

Estimate how far Arsat is a tragic character.]

Conrad's short story *The Lagoon*, set in a Malayan region, presents the tragedy of a strange Malayan native. He is Arsat, the central figure, the hero of the story, in which is depicted the tragic frustration of human life, which is of love and death.

The hero of Conrad's story is a somewhat mysterious character who lived, rather detached, aloof from others, in his humble hut by the side of a lagoon of a weird look. He lived there with his beloved woman Diamelen, and had little contact with the local people who disliked him as a stranger to their locality. Moreover, they were suspicious of his league with the evil spirit and scrupulously avoided him. So the boatmen of the white man did not like to stay on the lagoon, close to his hut.

Conrad's hero, as already noted, is a Malayan native. The author has represented in him a characteristic Asiatic native, with all the usual traits of such a native. In his sincerity, gallantry, devotion and impulsiveness, Conrad has well implied the nature of a simple, straightforward and sincere Asiatic native. Arsat was originally a champion of his ruler's right, authority and

title against the foreign aggressors. Along with his brother, he was deemed valorous, chivalrous and honourable in his land and by his people.

But Arsat was not merely a loyal follower of his ruler. He was a devoted lover, too. He was a plain, unsophisticated native in whom love and loyalty were equally strong passions and motives for action. In a moment of impulsiveness, he fell in love with a young woman Diamelen, probably an attendant of the mistress of the ruler his hand. His passion of love ran very high and made him restless till he resolved, in consultation with his brother, to take away the woman. That was a desperate decision, but Arsat and his unnamed brother were brave enough to face whatever odds might come. The woman was all in all in his mind and heart, possessed all his dreams and desires of life. Indeed, Arsat's passion of love was almost irresistible and prompted him to an act of grave risks and dangers.

Arsat, no doubt, won his love, but lost his brother whom he had loved so well. He did not come to his rescue, when he called him. In fact, he could not assist him only for the security of his own love. He was aware of his task to stand by the man who had been fighting for his love. Yet, he failed in his duty, not because he was afraid, but because he was solely interested in his own happy love, free from the shadow of death.

Nevertheless, Arsat was no selfish, ungrateful brother. He loved his brother well, as he himself categorically said, "I loved my brother". He was keen to stand by his side to face the pursuers. But the intensity of his passion of love mastered his spirit, made him restless, tempted him to run away with his beloved and he sought only peace in his love—"I wanted peace in my own heart."

Yet, Arsat was a thoroughly honest and sincere soul. He could not forget how his brother had died and how he had failed to come to his aid. He repented from the deep core of his heart for his act of ingratitude, and was haunted constantly with the last cry of his dying brother. He was no selfish man of ingratitude, but an unfortunate victim of the illusions of life, who dreamed of a realm of love, where death would be unknown—"And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten—where death is unknown?" But that was impossible, rather illusory.

Arsat's life was all a tragedy. His hope for a life of love, out of the bound of death, did not materialize. His dearly cherished ideal for which he even had ignored the dying call of his brother was not really secured. He

could not live in love, away from the icy hand of death. Death came to him to take away his love, his dear Diamelen. It was for her sake that he had forsaken his own brother whom he did not love less. She died. It was all despair for him, as he pitifully exclaimed, "She burns no more". She did not more burn with the warmth of life and love and his vision of life and love was all over. "I can see nothing." He realized bitterly the utter illusion of the world wherein nothing but death could persist—"There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death—death for many."

This naked truth, realized at long last by Arsat, is a deep tragedy of the vanity of human wishes and hopes. Here Arsat appears a tragic character, although he had not the grandeur of a conventional tragic hero. His bitter experience and painful frustration constitute a tragic tale that is too 'deep for tears.' He failed to preserve and possess what he had considered priceless in his life. In his tragedy of life is found the same tragic human helplessness, when caught in the web of a cold, cruel force—man's untamable fate. His deep tragedy is echoed in the concluding words of the story—"He stood only in the searching sunshine, and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions."