was on deck, he said, "my heart flew into my mouth at the nearness of the land on the bow." In order to carry out his plan, the ship must first approach the land very closely, which is a very dangerous proposition for a ship of its size. There was definitely the possibility of running aground and not being able to get back out to sea.

There is great suspense at this point, as the captain continues to point out the extreme closeness of the land before them. Although the crew questions his motivation, the captain maintains his ground and orders them to continue moving closer. They move so close that the captain could no longer bear to look at the land any longer and was forced to close his eyes.

Finally, the captain looks down into the sea and sees the floppy hat he had given Legatt floating in the water. It was a sign to him that Legatt had safely disembarked the boat, and he could now turn around and head for safety.

The captain gave the order to immediately turn the boat around; just as quickly as they headed for land, they headed back straight out to sea. Their journey continued on the peaceful sea. Legatt, at the closing of the story, is described as "a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny." Hence, both men are beginning new yet separate journeys.

Part 2 Analysis

Throughout part two, the captain continues to refer to Legatt as his other self, his double. As they inevitably spend more and more time together, the bond between them grows and becomes more evident. At one point, as the captain is about to leave his stateroom, he states, "Before I left the cabin our eyes met-the eyes of the only two strangers on board." It is this that seems to play a large part in the bond between the two men.

One the captain is up on deck, giving, for the first time, orders to move the boat forward, he remarks about the sensations of a man, who is feeling a ship move under his command for the very first time. He then remarks, "I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or rather, I was not completely and

wholly with her. Part of me was absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul." This shows the great extent to which the situation with the stranger has affected the captain. In a moment where he should be simply be absorbed in the feeling of feeling this great ship move under his command for the first time, he is tempted to admit that his command is not completely his; he feels he shares it with the stranger in his cabin. He is mentally and emotionally vexed with the situation and it is clearly beginning to get the best of him.

At one point, when the steward comes close to discovering Legatt in the captain's bathroom, the captain begins to question the possibility of the fact that Legatt is only visible to him and no one else, saying that it was like being haunted. The secrecy of the situation has affected him to the point that he admits, "I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not actually gone over the border."

Although the situation with Legatt has caused the captain great distress, he does not deny the connection the two men share. During one of their conversations, Legatt states, "It would never do for me to come to life again." The captain thinks to himself, "It was something a ghost might have said. But what he was alluding to was his old captain's reluctant admission of the theory of suicide." At this point, it is the assumption of the crew of both ships that Legatt had committed suicide when he jumped from the deck of the *Sephora*. The only two people in the world who know otherwise are the captain and Legatt himself.

Legatt shares his secret with the captain, and the captain is able to keep Legatt's secret to himself-- fully loyal, a good friend. Again, the reader sees a dual personification. The captain not only keeps the secret from his crew but the skipper of the *Sephora* as well. No wonder there is a mutual bond of admiration formed.

The ship almost running aground is the major source of symbolism in Part 2. It's all or nothing, take a gamble and run with it or else suffer the consequences. This is the only time we really see the captain have some authentic personality and decision-making ability. He is determined to help himself (i.e. Legatt) get back to safety. Is the captain's mind going bloggy from being out at sea without sleep?

The lesson of *The Secret Sharer* is quite simplistic. Sharing secrets and keeping secrets are a huge responsibility. Do not take them lightly. Realize the impact secrets can have on your life and those around you. Be forewarned, guilt will be found out! Don't be run aground by evildoers!

On the other side of the coin, once you do make the choice of sharing a secret, you will form a special bond with that person; a symbiotic relationship for the most part. This bond grows stronger as more secrets are shared and more delicate situations arise.

When the two are discussing the plan of Legatt's escape, Legatt tells the captain, "It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there in

purpose." The captain refers to him as "my second self," and "the double captain," towards the time of Legatt's departure, emphasizing again his connection with the man.

When the captain is on deck, he gave orders to change the course of the ship, telling the crew to continue to head for land, even though it is already dangerously close. "Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a bark of the dead floating under the very gate of Erebus." (Erebus refers to the believed darkness under the earth.)

The ship continues to head for land, and at one point the captain points out that "...it was as if the ship had two captains to plan her course for her," meaning him and Legatt. Once the captain sees the straw hat floating in the water, the captain is assured the man has escaped successfully. He touches upon the irony of the fact that the hat had been meant to save his head from the sun, but instead, it served to save his ship from running aground.

As the story closes, just like when it began, the author emphasizes the feeling of embarking on a new journey. The captain is now alone in command with his great ship, about to embark on a journey with her, while Legatt, finally free, is "striking out for a new destiny."

Part 2 Analysis

Throughout part two, the captain continues to refer to Legatt as his other self, his double. As they inevitably spend more and more time together, the bond between them grows and becomes more evident. At one point, as the captain is about to leave his stateroom, he states, "Before I left the cabin our eyes met-the eyes of the only two strangers on board."

It is very apparent the relationship between the captain and Legatt is based on fear, feelings of compassion and similarity. The captain is new to this ship and crew while Legatt is new to the feeling of being a stowaway and murderer. It seems as though the captain wants to live vicariously through Legatt - to experience the epitome of being "a bad guy." Someone who actually acts upon his feelings and deals with the circumstances. The captain is not a man's man, so to speak. He is a follower, cowardly and has not found his place amongst his crew. He sends ambivalent messages about himself throughout the book to the reader, his crew, the skipper and Legatt.

The skipper represents impending doom. The distinct possibility that when we live life "the hard way - on the edge so to speak" we are very close to running amuck (aground as does the ship.) While the skipper was convinced his story was the real deal, the captain obviously had bonded with Legatt and believed his side of the story to be more credible. What goes around, comes around, is the old adage that suits Secret Sharer perfectly.

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captain not only keeps the secret from his crew but the skipper of the *Sephora* as well. No wonder there is a mutual bond of admiration formed.

The ship almost running aground is the major source of symbolism in Part 2. It's all or nothing, take a gamble and run with it or else suffer the consequences. This is the only time we really see the captain have some authentic personality and decision-making ability. He is determined to help himself (Legatt) get back to safety.

The lesson of *The Secret Sharer* is quite simplistic. Sharing secrets and keeping secrets are a huge responsibility. Do not take them lightly. Realize the impact secrets can have on your life and those around you. Be forewarned, guilt will be found out! Don't be run aground by evildoers! On the other side of the coin, once you do make the choice of sharing a secret, you will form a special bond with that person; a symbiotic relationship for the most part. This bond grows stronger as more secrets are shared and more delicate situations arise.

Characters

Captain Archbold

Captain Archbold is the captain of the *Sephora.* He is searching for Leggatt, a fugitive sailor who killed a man on the *Sephora* and is wanted for manslaughter. When Archbold attempts to capture Leggatt aboard the nameless ship, he knows that Leggatt is there, but cannot prove it. It is here that the young captain shows just how shrewd and clever he can be. Archbold acts as a kind of comic relief in the story, illustrating that in some cases, those in charge can be incompetent.

The Captain

The captain is the nameless leader aboard a nameless ship who befriends the sailor Leggatt. Leggatt has just escaped from another ship and is Wanted for manslaughter. The captain is very insecure with being in charge and is unsure of his status on board ship. The crew has been together for some time and the captain, a stranger, despite his official position has not proven himself to the crew. The captain is only 27-years old, a young man to be in charge of men who are older and much more experienced than himself. The captain identifies with Leggatt, and through this identification he achieves a greater self-definition. The exact nature of the connection between the captain and Leggatt, however, is not clear. Leggatt has killed a man and is fleeing to escape punishment, but he may have committed this act in order to save his fellow crewmembers from danger. Through Leggatt, the captain becomes a stronger and more aggressive leader, but he also shows signs of instability. The captain helps Leggatt to escape by driving his ship dangerously close to the island of Koh-ring, after which he steers his ship back on course.

Leggatt

Leggatt is a fugitive sailor who is wanted for manslaughter. Leggatt has escaped by jumping ship (the *Sephora)* and ends up on board the captain's ship. Leggatt is a very forceful and straightforward man, who looks similar to the captain. Leggatt acts as a double for the captain, and it is through Leggatt that the captain achieves a degree of self-definition. The captain helps Leggatt hide from Archbold and ultimately helps him escape by navigating his ship dangerously close to the island of Koh-ring. For some critics, Leggatt represents the darker side of human nature. Thus, by his identification with Leggatt, the captain is examining his own dark side.

Themes

Initiation and Self-Definition

The captain in "The Secret Sharer" undergoes a process of initiation and self-definition. When confronted with the duties and responsibilities of a captain, he is not only overwhelmed but also impressed with all the responsibilities that he has taken on. He is constantly looking for reassurance from his crew that he is doing fine. He learns from Leggatt that in order to be a good leader, he has to be more aggressive, more intuitive, and more direct. Conrad's captain is exploring various ways in which to define himself; he must come to terms with his aggressiveness or else risk falling into insanity.

Mirror Image

The captain and Leggatt act as mirror images of each other, or as each others' doppelgangers, as "the other" is sometimes called in literature. They both have titles that command respect, they both are young, and they both are from the same background. According to Lionel Trilling, "the two young men are virtually the same person." When these characters first meet, the captain says, "He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes." Leggatt can be seen as one side of the captain's identity-aggressive and dangerous. Conrad uses this mirror-image to explore different sides of the captain's identity.

Symbiotic Relationship

The captain and Leggatt have a symbiotic relationship. That is, each is quite different from the other, but they have a mutually beneficial relationship. Leggatt receives from the captain shelter and refuge from those chasing him. The captain even helps him escape. Through Leggatt, the captain gains insight and knowledge. Leggatt acts as the captain's double, allowing him to explore darker facets of his own identity. For Leggatt, this relationship is more practical; the captain helps him to evade capture. For the captain the value of the symbiotic relationship is less tangible; it is an opportunity for self-exploration.

Style

Point of View

The narrator of "The Secret Sharer" is the captain. Typical of Conrad, the story revolves around this character's reflection on past experience in order to understand himself better. Because of the thematic focus of the story, that of a man in search of identity and understanding, the narrator is often seen as unreliable; that is, because of his preoccupations, he is not always perceiving events in a clear and non-judgmental way. The captain remains nameless throughout the story, suggesting that he be viewed as a representation of the rite of passage each person must experience.

Style and Structure

Conrad's style is seemingly simple: the story revolves around only a few events. However, the meaning of the story is complicated and ambiguous. Though the story is ostensibly about a murder, an escaped sailor and the relationship between two men who appear to mirror each other, it becomes clear that the story is actually about one man's search for self. The precise relationship between Leggatt and the captain is never fully defined, perhaps a comment by the author that the search for one's true nature can never be complete. Though It appears that the narrator is relating a simple story in a straightforward fashion, beneath this is the complicated journey toward self-realization. The structure of "The Secret Sharer" also reflects its thematic focus. The story is apparently the straightforward reminiscence of the captain, relating the events that took place some years before. This is complicated, however, by the interjected stories of Leggatt, who serves as the captain's mirror Image.

Historical Context

Many of Conrad's works, including "The Secret Sharer," were inspired by the author's journeys as a seaman. In 1890 Conrad went to work in the Congo. Before this time, Africa had largely been ignored by Europe, but the end of the 1800s brought a surge of interest in the continent, which experienced great changes as it became the site of rapid colonization. The 1870s sparked intense rivalry among Belgium, Germany, the United States, and older colonial powers, especially Great Britain, to create world empires. The scramble for control of Africa stirred heated debate about relations with the continent's natives. Stimulated by the abolitionist movements of the 1800s, Europeans began to ponder with increasing frequency the differences-if any-between African slaves and themselves. Conrad shared a stance taken by others in Great Britain, namely that Belgium's King Leopold was doing no more than ripping off riches from Africa. By contrast, many Britons felt that they were working for the betterment of the natives in Africa. They believed that they were replacing savage customs with more civilized ways. Real life atrocities in the African Congo greatly influenced Conrad.

Critical Overview

. 'The Secret Sharer" is considered one of Conrad's best works. It was written in two weeks, nearly ten years after Conrad's most famous work, *Heart of Darkness.* This story is based on a true incident that happened aboard the *Cutty Sark* in 1880. Critics view the story as typical of Conrad. the theme of self-discovery, the psychological depth of character, precise and evocative details. Like Conrad's other works, the story is largely a psychological portrait and is semi-autobiographical. Critics have differed greatly in their interpretations of specific details and actions in "The Secret Sharer," some interpreting Leggatt as symbolizing a "dark side" of human nature, others focusing on the story as a rite of passage. Ultimately, most critics View the story as representing the quest for self, which is both tragic and complicated.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton is an instructor at University of Texas Extension and the coordinator of the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. In the following essay. she discusses the theme of self-discovery in "The Secret Sharer. "

In "The Secret Sharer," Conrad tells the story of two simultaneous journeys: the literal sea journey, and the young captain's journey toward self discovery. That his ship barely gets underway in the final pages of the story is an indication of which of the two journeys Conrad found most interesting. The young captain of the unnamed ship, who has Just taken command of the vessel, and who, in his own words, is "somewhat of a stranger" to himself is given the opportunity and incentive to embark on his own Journey toward self-knowledge. Conrad uses a double for the captain, to force him to look into his "self" from the outside, and to journey through his own darker side towards a greater understanding of himself. Only after completing this journey will the young captain be capable of leading his skeptical crew on a literal Journey.

The opening paragraph of the story suggests that the captain's path to self-knowledge will not be well marked. The adjectives with which the narrator describe his surroundings give clues to his sense of strangeness and dislocation: "mysterious," "half submerged," "incomprehensible," and "crazy of aspect." The young man feels as though he is without all his familiar landmarks. He then takes his first tentative steps toward commanding his crew by rashly dismissing the night watch and walking the decks alone. Earlier in the evening he has wondered if he "should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly," indicating that he recognizes that the voyage will test and solidify his sense of self, and revealing an unusual degree of self-consciousness. Of course, the Journey he has in mind is the literal sort, and he cannot anticipate what awaits him on the bottom rung of the ship's ladder.

When the captain leans over the side and sees the white shape by the hull, the appearance of the seemingly headless body alongside the ship gives literal form to the captain's self-consciousness. He feels "painfully" that he is a stranger among men, and that his actions might have made him "appear eccentric." That the captain first perceives the body of Leggatt as headless is significant as well; it suggests that immediately their identities are fused by the captain figuratively placing his head on the other's body. Their "mysterious communication" is sealed when the captain notices that "the self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state" in himself. After Leggatt reveals the reasons for his fugitive status, after he shares his secret, the captain regards the visitor and thinks: "It was, in the night, as though 1 had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror."

The remainder of the first part of the story illuminates the ways in which the two young men share traits and experiences in common, how each man reflects himself back to the other. They are both about the same age and have attended the same training school, Conway, which establishes a kind of fraternity between them. Each of them also

feels alienated from the crew of his ship. Conrad emphasizes these similarities, perhaps to the point of excess, by stressing the Imagery of doubling. They are both dressed in identical clothing; Leggatt wears the captain's spare "sleeping suit," a designation that suggests the unconscious, the sleeping self inside the waking or conscious self. The captain speculates that anyone looking into his cabin "would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self." After several days of secretly sharing his cabin with Leggatt, and of sharing Leggatt's secret, the captain begins to succumb to the pressures: "1 was constantly watching myself, my secret self. . . . It was very much like being mad, only It was worse because one was aware of it." It becomes clear that soon both young men will have to take some action. The sense of urgency intensifies when suspicious old captain Archbold of the *Sephora* questions the captain and reveals that he will have to report Leggatt's disappearance as a suicide. The grizzled cynicism of old Archbold is in stark contrast to the young captain's untested innocence, and Archbold's stubborn attachment to following the rules makes the captain's risk-taking appear even more brash.

In the second part of the story, Conrad dramatizes the mirroring, or complementary, aspects of the relationship between the two young men rather than their similarities. This shift in emphasis suggests that the self-reflexive phase of the narrator's journey toward self-discovery may be corning to an end. The biggest difference between the two men is that while Leggatt has killed a man in order to avoid shipwreck, the captain is willing to risk shipwreck In order to save the life of one man (Leggatt). Furthermore, the young captain is hoping the experiences of his first command will make him more a member of the community of the ship and will enable him to make a name for himself on the seas and land. Leggatt, however, seeks to escape the censure of the group and the rule of the sea and knows that his existence from now on will be anonymous, that he is doomed to wander the earth without roots and that he will likely never regain his career as an officer. "It will never do for me to come to life again," he says.

After the two of them decide on a plan that will allow Leggatt to escape to the Koh-ring, the nearby island that they presume to be the most habitable, the story becomes more suspenseful. Conrad poses two questions as the story draws to a conclusion: Will Leggatt get away safely? and, will the young captain avoid losing the ship and his crew's confidence in the tricky maneuvering near the rocky coastline? The narrative focus remains, however, on the psychological dimension of the story. The events provide precisely the kind of crucible, or severe test, the young captain had been seeking in which to forge his Identity. He is aware that he has gained all he can from looking into his "other self" and now he must move from contemplation to action. He must establish the same kind of "mysterious communication" with his ship and crew that he had established with Leggatt. Before he even gives the orders to sail toward land he mutters to himself: "I realized suddenly that all my future, the only future for which I was fit, would perhaps go irretrievably to pieces in any mishap to my first command." His realization of the risks he is about to undertake is made all the more palpable because he must witness his "other self' literally throwaway his future as he slips out of the port into the dark water, In a symbolic reversal of the manner in which he happened to come aboard the ship in the first place.

Of course, the captain does manage to avoid losing his ship and crew on the reef. In the process he achieves "the silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command." But the manner in which the captain achieves this goal leaves the reader to resolve some difficult moral issues. We are left to wonder, for example, if the captain's newfound confidence in his command was justly achieved. He seems to take credit for planning to use the hat as a saving marker, when in fact it was an accident since he had intended for the hat to be used to protect Leggatt from the sun. This tendency looks a great deal like pride, an excess of which would almost certainly turn his crew against him in the future. Furthermore, though the captain is correct in believing that he will only be able to plumb the limits of his character in the throes of a crisis, is he justified in creating a dangerous situation just so he can test his courage and skill? Ultimately, Conrad poses a question of a more psychological nature. Is it possible to journey to the dark side of the self, which surely the narrator did, symbolized by his identification with the fugitive killer Leggatt, and emerge wiser but otherwise unchanged by the experience? In other words, is such self-knowledge gained at too high a price? Has the narrator become too much like the killer, as his willingness to risk the lives of his crew on the Koh-ring might suggest?

Source: Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton, for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following short essay, Dazey analyzes the title of "The Secret Sharer" as a clue into the deeper meaning of the story.

The ambiguity in Joseph Conrad's title *Heart of Darkness* is readily apparent because the nouns *heart* and *darkness* commonly suggest a variety of denotations and have a wide range in their levels of abstraction. The ambiguity in the title of his short story "The Secret Sharer," is more subtle but equally intriguing. Although the story concerns two characters, the Captain and his physical double Leggatt, whom he pulls from the South China Sea and saves from death, the title is not "The Secret Sharers." The referent of the singular noun *sharer* is, thus, ambiguous. A second ambiguity derives from the fact that the word *secret* can be read in the familiar pattern as an adjective modifier in the phrase *secret sharer* or, in the less traditional form, as a nominal in the two-member compound *secret* sharer (as in peace maker or aft lover).

When the word *secret* is interpreted as a nominal in the compound, it means information that is hidden or concealed or even unknown: two friends share a secret (hidden information), the Coke formula is a trade secret (concealed information), or the secret of happiness eludes us (unknown information). A strong brief can be made for Leggatt's being the sharer if this reading is accepted. Leggatt confides in the Captain that he has murdered a man and has jumped ship to avoid punishment, and this information, imparted in secret, is never revealed to the rest of the crew. Interpreting the word secret as a nominal, however, presents an even more cogent argument for the Captain's being the sharer, for it is he who receives the confidential information. When a landowner and a tenant enter into an agreement that the tenant pay as rent instead of money a part of his crop, it is the tenant who is called the sharecropper, not the landowner. When investors purchase shares in a corporation, it is they who become shareholders, not the corporation. If the nominal coupling *secret sharer* follows thiS lexical pattern in the English language, the Captain is the secret sharer.

Interpreting the word *secret* as a nominal in the compound *secret sharer* presents difficulty because of the rarity of its occurrence in Written English. In oral English the shift in stress from *sharer* to *secret* would immediately alert a listener to the compound; in written English the alternate meaning is indicated by spelling the two words together (as in crosswalk), by using a hyphen between the two words (as in cross-examination), by capitalizing the words (as in Cross Village), or by relying upon the reader's familiarity with the phrase (as in cross fire). No native speaker of English would read any of these examples of *cross* as meaning ill-tempered, cranky, or irritable, a meaning frequently supplied when the word *cross* is employed as an adjectival modifier in a common noun phrase (as in a cross infant). The lack of conditioning to reading the phrase secret sharer without topographical direction as a nominal compound makes interpreting *secret* as an adjectival the traditional choice of readers.

When the word *secret* is interpreted as an adjectival in the title phrase, the sharer becomes hidden or concealed person, a person kept out of sight. However, the

connotations of the adjectival *secret* range from the mysterious to the underhanded: this variety occurs in such common phrases as a secret staircase, secret password, secret society, secret drawer, secret lovers, secret meetings, secret treaty, secret war, and secret business dealings.

In this short story, Conrad is employing the adjectival *secret* to describe a mysterious, almost mystical, relationship between the two characters. The story is told from the Captain's point of view; and as narrator, he tells of his growing fondness for and dependence upon this stranger that he has pulled from the sea. As they spend more and more time alone together, the Captain begins to think of Leggatt as "the secret sharer of my life," "my secret self," and finally as "the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts"

The fact that the title phrase secret sharer is applied only to Leggatt should resolve the ambiguity of the referent; however, connotations such as mysterious, esoteric, and mystical prohibit such a simple solution. Although the Captain sees his double as the "secret sharer," the reader understands that he is seeing himself as the secret sharer as well. Shortly after the Captain has rescued Leggatt and before Leggatt has confessed to murder, the strange relationship between the two strangers develops. The Captain thinks, "A mysterious communication was established already between us two-in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea."

Leggatt's sharing his secret does not change anything. As the Captain sees the other man dressed in clothes identical to his own, he says, "I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other self inside that other sleeping suit." The Captain repeatedly refers to Leggatt as "my second self," "my double," "my secret double," and "my other self."

When the word *secret* is an adjectival in the phrase secret sharer and means simply to be hidden or concealed, it applies equally well to the Captain as it does to Leggatt. The Captain's need for concealment is just as great as is Leggatt's, once the Captain has taken Leggatt aboard his ship and hidden rum in his cabin. The Captain knows that had the crew learned that the murderer of another seaman was being offered sanctuary aboard their ship, they would have certainly mutinied. He observes that the fear of discovery' "hung like a sword over our heads." To attempt to discover the one secret sharer when secret is an adjectival modifier by determining which of the two men shared the most is to ignore Conrad's masterful choice of the word *sharer.* What is possessed is not shared until it is jointly possessed, nor is what is given away always shared. In the case of the Captain and Leggatt, each shares all that he has even at the risk of forfeiting his own life. An analysis of the phrase the secret sharer when the word *secret* functions only as an adjectival fails to support the fact that Leggatt, not the Captain, is the referent even though he alone is described by the Captain as "the secret sharer" in the story.

The ambiguity remains. Either the Captain or Leggatt can be Identified as the sharer of the secret or as the concealed or hidden sharer.

Source: Mary Ann Dazey, "Shared Secret or Secret Sharing In Joseph Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer'," In *Conradiana,* Volume XVIII, No 3, 1986, pp 201-3.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Hoffmann analyzes the narrative point of view in "The Secret Sharer, " stating that it "creates both the psychological and thematic bases" for the captain's identification with Leggatt.

Much attention has been given to the psychological and thematic Identification of the captain with Leggatt in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," but too little attention has been paid to the point of view which creates both the psychological and thematic bases for the identification. On the immediate narrative level the story is told in the first person by the captain himself, but on the psychological and thematic level Conrad sought to objectify the subjectivity of the first person point of view by introducing Leggatt, the captain's "double." If Leggatt, as the captain's other self, is examined in relation to Conrad's narrative technique, then the point of view will provide us with a clearer understanding of "The Secret Sharer."

There are three aspects of point of view In "The Secret Sharer," corresponding to the thematic structure of the story: the first fourth of the story establishes the subjective point of view which shows the captain a stranger to himself, a man dependent on subjective impressions and moods; the long middle section creates the objectification of self through identification with Leggatt which leads to self recognition; and the final fourth of the narrative provides an actual test of the captain's mastery of his ship and his self. In the beginning the captain is as yet untried by the sea. His thoughts are land bound: the fishing-stakes are like bamboo fences, the barren islets are like stone walls, towers and blockhouses, and even the sea itself seems an extension of the land. This land-consciousness is created by the subjective point of view, for what is significant about the descriptive details is the subjective *impression* they make on the captain's consciousness; the scene described is not an objective narrative description, but a portrayal of a state of mind.

The narrator's psychological sense of isolation in his role as captain is intensified by his impressions as he stands physically alone on the deck of the ship: "There was not a sound in her-and around us nothing moved, nothing lived. . . ." He is alone with his self and his ship, but he is a stranger to both. For a moment he feels a mystical communion with his ship, but because he lacks knowledge of himself as a captain, the moment is lost. This moment of communion is illusory because it is as yet only a subjective impression easily broken by staring stars and disturbing sounds. Significantly, at the end of the story the stillness, in a parallel impression, precedes the moment of his crisis as captain, but because he has achieved self-knowledge through Leggatt, the communion he feels with his ship is real, not illusory; self-confidently he meets the test and becomes In reality master of his ship.

Once the ship is under way, the captain shakes off his land-self and attributes his strangeness to the ship's being land-locked. The land is now associated in his mind with unrest and doubt, and he rejoices "in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land. . . ." His self-confidence is an Illusion based not on knowledge of

himself as a captain, but on a subjective mood of complacency "that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture."

It is at this very moment of self-delusion that the reality of his responsibility as captain breaks in: the side-ladder had not been hauled in; a small matter it would seem, but "exactitude In small matters is the very soul of discipline." The incident of the ladder causes the captain to return to his mood of self-doubt. Significantly, it is by this ladder that Leggatt gains entrance to the ship.

Leggatt's appearance is not the dramatic beginning of the story for which the rest has been a mere preparatory introduction. The narrator's conflict is essentially a psychological struggle within himself, which is subjectively dramatized In the first part before Leggatt's appearance. Leggatt, both in his identity as the captain's "double" and in his own story, is the objective dramatization of the captain's secret self. The captain does not recognize his other self immediately; his first impression is that he has seen a headless corpse. What is significant about his reaction is the shock it gives to his illusion about the security of the sea. The cigar, associated with his complacent sense of well-being, drops out of his mouth and falls into the sea, for the sea has presented him with a special surprise.

Leggatt is the sea come to test the captain as a man, just as at the end it is the land which comes to test him as a captain. That Leggatt is associated with the sea is reinforced by the imagery in contrast to the earlier land-Imagery of the captain's consciousness: he is "like a resting swimmer"; he appears "fish-like" and is "mute as a fish"; and even after their first words are exchanged the captain's impression is that Leggatt seems to have "risen from the bottom of the sea (it was certainly the nearest land to the ship)" rather than from the shore which marks the boundary of the sea. It is only after exchanging personal identities that a psychological state of Identification is established: "The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself."

Through a series of links Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* creates a "double" for Clarissa Dalloway so that Septimus Warren Smith's death becomes metaphorically Clarissa's "death." Similarly, through a series of details-similarity of physical appearance and age, the sleeping suit, and their ties with Conway-Conrad establishes this psychological state of identification between the captain and Leggatt so that Leggatt's moral crisis becomes metaphorically the captain's moral crisis. It is the point of view which is at the crux of the captain's identification with Leggatt and his personal crisis. To know his secret self the captain must achieve self-knowledge, but to attain self-knowledge the captain must go through an objective test of self. He has a subjective concept of himself as man and captain, but he is as yet uninitiated, a stranger to himself and to his ship. Without Leggatt's crisis to serve as an outward reflection of his inner self, his conception of himself would remain subjective and even self-deluded as is Captain Archbold's in his insistence that he gave the command that saved the *Sephora.*

Captain Archbold in his judgment of Leggatt' s "crime" is that aspect of self that has to do only with factual, legal evidence, corresponding to Captain Vere's statement in

Melville's *Billy Budd,* "The prisoner's deed. With that alone we have to do " But Captain Archbold lacks self-knowledge and thus lacks understanding; he does not understand his own failure in the crisis of his ship, and therefore cannot comprehend Leggatt's crisis. The narrator-captain in his judgment of Leggatt is that aspect of self that has to do with private conscience, corresponding to Captain Vere's personal understanding of the moral justification for Billy Budd's crime. By an understanding Identification with Leggatt's crisis, he is able to view himself objectively. Leggatt serves the same function in relation to point of view, as Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness,* presenting the captain with an objective insight into himself as Kurtz's story did for Marlow. Like Leggatt the captain is judged by his outward actions; it is this discrepancy' between outward appearance and inner reality that is objectified by Leggatt's story. Leggatt's appearance tests the narrator's conscience as a man; he is not found wanting. But as captain, he is yet untried by the sea though he is already judged by his officers. He is judged a failure as a captain by his chief mate. The mate's preconception makes him certain that the captain has lost his ship.

"She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this." In a parallel to the situation on the *Sephora* the mate panics at the very moment of crisis just as the captain of the *Sephora* did; the captain symbolically repeats Leggatt's act of violence; and he takes command of the ship to save it just as Leggatt acted to save the *Sephora.*

This crisis, the last part of the three-part thematic structure, is the test of the narrator's mastery of the ship, but he could have avoided the test altogether. Partly he is motivated by a desire to give Leggatt the best possible chance to reach shore, but basically he is motivated by the need to take command of his ship, having too long hidden himself from her. He stakes his whole future on his ability to master the ship and achieve "the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command." He will achieve this communion by meeting and conquering the challenge of the land.

It is significant that the hat he gave Leggatt is the saving mark for his eyes, dividing land from sea in contrast to the merging of land and sea at the beginning of the story. This is no conscious gesture on Leggatt's part: "It must have fallen off his head . . . and he didn't bother." The hat is the symbol of the captain's humanity, "the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh." It is the symbol of his mastery of the sea and the ship- "it was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness." Simultaneously he is no longer a stranger to himself nor to his ship.

As the captain gains mastery of his ship, Leggatt lowers himself into the sea. Even before, as Leggatt prepares to leave, the captain forgets him, for his "double" is no longer needed. Leggatt has served his role of providing the captain with an objective insight into himself; the land-self of the captain has left the ship, for his sea-self, his secret self, is now known to him, and the land, symbolizing doubt and danger, is vanquished. The white hat marks the spot and the moment of self-knowledge. Conversely, Leggatt has lost his identity; for him there is no more possible life on the sea with which his life has been identified. He will swim ashore and become "a fugitive

and a vagabond on the earth." What the captain has given Leggatt in return for his own self-knowledge is the freedom to find a new destiny and a new identity on land; the alternatives for Leggatt had been imprisonment, which he scorned, or death by drowning as he swam without purpose, which he would have chosen if the captain had not given him his second chance. It is no easy choice to find a new destiny; it is his "punishment." The captain has discovered his self at the very gateway of Erebus and is saved from "death"; Leggatt must "die" metaphorically before he can re-discover himself.

Conrad achieved in "The Secret Sharer" the objectification of what otherwise would be a purely subjective, psychological state of mind by extending the first person point of view into the realm of the third person while retaining the advantage of introspective dramatic monologue. Without destroying the consistency of point of view so necessary to the psychological truth of the story, Conrad has successfully portrayed the objective truth of the captain's secret self, which, just as Leggatt is never seen by anyone else, can never really be known except to himself. It is the externalization of point of view through the device of the second self that enabled Conrad to show the development of the captain from self-doubt to self-realization, from self-ignorance to self-knowledge.

Source: Charles G Hoffmann, "Point of View in 'The Secret Sharer'," in *College English,* Vol. 23, No.8, May, 1962, pp. 651-54.

Adaptations

"The Secret Sharer" was adapted for film and produced by Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corp. in 1973.

. The movie *Face to Face* is an adaptation *of* two short stories, "The Secret Sharer" and Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." The movie was released in 1952 and stars James Mason, Gene Lockhart, Michael Pate, Albert Sharpe, Sean McClory and Alec Harford.

Topics for Further Study

Research Conrad's concept of the dark side of man and how he uses this theme in various works. How is the concept of a dark side of human nature treated in other disciplines, for example, in psychology or philosophy?

Discuss how Leggatt and the captain are related. Is Leggatt a double for the captain? What does the captain learn from Leggatt? Does Leggatt learn anything from the captain?

Compare the relationship between Leggatt and the captain in "The Secret Sharer" to the relationship between Kurtz and Marlow in Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness.*

Compare and Contrast

1900s: Writers such as Conrad and Henry James write stylized stones emphasizing introspective and highly self-conscious, albeit often unreliable, narrators.

1990s: This tradition is continued today in such writers as V. S. Naipaul, who is often compared to Conrad. Naipaul is considered a psychological and social realist.

1900s: The late 1800s sees the rise of the science of psychology, and Sigmund Freud popularizes the concept of the unconscious and the practice of psychoanalysis. Human behavior is thought to stem from unconscious thoughts and conflicts.

1990s: Psychology is an established discipline, although Freud's theories are largely considered unscientific. Modern theories seek to explain human behavior in terms of organic and physical causes.

1900s: Life on the high seas is dangerous but highly romanticized as an opportunity for adventure to working-class men.

1990s: The mystique of a sea-faring life has largely disappeared with the advent of affordable air travel and luxury cruises that are available to many.

What Do I Read Next?

Heart of Darkness (1902), a tale of a man sent into the Belgian Congo to track the elusive and maniacal Mr. Kurtz, is considered Conrad's best work, and one of the twentieth century's most important novellas.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838), Edgar Allan Poe's novella of a rite of passage for a young man and his love of the sea.

"William Wilson,' , also by Edgar Allan Poe, is a story about a man's double. A man is persecuted throughout his life by a man with the same name, who mayor may not be real.

"The Double" by Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky is another story concerning a man's double.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner(1798), Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem about an ancient seafarer and his experiences with the supernatural.

Further Study

Baines, Jocelyn *Joseph Conrad A Critical Biography,* McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960.

Baines provides a comprehensive overview of all of Conrad's writings.

Dowden, Wilfred S. *Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style,* Vanderbilt University Press, 1970

Dowden explores how Conrad's style differs in each of his major works.

Gillon, Adam *Joseph Conrad' Rite of Passage,* Twayne Publishers, 1982, pp. 153-159.

Includes guides to each of Conrad's major works Graver, Lawrence *Conrad's Short Fiction,* University of California Press, 1969

Graver examines all of Conrad's short fiction and claims that "The Secret Sharer" is a "widely acclaimed. psychological masterpiece and the subject of more fanciful interpretations than any of Conrad's other stones."

Lothe, Jakob" 'The Secret Sharer" Economical Personal Narrative," in *Conrad's Narrative Method,* Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 57-71.

Contains a useful introduction to Conrad's life and work as well as a carefully argued chapter on "The Secret Sharer."

Bibliography

Lionel Trilling. *The Experience of Literature,* Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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