

Title

An Essay on Conrad's 'The Planter of Malata': Renouard's Suicide

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Abstract

At the beginning I have proposed that we should discuss why Geoffrey Renouard, the protagonist, has disappeared at the end of the story. It seems to me that he has finally committed suicide. I would like to investigate what has motivated his suicide.

In the first section some of the protagonist's peculiar traits in character are discussed. He is regarded by Professor Moorsom as a cool-headed person with calm judgement, but sometimes shows himself very emotional and passionate. He is also a man of strong character. He seems to have strong intentions and wishes as well, when he decides to commit suicide. We also notice that his other peculiar traits have contributed to the steps toward the action. His strong tendency toward solitude is considered to have led him to regard himself as part of nature. He seems to have no hesitation about stopping his suicide because it is not difficult for him to feel himself as part of nature, when 'setting out calmly to swim beyond the confines of life__with a steady stroke__his eyes fixed on a star!' He also attaches too much importance to Felicia's appearances, and therefore, is easily swayed by them. His strong jealousy toward Arthur also makes it hard for Renouard to deepen mutual understanding between Felicia and himself. Last but not least, he is known as 'a man that doesn't count the cost to yourself or others' when his heart is set on 'some object.' This trait has made it possible for him to achieve a reputation as a successful man, but it has also helped him take his radical action.

In the second section we have considered some traits of Felicia's personality. Some critics are quite severe in judging her personality. Frederic Karl says she is 'egocentric and shallow'; Edward Said points out that she is 'a deluded, beautiful idealist'; and John Palmer calls her 'a vain and fundamentally purposeless creature' and 'an impossible contradiction.' After considering the world she lives in, I have proposed another personality: she is 'a manifestation of disbelief.'

In the third section I have pointed out that the protagonist and the heroine have been living in opposite worlds. We can safely say that they are quite different people: 'she a young lady fresh from the thick twilight of four million people and the artificiality of several London seasons; he the man of definite conquering tasks, the familiar of wide horizons, . . . in which one loses one's importance even to oneself.' Even Renouard could not jump over the borderline between them, although he is a man of strong personality. His final wish is, therefore, to make Felicia—a woman with a heart of disbelief—believe in the truth of his own existence. In order to do so, he must first kill himself, and then becoming 'a ghost,' he must haunt her so as to make her remember him forever. This is the main motive and reason for his having committed suicide at the end of the story.