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Forms and Function of Scepticism in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad

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**FORMS AND FUNCTION OF SCEPTICISM
IN THE FICTION OF
JOSEPH CONRAD**

by

Mary L. McGinnity

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

June

1968

VITA

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PREFACE

I believe it was early in 1964, during a graduate seminar that emphasized the works of Conrad, that I first took hold of the body of ideas that developed into this dissertation. I find it curious to recall that several months of work resulted from my original, simple question: "Why does one experience a sense of exhilaration from this darkly inward, often cruelly ironic fiction?" Gropingly, I discovered that the answer to that question probably had very little to do with style or technique, but it seemed to have everything to do with the philosophical mind moving behind the challenging fiction of an exceptional novelist. In consequence of that intuition, I found myself striving to "see" life from Conrad's window, hopeful that an empathetic sharing of the view would reveal his philosophical identity to me in time.

Obscured by his natural and artistic preference for indirection, the rationale for Conrad's vision of life proved an elusive Grail; consequently, I was never surprised to encounter a critic who believed him to be a pessimist, or a fatalist, or even a nihilist--these qualities are present to a degree. However, a close reading of Conrad's novels, letters, and essays--which are all of a piece so that they can very profitably be read together--convinced me that none of the above categories

accommodated all of Conrad's characteristic movements of mind. Clearly I came to realize that their Conrad was not my Conrad; mine was an equilibrist as daring as any of his heroes, launched, by circumstances as well as by choice, upon a sea of scepticism, where the "joy in being lost" was constantly endangered by "the sorrow in being weary."

From such preliminaries, the purpose of this dissertation emerged as three-fold: (1) to invite the reader to examine Conrad's work, postulating scepticism as the ultimate philosophical framework for his views; (2) to suggest that at least six elements and emphases that critics generally regard as characteristically Conradian seem to derive quite logically from the sceptical attitude; and, (3) to suggest, too, that Conrad may have employed scepticism instrumentally, aware of its artistic force.

This study is offered as another way of looking at an Edwardian innovator in fictional form and matter, whose importance, though he left no school and few imitators, none would dispute. Conrad's "turn of mind" exerts a strong appeal to the modern man, who, once exposed to its exciting and perceptive intuitions, may say, with *Nostromo*, "It holds me yet."

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CHAPTER I

SCEPTICISM

"The fact is you want more scepticism at the very foundation of your work. Scepticism the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of truth--the way of art and salvation"¹

Joseph Conrad, one of the most personal, subjective, and modern of the Edwardian novelists, commented upon life in somber tones. In a style "that is unmistakably a speaking voice"² and through a form derived in part from "a temperamental evasiveness,"³ this naturalized Englishman of complex background described a view of life compounded of pessimism, irony, and scepticism. His pessimism was incomparably deeper than that of another Staffordshire author who, although he believed that life "had little to be enjoyed and much to be endured," would have shrunk from Conrad's equation of life with "destructive reality." His irony mocked God and man subtly, penetratingly, and so pervasively that Swift's brutal assaults upon man seem harmlessly

¹Georges Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters. Vol. I (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927), p. 301. Letter to John Galsworthy, dated November 11, 1901.

²Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 1.

³Ibid.

obvious by comparison. His scepticism left nothing untouched-- man, society, religion, "progress," and almost every institution upon which western civilization rested. Johnson's pessimism and Swift's irony were negative qualities that, in a paradoxical way, made the affirmation of traditional values by these Christian humanists especially poignant and memorable. This paper questions whether Conrad's scepticism fulfills a comparable function--whether, specifically, his scepticism, by characteristically Conradian indirection,⁴ functions to throw into sharp relief the sought-for human values.

⁴Indirection in Conrad's fiction is a subject in itself, but a brief reference to the device may not be out of order. The formula of indirection evolved, according to Ford Madox Ford (Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance [Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1924], pp. 136-7) when Conrad and he were discussing the deficiencies of the novel form in general and of the British novel in particular. One of its weak points, they agreed, was "that it went straight forward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straight forward." They came to the conclusion that a character and the events in his life should never be presented chronologically but rather introduced with a strong impression and then "work backwards and forwards over his past That theory at least we evolved." See also pp. 204-5.

From this beginning, a reader of Conrad will perceive how completely indirection dominated his presentation. We get to know Jim indirectly (through Marlow) and we "construct" Heyst and Flora from the viewpoints of many narrators. The theory extended to chronology, too, with Nostromo being the extreme example of manipulation.

My contention is that Conrad stated values indirectly, too, and that in their statement, scepticism is functional.

In connection with the subject of indirection and its part in a similar thesis, see Donald Davidson, "Joseph Conrad's

The striking paradox of Conrad's art for this reader--the way something dynamic rises from all the negations⁵--suggested that his "dark" quality deserved a serious attempt at definition. Yet, although nearly all of his critics have commented upon particular aspects of this quality, no single, unified, detailed exposition of the sceptical element in his fiction has been made. Edward Garnett, the lifelong friend and critic who guided Conrad's work from Almayer's Folly through Lord Jim mentioned suggestively Conrad's "sceptical faith and philosophic irony" among qualities revealed by letters which span nearly thirty years of their lives.⁶ F. R. Leavis, the critic whose Scrutiny articles⁷ were among the first re-evaluations of Conrad

Directed Indirections," Sewanee Review, XXXIII (April, 1952), his consideration of the indirect technique as an answer to his chief critical problem with Conrad, i.e., "how he (Conrad) extracts, from a subject matter that tends to be violently melodramatic, a representation of life eminently serious, intellectually and emotionally convincing (p. 163).

⁵This paradoxical effect has been noted by David Daiches (The Novel and the Modern World [University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1939], p. 60) in regard to Lord Jim: "Conrad managed to infuse into the story something that was not warranted by the facts at all--a sense that somehow it had been worth while." E. H. Visiak (The Mirror of Conrad [Werner Laurie: London, 1955], p. 114) was referring to the same kind of an effect when he said that Conrad "is invigorating and not, as bad writers in that genre . . . depressing."

⁶Letters from Joseph Conrad: 1895-1924 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928), p. 27.

⁷"Revaluations," X (June, 1941), 22-50; X (October, 1941), 157-81.

as a novelist of subtle dramas of conscience, discussed scepticism in relation to those characters who exhibit fully developed though differentiated sceptical attitudes: Decoud and Dr. Monygham from Nostromo, and Heyst from Victory.⁸ Paul Wiley noted "Conrad's scepticism with regard to the divinity of man" as assumed by Utopian planners,⁹ and remarked "that Conrad seems to have been sceptical of institutions as having it in their means to contribute in any way to the good of mankind."¹⁰ Thomas Moser brought out Conrad's ambivalence toward scepticism: condemned in Nostromo as the cause of Decoud's suicide, it was extolled in the same novel as a sort of preventive medicine for the popular mind against social and political visionaries.¹¹ Albert J. Guerard observed in general that Conrad had a "strong sceptical bent" held in check by an "ethical and conservative view of life,"¹² and instanced in another place¹³ a particular

⁸The Great Tradition (New York: G. W. Stewart, 1948), p. 192, 194.

⁹Conrad's Measure of Man (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1954), p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 127.

¹¹Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 23.

¹²p. x.

¹³"Introduction," (Heart of Darkness; Almayer's Folly; The Lagoon (Dell Publishing Co.: New York, 1960), p. 14.

example of that trait: Conrad's "ultimate skepticism" in equating God and the immortal sea in the first paragraph of Chapter Four in The Nigger of the "Narcissus." Further, Guerard makes explicit a connection frequently implied: "To put matters bluntly: Conrad may be condemning Decoud for a withdrawal and scepticism more radical than Decoud ever shows; which are, in fact, Conrad's own."¹⁴ Eloise Knapp Hay notes the same ambivalence toward scepticism mentioned by Moser: "As to scepticism, there is the castigated Decoud but also the approved scepticism of Dr. Monygham."¹⁵ In addition, Eloise Hay carries forward Guerard's comments on Decoud's "'major role in illuminating characters and events'"¹⁶ in Nostramo when she refers to Decoud's "form of scepticism" as "a source of light."¹⁷ Equally as suggestive as any of these later comments was the suggestion of one of Conrad's earliest critics: "He (Conrad) is probably the first novelist to use entire skepticism about the whole of things as the principal reason for illimitable faith in the separate parts

¹⁴Conrad the Novelist, p. 199.

¹⁵The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1963), p. 170.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 196

¹⁷Ibid., p. 201.

that lie nearest his interest"¹⁸--a provocative statement which has gone without amplification.

Such comments indicate that critical discussion of Conrad's scepticism, though almost universal among his commentators, has been fragmentary and limited, generally, to one aspect of his art such as character or to specific instances of scepticism. This paper invites the reader to examine Conrad's work, postulating scepticism as the ultimate philosophical framework for his views. It attempts to relate the traits mentioned above and other characteristically Conradian aspects of his fiction--the alienated character, the ironic tone, the polarized equilibrations, and the puzzling paradoxes--to the framework of scepticism as the logical expressions of that philosophical attitude of mind.¹⁹ Further, it suggests that Conrad employed scepticism

¹⁸Wilson Follett, Joseph Conrad. A Short Study of His Intellectual and Emotional Attitude toward His Work and of the Chief Characteristics of His Novel (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1915), p. 22.

¹⁹Pessimism, fatalism, nihilism, and even Existentialism could function as the common denominator for isolated acts, attitudes, or concepts, for example, the nihilism implicit in the suicide of Decoud; the fatalism in Flora's acquiescence to chance; and the concept of the morally isolated modern man that is common to Existentialism. However, adopting any one of these philosophical stances brings one into conflict with expressed Conradian convictions.

The claim of pessimism is contradicted by Conrad's view of human nature and of evil: "Not that I think mankind intrinsically bad. It is only silly and cowardly. Now you know that in cowardice is every evil,--especially that cruelty so characteristic of our civilization (Jean-Aubry, I, 229; letter to

instrumentally. Well-defined and ever present, it seems all but an accomplished fact that corrosive scepticism will prevail. When the human spirit grows in spite of it through ironic, somber, and sordid episodes which should have stifled it, scepticism has, by its intimidating presence, helped to define the essential qualities of that spirit, "the few things you can believe."²⁰

R. B. Cunningham Graham)." It is further contradicted by his opinion that "To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so (Notes on Life and Letters, p. 9)."

The claim of nihilism is contradicted by Conrad's contention that the human condition is a fit subject for every emotion except the emotion of despair.

Against the claim of fatalism stands the novel Chance, in which choice triumphs over chance as the epigraph indicates it will.

The relationship between Conrad's vision and Existentialism is explained satisfactorily, I believe, by this comment in Murray Krieger's The Tragic Vision (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960, pp. viii-ix): "I would suggest, rather, that it is works like these (Conrad's and others) and the vision that informs them that created the dramatic categories out of which emerged Existentialism and the receptive cultural psychology that could make Existentialism fashionable. As usual, formal philosophy followed upon the discoveries of the literary imagination, systematizing the vision literature made available. And as usual, in recent European Existentialism the fullness of vision has been thinned in its philosophical reductions--always the price of discursive accessibility."

²⁰Jean-Aubry, I, 208. Letter to Cunningham Graham, August 5, 1897.

Postulating scepticism as the philosophical framework for Conrad's observations invites the just and accurate criticism that Conrad was not a philosopher in any formal sense. E. M. Forster declared Conrad "misty" and "creedless" . . . an author "we needn't try to write down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact . . ."²¹ F. R. Leavis stated that Conrad cannot be said to have a philosophy: "He is not one of those writers who clear up their fundamental attitudes for themselves in such a way that we may reasonably, in talking of them, use that portentous term."²² David Daiches concurs: "He was constantly denying the logical implications of his attitude to his characters. He did not tie up these contradictions into a philosophical system--Conrad was no philosopher--but allowed them to live side by side, unreconciled."²³

Conrad was not schematic or deductive but he was, as Robert Penn Warren urged, "in the fullest sense of the term, a philosophical novelist . . . for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration,

²¹Abinger Harvest (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), p. 138.

²²The Great Tradition, p. 200.

²³The Novel and the Modern World, p. 60.

for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience."²⁴ That the philosophical mind engaged in this process was, predominantly, a sceptical mind is indicated, I believe by the following series of parallels between authentically sceptical observations and attitudes and those of Joseph Conrad.

First, Scepticism denies the possibility that the human mind can ever understand or grasp reality. Even this rarefied position is reflected in the numerous references that Conrad makes to the dream-like quality of life, references that are variations of Calderon's phrase--a favorite of Conrad's--that "Life is a dream." Consider the following examples:

Stein (in Lord Jim):

A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people do, he drowns in the destructive element immerse That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream--and so--ewig--usque ad finem ²⁵

Marlow (in Heart of Darkness):

Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the

²⁴"On Nostromo," The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium, ed. R. W. Stallman (Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 227.

²⁵p. 262. All quotations are taken from The Works of Joseph Conrad (London: William Heinemann, 1921).

dream-sensation No, it is impossible
 We live as we dream--alone²⁶

Conrad (in his letters):

Life passes and it would pass like a dream were it not
 that the nerves are stretched like fiddle strings.²⁷

In that town (Cracow) one September day I got into the
 train (Vienna Express) as a man gets into a dream--and
 here is the dream going on still, only one is conscious
 that the moment of awakening is drawing close.²⁸

Eloise Knapp Hay noted this quality and observed that "Conrad
 distrusted in himself the 'morbid excess' that Coleridge names
 in Hamlet: the loss of 'equilibrium' between the real and the
 imaginary worlds."²⁹

Secondly, this extreme philosophical stance of formal
 Scepticism translates into popular expression in the questioning
 or denial of current or customary beliefs in religion, politics,
 or economics--in an initial reticence before, or a stand
 against, the dogmatic in any sphere of thought or activity. The
 burden of Conrad's fiction is a questioning or a rejection of
 the political, social, and intellectual order of the day--of the
 claims of democracy, socialism, and capitalism, and of the ubi-
 quitous and indefinable "illusions" of progress and perfectibility.

²⁶Youth, p. 100.

²⁷Jean-Aubry, II, 127. Letter to John Galsworthy,
 Mar. 10, 1911.

²⁸Ibid., II, 155. Letter to Miss Harriet Capes,
 July 22, 1914.

²⁹Hay, p. 11.

Third, Scepticism as a broad movement of thought "does not imply any incapacity for conviction, but only a persistence beyond the point at which most thinkers settle back into conclusions."³⁰ This kind of sceptical mind moving behind his fiction is noted by Eloise Knapp Hay when she remarks that "what is most curious and most often missed about Conrad's creative genius is his extraordinary dread of being caught in a fixed moral position, when indeed his whole energy is expended in the effort to arrive at one."³¹ Though Conrad recognized few absolutes, he admitted the principle: "Absolutism," he once remarked to H. G. Wells, "did not fail to maintain itself because there is anything absurd in absolutism, but because autocrats had made themselves unbearable through a sheer want of intelligence. And that is the danger."³²

Finally, Scepticism came to have, through the centuries, two facets: "negative" scepticism and "positive" scepticism.³³

³⁰Margaret L. Wiley, The Subtle Knot: Creative Scepticism in Seventeenth-Century England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 28.

³¹Hay, p. 214.

³²Jean-Aubry, I, 329.

³³In Conrad's fiction a corollary of negative scepticism is withdrawal, while a corollary of positive scepticism is action. Withdrawal suggests passivity, quietism, the ascetic, and is Oriental in outlook. Oriental imagery and symbolism in connection with Marlow's scepticism has been noted by William B. Stein in two articles, "The Lotus Posture and the 'Heart of Darkness'" (Modern Fiction Studies, II, 4 [Winter,] 1956-57 ,

"Negative" scepticism is terminal and static, and, in its firm negative stance, but another form of the dogmatic.³⁴ "Positive" scepticism is instrumental, a process of truth-seeking and inquiry³⁵ which, like the methodical doubt of an Augustine or the systematic doubt of a Pascal, can become, paradoxically, a component of an affirmative position.³⁶ Conrad's scepticism functions at both levels: if his tone and imagery reflect the negative scepticism of the social and political conservative in a transitional age, something positive and dynamic is reflected

pp. 235-37) and "Buddhism and the 'Heart of Darkness'" (Western Humanities Review, IX [Summer, 1957], pp. 281-85). Paul Wiley has commented on it in regard to the "Asiatic" character of Peter Ivanovitch in Under Western Eyes (Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 127), and in regard to the clash of Heyst (Victory) between an Eastern philosophy of negation and the Western spirit of action (p. 153).

Conrad probably employed this imagery as an expression of one of his basic dualisms, East versus West, but it is interesting to observe, that, within the context of historical Scepticism, this negative-positive dualism rooted in an East-West division with just such characteristics mentioned above is accurate. Miss Wiley (p. 33) comments: "The Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics further develops this Oriental influence (a Hindu influence) until Pyrrho becomes a sort of Buddhist arhat, not so much a sceptic as an ascetic of quietist."

³⁴Wiley, p. 16.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 18-19; 27.

³⁶Ibid., p. 20-21. On this point Wiley quotes T. S. Eliot ("The Pensees of Pascal," in Essays Ancient and Modern [London, 1936], p. 150):

For every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own scepticism, that which stops at the question, that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it.

in those allegorical encounters where, for example, the scepticism of Heyst translates into an affirmation.³⁷

In her study of creative scepticism, Miss Wiley isolates certain characteristic qualities of the "positive" sceptical process "so that we may recognize it wherever it occurs in literature."³⁸ Most of the qualities that she mentions are as identifiably Conradian as they are Sceptical.

The basic quality common to the sceptical experience in any age is its awareness of the sometimes paradoxical quality of truth. Lord Jim may suggest itself as the artistic "rendering" of that awareness in the fiction of Conrad and certainly the amount of commentary on that one story alone testifies to his subtlety in defining the alternatives in the moral dilemma. The theme of Lord Jim--the difficulty of personal morality in complex situations--is a recurring subject in the fiction of Conrad, rendered through the paradox, that "intellectual formula for an experience whose complexity is matched only by the complexity of the human being."³⁹

³⁷Franklin Baumer (Religion and the Rise of Scepticism [Harcourt, Brace and Co.: New York, 1960], p. 33), comments on this dual process:

The final point to be insisted upon in our definition is that scepticism, or the sceptic, usually has a positive as well as a negative side.
 . . . Doubting is only one part of their mental spectrum; believing or the will to believe is usually at least as important a part."

³⁸Wiley, p. 14.

³⁹Ibid., p. 37.

That complexity is spelled out in the Sceptic's awareness of dualism and in his perpetually counterpoised antagonistic ideas. Conrad's fiction is conceived and executed in complete awareness of such dualisms. Whether it is illusion versus reality, negation versus affirmation, anarchy versus order, or alienation versus commitment, Zabel notes that it is the contraries that count in Conrad's art of tension:

They account for its complexity of both substance and method, of historical insight as well as psychological passion; of humanism playing against abstract justice, sympathy against detachment, moral pathos against impersonal irony. It is the working of these oppositions that makes effective the texture, structure, and insight of Conrad's finer work.⁴⁰

The two qualities mentioned above relate to an awareness and a statement of the problem. A third quality of the sceptical experience is concerned with a probable solution and to this end the Sceptical mind emphasizes the active and the ethical.⁴¹

Conrad tells us in Nostrome that

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates.⁴²

In Heart of Darkness Douglas Hewitt observes that Marlow's "immediate work gains for him the significance of a moral

⁴⁰Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction," Tales of the East and West (Garden City, New York: Hanover House), p. xxii.

⁴¹Wiley, p. 27.

⁴²Nostrome, p. 63.

principle:"⁴³

I went to work the next day turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemd to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life.⁴⁴

Heyst, who "could not defend himself from compassion,"⁴⁵ said "I have allowed myself to be tempted into action"⁴⁶ in an admission that, contrary to the principles of that negative scepticism bequeathed to him by his father, he instinctively obeyed the ethical imperative lodged in those "decent feelings"⁴⁷ that he was never able to ignore.

Finally, Miss Wiley notes that the sceptical mind pursues this process with a regard for characteristically human values and a great mildness in the treatment of human beings.⁴⁸ Conrad described the object of his fiction in a letter to Arthur Symons as "things human" approached "in a spirit of piety."⁴⁹ Approaching "things human" in such a spirit means subscribing to a conception of human nature larger than that basic to Hardy's

⁴³Joseph Conrad: A reassessment (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), p. 21.

⁴⁴Youth, p. 91.

⁴⁵Victory, p. 99.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁸Wiley, p. 38.

⁴⁹Jean-Aubry, II, 83.

pessimism, Butler's naturalism, or Pater's aestheticism. Such "temporary formulas of craft" seemed unreliable to Conrad in view of the fact that "the changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories."

Consequently, he made his appeal to

that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition--and therefore, more permanently enduring . . . to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation--and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity--the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.⁵⁰

It was the broadest possible appeal and "almost alone among his contemporaries," comments Ian Watt, Conrad "thought a broad appeal worth making."⁵¹

The attitudes and patterns considered above would seem to suggest not only that the broad outline of his philosophical orientation was Scepticism but that it was Scepticism of a markedly authentic character. The origins of that quality must remain conjectural but, in the case of Joseph Conrad, one may

⁵⁰"Preface," Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. viii.

⁵¹"Joseph Conrad: Alienation and Commitment," The English Mind: Studies in the English Moralists. Ed. by Hugh S. Davies and George Watson (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1964), p. 269.

reasonably assume that his scepticism was a state of mind induced by personal experience and nourished by the climate of his age.

Conrad's lonely childhood and adolescence, lived in the shadow cast by the tragic figure of his father, was marked by experiences which could not help conducing to the dark inwardness of his nearer vision. Born Josef Teodor Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski in a Ukranian province of Russian-dominated Poland, he was the only child of Evalina Bobrowska and Apollo Korzeniowski, whose families belonged to the landed gentry of Poland.⁵² His father was "an honorable but too ardent patriot,⁵³ in the opinion of his friends, "Utopian," it was said, and impractical but, withal, socially charming and personally likeable. His mother was a woman of a "higher level of education than was usual," distinguished by "rare qualities of . . . mind and heart."⁵⁴ Both of their families, so different in other ways, had this in common: "all of their members made sacrifices of fortune, liberty and life for the cause in which they believed; and very few had any illusions as to its success."⁵⁵

⁵²Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1960), p. 1.

⁵³Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁵Garnett, p. 166.

After their marriage Apollo rented an estate, engaged in an unsuccessful farming venture, and, after three years and with most of the dowry money gone, returned to his earlier and abiding interests: literature and politics. His literary interests were broad: he wrote comedies, poetry "mostly of a mystically religious and patriotic nature,"⁵⁶ and translated Hugo, De Vigny, and Shakespeare. Bridging the gap between his interests, he engaged in publishing popular literature to further the education of the peasants. Nationalistic in the extreme, he belonged to the most militant among several Polish political parties,⁵⁷ all of which envisioned a Poland free from the domination of Tsarist Russia. His political convictions were intense, but in the opinion of Conrad's uncle and future guardian, Thaddeus Bobrowski, obscure:

Though he considered himself a sincere democrat and others even considered him 'extremist' and 'red' he had a hundred-fold more traits of the gentry in him (as I often told him) than I had in myself, though I was not suspected, either by him or by others, of being a democrat. In point of fact, he had an exceedingly tender and soft heart--hence his great sympathy for the poor and oppressed; and this was why he and others thought he was a democrat. But these were only impulses of the heart and mind inherent in a member of a good family of the gentry; they were not truly democratic convictions. I could never establish the real composition of his political and social ideas, apart from a hazy inclination towards a republican

⁵⁶Baines, p. 7.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 9.

form of state incorporating some equally hazy agglomeration of human rights as set out by the Constitution of May the Third--which for our times was not far-reaching enough.⁵⁸

Thaddeus pointed to what he considered an inconsistency:

On the peasant question, for example, he hesitated before the emancipation of the serfs. In one sense he sympathized with me (my thought at this time was already precise in 1854); but he showed reticence, affirmed that only those who possessed the land had a right to make a decision on what concerned its redistribution. I am not surprised.⁵⁹

Conrad's parents were caught up in the plans for the uprising of 1863 which, in the context of the current political Messianic myth, was the "third day" upon which Poland, a Christ-figure among nations, would rise from the death-dominion of Russia. Fabricated out of the "vision" of the mystic, Towianski, by the political event for which Korzeniowski and many other Poles dreamed and wrote and planned.⁶⁰ The irony of the situation was that an almost identical "Messianic" myth, centering on the mission of "Holy Russia," inspired Poland's enemy.⁶¹

Dressed in colorful peasant costume, Apollo agitated openly, organized demonstrations, and interfered with elections until, predictably, charges were placed against him. In spite

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 8, quoting the Bobrowski Document.

⁵⁹ Czeslaw Milosz, "Apollo Nalecz Korzeniowski," Kultura (Paris: February, 1956), p. 63, as quoted in Hay, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Hay, p. 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 284-87.

of the combined weight of their families' influence he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to exile in the distant Russian province of Vologda,⁶² to which Evalina and the young Conrad, at her insistence, accompanied him. At Vologda, isolation was a condition of life guaranteed by the murderous climate, which weakened Conrad dangerously and caused the death of his mother from tuberculosis in 1865. Apollo's despair over these misfortunes was immeasurably deepened by the failure of the planned-for insurrection of 1863. Poland did not rise triumphant in the holy war against Russia; the myth vanished, and the hard realities were so much harder to bear because of the disparity between them and the illusion. He took refuge from despair in religious mysticism until, in 1868, his health necessitated the return of father and son from exile.

Conrad was eleven years old when he and his father, incurably ill of tuberculosis, returned to Cracow. Many years later he was able to reproduce vividly in a letter the atmosphere of immanent death in which he lived with a loved parent⁶³: the "panelled and bare" drawing-room in which he inked himself all over doing his homework; the "tall, white door," always closed, beyond which lay his ill father attended by two "noiseless nursing nuns." "The air around me was all piety,

⁶²Baines, pp. 12-15.

⁶³Ibid., p. 23.

resignation, and silence." If he had not been a reading boy, he said, "I would have had nothing to do but sit and watch the awful stillness of the sick room flow out through the closed door and coldly enfold my sacred heart I would have gone crazy. But I was a reading boy I read! What did I not read!" A second letter⁶⁴ describes his memory of that parent:

A man of great sensibilities; of exalted mind and dreamy temperament; with a terrible gift of irony and of gloomy disposition; withal, of strong religious feeling, degenerating after the loss of his wife into mysticism touched with despair. His aspect was distinguished; his conversation very fascinating; but his face, in repose sombre, lighted all over when he smiled. I remember him well. For the last two years of his life I lived alone with him--but why go on?

It is not unreasonable to think that in later years Conrad's scepticism about the individual's motives in relation to himself and in relation to society, specifically, his pejorative use of such words as "vision" and "dream" and of "democracy" and "liberalism," had their origin in this period of his life when the self-destructive though admirable fidelity of his parents to a lost cause isolated him from the normal in life and made alienation the "initial premise"⁶⁵ of his existence. "Visionaries," he said later in life, "work everlasting evil on earth. Their Utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for the secular logic of human

⁶⁴Aubry, I, 292. Letter to Edw. Garnett, Jan. 20, 1900.

⁶⁵Watt, p. 264.

development."⁶⁶ The motivational power of an illusion was unforgettably established, as was the danger of the fixed idea, a thing of "irresistible power and of headlong motion." "A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring down the heaven pitilessly upon a loved head?"⁶⁷ Something irrational seemed to radiate from the words of the Polish revolutionaires and the Russian autocrats alike that, clothed, ironically, in the imagery of religion, crushed the Truth between them. It never rose again as an Absolute for Conrad, an identifiable reality about which one could predicate existence with unquestioned certainty.

Following the death of his father in 1868, Conrad was under the guardianship of his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski, to whom he stood "more in the relation of a son than of a nephew."⁶⁸ His erratic background made the conventional discipline of regular school onerous and, for the next three years, he studied only indifferently. The letters of his uncle to his ward are a crescendo of mounting concern over his melancholy, restless, and academically indifferent temperament, peaking in that period of debate over Conrad's startling desire to go to sea. The

⁶⁶Under Western Eyes, p. 117.

⁶⁷Nostromo, p. 356.

⁶⁸Garnett, p. 166.

complete unreasonableness of a land-locked Pole, who, in all his life, had only one glimpse of the sea, deciding on a maritime career was proof to Bobrowski of the impractical Korzeniowski strain. Reluctantly consenting after two years of opposition, he watched his nephew board the Vienna Express one day in Cracow, bound for Marseilles and the French Marine Service, "like a man getting into a dream."⁶⁹

The four years in Marseilles, from 1874-78, introduced Conrad to the rigors of a career at sea, a Carlist gunrunning adventure, an unhappy love affair,⁷⁰ and an attempted suicide. If the attempted suicide is, as it now seems,⁷¹ a true fact of his biography, it goes a long way toward explaining the theme of suicidal tendency--and actual suicides of nine leading characters--in his fiction. It suggests, too, that alienation was still such a constant condition of his life that he was in danger of moving from indifference to despair to that logical and inevitable refuge of the despairing mind. What turned him from this course--if indeed it was ever seriously contemplated--may have been the acquisition of purpose and conviction that he talked about in a letter to his aunt, Marguerite Porodowska:

⁶⁹Baines, p. 30.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 46-58.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 44-45; p. 53.

One always thinks himself important at twenty. The fact is, however, that one becomes useful only on realizing the utter insignificance of the individual in the scheme of the universe. When one well understands that in oneself one is nothing and that a man is worth neither more nor less than the work he accomplishes with honesty of purpose and means, and within the strict limits of his duty toward society, only then is one the master of his conscience, with the right to call himself a man. Otherwise, were he more attractive than Prince Charming, richer than Midas, wiser than Doctor Faustus himself, the two-legged featherless creature is only a despicable thing sunk in the mud of all the passions. I could spoil a great deal of paper on this theme, but you doubtless understand me as well as I do myself, without further explanation.⁷²

Whether Conrad found in what Guerard calls "the merciless maritime ethic" the kind of imperative that Marlow recognized is open to conjecture. Something drew him to the British Merchant marine, something still undefined. It may have been the desire to prove himself to his uncle and family in Poland. It may have been that his failures in Marseilles made some other area more attractive to a bruised ego. Whatever the reason--and it may simply have been that the British Merchant ships did not bother about formalities which worried the French⁷³--Conrad left Marseilles on the British freighter, Mavis, in April of 1878 to become part of English life, first as a seaman, and then as a novelist.

⁷²Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Porodowska 1890-1920. Edited by John A. Gee and Paul J. Stumm (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1940), pp. 45-46.

⁷³Baines, p. 58.

If the conditions of Conrad's early life induced in him an alienation from the possibilities of belief, his scepticism was strengthened by the intellectual climate of his maturity. Scepticism flourishes, after all, in periods of transition when "accustomed structures of power and belief are disintegrating."⁷⁴ Conrad's age was just such an age of transition.

"By definition," says Houghton,⁷⁵ "an age of transition is one in which change is revolutionary and has a dual aspect: destruction and reconstruction. As the old order of doctrines and institutions is being attacked or modified or discarded, at one point or another, a new order is being proposed or inaugurated." This process was well under way in England when Conrad stepped from the decks of the British freighter, an aloof, aristocratic exile who was to become, as Guerard remarked,⁷⁶ "more British than the British." He may have been unaware at the time that what he idealized⁷⁷ as the sanity and method of

⁷⁴Baumer, p. 8.

⁷⁵Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 3.

⁷⁶Albert J. Guerard, "Introduction," Heart of Darkness; Almayer's Folly; The Lagoon (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), p. 9.

⁷⁷In 1905, Conrad wrote: "The true greatness of a State does not spring from such a contemptible source (as revolution). It is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the

the British Empire and the order that he associated with it were changing. They were. Victorian England was transitional even when Conrad lived in Poland and sailed the Mediterranean and Eastern seas under a French flag, far from his future adopted home. Almost coincident with his arrival--after 1870, suggests Houghton, a new temper, intellectually "modern," accelerated the rate of transition which affected every area of life. By the time he had mastered the English language, acquired a Master Mariner's Certificate, and become (in 1884) an English citizen, Conrad was registering marked scepticism generated not so much by the specific changes in the structure of the society as by the spirit in which those changes were conceived and pursued.

Political change turned upon the extension of franchise--apart from any consideration of property or wealth--in the Reform Bills of 1867 and 1884-5, which doubled and tripled the electorate. The balance of power passed as a consequence from

reward of gratitude" (Notes on Life and Letters, p. 121). Conrad believed that the British Empire partook of this kind of greatness. It possessed a "national conscience, which, in my view, is as much part of the Empire as the extent of the earth it holds, and of as great importance to its future and to its power" (Jean-Aubry, I, 294). Their instruments for attaining "reasonable English ideals" are "time and deep-seated conviction of the race,--the expansive force of its enterprise and its morality" (Jean-Aubry, I, 285). At the time of the Boer War he wrote: "That they--the Boers--are struggling in good faith for their independence cannot be doubted; but it is also a fact that they have no idea of liberty, which can only be found under the English flag all over the world" (Jean-Aubry, I, 288).

the Southern (aristocratic and upper middle-class) to the Northern (industrial and working class) constituencies. Predictably this triumph of political democracy led to changes on the social scene.

A broadly democratic system of education was devised and, if in 1833 general illiteracy was the rule, by 1891 compulsory elementary education was the law of the land. "Female Emancipation" followed tardily but inevitably upon the passage of Education Bills in 1870 and 1891 and, though social sanction was reluctant in this area, "feminism" emerged as a fact of the late Victorian social scene. Social security of another sort was obtained when workers won the right to strike in 1859, and the right to organize trade unions in 1864, the same year that Karl Marx founded the first International Workingmen's Association in London. Though Marx published Das Kapital in 1867, interest in socialism as a way of life did not quicken in England until the last quarter of the century when George Bernard Shaw and other middle-class intellectuals established the Fabian Society (1884) dedicated to the gradual, as opposed to violent, revolution of society through an expansion of government control. Universal brotherhood, Fraternity, emerged as an ideal.

Flexibility in the social structure had its counterpart in economics where the principle of laissez faire, justified by Benthamite utilitarianism, operated without restriction in an expanding capitalistic economy. After the 1840's when England

had become an industrial society of world-wide connections, "wealth grew faster than population" even though the population growth was itself unprecedented.⁷⁸ Steam, the railroad, and the telegraph; the revision of legal codes; and the rewards of brilliant scholarship and medical research were part of the transitional Victorian scene which, in the extent of its changes, has been compared to the Elizabethan. The exhilarating atmosphere of a world in which men could make their own careers contributed to the optimism of the time for it was optimism, an almost triumphant optimism, that constituted the response of the typical Victorian when his nearer vision contemplated the very real political, social, and material advances. His optimism seemed sanctioned by those Enlightenment ideas of progress and perfectibility which, still "in the air" and gaining strength and credence from their association with the doctrine of organic development, provided the intellectual leaven.

If the nearer vision of the Victorian resulted in optimism, his farther vision produced in him "a paralysis of doubt."⁷⁹ Developments in nineteenth-century science had combined to suggest the accidental nature of the physical universe and the occurrence, in the natural course of organic

⁷⁸D. C. Somervell, English Thought in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 233.

⁷⁹Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 11.

development, of the human species in that universe. The foremost scientific argument against religion--the evolutionary argument, derived from Darwin's research--was bolstered by at least five others:⁸⁰ (1) the utilitarian argument stressed the fact that the other-worldly character of religion stood in the way of reform and progress in this world; (2) the anthropological argument, advanced chiefly by Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough, suggested that modern religious belief and ritual derived from the myth and ritual of savage and uncivilized peoples and instanced the "counterpart" of Christian Atonement and Eucharist in the slaying of a divine victim and the partaking of his flesh among primitive tribes; (3) Ludwig Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians explained belief away as Illusionism, an exercise in self-projection in which man projects into a God-Idea all the qualities that he has or admires; (4) Karl Marx explained current belief as a "reflex" of the economic world: change the capitalistic social system and that belief would disappear; and (5) Historicism, perhaps the most devastating of all arguments, which submitted the idea of becoming for being, the relative for the absolute, dynamic movement for dogmatic fixity. It was historicism,⁸¹ declaring that all things were in a state of flux and relative only to the particular moment in time, that undermined the concept of an absolute morality.

⁸⁰Baumer, pp. 140-162.

⁸¹Houghton, p. 22.

The enduring stalemate between Science and Faith created a climate of doubt in which none of the old truths seemed to apply. What was man? Free agent or human automaton? Was the basis of his morality rightly conscience, or utilitarian rationalism, or the raw, instinctual response of self-preservation? The impossibility of knowing was debated in periodicals; doubt was the prevailing atmosphere of the time.⁸² "As one prophet after another stepped forward with his program of reconstruction, the hubbub of contending theories, gaining in number as the century advanced, and spreading out from the intellectuals to the large audience of periodicals, created a climate of opinion in which, quite apart from any specific doubts, the habit of doubt was unconsciously bred."⁸³

In that habit of doubt the mood of the man and his age coincided. From his letters we know that Conrad was as shaken as any by the late Victorian world view: the knitting machine world that "knits us in and . . . knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair, and all the illusions,--and nothing matters."⁸⁴ "The attitude of cold unconcern is the only reasonable one The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the

⁸²Ibid., p. 15.

⁸³Ibid., p. 12.

⁸⁴Jean-Aubry, I, 216. Letter to Cunninghame Graham, December 20, 1897.

least. The fate of a humanity condemned to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvements you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness, and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement, virtue, for knowledge and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances, as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men."⁸⁵

"Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore."⁸⁶

"Christianity . . . is an absurd oriental fable"⁸⁷

"The business in the stable isn't convincing; . . . And the most galling feature is that nobody--not a single Bishop of them--believes in it."⁸⁸ He was acutely aware that "The true sign of the times was spiritual isolation . . . :"⁸⁹ "Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life,--a view that rejects all formulas,

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 222. Letter to Cunninghame Graham, January 14, 1898.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Garnett, p. 245. Letter to Edward Garnett, February 23, 1914.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 185.

⁸⁹H. V. Routh, Toward the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1937), p. ix.

dogmas, and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me."⁹⁰

Conrad rejected with the Victorians the order of the past--"The old order had got to die, but they died nobly" --but he rejected as well the secular order of progress with which they tried to replace it. "It is those who are left," he continued, "who may have to bargain for their souls with the most materialistic and unscrupulous of forces that have ever moved mankind."⁹¹

If democracy and socialism meant progress to the majority, to Conrad they were "infernal doctrines born in continental backslums."⁹² Their acceptance meant that "every disreputable ragamuffin in Europe feels that the day of universal brotherhood, despoilation and disorder is coming apace, and nurses day-dreams of well-plenished pockets amongst the ruin of all that is respectable, venerable and holy."⁹³ Socialism, "robbing men of natural incentives to self-government and inner moral restraint"⁹⁴ led, inevitably, to Caesarism. On the other hand,

⁹⁰Jean-Aubry, I, 184. Letter to Edward Noble, November 2, 1895.

⁹¹Ibid., II, 217. Letter to Sir High Clifford, January 25, 1919.

⁹²Baines, p. 81. Letter to Spiridion Kliszewski, December 19, 1885.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Hay, p. 27.

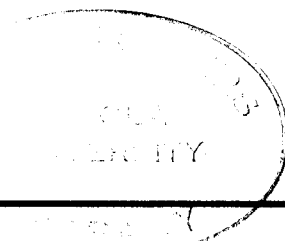
Democracy, "tainted with the abstractions that incited the French Revolution or the lawlessness of American bossism in the West," was a "mounting battle cry for revolutionary forces quickened by hatred for much that is good as well as much that is corrupt in Western civilization."⁹⁵ One can see the justice of Bertrand Russell's observation that Conrad was not a modern man, opposed, as he was, alike to indiscipline and to that discipline that was merely external.⁹⁶ He pointed out, moreover, that these doctrines were imbued with the revolutionary spirit, which, he said, "is mighty convenient in this, that it frees one from all scruples as regards ideas. Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains."⁹⁷ He reminded his readers in the Author's Note to Under Western Eyes that no fundamental change of hearts follows the downfall of any given human institution.

If Fraternity was an illusion that imposed by its size alone, as he said, the ideal of human perfectibility, derived from the Enlightenment concept of Helvetius and Condorcet, seemed utterly unrealizable. A familiar subject in his correspondence with the aristocratic-Socialist-reformer, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, the ideal of human perfectibility drew such

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

⁹⁷ A Personal Record, p. xxi.



comments as: "You want from men faith, honour, fidelity to truth in themselves and others. You want them to have all this, to show it every day, to make out of these words their rules of life What makes you dangerous is your unwarrantable belief that your desire may be realized. That is the only point of difference between us. I do not believe. And if I desire the very same things no one cares."⁹⁸ "I am more in sympathy with you than words can express, yet if I had a grain of belief left in me I would believe you misguided. You are misguided by the desire of the Impossible,--and I envy you. Alas! What you want to reform are not institutions,--it is human nature. Your faith will never move that mountain. Not that I think mankind intrinsically bad. It is only silly and cowardly."⁹⁹ Such hopes for perfection ignored the fact--one Conrad "rendered" in the character of Kurtz--that "the ape and the tiger are not merely part of our evolutionary heritage, but are ontologically present in every individual."¹⁰⁰ "Man is amazing," as Stein remarked,¹⁰¹ "but he is not a masterpiece."

The practical results of democratic equalizing seemed dubious, too. The "emancipated" woman, abdicating her woman's

⁹⁸Jean-Aubry, I, 215.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 229-230.

¹⁰⁰Watt, p. 261.

¹⁰¹Lord Jim, p. 254.

world, was more curious than admirable: "A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency," Conrad remarked in Nostromo,¹⁰² "she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation." The workman who is more conscious of his rights than of his duties is like Donkin, whose contribution in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" was the creation of "a discontented and aspiring population. They found comfort of a gloomy kind in an interminable and conscientious analysis of their unappreciated worth; and, inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines, they dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea, manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers."¹⁰³ The end result of such "equalizing" could only be "a dull world of perfected municipalities and W. C.'s sans peur et sans reproche. The grave of individual temperaments is being dug"¹⁰⁴

As much as any specific change it was the righteous spirit which accompanied change that triggered Conrad's negative response. "All claim to special righteousness awakens in me that scorn and anger from which the philosophical mind should be free."¹⁰⁵ The "special righteousness" derived from the defunct

¹⁰²p. 64.

¹⁰³p. 116.

¹⁰⁴Joan-Aubry, II, 12.

¹⁰⁵A Personal Record, p. xxii.

Comtian "Religion of Humanity" which bequeathed to Victorian England a "universalist faith in man, and in man's ability to create with or without God's assistance, a new 'Kingdom of Man' on earth characterized by happiness, social justice, and peace."¹⁰⁶ Social purpose and ethical premise coalesced, cemented by Victorian evangelical zeal, and man's latent--and currently unsatisfied--religious feelings were drained off into a worship of humanity. A Utopian vision, clothed in religious imagery, soliciting belief, it was not the kind of vision--or the kind of ethical imperative--that Conrad, either from temperament or from personal experience, could credit.

Conrad's general mental climate suggested scepticism as his response to the most characteristic ideologies of the Victorian and Edwardian world. The age seemed to be one characterized by a commercial society with an almost total lack of human warmth, "an age in which we are camped like bewildered travelers in a garish, unrestful hotel."¹⁰⁷ The world "seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive."¹⁰⁸ The disordered world, alienating and disillusioning, is refracted in the fiction of Joseph Conrad in his thematic concept of character, the isolato.

¹⁰⁶Baumer, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷Victory, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸Lord Jim, p. 387.

CHAPTER II

THEMATIC CONCEPT OF CHARACTER

Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affections of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief.¹

The concept of the isolato, which enlarged originally the range of character study in literature, is a familiar one now to the readers of the modern novel. Men "marked by apartness and alienation" are the heroes, as Zabel pointed out,² of James, Mann, Joyce, Kafka, and of the French Existentialists Camus and Sartre. One could add the names of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Wolff, of Melville, Hemingway, and Carson McCullers, and the list would still be incomplete. The concept derives in part from nineteenth-century will-worshipping Romanticism, whose Byronic heroes were estranged by sensibility or social ostracism from the common collective life. Idealistic and individualistic, they sought in Nature the moral values that were blurred for them in civilization. Paul Wiley³ notes that the concept of the

¹Nostramo, p. 367-68.

²Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction," Portable Conrad (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 40.

³Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 28.

solitary man was a familiar one in the French literature that Conrad discussed so often with his cousin Marguerite Poradowska. Citing Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Huysmans, Wiley observes that their hermit-type characters share two qualities⁴ with Conrad's isolates: (1) the fact of physical and spiritual alienation, and (2) the condition of duality, with alienation aggravating the tension between opposing forces of mind and will, virtue and vice, morality and instinct. The apt and convenient term, isolato, first appeared in Moby Dick⁵ where, borrowing from Italian the word for "island," Melville described the Pequod's crew as "nearly all islanders . . . Isolatoos, too, . . . not acknowledging the common continent of man, but each isolatoe living on a separate continent of his own." Conrad did not exploit the term but it associates comfortably with his concept of moral isolation symbolized by the physical. These and other literary precedents may have exerted some power of suggestion, but his own concept of the alienated man, incorporating in his character the theme of isolation, owed little to vicarious sources; it was the logical result of Conrad's personal experience and of his sceptical view of modern man in a disordered, increasingly anarchic world.

⁴Ibid., p. 28-32.

⁵Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 118.

It would be hard to mistake the fact, as Peter Ure remarked,⁶ that Conrad's isolated heroes are created partly in his own image. Isolation, the "original premise" of his existence discussed in Chapter I, was a continuing condition while as a Polish-speaking exile he sailed on English ships barely able to communicate with the other mariners. The sea years past, isolation was a state necessitated by his new craft of fiction. The condition described in a letter to John Galsworthy could be duplicated a score of times in his correspondence:

I feel myself strangely growing into a sort of Outcast, a mental and moral Outcast. I hear nothing--think of nothing--reflect nothing--I cut myself off--and with all that can just only keep going, or rather keep on lagging from one wretched story to another--and always deeper in the mire.⁷

Isolation was the "hard and absolute condition of life"⁸ for a novelist who

. . . lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil.⁹

Finally, Conrad's sense of isolation was almost certainly increased by his existence outside the intellectual order of his

⁶"Character and Imagination," Cambridge Journal (III Oct. 1949-Sept. 1950 , 729-740), p. 729.

⁷Jean-Aubry, I, 317.

⁸Lord Jim, p. 220.

⁹"A Familiar Preface," A Personal Record, p. xix-xx.

day, an order based on political, social, and intellectual assumptions which, as Chapter I indicated, Conrad regarded as precarious at best. To his Socialist friend Edward Garnett he wrote:

My misfortune is that I can't swallow any formula and thus am wearing the aspect of enemy to all mankind.¹⁰

Conrad's alienation translated into fiction in a hero's situation in a remote jungle, on an endangered ship at sea, or on a desert island, the physical isolation symbolizing the protagonist's spiritual isolation within his own illusory universe. Isolation within the circle of one's mistaken identity could exist as well, he demonstrated in Secret Agent, in a crowded modern city like London, where the unconscious indifference of people insured isolation while cruelly devouring "the world's light," the human values.¹¹

In addition to his sense of apartness, Conrad's isolated men reflect his complex psychological condition, that division of Self and Other that crops up so often in his letters. Zabel comments on this characteristically sceptical dualism:

Whatever was buoyant, romantic, intrepid, or wilful in his nature was continuously at grips with all that was doubtful, pessimistic, passionate, skeptical. That much we can take not only from the evidence in his letters and personal writings but from the self-divided

¹⁰Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, p. 265.

¹¹"Author's Note," p. xv.

self-doubting, and self-incriminating men who appear as heroes in most of his characteristic tales. That Conrad habitually dramatized himself in such characters is written as plainly in his pages as we can expect it to be in the work of any man of acutely self-conscious temper. The evidence appears as much in the morbid excesses and exaggerated or defensive self-projection of his weaker dramas as in the searching moral and psychological inquisition of his greater. Like all powerful psychologists, Conrad offers himself as analyst and subject. The other self, the double self, gave him a radical problem, throughout his fiction.¹²

This complexity of the human personality is rendered in Conrad's fiction by "doubling," that process by which other characters embody unrealized potentialities in the protagonist; create, as Harvey said,¹³ "the penumbra of alternative histories around the actual history he created for himself." So the Quixotic Lingard (The Rescue)¹⁴ is "seen" in relationship to the defeated Jorgensen; the hero Heyst (Victory) and the villain Mr. Jones share a "mistrust of life," differing only in degree; and the betrayer Razumov (Under Western Eyes) reluctantly but instinctively assumes the moral identity of the betrayed Haldin. A particularly rich example of the process is found in Lord Jim where the reader is invited to speculate on the several submerged potentialities of Jim's personality as "seen" in the

¹²"Introduction," Tales of the East and West, pp. xviii-xix.

¹³W. J. Harvey, Character and the Novel (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 148.

¹⁴Kingsley Widmer, "Conrad's Pyrrhic Victory," Twentieth Century Literature (V [October, 1959], 123-130), p. 123.

Patna crew members, in Captain Brierly, in Chester, in the French Lieutenant, and in Gentleman Brown, the outlaw and classic doppelganger. Jim's instinctive jump, a response to the fundamental law of Nature rather than to any civilized code, discloses the seed of personal anarchy exhibited full grown in Brown. Moreover, Jim's emphasis on the chance missed--"Ah! what a chance missed! My God! What a chance missed!"¹⁵--when even the sympathetic Marlow feels that it is "the guilt alone that matters,"¹⁶ betrays a fundamental indifference to the human element--the fate of eight hundred pilgrim-passengers--that is a characteristic of Brown's criminal patterns of human betrayal. Brown, recognizing their obscure but ominous consubstantiality, touches a nerve in his talk with Jim:

And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts.¹⁷

In Conrad's ethical hierarchy the villain, himself an isolato, has as much to reveal about the human condition as the hero.

Alienated and self-divided, Conrad was, as Gillon concluded, "an isolatoe par excellence"¹⁸ who projected his

¹⁵Lord Jim, p. 100.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 480.

¹⁸Adam Gillon, The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1960), p. 56.

imagination into the common fate of the isolated. But more than personal history went into the concept: Conrad's isolato is never "an individual and nothing more. He becomes . . . a metaphor of society and humanity."¹⁹ The metaphoric, imagistic,²⁰ representative²¹ nature of Conrad's isolato is confirmed in his own description of Jim as "symbolic":

He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me as symbolic.²²

¹⁹Zabel, "Introduction," Portable Conrad, p. 29.

²⁰Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, p. 25: "This image of a lone man has such vividness and clarity that it must have been deeply felt."

²¹Leavis, The Great Tradition. In discussing the characters in Nostromo, Leavis states that we are not interested in them for any "sustained analytic exhibition of the inner complexities of the individual psyche" (p. 196) but rather for their vividly realized "representative attitudes (p. 195)."

Speaking of the same characters, Walter Allen commented: ". . . Conrad so sets them in the scene, so poses them as to persuade us not only of their ordinary reality as lifelike characters but of their symbolic reality" (The English Novel: A Short Critical History [New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954]), p. 373.

²²Lord Jim, p. 326. Character becoming symbolic is, according to Harvey (Character and the Novel, p. 195), a characteristic of the modern experimental novel. Of interest to this thesis is Harvey's association of this development, as well as other technical developments in which Conrad participated--the complication of narrative methods, the elimination of the omniscient author, the expressive manipulation of style, the greater stress on image and symbol, and the stream of consciousness technique--with

a changed conception of the relation of art to reality, a change largely determined by the modern novelist's

In the isolate Conrad symbolizes the human condition. His alienated man is the battleground for those forces of civilization which demand communication, commitment, and order versus the forces of barbarism that thrive on betrayal, alienation, and anarchy. He is the modern Everyman who, unlike his Morality ancestor, is alienated from any informing tradition that will, by telling him who he is--morally--and where he is going, draw him into a commitment to the human community. Modern men seemed to Conrad like his two sceptics Decoud and Nostromo who, together on the lighter in the bay off Great Isabel Island, felt the burden of their solitary condition for want "of a bond of conviction, of common idea."²³ Isolation may be attributable in part to temperament or the forces of circumstances, but its ultimate cause is a modern world increasingly impersonal and mechanistic, morally nihilistic, and illuminated by the false lights of irresponsibly abstract political and social faiths. In response to Heyst's request that he identify himself, Mr. Jones, whose features in repose had a curious "character of evil," said:

sense of increasing alienation. Behind this changed conception often lie radical doubts about the very nature of reality. We are no longer certain of the world we live in; physics, psychology, politics and philosophy conspire to dissolve the comfortably solid boundaries of our everyday world (p. 194).

²³Nostromo, p. 278.

I, my dear Sir? In one way I am--yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast--almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a fort of fate--the retribution that waits its time.²⁴

Alien, "come where he (the human quality) is not wanted,"²⁵ as Stein said, man is uncommitted and lonely, and, Conrad mused:

Who knows what true loneliness is--not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion. Now and then a fatal conjunction of events may lift the veil for an instant. For an instant only. No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad.²⁶

The "mask" of an isolato's loneliness is the illusion that he imposes upon his life. It may be a romantic illusion like Jim's, an idealistic one like Kurtz's, a cynical one like Razumov's, a sceptical one like Heyst's, or a fatalistic one like Flora's--they all suffice until that moment in time when the isolato, unless he be a man "disdained by destiny,"²⁷ encounters the crisis that shatters his illusion and reverses for him "the terms of life."²⁸ His test is "the precondition of manhood"²⁹ through which he is born, as Kurtz was, to the hard

²⁴Victory, p. 464.

²⁵Lord Jim, p. 254.

²⁶Under Western Eyes, p. 46-47.

²⁷Typhoon, p. 22.

²⁸Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Chance and Recognition," The Art of Conrad, p. 21.

²⁹Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, p. 58.

knowledge of his essential imperfection in an age that held out the lure of perfectibility. "It is the stroke by which fate compels recognition--of one's self, of reality, of illusion, error, mistaken expectations, and defeat. At that moment, if a man can measure up to it, his conscious moral existence begins, an existence for which previous intellectual or theoretical anticipation can never fully prepare."³⁰ Illusions, ideals, and principles cannot sustain him--they are the "rags" of civilization that "would fly off at the first good shake."³¹ The only support that he has is the "voice" that restrained Marlow,³² a "voice" frail but persistent as MacWhirr's,³³ endearing as Lena's,³⁴ the "voice" that spoke to Heyst through his compassion and decent feelings, the "oldest voice in the world . . . that never ceases to speak"³⁵--the voice of conscience. An analogy exists in Conrad's writings between two men in extremis, the

³⁰Zabel, The Art of Conrad, pp. 21-22.

³¹Youth, p. 118.

³²Ibid., p. 118: "An appeal to me in this fiendish row-- is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced."

³³Typhoon, p. 55: "But after a while he heard with amazement the frail and resisting voice in his ear, the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult."

³⁴Victory: "But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality (p. 93)." . . . "These words came out of the common experience of mankind; yet by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation (p. 95)."

³⁵Ibid., p. 212.

"isolated" author and his creation, the "symbolic" alien, that leaves little doubt about the identity of that guide. In A Personal Record, he theorizes:

In the interior world where [the artist's] thought and his emotions go seeking for the experience of imagined adventures, there are no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstances or dread of opinion to keep him within bounds. Who then is going to say Nay to his temptations if not his conscience.³⁶

In Heart of Darkness Marlow tries to suggest extenuating circumstances in Kurtz's betrayal in like terms:

. . . how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by way of solitude--utter solitude without a policemen--by way of silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness.³⁷

"Conscience, gifted with a voice,"³⁸ speaks to man of Fidelity--of "love," "hope," and "trust in life,"³⁹--penetrating the isolate's illusory identity with imperatives that enforce the necessity of human community, that "unavoidable solidarity" which Conrad invoked in the Preface to the Nigger of the "Narcissus" as the criterion of a moral action, whether that action be Life or Art. The crisis poses the alternatives:

³⁶ p. xxvi.

³⁷ Youth, pp. 142-143.

³⁸ A Personal Record, p. 116.

³⁹ Victory, p. 502.

communication, "the fundamental human act,"⁴⁰ or betrayal, "the ultimate crime,"⁴¹ and the isolato's position in Conrad's moral hierarchy is dictated by his response.

One ethical level is represented by the steadfast, reliable man who is the "raw material of great reputations."⁴² Lacking in imagination and intuition, consequently not susceptible to illusion, he is true to a fixed code that "unites him with a large group of similarly loyal people, so that he is seldom oppressed by any sense of isolation."⁴³ His unquestioning acceptance of the code (generally maritime), which he lives like a reflex action, is in itself an example of unconscious solidarity. The French Lieutenant (Lord Jim), Singleton (Nigger of the "Narcissus"), MacWhirr (Typhoon), Captain Mitchell (Nostromo), and Mr. Fyne (Chance) are numbered among those uncomprehendingly solid ethical counters in Conrad's novels. Moser describes this type as "the simple hero" who meets his crisis with "unthinking devotion."⁴⁴

As predictable as the "simple hero" is Conrad's villain, the barbarian of his fiction, who, in his anarchic, destructive

⁴⁰ Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, p. 58.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lord Jim, p. 176.

⁴³ Moser, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

propensities, augmented as these sometimes are by intelligence, imagination, and intuition, poses a real and formidable danger. He fails his crisis and many crises, but he does not care--he has, as Moser explained, "no moral sense" ⁴⁵ Represented by Gentleman Brown (Lord Jim), by Donkin and Jim Wait (Nigger of the "Narcissus"), by Sortillo and Bento (Nostromo), by Nikita (Under Western Eyes), by Verloc and associates (Secret Agent), by Mr. Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro (Victory), by De Barral (Chance), and by Scevola (The Rover), this type is identified by an inclination and a willingness to betray every human imperative.

What Fletcher calls the "ideal type," ⁴⁶ the type Moser describes as "the perceptive hero," ⁴⁷ is represented by Marlow (Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness, Chance), Stein (Lord Jim), Davidson (Victory), Powell (Chance), and D'Alcacer (The Rescue)--emotionally and morally balanced individuals of some complexity. The "ideal type" is like "the simple hero" in that he "understands, appreciates, and subscribes" ⁴⁸ to a fixed ethical code. Consequently, he is in no more danger of betraying human values than is the "reflexively" loyal, simple man. However, the

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶James V. Fletcher, "Ethical Symbolism in Conrad," College English, II (October, 1940), p. 20.

⁴⁷Moser, p. 16.

⁴⁸Ibid.

"ideal type" possesses enough imagination, intuition, and understanding to become involved empathetically in the moral crisis of the central isolato, and in his role as narrator or commentator he has the opportunity as well as the ability to project the grayness of the moral atmosphere.

The central isolato or "vulnerable hero,"⁴⁹ described by Fletcher as Conrad's "fallen angel,"⁵⁰ is an intuitive, imaginative illusionist who, confronted with a moral crisis, fails. He is the "civilized" man, superior in many ways and confidence-inspiring. Represented by Jim (Lord Jim), Kurtz (Heart of Darkness), Decoud, Monygham, Nostromo, and Gould (Nostromo); by Razumov (Under Western Eyes), Heyst (Victory), by Flora and Anthony (Chance), the "fallen angel" is the ethical type in which Conrad and the reader is most interested. He is "one of us," seemingly incapable of the inner falseness that would dispose him toward betrayal, facing the same moral dilemmas as "those we know today . . ."⁵¹ Yet betrayal winds through the lives of Conrad's central isolatos, taking many different forms. Sometimes it is an overt act, like Willems' betrayal of Lingard

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰"Ethical Symbolism in Conrad," p. 20.

⁵¹Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History, p. 370: "The world Conrad describes, the moral dilemmas facing his characters, are those we know today, that seem to us now, as someone has said, almost to have come into existence in 1940."

(An Outcast of the Islands), or Razumov's betrayal of Haldin (Under Western Eyes); sometimes it is the thoughtless corollary of an illusion, such as Almayer's undervaluing of Nina (Almayer's Folly); sometimes it is a sin of omission, such as Heyst's withdrawal from life (Victory), or Nostromo's refusal of Teresa (Nostromo); or it may be the completely unconscious and unintentional inhumanity of the characters in The Secret Agent toward one another--a particularly modern expression of "the ultimate crime." Betrayal, the inevitable result of the isolate's lack of self-knowledge, solicited, as James would say, Conrad's creative imagination from the outset of his literary career.

Conrad's first isolate Kaspar Almayer (Almayer's Folly), the Dutch trader, lived on the Bornean coast with his native wife and half-caste daughter, Nina. It would be more accurate to say that Almayer lived with the fixed idea that nothing in his life was ever quite worthy of him,⁵² and with the illusion that "a great and splendid reward"⁵³ for his bitter years of toil and strife was imminent. His initial offense against a human standard was taking the native ward of the wealthy

⁵²A Personal Record, p. 111: "But you were always an unlucky man, Almayer. Nothing was ever quite worthy of you. What made you so real to me was that you held this lofty theory with some force of conviction and with an admirable consistency."

⁵³Almayer's Folly, p. 2.

adventurer, Tom Lingard, for his wife in the spirit that he did:⁵⁴

. . . there was only within him a confused consciousness of shame that he a white man--Still a convent education of four years--and then she may mercifully die. He was always lucky⁵⁵

His offense was compounded when, years later, he enclosed Nina in his illusion--the Beauty that with his expected Wealth would make him the most envied man in Amsterdam. Nina turns from her father to Dain, the Malay Prince, for honest, human affection and when Almayer, the betrayer, cries "Betrayed!" Nina retaliates:

. . . You ask me why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions--the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife? . . . You were speaking of gold then, but our ears were filled with the song of our love, and we did not hear you.⁵⁶

Nina leaves with Dain, and Almayer is left to face the reality of his life. His false illusion took no cognizance of the disparity between his potential and the dream, and when it shattered, so heavily had he invested in himself in it that he

⁵⁴Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 35.

⁵⁵Almayer's Folly, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 223-224.

despaired and withdrew to the forgetfulness of a narcotics-drenched death-in-life.

Willems (Outcast of the Islands) shares with Almayer an exploitive marriage to a half-caste girl, a conscienceless respect for self and for white civilization, and an illusion-- "faith in his own success"--that he himself destroys when his embezzling practices are exposed. Like many of Conrad's isolates he, the betrayer, feels betrayed because

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect. It was going to be a short episode-- a sentence in brackets, so to speak--in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten . . . He fancied that nothing would be changed.⁵⁷

Instead, everything changed, and were it not for the generosity of Captain Lingard, Willems would have become a beach-combing derelict in the little community he formerly bestowed himself upon with such arrogance.

Lingard takes Willems with him up "his river"⁵⁸ along a secret route to the trading station of Kaspar Almayer where, antagonism developing from the start between Almayer and the refugee, Willems frequents the native village and becomes involved with a beautiful native girl, Aissa. He "buys" access

⁵⁷Outcast of the Islands, p. 3.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 247.

to her by divulging to her Arab chieftain the secret trade route responsible for Lingard's wealth, thus adding to his betrayal of his wife and of his employer (father-in-law), the betrayal of Lingard, who befriended him, and of Almayer, whose station is ruined by the Arab competition. Soon after, he turns upon Aissa, too, as

A savage . . . A damned Mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay . . . Take me away. I am White. All White! . . . She, a savage, I, a civilized European, and clever . . . I did not know that there was something in me she could get hold of . . . Well, she found out something in me.⁵⁹

A more subtle and complex persona than Almayer, Willems comes to the same end. He, too, refuses the burden of self-knowledge: "The evil was in them," he explains to Lingard, "not in me."⁶⁰ "I had principles from a boy. Yes, principles."⁶¹ Then, "he laughed. His laugh seemed to be torn out from him against his will, seemed to be brought violently on the surface from under his bitterness, his self-contempt, from under his despairing wonder at his own nature."⁶²

Like most men, he had carried solemnly within his breast the whole universe, and the approaching end of all things in the destruction of his own personality filled him with paralyzing awe.⁶³

Willem's death, shot by Aissa when his wife came to rescue him, is preceded by what may be recognition:

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 332.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 329.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 328.

⁶² Ibid., p. 339.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 420.

Never before did he understand, as in that second, the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life.⁶⁴

Lingard occupies center stage in the second to the last novel (The Rescue) that Conrad wrote, one that poses the dilemma defined in the title to Part V, "The Point of Honour and the Point of Passion." A younger Lingard than in Almayer's Folly or An Outcast of the Islands, he wields the same powerful influence over the native population and seems, in his adventurous and chivalric commitments, the "descendent of the Immortal hidalgo errant upon the sea."⁶⁵

In an area verging dangerously on civil war, Lingard plans the rescue of his friends, the deposed Malayan Prince and Princess, Hassim and Immada. The bond of solidarity between them, strengthened by the fact that Hassim had one time saved his life, impels him to the action that is quite in keeping with his own Quixotic concept of self. Moreover, honour demands that he act upon his promise to Hassim: "If ever you and Immada need help at once and I am within reach, send me a message with this ring, and if I am alive I will not fail you."⁶⁶

Into "his waters" sails a yacht bearing a European party composed of Mr. Travers, the somewhat unpleasant, materially successful capitalist; Mrs. Travers, his socially brilliant,

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 443.

⁶⁵ The Rescue, p. 175.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 115.

bored, and beautiful wife; and D'Alcacer, their sceptical, philosophical friend. As inconvenient an intrusion for him as it is dangerous for them, the situation worsens when Lingard falls in love with Mrs. Travers, assumes the passion is returned, and begins to put the safety of the European party above that of his native friends. Because the ring from Hassim, symbol of solidarity as it is in Lord Jim, never reaches him, no explicit decision to betray is ever made, but when the "white" party is saved and Hassim and Immada are dead this man "of infinite illusions" seems to "have lost his own soul."⁶⁷

Betrayal was implicit in the situation, and Hassim as well as Lingard seemed to know it: one of the last things Hassim did was to send his servant, Jaffir, to Lingard with the message "to forget everything."⁶⁸ Now, with Jaffir dead, too, there is no one to reproach him, but neither is there anyone to "know the greatness of his intentions, the bond of fidelity between him and Hassim and Immada, the depth of his affection for these people, the earnestness of his visions and the unbounded trust that was his reward It had become a secret locked up in his own breast forever."⁶⁹

Ambiguity in regard to the act of betrayal and the acquisition of self-knowledge is emphasized in Lord Jim, the most familiar of Conrad's dramas, in which a dreamy, romantic isolato

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 567. ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 563. ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 564-65.

is betrayed by "imagination, the enemy of men,"⁷⁰ into the instinctive jump that brands him a coward. That fact of his life--his abandonment of eight hundred pilgrim-passengers--contrasts glaringly with Jim's heroic illusion that "on the square"⁷¹ he is equal to anything.

In flight from self-knowledge and the coward's brand, Jim comes to the isolated community of Patusan, where he does, in fact, prove that he is equal to any situation. His power and control in the native community is a magnified version of Lingard's until the world pays him a visit in the person of Gentleman Brown and his renegade crew.⁷² Thief, murderer, sadist, Brown is beyond the reach of any human imperative, but he is a white man, an exile, like Jim in many of the accidents of his life and, Brown insinuates, like him, too, in moral identity. Jim allows Brown, defeated, to leave Patusan unharmed, against the advice of the native ruler, Doramin.

In conscienceless vindictiveness for being turned away from the imagined wealth of Patusan, Brown murders Dain Waris, Jim's friend and the only son of Doramin. Jim, responsible for the free movements of Brown, assumes the guilt for the crime and presents himself to Doramin who, as Jim expected, claims his

⁷⁰Lord Jim, p. 11.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 115.

⁷²Ibid., p. 478: "These were the emissaries with whom the world he had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat."

life in retaliation for the death of his only son. The questions of betrayal and of self-knowledge remain purposely clouded. Readers debate the morality of Jim's sacrifice on Patusan and the meaning of his "proud and unflinching glance"⁷³ without ever arriving at the definitive interpretation--a dilemma that Conrad intended.

There is no doubt about the acquisition of knowledge in Heart of Darkness where Kurtz sees the moral horror of his degeneration in one moment of insight when, before his death, "the veil had been rent."⁷⁴ In this symbolic masterpiece, there is no doubt either about the extent of his betrayal--it is total.

An imperialistic envoy formed by all of Europe, Kurtz journeys into the dark heart of Africa, bearing pity, progress, and the possibility of perfectibility to natives anthropologically so remote from him in their development that he, an abstract idealist, cannot articulate the gap. He comes to regard the Africans as "brutes"⁷⁵ whom he exploits materially and spiritually. Increasingly conscious of his white superiority, a superiority that he invests with a kind of divinity, Kurtz is impervious to the humanity of his African "subjects." In contrast, it is the Africans' humanity which, becoming obvious and touching during the symbolic river-pilgrimage disturbs Marlow:

⁷³Ibid., p. 516. ⁷⁴Youth, p. 183. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 145.

. . . it was unearthly, and the men were--No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it --the suspicion of their not being inhuman.⁷⁶

In his pilgrimage to self-knowledge, Marlow, faced with the extent of Kurtz's betrayal of self and others, concludes that he was "hollow at the core."⁷⁷ His acts showed

that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence.⁷⁸

The voice that restrained Marlow could not make itself heard through the stirring, idealistic monologues of Kurtz. Nothing warned him--no kind neighbor, no policeman, no public opinion, no voice from within. Because of this, he touches a responsive chord in Marlow, who "sees" him as "one of us," as much betrayed by abstract standards as he was the betrayer--a failure peculiar to modern life.

In marked contrast to the evangelical zeal of Kurtz at the outset of his moral adventure is the bitter and solitary taciturnity of Dr. Monygham (Nostromo), openly scornful of men and their motives. Doctor Monygham did not seem to miss social communion with others, so absorbed was he in his self-destructive remorse over a past betrayal--the result of physical failure to endure the atrocious torture of Guzman Bento's sadistic priest-interrogator. The Doctor's subsequent betrayal of

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 177. ⁷⁷Ibid., p. 160. ⁷⁸Ibid.

friends in his confession seared his soul; the "last thing a man ought to be sure of,"⁷⁹ he said, was himself. By extension this lack of faith covered all men for, he remarked to Mrs. Gould: ". . . it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think so much better of other people than he is able to think of himself."⁸⁰ His "eminently loyal"⁸¹ nature led this man to make of himself "an ideal conception of his disgrace."⁸²

Isolated from all others, Doctor Monygham settled "a great fund of loyalty"⁸³ upon Mrs. Gould and sustained himself by a devotion to her that was like a store of unlawful wealth. When her need for help became apparent and when Doctor Monygham equated her safety with the safety of the San Tome mine, he dropped instinctively that "grim and distant reserve" towards events "which, he imagined, his lamentable history imposed upon him:"⁸⁴ "let me serve you," he offered, "to the whole extent of my evil reputation."⁸⁵ He was prepared to "lie, and to deceive" even though these activities were odious to him by "training, instinct, and tradition."⁸⁶ His love for Mrs. Gould impelled him out of his passive scepticism, out of moral isolation, into a human commitment in much the same way that Heyst

⁷⁹Nostromo, p. 292. ⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 43-44. ⁸¹Ibid., p. 353.

⁸²Ibid., p. 352. ⁸³Ibid., p. 353. ⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 386. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 413.

responds to Lena's need in Victory, and Razumov to Natalie's in Under Western Eyes.

Remorse over betrayal figures largely in the life of another of Conrad's isolatos--Razumov in Under Western Eyes. Studious, ambitious, confidence-inspiring, this third-year philosophy student is looked upon as "profound" because of his taciturn nature.⁸⁷ Non-committal in university groups ceaselessly debating, passive in a time of violent national activity, Razumov's attitude underlines his alienated state. Acutely aware that "there were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere,"⁸⁸ he works to change the name of Razumov, "the label of a solitary individuality,"⁸⁹ into an honored Professor's name. The tangible symbol of this material reward was to be the acquisition of the Silver Medal.

Razumov's ambition seems so little for one to ask of life that he feels justified in his righteous indignation when Haldin, seeking sanctuary in his room, jeopardizes it. The revolutionist-assassin of De P_____, Victor Haldin "confidently" appeals to Razumov for help, never suspecting the quiet rage and bitterness of his host. He believes, he tells Razumov, in liberty, and above all, in the soul--his own and Russia's mystically one. "Ha! You say nothing," observes Haldin. "You

⁸⁷Under Western Eyes, p. 4.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 10.

are a sceptic. I respect your philosophical scepticism, Razumov, but don't touch the soul"⁹⁰

Razumov does, of course, "touch the soul" in that betrayal of Haldin which, he rationalizes, is the only course to follow. Convinced intellectually that he is justified in the action, emotionally, and in Conrad's credo, instinctively, he knew it was wrong--a violation of "instinctive decency."

After the betrayal, reluctantly working for the autocrat Michulin in Geneva as a spy, Razumov meets Victor's sister Natalie, who increases his burden of guilt by assuming that Razumov's friendship with Victor "must have been the very brotherhood of souls."⁹¹ Irresistibly, Razumov begins to love in Natalie the very qualities he mocked in her brother. His supreme power of rationalization weakens in his appreciation of Natalie's "light" and "truth" that the political "prophet" Ivanovitch, distinguishing it from fanaticism, identifies as "faith."⁹² Razumov's confessions of betrayal, first to Natalie and then to the Revolutionaries, become acts invested with moral significance--private and public affirmations of the supreme value of loyalty and faith. At the beginning of his story nothing mattered except the Silver Medal; by the last chapter, Razumov has grown in self-knowledge to such an extent that human

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 25. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 215. ⁹²Ibid., p. 160.

values matter, more than any material rewards, more, if need be, than life.

In the lives of these isolatos, and in those of Chapter VII who are involved in conflicts of an even more imposingly allegorical character, Conrad defined the condition of the modern man as it appeared to him, a philosophical novelist of strongly sceptical convictions. The principal character and symbol of his fiction is this alienated man, living in a dangerous state of nescience that extends to his own nature and leaves him victimized by that nature's unsuspected imbalance toward the sensual (Willem), the imaginative (Tuan Jim), the abstractly "Utopian" (Kurtz), or the coldly rational (Razumov). The conflict between antipathetic forces involves the isolato in profoundly sceptical experiences phrased as puzzling paradoxes: Marlow's discovery (Chance) that the seed of man's destruction may lie imbedded in his best quality; Decoud's observation (Nostromo) that each conviction contains the germ of an almost equally convincing counter-conviction; Gould's bitter knowledge (Nostromo) that his successful defense of material interest in the name of Justice and Order guaranteed future injustice and disorder; and that most impressive and universally applicable of prardoxes, the experience of moral victory coincident with physical defeat (Razumov in Under Western Eyes and Heyst in Victory).

If alienation--expressed by the theme of nescience, antagonistic dualism, and paradox--constitute Conrad's "negatively" sceptical judgment on the modern human condition, it is not flaunted "like a banner announcing a certified Dark knight of the Soul"⁹³; ". . . the dominating question in Conrad is: Alienation, yes, but how do we get out of it?"⁹⁴

The "positive" side of Conrad's scepticism explores the necessity and the possibility of his alienated, self-divided illusionist moving toward others, a quest that assumes both for the character and for the reader a much larger moral significance than that of the personal relationships as such. His isolato speaks with peculiar urgency to twentieth-century man who reasons, as Harvey does:

What do we care for theme or for moral vision, except in so far as these are incarnated in human realities? In our response to and our exploration of these we extend and explore ourselves; it is here that our deepest sense of value, belief, allegiance, sympathy, and understanding are engaged; it is here that we are compelled to judgment.⁹⁵

⁹³Ian Watt, p. 269-70.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 272.

⁹⁵Character and the Novel, p. 211.

CHAPTER III

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUSION

Life, looked upon as a whole, presents itself to my fancy as a pursuit with open arms of a winged and magnificent dream, hovering just over our heads and casting its glory on our hopes. It is in this simple vision which is one and enduring, and not in the changing facts, that we must look for meaning and truth.¹

The search for truth--or some other hope-filled quest that symbolized it--was the joyful part of this dream-like life for Conrad and for those isolatos that he created partly in his own image. "As mysterious as an overshadowed ocean," life stretched before his alienated men, "while the dazzling brightness of supreme hope lies far off, fascinating and still, on the distant edge of the horizon."² Conrad spoke wistfully of the quest in a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Grahame:

Ah! the lone tree on the horizon and then bear a little (a very little) to the right. Haven't we all ridden with such directions to find no house but many curs barking at our heels? Can't miss it? Well, perhaps we can't. And we don't ride with a stouter heart for that. Indeed, my friend, there is a joy in being lost, but a sorrow in being weary.³

¹Romance, p. 391.

²A Personal Record, p. xxiv.

³Jean-Aubry, I, 245.

The search and the "joy in being lost" are characteristics of Conrad's illusionist-isolato who pursues Truth "in the light of his own experience and prejudices."⁴ The pragmatic relativity of this identification derives from the modern Everyman's alienation, his traumatic heritage, in a scientific and sceptical age that cast, as Marlow said, "man-made doubts" upon the absolute, the universal, and the eternal. In at least two instances, Conrad equated man's loneliness with this condition:

I couldn't have felt more lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life⁵

and, more explicitly:

The sea and the earth are unfaithful to their children; a truth, a faith, a generation of men goes--and is forgotten, and it does not matter! Except, perhaps, to the few of those who believed the truth, confessed the faith--or loved the men.⁶

For better or worse, the man so alienated follows, in lieu of an absolute, his dream, his vision; he accepts the masking illusion for the Truth it veils; he does this, moreover, of necessity, exercising innate capacities to believe, to hope, and to love, that rise instinctively to combat the "sorrow in being weary," what Conrad described in Decoud as "the sadness of the sceptical

⁴Victory, p. 193.

⁵Youth, "Heart of Darkness," p. 140.

⁶Nigger of the "Narcissus", p. 27.

mind."⁷ Reflecting the climate of his age, Conrad indicated the rationale for illusion: "Appearances--what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have better. You can't have anything else."⁸ Decoud, commenting on Gould's pursuit of his particular vision, suggested more than he knew about the value of an illusion when he perceived that "somehow or other it helps him to get a firm hold on the substance of life."⁹

Illusion is a "freighted"¹⁰ word in Conrad's fiction and letters, a word used so meaningfully and so frequently that it challenges the reader to definition. It is hardly surprising to find that nowhere in his fiction does this advocate of indirection provide his readers with the explicit kind of definition that one would like. He does, however, in that roundabout way that is so characteristic of him, scatter partial explanations and half-definitions which, if gathered together, illuminate the concept.

Irvin Anthony, an early researcher into Conrad's concept of illusion, was engaged in just such literary detective work

⁷Nostromo, p. 468.

⁸Victory, p. 97.

⁹Nostromo, p. 225.

¹⁰Stallman (ed.), The Art of Conrad, p. 221.

when he discovered¹¹ that the word "illusion" began to figure prominently in Conrad's fiction after this reference in The Nigger of the "Narcissus":

They were bound for the Black Horse where men, in fur caps, with brutal faces and in shirt sleeves, dispense out of varnished barrels the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness, the illusion of splendour and poetry of life, to the paid-off crews of southern-going ships.¹²

A "fetching" word, spoken here of "a remembered vision,"¹³ it was, Anthony claimed, the initial stage of a concept that grew in "relative worth and power" until it became identifiable with the "genus of dogma."¹⁴ Anthony was correct in stating that the word "illusion" is used more frequently after 1897, but he failed to observe that the concept of illusion as a way of life, the common and only philosophy of life that Conrad's solitary men possessed, was identifiably complete in every detail from his very first novel. Beginning with *Almayer*, who "absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power,"¹⁵ Conrad's alienated men have, like Jim, immersed themselves in the destructive element by following the dream. They have done so, as Stein explained, of necessity:

¹¹"The Illusion of Conrad," Bookman (New York), LXXIV (March, 1932), 648-53.

¹²Ibid., p. 195.

¹³Anthony, p. 648.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 649.

¹⁵Almayer's Folly, p. 1.

Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavor to do, he drowns--night war?

. . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep, sea keep you up. So you ask me--how to be?

.
And yet it is true--it is true. In the destructive element immerse That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream--and so--ewig--
usque ad finem¹⁶

Illusion, coloring Conrad's fiction from the outset of his career, consistently and unvaryingly operated as the motivational element that moved the isolate off dead center, persuaded him to action--a "good" in Conrad's metaphysics,--and to a continuity of life.

The suggested origins of Conrad's concept of illusion are, not surprisingly, various. Jocelyn Baines opts for a literary source, noting that whether the influence was conscious or unconscious, one "undeniable similarity" between Flaubert's Madame Bovary (which Conrad knew and admired) and Conrad's Almayer's Folly is a leading character "immersed in visions of life at variance with actual circumstances."¹⁷ Wilbur L. Cross emphasizes the influence of Conrad's earlier reading:

"Don Quixote" held him like a spell, not by its humor, on which he was silent, but by the charm of that imaginary world through which the Gentleman of La Mancha

¹⁶ Lord Jim, pp. 261-62.

¹⁷ Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography, p. 146.

rode with a halo round his head, oblivious of the world of ordinary mankind in which he was to meet disaster. Here for the first time Conrad was made aware of those realms of illusion which all minds are destined to enter and leave disenchanted at last. This aspect of human life, which appears in all the novels written in his maturity, took a firm hold upon his imagination during the period when he was passing from childhood to youth.¹⁸

The chivalric and Quixotic temperament of such characters as Lingard, described as "an hidalgo errant upon the seas,"¹⁹ and of Gould and Axel Heyst, compared respectively to the real-life knights Charles IV²⁰ and Charles XII,²¹ lend credence to the claim of Cervantian origin. Specific references in the text²² and the commentary in A Personal Record²³ and The Mirror of the

¹⁸Four Contemporary Novelists (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), pp. 13-14.

¹⁹The Rescue, p. 175.

²⁰The equestrian status of the knight-king, Charles IV, is a symbol of the modern "El Rey de Sulaco," as Decoud called Gould. Much emphasis is placed on Gould's horsemanship: "Charles Gould, to use the suitably lofty phrase, rode like a centaur. Riding for him . . . was a natural faculty (p. 47)." He attacked his mission, we are told, with all the fervor of a knight-saviour who was "prepared to stoop for his weapons (p. 81)."

²¹Victory, p. 10: "At that epoch in his life, in the fullness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head, and long mustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII, of adventurous memory."

²²Nostromo, p. 161.: "There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption."

²³p. 45; p. 53.

Sea²⁴ might lead one to conclude that the Knight of La Mancha, never far from Conrad's mind, may indeed have been responsible for some part of the vision, the "unreasonable" faith, and the ardent plea for illusion as the most powerful sustaining force in life and the most meaningful function of imagination. Conrad, admittedly, had "a romantic feeling of reality."²⁵

Because in post-Kantian philosophy, and subsequently in Romantic criticism, the imagination emerged as the supreme faculty just as, we shall see, that intuiting agent did for Conrad, the temptation to look beyond literature to formal philosophy for the origin of Conrad's illusion is strong. It is possible to assign an origin in formal philosophy for several aspects that converge in Conrad's illusion. At the same time, it is essential to realize that this source hunting is conjectural--Conrad never indicated in letter, essay, or novel that he was familiar with, or impressed by, the formal analyses of a particular philosopher. As a matter of fact, Conrad's whole approach to knowledge and experience was inimical to the codified abstractions of philosophers whom he regarded, no less than his seamen or his modern Everyman, as wanderers in a metaphysical wasteland.²⁶

²⁴ pp. 189-90.

²⁵ A Personal Record, p. 172.

²⁶ One of Conrad's few references to philosophers occurs in Lord Jim. Describing the alcoholic Chief Engineer, Conrad said that he wandered around his engine room "with the imbecile gravity of a thinker evolving a system of philosophy from the hazy glimpse of a truth (p. 28)."

"So far as he thought his philosophy out," suggests Wilbur Cross,²⁷ "it was akin, in its broad aspects, to the idealism of Berkeley, according to which the world is a creation out of the images of the mind. In that sense the world is an illusion, . . ." George Berkeley's eighteenth-century, anti-empirical philosophy--one of the first modern Platonic re-statements--postulated that no object existed apart from the mind. Just as external things were caused, he explained, and caused in regular order by the will of a Divine Intelligence, so the world that men knew was caused by the images in man's mind. Undoubtedly, as Cross suggested, Berkeley's basic concept of the mind creating its reality is related to Conrad's concept of illusion, sharing, as both do, the subjective element. What Conrad did not mean by the term, continues Cross, was what Schopenhauer meant by it: his [Conrad's] was not a doctrine of negation."²⁸

Conrad's illusion had nothing in common with the pessimistic fraud of Schopenhauer's illusion,²⁹ but the possibility that

²⁷Four Contemporary Novelists, pp. 45-46.

²⁸Ibid., p. 45.

²⁹In Schopenhauer's philosophy (The world as Will and Idea, Translated from the German by R. B. Haldane, M.A., and J. Kemp, M.A., 3 vols.; London: Trubner and Co., Ludgate Hill, 1886), illusion was described as either an error of vision or an error of understanding. As examples of errors of vision, Schopenhauer mentioned the broken appearance presented by a straight stick when dipped in water, and the reflections in a spherical mirror which, when the surface is concave, appear a long way in front

he was influenced by Schopenhauerian observations on temperament and imagination that pertain to illusion does exist. For example, Schopenhauer saw in the will and in the passions the determinants of the intellectual life, and in the character and the temper the source of theories and beliefs. This last insight--that the temperament has some influence on the ideas and beliefs accepted as true--was one in which Conrad would concur.³⁰ A second observation--that the pursuit of the Beautiful and the

of it (Vol. I, p. 30). An error of the understanding was described by Schopenhauer as "what is falsely perceived (Vol. III, p. 482)."

One of the life situations that man "falsely perceived," according to Schopenhauer, was his separateness. Man's existence apart from the one vast Will of the universe was only an illusion, part of the "veil of Maya" that covered all the world. Since, in pessimistic Schopenhauer's analysis, the Will was wicked, man was ethically obliged to abolish Will by striving for a Nirvana-like state, thereby doing his part to lift the "veil of Maya." Withdrawing from willing and, consequently, from action--a course that Conrad would have condemned--man would come to realize that all things are one, and that the distinction between self and another is only illusion (Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy [Simon and Schuster: New York, 1945], p. 756).

³⁰Conrad's conception of temperament as the ultimate determinant is indicated in this interpolation in Chance, pp. 62-63:

Difference in politics, in ethics, and even in aesthetics need not arouse angry antagonism. One's opinion may change; one's tastes may alter--in fact they do. One's very conception of virtue is at the mercy of some felicitous temptation which may be sprung on one any day. But a temperamental difference, temperament being immutable, is the parent of hate. That's why religious quarrels are the fiercest of all.

Good could only be based upon an intuition which penetrated the heart of reality--was common to Schopenhauer, the Romantic poets and critics (especially Shelley), and Conrad. In his frequent analogies between Art and Life, Conrad implies that a logic of the imagination obeying the unpredictable dictates of temperament accounts for the artist's conscientious but un-theoretical art in the same way that a logic of the imagination obeying the unpredictable dictates of temperament intuits the ideal (the illusion) by which the alienated man lives his life. Illusion is "the plane on which Art and Life meet."³¹ Both the isolato and the artist, restrained, hopefully, by "the voice from inside,"³² rely upon a logic of the imagination rather than a ratiocinative logic to arrive at the knowledge of Truth, or of that truth which it is possible to attain.

In addition to the possible influence of Berkeley and Schopenhauer, Ludwig Feuerbach is of interest because of his use of the word "illusion." Like Berkeley and Schopenhauer in his concept of the mind creating--rather than mind receiving--

³¹Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949), p. 202.

³²Jean-Aubry, II, 289. Letter to George T. Keating, December 14, 1922: "In whatever I have achieved afterwards (since boyhood) I have simply followed by instinct: the voice from inside." "Without restraint," such as the "voice" mentioned above, "your imaginative people swing farther in any direction, as if given a longer scope of cable in the uneasy anchorage of life. They do. They take to drink, too (Lord Jim, p. 275)."

Feuerbach, in his attacks upon religion, explained God as an illusion, the subjective extension of man's need.³³ His God-Idea or Illusion was the creation by the mind of man in the image of attributes that man most admired or wanted to have. If one thinks for a moment of Tuan Jim and his heroic illusions³⁴-- certainly the creation by Jim in the image of attributes that he admired and wanted to have--one can see the possibility of correspondence between Feuerbach's and Conrad's illusion.

Literature probably did provide Conrad with examples of characters who, like Jim, followed the dream. He may even have associated them with Don Quixote, "the patron saint of all lives spoiled or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination."³⁵

³³" . . . what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something human (Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, Translated from the Second German Edition, by Marian Evans [London: John Chapman, 8 King Street, Strand, 1854], p. 13)." "The divine being is nothing else than the human being . . . made objective--i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being . . . (Ibid., p. 14)." "God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracting from himself (Ibid., p. 30)."

³⁴Lord Jim, p. 23:

At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread: they carried his soul away with him and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face.

³⁵A Personal Record, p. 45.

To some degree, the philosophical concepts that were part of the intellectual climate of his age were absorbed "osmotically" so that, perhaps quite unconsciously, they influenced Conrad's concept of illusion. But the ultimate source for Conrad's recognition of illusion as a way of life was his scepticism, that instinctive and learned response to life, born of his own experience and observation, first as a seaman, later as a novelist, and always as an "isolatee par excellence."³⁶ In an age when none of the old truths seemed to apply, Conrad came to accept the fact that men followed relative truths of necessity. Worth repeating at this time is his conclusion that

Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life,--a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas, and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me.³⁷

In other letters of varying moods, Conrad spoke of illusion in reference to his own life. To Edward Garnett he confided:

Even writing to a friend--to a person one has heard, touched, drunk with, quarreled with--does not give me a sense of reality. All is illusion--the words written, the mind at which they are aimed, the truth they are intended to express, the hands that will hold the paper, the eyes that will glance at the lines. Every

³⁶Gillon, p. 56.

³⁷Jean-Aubry, I, 184. Letter to Edward Noble, November 2, 1895.

image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt--and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of uncertainties.³⁸

The words quoted above, expressing Conrad's alienation from other people, from the writing process, and from self, indicate how completely he could be obsessed with the Sceptic's feeling that the real might be the unreal, an illusion. Another letter, in a nostalgic mood, contains a partial definition of illusion:

There is twilight and soft clouds and daffodils--and a great wearying. Spring! Excellentissime--Spring! We are annually lured by false hopes. Spring! Another illusion for the undoing of mankind.³⁹

Illusions, then, are a lure; they are a form of hope; moreover, they possess, Conrad noted facetiously in another letter, a "saving power":

My head feels as if full of sawdust. Of course many people's heads are full of sawdust,--the tragic part of the business is in my being aware of it. The man who finds out that apparently innocent truth about himself is henceforth of no use to mankind. Which proves the saving power of illusion.⁴⁰

Illusions had something in common with spells or mysteries, which almost justified the conception of life as an enchanted state, and "there are," Conrad reminded his readers, "more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of."⁴¹ The

³⁸ Letters from Joseph Conrad, p. 155.

³⁹ Jean-Aubry, I, 234. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, "Thursday, April, 1898."

⁴⁰ Ibid., I, 247. Letter to Mrs. E. L. Sanderson, August 31, 1898.

⁴¹ Victory, p. 7.

sea had cast its spell over Conrad as a young man--"It cast a spell," he remembered, "it gave joy, it lulled into boundless faith,"⁴²--and he discovered in the pursuit of that youthful vision that "in no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality--in no other is the beginning all illusion--the disenchantment more swift--the subjugation more complete."⁴³

Conrad's pursuit of his illusion--the archetype of his isolate's pursuit of his "true lie,"⁴⁴--began when his tutor turned to him at Furca Pass and said, "You are an incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote. That's what you are,"⁴⁵ capitulating with these words to Conrad's unreasonable dream of a maritime career. The incredulity of his family, alternating with both subtle and pointed disparagement, and climaxed by the diversionary tactic of travel, had failed to dim the vision that was not, Conrad was careful to point out later, merely

the lyric illusion of an old, romantic heart . . . [but rather] a passion . . . various and great like life itself, . . . beginning mysteriously like any great passion the inscrutable gods send to mortals . . . unreasoning and invincible, surviving the test of disillusion, defying the disenchantment that lurks in every day of a strenuous life.⁴⁶

⁴²Outcast of the Islands, p. 14.

⁴³Lord Jim, p. 157.

⁴⁴Stallman (ed.), The Art of Conrad, p. 218.

⁴⁵A Personal Record, p. 53.

⁴⁶Mirror of the Sea, "Author's Note," p. viii.

Later in life he remarked: "in my early days, starting out on a voyage was like being launched into Eternity."⁴⁷ Life at sea was "invested with an elementary moral Beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose."⁴⁸ "In a spirit of piety" Conrad remembered the imperishable sea, the ships that were no more, and the simple men who sailed them as the "ultimate shapers of my character, convictions, and in a sense, destiny."⁴⁹ For "twenty years I lived like a hermit with my passion From sixteen to thirty-six . . . is a pretty long stretch of that sort of experience which teaches a man to see and to feel."⁵⁰

Conrad's "initiation"⁵¹ by way of youthful illusion into the destructive element of life is reflected in the experiences of Jim, Kurtz, Heyst, Razumov, Gould, and other illusionist-isolatos. His maritime illusion, as Decoud perceived of Gould's dream, actually did help him to get a hold on the substance of life, taught him, as he said, to see and to feel. He recognized that he was imprisoned, as are all his isolatos, in a "personal house of illusion,"⁵² but not hopelessly:

⁴⁷Notes on Life and Letters, p. 239. ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁹Mirror of the Sea, p. ix.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

⁵¹A Personal Record, p. 177: "initiation into the sea's implacable hate."

⁵²Mirror of the Sea, p. 224.

Beyond the line of the sea horizon the world for me did not exist, as assuredly as it does not exist for the mystics who take refuge on the tops of high mountains. I am speaking now of that innermost life, containing the best and the worst that can happen to us in the temperamental depths of our being, where a man indeed must live alone but need not give up all hope of holding converse with his kind.⁵³

In what Wiley⁵⁴ describes as a typical sceptical preoccupation, he emphasized the active and the ethical aspects of his occupation, just as Marlow would do in Heart of Darkness:

Now the moral side of an industry, productive or unproductive, the redeeming and ideal aspect of this bread-winning, is the attainment and preservation of the highest possible skill on the part of the craftsman. Such skill, the skill of technique, is more than honesty; it is something wider, embracing honesty and grace and rule in an elevated and clear sentiment, not altogether utilitarian, which may be called the honour of labour. It is made up of accumulated tradition kept alive by individual pride, rendered exact by professional opinion, and, like the higher arts, it is spurred on and sustained by discriminating praise.⁵⁵

What Conrad learned in the pursuit of his illusion about the craft of seamanship applied without changing a word to his second craft of fiction and, in fact, to life itself. Acquiring his firm hold on the substance of life at a time when--if we credit his attempted suicide--he needed that hold as desperately as any of his isolatos, Conrad discovered that there was

⁵³ Ibid., p. viii.

⁵⁴ The Subtle Knot, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Mirror of the Sea, pp. 26-27.

something beyond

efficiency of a practically flawless kind . . . a higher point, a subtle and unmistakable touch of love which gives to all work that finish which is almost art-- which is art.⁵⁶

A man possessing that kind of skill "sees" more clearly than his merely efficient colleagues; he

understands--a thing (let me remark in passing) much rarer than one would expect, because that sort of understanding is inspired by love; and love, though in a sense it may be admitted to be stronger than death, is by no means so universal and so sure. In fact, love is rare--the love of man, of things, of ideas, the love of perfected skill. For love is the enemy of haste; it takes count of passing days, of men who pass away, of a fine art matured slowly in the course of years and doomed in a short time to pass away, too, and be no more. Love and regret go hand in hand in this world of changes swifter than the shifting of the clouds reflected in the mirror of the sea.⁵⁷

Conrad's illusion lured him to action, brought him into a human community of an especially tightly knit and highly regulated kind, rewarded him with a share in its collective life, and privileged him to work with men

whose influence left a trace upon my character to this day, . . . [They] combined a fierceness of conception with a certitude of execution upon the basis of just appreciation of means and ends which is the highest quality of the man of action. And an artist is a man of action, whether he created a personality, invents an expedient, or finds the issue of a complicated situation.⁵⁸

He perceived that landmen and sailors alike "live in an unstable element, and are subject to subtle and powerful

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 27. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 28. ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 38.

influences;"⁵⁹ if "heavy grey curtains of mist and spray"⁶⁰ blind the seaman, reality is veiled for the landsman, too:

To see! to see!--this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity. To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence. I have heard a reserved silent man with no nerves to speak of, after three days of hard running in thick southwesterly weather, burst out passionately: "I wish to God we could get sight of something."⁶¹

In the pursuit of his illusion Conrad achieved identity; the illusion was, as Marlow decided about Jim, "what makes him know himself . . . makes him . . . exist--[defines his] imperishable reality . . . with a convincing, with an irresistible force."⁶²

I discovered how much of a seaman I was, in mind, in heart, and, as it were, physically--a man exclusively of sea and ships; the sea the only world that counted, and the ships the test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity--and of love.⁶³

Not merely efficient, he became the kind of seaman who practiced his skill in faithful bondage to an exacting art: "I do not know whether I have been a good seaman," he said, "but I do know I have been a faithful one."⁶⁴

And faithfulness is a great restraint, the strongest bond laid upon the self-will of men and ships on this globe of land and sea.⁶⁵

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 31. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 118. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 105.

⁶²Lord Jim, p. 264-265.

⁶³The Shadow Line, p. 49.

⁶⁴A Personal Record, p. 149.

⁶⁵Mirror of the Sea, p. 134.

Conrad's illusion endured for twenty years because it was "true," or "good." What made his illusion "true" was the fact that Conrad brought to it skill, faithfulness, and the understanding that is inspired by love. Seamen who brought less to their illusion had to face the "bitterness of human error,"⁶⁶ the lost men, the wrecked ship, or the damaged cargo that meant the illusion of a seaman's identity was "false." Like Almayer, Willems, Kurtz, Gould, and Razumov, the "false" illusionist is brought face-to-face with the fact that his dream was "a complicated edifice of self-delusion, over-confidence, and wrong reasoning . . . brought down in a fatal shock."⁶⁷ When that happens

You are ready to renounce all belief in your good sense, in your knowledge, in your fidelity, in what you thought 'till then was the best in you, giving you the daily bread of life and the moral support of other men's confidence.⁶⁸

Then is the crushing time of the "heart pain--the world pain" that Stein spoke of, confiding

I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough.⁶⁹

One is never able to escape "a distinct sense of loss,"

a flavour in the mouth of the real, abiding danger that lurks in all the forms of human existence. It is an acquisition, too, that feeling. A man may be the better

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 80. ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 81. ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁹Lord Jim, p. 261.

for it, but he will not be the same the feast shall not henceforth have the same flavour.⁷⁰

When and if that shock occurs, a shock, "as of a gate flung to behind one by the perfidious hand of fate,"⁷¹ the man of false illusion must

Go and seek another paradise, fool or sage. There is a moment of dumb dismay, and the wanderings must begin again; the painful explaining away of facts, the feverish raking up of illusions, the cultivation of a fresh crop of lies in the sweat of one's brow, to sustain life, to make it supportable, to make it fair⁷²

Conrad's illusion about the sea, sailing ships, and the men who sailed them would have fallen victim inevitably to the inexorable law of change represented by the age of steam had not the "veil" been lifted one day in the course of a rescue operation. Nine men who had drifted for weeks, always at the pumps of their dismasted vessel, were rescued from the drifting wreck minutes before it sank. They stood "with the salt drying grey in the wrinkles and folds of their hairy, haggard faces, blinking stupidly at us their red eyelids, . . . tottering and jostling against each other, and positively flung themselves upon our very heads."⁷³

⁷⁰Mirror of the Sea, p. 82.

⁷¹Tales of Unrest, "The Return," p. 166.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Mirror of the Sea, p. 172.

The clatter they made tumbling into the boats had an extraordinarily destructive effect upon the illusion of tragic dignity our self-esteem had thrown over the contests of mankind with the sea. On that day . . . perished my romantic love The cynical indifference of the sea to the merits of human suffering and courage . . . revolted me I looked coolly at the life of my choice. Its illusions were gone, but its fascination remained.⁷⁴

His illusion tempered by reality, Conrad was fortunate in that his fascination with the sea remained to figure prominently in a new vocation intrinsically dependent upon illusion.

Turning to letters, he likened his new vocation to the sea in that both areas of activity constituted scenes "of great endeavor and great achievements, changing the face of the world, the great open way to all sorts of undiscovered countries."⁷⁵

"I do not know which of the two impulses," he remarked later in life, "appeared more mysterious and more wonderful to me."⁷⁶

The philosophy of illusion operated in Conrad's life a second time; Art became, like life at sea, a moral experience:

It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence.⁷⁷

"I dare say I am compelled," he wrote at the time, "unconsciously compelled now

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ A Personal Record, p. 136.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁷ Nigger of the "Narcissus", "Preface," p. vii.

to write volume after volume, as in past years I was compelled to go to sea voyage after voyage. Leaves must follow upon each other as leagues used to follow in the days gone by, one after one to the appointed end, which, being Truth itself, is One--one for all men and for all occupations⁷⁸

As a novelist the task he set for himself was the faithful rendition "of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of the earth's surface"⁷⁹--this he called "truth"--and if it was necessarily not the truth entire, perhaps it was "truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale."⁸⁰

In trying to account for illusion in the context of Conrad's life and fiction, one arrives at the conclusion that illusion is the pivotal concept in a unique and consistent epistemology growing out of Conrad's scepticism. The emphasis of this epistemology is away from a state of mind determined by ideas, reason, logic, and reflection, toward a state of mind dependent upon imagination, illusion, and conscience. Conrad's dialectic, reconstructed from comments of a general nature interpolated throughout his work, emerges with impressive consistency from fiction and letters covering nearly thirty years of his life. The unchanging observations lend credence to Conrad's claim to Barret Clark that when he began writing fiction he was a man of

⁷⁸A Personal Record, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁹Under Western Eyes, p. 81.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 82.

formed character and certain fixed convictions.⁸¹ One of those convictions was his denial of ultimate value to an exclusively rational and factual interpretation of life.

We have mentioned in Chapter I Conrad's habitual references to the dream-like quality of life: the world was not so much a thing of reality for him as it was of appearances:

The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive like everything that falls under the judgment of our imperfect senses.⁸²

In the same way that the mysterious reality lay concealed from men behind a world that was only a world of vain and floating appearances, so Truth lay concealed from the minds of men, knowable only to the extent that it could be glimpsed by way of the individual illusion. The modern Everyman--"one of us"--stands isolated from any tradition that will tell him who he is or how to be. His age has destroyed for him that traditional dependence upon reason that guided men of earlier ages: reason tells him that he can look to no revealed values in life; reason tells him that the possibility of a life after this one is unlikely; reason forces upon him, as the result of scientific investigation, the grim knowledge that the survival of the human race is dubious; reason assigns human nature and human values to the area of inexorable flux. Conrad reflected the sceptical

⁸¹Jean-Aubry, II, 204.

⁸²A Personal Record, p. 43.

burden of his age when he argued that Truth might be "just around the corner. I can't tell. No one can tell. It is impossible to know anything, tho' it is possible to believe a thing or two."⁸³

In his quest for that "thing or two" the illusionist-isolato would do well, in Conrad's opinion, to beware the respectable but misleading compasses of ideas, reason, logic, and reflection. The ideas and convictions that men boast of, even die for, he cautioned, were, in the last analysis, merely "the disguised servants of our passions,"⁸⁴ and sometimes, he continued, they amounted to little more than the "clairvoyance of imbecile hatred, or mere stupid tenacity of opinion."⁸⁵ Ideas were "tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back door of your mind, each taking a little crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy."⁸⁶ Ideas could be worse than misleading; they could be evil, as in the case of the fixed idea, diabolically ingenious in its perverse unreason which possesses, nevertheless, its own logical process. The "logic of our conduct," he warned, "is always at the mercy of obscure and unforeseen impulses."⁸⁷

⁸³Jean-Aubry, I, 208. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, August 5, 1897.

⁸⁴Victory, p. 199.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 76.

⁸⁶Lord Jim, p. 52.

⁸⁷Typhoon, p. 88.

"Rationalism," Guerard remarked with obvious understatement, "had its limits for Conrad."⁸⁸ Men use reason as often as not, argued Conrad, "to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices, and follies, and also our fears."⁸⁹ Intelligence leads people astray as far as passion sometimes,⁹⁰ for it cannot be denied that every piece of viciousness presupposes a balance of thought, feeling, and will, like a correct attitude in a game. "Our wits are much more alert when we are engaged in wrong-doing (in which one mustn't be found out) than in a righteous occupation."⁹¹ Reasoning cannot yield truth in any real sense of the word, because truth is not to be found in a syllogism, or lurking in a laboratory, or by the pedantry of a mental exercise. "I think," he volunteered, "that to understand everything is not good for the intellect. A well-stocked intelligence weakens the impulse to action; an overstocked one leads gently to idiocy."⁹²

"Theory," Conrad decided, "is the cold and lying tombstone of departed truth,"⁹³ as wide of the mark applied to life as when it is applied to art. In the latter case, theory is "a vain thing against a man's [the artist's] conception as to life,

⁸⁸ Conrad the Novelist, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Victory, p. 103.

⁹⁰ Chance, p. 42.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 484.

⁹² Ibid., p. 72.

⁹³ Jean-Aubry, I, 174. Letter to Edward Garnett, March 15, 1895.

character, morality, and whatever goes to make up the only truth that matters."⁹⁴ "Thinking," he said, "is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man."⁹⁵ ". . . it is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective. Nothing humanly great," he concluded, "--great, I mean, as affecting a whole mass of lives--has come from reflection."⁹⁶

The rationale for Conrad's philosophy of illusion was the assumption that men are guided by "the consoling mysteries of Faith" or their "invincible dreams of sentiment," but "it is never, never reason which governs men and women."⁹⁷ Men are driven about in the world by a "consciousness of ourselves" that "whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating appearance."⁹⁸ "Egoism props up everything--absolutely everything,--all that we hate, all that we love."⁹⁹

⁹⁴Ibid., I, 309. Letter to Sir Hugh Clifford, February 26, 1903.

⁹⁵Victory, "Author's Note," p. xi. Also, "The young man [Heyst] learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost (p. 115)."

⁹⁶A Personal Record, "A Familiar Preface," p. xvii.

⁹⁷Chance, p. 239.

⁹⁸Jean-Aubry, I, 269. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, February 8, 1899.

⁹⁹Ibid.

"Look!" he exclaimed in Chance, "even a small child lives, plays, and suffers in terms of its own existence."¹⁰⁰ Every isolated man is, like Almayer, "an egotist who supports his own subjective universe," and thinks "the whole universe unsettled and shaken by the frightful catastrophe of his life."¹⁰¹ "With the quality of our desires, thoughts, and wonder proportioned to our infinite littleness we measure even time itself by our own stature. Imprisoned in the house of personal illusions thirty centuries in mankind's history seem less to look back on than thirty years of our own life."¹⁰² Each of us "arranges the world according to his own notion of the fitness of things."¹⁰³ Conrad, noting the complexity of this personalizing action, observed: "There is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even by the same mind at different times. Any man living at all consciously knows that embarrassing truth."¹⁰⁴

"How to be" in this subjective universe? "Do you notice," Conrad asked, "how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mailboat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of

¹⁰⁰Chance, p. 135.

¹⁰¹Almayer's Folly, p. 241.

¹⁰²Mirror of the Sea, pp. 223-24.

¹⁰³Chance, p. 162.

¹⁰⁴Victory, p. 305.

our civilization wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art?"¹⁰⁵ In analogous isolation the modern man, existing outside of a tradition and seeking sanctions for his life, intuits the illusion or sanction, "idealizing himself and his actions into moral significance of some order."¹⁰⁶ Not the truth of facts, his illusion is a personal illusion of values, "a truth men make of facts,"¹⁰⁷ a value that is "compelled out of vanity, negation, or despair by the human necessity of action and sacrifice."¹⁰⁸ Reason and the grim successes of science may have called traditional values into question, "but against all reason man insists, as man, on creating and trying to live by certain values."¹⁰⁹ The Chief Engineer in Nostramo expressed this thought to Dr. Monygham:

Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Lord Jim, p. 348.

¹⁰⁶ Guerard, p. 190.

¹⁰⁷ Karl, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Zabel, Portable Conrad, p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ Stallman (ed.), p. 218.

¹¹⁰ p. 317-18.

Guerard judges this tendency to "idealize all impulse . . . deeply repugnant,"¹¹¹ but he concedes that "we dream this dream because we are the people we are; because our conscious and unconscious lives alike have certain psychic needs."¹¹² Robert Penn Warren adds that although his values are "illusions, . . . the last wisdom is for man to realize that . . . the illusion is necessary, is infinitely precious, is the mark of his human achievement, and is, in the end, his only truth."¹¹³

Illusions do more than indulge and idealize impulse; they exercise the human capacity to believe, to hope, and to love. Conrad, consistently stressing Fidelity and faithfulness, advised that "Some kind of belief is very necessary."¹¹⁴ Echoes of "Hope" conclude The Outcast of the Islands, and Almayer, upon the collapse of his illusion, can only rage at Nina: "Have you lived without hope?"¹¹⁵ D'Alcacer, the sceptical guest of the Travers' in The Rescue, tries to explain Mrs. Travers' illusion [her love for Lingard] to her in terms that can explain other illusions, too:

¹¹¹Conrad the Novelist, p. 192.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹³Stallman (ed.), p. 218.

¹¹⁴A Personal Record, p. 20.

¹¹⁵Almayer's Folly, p. 126.

You do not love [or hope, or believe] because of what is in the other. You love because of something that is in you--something alive--in yourself A capacity in you¹¹⁶

Illusions, exercising these human capacities, move the isolate off dead center with their subtle and resistless power, and lure him into the realm of action:

Action--the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations.¹¹⁷

Without the saving power of illusion the alienated man could move in the other direction--toward passivity (Flora), toward negation (Heyst), toward despair (Almayer), and even toward self-destruction (Decoud):

For every age is fed on illusions, lest man should renounce life early and the human race come to an end.¹¹⁸

Conrad spoke of illusions "faithful, faithless: of the illusions that give joy, that give sorrow, that give pain, that give peace; of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene, inspiring, tormented, or ignoble."¹¹⁹

Illusions can lead to "the religion of undying hope," or to the "mad cult of despair . . . ; the difference lies in the moral

¹¹⁶pp. 160-61.

¹¹⁷Victory, p. 212.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 118.

¹¹⁹Tales of Unrest, p. 4.

motive springing from the secret needs and unexpressed aspiration of the believers."¹²⁰ Objectively speaking, some illusions are true, some false, but in Conrad's sceptical philosophy the illusion was true enough if it enabled the isolato to live "profoundly, experiencing deep sorrow and great joy."¹²¹

Conrad, as his analogies show, insisted on the deepest inward relationship between Life and Art; consequently, it is not surprising to find that he regarded the sympathetic imagination as the superior faculty in both areas:

Only in men's imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art and of life.¹²²

The parallels that he drew are striking.

First, the isolato's illusion, like the artist's, was selective, an "artistic vision of the facts, an imaginative recreation of reality which, while it may be illusory and dream-like to the reader, is real to the believer and immerses him in the destructive element of life itself."¹²³ Secondly, the isolato's illusion is subjective and individualized, the equivalent of the artist's way of looking at life: "as characteristic of an individual as his opinions, for instance, or the features of his face."¹²⁴ Third, illusion, elicited by way of the

¹²⁰ Portable Conrad, "Prince Roman," p. 77.

¹²¹ Wright, p. 27.

¹²² A Personal Record, p. 29.

¹²³ Karl, p. 61.

¹²⁴ Anthony, p. 653.

imagination, visited those who, like the artist, were susceptible to the intensity of life. Illusions did not, as Marlow implied, solicit the respectable, the safe, or the dull:

It is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions--and safe--and profitable--and dull. Yet, you, too, in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamor created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone--and as short-lived, alas!¹²⁵

A fourth parallel turns on paradox, illusion in Life and in Art alike expressing "the genius of artistic paradox. Common sense could deny the illusion a factual basis, that is, a basis in the world of common sense. Yet it is itself the imaginative creation which gave facts meaning--in the world of the imagination. It was true or false according as it was or was not consistent within itself."¹²⁶ Finally, illusion gave life and feeling to an existence which was, by its nature, vague and uncertain. Just as the exercise of the imagination in art "makes life supportable" for the artist--"it almost makes me believe in a benevolent scheme of creation,"--so illusion operating in life, where man, like the groping artist, saw all things through a glass darkly, made life supportable, too,¹²⁷

¹²⁵Lord Jim, p. 276.

¹²⁶Wright, p. 27.

¹²⁷Notes on Life and Letters, p. 20.

The isolato pursuing his illusion seemed symbolic to the sceptical Conrad, "the very image of struggling mankind,"¹²⁸ "for is not mankind itself pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion. And what is the pursuit of truth, after all?"¹²⁹

¹²⁸Lord Jim, p. 300.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 433.

CHAPTER IV

THE IRONIC VISION

In his eyes lurked a look of perfectly remorseless irony, as though he had been provided with an extremely experienced soul¹

Dominic Cervoni, the Corsican seaman who sailed the Tremolino with Conrad on those vaguely alluded to smuggling ventures off the coast of Spain, is that man of perfectly remorseless irony who haunts the pages of Conrad's fiction almost to the extent of a Don Quixote. Nostromo is his obvious physical likeness; Heyst displays Cervoni's "almost imperceptible playfulness of tone and matter";² Peyrol is, like Cervoni, a Latin with almost classic Roman features, a seaman of the Mediterranean coast, and, more important, a man capable of the same Olympian defiance, the same sardonic regard of self, and one who is, in the business of life, the philosophical double of that mature companion of Conrad's youthful adventures.³ The

¹The Mirror of the Sea, p. 199.

²Ibid., p. 200.

³Peyrol's interior monologues fit the philosophy of Cervoni--and of Conrad--as, for example, this excerpt from Chapter Nine of The Rover (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1923), p. 132.

He had known the practice of liberty, equality, and fraternity as understook in the haunts open or secret

real Dominic impressed Conrad, not by his dark virility, his grimly playful manner, or his colorful background; he made his deep and lasting impression because his mastery of self provided such a striking contrast to the self-division of the illusionist-isolato.⁴ Dominic Cervoni was not the man to spend his substance--his faith, hope, or charity--foolishly; experience had "put a drop of universal scorn, a wonderful sedative, into the strange mixture which might have been called the soul"⁵ of Dominic Cervoni. This scepticism insured in him

of the Brotherhood of the Coast. So the change [following the French Revolution], if one could believe what people talked about, could not be very great. The rover had also his own positive notions as to what these three words were worth. Liberty--to hold your own in the world if you could. Equality--yes! But no body of men ever accomplished anything without a chief. All this was worth what it was worth. He regarded Fraternity somewhat differently. Of course, brothers would quarrel amongst themselves; it was during a fierce quarrel that flamed up suddenly in a company of Brothers that he had received the most dangerous wound of his life. But for that Peyrol nursed no grudge against anybody. In his view the claim of Brotherhood has a claim for help against the outside world."

⁴Self-mastery implied self-knowledge and self-acceptance, and, consequently, freedom from the paralysis of conflicting dualisms that plagued the nescient isolato: "It may be my sea training acting upon a natural disposition to keep hold of the one thing really mine, but the fact is that I have a positive horror of losing even for one moving moment that full possession of myself which is the first condition of good service. And I have carried my notion of good service," continued Conrad, "from my earlier into my later existence . . . (A Personal Record, pp. xxiv-xxv)."

⁵Hay, p. 318.

the habit of weighing, before accepting them, all the presents thrown by destiny But he knows too, when destiny calls, how to forget everything, abandon everything--interests and all--and fling his own life, as a last and worthy missile, into the middle of adverse circumstances.⁶

Conrad's philosophy was much like Dominic Cervoni's, and for the same reason: experience "had put a drop of universal scorn" into his soul, too, and, as a result, he regarded the confident assumptions of modern man and contemporary society with "perfectly remorseless irony"

Conrad's irony was appreciated even by those early reviewers who missed the universal appeal and moral intent of his fiction. As early as 1899, an anonymous reviewer of Tales of Unrest commented:

He seems to have some of the attributes of the Greek tragic dramatists. He has their irony. He sees so much at once, and is so conscious of the infinitesimal place a man can fill.⁷

More than any other single quality, it is Conrad's irony--irony of understatement, irony of incident, and the innumerable, subtle shadings of irony in epithet, euphemism, symbol, and simile--that alerts the reader to the presence and purpose of his scepticism. Perhaps, too, it is that quality which most interests the modern reader, and interests him for the same

⁶Ibid.

⁷Jean-Aubry, I, 67.

reasons that it compelled the attention of an early commentator on that subject:⁸

I can only say that the ironic view (rather than the pessimistic view, or the optimistic view) is, for myself, the most interesting, perhaps because that outlook contains, as it seems more of the element of genuine scepticism and therefore more of the acknowledgment of the impossibility of any absolute knowledge, and beyond all, an infinitely greater curiosity; a greater zest for life--life the fact and not just the theory of it--whether that life be fortunate or unfortunate, to a degree, indeed, indifferent to fortune so long as life be full of action and intelligence, so long as it pulsates with energy in some direction. It is for the ironist the great moral fact of life that is so important

The value of the ironic view seemed, to Austin, to be that

[in the ironic view,] we have the sceptical questioning of the ultimate reality and verity of anything, and, too, of the ultimate value, which so forbids a definite acceptance of any face worth. Yet all the while one can maintain that there is and must be an ultimate end to which man may attain.⁹

Conrad's letters and reminiscences reveal that the same contemporary developments that inspired triumphant optimism in many of his friends only filled him with a sense of impending disaster. Attempting to undermine comfortable political and social assumptions and to force scrutiny of current beliefs and values, he relied heavily on irony in his fiction, on irony, the instrument of scepticism. His irony is essentially critical, "surgical," as Austin says, but "only for the purpose of

⁸Hugh P. Austin, "Joseph Conrad and the Ironic Attitude," Fortnightly, CXXX (Spring, 1928), pp. 377-78.

⁹Ibid., p. 388.

investigation."¹⁰ Pointing out that a cure is necessary, Conrad--and this is generally true of an ironist--does not specify the cure, and

that is why irony is unpopular; it gives us no soporific drug, it does not flatter and it does not excuse; it cherishes no pleasing illusions, and it does not even attack a vice or a folly, but leaves the vice or folly to destroy itself by self-exposure, which is the highest of all moral attitudes since it makes the individual afflicted, if he will and if he can be, self-curative.¹¹

The investigative nature of Conrad's ironic vision is apparent in all of his fiction, but in no novel does it range more widely than in Nostromo, that pervasively ironic novel that Robert Penn Warren described as Conrad's "supreme effort,"¹² . . . one of the few mastering visions of our human lot."¹³

Conrad called Nostromo " . . . an intense creative effort on what I suppose will always remain my largest canvas."¹⁴ He was two years creating the fictional world of Costaguana where illusionists--social, political, and economic--move in the closed circles of their individual illusions, as physically near and as spiritually remote from each other as the characters in

¹⁰Ibid., p. 387.

¹¹Ibid., p. 388.

¹²Stallman (ed.), p. 210.

¹³Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁴"Author's Note," The Secret Agent, p. xi.

The Secret Agent. Among them, supplying the negative evidence of Conrad's philosophy of illusion, is Decoud, the man incapable of sustaining an illusion and, consequently, a suicide. In Costaguana, Charles Gould, the modern isolato of good intentions, moves, mechanically motivated by the fixed idea to the same extent as Kasper Almayer (Almayer's Folly), rationalizing away the facts of moral corruption with the round-about logic employed by Willems (Outcast of the Islands). Costaguana's cynical Dr. Monygham, an ex-Maritime officer, is an older Jim (Lord Jim) who suffers the guilt rather than the "chance missed," and is haunted by his betrayal of friends as relentlessly as Razumov (Under Western Eyes) is haunted by his betrayal of Haldin. Drawn back into the human community by his affection for Mrs. Gould and his awareness of her need--as Heyst is for Lena (Victory)--Monygham is one of the more fortunate of Nostromo's solitaries. Antonia is a patriot comparable to Natalie (Under Western Eyes) who abhors the violence of Revolution, but who, susceptible to the eloquence of its rhetoric, accepts it and the destructive anarchy that revolution entails in the hope that it will purge society of its ills. The illusions of Antonia, of her father, and of Viola are the principal illusions that bear upon the subject of revolution; Gould's illusion relates to capitalism, and, by way of that interest, to the imperialistic dream entertained by Sir John and Holroyd; and the illusion of Hernandez, the Robin Hood of the Campos, is his

particular interpretation of the concept of social justice. At the Casa Gould, the gathering place for all the illusionists, Emilia Gould slowly and bitterly comes to realize that all their illusions, debased by corrupt contacts, are doomed to failure.

A complicated history of personal and public tragedies, Nostromo experienced, upon its publication in 1904, "the blackest possible frost"¹⁵ with Conrad's indifferent public, who would have preferred another Malayan tale. The idea that this technically innovative, chronologically confusing novel might be central to, and even pre-eminent in, the Conrad canon was never seriously considered¹⁶ until the 1940's when Leavis described it as Conrad's "most considerable work, . . . one of the great novels of the language,"¹⁷ an evaluation that he repeated in the "Introduction" to the Signet edition of the novel. In that same "Introduction" Leavis commented upon Nostromo's

¹⁵Jean-Aubry, II, 143. Letter to Arnold Bennet, Nov. 25, 1912.

¹⁶Earlier advocates of Nostromo's primacy went unheeded. As early as 1912, Arnold Bennet wrote to Conrad:

When I first read it I thought it the finest novel of this generation (bar none), and I am still thinking so. It is "majestic and orbicular" and just peerless, and there is no more to be said. It's the Higerota* among novels (As quoted in R. L. Megroz, Conrad's Mind and Method [London, 1931], p. 94).

*Higerota is the mountain towering serenely above the chaos of Sulaco.

¹⁷The Great Tradition, p. 190.

"total irony," suggesting that even the numerous and controversial time shifts were a successful device to create irony by juxtaposing contrasting incidents.¹⁸ Morton Dauwen Zabel¹⁹ agreed upon the importance of Nostromo, and Robert Penn Warren published criticism compatible with the comments of both earlier critics, emphasizing this insight into Nostromo's centrality:

As earlier fiction seems to move toward Nostromo, so later fiction seems to represent, by and large, specializations and elaborations of elements that had been in suspension in that work.²⁰

During the 1950's, Douglas Hewitt, David Daiches, Albert Guerard, and Walter Allen were among those critics who helped to revise upward the critical standing of Nostromo. Although the primacy of Nostromo is still challenged occasionally,²¹ its importance as the most elaborate attempt to articulate Conrad's ironic vision of life is clearly established. The characters

¹⁸ Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (New York: The New American Library, Signet Classics, 1960), p. xi.

¹⁹ Nostromo remains "the distinct test case for the critics," said Zabel (The Portable Conrad, p. 42), ". . . a profound if elusive drama of moralities, races, and creeds of conduct (Ibid., p. 43). Acknowledging Nostromo's importance, Zabel stated his preference for the more clearly focused and limited subject matter of such "parabolic" dramas as The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Chance, and Victory (Ibid.).

²⁰ Stallman (ed.), p. 212.

²¹ Moser: "We may admire Conrad's achievement in Nostromo, but for the Conradian manner at its most meaningful, we shall return to Lord Jim (p. 90); and Hay: "Nostromo . . . argues a theory of history almost at the cost of its felt life and characterization . . . (p. 175)."

are so various, and the themes and conflicts are so comprehensive that Costaguana stands "as a picture of the modern world in microcosm,"²² viewed by a hidden narrator "with perfectly remorseless irony." In view of that fact, Nostramo suggests itself as the ideal subject for the analysis of Conrad's ironic vision.

The irony in Nostramo is conveyed, for the most part, subtly and indirectly, but the reader is unremittingly aware of its insistently contrapuntal voice, whispering against the personal and public assumptions of the characters who are swept along on a tide of illusive "progress." The large number of techniques employed to guarantee its continuing presence relate to three principal forms of irony:²³ (1) dramatic or Sophoclean irony, in which the character is unconscious of facts of which the reader is aware; (2) rhetorical or Socratic irony, in which there is a disparity between the surface and the underlying meaning; and (3) the irony of Fate, in which an entire group is unaware of the course of events.

Examples of dramatic irony include Charles Gould's statement to Emilia: "Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist." Gould is saying more

²²Allen, pp. 370-371.

²³Richard G. Lillard, "Irony in Hardy and Conrad," PMLA, L (March, 1935), 316-22.

than he knows, for, in a way that he never anticipates, that is precisely the fate descending upon Sulaco at the story's end. A second example of pure dramatic irony, extending to seventeen pages, is the summary of the war and the post-war period that the unimaginative Captain Mitchell inflicts upon a foreign visitor.²⁴ Consistently placing the most optimistic interpretation upon events--a Chamber of Commerce view, as Robert Haugh described it--that even modest penetration would reveal as ominous, Mitchell talks at great length about Costaguana's "progress."

Rhetorical irony is omnipresent in euphemisms, epithets, symbols, and simile. Euphemisms veil reality on every side: "material interests" is probably the most frequently repeated, followed by "progress," the illusion in which everyone shares, to which one could add the "New Era," that peaceful time that is always in the process of being bought with the bloodiest of revolutions. The graft money that Gould pays to politicians is referred to as "a memorial."²⁵ Montero's march on Sulaco is described as "the most heroic military exploit of modern times," while Sotillo's insurrection is referred to as "this little festivity."²⁶ The narrator reports that "the local difficulties [in regard to the intrusion of Sir John's railroad] . . . had

²⁴Nostromo, pp. 445-461.

²⁵Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶Ibid., p. 38, p. 271.

fallen away before Charles Gould's mediation,"²⁷ a delicate way of referring to the pressure of power. Sometimes, euphemisms are so outrageous as to be funny, such as this statement referring to the custom of lassoing "volunteers" for the "Army of Pacification": "Whole villages," the narrator blandly states, "were known to have volunteered for the army in that way."²⁸

Epithets abound, the most significant being "incorruptible" applied to the silver and to Nostromo.²⁹ Gould is called "The King of Sulaco," more for the power he exerts than for his considerable wealth.³⁰ His description as "incorrigible"³¹ indicates the romantic, falsely-based foundation of his fixed idea. Emilia Gould is called the "First Lady of Sulaco," a title and a position that she richly deserves, assures the dense Captain Mitchell--and nothing could be further from the truth.³² Costaguana is called "The Treasure House of the World,"³³ because "it has always been our fate to be"--Decoud did not say 'robbed,' but added, after a brief pause--"exploited!"³⁴ During his brief stay in office, the benevolent citizen-dictator, Ribiera, is called "the Hope of honest men," and his assembly, "the Junta of Notables"; but some Costaguaneros can remember that even the bloody tyrant Bento was called "Citizen Saviour."³⁵

²⁷Ibid., p. 112. ²⁸Ibid., p. 43. ²⁹Ibid., p. 282, p. 209.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 112, 172, 191, 205, 297, 336.

³¹Ibid., p. 490. ³²Ibid., p. 452. ³³Ibid., p. 455; 460.

³⁴Ibid., p. 164. ³⁵Ibid., p. 112, 226, 348.

At least four symbols have ironic significance. The first is the title of Avellanos' newspaper, the Porvenir, meaning The Future, an ironic title in a country that seems bent upon dissolving in anarchy. The second ironic symbol is the title of the history written by Avellanos, Fifty Years of Misrule, although the misrule shows no sign of observing that tidy and optimistic temporal limitation. Giorgio Viola's hotel, the Albergo d'Italia Una, is a third symbol, its name standing for unity vainly sought in Italy as it is vainly sought in Costaguana. Finally, the lighthouse is a complex ironic symbol: instrumental in "bringing to light" literally the moral darkness engendered by the silver in the life of Nostromo, it stands, too, as a mute appeal to all Costaguaneros to see.

Simile exposes the current demagogues and the rioters. Sotillo "imagined himself a master of intrigue, but his corruption was as simple as an animal instinct."³⁶ Pedro Montero's voice as he addresses the rioters in Sulaco, is "thin as the buzzing of a mosquito," and, the narrator, developing the animal imagery, observes "he seemed to prance between his two supporters."³⁷ The "smaller-than life" quality of the fickle rioters is described in their frenetic activity: ". . . and the movements of the animated scene were like the passages of a violent game played upon the plain by dwarfs mounted and on

³⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 390.

foot, yelling with tiny throats, under the mountain that seemed a colossal embodiment of silence."³⁸

The irony of Fate is expressed in the larger actions of the tale, for example the general unawareness of several groups--the Goulds, the Avellanos, and the mine workers--of the gradual metamorphosis of the mine into a new kind of tyrant.

These types of irony, taken together, inject an opposing and sceptical vision into the worlds of personal illusion, each world tied to an equally individualized concept of society, and, in fact, to a "personalized" sense of history. Hence, the irony helps the reader to "see" that Gould's Promethean sense of self as a modern "light-bearer," old Viola's libertarianism, Avellano's liberalism, Antonia's sublimated patriotism, Decoud's cynical journalistic solicitations, even Sortillo's brutality, and Montero's almost comic posturing relate, with the aid of rhetoric that, as Winnie Verloc said of life, does not bear too much looking into, to serious issues of the day. These issues--capitalism, imperialism, revolution, and socialism--relate, in turn, to an abstract historical concept of "progress." The popular Nostromo, the reclaimed Monygham, and the compassionate Emilia Gould constitute a minority that remains personal in its allegiances: Nostromo to himself, Monygham to Mrs. Gould, and Mrs. Gould to numerous individuals, including, in the

³⁸Ibid., p. 27.

comprehensiveness of her compassionate spirit, those of conflicting convictions.

Almost alone of Conrad's critics, Eloise K. Hay has attempted to supply the rationale for Conrad's social and political convictions by relating them to his heritage of Polish liberalism, and one or two of the points that she makes in her recent book³⁹ are of interest here. In Conrad's opinion, democracy, socialism and revolution had a common and corrupt origin in the French Revolution, which he always regarded as a turning point in Western civilization, and a turning point for the worse. Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were, he thought, rhetorically moving abstractions that had incited the popular mind to violence, persuading it to carnage in the name, ironically, of Humanity, while guarantees of "progress" and perfectibility fostered dreams of an earthly paradise. In his last novel, The Rover, laid in the post-Revolutionary period in France, Conrad graphically rendered the disillusionment attendant upon the failure of these extravagant, ideologically irresponsible claims. What is dramatized there in the lives of Real, and Arlette, of Peyrol, Catherine, and Michael is stated explicitly in an essay, "Autocracy and War," written a few months after Nostromo:

³⁹"Conrad's Polish Background: The Political Imperative," The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad, pp. 31-83.

The degradation of the ideas of freedom and justice at the root of the French Revolution is made manifest in the person of its heir; a personality without law or faith, whom it has been the fashion to represent as an eagle, but who was, in truth, more like a sort of vulture preying upon the body of a Europe which did, indeed, for some dozen of years, very much resemble a corpse. The subtle and manifold influence for evil of the Napoleonic episode as a school of violence, as a sower of national hatreds, as the direct provocator of obscurantism and reaction, of political tyranny and injustice, cannot well be exaggerated.⁴⁰

Hay has drawn attention to a letter of Conrad's which places capitalism and imperialism in the same category as revolution, and indicates that Conrad considered anarchy the common denominator of all. In the 1907 letter to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad wrote:

By Jove! If I had the necessary talent, I would like to go for the true anarchist, which is the millionaire But it's too big a job.⁴¹

He stated bluntly the connection that he perceived between the economic and the political:

Industrialism and commercialism--wearing high-sounding names in many languages (Welt-politik may serve for one instance), picking up coins behind the severe and disdainful figure of science whose giant strides have widened for us the horizon of the universe by some few inches--stand ready, almost eager, to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another ell or so. And democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end, on a mere pittance--unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability

⁴⁰Notes on Life and Letters, p. 115.

⁴¹Hay, p. 189.

and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth⁴²

This was the dialectic which grouped together democracy, revolution, socialism, capitalism, and imperialism as dangers to civilization, sharing, as Conrad believed they did, the barbaric quality of anarchy which endangered the slow development of a stable social and political order. Looked at in this light, the basic antagonistic dualism of Nostromo, whether the subject be capitalism or revolution, is Conrad's most typical one: order versus anarchy. Irony enters the picture as the point of view of the hidden narrator--a point of view virtually indistinguishable from Conrad's--and of the narrator's character-reflectors, Decoud and Monygham, both of whom supply accurate and incisive commentary on the moral pretentiousness that enlists the power of the word in journalism, pronunciamento, business deal, or salon conversation to clothe anarchy in the acceptable dress of glowing political and social abstractions. Those who bend their energies to this end are guilty of pride, one might say, but their perverse desire to see the illusion instead of the reality is characteristic of the modern alienated man discussed in Chapter Two, whose nescience is not wilful, and victimizes him as much as anyone. The painful folly of his easy credulity is rendered with sustained irony in the tragic lives of several

⁴²Notes on Life and Letters, p. 141. Italics mine.

solitary figures who project their personal chaos onto the national scene of Costaguana.

The isolato most intent upon a new epoch for Costaguana, conceived, of course, in his own terms, is Charles Gould, the Costaguana-born son of an English father who died in his adopted country, oppressed and financially ruined by the corrupt, anarchic political structure. A second family fatality was Gould's Uncle Harry, once Chief of State, who was executed in one of the frequent revolutionary coups. "The name of Gould has always been highly respected in Sulaco," Charles Gould tells Emilia on the day of their marriage; "in Costaguana, we Goulds are no adventurers"⁴³--and the irony of that statement becomes obvious as the story unfolds.

In spite of the repeated warnings of his father to forget the San Tome mine, Gould sets out to succeed where his father and uncle failed. The narrator presents his thoughts as he prepares for his venture:

. . . with advancing wisdom, he managed to clear the plain truth of the business from the fantastic intrusions of the Old Man of the Sea, vampires, and ghouls, which had lent to his father's correspondence the flavor of a gruesome Arabian Night's Tale.⁴⁴

Partly in atonement for his father's bitter experiences and partly out of pride in the self-sufficiency of the modern man,

⁴³Nostromo, p. 62.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 56.

Gould embarks upon a successful program to rehabilitate the silver mine upon which the Gould Concession is based. Emilia Gould watches in an agony of awareness as her husband succumbs to the fixed idea that the social and political stability of Costaguana is directly dependent upon the mine. He explains:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope.⁴⁵

Gould's life in Sulaco is rendered in terms of a terrible failure growing out of success, a bitter irony of Fate. Obsessed with his fixed idea, Gould succeeds in rehabilitating the mine at the cost of (1) moral corruption; (2) a ruined marriage; and (3) the grim knowledge that his powerful mine has become, paradoxically, a threat to the public good it was developed to protect.

The moral corruption is easily rationalized away:

The Gould Concession had to fight for life with such weapons as could be found at once in the mire of a corruption that was so universal as almost to lose its significance. He was prepared to stoop for his weapons. For a moment he felt as if the silver mine, which had killed his father, had decoyed him further than he meant to go; and with the round-about logic of emotions, he felt that the worthiness of his life, was bound up with success. There was no going back.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 81.

From that decision on, Gould's life is a series of ironic contrasts between what he says and what he does. He accepts the necessity of bribing local government officials to insure the protection of the mine's operation.⁴⁷ Later, he convinces himself that the safety of the mine is worth stabilizing, with the power of Gould wealth and influence, the reign of the benevolent dictator Ribiera.⁴⁸ Finally, he opens the door to the "Treasure House of the World" to outside (imperialistic) interests, because their presence will, in one way or another, strengthen the position of the mine.

The first outside business interest to gain a foothold is represented by Sir John, the English railway financier, whose company is not above being compromised by graft for the acquisition of land:

In the Sta. Marta Valley, where there was already one line in existence, the people were tractable, and it was only a matter of price. A commission had been nominated to fix the values and the difficulty had resolved itself into the judicious influencing of the commissioners.⁴⁹

The rhetorical irony is repeated in another understated explanation of Sir John's future plans:

He worked always on a grand scale; there was a loan to the state, and a project for systematic colonization of the Occidental Province, involved in one vast scheme with the construction of the National Central Railway. Good faith, order, honesty, peace, were badly wanted for this great development of material interests.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 87

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 111-112.

Although obscured by appealing abstractions--good faith, order, honesty, peace--one cannot miss the fact that the "loan" was repaid with colonization privileges on a disproportionately large scale.

The second architect of "material interests" admitted is the American financier Holroyd, who alarms Emilia Gould on many counts, but especially with his freely declared theory of the world's future:

The Costaguana Government shall play its hand for all it's worth--and don't you forget it, Mr. Gould. Now, what is Costaguana? It is the bottomless pit of 10 percent loans and other fool investments. European capital has been flung into it with both hands for years. Not ours, though. We in this country know just about enough to keep indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the world of God's universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it--and neither can we, I guess.⁵¹

To the "temperament of a Puritan," Holroyd has joined an acute business sense in a manner that would have gladdened the Elect of Geneva a few hundred years ago. Establishing a "purer form of Christianity" is almost as much his concern as establishing "material interests." With a flourish of rhetorical irony, the

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 73-74.

hidden narrator comments: "Thus spoke the considerable personage, the millionaire endower of churches on a scale befitting the greatness of his native land."⁵²

In addition to Sir John and Holroyd, other business representatives appear on the scene:

Even the few Europeans around Charles Gould--a Dane, a couple of Frenchmen, a discreet fat German, smiling, with down-cast eyes, the representatives of those material interests that had got a footing in Sulaco under the protecting might of the San Tome mine--had infused a lot of good humour into their deference. Gould, to whom they were paying their court, was the visible sign of the stability that could be achieved on the shifting ground of revolutions. They felt hopeful about their various undertakings.⁵³

The hidden narrator focuses his attention on one of the Frenchmen, representing "a syndicate of European capitalists":

"Ten million dollars' worth of copper practically in sight, Monsieur l'Administrateur. Ten millions in sight! And a railway coming--a railway! They will never believe my report. C'est trop beau." He fell a prey to a screaming ecstasy, in the midst of sagely nodding heads, before Charles Gould's imperturbable calm.⁵⁴

As Father Corbelan and the repatriated Decoud watch the "court" scene from the sidelines, Decoud murmurs ironically; "Those gentlemen talk about their gods."⁵⁵

The result of Gould's actions is not what he intended for Costaguana, although it is true that the province of Sulaco does grow rich on the hidden treasures of the earth,

⁵²Ibid., p. 73.

⁵³Ibid., p. 181.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 187.

⁵⁵Ibid.

hovered over by the anxious spirits of good and evil, torn out by the labouring hands of the people. It was like a second youth, like a new life, full of promise, of unrest, of toil, scattering lavishly its wealth to the four corners of the excited world. Material changes swept along in the train of material interests. And other changes more subtle, outwardly unmarked, affected the minds and hearts of the workers.⁵⁶

The many changes in Costaguana are symbolized by the physical change affecting the scene of the San Tomé mine:

The waterfall existed no longer. The tree-ferns that had luxuriated in its spray had died around the dried-up pool, and the high ravine was only a big trench half filled up with the refuse of excavations and tailings. The torrent, dammed up above, sent its water rushing along the open flunes of scooped tree trunks striding on trestle-legs to the turbines working the stamps on the lower plateau--the mesa grande of the San Tome mountain. Only the memory of the waterfall, with its amazing fernery, like a hanging garden above the rocks of the gorge, was preserved in Mrs. Gould's water-colour sketch;⁵⁷

Alluding to that gorge, a wiser and disillusioned Emilia Gould remarks to her husband about the whole enterprise:

"We have disturbed a good many snakes in that paradise, Charley, haven't we?"⁵⁸

One change is "the expansion of San Tomé Consolidated Mines (whose territory, containing gold, silver, copper, lead, cobalt, extends for miles along the foothills of the Cordillera)" ⁵⁹

A second change is indicated in a chance remark of Charles Gould to his wife as they return from the harbor:

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 479.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 474.

"All this piece of land belongs now to the Railway Company. There will be no more popular feasts held here."

Mrs. Gould was rather sorry to think so.⁶⁰

The slow attrition of their land and customs is accompanied by a third innovation for Sulacans: "the Protestant invasion of Sulaco organized by the Holroyd Missionary Fund."⁶¹ A fourth change is inadvertently described in Mitchell's rambling commentary, pointing out the Anglo-American Club which caters to mining engineers and business men, the Mirriflores Club for "lively young fellows, the English, French, Italians, all sorts," and the American bar,⁶² giving one the impression that foreign influences have "taken over" this small country. Finally, there is the growing discontent among the mine workers, and the threat of labor problems is added to a predictably turbulent future. The definitive irony in regard to all the material interests is the contrast between Gould's initial claim for them--"I pin my faith to material interests"--and the fact that it was their safety that tipped the scales against the annexation of the rich province of Sulaco to the rest of Costaguana--a move which would have ended an unnatural division.

In the course of these events, Charles Gould acquires some insight into his motivation. Before their marriage, he had said to Emilia: "In Costaguana we Goulds are no adventurers." Now

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 119

⁶¹Ibid., p. 479.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 446; 450.

. . . he perceived that he was an adventurer in Costa-guana, the descendant of adventurers enlisted in a foreign legion, of men who sought fortune in a revolutionary war, who had planned revolutions, who had believed in revolutions. For all the uprightness of his character, he had something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraising of his action.⁶³

As unlikely as it seemed at the outset, Charles Gould had something in common with those "impious adventurers" of the Azuera legend.

A second result of Gould's successful rehabilitation of the mine is the destruction of his marriage. His growing interest in the mine is paralleled by a decreasing awareness of his wife, a singular "infidelity" that began even before their marriage. Attending a meeting in a German mining town with a Holroyd representative who is accompanied by his wife, "Gould had with him the inseparable companionship of the mine."⁶⁴ Once settled in Sulaco, Gould's obsession with the mine is total. His fixed idea about the saving power of material interests is a brick wall that blocks out communication. Reluctantly, Emilia admits to herself the ironic relationship between the success of the mine and the failure of their marriage:

The fate of the San Tome mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish was grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by

⁶³ Ibid., p. 343.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, 65 mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration.

Their estrangement does not go unnoticed; the loyal Dr. Monygham broods about Emilia's loneliness, and Decoud writes to his sister in France:

The San Tome mine stands now between these two people

. . . .
His wife had understood it, too And he defers to her because he trusts her perhaps, but I fancy rather as if he wished to make up for some subtle wrong, for that sentimental unfaithfulness which surrenders her life, her happiness, to the seduction of an idea. The little woman has discovered that he lives for the mine rather than for her. 66

Gould, too, is aware of his obsession, and his guilt feelings bear upon his decision to blow up the mine, a decision taken partly to keep his mine out of the hands of Monterists and partly to express

the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts. 67

In addition to moral corruption and a ruined marriage, the rehabilitation of the mine brings with it the knowledge that any peace and justice it insured was only temporary. When Mrs. Gould asks Dr. Monygham if a lasting peace will ever come to Costaguana, his reply is an expansion of an earlier, and accurate, observation made to Antonia Avellanos:

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 225; 230.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 343.

"No!" interrupted the doctor. "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back."⁶⁸

The tragic irony of Gould's illusion colors Emilia's life as well as his own, for, in the beginning of their marriage, she, too, was inspired by "an idealistic view of success."⁶⁹ The veil of her illusion lifted early, however, and the most poignant part of her tragedy is that she sees so clearly.

Her wry, ironic remarks to Sir John as he promises exciting "progress" to isolated Sulaco, are duplicated by her manner with Holroyd and his associates.⁷⁰ Sir John and his railway landgrab, Holroyd's righteous economic theory of the future--his "religion of silver and iron,"--as well as their own San Tome mine are all indicated by her remark:

"This seems to me the most awful materialism"⁷¹

But Gould "refused to discuss the ethical view with his wife,"⁷² and their alienation, mutually recognized and mutually lamented, deepens.

With the Senor Administrador spending more and more time at the mine, the "first lady of Sulaco . . . wealthy beyond

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 481

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 35; 65.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁷² Ibid., p. 134.

great dreams of wealth, considered, loved, respected, honored" moved through the rooms of her empty house, where there was no one to ask her what she thought, but

It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present. Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after. She thought that, and . . .
 . a great wave of loneliness swept over her head⁷³

With a fine sense of irony, she evaluates her life in a foreign country, childless, and alienated from her husband. It

. . . was a terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! . . . With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work--all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes She stammered out aimlessly the words-- "Material interests."⁷⁴

If the mainspring of the Gould's idealistic vision was economic, that of Don Jose Avellanos, of his daughter Antonia, and of old Viola was political. Caustically, the narrator injects the information that the government which forced the mine concession on Charles Gould's father was "an ordinary Costa-guana government--the fourth in six years"⁷⁵

Avellanos was, at that time, an active patriot who suffered cruel persecution at the hands of Guzman Berto, the same insurrectionist who executed the uncle of Charles Gould and who

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 522; 489

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 490-91.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

tortured and imprisoned Dr. Monygham. Since then, repeated discouragements have failed to dim Don Jose's vision of a New Era for Costaguana. Selflessly devoted, he laboured as a Federalist, as a leader of the Blanco party, and allied with the Constitutionalists under Ribiera

. . . for order, peace, progress; for the establishment of national self-respect without which--he declared with energy--"we are a reproach and a byword amongst the powers of the world."

Don Avellanos loved his country.⁷⁶

Accepting the premise that the New Era must be built upon a stable economic order, Don Jose sees Gould as a patriot,⁷⁷ and the mine as a "patriotic" activity. Only the legend of the mine, "Imperium in Imperio"--another ironic epithet--gives him moments of discomfort.⁷⁸ Still, he is encouraged by the fact that the economic activity seems to have succeeded in halting the almost continual re-shaping of government, usually by relentless militarism, that has identified Costaguana in the past.

A believer in the power of the word, Don Jose writes a history, Fifty Years of Misrule, for the enlightenment of the people, and establishes a newspaper Porvenir (The Future), for which he persuades his repatriated nephew, Martin Decoud, to write. Moved by the passion in his uncle's appeal, Decoud accepts, but his exasperation with the comic opera atmosphere of

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 129

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 127.

South American politics causes him to declare that

There is a curse of futility upon our character; Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of a democratic parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce--a Guzman Bento our master! And we have sunk so low that when a man like you [Don Jose] has awakened our conscience, a stupid barbarian of a Montero--Great Heavens!--a Montero--becomes a deadly danger, and an ignorant boastful Indio, like Barrios, is our defender.⁷⁹

A completely inadmissible and crushing evaluation to the idealistic Don Jose, it moves him to defend Barrios as a man "competent enough for his special plan of campaign." Then, "Don Jose became quite animated under a great flow of speech,"⁸⁰

Susceptibility to rhetoric is an element common to two scenes in the Sulacan Assembly, meeting in Casa Gould. In the first scene, following the outbreak of the Monterist insurrection, the Assemblymen bluster righteously about the "unheard of audacity of that evil madman,"⁸¹ Montero. But when Montero seems about to succeed, the Sancho Panza side of the national character emerges in a second and casuistical performance, led by Don Juste, justifying the intentions, if not the means, of "the general . . . that distinguished man,"⁸² Montero. Witnessing that "supine morality" in action as he lay ill in the

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 161.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 161.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 179.

⁸²Ibid., p. 223.

mountain stronghold of Hernandez the bandit, Don Jose's spirit is broken, and he dies. Decoud is, as usual, closer to the truth when he writes to his sister: "I know that Don Jose really died there, in the Casa Gould"⁸³

The final irony directed at Avellanos' life-illusion is the inscription on his commemorative bust in the Cathedral:

Minister to the Courts of England and Spain, etc., etc.,
died in the woods of Los Hatos worn out with his life-
long struggle for Right and Justice at the dawn of a
New Era.⁸⁴

The reader is aware that there will be nothing new about the coming era. Again the superficial evaluation of Captain Mitchell provokes the ironic response:

"We have the Parliamentary Party here of which the actual Chief of the State, Don Juste Lopez, is the head; a very sagacious man, I think. A first-rate intellect, sir."⁸⁵

The "very sagacious man" is, of course, the same casuist who rationalized submission to the brutal Montero. Moreover, Hernandez, the bandit-Master of the Campo, is Sulaco's Minister of War! Circumstances point to another violent reshaping of government, led this time by an unlikely triumvirate: Antonia Avellanos, Cardinal Corbelan, and Nestromo.

Antonia Avellanos, "an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism,"⁸⁶ is obsessed with the desire to carry on Don Jose's

⁸³Ibid., p. 222.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 449.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 450.

⁸⁶Ibid., "Author's Note," p. xvi.

work, and to give meaning to the death of her beloved Decoud. A South American Charlotte Corday,⁸⁷ she cannot see any truth to the Bolivar statement brooded over by Decoud:

"America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence ploughed the sea."

Antonia voices the same idealism and optimism as her father:

"But we are laboring to change all that," Antonia protested. "It is exactly what we desire. It is our object. It is the great cause. And the word you despise [patriot] has stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering. Papa, who--
"Ploughing the sea," interrupted Decoud, looking down.⁸⁸

Cardinal Corbelan, Antonia's uncle, is the second conspirator, and, considering the evangelistic proclivities of Holroyd, the newly-elevated Cardinal has another kind of anticlerical government to fight. Popular with the people and an aggressive political in-fighter, the Cardinal escaped to Hernandez's mountain stronghold with a document in his pocket,

. . . a piece of official writing turning a bandit into a general in a memorable last official act of the Ribierist party, whose watchwords were honesty, peace, and progress. Probably neither the priest nor the bandit saw the irony of it.⁸⁹

Decoud commented on Antonia's uncle-priest in this way:

"Any slight sign of favour from a relative of yours is welcome, Antonia. And perhaps he understands me, after all! But I know him, too, our Padre Corbelan. The idea of political honour, justice, and honesty for him consists in the restitution of the confiscated Church property."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 169.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 332.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 177-178.

The third conspirator is Nostromo, or Captain Fidanza as he is known in the latter part of the tale. The non-political man has assumed the Republican heritage of his adopted father, Viola, under circumstances that might suggest the influence of the mysterious Anarchist. But, in fact, Nostromo's "politics" is a rationalization grounded in his conviction that he, the betrayer, has been betrayed. The saviour of the San Tome mine projected his illusion of betrayal into the lives of the people, and he "hated that immense mine, lording it by its vast wealth over the valour, the toil, the fidelity of the poor, over war and peace, over the labours of the town, the sea, and the campo."⁹¹

United, to all appearances, in selfless pursuit of a national goal, but in reality isolated within the closed circle of personal illusion, these three conspire as hundreds have conspired before them. Dr. Monygham comments scathingly on their activities:

"Conspiring. Yes!" said the doctor. "The last of the Avellanos and the last of the Corbelans are conspiring with the refugees from Sta. Marta that flock here after every revolution. The Cafe Lambrose at the corner of the Plaza is full of them. You can hear their chatter across the street like the noise of a parrot-house. They are conspiring for the invasion of Costaguana. And do you know where they go for strength, for the necessary force? To the secret societies amongst immigrants and natives, where Nostromo--I should say Captain Fidanza--is the great man. What gives him that position? Who

⁹¹Ibid., p. 472.

can say? Genius? He has genius. He is greater with the populace than ever he was before. It is as if he had some secret power; some mysterious means to keep up his influence. He holds conferences with the Archbishop, as in those old days which you and I remember. Barrios is useless. But for a military head they have the pious Hernandez. And they may raise the country with the new cry of the wealth for the people.⁹²

If the form of political idealism based upon "material interests" is suspect in the ironic vision of the narrator, so too is an earlier and purer form of that idealism, rendered in the vignette tragedy of Giorgio Viola. The Albergo d'Italia Una stands in the plain between town and harbor, an island of the "pure" revolutionary spirit. Inviting as it is to contrast the nobility of Viola with the meanness of Sortillo, Montero, and Bento, one should not miss the fact that Viola's political idealism possesses the disturbing overtones of a secular religion, that special righteous quality that indicates Viola has something in common with such seemingly unlike characters as Antonia, "an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism," and with Holroyd, whose "religion of iron and silver" derives from the Protestant ethic. The irony of the revealing euphemisms is, I think, unmistakable.

Viola, a Genoese, was often called "the Garibaldino (as Mohammedans are called after their prophet) because, "Liberty and Garibaldi were his divinities."⁹³ "Full of scorn for the

⁹²Ibid., pp. 480-81

⁹³Ibid., p. 16.

populace, as your austere republican so often is," Viola barricades himself in his hotel during the rioting, contemptuous of flight:

Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation for a man who had been one of Garibaldi's immortal thousand⁹⁴

His eye is drawn to the colored lithograph of Garibaldi hung on the white wall of the Casa as the eye of a religious man would be drawn to an icon. His "fanaticism" for that "immortal hero . . . suffered no diminution"

This was your liberty; it gave you not only life, but immortality as well!⁹⁵

Viola remembers that his enthusiasm [for liberty] had been fed on scenes of carnage, on the examples of lofty devotion, on the din of armed struggle, on the inflamed language of proclamation.⁹⁶

Like a secular saint who has missed his martyrdom, he reminds the recent Italian immigrants among his customers:

"We wanted nothing, we suffered for the love of humanity."⁹⁷

However, none of his countrymen are susceptible to the abstract imperative in his "declamatory narrative."

In the closed circle of his illusion, Viola believes that he is reduced "to live for the love of liberty . . . in a brute of a country," but Teresa, countering with "we are lost in this

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 16; 20.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 31.

country . . . because you cannot live under a king,"⁹⁸ lifts the veil. The anarchic ingredient in Viola's revolutionary creed is class hostility, an ingredient inimical to the establishment of justice and peace. His black and white morality--the rich are "evil"; the poor are "good"--makes him proud that he lives in poverty "as a matter of principle . . . a puritanism of conduct, born of stern enthusiasm like the puritanism of religion."⁹⁹ The accidental shooting by this old Republican of Nostromo, his political heir as well as his "adopted" son, symbolizes the destructiveness of the heritage.

One of the least susceptible characters to an abstract ideal is that other Genoese sailor, Gian' Battista Fidanza, called Nostromo, who, leaving his ship to make his fortune in Costaguana, became like a son to the Violas. The fortune that he found was reputation, as the swaggering, colorful foreman of the docks, the Capataz de Cargadores. A vivid and audacious physical double of his model, Dominic Cervoni, Nostromo was non-political, amoral, sceptical, and motivated by the kind of vanity that depended on outward show. His identity, not born of moral awareness, was defined by admiring glances and flattering descriptions. It was wealth enough for him that he was respected and admired by the people for his exploits, adventures, and loves; that his superior, Captain Mitchell, called him

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 24

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 31.

"a fellow in a thousand"; and that his name was always coupled with such flattering epithets as the "renowned," the "magnificent," and the "unique" Capataz, an "indispensable man."¹⁰⁰ A "Man of the People," he was "their very own un-envious force, disdaining to lead but ruling from within."¹⁰¹

The acutely perceptive Decoud alone questions that reputation, remarking to Mrs. Gould:

" . . . I have heard no end of tales of his strength, his audacity, his fidelity. No end of fine things. H'm! Incorruptible! It is indeed a name of honour for the Capataz of the Cargadores of Sulaco. Incorruptible! Fine, but vague."¹⁰²

Nostromo interests Decoud: " . . . it is curious to have met a man for whom the value of life seems to consist in personal prestige."¹⁰³ Teresa Viola ridicules the quality:

" . . . to be first somewhere--somehow--to be first with these English. They will be showing him to everybody. 'This is our Nostromo!' What a name! What is that? He would take a name that is properly no word from them."¹⁰⁴

Perceptively, Decoud foreshadows the tragedy of Nostromo's life when he concludes that Nostromo will remain incorruptible only as long as his vanity is fed by the near-adulation of the people and the dependence of the Europeans.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 239; 92; 392; 396; 425; 428.

¹⁰¹Ibid., "Author's Note," p. xv.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 208

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 233-34.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 283.

That critical time arrives the night that Nostromo and Decoud sail the silver-laden lighter out of Montero's reach, attempting to intercept a steamer to which they can transfer the "incorruptible metal." Decoud's inclusion in the kind of dare-devil task usually entrusted to him alone raises in Nostromo's mind the suspicion that Gould may not trust "incorruptible" Capataz. The threat to reputation is forgotten temporarily as he rides with Dr. Monygham to attend the dying Teresa. When Nostromo, pressed for time in his commitment to save the silver, refuses Teresa's request that he ride for a priest, she says bitterly:

"You never change, indeed always thinking of yourself and taking your pay out in fine words from those who care nothing for you."¹⁰⁶

The earlier uneasiness returning, Nostromo counters her accusation with a defense that, considering future events, is ironic:

"A good name, Giorgio says, is a treasure, Padrona."¹⁰⁷

Teresa sends him on his errand with bitter words:

"Look to it man, that you get something for yourself out of it, besides the remorse that shall overtake you some day. . . . Get riches at least for once, you indispensable, admired Gian' Battista, to whom the peace of a dying woman is less than the praise of people who have given you a silly name and nothing besides--in exchange for your soul and body."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 241.

Baffled at Teresa's disparagement "of this reputation that he had obtained and desired to keep," Nostromo backs out of the sick room. For no apparent reason, Dr. Monygham contributes another unsettling remark:

"I hope you have made a good bargain in case you come back safe from this adventure."¹⁰⁹

When Nostromo asks him what he would consider a good bargain, Dr. Monygham laughingly replies

" . . . nothing else but the whole treasure would do."¹¹⁰

Nostromo's uneasiness turns to resentment when he overhears Charles Gould remark to an engineer at the dock:

"If it must be lost, it is a million times better that it should go to the bottom of the sea."¹¹¹

Gould's remark means that the silver they have been feverishly trying to save is actually expendable; but, more significant than that, it means that he, "the lordly Capataz de Cargadores, the indispensable man," is expendable, too. Teresa was right. Now, faced with the collapse of his illusion, Nostromo remembers that the lost illusion bore upon his refusal of Teresa:

"I refused to fetch a priest for a dying woman," he tells Decoud; "the thing sticks in my throat."¹¹²

Decoud's surprise at Nostromo's resentfulness and at his recurring reference to the curse that, supposedly, attaches to the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 244.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 245.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 252.

treasure of Azuera is forgotten in the chaos that attends the collision between their lighter and Sotillo's troopship.

Reaching the safety of Great Isabel Island, they bury the treasure, sink the lighter, and part temporarily, Decoud remaining in the comparative safety of the island while Nostromo swims toward the mainland.

Nostromo's awakening from the sleep that follows his strenuous swim is described in terms that suggest a moral awakening:

. . . everything that had gone before for years appeared vain and foolish, like a flattering dream come suddenly to an end.¹¹³

He thought, for one thing, that Viola had been right; that

Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.¹¹⁴

His subjective nature evaluated all events in relation to his own life: he had been betrayed! He had been betrayed to the betrayal of Teresa, of whose death he felt certain when he heard the cry of the owl, superstitiously connected with death.

His imagination seized upon the clear and simple notion of betrayal to account for the dazed feeling of enlightenment as to being done for, of having inadvertently gone out of his existence on an issue in which his personality had not been taken into account.

.
 . . . he was ready to feel the burden of sacrilegious guilt descend upon his shoulders.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Ibid., p. 390

¹¹⁴Ibid., p.391.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 395-96.

On his return to town, Nostromo laughs with Dr. Monygham over Sotillo's search for the silver, but the reader is aware that Nostromo is laughing at the irony of his own life:

"There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man's mind He will see it every time he closes his eyes. He will never forget it till he is dead--and even then--Doctor, did you ever hear of the miserable gringos on Azuera, that cannot die? Ha! Ha! Sailors like myself. There is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind."¹¹⁶

One of the lives least likely to be dedicated to material interests, or to a political ideal falls under the curse of the symbolic silver. Discovering Decoud's suicide on his return to the island, Nostromo resolves: "I must get rich slowly"¹¹⁷ He awakened morally just in time to sell his soul for silver.

Nostromo's new life-illusion, built on the hidden silver, is endangered when Great Isabel Island is designated as the site of a lighthouse, a development that would make his visits dangerous. "Not every man has such a darkness," he says. "And they are going to put a light there."¹¹⁸ Suggesting Giorgio Viola for its caretaker, Nostromo provides himself with a reason for the visits, since it is generally accepted that he and Linda Viola will marry one day. Unfortunately, Linda reminds Nostromo of Teresa, and his affective settles upon the younger sister, Giselle. He embarks upon a course of betrayal, courting Linda

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 433.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 473.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 494.

openly, visiting Giselle furtively at night, and using the visits to "grow rich slowly" from the cache of silver.

Nostromo's tragedy of betrayal ends on a fateful night's visit to the silver when Viola, mistaking his dark figure for Ramirez, the unwelcome suitor of Giselle, mortally wounds the man he loves like a son. The wounded Nostromo tells Giselle:

"It seemed as though I could not live through the night without seeing thee once more--my star, my little flower"119

Giselle, who knows so little of Nostromo and of his illusion, is like Kurtz's Beloved as she protests to Emilia Gould:

"He loved me as no one had ever been loved before."120

Only Mrs. Gould, Nostromo's compassionate, hooded confessor knows the truth, and, refusing knowledge of the silver's location, understands Nostromo's final cry: "It holds me yet."121

Martin Decoud shared with Nostromo that "drop of universal scorn" that should have immunized him against the Costaguana political climate. Decoud, the spoiled darling of the family, had studied law, dabbled in literature, and thought about writing poetry, but the only tangible proof of his industry was a series of articles on European affairs written for the newspaper of the Santa Marta Province. "Journalese" came naturally to the dandified boulevardier, whose superficially French

119 Ibid., p. 521.

120 Ibid., p. 521.

121 Ibid., p. 525.

cosmopolitanism was "in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority."¹²² He amused his French friends describing "the screamingly funny" comic opera atmosphere of his native land's politics--"the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe."¹²³

Unexpectedly, Don Jose managed his nephew's election to the small arms committee of Sulaco. Decoud found it so diverting to gather the precious consignment, that "the whole burlesque business, he thought, was worth following to the end."¹²⁴ Personally delivering the small arms to Sulaco, he was met by Don Jose with this ironic greeting:

"You have come yourself! No less could be expected from a Decoud . . ." This was indeed the time for men of intellect and conscience to rally round the endangered cause.¹²⁵

Moved by the patriotic ardor of Don Jose and by the frank and approving warmth of Antonia, he agrees to become the journalist of Sulaco, counteracting in The Porvenir the lies of the Monterist press. The futility of battling the moral darkness of Costaguana is a reluctantly surrendered conviction for one who notes wearily that ". . . the noise outside the city wall is new, but the principle is old."¹²⁶ However, under the reproach

¹²² Ibid., p. 144.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 146.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 146.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

of Antonia's unwavering patriotism, he cultivates illusion and acts as though he had faith. No patriot, Decoud's illusion is, he thinks, the "supreme illusion of the lover," whose faith resides "in my passions, . . . in the truth of my own sensations":

"There is nothing I would not do for the sake of Antonia. There is nothing I am not prepared to undertake. There is no risk I am not ready to run."¹²⁷

The truth is that Decoud finds "fresh audacity in this voicing of his thoughts,"¹²⁸ an effect common to many of the isolatos who delude themselves or others, or are deluded by, words. Decoud's journalistic occupation is in itself a subtle ironic comment on that pattern. It is his propagandist task, in the words of Don Jose, to

". . . have a long and confident article upon Barrios and the irresistibility of his army of Cayta! The moral effect must be kept up in the country. We must cable encouraging extracts to Europe"129

Journalists, Conrad thought, were as unscrupulous in their use of language as demagogues:

But journalists can't speak the truth--not even see it as other men do. It's a professional inability, and that's why I hold journalism for the most demoralizing form of human activity, made up of catch phrases, or merely daily opportunities, of shifting feelings.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 178; 201.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 165.

¹³⁰ Jean-Aubry, II, pp. 186-87.

Similarly, Nostromo found fresh audacity in the flattering comments of the people; Viola's enthusiasm for Liberty had been fed on "the inflamed language of proclamations"; the Monterist "pronunciamento" was the last of a series that had succeeded in disseminating emotion-charged misinterpretations to a populace

incapable of scepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny.¹³¹

Charles Gould's abstractions--"law, good faith, order, security"--kin to Sir John's "good faith, order, honesty, peace," are the antipodal expression of that pattern. Holroyd's apocalyptic vision of a high destiny is as seductive to the popular minds of developed countries as the almost comical pronunciamento is to the popular mind in undeveloped lands. A clue to the veiling identity of rhetoric is provided when Charles Gould reflects that familiar words seem to have lost their meaning in this country.

The tragedy of Decoud is the tragedy of the hollow man, dependent on intellectual and critical repartee, succumbing to the silence of a solitude where these props are unavailable. With a good measure of sympathy and respect, Conrad produced in Decoud his most telling portrait of the negatively sceptical personality. Here was a man without spiritual resources placed, ironically, in a position where only those resources would

¹³¹ Nostromo, pp. 395-96.

prevail. In the ten days of his isolation, Decoud lives out the pattern--loneliness, indifference, melancholy, despair, suicide--that Conrad associated with negative scepticism. Between the fifth and the seventh day, Decoud experiences the bitter beginnings of self-knowledge, comparable to Gould's recognition in his encounter with the messenger from Hernandez, and Nostromo's awakening to a new identity following his swim from Great Isabel Island. Becoming vaguely conscious of a "misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth," Decoud experiences "the first moral sentiment of his manhood."¹³² By the end of the seventh day, "he no longer dared to think of Antonia. She had not survived."¹³³ On the tenth day the solitude appeared like a

great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands, . . . he began to wish this cord would snap.¹³⁴

"I wonder whether I would hear it snap before I fell," he asked himself, buckling on the gun belt. Weighing his pocket with four ingots of the symbolic silver, he pulled away from the shore, steering the boat toward the setting sun. "He believed in nothing." Pointing the revolver at his heart, he pulled the trigger, "and the lever of Antonia Avellanos rolled overboard without having heard the cord of silence snap in the solitude of the Placid Gulf" ¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid., p. 468.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 469.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 468.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 470; 471.

The personal and public expectations of these and other hopeful isolatos seem doomed to disillusionment in the ironic vision of Nostromo's narrator. In a variety of forms, tragedy--moral corruption, personal loss, death, and suicide--terminates the dreams of the Goulds, the Avellanos family, Nostromo, Decoud, and a dozen others. Nostromo has been described as a pessimistic novel: "By the end of the book we are virtually back where we started; it looks as if the future of Costaguana will be very similar to her past."¹³⁶

If Conrad's moral intent in Nostromo was nothing more than an expose of personal and public exercises in futility, then the novel is indeed a pessimistic one. However, it seems to this reader that his intentions went beyond that to embrace a hopeful vision. Ian Watt's remark about Conrad's treatment of alienation applies here. Watt noted that, while some modern writers seem to revel in the idea of alienation, Conrad's attitude was "Alienation, yes. But how do we get out of it?" In a larger context, Conrad is asking the same question in Nostromo, and he is posing that question as a crucially important one because the problems of Costaguana are not limited to that obscure, undeveloped South American state. Transplanted there, the better to cultivate the detachment he desired in his readers, Costaguana's problems mirror current social and political conditions, as well

¹³⁶Baines, p. 301.

as new beliefs and values, that Conrad thought were dangerous to civilized standards. Their European sources are, thinly veiled.

Costaguana is modelled on Russia to the extent that it is a country blinded by "ages of error," without the "faintest tradition" to which reformers could return as "to a parting of the ways."¹³⁷ Spanish conquistadores and buccaneers have been replaced by those interests that Conrad described as "modern conquistadores," and a stable governing tradition concerned none of them. The moral principle of government is subverted to the utilitarian principle of economics. The past offers nothing upon which to build, and if "it is impossible to initiate a rational scheme of reform upon a phase of blind absolutism,"¹³⁸ as Conrad said of Russia, one might conclude that it is equally impossible to build upon the blind anarchy of Costaguana's past, a past devoid of national tradition.

Secondly, Costaguana is, like Poland, suffering the effects of self-division, a crime perpetuated within the novel by the paramount but inhuman demands of "material interests" that will never defer, as Dr. Monygham said, to a mere idea of justice and pity. The national division relates to the self-division of the isolato-citizens who move within the circles of their personal

¹³⁷Notes on Life and Letters, p. 128.

¹³⁸Ibid.

illusions, betrayed and betraying in their nescience. Civilization condemns division in the human community when that division derives from war, but the exploitation of capitalism-imperialism and the class hostility of socialistic revolutions are just as divisive and destructive of human values.

Third, Costaguaneros live, like the modern alienated man, in what Father Corbelan called a "faithless age." Their anxiety to invest their faith in something renders them incapable of scepticism. Easy converts to the religion of "progress," the Enlightenment principle in the new form of "material interests," they put their trust "in the peaceful nature of industrial and commercial competition,"¹³⁹ just as an earlier age had put its trust in the theory of Das Kapital (1867), and a still earlier age, in the abstractions of the French Revolution. Currently, Germany seemed the most dedicated believer in material interests and Conrad's comment on Germany coincides with his treatment of Costaguana:

Germany's attitude proves that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests which she seems to have adopted exclusively as her only aim, ideal, watchword.¹⁴⁰

That kind of progress, he reminded his readers, "leaves its dead by the way,

for progress is only a great adventure, as its leaders and chiefs know very well in their hearts. It is a march into an undiscovered country; and in such an enterprise, the victims do not count.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹Notes on Life and Letters, p. 141.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

The moral intent of Nostromo is only partly the graphic representation of futile activity in the personal and public realm, viewed "with remorseless irony." That representation comprised the limited vision of Decoud, a negatively sceptical personality who "believed in nothing." Conrad understood and sympathized with Decoud's comments, but, in the last analysis, he rejected Decoud's negative solution. The burden of Nostromo is an illusion that Decoud could never have entertained. Not to the same extent as with Jim (Lord Jim) or Flora (Chance), but to a great extent, the reader "constructs" the characters and their world in a piecing-together process that the complicated chronology imposes. In exploring the characters--their motivation and their moral dilemmas--we explore ourselves; in exploring their world--its conflicts and its value system--we explore our own. Conrad succeeded in forcing the reader to join in creating the real; with that creative momentum behind him, the reader proceeds to create the ideal that is implied by the real--to create the truer identity, the nobler ethic, the more realistic (as opposed to romantic) norm of conduct. That activity, exploring the possibilities of solution, registers, not pessimism, but a positive scepticism.

As Austin said, the ironist does not specify the cure, but it is possible to suggest hypothetical answers from Conrad's letters and essays to the three problem areas described above,

answers that even his own contemporaries might have found obvious, impractical, but hopeful.

To those countries which, unlike unfortunate Costaguana (or Russia) had a national tradition, Conrad advised that they

. . . turn to the national spirit, which, superior in its force and continuity to good fortune, can alone give us the feeling of an enduring existence and of an invincible power against the fates.

Like a subtle and mysterious elixir poured into the perishable clay of successive generations, it grows in truth, splendour, and potency with the march of ages.¹⁴²

Conrad was convinced that stable states do not rise from revolution, nor are they created by material interest; they are the result of "logical growth, of faith, and courage," their inspiration springing

from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of collective conscience, and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, the concept of logical growth toward national goals was discarded during the French Revolution in favor of violent "short-cuts," but the tradition was there in Europe's past for those reformers with vision enough to return to it.

Secondly, if Conrad praised orderly processes, he preached the dangers of anarchy whether that disorder occurred within the human personality, or among social classes, or among nations.

¹⁴²A Personal Record, p. 238.

¹⁴³Notes on Life and Letters, p. 121.

Identified in his fiction with the themes of communication and solidarity, he was hopeful that the human community would achieve a "wider solidarity" than national, a

solidarity of Europeanism, which must be the next step toward the advent of Concord and Justice, an advent that, however delayed by the fatal worship of force and the errors of national selfishness, has been, and remains the only possible goal of our progress.¹⁴⁴

Finally, Conrad said: "I think that all ambitions are lawful, except those which climb upwards on the miseries or credulities of mankind."¹⁴⁵ The only defense one has against the irresponsible use of language is the cultivation of scepticism, that "habit of weighing . . . the presents thrown by destiny," that in no way preclude an act of faith.

In a letter to his friend, H. G. Wells, written during the period of Nostromo's composition, Conrad seemed optimistic about the future:

The future is of our own making--and for me the most striking characteristic of the century is just that development, that maturing of our consciousness which should open our eyes to that truth--or that illusion. Anything that would help our intelligence toward a clearer view of the consequences of our social action is of the very greatest value.¹⁴⁶

Nostromo, published in 1904, was intended to help achieve "that clearer view of the consequences." "I feel deeply what happens

¹⁴⁴Notes on Life and Letters, p. 128.

¹⁴⁵A Personal Record, p. xxvi.

¹⁴⁶Jean-Aubry, I, 323.

in the world," he wrote to Richard Curle, "a genuine sentiment, qualified by irony."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷Richard Curle, The Last Years of Joseph Conrad (London, 1920), p. 26.

CHAPTER V

IMAGERY AT THE LEVEL OF SYMBOL

"And also you must remember that I don't start with an abstract notion; I start with definite images and as their rendering is true some little effect is produced."¹

Conrad has been credited with a mastery of tone, with creating a unity of feeling and mood by sustaining the emotional vibrations at appropriate degrees of intensity through each of his novels--an essential preoccupation for the novelist whose aim it is to make the reader see and feel. Theme and subject are caught not abstractly or as surface events, but with their emotional resonance and overtones. Upon analysis one finds, quite frequently, that the vibrations and resonance are caused by a central symbolism supplemented by interrelated clusters of images. Conrad's frank admission in 1899 that he began his novels with "definite images" might seem to have been sufficient to define this as one of the major areas of his art. However, though they by no means escaped the attention of critics engaged in general commentary, the myths, symbols, and images that

¹Jean-Aubry, I, 268. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, February 8, 1899.

comprise a sub-surface dialectic in his novels received comparatively scant attention. Paul Wiley's Measure of Man, published in 1954, was the only full-scale analysis of recurring themes and images in Conrad's fiction until the publication in 1965 of Ted E. Boyle's Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad stressed the almost inexhaustible richness and complexity of his image patterns.

Conrad's imagery derives from nature, his basic pattern being a light versus dark dualism that defines Good and Evil, civilization and barbarism, order and anarchy in an endangered microcosmic world that may be a ship, an island, or a modern city. Such water imagery as storm or flood defines the times of moral stress in Outcast of the Islands, Nigger of the "Narcissus", Typhoon, Under Western Eyes, and Victory. The fog, mist, cloud, and moonlight imagery that is especially prominent in Lord Jim coincides with passages expressing the deceived and often self-deceptive condition of the modern man who does not see clearly. Vision imagery associated with Sir Ethelred in The Secret Agent and the "goggle-eyed" General T. _____ in Under Western Eyes indicates the near-blinding effect of each man's fixed idea. Images of disease, deformity, and madness define the moral sickness of modern civilization in The Secret Agent and The Rover. Throughout all his fiction, animal imagery exposes those characters who, insensitive to human values, are motivated by instinct, while knightly imagery describes the Quixotic

isolatos, such as Jim, Gould, Lingard, and Heyst, who entertain a romantic concept of self. Conrad's most characteristic symbol, described in Chapter II, remains the alienated man standing alone--like Jim, clothed in white, standing against the dark background of the jungle--the only "light" in a menaced, darkening world:

"I don't know why he [Jim] should always have appeared to me as symbolic."²

The concrete image pregnant with thematic value was Conrad's germ of inspiration, or, as James would have said, his "virus of suggestion." As early as Almayer's Folly and Outcast of the Islands, his expertise in raising that image to the level of symbol became evident. Conrad's jungle is no more exotic background; it symbolizes one kind of knowledge and virtue--an intuitive, instinctive pattern of conduct, that "good" for the native, can be "evil" for the white man, while the river constitutes an ambiguous life symbol that relentlessly and indifferently carries both good and evil into the lives of Almayer, Lingard, and Jim. River and jungle imagery dominate "Heart of Darkness," where the river signifies the journey toward self-knowledge that every man makes during his life unless he be "disdained by destiny," and the ambiguous jungle remains that area outside law which can be "good" or "evil" depending upon the "restraint," or

²Lord Jim, p. 326.

conscience, of the man who enters it. The city images of The Secret Agent tend dialectically toward one symbolic scene--the cab ride to the poorhouse--that exposes the degree of inhumanity in modern life through Winnie and Stevie's dialog on the role of "law," through the vignette of the cab-driver and his horse, and most of all, through the appalling lack of communication between Winnie and her mother, two people who really love each other. From the outset of his career, Conrad was adept in piling up imagistic details, like the animal imagery that describes Jim's fellow officers on the Patna or the wide range of images of physical deformity in The Secret Agent, that operate as a stream of consciousness technique. The truth contained in the imagery is the real truth, contradicting the apparent truth at times, as for instance, the apparent moral soundness of Jim is contradicted by his sharing the boat with those defined so persistently in animal imagery that clearly reveals their moral insensitivity.

Frederick Karl distinguishes between minor and major symbols in Conrad. A minor symbol, he explains, has only "situational importance,"³ and in this category Karl would place those images or symbols which are the "objective correlative" of a specific psychological state. An example of this kind of image is the "veil" or "curtain" image that is so common in

³Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad, p. 15.

Conrad's fiction; though a persistent reminder of the sceptical philosophical conviction that reality is hidden from men's eyes, the image functions independently in particular situations. Hence, the raising of Natalie Haldin's veil (Under Western Eyes) indicates her readiness to understand and love Razumov; Aissa's long hair veiling her face (Outcast of the Islands) is both a pose of mourning and a sign that a barrier has arisen between her and Willems; the curtain dividing Captain Anthony's quarters from those of his wife on board the Ferndale (Chance) symbolizes the psychological barrier resulting from Flora's "mystic wound" and Captain Anthony's exaggerated sense of chivalry; and Heyst raises two significant curtains during Victory: the calico curtain leading to the "concert hall," where Heyst encounters Lena for the first time, and the curtain separating Lena's room from the main body of the bungalow on Samburan. The minor symbol is, therefore, illuminating to the specific situation, but the major symbol relates to the entire book, providing, as Karl says, a "spine" for the story. The river journey in "Heart of Darkness" is such a symbol, and the variety of explanations regarding it--Guerard's "night journey" for one.⁴ Lillian Feder's descent into Hell for another⁵--offers proof that symbolic

⁴Conrad the Novelist, p. 15.

⁵"Marlow's Descent into Hell," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IX (March, 1955), 280-92.

art admits of numerous explanations. Jim's jump from the Patna is another major symbol, reverberating through a text that is, as one critic said, "one jump after another."⁶ The silver of the mine in Nostromo is a third major symbol, touching, as we have seen in Chapter IV, every life and affecting every character whether he wills it or not. The city imagery in The Secret Agent--the shady shops, slimy streets, dark alleys--appropriately backgrounds a tale of moral darkness and imminent barbarism. Finally, the books, furniture, and portrait, symbolizing Axel Heyst's negative philosophical heritage from his bitter, sceptical father, constitute the major symbol dominating Victory.

Almost any one of Conrad's novels in that especially rich imagistic period from "Heart of Darkness (1898)" to Victory (1915) could be used to indicate the complexity of symbolic pattern and its justification in terms of the entire text. Victory seems the appropriate and challenging choice for analysis in this chapter for two reasons: first, because Victory's major symbol--negative scepticism--relates directly to the thesis of this paper; secondly, because the controversial status of Victory in the Conrad canon results, at least in part, from an imperfect understanding of the meaning and the relationship of its symbolic elements and, consequently, of its moral value.

⁶A. Grove Day, "Pattern in Lord Jim: One Jump after Another," College English, XIII (April, 1952), 26-29.

Of the five major-symbol novels named above, the least amount of explication has been devoted to Victory, perhaps because Victory is the one among those five novels which some critics would be most inclined to delete from any list of "classic" Conradian works: F. R. Leavis, Merton D. Zabel, and Muriel Bradbrook number Victory among the best of Conrad, but Albert Guerard, Douglas Hewitt, and Thomas Moser have serious doubts about the artistic merit of this later novel.

From the very first reading, it seemed to this reader that Victory was justified philosophically and artistically. Philosophically, Victory states Conrad's basic position: that in spite of the nescience that is a corollary of his alienated state, in spite of the fact that he may have followed previous illusions down dead-end streets, in spite of the fact that he gropes in a world of ambiguous and often inverted moral values, the modern isolato, against all reason perhaps, instinctively exercises an innate capacity to believe, to hope, and to love. Artistically, the narrative is rendered in a surprisingly melodramatic surface plot, revealed in its imagery and symbolism as something infinitely more significant and epic, revealed, in fact, as a parabolic confrontation of Life and Death. It matters only in terms of melodrama that Heyst's affirmative gesture is late; in terms of the cosmic drama, the important fact, the "victory," is that the gesture is made. The major symbol dominating Victory--the library and the furniture left to Heyst by

his bitter philosopher-father--represents the burden of his father's philosophical scepticism which, as the source of Heyst's faltering gestures toward life, causes the tragedy. This philosophy "furnishes" Heyst's mind with those remembered conversations and inherited convictions that, purely negative in tone, "touch the soul." The father's case for passive spectatorship, though intellectually assented to by the son, conflicts with those "decent feelings" that carry the son instinctively into the "destructive element" in defense of a "cornered" human being. The internal tension between Heyst's instinctive fidelity, trust, and love and his intellectual detachment from these commitments is reflected outward in a series of antagonistic thematic dualisms: in Lena's love versus Schomberg's hate; in Heyst's trust versus the world's calumny; in Jones' "fidelity" versus Ricardo's "infidelity"; in Mrs. Schomberg's love versus Schomberg's scorn; in Heyst's reverence for Life (Lena) versus Schomberg's and Ricardo's debasing of Life (Lena); in Lena's unquestioning faith in Heyst versus Heyst's faltering faith in her. The counterpointing of trust and mistrust, of love and hate, of faith and infidelity is translated into a series of dramatic conflicts, the deceptively melodramatic quality of which is justified by the symbolic pattern. Related to the antagonistic themes is the Redemption myth that encloses the tale, providing a symbolic frame of reference as did the legends beginning "Heart of Darkness" and Nostromo.

The story of Heyst's island life begins with his encounter of Morrison in Delli, "that highly pestilential place," where Heyst volunteers the money to release Morrison's brig from the custody of corrupt port officials. Altruistic Morrison, described as "one of us,"⁷ would never have found himself in such a spot if he had not extended unlimited credit to the native customers, who greeted the arrival of his trading brig with gongs, streamers, and flowers. "He was a true humanitarian,"⁸ a man suffering, in fact, from an excess of faith, intensely gratified by his ability to help the villagers, but sentimentally incapable of pressing for payment. Morrison's life-illusion depends on his trading brig; consequently, he feels the threat of its loss as no small matter:

"Fever!" he cried. "Give me fever. Give me plague. They are diseases. One gets over them. But I am being murdered. I am being murdered by the Portuguese. The gang here downed me at last among them. I am to have my throat cut the day after tomorrow."⁹

Tired, ruffled, unshaven, "cornered" Morrison "looked already gone to the bad, past redemption" when Heyst encounters him on the street.¹⁰ Morrison hardly can believe the "miracle" of his stumbling upon a "white man, figuratively and actually white-- for Morrison refuses to accept the racial whiteness of the

⁷Victory, p. 11

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁹Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 15.

Portuguese officials.¹¹ He confides to Heyst that he "prayed": "I prayed like a child"; he regards Heyst's arrival in this "God-forsaken spot" as providential, the answer to that prayer, and the Redemption myth takes definite shape:

"This morning on board in my cabin I went down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees! . . . A sudden impulse--I went flop on my knees; so you may judge--"¹²

With a distinct note of respect, Heyst asked:

"You are a believer, Morrison?"

and Morrison replied,

"Surely I am not an infidel."¹³

.
"Forgive my, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me; 'What if it's the Devil who has sent him?'"¹⁴

Heyst graciously disavowed any "connection with the supernatural," and, as one who "didn't toil or spin visibly, he seemed the very last person to be the agent of Providence."¹⁵ The truth was that Heyst's unattached, floating existence made possible his turning up anywhere within the "magic circle" whose diameter reached from Saigon to Manila. Helping Morrison was not unusual either: "No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst."¹⁶

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹³Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 21.

Heyst "saved" Morrison, and the two men, to prevent public embarrassment--Morrison at being duped by the Portuguese, Heyst at being cast in the role of "heavenly messenger"¹⁷--decided to veil the episode in secrecy. Eager to repay his benefactor, Morrison invited Heyst to travel with him in the rescued brig and to share his trading ventures up to the amount of the loan; Heyst, uncommitted at the time to any one or to any idea, accepted. An unusual combination, they came to the notice of Schomberg, the coarse, bearded Teutonic gossip who kept the hotel in Sourabaya. Perhaps it was because Morrison and Heyst were not his regular customers, or perhaps it was that Schomberg instinctively recognized in Heyst a natural enemy, but, whatever the cause, rumors radiated from Schomberg's hotel that Heyst had some mysterious hold on Morrison and was "sucking him dry." "And," the narrator interjects, "you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what it does not understand."¹⁸ No one really believed Schomberg, who was above all things, "a good hater," but, on the other hand, the opportunity for definitely disproving his calumny died with Morrison. On a trip back to England to investigate the possibilities of a "magnificent coal idea" in partnership with Heyst, Morrison died, the victim of the damp Dorsetshire climate. Heyst disappeared for a time, unaware that his act of instinctive fidelity, distorted to seem

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 23.

its very opposite by the calumny of Schomberg, was further impugned by Schomberg's dark suggestion that Heyst was, in some unexplained way, responsible for the death of Morrison.

Heyst as Savior is the mythic role that he enacts a second time, again instinctively, in response to those "decent feelings" experienced in his initial encounter with Lena. His decision to "save" Lena from her unhappy life with Zangiaco's Ladies' Orchestra and from the attentions of the predatory Schomberg was

the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, and lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognize it.¹⁹

Heyst figures as Savior a third time when Mr. Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro arrive on the island of Samburan. The three, set upon Heyst by Schomberg, are guided to his island by a neighboring volcano, a "pillar of smoke by day and a loom of fire at night." Weak and dazed after drifting for two days in an open boat with no water, the unholy trio accepts "life-giving water" from Heyst:

Water was life. He [Ricardo] felt now as if he could run a mile, scale a ten-foot wall, sing a song. Only a few minutes ago he was next door to a corpse, done up, unable to stand, to lift a hand; unable to groan. A drop of water had done that miracle.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰Ibid., p. 289.

When Pedro, an allegorical representation of Brute Force, tries to drink first, Ricardo beats him back viciously, calling him an "infidel, a robber of churches."²¹ Helping the deathly pale Mr. Jones to the reviving water, Ricardo exults:

"Great wonder-worker water is! And to get it right here on the spot! It was heaven, hey, sir?"²²

Talkative, cunning, Ricardo continues to abuse the battered Pedro in the idiom of faith while "sizing up" Heyst as he stands on the wharf:

"You ought to kiss my hands!"

.....
 "Yes! You ought to burn a candle before me as they do before the saints in your country. No saint has ever done so much for you as I have, you ungrateful vagabond."²³

Ricardo's conclusions about Heyst inject a new mythic element, foreshadowing Heyst as a Savior marked for sacrifice:

But the man on the wharf, were he in league with the devil himself, would pay for their sufferings, thought Ricardo with an unholy joy.²⁴

The foreshadowed expiation takes place in the holocaust scene, where Heyst sacrifices himself to the fire--"fire purifies everything," says Davidson--an atonement for his passing mistrust of Lena, signifying his "infernal mistrust of all life."²⁵ Thus, the Redemption myth used as symbol begins and ends the story of Axel Heyst, surfacing often enough throughout the narrative in the clusters of "faith" and Biblical imagery to serve as the primary antagonistic symbolic framework.

²¹Ibid., p. 284. ²²Ibid., p. 294. ²³Ibid., p. 295.

²⁴Ibid., p. 292. ²⁵Ibid., p. 498.

The Redemption myth-symbol, revealing the "decent," the "compassionate" side of Heyst's detached personality, exposes his self-division: emotionally, Heyst cannot "defend himself from compassion,"²⁶ and he spontaneously performs acts of faith in the human nature that intellectually, as the heir of his father's negative scepticism, he professes to mistrust. Early in the story, the landfall volcano that guided the "unholy trio" to Samburan is introduced as a "symbol of . . . Heyst's dynamic emotional force":²⁷

His nearest neighbor . . . was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker, and when he lounged out on his verandah with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.²⁸

The antagonistic aspects of Heyst's personality are urged on the very first page in the seemingly irrelevant comments about coal and diamonds. There is a "very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds," the narrator begins, paradoxically so, since one is black and practical, the other white and impractical, or as the narrator says, "mystical." Diamonds and "black

²⁶Ibid., p. 99.

²⁷Ted E. Boyle, Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (London: Mouton & Co., 1965), p. 219.

²⁸Victory, p. 4.

diamonds," as coal is sometimes called, both represent wealth, but the current age, the age of steam and of progress, favors the former; coal is the "supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel."²⁹ It was the recognition of that fact by Morrison that established Axel Heyst on Sanburan, the "Round Island" of the charts, as manager of the No. 1 coaling station of the Tropical Belt Coal Company shortly after the untimely death of his "partner." The whole mining project, originally conceived by Morrison, was, Heyst repeated time and again, a "stride forward," a "great stride forward for these regions."³⁰ Earnestly and persuasively, he preached the idea of progress based on his dream of tropical coal. Heyst, enchanted with the magic circle of his islands, had been known in the past as "Enchanted Heyst" and as a "Utopist"; in circles close to Mr. Tesman the banker, Heyst was later known as "Hard Facts," contradictory descriptions that reflect, as did the opposites of diamond and coal, white and black, the antagonistic duality of Heyst's personality. Clearly a symbol of the self-divided, nescient isolato, Heyst is a man susceptible to the imperatives of love, and trust, and hope, conditioned by the sceptical convictions of a nihilistic father to recoil from the commitment exacted by these imperatives.

²⁹Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰Ibid., p. 6.

Heyst remembers with affection the pale, distinguished face of the father with whom he lived alone for the last three years of his parent's life. The elder Heyst was an expatriated Swedish philosopher who died in London, "dissatisfied with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom."³¹ He had begun by coveting all the joys, "those of the great and those of the humble, those of the fools and those of the sages,"³² a state of mind that guaranteed sixty painful and weary years filled with disillusion and regret. "One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls."³³ At the end of a life spent destroying "systems, hopes, and beliefs, engaged in writing his last book, he "claimed for mankind the right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy."³⁴ During one discussion with his father, Heyst, being quite young, asked this question about life:

"Is there no guidance?"³⁵

to which the father, in a mellowed mood than usual, replied:

"You still believe in something, then?" he said in a clear voice, which had been growing feeble of late. "You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained to it, I advise you

³¹Ibid., p. 113.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 114.

³⁴Ibid., p. 115.

³⁵Ibid., p. 213.

to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult--always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself."³⁶

Axel Heyst's life should have been a "masterpiece of aloofness" for the father had provided the son with this formula before his death:

"Look on--make no sound."³⁷

The young boy missed the dead parent, because the elder Heyst had "kept him on the bank by his side." Now he realized that he was alone on the bank of that stream and "in his pride he determined not to enter"³⁸ the destructive element.

Heyst's tangible legacy from his father was a little money, many books, some furniture, and a portrait:

It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these objects familiar to his childhood and his youth and associated with the memory of an old man, were the only realities, something having an absolute existence."³⁹

Heyst shrouded the books, furniture, and portrait, locking them away in rooms in London, and then he began to travel, carrying with him that intangible inheritance, a "mistrust of life":

"I'll drift," Heyst had said to himself deliberately . . . drift without ever catching on to anything."

 "This shall be my defense against life," he said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other alternative."⁴⁰

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 214.

³⁹Ibid., p. 215.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 115.

Heyst's wanderings consumed fifteen years:

It was the essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world --invulnerable because elusive.⁴¹

At the end of fifteen years, Heyst, in "the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and long moustaches, resembled the portraits of Charles XII of adventurous memory." However, the narrator emphasizes this apparent discrepancy between the appearance and the reality: "there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man."⁴² The knightly imagery, invoking the Quixote theme as a second symbolic interpretation, marks Heyst as a romantic, a designation substantiated by the narrator and Captain Davidson as they evaluate Heyst's rescue of Lena:

Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was.⁴³

Davidson and the narrator are surprisingly accurate in their appraisal; on three occasions Heyst's "sceptical mind" has been "dominated by the fullness of his heart."⁴⁴ His detachment

⁴¹Ibid., p. 113.

⁴²Ibid., p. 10.

⁴³Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 104.

from the world is, apparently, not complete, and, in deceptively casual foreshadowing, the narrator comments: ". . . incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble."⁴⁵ The truth is that the self-divided Heyst enters from time to time upon the "broad human path of inconsistencies."⁴⁶ That he is vulnerable to illusion--an inconsistency in the heir of the elder Heyst--is apparent if one recalls that the islands cast a "spell" over him--

"I am enchanted with these islands"--
 Heyst exclaimed at billiards one night,⁴⁷ so impressing his hearers with the fervor of that exclamation that the description "Enchanted Heyst" fastened upon him. That spell was broken with the death of Morrison and, in the idiom of faith, Heyst "renounced" the illusion:

He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave them ever. Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact . . . he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 83.

After a brief disappearance, Heyst reappeared upon the scene with a new "faith"; he was interested, he told Mr. Tesman the banker in

"Facts," . . . "There's nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman."⁴⁹

Heyst acquired the name of "Hard Facts" as he bustled about, organizing for the Tropical Belt Coal Company. Samburan, or Round Island, was selected for the central station; "engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out."⁵⁰ But all of Heyst's dreams of "a great stride forward" evaporated with their uncertain financing, and the Tropical Belt Coal Company liquidated. Steaming by the island some time later, a little off his regular trading route, Captain Davidson was surprised to find that Heyst had decided to remain on Samburan: "I am keeping hold," said Heyst. "But all this is as dead as Julius Caesar," protested Davidson; "in fact," he continued, and the statement was, ironically, more accurate than he knew--"you have nothing worth holding on to, Heyst."⁵¹ Heyst knew that, too; he had "renounced" his second illusion:

"Oh, I am done with facts," says he, putting his hand to his helmet sharply with one of his short bows."⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 28.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁵²Ibid.

Heyst's manner dismisses Davidson, politely, of course, but finally; like most people, Davidson was somewhat disconcerted by that manner. Heyst's most obvious characteristic is a "finished courtesy of attitude, movement, and voice . . ."; a "delicate playfulness" of attitude, a "delicate intonation" of voice, and "consummate politeness" describe Heyst, who speaks with "an extraordinary detached grin."⁵³ His manner is the behavioral expression of his sceptical heritage, a controlled, passionless, tenuous, and "fastidious" relationship to people and events. "Look on--make no sound," his father had advised, and Heyst, in spite of what in his inverted moral heritage appear as "falls from grace," remains intellectually committed to doing just that from behind a smile that is, as he confides to Lena, the "best of masks."⁵⁴ Beguiled twice into action--once on behalf of Morrison, a second time on behalf of "progress,"

. . . his scornful temperament . . . suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like a gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; . . ."⁵⁵

When Heyst contracts with Davidson to take him from his hermitage on Samburan, it is with the understanding that, his business with Mr. Tesman concluded, he will return to his island solitude. Unaware of Schomberg's antipathy, Heyst arranges to stay at Schomberg's hotel.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 10; 17; 21; 101.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 81.

Zangiaco's Ladies' Orchestra was established at Schomberg's for some time when Heyst takes up his temporary residence. One evening he lifts the calico curtain, and enters the "concert hall"; the band is "murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy."⁵⁶ The performers are devoid of charm and grace except for one young English girl whom Heyst notices when Mrs. Zangiaco pinches her to encourage her speedier fraternization with the "guests." Heyst is not even thinking of Morrison as he goes to Lena's rescue, but it is the "same sort of impulse." He has "the sensation of a new experience"; he positively forgets where he is."⁵⁷ Symbolically,

They looked at each other across a little round table with a surprised, open gaze, self-consciousness growing on them so slowly that it was a long time before they averted their eyes; . . .

.
But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter unsupportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.⁵⁸

She is, Heyst decides, "clearly unaware of her voice,"⁵⁹ which moves him so strangely.

On successive nights Heyst sits with Lena during "intervals," while she describes her wretched background and depressing existence, menaced by Mrs. Zangiaco and stalked by the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 88.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 92-93.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 93.

lustful Schomberg. The quantities of "black men" all about frighten her: "they are too many for me," she repeats, sometimes recklessly, but more often shaking her head in ominous dejection. Heyst explores his "new sensation" as he listens:

Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of convention self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled; a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman.⁶⁰

Lena's plea for rescue--"in the manner of supplicants everywhere"--elicits characteristically contradictory responses from the self-divided man:

Heyst had removed his arms from her suddenly and had recoiled a little . . .

.
He felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

.
[But] his compassion was as genuine as his shrinking had been, and in his judgment more honorable.⁶¹

Davidson, stopping at Schomberg's hotel for Heyst's return trip, is incredulous at the tale of Heyst running off with the orchestra girl, a tale colored by the frustrated passion of the hotel-keeper:

Schomberg's vanity clung to the belief in some atrocious, extraordinary means of seduction employed by Heyst. "Look at how he bewitched that poor Morrison," he murmured.⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 102-103.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 106.

⁶²Ibid., p. 201.

Steaming by Samburan, Davidson responds to Heyst's signal and docks to become the auditor of Heyst's oblique explanation. Heyst seems to have had second thoughts from the sceptical tone of the following remarks:

"I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not, but now I have done with observation, too."⁶³

To the placid Davidson--who thinks to himself, "He's gone mad," --Heyst echoes his father's conviction that

"The world is a bad dog.⁶⁴ It will bite you if you give it a chance; . . ."

and adds: "but I think that here we can safely defy the fates." Heyst is not "done with it!"; nor can he "defy the fates"; the ensuing three months on Samburan dispel both illusions.

The first part of Victory graphically portrays the subtle complexity of Heyst's fine sceptical "consciousness" in the Jamesian sense, exploring his paralyzing self-division as the result of inherited philosophical convictions which "disarm" him for his encounter with the realities of existence; the second part introduces the Fates, the three envoys of the outer world, who, guided by Schomberg's hate and their own greed, intrude

⁶³Ibid., p. 66.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 70.

upon the third fragile illusion entertained by Heyst in his Edenic existence with Lena, and precipitate the "test" of this disarmed man.

The principal member among the three self-proclaimed "tourists" who descend upon Mr. Schomberg's hotel is Mr. Jones, a handsome, emaciated gentleman-at-large, of "cavernous, mesmerizing glance,"⁶⁵ framed by "devilish eyebrows," who always seems to be exhausted. He has a "used-up, weary, depraved distinction," "sunken" eyes, and a hollow and mournful voice as "though he were speaking from the bottom of a well."⁶⁶ In action Mr. Jones looks like "a starved spectre";⁶⁷ in repose, remarkably like a "corpse." This "tourist" is vaguely threatening in his manner, although it is not a "frank physical fear he inspires . . . but a superstitious shrinking awe" as though he were a "daylight ghost."⁶⁸ A gambler, Mr. Jones is the suave descendant of the most reckless gambler of all, and his sepulchral presence, defined in diabolic and funereal imagery, evokes the presence of the arch-fiend. Three weeks after his arrival at Schomberg's hotel, Mr. Jones' spectral presence dominates the scene, and his illicit gambling activities in the "concert-hall" constitute a pressing danger to the superficial respectability of Schomberg.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 127; 137.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 146; 139.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 150.

Martin Ricardo is Mr. Jones' "secretary," cat-like in his muscular grace, feline, too, in the flickering green of his gleaming eyes. Ricardo's voice is harsh, and his pock-marked face is usually adorned with "a savage grin."⁶⁹ Acutely, Schomberg perceives that, however disparate in external appearance, Mr. Jones and Ricardo are "identical souls in different disguises."⁷⁰ Ricardo confirms this intuition when, discussing his enthusiasm for gambling, he exults: "I would play them for their souls."⁷¹ Unlike Mr. Jones, Ricardo goes about armed: "I have a knife up the leg of my trousers,"⁷² he confides to Schomberg, a knife that belonged to a man he killed. Violence is the common denominator of this ferocious, sensual being who has "the morals of a cat"; he destroys, and he revels in it. Believers rest on the seventh day, but "on the seventh day we had to kill a man," this infidel boasts to Schomberg. Conversation with Ricardo makes Schomberg faintly sick; he feels the gleaming eyes watching him "like a cat watching the preparations of a saucer of milk,"⁷³--like a cannibal.

Pedro, the third Fate, is described as Mr. Jones' "servant." An alligator-hunter from Columbia, Pedro is a "simple, straight-forward brute, if a murderous one."⁷⁴ A specimen of

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 127.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 161.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 183.

⁷²Ibid., p. 176.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 170; 181.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 143.

exceptionally strong "hair-smothered humanity," Pedro "displays a pair of remarkably long arms, terminating in thick, brown hairy paws of simian aspect." Low-browed, grunting, mindless, Pedro seems more like a "performing bear" than a human.⁷⁵ His brute strength is at the disposal of the cunning and rapacious Ricardo, who directs Pedro's every move.

These three, so gratefully received as paying guests upon their arrival, have become a serious problem for Schomberg. "Why do you want to stick here?" Schomberg queries Ricardo; "it can't pay you people to fool around like this."⁷⁶ The gambling profits are small, and if the police discover their nightly game, deportation is certain. Ricardo agrees, but where is the inducement to do otherwise? What promise of "sport" can he use to "lever" Mr. Jones out with? Schomberg reflects upon the characters of these menacing, arrogant gamblers, who are thieves and murderers as well: "their fitness for purposes of vengeance was appallingly complete."⁷⁷ They could be the means of avenging himself upon Heyst for the loss of Lena:

He had only to let loose his natural gift for talking scandalously about his fellow creatures. And in this case his great practice in it was assisted by hate, which, like love, has an eloquence of its own. With the utmost ease he portrayed for Ricardo, now seriously attentive, a Heyst fattened by years of private and public rapines, the murderer of Morrison, the swindler

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 128.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 189.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 191.

of many shareholders, a wonderful mixture of craft and impudence, of deep purpose and simple wiles, of mystery and futility.⁷⁸

"He's in no way a fighting man, I believe," offers Schomberg; "it will be like going to pick up a nugget of a thousand pounds, or two or three times as much, for all I know."⁷⁹ Ricardo is more than interested, but Lena presents an obstacle: Mr. Jones has an intense, morbid loathing of all women. His "follower" weighs that reaction against the probable gain and decides:

"I've never actually lied to him," he said "and I ain't going to now. I shall just say nothing about the girl. He will have to get over the shock the best he can. Hang it all! Too much humouring won't do here."⁸⁰

Schomberg suggests these arrangements: he will provide the trio with his own boat, stock it with provisions for the three-day journey, and chart their course. Charting alone won't be enough, objects Ricardo: "Can't you say what sort of landfall a fellow can expect?" Schomberg enjoys his little joke as he answers:

"What do you think of a pillar of smoke by day and a loom of fire at night? There's a volcano in full blast near that island--enough to guide almost a blind man. What more do you want? An active volcano to steer by."⁸¹

The little world of Samburan, like the ship-worlds of the Nan-Shan and the Narcissus, stands in the path of a gathering storm.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 191-92.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 192; 200.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 204.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 207; 208.

For three months Samburan has been an Eden--a third mythic reference--for Lena and Heyst; now the world is come to pay them a visit.

"Love is rare," Conrad mused in his memoirs, "the love of man, of things, of ideas, the love of perfected skill."⁸² Heyst's impulsive acts of faith, committing him to Morrison, to the idea of "progress," and to Lena are expressions of the capacity for love, for fidelity to the human bond, that erupts, volcano-like, in spite of his intellectual assent to the sceptical precepts of his father. Heyst "renounced" the first and second fidelities as acts of "apostasy," and, talking to Davidson after his rescue of Lena--"I have done with it!"--it seems that Heyst may be on the verge of a third renunciation.

It was naturally difficult for Heyst to keep his mind from dwelling on the nature and consequences of this, his latest departure from the part of an unconcerned spectator Like the rest of us who act, all he could say to himself, with a somewhat affected grimness, was:

"We shall see!"⁸³

The third "act" of Victory--so dramatically conceived and scenically presented a novel seems to fall into "acts"--centers on the big room of the bungalow on Samburan, the refuge to which Heyst has spirited Lena on board one of Mr. Tesman's steamers. Three walls of the room are lined half-way up with

⁸²Mirror of the Sea, p. 18.

⁸³Victory, pp. 227-28.

the elder Heyst's library, shipped from London in the enthusiasm of that "great stride forward." The fourth wall is bare except for a gilt-framed picture of Heyst's father "lonely in the middle of the wall."⁸⁴ The burden of Heyst's sceptical heritage is substantially and palpably there, counterpointing Lena's influence, but

. . . in the intimacy of their life her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force--or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender.⁸⁵

Lena asks about the "mystery of his existence" on Samburan, and Heyst points to the picture of his father:

"Primarily the man with the quill pen in his hand in that picture you so often look at is responsible for my existence. He is also responsible for what my existence is, or rather has been. I don't know much of history. I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, himself, by the way. Later he discovered--how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money."⁸⁶

Talking to himself as earnestly as he is explaining to Lena, Heyst continues:

". . . my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced--even by a negation. He was very ruthless, and yet he was not without pity. He dominated

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 228.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 236.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 240.

me without difficulty. A heartless man could not have done so He could be indignant, but he was too great for flouts and jeers. What he said was not meant for the crowd; it could not be, and I was flattered to find myself among the elect. They read his books, but I heard his living word. It was irresistible There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything."⁸⁷

Reverting to the story of his life during a walk in the forest one day, Heyst tells Lena about Morrison, and about how ironic it seemed at the time that

". . . I should be there to step into the situation of Providence. I, a man of universal scorn and unbelief"88

When Lena objects to that description, Heyst admits:

"And there is even less in me than I make out, because the very scorn is falling away from me year after year."⁸⁹

If that were not true, reasons Heyst, he would not form these "ties":

"One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? . . . I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered his soul."⁹⁰

Heyst pronounces his father's sceptical "faith" in the presence of a silent Lena, unaware, lacking in self-knowledge as he is, of that inverted faith's incompatibility with "that human being so near and still so strange," who "gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life."⁹¹

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 241.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 244.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 245.

⁹¹Ibid.

Morrison, Heyst continues, was responsible for Heyst's involvement in the ill-fated coal venture:

" . . . he got hold of this coal idea--or rather, the idea got hold of him . . . There was no dislodging it, you know! It was going to make his fortune, my fortune, everybody's fortune. In past years, in moments of doubt that will come to a man determined to remain free from absurdities of existence. I often asked myself, with a momentary dread, in what way life would try to get hold of me? And this was the way! He got it into his head that he could do nothing without me. And was I now, he asked me, to spurn and ruin him? Well, one morning--I wonder if he had gone down on his knees to pray that night!--one morning I gave in."⁹²

Lena tells Heyst of Schomberg's insinuations that Heyst had something to do with Morrison's death. Surprised, Heyst is less shocked at the calumny than at the thought that Lena might have believed it:

His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself--that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind.⁹³

Returning from their walk, Lena and Heyst pass a clearing at the high point of the promontory from which they have an unobstructed view of the "lonely, empty" sea that is, ironically, at that very moment, bearing toward Samburan the three conjurers of their personal "deluge."⁹⁴ Symbolically, Lena shields her eyes from the sight of the "fiery" sea, the "abomination of desolation": it "makes my head swim," she says, and "my heart sink, too."⁹⁵

⁹²Ibid., pp. 247-248.

⁹³Ibid., p. 264.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 234.

⁹⁵Ibid.

The flaming abyss of emptiness, the liquid, undulating glare, the tragic brutality of the light made her long for the friendly night⁹⁶

Arriving at the bungalow, Lena goes to her room divided by a curtain from the big room, where Heyst remains alone:

The girl, seeing him take up a book, had retreated to her chamber. Heyst sat down under his father's portrait; . . . The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author's eye, with a vivid consciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head; a wonderful presence in his heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled and at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of the profile.

And Heyst, the son read:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love--the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams.⁹⁷

His father spoke again in that ghostly voice; the last words in that last book were:

Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity. To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably tumbled bed of their servitude. Man alone can give one the disgust of pity; yet I find it easier to believe in the misfortune of man-kind than in its wickedness.⁹⁸

Lena returns to the room at that moment, and, when Heyst notices her "eying the book," he returns it to the bookcase. She seems "languid," "defenceless," her grey eyes "as unreadable as ever" to him. "All the charm of physical intimacy is revealed in her voice" as she suddenly admonishes him:

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 265.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 267-68.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 270.

"You should try to love me! . . . But sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for my self, as people do love each other when it is to be forever.

Do try!"⁹⁹

Heyst does not know what to say:

All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat.¹⁰⁰

He manages the "well-known Heyst smile of playful courtesy":

"I don't even understand what I have done or left undone to distress you like this."

.
"No! I don't see clearly what you mean. Is your mind turned toward the future?"¹⁰¹

Heyst is "ashamed" to let such a word pass his lips, but

. . . all his cherished negations were falling off him one by one.¹⁰²

Comforting Lena, who is more distressed by his "playful courtesy" than he realizes, Heyst promises that "Nothing can break in on us here . . .," but Lena's surprised "He's here!" announces the servant Wang, bearing news of the three white men arriving in an open boat.

The three men, revived by the life-giving water administered by Heyst, are installed in one of the empty bungalows, and Heyst returns to Lena, wondering what manner of people would keep such a servant as Pedro. A new emotion arrests him:

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 217-18.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁰²Ibid.

The vague apprehension of a distant future, in which he saw Lena unavoidably separated from him by profound and subtle differences; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. He no longer belonged to himself. There was a call far more imperious and august.¹⁰³

The intrusion stirs similar thoughts in Lena:

She had thought of him, but not in connection with the strangers. She had admired him from the first; she had been attracted by his warm voice, his gentle eye, but she had felt him too wonderfully difficult to know. He had given to life a savour, a movement, a promise mingled with menaces, which she had not suspected were to be found in it--or, at any rate, not by a girl wedded to misery as she was. She said to herself that she must not be irritated because he seemed too self-contained, and as if shut up in a world of his own.¹⁰⁴

Standing close to Lena's chair, the light falls across Heyst's martial face "that was like a disguise of his disarmed soul."¹⁰⁵

He becomes aware that this unexpected visit bodes nothing pleasant, because

. . . for a whole minute, perhaps, with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person, he had lost the sense of her existence, for the first time since he had brought her over to share this invincible, this undefiled peace.¹⁰⁶

A metamorphosis is under way in the character of Heyst:

Absent-mindedly, he pulled a book out of the top shelf, and sat down with it; but even after he had opened it on his knee, and had been staring at the pages for a time, he had not the slightest idea of what it was about.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 301-02.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 302-03.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 380.

Formerly described as "not a fighting man," now he turns an uncovered head "set on a fighter's muscular neck."¹⁰⁸ Waking one night, Heyst thinks almost immediately about arming himself with a revolver usually kept in a desk drawer:

It was a heavy weapon which he had owned for many years and had never used in his life The real dangers of life, for him, were not those which could be repelled by swords, or bullets.¹⁰⁹

Finding the revolver missing, Heyst concludes correctly that the impassive Wang, perhaps sensing the danger represented by the visitors, must have taken it. Unarmed,

. . . he felt contemptuously irritated with the situation. The outer world had broken in on him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself¹¹⁰

While Heyst ponders this new development, Schomberg's theory of hidden plunder exercises the imagination of the unwelcome visitors. Mr. Jones "lay stretched out on his side with his back to the light. In that position the shadows gathered in the cavities of his eyes made them look perfectly empty."¹¹¹ Ricardo expresses the opinion that Heyst is an easy target:

"I don't know that he is so tame," was Mr. Jones's remark, in a sepulchral undertone.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 313.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 317-18.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 327-28.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 329.

A "weariness with the monotony of life" is reflected in his voice as Mr. Jones continues

"As far as I can make out the story that German hotel-keeper told you, it seems to show a certain amount of character; and independence from common feelings which is not usual. It's very remarkable, if true."¹¹³

The self-possession of Heyst, the unexpected presence of Wang, and the scores of possible hiding places for the "plunder" in this island solitude present unforeseen problems. Ricardo suggests that Mr. Jones gain them time by playing ill--"With your looks, sir, it will be easy enough"--while he scouts the island.

Mr. Jones received the suggestion without the slightest stir, even in the deep sockets of his eyes, where a steady, faint gleam was the only thing telling of life and attention in his attenuated body.¹¹⁴

Confining Mr. Jones to the bungalow on the pretence of illness, Ricardo congratulates himself, will have the added advantage of postponing his discovery of Lena. On the other hand, Ricardo, the embodiment of carnality, is eager for his encounter with the girl, and his eagerness increases as the days go by and Lena stays out of sight. "I must make a move," he decides, and he stealthily invades Heyst's bungalow.

Lena is alone when Ricardo surprises her, and, surrendering to his savage psychology, springs upon her. Her completely silent but surprisingly capable defence of herself wins Ricardo's admiration:

¹¹³Ibid., p. 330.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 334.

"Jee-miny! You are a wonder," he murmured earnestly We shall be friends yet. I don't give you up. Don't think it. Friends as friends can be!" he whispered confidently.

"Jee-miny! You aren't a tame one. Neither am I. You will find that out before long."¹¹⁵

Ricardo confides trustingly in Lena:

"The swag--plunder--pieces. It's a game of grab. We must have it; but it isn't easy, and so you will have to lend a hand. Come! Is it kept in the house?"¹¹⁶

Lena allows Ricardo to think that she will cast her lot with the trio:

Duplicity--the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not, she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own.¹¹⁷

Heyst is as anxious for Lena's safety as she is for his:

"I am so anxious about you that I can't keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only three months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. But now I have you! You stole into my life and--"¹¹⁸

Within three months, Heyst became accustomed to the "rare timbre" of her voice, which gave a special value to everything she said. He learned to respond to the "warm and wonderful

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 361-62.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 365.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 366.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 397-98.

voice, which in itself comforted and fascinated one's heart, which made her lovable."¹¹⁹ Her unreadable eyes, those "veiled grey eyes produced--whether on his heart or on his nerves, whether sensuous or spiritual, tender or irritating,"¹²⁰ a profound effect, the exact nature of which he was unable to describe. Poised and statuesque, Lena came to possess for him in those months the "charm of art tense with life"; she seemed a figure reduced in perfect proportion from "an heroic size."¹²¹ His growing awareness of Lena is coupled with a growth of self-knowledge; Heyst knows now that he doesn't "react with sufficient distinctness"; "he wonders if he could shoot a man even if he had the revolver"; he discovers that he has "refined everything away . . . anger, indignation, scorn itself," but, he confesses to Lena, he dissembled during his meeting with Mr. Jones, and dissembling is something new for the sceptical Heyst: "Diplomacy doesn't go well with consistent contempt."¹²² Heyst has no doubt about their danger, nor about the nature of the "visitation";

"Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you--evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back."¹²³

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 256.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 237.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 310.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 401; 403; 399.

¹²³Ibid., p. 403.

Heyst's turning toward Lena and Life is threatened by the revelation of his unlikely spiritual kinship with the death-like Mr. Jones in a scene reminiscent of Tuan Jim's encounter with Gentleman Brown. "There is . . . a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds," the narrator began in Chapter One, paradoxically so, it would seem, since one is black, and one is white. "Black" Mr. Jones and "White" Axel Heyst are both wanderers, both gentlemen, and both are referred to during the story by the same epithet, an "agent of Providence." Heyst considers the world a "bad dog"; Jones refers to the world as a "wild jungle without law." Heyst recounts to Lena that he was "amused" by his relationship with Morrison; Jones described his evil associations with people as "sport." Like Gentleman Brown, Jones is the one who recognizes their spiritual kinship in a negative scepticism, differing only in degree, and he remarks cryptically to Heyst that his [Jones'] presence on Samburan is no more morally reprehensible than Heyst's, that, in fact, both of them pursue the same ends "only I pursue them with more openness than you--with more simplicity."¹²⁴ That recognition makes the "game" interesting to Mr. Jones for the first time:

"We must [pull it off]," pronounced Mr. Jones. This thing, Martin, is not like our other tries. I have a peculiar feeling about this, It's a different thing. It's a sort of test."¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 472.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.410.

"I mean to have some sport out of him.

.....
I've been hounded out of my sphere by people very much like that fellow. How enraged and humiliated he will be! I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play."¹²⁶

Heyst is aware that some "test" is imminent, and that he must face that test unarmed. He has no weapon, not even a sharp kitchen knife with which to defend them. Physically disarmed, Heyst's self-knowledge encompasses the realization that he has been morally disarmed all his life. "I have managed to refine everything away," he repeats.

"I have said to the earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow.' And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities
Lena, give me your hand."¹²⁷

Lena wonders if "this trouble, this danger, this evil" is not a sort of punishment for their life together. "A sort of retribution from an angry Heaven?" questions Heyst in wonder. "On us? What on earth for?" Then, seeing that Lena is seriously troubled, he finds himself "profoundly touched so that he cannot speak for a moment. To conceal his trouble, he assumes his best Heystian manner":

"What? Are our visitors then messengers of morality, avengers of righteousness, agents of Providence? That's certainly an original view. How flattered they would be if they could hear you."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 412. ¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 427-28. ¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 433.

The "ill-omened chaos of the sky . . . with great masses of cloud piled up and bathed in a mist of blood" claims their attention; a thunderstorm is brewing, but, Heyst observes erroneously, "it won't touch us, probably."

The storm coincides with the moral test in Victory as it so often does in Conrad's fiction. The final action begins in the bungalow where, at a table set for three, Lena and Heyst talk before the arrival of Martin Ricardo:

"I wonder, Lena," Heyst said, with a return of his urbane playfulness, "whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world."¹²⁹

Lena is seated directly under the portrait of his father, which, symbolically, seems to be "ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling." "I?" Heyst counters, in answer to her question,

"I date later--much later. I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour--or is it the hour before last."¹³⁰

The arrival of Ricardo brings Mr. Jones into the conversation.

The "invalid" would be glad of a visit from Heyst, Ricardo urges:

"He ain't at all well; and he can't make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you."¹³¹

Heyst has the impression of an almost imperceptible affirmative movement of Lena's head:

He had decided to go. Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale.¹³²

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 440.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 448.

¹³²Ibid.

Before leaving to confront Mr. Jones, Heyst withdraws with Lena to her darkened room, where he advises her temporary flight to the woods in concealingly dark clothing. Lighted candle signals will indicate the time for safe return, or, in the event of his death and the absence of that signal, Lena is instructed to retreat to the safety of the native village. Lena seems to understand and accept the instructions, but, on turning to rejoin Ricardo, Heyst lifts the curtain, allowing a shaft of light to penetrate the room, and he plainly sees Lena

. . . all black, down on her knees, with her head and arms flung on the foot of the bed--all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner. What was this? A suspicion that there were everywhere more things than he could understand crossed Heyst's mind. Her arm, detached from the bed, motioned him away. He obeyed, and went out, full of disquiet."¹³³

Heyst and Ricardo leave together to meet Mr. Jones at his bungalow. The menacing conversational assaults of Mr. Jones have hardly begun when Ricardo slips away, unnoticed by Heyst. "I am a person to be reckoned with," Jones warns: "I am a sort of fate--the retribution that waits its time." No amount of logic can convince Mr. Jones that Schomberg's calumny about hidden plunder, relayed by way of Martin Ricardo, is the diabolical invention of a vengeful man:

"What do you imagine? If the story of my riches were ever so true, do you think Schomberg would have imparted it to you from sheer altruism? Is that the way of the world, Mr. Jones?"¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid., p. 458.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 472.

Jones' trust in Martin--"He's simple--and faithful--and wonderfully acute"--inclines him to regard this line of defence as "artfulness" until Heyst inadvertently mentions Lena:

"If it had not been for that girl whom he persecuted with his insane and odious passion, and who threw herself on my protection, he would never have--but you know well enough."¹³⁵

Mr. Jones explodes: "I don't know!" and his shock, incredulity, and something like disgust is too spontaneous a response to be feigned:

"No, I didn't!" Mr. Jones shouted, "but Martin did!" he added in a faint whisper, which Heyst's ears just caught and no more

.....
 "He knew. He knew before!" Mr. Jones mourned in a hollow voice. "He knew of her from the first."¹³⁶

Mr. Jones' reaction is that of a man who has lost his illusion--his reign over the "faithful" Ricardo--and he seems to be standing on the edge of an abyss. Heyst meditates dispassionately on the scene:

"If I want to kill him, this is my time," . . . but he did not move.¹³⁷

Mr. Jones' fury mounts as he dwells on the failure of Ricardo's "fidelity":

A woman had intervened! A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly The very object of the expedition was lost from view in his sudden and overwhelming sense of utter insecurity. And this made Mr. Jones feel very savage; but not against the man with the moustaches.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 473.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 474.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 475.

Suddenly, Mr. Jones' mood changes:

"What do you say, unarmed man? Shall we go and see what is detaining my trusted Martin so long?"¹³⁹

Heyst moves out into the oppressive night air, and the "spectre" follows, wearing "a horrible cadavernous smile of inscrutable mockery" as, symbolically "touching elbows with Heyst," he leads them toward the large bungalow. The situation presents an ideal opportunity for resistance:

At that moment, by simply shouldering Mr. Jones, he could have thrown him down and put himself by a couple of leaps beyond the certain aim of the revolver; but he did not think of that. His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of the grave. Mr. Jones took charge of the direction.¹⁴⁰

The image of Lena, cowering in the jungle, fills Heyst's mind with its "almost holy" appeal. Then, in a flicker of lightning coincident with their appearance in the clearing surrounding Heyst's bungalow:

. . . he saw the girl--the woman he had longed to see once more--as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast. . . . It was no mocking vision. She was not in the forest--but there! She sat there in the chair, seemingly without strength, yet without fear, tenderly stooping.¹⁴¹

The pressure of Mr. Jones' revolver moves Heyst toward the steps, but the vision of Lena there fills him with such apprehension that he loses the feeling of the ground under his feet:

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 477.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 479.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 480.

Doubt entered into him--a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live--or perhaps was no longer living.¹⁴²

The eight lighted candles surround the enthroned, idol-like Lena with an intolerable brilliance which hurts his eyes;

It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all-forgetful rapture of his contemplation.¹⁴³

The rolls of thunder swell and subside; the bungalow, the forest, and the open ground around tremble incessantly as

A great shame descended upon Heyst--the shame of guilt, absurd and maddening. Mr. Jones drew him still farther back into the darkness of the verandah.¹⁴⁴

As that great shame, that new sense of "apostasy," descends upon Heyst, he, in effect, "renounces" his third illusion without considering that the appearance of the situation might belie the facts. The truth is that Lena never left the bungalow for the safety of the woods out of concern for his safety. She came out after Heyst's departure with Ricardo and seated herself under the portrait of Heyst's father to await the coming of Ricardo, "the man of violence and death." Her vague purpose was to "capture" death--"death embodied in the knife ready to strike

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 481.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

into Heyst's heart." Earlier in the evening, Lena agreed thoughtfully with Heyst:

"Yes, a knife--it's a knife that you would want, wouldn't you, in case, in case--"¹⁴⁵

All that Lena can think of is how to get hold of Ricardo's knife, "the mark and sign of stalking death," and, knowing his weakness, she waits for him in the bungalow. When Ricardo arrives, she has to listen "to the man's impassioned transports of terrible eulogy." A "smile of imbecile worship bathed his face as he exhibited the ready obedience of a conquered man who can bide his time." He "babbled insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation," and Lena listened for the "unexpected word that might give her some sort of opening to get that dagger, that awful knife--to disarm murder itself" ¹⁴⁶ As Mr. Jones and Heyst start toward the bungalow, Ricardo gloats over severing their respective "partnerships" with Jones and Heyst, tapping his leg ominously. As the two approach the steps, Ricardo utters the "unexpected word" for which Lena waits:

"Say! You, who are up to fighting a man with your bare hands, could you--eh?--could you manage to stick one with a thing like that knife of mine?"¹⁴⁷

Lena opens her eyes, giving Ricardo a "wild smile,"--the "best of masks":

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 362.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 486; 487.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 489.

"How can I tell?" she whispered enchantingly. "Will you let me have a look at it?"¹⁴⁸

Ricardo unsheathes the "short, broad, cruel, double-edged blade with a bone handle," and offers it to Lena:

The very sting of death was in her hands; the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession--and the viper's head all but lying under her heel.¹⁴⁹

Exulting in her success--"She had done it!" Lena realizes that, if it came to a struggle, she could not use the weapon; she would "have to drop the dagger and fight with her hands."¹⁵⁰

Ricardo clasps her ankle, kissing Lena's foot and "gasping words that were more like sobs, making little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress." Suddenly, Ricardo feels himself pushed back by that foot with such violence that he recoils instantly into a kneeling position. Simultaneously, he sees Heyst towering in the doorway, and hears the sharp report of a gun. Realizing that he has been grazed by the bullet, Ricardo, obeying "the instinct of self-preservation," flees into the forest:

". . . she knows how to take care of herself," he muttered.

She had his knife.¹⁵¹

Mr. Jones silently disappearing too, Heyst is left alone, facing Lena with a "black, horror-struck" look of curiosity at finding her with the sensual Ricardo. The "triumphant"

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 489.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 490.

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 491; 492.

expression on her face and the accent of "wild joy" in her voice shock him; he speaks in his polite, Heystian manner:

"No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man. I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm!"¹⁵²

Her "enchanting voice" pains him as she answers:

"You mustn't make fun of me now. I know no shame. I was thanking God with all my sinful heart for having been able to do it--for giving you to me in that way--oh, my beloved--all my own at last!"¹⁵³

Her "faltering" tone halts his departure, and Heyst returns to her side to "read some awful intelligence in her eyes": the bullet that grazed Ricardo fatally wounded Lena.

Heyst is standing idly by the bedside of the dying Lena-- "There did not seem anything more for him to do"--when Davidson suddenly and unexpectedly appears beside him, holding Ricardo's dagger.

"Give it to me," Lena says. "It's mine."

Holding the "Symbol of her victory" in her feeble hands, Lena offers the weapon to Heyst:

"For you," she gasped, turning her eyes to Heyst.
 "Kill nobody." . . .

 "Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?"¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 495.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 498.

But Heyst's "fastidious" soul, nurtured by his father in a "faithless" creed, in an "infernal mistrust of life," paralyzes him still; he cannot utter the word of love; "he dared not touch her and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms around his neck."¹⁵⁵ Convinced of the reality of her triumph over death, Lena whispers, dying:

"Who else could have done this for you?"

.
 "No one in the world," he answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair.¹⁵⁶

"Fire purifies everything," Davidson philosophized on the "mystery of Samburan" to the touring high official called in to investigate the deaths of five white people on the Round Island of the charts. Davidson was in a position to offer some explanation because Mrs. Schomberg, desperately protecting her infatuated Wilhelm, alerted the discreet Davidson to her husband's scheme. The humane Davidson realized he was justified in acting on her information when, entering Diamond Bay, he encountered the body of Pedro in a drifting boat: Wang had made use of Heyst's gun to eliminate a possible danger to the native village. Arriving at Heyst's side as Lena lay dying, Davidson tried to console Heyst, confiding

"I won't tell you what a time I had with him afterward. He talked to me Practically the last words he said to me, as we came out on the verandah, were: 'Ah,

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 498.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 499.

Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!"¹⁵⁷

Standing together on the verandah, Davidson related, he and Heyst witnessed the vengeful retribution Mr. Jones exacted for "infidelity," shooting Ricardo on sight as both emerged from the bushes:

"This time he has not missed him," Heyst said to me bitterly, and went back into the house.¹⁵⁸

No one could say, Davidson explained to the official, when Mr. Jones' body was found floating in the bay, whether his drowning was a suicide or accidental, but no doubt attached to the death of Heyst. Leaving the "unarmed man" to his grief in the bungalow with Lena's body, Davidson was spending the night on board his boat, when, shortly after dawn, his crewmen awakened him with shouts of a fire ashore. He arrived at the clearing to see the main bungalow blazing and the flames leaping to ignite the smaller structures even as he watched helplessly:

"He is--ashes, your Excellency," said Davidson, wheeling a little; "he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body--and fire purifies everything.

.
And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there

Nothing."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 502.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 503.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 503; 505.

Transposing experience into spiritual terms in art is "a perfectly legitimate thing to do, as long as one preserves the exact truth enshrined therein," Conrad wrote to a friend in 1917.¹⁶⁰ The melodramatic quality of the experience in Victory may trouble some critics, but the fact remains that Conrad successfully transposed that melodrama into spiritual terms of universal applicability that, "preserving the truth enshrined therein," amounts to the most philosophical statement Conrad made in any of his novels. The theme is not new; the "sadness of the sceptical mind" and the "sorrow in being weary" that burdened Decoud and that, more than the four weighty ingots of silver, bore him down to his death, is the special concern of Victory. Axel Heyst's negative scepticism, of a more intellectual cast than Decoud's, is the corresponding illusion that identifies him as the counterpart of Conrad's romantic illusionist-isolato, a symbol of the modern man in his alienation, in his self-division, and in his lack of self-knowledge.

Axel Heyst is a nineteenth-century modern man of Schopenhauerian convictions, the legacy of a bitter father who, interestingly enough, retreated to them from a wholehearted belief in fine words and noble ideals that proved falsely based. Conrad had long emphasized in his fiction the desirability of a drop of "Cervonian" scepticism for modern minds so eager to believe, in

¹⁶⁰Jean-Aubry, II, 183. Letter to Sidney Colvin.

a faithless age, in something; in the elder Heyst, he portrayed a man above the average who, betrayed by extravagant claims in his first spiritual commitment, renounced all commitments and became a spiritual bankrupt. That, as Conrad saw it, was the danger. The father's inverted creed--the major symbol of the novel--prohibiting love, and trust, and hope in favor of passive spectatorship, conditioned Heyst to a "fine detachment" from the realities of life. This negative philosophy vibrates throughout the pages of Victory, materially present in the books, furniture, and portrait of the elder Heyst; explicitly stated as the philosophical convictions of the father and the son; rendered in the polite speech, reserved behavior, "fastidious" reactions, and consummate courtesy that characterized Heyst; and reflected in the actions of characters seemingly unlike Heyst--characters like Jones, Ricardo, and Schomberg--whose spiritual vacuum in the areas of trust, hope, and faith constitutes the extreme expression of his negative philosophy.

Men of any creed are invulnerable if, like the Professor in The Secret Agent, they are extremists, but such cases are rare. Heyst, incapable of the complete detachment dictated by his convictions, was "betrayed" to commitments by sound moral feelings, whose imperatives led to actions--and illusions--that could be sustained only by a man of unfaltering faith, unquestioning love, and unwavering hope. The tragedy occurs because Heyst was not such a man; character is Fate in Victory, the

"retribution that waits its time." Heyst is "a man of the last hour," who has "lost the habit of asserting himself," Conrad explained in the Author's Note:

"I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and for the matter of that, even in love."¹⁶¹

At the most critical moment of his existence, he stands paralyzed by the bedside of Lena, unable to utter the word of love.

Lena symbolizes Life and the demands that life makes upon one to love, and trust, and hope. Heyst was right when he wondered if she were "something as old as the world." She is. Lena's enchanting and seductive voice is the voice of humanity, the "oldest voice in the world that never ceases to speak," and her silence, Conrad wrote to a friend, "seemed to me truth itself."¹⁶² Lena, reflecting another facet of the Redemption myth, establishes the antagonistic affirmation that opposes Heyst's negative scepticism; her silence, her voice, the firmness of her hand, the "profound" effect of her veiled grey eyes, her very stature, cut down in perfect proportion from "heroic size," further defines Heyst's scepticism by portraying what it is not. Accidentally but fittingly, Jones, who stands for the

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. x.

¹⁶² Jean-Aubry, II, p. 184. Letter to Christopher Sandeman, March 14, 1917.

ultimate negation, wounds Lena; they are, after all, natural enemies. The death of Mr. Jones, required symbolically as proof of Lena's victory over negation, seemed to this reader to indicate the lack of any ironic intent in the title. Lena does succeed in providing Heyst with a "weapon" for life; he acquires self-knowledge, but the tragedy is that his acquisition comes too late in life to counter the reflex action of ingrained and undermining negative scepticism. Lena's victory consists in Heyst's knowing at the end of the story all the things that Lena understood. His affirmation of human values is implicit in his remark to Davidson--

"Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life"--

Images of life and death, faith and infidelity, trust and mistrust, hope and despair rise contrapuntally to the level of dialectic in Victory, arguing antagonistic philosophies. Death, infidelity, mistrust, and despair images derive from the major symbol--the negative scepticism of the elder Heyst--reverberating throughout a fiction that refines, deepens, and intensifies the warning sounded simply in Under Western Eyes:

"I respect your philosophical scepticism, Razumov, but don't touch the soul."

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO MORALITIES

". . . I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible--for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death--the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct."¹

The uneasy doubt about a fixed standard of conduct was part of the "paralysis of doubt"² that invaded the spiritual realm in the Victorian Era at a time when developments in the political, social, and economic arena gave rise to widespread optimism. The questioning of an absolute standard resulted in part from Historicism, that convergence of intellectual forces which the historian Lord Morley described as "the triumph of the principle of relativity in historic judgment."³ A new, nineteenth-century form of scepticism, Historicism combined elements of the Romantic and the scientific movements, uniting the historical approach and the Romantic emphasis upon the

¹Lord Jim, p. 60.

²Buckley, p. 11.

³John Viscount Morley, On Compromise, in Works, Vol. III, p. 14; as quoted in Baumer, p. 157.

individual to an evolutionary concern with origins and the concept of things in a state of flux. The sceptical drift of Historicism implied that the diversity of judgments, sometimes the flat contradictions, in any historical review of thinkers professing to define fundamentals would seem to prove that such definition is impossible. History revealed that everything, including ethical concepts and spiritual values, was subject to change from civilization to civilization. One might profitably analyze the single moral phenomenon, but any hope that cumulative perceptions from a series of phenomena might rise to the level of fixed theory was an unreasonable expectation. Inevitably, Historicism implied, that theory would be superseded by another, perhaps even a contradictory, judgment. Referring all things--facts, ideas, beliefs, values--to their origins, Historicism encouraged their exploration as opinions, and as Lord Morley explained in 1874:

Opinions are counted rather as phenomena to be explained, than as matters of truth and falsehood. Of usages, we are beginning first of all to think where they came from, and secondarily whether they are the most fitting and convenient that men could be got to accept. In the last century men asked of a belief or a story, Is it true? We now ask, How did men come to take it for true?⁴

Thus, several years before Conrad's arrival in England in 1878 and almost twenty years before his first novel, the climate of doubt had descended. Intellectually, Conrad seemed to accept

⁴Recollections, in Works, Vol. I, p. 65; as quoted in Baumer, p. 157.

the modern state of things with that attitude of cold unconcern that he once said was the only reasonable one:

There is no morality, no knowledge, and no hope: there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that, whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating appearance. Ote-toi de la que je m'y mette Make room for me is no more of a sound rule than would be the reverse doctrine. It is, however, much easier to practice.⁵

Emotionally, however, the verdict was unacceptable, and Conrad's questioning of the rival claims of two moralities--the absolute versus the relative, the fixed versus the flexible--constitutes a characteristic dualism in the moral dramas that he began writing even before the termination of his maritime career.

In 1893 while Conrad was serving as first mate aboard the Torrens, he formed a friendship with one of the passengers that lasted until his death. That passenger was John Galsworthy, whom Conrad described as "a first class classical man at Cambridge who plays chess a good deal" ⁶ Galsworthy wrote to a friend this impression of Conrad:

The first mate is a Pole called Conrad and is a capital chap, though queer to look at; he is a man of travel and experience in many parts of the world and has a fund of yarns on which I draw freely. He has been right up the Congo and all around Malacca and Borneo and other out of the way parts, to say nothing of a little smuggling in the days of his youth⁷

⁵Jean-Aubry, I, 226. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, January 31, 1898.

⁶Baines, p. 129.

⁷Ibid., p. 131.

Though neither realized it at the time, both men were destined for a literary career, Conrad's beginning with the publication two years later of Almayer's Folly, and Galsworthy's with the 1897 appearance of From the Four Winds, a collection of short stories. There is every reason to believe that Galsworthy never understood Conrad's fiction--"There is practically nothing of the moralist in him [Conrad],"⁸ he was able to write in 1906--and Conrad's courteously phrased comments on Galsworthy's work are nearly impossible to crystallize into a definite opinion. Both authors, reflecting their transitional age, addressed themselves to the conflict between the fixed standard of morality and the intuitions of a private moral code. Although Galsworthy seems not to have perceived this interest in Conrad's fiction, Conrad, on the other hand, thought that Galsworthy was too emphatically the "humanitarian moralist."⁹ Two letters touch that topic directly and suggestively. In the first letter, dated November 11, 1901, Conrad advised Galsworthy

The fact is that you want more scepticism at the very foundation of your work. Scepticism, the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of truth--the way of art and salvation You seem [for the sake of your characters] to hug your conceptions of right and wrong too closely.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 131.

⁹Jean-Aubry, II, 77.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 301.

Conceptions of right and wrong were, as James might have said, the whole case; moreover, when that case turned on a moral dilemma, Conrad perceived that its complexity, if looked at from all sides, could render solution impossible. Because of a distaste or an incapacity for philosophical speculation, Galsworthy did not see the moral difficulties to the same depth and, consequently found it easier to resolve fictional moral problems. Conrad's criticism went unheeded, but the topic of morality continued to enter into their correspondence until, in 1909, the moral atmosphere of Galsworthy's most recent novel, Fraternity, drew from Conrad this blunt phrasing of the earlier criticism:

A moralist must present us with a gospel--he must give counsel, not to our reason or sentiment, but to our very soul. Do you feel in yourself the stature for that task? That you must meditate over with great seriousness¹¹

Conrad's meditations on the subject of morality wind through all his dramas of conscience, but he resisted presenting his readers "with a gospel." His "attitude to subjects," . . . his "angle of vision" changed in the course of his fiction, he admitted to Barrett Clark,

. . . not because I am unstable or unprincipled but because I am free. Or perhaps it may be more exact to say, because I am always trying for freedom--within my limits.¹²

His explorations in the subject of morality, supplying in the process of weighing the moral alternatives as much evidence in

¹¹Ibid., II, 77-78.

¹²Ibid., II, 204.

favor of a fixed standard of conduct as they entertained intuitions opposing that standard, began in 1895 with his first novel, Almayer's Folly.

In 1895 Englishmen like Conrad's friend Hugh Clifford, author of Studies in Brown Humanity, wrote about Malaysians as a colorful "exotic" people, very different from the white Europeans who were all too often their masters in an imperialistic situation. Implicit in the standard approach was the acceptance of white superiority and the assumption of moral justification in extending the white man's culture--his religion, his morality, and his institutions--to the Orient or to Africa, where it had to be imposed upon a resisting native culture. Conrad's treatment of the Malay, the Arab, and the African, admitting differences while stressing a common humanity, set him apart. If intellectually Conrad recognized and was himself governed by the principles of Western morality and action--the traditional "standards of honor, fidelity, ethical prudence, responsibility, moral tact, sanity, method"¹³--he admitted the secret and, perhaps, emotional appeal of primitive forms of knowledge, those instinctive, intuitive truths that "lie below the surface of public honor and action."¹⁴ In his early fiction, that instinctive truth is posited in the native culture. Nina Almayer, the

¹³Zabel, "Introduction," Tales of the East and West, p. xix

¹⁴Ibid.

half-caste daughter of Kasper Almayer, utters for the first time some of the Conradian sentiments that echo through his fiction.

Returned from years of schooling "under the Protestant wing of the proper Mrs. Vinck,"¹⁵ half-caste Nina struggles to adjust to life in Sambir with her white father and her native mother. The friction between her parents is symbolic of the friction between East and West, between native and white, a friction compounded of ignorance, intolerance, and fear. Mrs. Almayer had a Christian indoctrination in her youth similar to Nina's, one that lapsed almost immediately upon her return to the native scene. The visible trace of Mrs. Almayer's four years in a convent is the medal that she wears out of superstitious fear. Nina's return to native ways follows, though less sensationally, the same pattern. Beginning with her acceptance of the wild, scantily clad, betel-nut chewing maternal parent she has not seen in years, it accelerates with her growing delight in hearing the stories of her mother's race, the stories of savage feasting, barbarous fights, and valorous deeds:

She felt herself irresistibly fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilized morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss.¹⁶

Analyzing the superior white and the conquered native from her close knowledge of both races,

¹⁵Almayer's Folly, p. 49.

¹⁶Ibid.

It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river bank; whether they reached after much or little; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of the cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes.¹⁷

Realizing that she must choose between her mother's and her father's people, Nina makes her choice on the basis of morality:

To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at least preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had the misfortune to come in contact with.¹⁸

Conrad pursues this comparison in "Heart of Darkness" (1902) in a manner that is still more unfavorable to the white man and his moral code. There, closely associating morality and the work ethic, he demonstrates again that virtue resides in the native colony.

The Europeans in "Heart of Darkness" are, in terms of the work ethic, faithless to these matters of life nearest to hand. The Central Station is managed by a manager who has "no genius for organizing, for initiative, for order even."¹⁹ His uncle

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 50-51.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁹Youth, p. 89.

is the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, a group that has "not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they do not seem aware that these things are wanted for the work of the world."²⁰ The "pilgrims," Marlow reports, are preoccupied with petty intriguing and gossiping. The brick maker makes no bricks, and if the accountant manages to preserve the externals of civilized order with his clean shirt, starched collar, and well-kept books, he does so by closing his mind and heart to the human element, as his irritation over the moans of the dying agent indicates. The accountant's way of life graphically renders the condition of a fixed code that jealously preserves appearances after the vitalizing moral imperative has ceased to be felt. Even Kurtz in his most stable days was no more constructive in his method. Regulated entirely by impulse and mesmerized by his own fatally eloquent monologues, Kurtz had "no method at all,"²¹ Marlow decides. In the same pattern that Conrad will use later in Nostramo, where those whose lives are touched by the silver find that they have something in common with the "adventurers" of the Azuerra legend, the Europeans' motivation in "Heart of Darkness" is equated with the motivation of the Roman imperialists. At the outset of his tale Marlow recalls, very much to the point, the Romans who settled England:

²⁰Ibid., p. 106.

²¹Ibid., p. 168.

But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect.²²

On the other hand, "Heart of Darkness" has a native colony that, composed mainly of cannibals, wins Marlow's respect:

"Fine fellows--cannibals--in their place. They were men one could work with."²³

The cannibals haul in the anchor, sound in the bows, grinning at their work or "grunting phrases which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction."²⁴ The "dignified and profoundly pensive attitude"²⁵ of the headman is not an uncommon attitude among the bush natives who, on the whole, generally exhibit a self-assurance that bespeaks close identity with a society responsive to one code. Their expressions contrast markedly with those of the discomposed white men at that moment when an attack from the on-shore natives seems imminent:

"Will they attack?" whispered an awed voice. "We will be all butchered in this fog," murmured another pilgrim. The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled slightly, the eyes forgot to wink The black fellows of our crew were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course, greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet²⁶

²²Ibid., p. 60.

²³Ibid., p. 114.

²⁴Ibid., p. 125.

²⁵Ibid., p. 126.

²⁶Ibid., p. 125.

The calm self-mastery of the cannibals contrasts just as curiously with the manner of those natives who have been re-educated in the white man's way: with the rascally guard of the prisoners at the station; with the manager's insolent and over-fed "boy"; with the fireman, an "improved specimen"; and with the imprudent helmsman who, like Kurtz, lacked restraint:

He was the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute.²⁷

Like Kurtz, the helmsman fails his "test," but the cannibals withstand theirs, described by Marlow as "the test of inexorable physical necessity"²⁸ precipitated by the jettisoning of their rations of raw, rotten hippo meat for obvious reasons. Only when one of the cannibals calmly suggests to Marlow the possibility of securing one of the on-shore natives for supper does Marlow become aware of their hunger.

"Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us--they were thirty to five--and have a good tuck-in for once, amazes me now when I think of it."²⁹

Their brief exposure to the white man's civilization had resulted in skins that "were no longer glossy" and muscles "no longer hard," but

²⁷Ibid., pp. 133-34.

²⁸Ibid., p. 128.

²⁹Ibid., p. 127.

. . . they were big, powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet And I was that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest-- . . . Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint?³⁰

Marlow discounts superstition, disgust, patience, and even fear; none of these would restrain in the face of hunger: "It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly."³¹ The dazzling fact was that the cannibals had that "inborn strength"; they possessed "some kind of primitive honor" that restrained them in the face of moral darkness, while "the prodigy" Kurtz, "formed by all of Europe," did not.

Conrad's "angle of vision" shifted in his second novel, Outcast of the Islands (1896), in which both the fixed code and the intuitive code are defined by the actions of white men. For the love of the native woman Aissa, Willems betrays his benefactor Lingard, disclosing to native merchants the secret river trade route from which Lingard derives much of his wealth and, consequently, his influential standing in the native community. The betrayal is Willems' third, a pattern that began with his exploitive marriage to merchant Hudig's half-caste daughter, followed by his embezzlement of funds from Hudig, his father-in-law and employer. Characteristically, Willems feels no

³⁰ Ibid., p. 127-128.

³¹ Ibid., p. 129.

guilt; he possesses that peculiarly roundabout illusionist-logic that allows him to see himself as the betrayed. Seemingly incapable of fidelity, Willems personifies the "darkness in nature or character that must be faced, explored, and recognized as elements of the human personality."³²

Opposed to Willems' subjective moral code is Lingard's fixed moral standard, a cause and effect morality that has, until Willems' betrayal, satisfied Lingard's rigid moral sense. Need, whether in the native or white community, has always exerted a claim upon Lingard's charity which he never failed to honor. His benevolence has been repaid in the past by obedience, respect, and gratitude. Willems' repayment of his charity by betrayal raises two questions that confound his relatively simple code. The first question is how to explain an act of such unprovoked malevolence; the second question is raised when Lingard, in response to his rough code of Justice, seeks a personal confrontation with Willems.

Lingard's sense of outrage leads him to scorn weapons in favor of

". . . naked hands, by heaven! No firearms. Hands that could take him by the throat, beat down his defense, batter his face into shapeless flesh; hands that could feel all the desperation of his resistance and overpower it in the violent delight of contact lingering and furious, intimate and brutal."³³

³²Zabel, "Introduction," Tales of the East and West, p. xix.

³³Outcast of the Islands, p. 320.

Lingard encounters Willems and, his anger exploding, strikes him, but Willems does not fight back. Lingard

was amazed and aggrieved--profoundly--bitterly--with the immense and blank desolation of a small child robbed of a toy.³⁴

He looked at the drops of blood on Willems' face,

looked at what he had done, with obscure satisfaction, with anger, with regret. This wasn't much like an act of justice.³⁵

Willems reminds Lingard that he saw him coming, that he had a gun, that he could have shot him.

"You would have missed," said Lingard, with assurance. "There is, under heaven, such a thing as justice."³⁶

But, his anger spent, and nothing remaining "but the sense of some immense infamy--of something vague, disgusting and terrible," he phrased the second question in his mind:

Was there, under heaven, such a thing as Justice?³⁷

If it exists, the reader is led to ask, did it reside in Lingard's final disposition of Willems:

"You shall stay here on this island, If I let you out you would go amongst unsuspecting men, and lie, and steal, and cheat for a little money or for some woman. I don't care about shooting you Do not expect me to forgive you. To forgive one must have been angry and become contemptuous, and there is nothing in me now--no anger, no contempt, no disappointment You are my shame."³⁸

³⁴Ibid., p. 321.

³⁵Ibid., p. 322.

³⁶Ibid., p. 327.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 340.

Lingard executes Justice upon Willems, the kind of Justice that the native politician Babalatchi describes as "your white man's justice; your great justice that knows not anger."³⁹ Though there is not much to be said for Willem's code that excuses betrayal, one cannot be easy in mind about Lingard's "justice" that, motivated by feelings of shame and wounded pride, comes uncomfortably close to vengeance. The truth is that Lingard's affinity for a fixed code that may demand heroic selflessness is compatible with his romantic, Quixotic concept of self; Willem's affinity for a private code is the expression of his intense self-consciousness, that egoism that preserves, as Conrad said, all that we hate, all that we love. The irony is that an ideal of Justice informed by moral feeling is equally foreign to both white men.

The uneasy doubt about a fixed standard of conduct is more easily laid to rest when the world it governs is a ship-world. Equating the fixed code with the maritime code of the British Merchant Service, it can be demonstrated that the exacting demands of that code preserve Justice as effectively as limited men can, and that the collective life as well as the physical and spiritual well-being of individuals depends upon it. The question of Justice is almost comically integrated into the plot of Typhoon when Captain MacWhirr divides the recovered coins

³⁹Ibid., p. 282.

equally among the battered Chinese coolies--"an act in keeping with the Captain's rough notions of justice formed, like Lingard's, beyond the pale of custom"⁴⁰--but the moral issue is a completely serious one in the ship-world of the Narcissus. In that microcosmic world, Donkin and Wait challenge the code, disrupting and endangering the communal life.

Donkin's "filthy loquacity,"⁴¹ dwelling upon the "rights" of the crew and upon the "wrongs" they endure, is the instrument that conquers "the naive instincts of that crowd."⁴² The first of a long line of Conradian anarchists, Donkin is described as a "votary of change" who knows how to reach the "grown-up children of a discontented earth . . . less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing"⁴³ than the men of Singleton's breed, who were "men enough to scorn in their hearts the sentimental voices that bewailed the hardness of their fate."⁴⁴ Donkin dwells on the "hardness of their fate," and the crew listens:

We began at last to think it was awful. And we were conceited! We boasted of our pluck, of our capacity for work, of our energy. We remembered honorable episodes; our devotion, our indomitable perseverance-- and were proud of them as though they had been the

⁴⁰Wiley, p. 74.

⁴¹Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. 114.

⁴²Ibid., p. 11.

⁴³Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 26.

outcome of our unaided impulses. We remembered our danger, our toil--and conveniently forgot our horrible scare. We decried our officers--who had done nothing--and listened to the fascinating Donkin. His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity, were not discouraged by the invariable contumely of our words, by the disdain of our looks. Our contempt for him was unbounded--and we could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist.⁴⁵

An apostle of "equality," Donkin credits the crew with saving the ship, asking

"What 'ee [the captain] could do without us?"⁴⁶

In spite of their contempt for the "abominative creature," the crew is effectively demoralized:

We were oppressed by the injustice of the world, surprised to perceive how long we had lived under its burden without realizing our unfortunate state, annoyed by the uneasy suspicion of our undiscerning stupidity.⁴⁷

While Donkin plays upon the crew's sense of injustice, James Wait cultivates their humanitarian feelings. The tenderness of the crew in Jimmy's illness which, ironically, proves to be more real than Wait knew, their sentimental tolerance of his delinquent malingering when even "the most prejudiced person could perceive that, mostly, he coughed when it suited his purpose,"⁴⁸ their pity, the mutually destructive pity that Heyst's father would describe as "a form of contempt,"⁴⁹ demoralized them:

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 112-13.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 114-15.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁹Victory, p. 213.

Falsehood triumphed. It triumphed through doubt, through stupidity, through pity, through sentimentalism His obstinate non-recognition of the only certitude whose approach we could watch from day to day was as disquieting as the failure of some law of nature He was demoralizing. Through him we were becoming highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent; we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathized with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions . . . as though we had been overcivilized and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life.⁵⁰

Metaphorically imagining the crew's vacillation between the demands of the Maritime code and the anarchy of mutiny, the ship passes through a series of calms and crises. Not until the body of James Wait slips under the waves does the ship enjoy the needed breeze prophetically promised by Singleton upon the discharge of that "unfair burden." The dark clouds break up, the sails fill, and the "Narcissus" skims swiftly toward home, pursued by sunshine.

The "Narcissus" owes its safe voyage to the fact that the majority of its crew rallies to the code in time of stress, acquiescing in the exacting demands that are obviously necessary for survival. The crew gropes toward recognition of the relationship between their individual identities and that code, between community solidarity and the code. Yet confidence men like Donkin and Wait are able to make just acts appear unjust, and reasonable demands, unreasonable. Their degree of effectiveness indicates that the moral imperative of that code is

⁵⁰Nigger of the "Narcissus", pp. 156-57.

seriously impaired from what it was in the youth of a Singleton, or even of the younger Captain Allistoun. Nigger of the "Narcissus" records that particular stage in the disintegration of the moral code at which its imperatives are consistently honored by some (Allistoun and Singleton), openly challenged by others (Donkin and Wait), and obeyed reluctantly and often without understanding by the majority (the crew). Described in the original subtitle as "children of the sea," the crew is child-like in its credulity and, as the author said of the populace in Nostromo, "incapable of scepticism." Unwittingly conditioned by the righteous rhetoric of Donkin, they are easily betrayed by the pitiful fear of Wait to a sentimental humanitarianism that is, as Conrad remarked, more a matter of "crazy nerves and morbid conscience" than it is of sound feeling. The code prevails in the Nigger of the "Narcissus" because recurring crises unify its adherents and isolate its detractors. But even though the crew's sense of solidarity under pressure effectively ostracizes Donkin and Wait, and even though the authority of Captain Allistoun is sufficient to "exile" Wait in his cabin (as Lingard exiled Willems on the island), the danger of mutiny (anarchy) is ever-present. The age is breeding a "queer lot"⁵¹ of men, alienated from an informing code, preaching their own inverted morality, and the susceptibility of the

⁵¹Ibid., p. 155.

crew indicates that, even for those who pay it lip-service, that code has become a "shadowy ideal of conduct."

The "shadowiness" of that imperative figures importantly in Jim's tale (Lord Jim, 1900) where the fixed Maritime Code and his own private concept of morality--his egoism--coincide in the expectation of heroic selflessness. Jim's jump from the Patna is a faithless act in terms of the fixed standard, but it is also, in terms of his own heroic illusion, a betrayal of self.

Jim belongs to that "queer lot" of modern sailors that Captain Allistoun described as

"A crazy crowd of tinkers. Yes, tinkers! I could count the real sailors amongst them on the fingers of one hand."⁵²

"Real sailors" still people the maritime world; the French Lieutenant who performs so heroically and matter-of-factly is proof of their continuing tradition. But Jim is a "modern," a man in decline from some balanced ideal as the "infernal alloy in his metal"⁵³ indicates. The fact that he left the Maritime service after his hospitalization to ship on the Patna, looking so out of place among its coarse and disorderly officers, betrays his alienation from that ideal. The "five whites on board the Patna lived amid ships, isolated from the human cargo,"⁵⁴ the eight hundred Moslems who are described as "the

⁵²Ibid., p. 143.

⁵³Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 17.

unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief."⁵⁵ The segregation is significant; Jim, in his lack of self-knowledge, is dedicated to an "exacting belief" that, practically, he cannot live by. Yet, Marlow never allows himself or the reader to forget that Jim is "one of us."

The absolute morality of the fixed code is enthroned in the decisions of the Maritime Court whose members, with the exception of Brierly, administer Justice without feeling. The "facts" of the case are incapable of conveying Jim's subjective motivation toward an act that, predictably, deprives him of his certificates. The depressing and bitter part of Jim's punishment seems to Marlow to be "its chill and mean atmosphere":

Those proceedings had all the cold vengefulness of a death-sentence, had all the cruelty of a sentence of exile.⁵⁶

The emotional involvement of Brierly, one of the more respected and highly placed members of the maritime community, indicates the weakening imperative of the code. Sitting in judgment on Jim, Brierly seeks out Marlow and suggests that Jim run away rather than stand trial, thus advocating a morally evasive tactic that is the equivalent of Lingard's exile of Willems and of Allistoun's ostracism of Wait. When Marlow fails to respond to the suggestion, Brierly complains:

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 194.

"The worst of it, . . . is that all of you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don't think enough of what you are supposed to be."⁵⁷

.
 "We aren't an organized body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency. Such an affair destroys one's confidence."⁵⁸

Brierly and Jim are both "moderns" who have this in common that their motivation, like the motivation of the accountant in "Heart of Darkness," derives from something other than human values. Brierly says:

"Frankly, I don't care a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales."⁵⁹

Jim, one recalls, agonizes over the "chance missed," when Marlow thinks that guilt over abandoning eight hundred trusting people should be the corrosive memory. Brierly, the man who never made a mistake, never had an accident, never a check in the steady rise of his career, is like Jim in another way, too. Mr. Jones, Brierly's admiring first mate, volunteered to Marlow with "amazing profundity" his impression that

". . . neither you nor I, sir, had ever thought so much of ourselves."⁶⁰

Marlow's thought about Brierly's suicide--

Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?⁶¹

--bears significantly upon Jim's final act on Patusan.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 81.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁶¹Ibid.

Jim tries to see himself as true to the code, explaining to Marlow that he was not "ready";

"It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not--not then. I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain--I would like somebody to understand--somebody--one person at least! You! Why not you?"⁶²

As Jim explained, Marlow thought about how solemn it was, and how ridiculous, too,

. . . those struggles of an individual trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be, this precious notion of convention, only one of the rules of the game, nothing more, but all the same so terribly effective by its assumption of unlimited power over natural instincts, by the awful penalties of its failure.⁶³

Marlow listened, trying to resist taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession--to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies.⁶⁴

Jim's anguish and sincerity told:

He swayed me. I own to it, I own up . . . he was one of us The mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself⁶⁵

His certificates cancelled, Jim accepts an offer to manage Stein and Company's trading post in Patusan, an offer arranged by Marlow who feels "bound" to Jim:

⁶²ibid., p. 98.

⁶³ibid.

⁶⁴ibid., p. 113.

⁶⁵ibid., pp. 113-14.

. . . it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. I did not know so much more about myself.⁶⁶

The second half of Jim's story takes place on the island of Patusan, where Jim realizes the heroic ideal he entertains of his identity. Loved, trusted, obeyed, Tuan Jim sees his power and influence grow as he helps stabilize the community and establish justice. Jim looks upon the Patusan experience as the moral equivalent of the Patna event, an opportunity for proving himself by which he hopes to blot out the failure of the first with the success of the second episode. Some round-about logic of this kind is behind his decision to counteract the memory of the Patna infidelity by an act of faith in the outlaw Gentleman Brown. When Brown wantonly murders Dain Waris, Jim's friend and the only son of the native chief Doramin, during the safe exodus guaranteed by Jim, Tuan Jim surrenders himself, assuming the guilt for Dain's death. Although no guilt could possibly attach to Jim, he offers himself to the rough justice of Doramin--to the vengeful, fixed code of an earlier Patusan--in a romantic and futile gesture that answers to the chivalrous ideal he entertains of himself.

Doramin's act of justice--shooting and killing Jim--is essentially like Gentleman Brown's shooting of Dain:

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 271.

. . . a lesson, a retribution--a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think.⁶⁷

Just as Jim failed the fixed code and himself on the Patna occasion, so, morally equivocating, he satisfies the vengeful fixed code and his own heroic illusion of self on the second and long-awaited opportunity, thinking that Justice is served. The fact is that Jim is so completely the nescient modern, alienated from any informing tradition, that his recognition of a moral standard is "shadowy." His remorse in the Patna case was triggered by the "chance missed" rather than the betrayal; he suffered guilt, it is true, but for the wrong reason. Conrad, by paralleling the incidents, questions the sense in which Jim succeeds--if indeed he does succeed--on Patusan. The moral ambiguity is traceable to a fixed standard of unlimited powers, a standard that, perhaps, should not exist at all, tied as it is to such terrible penalties for failure. Its moral rigidity evades the fact that dark spots do exist in human nature, that, like submerged logs, they surface when one least expects it. When they surface, like Jim's single act of cowardice, should the penalty brand one a moral exile for life? "A rule of conduct resting mainly on severe rejections is necessarily simple," Conrad remarked in Nostromo,⁶⁸ but an informed, sound moral standard should never be simple; it had to take into account

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 522.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 353.

the "claims" of the "reputable," and the "exigencies" of the "disreputable," and that complex necessity created the moral dilemma.

Jim's moral imbalance is as apparent in his second "opportunity" as in his first: only a blind, mechanical morality could impute guilt to Jim in Dain's death, and only an isolato, alienated and uninformed, could delude himself into accepting Doramin's "justice" with a "proud and unflinching glance." Again, the very identity of the just act is the question. The price of Jim's "superb egoism" is exacted at the expense of human values, a fact which should render it suspect. In the private realm, Jewel suffers the cost--"They always leave us," she had said to Marlow prophetically; in the public realm, the entire community of Patusan, which had only recently recovered its "belief in the stability of earthly institutions,"⁶⁹ is surrendered to certain anarchy. Marlow wonders if Jim, answering to his own interior logic, may have confessed to "a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress."⁷⁰ He admits that he didn't know at the time, that he doesn't know as he recounts the story, that he never expects to know any more than that Jim was "one of us," who are

. . . only on sufferance here and got to pick our way in cross lights, watching every precious minute and every irremediable step, trusting we shall manage yet

⁶⁹Lord Jim, p. 481.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 420.

to go out decently in the end--but not so sure of it after all--and with dashed little help to expect from those we touch elbows with right and left.⁷¹

The problem for the modern alienated man is to identify right and wrong in a world of moral ambiguities, a world ineffectually regulated by a fixed code of conduct which has lost its universal imperative. A comparison of the fixed code of the larger social world with the fixed Maritime Code reveals the weaknesses of the former. The Maritime Code is vitalized by an obvious, exacting work-ethic recognized by mariners who derive their identity from that ethic. Observance of the code unites the men into an orderly, harmonious brotherhood, as the mariners on the "Narcissus" discovered, a brotherhood in which their care for each other is indicated by the spontaneous sharing of the remaining clothing and boots after the storm. The Maritime Code, therefore, approaches the ideal, promoting the welfare of the individual and of society. The order, coherence, and inevitability characteristic of the Maritime Code is vainly sought in the fixed moral code of the larger social world. Somewhere along the line, that code has become detached from sound moral feeling; like the bookkeeper in "Heart of Darkness," the code is preoccupied with abstractions at the expense of human values. Consequently, the fixed code fails to explain the isolato to himself, evading taking into account those dark spots in human

⁷¹Ibid., p. 41.

nature that make it possible for "one of us" to betray. The fact that its adherents can be morally objectionable but "respectable" types--like the "pilgrims" from the "sepulchral" cities going about their business "in the assurance of perfect safety, eager to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant dreams"--casts doubt upon its moral soundness. Inequitous, it allows one man to steal a horse, as Marlow observed in "Heart of Darkness," while another hangs for looking at a halter. Its "justice" can be inhuman and without rectitude, as Dr. Monygham grimly observed. At such times, the moral incoherence of the fixed standard renders that other "light," the private, relative code, the more respectable code by comparison: operating within the closed circle of an inevitable identity, the private code is the expression of an inevitable, coherent pattern within that prescribed area. Whether such limited "lights" are sufficient to illuminate a world to the degree where a man can "see" the humane and rational standards essential for the individual and collective life is a question that bears upon Conrad's next novel, The Secret Agent (1907).

The decaying moral order of The Secret Agent makes no demand upon the individual comparable to the imperative of the work-ethic of the Maritime Code. Conrad's "angle of vision" shifted sharply in this ironic little novel to question whether

an absolute standard can even survive "in a world yielding everywhere to the rule of unreason which operates according to its own inhuman law."⁷² A fixed moral standard is hard to discern in the squalid city-world of London, its atmosphere as appropriately dark and threatening as the deepening moral chaos. Imagery of madness, disease, and deluge defines the desperately critical condition of modern life, while, paradoxically, characters curiously indifferent and devoid of passion pursue their insular existences, symbolized by Stevie's masses of circles.

In the limited cast of characters, Stevie is the mentally retarded adolescent destroyed in the bombing incident planned by anarchists and directed at that newest fetish of Society, Science, in the reality of the Greenwich Observatory. Defective, credulous, self-divided (as his compassion-rage syndrome indicates), sacrificed, Stevie, with Winnie, stands for humanity. Winnie (Mrs. Verloc) is Stevie's plump, placid, and protective sister whose distinguishing characteristic is her consistent refusal to look below the surface of things. Their mother, who exiles herself to the workhouse so that Stevie's position in the Verloc home will be strengthened, is, in spite of her fraud, heroic. Significantly, her heroic actions are so far beyond the comprehension of the age that even Winnie, who loves her mother, attributes them to selfishness. Other characters divide into

⁷²Wiley, p. 112.

those who, ostensibly, uphold the "law," and those whose professed activities would seem to cast them in the role of opponents of the fixed legal structure.

One guardian of the fixed standard is Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crime Department, a routine-oriented bureaucrat, who has a working agreement with certain criminals, trading immunity for information to the benefit of Heat's reputation. Partial to thieves and burglars who "play the game," admit the same social conventions, and submit to the severe sanctions of a recognized morality, Heat is baffled by anarchists: "There were no rules for dealing with anarchists."⁷³ Not averse to withholding information from his superior if it will be to his benefit, Heat decides to conceal the fact that Stevie's name, sewn into his collar by Winnie, has been found at the scene of the bombing, an unsuccessful attempt to divert attention from Verloc one of his extra-legal sources of information.

A second guardian of the law is Heat's superior, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, whose career in police work began in a tropical colony. Impulsively marrying on a long leave of absence, he pleased his fastidious wife and her family by taking up police work in London. Too many masters, too many subordinates, and the "near presence" of that irrational phenomenon, public opinion, made the job unrewarding for a Quixotic

⁷³The Secret Agent, p. 108.

personality geared to the personal involvement possible in the simpler Eastern community. His daily whist game is "the most comforting habit of his life, in a mainly successful display of his skill without the assistance of any subordinate."⁷⁴ When Heat injects the name of the uninvolved anarchist Michaelis into the investigation in a second attempt to distract attention from Verloc, the Assistant Commissioner comes to two revealing decisions: first, he decides to protect Michaelis, not from any sense of justice, but because the influential "lady patroness" who has befriended Michaelis since his release from prison is the same society matron whose wisdom and kindness prop up his own shaky marriage and bear upon his future appointment; secondly, correctly suspecting Heat of "dangerous reservations,"⁷⁵ the Assistant Commissioner decides to disguise himself and personally--and Quixotically--maintain surveillance over the Verloc shop and home.

The third guardian of established law is Sir Ethelred, the Assistant Commissioner's superior and the Secretary of State. Sir Ethelred is an aging, dim-eyed, aristocratic official, who is seeing his "new" Assistant Commissioner for the first time since the novice took office eighteen months earlier. Indifferent to the work nearest to hand, he, nevertheless, is capable of generating considerable crusading zeal for his Bill to

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 132.

Nationalize the Fisheries. His impatience with the daily facts of reality is indicated in his intolerance for the burden of detail that the Assistant Commissioner is obliged to inject surreptitiously into a closely timed interview. Sir Ethelred concurs in the disguise and surveillance plan projected by his subordinate, thus abdicating responsibility in an important public matter to indulge himself with his favored legislative project.

The individual lives of the guardians of the law possess a coherence and an order which is not the order dictated by their official role in society, but one created from relative sanctions. "They have their own morality,"⁷⁶ the Assistant Commissioner remarked to Sir Ethelred, speaking of Heat as "an old department hand." Ironically, that comment applies to all the guardians of law. Responding only to the convenient imperatives of the fixed code and deferring to a private morality when it suits them, they are surprisingly like the anarchists who frequent Verloc's home. These opponents of established order dispute only the inconvenient imperative of the fixed code--such imperatives as toil (solidly and impassively ignored by Verloc and Michaelis), restraint (vociferously challenged by Yundt), and accepted morality⁷⁷ (impugned by Ossipon)--allowing its advantageous aspects to go unchallenged.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 159.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 58.

Verloc is the leader of the anarchist circle, a lazy, obese secret agent, "the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort."⁷⁸ Verloc's one asset to anarchy resides in his booming voice:

His voice, famous for years at open-air meetings and at workmen's assemblies in large halls, had contributed, he said, to his reputation of a good and trustworthy comrade. It was, therefore, a part of his usefulness. It had inspired confidence in his principles.⁷⁹

Completely domesticated and "conventionally respectable," Verloc is shocked when Vladimir, the First Secretary of the Embassy, demands that he involve himself in such active subversion as bombing. Ironically, this enemy of established order is offended at Vladimir's progressive approach, which threatens the established order of anarchy.

Fellow anarchists Michaelis, Yundt, and Ossipon are frequent visitors to the rooms back of Verloc's shop of shady wares. Michaelis "round as a tub"⁸⁰ after fifteen years in prison is as averse to action as Verloc, preaching "Patience."⁸¹ It had come to this angelic, humanitarian sentimentalist in prison, like a "faith revealed in visions,"⁸² that the secret of fate resided in the material side of life, which evolved patterns in its own time. Capitalism was currently being replaced by socialism, and "no one can tell what form the social organization may take in the future."⁸³ Yundt, the bald, blind,

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 53.

⁸²Ibid., p. 48.

⁸³Ibid., p. 44.

skinny, and "senile sensualist,"⁸⁴ who calls himself "the terrorist," is another anarchist who is

. . . no man of action; . . . he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity, and revolt.⁸⁵

Conrade Ossipon, ladies man, ex-medical student, lecturer to workingmen's associations, pamphleteer ("The Corroding Vices of the Middle Classes"),⁸⁶ referred everything to the wisdom of science. A disciple of the Italian criminologist-psychiatrist Lombroso, Ossipon was distinguished by that "glance of insufferable, hopelessly dense sufficiency which nothing but the frequentation of science can give to the dulness of common mortals."⁸⁷ He offered this "scientific" observation on the motivation of men:

There is no law and no certainty What the people know does not matter, were its knowledge ever so accurate. The only thing that matters to us is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action.⁸⁸

In a class by himself is the extreme anarchist called the Professor, who disdains the company of the Verloc circle. A solitary, bitter, and brooding man, the Professor fears the mistrusts the emotions of the innumerable masses: "What if nothing could move them?"⁸⁹ The moral righteousness of the Professor,

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 46.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 55.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 91.

the son of a minister, was transmuted in an age of science into a "frenzied puritanism of ambition."⁹⁰ His ambition thwarted by the "injustice" of early employers unaware of the privileges of that puritanism, the Professor has come to consider himself a "moral agent" with a special mission: to destroy "public faith in legality"⁹¹ even if it means wholesale destruction. His mad fixed idea--to regenerate an unjust society through annihilation--is symbolized by his attempt to invent the perfect, instantaneous detonator, an improvement over the twenty-second margin type that he carries on his person at all times as insurance against arrest.⁹² The Professor defines the essential difference between himself and Verloc's circle of anarchists, a difference explained in part by an earlier interior monolog of Inspector Heat's:

"They are inferior [Verloc and Anarchists]. . . . Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order They depend on life, which in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organized fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident."⁹³

The conflict between "law" forces upholding a fixed standard of conduct and "criminal" forces defending their own relative codes of morality proves to be an illusion that fades before the reality of a perfect barbaric nihilism confronting

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 90.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 94.

⁹³Ibid., p. 75.

the imperfect, decaying remnants of civilized order. Some of that civilized order still resides in codified law, some, in the Verloc home which shelters whatever defective human values exist in this ironic little "entertainment." And they are defective. Too often the example of Winnie's maternal love for Stevie is extolled as a shining human affirmation, with little or no regard for the fact that Winnie's love is, like the law, a disordered thing. Her marriage arrangement with Verloc defrauds Verloc just as much as it does Winnie and her Paris sweetheart; the utterly meaningless pattern of their domestic life is due in large part to the fact that Winnie's thoughts center exclusively on Stevie. Winnie's caritas fails to inform: she construes her mother's heroic sacrifice as an act of selfishness, and she is insensitive to the desperate poverty of Mrs. Neale. Winnie's love for Stevie is imperfect, too, related to the compassion-rage syndrome that she shares with her brother, a pattern defined in Stevie's reaction to the cabbie's cruel treatment of his horse:

The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of innocent but pitiless rage.⁹⁴

The pattern is repeated when Winnie kills Verloc in a rage that induces upon her features the same physical anomalies

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 190.

characteristics of her retarded brother. A psychological expression of the disordered modern personality, the pattern is described by the narrator on another occasion as he relates how the "fine sensibilities" of Winnie's father, offended by the fact of his son's mental retardation, frequently erupted in brutal treatment of the child.⁹⁵ Again, the apparently common but imperfect affective reaction is described in reference to Michaelis: "an outburst of . . . raging, implacable pity"⁹⁶ for the police constable killed in the attempted robbery resulted in the hanging of three of the thieves and the fifteen-year imprisonment of young Michaelis--an irrational response, considering the fact that men died every day as a matter of duty in some part of the realm. Imperfect as it is, the Verloc home shelters that defective human love as well as the incomplete anarchy that is pursued by illusionists who are, paradoxically, conventionally dependent upon the established order. The "cross lights" that Marlow referred to in Lord Jim fail to illuminate an ever-darkening world; neither the fixed code nor the flexible codes of illusionists are vitalized by a sound moral principle expressed in order, coherence, and inevitability.

Anarchy in The Secret Agent is, therefore, more than a political philosophy; it is a moral condition, involving everyone. An entire universe of moral values, official and domestic,

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 118.

is falling apart in a darkening world where the dislocation is perpetuated by characters who share Winnie's persistent and tragic refusal to look deeply into things. The character's indifference to the needs of the individual human being and of society is, in the terminology of Ossipon's "saint" Lombroso, and within the context of the theme, "criminal," and the criminal mind, as Lombroso's research indicated, is a special kind of mind, mid-way between the lunatic and the savage. Conrad saw modern civilization poised mid-way between the amoral nihilism of the Professor and the moral indifference of the remaining characters that produced, ultimately, the same barbarism. The threat of imminent descent into barbarism is woven into the domestic pattern on two occasions. At the conclusion of chapters three and eight, Winnie asks Verloc if she should put out the "light." Verloc's affirmative answer on both occasions invokes the memory of the ominous decree of Chaos in The Dunciad: "Let there be darkness."

A large part of mankind endures the dead-end state of moral anarchy in Under Western Eyes (1911), where the fixed standard is enthroned in the directives of an inhuman Eastern autocracy while the human imperative resides in the imperfect claims of a rebel against that system. Conrad describes the political climate:

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile

and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of heart must follow the downfall of any given human institution.⁹⁷

Ordinarily, the constancy of a man to a fixed code of conduct which takes priority over personal desires is an act of fidelity, the expression of "unconscious" solidarity. The solitary Razumov, however, formed no other tie or tradition than the state, acts in accordance with that fixed standard to find, ironically, that his act of fidelity to a fixed code constitutes a betrayal of self in his officially approved betrayal of Haldin, an idealist-assassin. The old language teacher, under whose "western" eyes the action takes place, comments:

"Nations it may be have fashioned their governments, but the governments have paid them back in the same coin."⁹⁸

The coin of Russian autocracy is a counterfeit, an inverted idealism. Hence, Razumov is counselled to betray by the Prince, his unacknowledged natural father, and by General T____; the moral climate is such that a semblance of political virtue resides in the act; his perversion of brotherhood actually appears a "good" in the ethics of the fixed order. This disordered state of things begins to dawn on Razumov when it occurs to him that Haldin, a man of family and secure social position,

⁹⁷ "Author's Note," Under Western Eyes, p. xiii.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

should be the conservative, while he, a solitary outsider, should be the radical. Inexplicably, the reverse is true.

Haldin is an impulsive "Utopian" patriot, righteous, as the religious imagery indicates, but selflessly dedicated to an ideal of Justice. Engaging and likeable, Haldin never suspects what the reader discovers: that his youthful, revolutionary idealism supports the corrupt exile Peter Ivanovitch in an evil spy-network radiating outward from the Chateau Borel in Switzerland. Possessing all the "special righteousness" of the social or political revolutionary in Conrad's fiction, Haldin has no scruples about uniting the office of judge and assassin. Successful in his attempt on the life of a Czarist official, he impulsively seeks shelter with an impoverished student named Razumov, whose modest dreams of a scholar's career are endangered by the intrusion of the near-stranger.

Compared to the socially secure Haldin, doted on by mother and sister, Razumov, whose name is an epithet for "man of reason" is a solitary figure:

The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality. There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was Russian. Whatever good he expected from life would be given to or withheld from his hopes by that connexion alone. This immense parentage suffered from the throes of internal dispensations, and he shrank mentally from the fray as a good-natured man may shrink from taking definite sides in a violent family quarrel.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 70-77.

Two movements direct the course of Under Western Eyes: one, the relatively swift movement toward betrayal, triggered by an instinct for self-preservation in a menacing political climate; the second, the slow and tortuous movement toward fidelity, commitment, and solidarity, a movement that waits upon Razumov's acquisition of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. The first movement begins as Razumov, outwardly compliant as he departs on his errand to secure the sledge-driver Ziemianitch for the night's escape, inwardly registers resentment and fear:

He hated the man . . . he felt the safety of his lonely existence to be permanently endangered.¹⁰⁰

Finding the simple peasant-driver too intoxicated to help, Razumov becomes enraged to the point of beating his inert form. He fears the prospect of spending days alone with the dangerously selfless revolutionary "in mortal alarm at every sound":

"I am being crushed--and I can't even run away." Other men had somewhere a corner of the earth--some little house in the provinces where they had a right to take their troubles. A material refuge. He had nothing. He had not even a moral refuge--the refuge of confidence. To whom could he go with this tale--in all this great, great land?¹⁰¹

Like many Russians before him who had "turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers for the blessing of spiritual rest," Razumov turned to autocracy, and "the grace entered into Razumov."¹⁰² He exulted in the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 24. ¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 38. ¹⁰² Ibid., p. 40.

reasoned patterns into which his desires fell:

"I shall give him up."

.....
He had simply discovered what he had meant to do all along.¹⁰³

The word "betray" rose in his mind:

"Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary--every obligation of true courage is the other way."¹⁰⁴

He would give Haldin up, he told himself, because

... absolute power should be preserved--the tool ready for the man--for the great autocrat of the future. Razumov believed in him. The logic of history made him unavoidable. The state of the people symbolized by Ziemianitch demanded him. "What else . . . could move all that mass"¹⁰⁵

Introduced by his unacknowledged father, the secretive Prince K.____, into the presence of General T.____, Razumov feels a loathing for the autocratic official that is instinctive and intense. The "blue, unbelieving eyes and the bright white flash of an automatic smile had an air of jovial, careless cruelty" as he remarked:

"Fidelity to menaced institutions on which depend the safety of a throne and of a people is no child's play . . . Mr. Razumov here begins to understand that, too."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 44; 46.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 44-45.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 55.

When General T.____, expresses confidence that Haldin will confess, Razumov, experiencing the stirrings of loyalty to the character of the man, declares: "Haldin will never speak."¹⁰⁷

Later, as he watches Haldin leave his room to meet the sledge that will never arrive, Razumov thinks of Spontini's "Flight of Youth," the statue that Prince K. pointed out to him at the General's palace, and he associates Haldin with the figurine:

Haldin

tall and straight as an arrow, with his pale face and hand raised attentively, might have posed for the statue of a daring youth, listening to an inner voice.¹⁰⁸

The moral consequences of the act pursue him like a phantom: the revolutionaries, recalling Haldin's brief but warm comments on his reserved character, conclude that he is secretly one of them, and their blind hero worship surrounds him with a "dark prestige"; the autocracy concludes that the very fact that Haldin turned to him renders him suspect:

"An occurrence of that sort marks a man."¹⁰⁹

During an official search of his room, his papers and notes, symbolizing his life-illusion, are

shuffled up and heaped together into a ragged pile in the middle of the table.

This disorder affected him profoundly, unreasonably. He sat down and stared. He had a distinct sensation of his very existence being undermined in some mysterious manner, of his moral supports falling away from him one by one.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

Caught between the lawlessness of the revolutionaries and what he has come to recognize as the lawlessness of the autocracy, Razumov feels trapped:

The feeling that his moral personality was at the mercy of these lawless forces was so strong that he asked himself seriously if it were worth while to go on accomplishing the mental functions of that existence which seemed no longer his own.¹¹¹

Summoned to the office of Councillor Mikulin, Razumov, attempting to save his identity, describes, ironically, the condition of the fettered mind:

. . . I am not an intellectual mongrel. I think like a Russian. I think faithfully--and I take the liberty to call myself a thinker. It is not a forbidden word, as far as I know.¹¹²

Mikhulin assures him that it is not a forbidden word:

Why should it be forbidden? . . . I, too, consider myself a thinking man, I assure you. The principal condition is to think correctly.¹¹³

Bitterly protesting his summons, Razumov defines the moral incoherence of the fixed morality:

"Yes--you wished to see me," said Razumov in a tone of profound distaste. "Naturally you have the right--I mean the power. It all amounts to the same thing."¹¹⁴

Expressing a wish "to be done once for all with that man Hal-din . . . to retire--simply to retire," Razumov is stopped by the soft, unhurried voice that questions, "Where to?"¹¹⁵

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 95.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 111.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 120.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 123.

The second movement begins with Razumov's arrival in Geneva, the unwilling secret agent of Mikhulin, whose mission is to spy on the colony of exiled Russian revolutionaries grouped around Ivanovitch, the political "prophet." Fanatical, corrupt, and self-seeking, Peter Ivanovitch autocratically rules a small society into which he has been unable to entice the exiled mother of Victor Haldin and, especially, his sister Natalie:

"Do you know what I want, Natalie Victorovna?" he [Ivanovitch] uttered solemnly. "I want you to be a fanatic."

"A fanatic?"

"Yes. Faith alone won't do."¹¹⁶

Natalie is the counterpart of her idealistic brother:

"Of course the [people's] will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated," she went on. "That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one's life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel--perhaps blind--officials against a nation."¹¹⁷

Natalie's friend, the Western language teacher who acts as narrator, counters with this unmistakably Conradian conviction:

". . . in a real revolution--not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions--in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement-- but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment--often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured--that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. But enough of that. My meaning is that I don't want you to be a victim."¹¹⁸

Natalie reacts to the warning as Victor would have reacted:

"If I could believe all you have said I still wouldn't think of myself," protested Miss Haldin. "I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch after a piece of bread. The true progress must begin after. And for that, the right men shall be found. They are already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity, unknown, preparing themselves"¹¹⁹

Such a man would be "unstained, lofty, and solitary," Natalie volunteered, characteristics her brother discerned in a fellow university student. That student was Razumov, and, when he arrives in Geneva, Razumov finds Natalie and her mother eager to embrace him as the legacy of Victor. Like the ghost of Haldin's "bright dream" the moral consequences of his act pursue him still.

The chance meeting of Razumov and Natalie at the Chateau Borel accelerates the moral awareness that has been developing in Razumov since the night of the betrayal. "What is betrayal?" he asked that night; "there must be a moral bond first." Slowly, Razumov's affection grows for Natalie, who is, in the harmony of her character, the counterpart of the man he betrayed.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 167-68.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 168.

He comes to realize that, whether one recognizes it or not, whether one cultivates it or not, there is always a moral bond between men; that it exists by virtue of their common humanity. The "truth" did not matter, he knew, to autocrats; nor did it matter, he discovered, to revolutionaries. The "old revolutionary hand" Sophia Antonovna, whose political morality, stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, personified "the true spirit of destructive revolution,"¹²⁰ made that plain:

"I can't speak for the dead. As for myself, I can assure you that my conduct was dictated by necessity and by the sense of--well--retributive justice."¹²¹

Autocracy and revolution bred the same perversion of human values. Neither the fixed code of autocrats--the "absolute power" that Razumov once believed in--nor the relative morality of revolutionaries that, unveiled, stood for "retributive justice," made of life anything more than an incomprehensible unreality. Intelligibility derived from standards foreign to both.

Irresistibly, Razumov begins to love in Natalie the fidelity, the illusion, and the sense of commitment that he mocked in her brother. His supreme power of rationalization weakens in his appreciation of her power to believe, and hope, and love. The "haunting, falsehood-breeding spectre"¹²² that

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 220.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 326.

¹²²Ibid., p. 380.

stalked him--the moral consequences of that reasoned betrayal--fades, and "it was she who was haunting him now."¹²³ "You are a pre-destined victim," Razumov bluntly begins, echoing prophetically the language teacher's terminology in the confession scene where he admits his betrayal of Victor. Throwing off his false identity, Razumov decides to return to Russia to "perish" to all hope of immediate reward and to live, if at all, in "misery." Natalie's "light" and "truth" impel him toward the act of confession in a spirit of hope--"I am not in despair"--and freedom.¹²⁴ This act and his subsequent confession to the revolutionaries are acts invested with moral significance--private and public affirmations of the supreme value of loyalty and faith.

Conrad's fiction reflects a particular state in the disintegration of the moral order of the modern world, a world that Conrad described to Garnett as "a dreary place and a prey to minor virtues."¹²⁵ It was an age when men lacked common philosophical convictions about the nature of man and the nature of life, and that lack contributed to the loneliness of their spiritual alienation. Decoud and Nostromo, drifting together in the lighter, experienced the loneliness that grew out of a want of "common convictions." Society was fragmented into islands of social, political, and economic opinion, each island responsive

¹²³Ibid., p. 427.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 451.

¹²⁵Jean-Aubry, I, 173.

only to its own sanctions as were the police and the anarchists in The Secret Agent, or the autocrats and the revolutionaries in Under Western Eyes. Communication broke down between individuals and groups to such a degree that, as Charles Gould remarked in Nostromo, ordinary words seemed to lose their meaning. The decaying moral order "made no demand on the individual in terms of which he could be helped to the transcendence of his own nature";¹²⁶ failed to explain to the alienated man who he was, and how to be. Paradoxically, the fixed moral code sanctioned the international theft of imperialism with all its inhuman exploitation, dignified the "thieves of commerce" in Nostromo and upheld their utilitarian concept of Justice which was, as Dr. Monygham declared, inhuman and without rectitude; moreover, the Church served Autocracy in Under Western Eyes. Confronted with such moral incoherence, the modern isolato searched the depths of his being for the ideal conception of his personality on which he based the terms of his appeal for life-meaning. He created this truth, or value, or illusion of necessity, because it gave him, as it gave Charles Gould and Conrad's other illusionist-isolatos, a hold on the substance of life.

Conrad may have been influenced by Historicism in his thinking on fixed moral codes; he spoke of "the mustiness of the Middle Ages, that epoch when mankind tried to stand still in a

¹²⁶G. H. Bantock, "The Two 'Moralities' of Joseph Conrad," Essays in Criticism, III (April, 1953), p. 139.

monstrous illusion of final certitude attained in morals, intellect, and conscience." This intellectual judgment seems to be at odds, however, with a temperamental affinity for a code or tradition, like the Maritime Code, that would unite men, and, as the narrator of Nigger of the "Narcissus" claims in conclusion, help them to wring out a meaning from their sinful lives. Over and over, it is true, Conrad rendered the fixed code as hollow fetish, clothed in rhetorical abstractions, but his awareness of its defects failed to lead him into the camp of "humanitarian moralists." Conrad's most characteristic statements on morality are phrased in the dilemma of Lord Jim where Marlow's sympathy for the human condition, a dark odyssey in the "cross lights" of conflicting standards, is Conrad's sympathy; where Marlow's inability to choose between the "reputable" fixed standard that had its "claims," and the "disreputable" private code that had its "exigencies" was Conrad's inability, too. Unlike his friend Galworthy, Conrad never felt himself to possess the stature of moral counsellor, although he explored the question of morality in his fiction from every "angle of vision." He lived with his scepticism in this area all of his life, explaining late in his career:

". . . what is lacking in the facts is simply what I did not know, and what is not explained is what I did not understand myself, and what seems inadequate is the fault of my imperfect insight."¹²⁷

¹²⁷Mirror of Gold, p. ix.

CHAPTER VII

THE ALLEGORICAL CONFRONTATION

"Remember that death is not, the most pathetic,--
the most poignant thing--"¹

The most poignant fact in Martin Decoud's history is not his death, but the fact that he allowed his capacity to believe, to hope, and to love to atrophy. Negatively sceptical, cynical, and intellectual, Decoud allowed the plain fact of human life to lose its meaning and mystery for him. "I believe in nothing," he admitted before ending his life in the solitude of the bay off Great Isabel Island, Decoud's "sadness of the sceptical mind," as Conrad knew from personal experience, was the enemy that lay in wait for the modern isolato who, unlike a "Narcissus" mariner, was unable to "wring out a meaning from his sinful life" in a transitional and bewildering age. Scepticism seemed to Conrad the only reasonable attitude in life and in art in such an age--certainly he viewed the state of man and society in his fiction and letters with that "perfectly remorseless irony" that is the weapon of scepticism--but, himself an isolato, he was able to project his imagination into the common fate of the

¹Jean-Aubry, I, 183. Letter to Edward Noble, dated October 28, 1895.

alienated, and to understand the necessity of fidelity, of illusion, and of solidarity--a secularized faith, hope, and charity--to sustain and give meaning to that solitary life. "It is always the unexpected that happens," Marlow remarked philosophically to Jim, and, when he faces the unexpected that may rise from the depths of his secret self or from external circumstances, the untested isolato is an unarmed man if he lacks the weapons of the soul. As Heyst, who received his "weapon" from a dying Lena discovered--too late--life is fed at the spiritual springs of love, and trust, and hope. Conrad's scepticism, like Decoud's, passes negative judgments on the current assumptions and values regulating modern life, but, at the same time, something positive and exhilarating, some "unreasonable" prior knowledge, intuitive and instinctive, counterpoints that negative scepticism in his fiction and insists that man, in spite of folly, of cowardice, of evil in any form, is capable of inventing if not discovering values upon which paradoxically he can base triumphant, even though defeated, action.

Affirmation versus negation is a constant in Conrad's fiction, a dualism hardly less characteristic than order versus anarchy. Contrary to the view expressed by Thomas Moser,² affirmation is not limited to the "later" Conrad, nor does it result from a "failure of nerve" philosophically speaking, that

²Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, pp. 131-178.

persuaded a writer in the twilight of his creative life toward easy affirmations. Critical opinion generally concedes that Conrad's later novels are not the artistic equivalent of his early works; Galsworthy noted that fact about his friend's work in the early twenties. However, ascribing creative decline to the affirmative spirit seems questionable, and may result from some confusion about just what Conrad meant by affirmation. In "Heart of Darkness," the first novel to describe the "test"--the cannibals' "test of inexorable physical necessity"--Marlow defined the nature of affirmation when, speaking of Kurtz, he said:

"He had summed up--he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth--the strange commingling of desire and hate It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!"³

Self-knowledge constitutes the whole of Kurtz's victory, qualified as it had to be in view of the circumstances, by an atmosphere of "cold moral dusk," the same climate in which the modern isolato, picking his way in the "cross lights" of conflicting moralities, tries to give meaning to his solitary life. Taking self-knowledge and self-acceptance as the essence of Conrad's affirmation, one can see that moral victories of this kind are the significant experiences in his dramas of conscience from the

³Youth, p. 183.

beginning of his career. "Faithless Willems," as Conrad described him in a letter,⁴ may have had a glimmer of that moral recognition when the circumstances of his life forced upon him a "despairing wonder at his own nature."⁵ He died refusing the burden of self-knowledge--"The evil was in them, not in me."⁶--but at the moment of death he seemed to understand "the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life."⁷ Quixotic Lingard (The Rescue) failed his "test," even though no overt act of betrayal occurred, and in his recognition of that inclination to betray, this "man of infinite illusions" felt as though he had "lost his own soul." Although he sailed away with the "secret locked up in his own breast forever," he would never be the same; he would never be able to escape "a distinct sense of loss, a flavour in the mouth of the real, abiding danger that lurks in all forms of human existence."⁸ Conrad added:

It is an acquisition, too, that feeling. A man may be the better for it, but he will not be the same . . . the feast shall not henceforth have the same flavour.⁹

⁴Jean-Aubry, I, 174. Letter to Edward Garnett, dated June 7, 1895: "You must think me as faithless as Willems . . . hiding the blackness of my soul in epistolary silence."

⁵Outcast of the Islands, p. 339.

⁶Ibid., p. 329.

⁷Ibid., p. 443.

⁸Mirror of the Sea, p. 82.

⁹Ibid.

Razumov is another isolato whose act of betrayal results from a lack of self-knowledge; that knowledge, arrived at through the mission of Natalie, finds expression in private and public acts of confession that constitute Razumov's dearly purchased moral victory, his affirmation. Self-knowledge and self-acceptance, moral recognitions prerequisite for the action and illusion that Conrad recognized as ethically "good," must precede the isolato's movement toward the human community, a gesture not necessarily associated with happiness, success, or even life. H. L. Mencken noted this dark truth:

His stories are not chronicles of men who conquer fate, nor of men who are unbent and undaunted by fate, but of men who are conquered and undone I can scarcely recall an exception. Kurtz, Jim, Razumov, Nostromo-- one and all, they are destroyed and made a mock of by the blind, incomprehensible forces that beset them.¹⁰

Yet Conrad would have considered that the characters named by Mencken, characters born into a materialistic "age in which we are camped like bewildered travelers in a garish, unrestful hotel," disarmed by nescience yet faced with the necessity to make moral decisions in lives filled with stress and passion had, by arriving at moral awareness, achieved a victory, an affirmation that was the first step to selfhood. That state, in which a man understands and accepts himself, makes it possible for him to live with others. Achieving selfhood, the isolato can more

¹⁰"Joseph Conrad," A Book of Prefaces (New York: Knopf Publishing Co., 1917), p. 12.

accurately plumb the depths of his temperament for the terms of his appeal for meaning in life. After that, the challenge is, as Conrad wrote to a troubled friend, to be "faithfully yourself":

. . . the great thing is to be faithfully yourself . . . This seems vague, --yet it is my clear thought for which I cannot find another form. Nothing more difficult than expression. And if, --at times,--you feel defeated, believe me, it will be a delusion, because no circumstances of man's contriving can be stronger than a personality upheld by faith and conscience. There! I wish I could say something really helpful,--something practical to you,--and here I am unable to present anything but a belief. I believe it is truth.¹¹

Something of Conrad's belief in the indomitability of the human spirit finds expression in that letter, which suggests also the distinction that Conrad made between an apparent and a real victory. The age, it seemed to Conrad, had reduced men, as he described Lena reduced, to less than heroic proportions, a reduction at odds with his own persistent recognition of the defiant, challenging, Promethean qualities of the human spirit, qualities that called man to the defense of men, that were "the true elixirs against the majestic overpowering tediousness of an existence full of allegoric visions."¹² The values and assumptions of the age were based on less than heroic recognitions--utilitarianism reasoned man downward from the transcendental;

¹¹Jean-Aubry, I, 238. Letter to Mrs. Sanderson, June 3, 1898.

¹²Ibid., I, 331. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, July 2, 1904.

naturalism preached a view of man and of life considerably diminished from Conrad's romantic-realistic vision--but the narrowly realistic in life, as Conrad remarked to Bennett about art, just missed being real by failing to account for the impressive aspect of the human personality--its indomitability, the power to resist. Fear, doubt, the pragmatic appeals of utility, passivity, as well as the unpredictable assaults of destiny were only some of the negations threatening the "unchanging Man of history" so "wonderfully adaptable in his power of endurance," rooted in some mysterious quality that stirred the "pagan residuum of awe and wonder which lurks still at the bottom of our old humanity."¹³ Conrad tried to define that resisting spirit in several novels that are "parabolic" in presentation, as Zabel said, allegorical in the moral lesson implicit in character and incident. Five novels, Nigger of the "Narcissus" (1897), Typhoon (1902), Chance (1914), Victory (1915), and The Rover (1923), oppose the antagonistic forces of affirmation and negation in such a way as to impress the reader as desperate, dramatic confrontations of universal ethical significance.

Nigger of the "Narcissus," Conrad explained in the preface to a friend's biography, portrayed "the crew of a merchant ship, brought to the test of what I may venture to call the moral

¹³"Note to the First Edition," Victory (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957), p. vii.

problems of conduct."¹⁴ The journey of the Narcissus from Bombay to London, presented with strictly conventional chronology, is a life allegory, a "version of our human pilgrimage,"¹⁵ the smooth course of which is interrupted by crises. Three times the Narcissus is threatened with destruction, and three times is preserved by the affirmative resistance of the crew in crises differentiated by Robert Haugh as the physical stress of storm, the political stress of mutiny, and the moral stress of death.¹⁶ Courage, order, and authority represent affirmation; fear, disorder, and mutiny represent negation in the recurring crises, the first encountered of which is the physical stress of storm.

The ship's efficient officers are aware, as the Narcissus nears the Cape, that the impudent agitator Donkin and the proud malingering Negro, Jim Wait, have succeeded by their ridicule and scorn in bringing the crew to the verge of mutiny. Destructive qualities that serve as Conrad's synonyms of evil--disloyalty, dishonesty, disorder, and doubt--demoralizing the seamen and unfitting them for the job at hand, attend the addition of Donkin and Wait to a normally loyal crew. The inverse morality of Donkin and Wait brands the crew's fidelity to daily tasks as contemptible submission, and their acceptance of order and

¹⁴From the Preface to Thomas Beer's Stephen Crane, as quoted in Baines, p. 183.

¹⁵Conrad the Novelist, p. 57.

¹⁶Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design, p. 15.

authority as a naive endurance of injustice. Friendships wither under their scorn, discord rules the forecandle, and mutiny is in the offing as the Narcissus, rounding the Cape, encounters the challenge of bad weather.

The powerful, merciless sea batters the beautiful craft, and the mariners realize that their ordeal is developing into a test for survival. Instinctively, they respond to the demands of the groaning ship, becoming, in the performance of their duties, a closely-knit brotherhood again. Authority returns to the capable officers, whose commands are instantly and unquestioningly obeyed by tired, wet, hungry men, glad of direction. The days and nights of battle against a pitiless adversary seems to be nearly ended when, unexpectedly, the Narcissus, swamped by waves, rolls over on her side. An almost personal malevolence seems to activate the sea:

A big foaming sea came out of the mist: it made for the ship, roaring wildly, and in its rush it looked as mischievous and discomposing as a madman with an axe. Before we could draw breath a heavy gust struck her unfairly under the weather bow; we gave a toppling lurch.¹⁷

Cutting the lines and masts would right the ship, but would leave her a helpless, drifting hulk. Donkin, more frightened and desperate than anyone, yells "Cut!" repeatedly, but Captain Allistoun roars "No!":

¹⁷Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. 64.

They all believed it was their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his gray head and shouted "No!" without giving them as much as a glance. They were silent and gasped . . . Singleton stuck to the wheel.¹⁸

Shrieking in fear and apprehension, Donkin is silenced when one of his tired and tried shipmates, so recently under Donkin's agitating spell, strikes him an impatient blow. Constantly wet and driven, tied to ringbolts for safety, the men somehow answer the grueling demands of duty, taxed, it would seem, beyond human endurance.

In the midst of this exhausting effort, someone remembers Jim Wait, isolated because of his delinquent malingering in a sick bay cabin, half under water. Five crewmen spontaneously move to rescue the forgotten captive, whose screams leave no doubt about his live and frightened condition. Battering down the bulkhead, they curse the Clyde shipbuilders who built so solidly, and, reverting further to inverse morality, the rescuers throw overboard the kegs of nails that, like the bolts in "Heart of Darkness"--devices for holding things together--symbolize solidarity. An ungrateful Jim, rescued by generous shipmates, upbraids them for forgetting him, and they, feeling guilty, handle that "limp, that hateful burden"¹⁹ all the more gently because of their intuitive recoil from his dark influence.

The ship and the crew survive the first ordeal because, instinctively, officers and men perform appointed tasks in spite

¹⁸Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 81.

of terrifying obstacles. Acts of bravery go unnoticed, and even Podmore achieves the "meeraculous"²⁰ when he appears with hot coffee--no small accomplishment in a galley almost up-ended. Terror and fear remain as shipmates after the storm, however; the crew's memory of demoralization--by the terror spread by Donkin and the fear generated by Wait--reminds them that, perhaps for the first time on any voyage, courage failed:

Never before had the gale seemed more furious, the sea more mad, the sunshine more merciless and mocking, the position of the ship more hopeless and appalling.²¹

The crew's first instinctive "affirmative resistance to fate"²² is followed by a routine period of duty in which the combined influence of Donkin and Wait generates the political stress of mutiny. Donkin, the apostle of equality, conquers the "naive instincts of the crowd"²³ by dwelling on the hardness of their fate, and succeeds in making them believe that authority uses them unjustly. Belittling the contribution of the Captain and the officers, he lavishly praises the crew, convincing them that they are "oppressed by the injustice of the world."²⁴ With all the damage of storm to be repaired in addition to regular duties, the time is right to plant the seeds of self-pity, and a

²⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

²¹ Ibid., p. 78.

²² Haugh, p. 12.

²³ Nigger of the "Narcissus", p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

sense of injustice, that, nurtured by his incendiary rhetoric, poisons the atmosphere. Revolt smoulders beneath the surface as men perform grudgingly and sulkily the tasks that Donkin describes as oppressive. The Cockney anarchist suggests that the crew challenge authority and force redress of the "grievances" by feigning illness--an idea suggested by Jim's successful malingering. The bold and unheard-of suggestion startles the crew, whose hesitant reply is postponed by a call to duty, instantly obeyed in response to a deeply ingrained morality.

The mutiny averted for the time, watchful Captain Allistoun turns his attention to the arrogant, delinquent Wait, whose illness the Captain has come to accept as fact. Unexpectedly, Jim asks to be returned to duty, but Allistoun, realizing the seriousness of his symptoms, refuses. A demonstrably just act, soundly humanitarian, Allistoun's refusal of Wait is interpreted by the crew as oppression, and the mutiny so fatefully averted by the call to duty, is triggered, ironically, by a genuinely humane gesture. Discipline deteriorates as the crew's fidelities to the ship's demands corrode under Donkin's scorn, culminating in two critical acts of anarchy: first, Donkin hurls an iron belaying pin at Captain Allistoun, the figurehead of authority; and secondly, the helmsman, abdicating responsibility, leaves his post at the wheel. The latter act--the supreme betrayal for any mariner--invites disaster, with damage to helm, sails, and yardarms so that the ship flounders in danger as grave as the

storm. Again, the crisis mobilizes the crew into a united and successful effort during which Donkin and Jim are forgotten in the demands of the ship. On the following day Captain Allistoun musters the crew, and all hands watch as he confronts Donkin with the belaying pin and directs him to replace it in the rack. Thus Allistoun, the symbol of affirmation--of authority, order, and courage--confronts Donkin, the symbol of negation--of fear, disorder, and mutiny--and, in plain sight of the morally troubled men, defeats the agitator.

The physical stress of storm and the political stress of mutiny are dwarfed by the moral stress presented by Jim Wait in what are obviously his last days. Wait's presence is the presence of Death, the ultimate negation, among them, a presence that warps sound moral feelings and fosters self-pity as well as sentimentalism, evasions, doubt, and fear. "Highly humanized," the crew suffers from Wait's non-recognition of the fact of approaching death; they find his willed ignorance "as disquieting as the failure of some law of nature." Their helpless pity for Wait deteriorates into self-pity; each man isolates himself within the circle of his own folly or cowardice, becoming emotional, irritable, religious, or withdrawn, and only one--aged, patriarchal Singleton--remaining silent and serene.

The men who could understand his silence were gone--those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within the sight of eternity They had been men who knew toil, privation, violence,

debauchery--but knew not fear, and had no desire of spite in their hearts . . . They are gone now-- and it does not matter.²⁵

Singleton faces the idea of death calmly, predicting, according to his unshakable belief in the "laws" of the sea, that Wait will die when land is sighted, and that the needed winds will follow upon the death of Jim. Donkin retreats to Jim's cabin, supposedly caring for him; the cabin becomes a little world, ruled and inhabited by negative forces. Donkin, still smarting from his public rebuke, feels spiteful:

He had a desire to assert his importance, to break, to crush, to be even with everybody for everything; to tear the veil, unmask, expose, leave no refuge--a perfidious desire of truthfulness. He laughed in a mocking sputter and said about Jim's hope for life:
 "Ten days! Strike me blind if I ever! You will be dead by this time tomorrow. Ten days! Splash! Never see you any more. Overboard! Good 'nuff for yer."²⁶

Ignoring Wait's plea that he "light the lamp," Donkin takes a key from under Wait's pillow, and calmly goes about the job of pillaging the dying man's sea-chest. The cold moral world of Donkin and Wait is exposed, barren of any human value.

Jim Wait dies, and, as his canvas-covered body slips beneath the waves, the breeze Singleton promises freshens the sails. The ship rises, graceful and light, the sky clears, and the gloom of the crew dissipates in their robust performance of routine tasks that bring them safely to England. During the voyage each man encountered his own private world of darkness;

²⁵Ibid., p. 26.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 169-70.

each succumbed in some personal way to unexpected stresses that, temporarily, drew him into the dark orbit of disaster, fear, and mutiny. But the Narcissus, their world, made its demands upon them, to which their fidelities responded, and in three confrontations order, courage, and authority--the affirmative stance--prevailed over the morally bankrupt negations of Donkin and Wait, a victory of "the normal over the abnormal."²⁷

Five years later, in 1902, Conrad returned to this structural pattern and wrote Typhoon, another tale of an endangered ship. Captain MacWhirr, one of Conrad's unimaginative men, serene and decorous, directs the passage of the Nan-Shan, crossing the China Sea to Fuchau. His physiognomy is "the exact counterpart of his mind: . . . it was simply ordinary, irresponsible, and unruffled."²⁸ "Bashfulness" is suggested by the downcast eyes of the round-shouldered, bowler-hatted, middle-aged man of few words. Captain MacWhirr had, like Winnie Verloc, a tidy shopkeeper's mind that methodically ticked off dutiful letters home to a wife who dreaded his homecoming, to a daughter who was embarrassed by his obtuseness, and to a son who hardly remembered him. MacWhirr's first mate, Jukes, is a young, restless officer, impatient with the plodding MacWhirr: "He simply knocks me over," he complained to the Chief Engineer;²⁹ "He's

²⁷Wiley, p. 44.

²⁸Typhoon, p. 3.

²⁹Ibid., p. 14.

too dense to ever trouble about, and that's the truth," he confided to a friend by letter.³⁰ The Chief Engineer, Mr. Solomon Rout, is a tall, sandy-haired man, "pale, too, as though he had lived all his life in the shade,"³¹ who had acquired the habit of a stooping leisurely condescension in his satisfied overlordship of the boiler room. These principals guide the Nan-Shan, burdened with two hundred Chinese coolies en route home to Fo-kien, each carrying with him a little box with all "the savings of his labours."³² The Nan-Shan is a good ship, undoubtedly and not old either,³³ whose builders suggested the name of her "reliable skipper" to her present owners. The reason, the senior builder explained to his junior partner, that he volunteered the name of MacWhirr was that, though he had "nothing of your fancy skipper about him,"³⁴ he was faithful to the job nearest at hand: MacWhirr's attention was claimed during their interview by the defective new lock on the cabin door rather than by the inviting prospect of command on some distant sea.

This particular voyage had only begun when the falling barometer and an oppressive calm moved MacWhirr to observe that "There's some dirty weather knocking about":

³⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² Ibid., p. 7.

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

Dirty weather he had known, of course. He had been made wet, uncomfortable, tired in the usual way But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased--the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean.³⁵

The "leaden heat" of the sun shortens tempers, provoking even MacWhirr to an irrational attack upon Jukes for careless husbanding of the canvas bags that are used to whip up the coals. The temperature in the engine room rises to one hundred and seventeen degrees, and irritated voices of engineers and stokers testify to tempers as short below the deck as they are on the bridge. "Engine-room" and "deck" workers are soon shouting insults at each other; "all the Chinamen . . . appeared at their last gasp."³⁶ The calm gives way to rolling swells, so that Jukes, laboring at filling in the log, repeatedly retrieves the inkstand sliding away in a manner that "suggested perverse intelligence"; "every appearance of a typhoon coming on," he writes with difficulty.³⁷ Thinking of the discomfort of the Chinese passengers, Jukes goes in search of MacWhirr--found, amazingly, reading a book in his cabin--to suggest that steering four points off course would avoid the worst of the storm.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 21-22.

³⁶Ibid., p. 30.

³⁷Ibid., p. 31.

Neither dropping the book nor losing his place, Mac Whirr replies in astonishment:

"You want me to haul a full-powered steamship four points off her course to make the Chinamen comfortable! Now I've heard more than enough mad things in the world --but this³⁸

MacWhirr's contempt for Juke's suggestion is equaled by his contempt for the just-completed chapter on storms:

"It's the damndest thing, Jukes," he said. "If a fellow was to believe all that's in there, he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather It's the maddest thing."³⁹

MacWhirr judges that:

"A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes and a full-powered steamship has got to face it."⁴⁰

The gale, Jukes finds as he opens the cabin door, has arrived. Catnapping for a few minutes after delivering judgment, Captain MacWhirr wakens to hear a high, whistling wind announcing the arrival of the storm, "formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath."⁴¹ Jukes is "uncritically glad to have his captain at hand"⁴² when MacWhirr appears on the bridge, thick, clumsy, and shapeless in his rainwear, the "panoply of combat." The combat intensifies; the wind increases, and the disintegrating power of a great wind is this: that "it isolates one from one's kind."⁴³ Waves wash over the bridge,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴² Ibid., p. 46.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 47.

tossing half-drowned Jukes one way, his "silent" commander another. The marked contrast between the silent, calm, duty-oriented, middle aged Captain and his talkative, agitated, daunted, young first mate threads through the major part of the tale. Juke's incapacitating reaction stems from the fact that, like the merchants under attack on the Congo steamer in "Heart of Darkness," he simply cannot believe that the experience, in all its terrible ferocity, is happening to him. Relieved when the "stout arms" of the Captain clasp him, Jukes takes the time to note that sail, gaskets, awnings, even boats are being borne away by the waves: "Our boats are going now, sir," Jukes cries in an agitated voice, and a voice answers:

. . . forced, and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice-- the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution, and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall, and justice is done--again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far--"All right. . . Can't be helped."⁴⁴

"She's done for," Jukes is thinking to himself, when his commander's voice inquires where the hands have "got to." "Ought to know," asserted MacWhirr; "Hold hard."

They held hard . . . all at once she sprang up again to her desperate plunging, as if trying to scramble out from under the ruins.

The seas in the dark seemed to rush from all sides to keep her back where she might perish. There was hate in

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 51.

the way she was handled, and a ferocity in the blows that fell. She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob; hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon.⁴⁵

Jukes tries to "outscream" the wind: "Will she live through this?" After a while he heard with amazement "the frail and resisting voices in his ear, the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult: "She may!"

The boatswain crawls onto the bridge to announce another kind of crisis: "All them Chinamen in the fore 'tween deck have fetched away, sir."⁴⁶ Writhing bodies, naked soles, pigtaails, and clinking coins tumble from port to starboard 'tween-deck: "A regular little hell in there."⁴⁷ A daunted Jukes is dispatched to see what the matter is, a little revolted at the absurdity of the demand at a time of seemingly imminent disaster.⁴⁸ "Do you think she may [get through this]?" Jukes asks, departing on his mission; he hears only the one word in answer, pronounced with great energy: ". . . Always . . ." Jukes stumbles against bodies in the dark, giving reassuringly rough answers to the two or three voices that ask, eager and weak: "Any chance for us, sir?" Arriving in the boiler room, Jukes lurches toward one of the tubes to convey his verification of chaos among the Chinese coolies, who need, more than anything, a lifeline--something to hold on to. He notices that the donkeyman shovels coal "in a

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 68.

sort of mute transport"; the second engineer keeps up, by contrast, a steady volley of curses, "all the time attending to his business"; and Solomon Rout moves "with a restless, purposeful industry."⁴⁹ The Captain reports from the bridge in a "matter-of-fact tone" that the second mate "lost his nerve" and "rushed at me": "I had to give him a push,"⁵⁰ he explains curtly to Jukes later, indicating the tumbled-looking second mate. Jukes is about to reply into the tube when, "with a tearing crash and a swirling, raving tumult," tons of water fall upon the deck; "Swept from end to end, by God!" bawls Jukes. Solomon Rout and Jukes have the same thought: the Captain must have been swept away, but when Jukes puts his ear to the tube, "the voice is ready for him: Pick up all the money. Bear a hand now. I'll want you up here." And that was all. Jukes returns to supervise the rigging of lifelines for the Chinese; their money is taken into custody, their tossed belongings gathered for sorting later. Jukes can hardly believe that he has accomplished the task, even with the help of the crew, and he struggles back to the bridge to report with pride:

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.

"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.

"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself.

.....
 "Had to do what's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr stolidly. You don't find everything in books."⁵¹

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 91.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 93-94.

MacWhirr remains with Jukes on the bridge until the Nan-Shan achieves the "still core of the hurricane,"⁵² where the still air moans and a few stars are visible, and then Captain MacWhirr leaves the bridge for the chart room. The instruments there leave no doubt; they register the lowest reading he had ever seen in his life. The worst is yet to come. The light is out in the chart room, but MacWhirr can sense the disorder, and the fact that things are not in their "safe appointed places" actually dismays the composed man. He reflects with satisfaction on the treatment of the Chinese; it wouldn't have done at all to have a ship go to the bottom with people fighting in her tooth and claw:

That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things.⁵³

As they listen for the first sounds of the returning wind, the defenses of the man are penetrated: "I shouldn't like to lose her, he said half aloud." Then, he caught sight of the washstand with the towel hanging in its appointed place: "She may come out of it yet," he murmured.

Back on deck with Mr. Jukes, Captain MacWhirr reverts to the subject of the Chinese. "We did [that infernal job]," says Jukes, "and it may not matter in the end."⁵⁴ MacWhirr replies:

⁵²Ibid., p. 97.

⁵³Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 101.

"Had to do what's fair for all--they are only Chinamen. Give them the same chance with ourselves--hang it all. She isn't lost yet. Bad enough to be shut up below in a gale . . . without being battered to pieces," pursued MacWhirr with rising vehemence. "Couldn't let that go on in my ship, if I knew she hadn't five minutes to live. Couldn't bear it, Mr. Jukes."⁵⁵

The wind begins to rise; the last star goes out; MacWhirr reminds Jukes that, if anything happens to him, "you would be left alone . . ." He remonstrates: "You are always meeting trouble half-way, Mr. Jukes":

"Don't you be put out by anything," the Captain continued, mumbling rather fast. "Keep her facing it. They may say what they like, but the heaviest seas run with the wind. Facing it--always facing it--that's the way to get through. You are a young sailor. Face it. That's enough for any man. Keep a cool head."⁵⁶

Hearing MacWhirr talk to him that way makes young Jukes feel confident, equal to any demand. The two men on the bridge are growing indistinct to each other again; the wrath of the storm is descending when Jukes hears MacWhirr declare vexatiously, "I wouldn't want to lose her." Captain MacWhirr was "spared that annoyance."⁵⁷

The Nan-Shan arrives in port, battered and salt-encrusted, but with all hands safe, and the Chinese coolies prepare to debark. MacWhirr decides that, since the Chinese worked at the same place for the same length of time, he would be justified in apportioning the retrieved dollars equally among them. Three

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

dollars remaining after the distribution are given to the three most seriously injured of the quiet, gentle, but "deucedly tough" Celestials. To the surprise of the apprehensive crew, the numerically superior Chinese accept this rough justice. "There are feelings that this man simply hasn't got--and there's an end of it," Jukes concludes to his friend in another letter, but, he continues, reflecting the general opinion, "I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man."⁵⁸

Allegorically, Typhoon opposes to the violent wind and the other assaults of nature that "isolate one from one's kind," that other sound--the calm, frail, indomitable human voice in which something--inspiring or stupid--resides. As long as that voice is heard, the ship is safe; the kind of flag under which it sails doesn't make any difference, MacWhirr reminds the crew, as long as we are here. The voice speaks for dignity, compassion, justice, courage; it persuades the frightened to heroism, heals divisions, and inspires the effort that brings the ship to safe harbor. It is a "small voice, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope and fear," but indomitable.⁵⁹

In a later novel Victory (1915), Conrad used the voice image in a comparable manner. The symbolic and dramatic character of the conflicts in Victory were explored at length in Chapter V; their allegorical nature is re-emphasized here

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 55.

briefly. The principal action in Victory takes place on the Round Island of Samburan, a microcosmic world as the Narcissus and the Nan-Shan were. Axel Heyst is an alienated, self-divided man, whose self-division is rendered in the affinity of his negatively sceptical convictions for those of the death-like Mr. Jones, and his instinctive response to the affirmations--to love, and trust, and hope--rendered in the character of the Cockney waif Lena, and conveyed in her seductive voice. Although the philosophical conflict may have certain overtones peculiar to Conrad's day, Victory seems to have a universal and timeless quality, extracted from the most unlikely melodramatic situations.

A modern man, conditioned by rationalism and scepticism to a role of passive spectatorship, Heyst knows that he may be a man, not only of the "last hour," but, perhaps of the "hour before the last." The curtain of negation may be lowering on the human spectacle, a spectacle fit for every emotion except the emotion of despair. Axel Heyst is the most subtle of the characters, but still representational. Like a figure in a morality play. Even more so is Lena, representing Life, and Mr. Jones, representing Death, with his lesser negations rendered in the characters of Ricardo and Pedro. Axel Heyst's physical isolation on the island of Samburan is a matter of choice; so, too, is his spiritual isolation in the negative scepticism of his father:

". . . all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again."⁶⁰

"Cornered" Lena breaks the circle of Heyst's isolation, making demands upon the alienated man that his "instinctive decency" cannot refuse. Her voice is the voice of humanity, the "oldest voice in the world that never ceases to speak." The voice challenges his inherited negations, and the negations begin to fall away from him, one by one. Heyst admits to himself that Lena speaks to him in a "warm and wonderful voice which in itself comforted and fascinated one's heart, which made her lovable."⁶¹ From their very first meeting, he is aware of the "amazing quality of that voice;" Heyst "drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune."⁶² The experiences that Lena spoke of during their first meeting "came out of the common experience of mankind; yet by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation."⁶³ The appeal of Life is clothed in the melodious tones of Lena's voice, and, in spite of passing mistrust, the appeal carries. Curiously enough, Conrad was able to associate stupidity, however glancingly, with the appealing Lena, a stupidity that associates more easily with the Captain of the serio-comic Typhoon. In the scene where Heyst realizes his attraction to

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶² Ibid., p. 93.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 95.

Lena, he begins to wonder what it is in her that gives her a special charm:

. . . her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force--or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender.⁶⁴

Allegorically, Lena as Life confronts the influence of the elder Heyst in its extremest form, represented by Mr. Jones as Death. Paradoxically, Lena, scarificing her life, wins a victory for life; Heyst arrives by her sacrifice at the self-knowledge that constitutes his moral victory, an achievement undiminished by the fact of his suicide. Heyst chose suicide as, earlier in his life, he had chosen isolation, because "no one in all the world" but Lena could cure the temperamental paralysis ingrained by years of negation. From Conrad's point of view, Heyst might well be a man of the "hour before the last"; not irony, but the note of prophetic warning ends Victory, which is the reason, it seems, that the final word is "Nothing," in the book which, Conrad confessed, "I have tried to grasp at more life stuff than perhaps in any other of my works."⁶⁵

The title of Chance (1914), the novel preceding Victory, would seem to be demonstrably ironic, since the force from which the deciding action in Flora's life springs is not chance, but

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

⁶⁵ Jean-Aubry, II, 243. Letter to Henry S. Canby, April 7, 1924.

choice. Jessie Conrad related that her novelist-husband anguished over the epigraphs to his novels in a way that left no doubt about their importance to the text. The epigraph of Chance, a quotation from Sir Thomas Browne, suggests the structural antagonisms:

Those that hold that all things are governed by
Fortune had not erred, had they not persisted there.

Fortune, or the Wheel of Fortune as a synonym for Fate, or Destiny, or Chance--"absence of intelligent design"⁶⁶ is a well-worn one in literature; in Conrad's fiction, Fortune, or Chance, is the "unexpected" that always happens, as Marlow said to Jim, the unforeseen and unpredictable event that, entering a life, alters it. The unforeseen enters the life of Flora de Barral when the fraudulent business schemes of her wealthy, unprincipled father are discovered, resulting in a jail sentence for him and social ostracism for her. Flora is sixteen years old, on the threshold of selfhood, with all the doubts and insecurities attendant upon that sensitive age, when chance takes a hand in the direction of her young life. Fortunately, Flora is able to cling to two "false" illusions during her test, a test which lasts for several years: first, the belief that her father is an innocent man, and secondly, the conviction that she is the most important thing in the world to him. Neither illusion has any basis in fact, but, as Conrad indicated so many times, that factual basis is

⁶⁶Chance, p. 42.

unnecessary if, as in Flora's case, the illusions are life-sustaining. Even with her illusions, Flora's despair deepens to a point where she calmly contemplates suicide on two occasions: the Fyne's barking dog and the unexpected appearance of Marlow prevents her leap into the quarry on the first occasion; the second time, something in the voice and manner of the accidentally encountered Captain Roderick Anthony, Mrs. Fyne's brother, distracts her from the intended self-destruction.

When the rumors of de Barral's bankruptcy begin to spread through the financial centers of England, Flora continues a quietly affluent existence in a luxurious home located in a small town. Chance had brought her governess Eliza to the attention of de Barral when, his wife dying "from neglect, absolutely from neglect,"⁶⁷ he needed a governess for his only child. Eliza, a beautiful but waspish woman of "nearly forty," probably impressed de Barral with her previous service in a ducal home; certainly his own lower-middle class origins seemed to condition him to something like awe before her imperious airs, derived, perhaps, from that previous connection. Eliza effectively dictated the kind of "splendidly furnished house in the most expensive part of Brighton" where she would consider employment, and de Barral retreated before her demands to the in-fighting of the London financial district and opponents he felt surer of.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 82.

Eliza is very much in control of the de Barral mansion when the tale begins, supervising Flora's contingent of tutors, and indulging in her illusion at the same time. Eliza's illusion centers upon her twenty-three year old "nephew" Charley, a remarkable young man for the strength of his family feeling, if one is to judge by the frequency of his visits to discuss "family affairs." Not much older than Flora, Eliza's nephew, a "young man with furtive eyes and something impudent in his manner,"⁶⁸ is encouraged by his aunt to frequent the company of the young heiress--to walk with her, to ride with her, to watch her paint, in short, to make himself necessary to the happiness of the young and often lonely girl. Compassion has no part in Eliza's suggestions; her illusion requires that Flora, upon coming into her money, marry the nephew; he, in turn, upon gaining control of Flora's fortune, will desert her for the company of his aunt.

Eliza's ambitious scheme is proceeding according to schedule until, by chance, de Barral invests heavily in a losing Indian client, precipitating a drain on his "Thrift" exchanges which leads to bankruptcy. One of Charley's visits coinciding with that development, he and Eliza furtively pack their belongings all through the night, while Flora sleeps her last sleep of innocence, or perhaps it would be better to say

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 104.

of that unconsciousness of the world's ways, the unconsciousness of danger, of pain, of humiliation, of bitterness, of falsehood. An unconsciousness which in the case of other beings like herself is removed by a gradual process of experience and information, often only partial at that, with saving reserves, softening doubts, veiling theories. Her unconsciousness of the evil which lives in the secret thoughts and therefore in the open acts of mankind, whenever it happens that evil thought meets evil courage; her unconsciousness was to be broken into with profane violence, with desecrating circumstances, like a temple violated by a mad, vengeful impiety And if you ask me how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why by chance! By the merest chance as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; . . .⁶⁹

Eliza's rage builds up as she packs to leave, rage at life which had kept all the good things beyond her grasp, that, defrauding her of love now, was snatching away her last chance for it; Charley's "devotion" would fade, Eliza realized, without the lure of money. Evil emanating from her face, Eliza bursts in upon Flora in the morning, reluctantly followed by Charley, and, by way of revenge on life, shatters the spirit of the young girl in a savage attack--berating her for her convict father, sneering at her expectation of affection without his money--that leaves Flora stricken into silence, with a frightened, bloodless expression--"the face of a victim"⁷⁰--that remains for years. The venomous abuse inflicts a "mystic wound" upon Flora; she rushes blindly into the street, and is hardly aware of her

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 71.

interception by Mr. Fyne, whose extraordinary wife takes charge of the distraught young girl.

Mrs. Fyne, as chance would have it, is motivated by a militantly feminist social doctrine to provide aid for the young girl who,

by the mere fact of her sex, was the predestined victim of conditions created by men's selfish passions, their vices, and their abominable tyranny.⁷¹

Mrs. Fyne's help is, therefore, devoid of the human warmth and reassurance that Flora needs so desperately at the time. The Fyne home, if not a center of compassion, is at least "neutral ground," so that Flora dreads leaving it for the home of the unpleasantly sly male relative of her father who, at the request of the father, comes to claim her. The elderly man manages to project

a derisive disapproval of everything that was not middle class, a profound respect for money, a mean sort of contempt for speculators that fail, and a conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity."⁷²

Flora's spirit is under constant attack in his home from her two crude cousins, backed by their doting and equally crude mother, who pilfer her belongings, intrude upon her privacy, and pepper their conversation with cruel jibes at her poverty, her convict-father, and her social ostracism. Finally, "the passive victim" runs out of their home into the rain, as she ran blindly out of her own home once before; no haven beckons except that of the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁷² Ibid., p. 150.

the Fynes, where she is taken in by the "good, stupid, earnest couple . . . very much bothered . . . ," only to be reclaimed by her relatives the following day. If she were only a boy, Mrs. Fyne reminds her husband, then it would be different; then she could go out into the world and make her own way, but a woman has no choice but to remain a "cornered" human being until some opportunity for employment or for marriage chances to present itself.

Flora's first opportunity for employment with an elderly woman who needs a cheerful companion, ends in failure, because, as the woman explained to Mrs. Fyne, Flora wasn't cheerful, and when she tried to pretend cheerfulness it was sadder yet. Her second opportunity is as governess in a German household, where the unencouraged amorous attentions of the husband, discovered by the wife, are imputed to Flora's weak character:

It was as though Flora had been fated to be always surrounded by treachery and lies stifling every better impulse, every instinctive aspiration of her soul to trust and to love. It would have been enough to drive a fine nature into the madness of universal suspicion--into any sort of madness.⁷³

Returning to the Fyne home, the only haven she knows, Flora, obsessed by a sense of inferiority, begins to entertain thoughts of suicide. One day, when Fyne's neighbor Marlow is out for a walk, he sees Flora poised dangerously on the edge of the quarry, and, without knowing anything about her, he feels sure that her

⁷³Ibid., pp. 202-203.

intentions are suicidal. When Marlow returns to the vicinity of the Fyne cottage the next time, he discovers that Flora has eloped with Captain Anthony, Mrs. Fyne's brother. The Fynes are convinced that Flora is guilty of duplicity; that she lured Captain Anthony into marriage as a way out of her "cornered" status, and as a haven for her soon-to-be released father. Mrs. Fyne possesses an added source for her displeasure: she cannot forgive Flora for "acting like a woman."

Flora's sudden action was dictated by a sense of unworthiness, an inferiority complex, in fact, while Captain Anthony's motivation was idealistically romantic. Recognizing in Flora the damsel in distress, Captain Anthony Quixotically responded to her need, proposing marriage and her own home at sea aboard his ship, the Ferndale. Mr. Fyne shatters any chance that union might have had when he journeys to London to tell his brother-in-law that Flora only plans to marry him to better her social status. Captain Anthony's knowledge of self is no more accurate than Flora's, and, consequently, Fyne's words are enough to introduce the curtain between his quarters and hers on board ship. According to his romantic, knightly sense of honor, Captain Anthony says nothing of his conversation with Mr. Fyne, and seems to take a knightly oath to rescue the "cornered" damsel without making any demands upon her. Captain Anthony's avoidance of her is taken by Flora as further proof of her inferiority, and her passivity to life's blows deepens, her spirit,

"bewildered in quivering hopelessness by gratuitous cruelty":

It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody would love her. Humility clung to her like a cold shroud--never to be shaken off--unwarmed by this madness of generosity.⁷⁴

The presence of the paroled father on board the Ferndale symbolizes all the blows of chance that have rained down on Flora as a result of his illegal activities and that, condescending to her passive state, poison her life still. Irrationally, her father, a man "of overweening, unmeasurable conceit,"⁷⁵ resents the marriage that has provided Flora and him with a home together, and he develops a hatred for Captain Anthony, calling him "that man" and "jailer." He dwells upon the subject of betrayal, straining the fragile bond between husband and wife. De Barral dreams of recouping his fortunes and of using Flora to help him, but first, he must get rid of "that man." Flora, unaware of the evil in her father, regards his hostility as the natural reaction of an innocent man to imprisonment; she rarely leaves his side in an attempt to restore his spirits.

The crisis in all their lives arrives one night when the young seaman Powell, who has befriended the friendless Flora, sees what he assumes to be her father's hand putting poison in the brandy glass of Captain Anthony from behind the dividing curtain. Entering the Captain's cabin to investigate, Powell is discovered by the Captain and, reluctantly, tells what he saw

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 94.

from the skylight on deck. Roderick Anthony looks "like a wild animal at bay, not knowing which way to break out,"⁷⁶ when he hears the news. De Barral enters, followed by Flora who, wondering at the presence of Powell, asks what the trouble is. She looks, Powell thinks at the time, like Desdemona to Anthony's Moor. In the threatening silence that prevails, Flora moves protectively to the side of her father; Captain Anthony takes that positioning as a statement of prior loyalty and, defeatedly, he says:

" . . . I am not blind. But I can't fight any longer for what I haven't got. I don't know what you imagine has happened. Something has, though; only you needn't be afraid. No shadow can touch you--because I give up. I can't say we had much to talk about, your father and I, but, the long and the short of it is, that I must learn to live without you--which I have told you was impossible. I was speaking the truth. But I have done fighting, or waiting. Yes. You shall go."⁷⁷

Flora, who "had arrived at the very limit of her endurance as the object of Anthony's magnanimity" persisted; Captain Anthony continued:

"Your father has found an argument which makes me pause, if it does not convince me. No. I can't answer it. I --I don't want to answer it. I simply surrender. He shall have his way with you--and with me."⁷⁸

Marlow interjects that at this psychological moment the "tension of the false situation was at its highest":

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 491.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 498.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 499.

". . . if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the --embrace, in the noblest sense of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple, perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom--or even a straight if despairing decision.⁷⁹

Anthony's offer astonishes and silences Mrs. Anthony for a moment,

But next minute a cry came out from her heart, not very loud, but of a quality which made not only Captain Anthony (he was not looking at her), but also the more distant (and equally unprepared) young man [Powell] catch their breath: "But I don't want to be let off!" she cried.⁸⁰

Mrs. Anthony's voice, entreating and indignant, protested as she ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck:

"You can't cast me off like this, Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't-----"⁸¹

Mrs. Anthony made her choice, registering active indignation against chance for the first time in years. Like Heyst, she had almost lost the trick of it until that crucial moment in her life when further passive acquiescence to chance meant "sinning against life." The "complexity of her situation," the "tormenting, forcibly, tortuous involutions of feelings," evaporated in her choice of Anthony and life over the malignant

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 496.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 499.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 500.

influence of her unbalanced and, presently, suicidal father-- another victory, as Wiley said, "of the normal over the abnormal," of affirmation over negation.

One of the least complicated of Conrad's narratives, structurally speaking, is his last novel, The Rover (1923), originally planned, as so many of his novels were, as a short story. The hero of the tale is Peyrol, a Cervonian type of pre-Revolutionary Frenchman, who comes home to post-Revolutionary France after a lifetime spent upon the sea in the company of the piratical Brotherhood of the Coast, serving France in their way by preying upon her enemies. Peyrol's alienation from the forces that formed and directed the Revolution make him an isolate in his own country, a fact that hardly matters to Peyrol at the beginning of his homecoming. He asks very little of life--only to live out his last days in peace on a little farm purchased with the gold coins sewn into the lining of his unique seaman's vest. Eloise Hay quotes one French critic's approving identification of Peyrol's authentic Provençal character:

"He has the people's total skepticism; the habit of weighing, before accepting them, all the presents thrown by destiny. He has their heavy phlegmaticism, which, when occasion demands, is transformed into instantaneous decision and action. He has their devotion to their own interests; he knows how to keep out of the way, how to calculate and how to establish the most suitable place for himself. But he knows, too, when destiny calls, how to forget everything--interests and all--and fling his own life as a last and worthy missile into the middle of the adverse circumstances.⁸²

⁸²Dennis Saurat, "Conrad et la Provence," Perspectives (Paris, Stock, 1938), p. 230, as quoted in Hay, p. 318.

Arriving in Toulon, Peyrol wastes no time in losing himself in the near-by farm country, lest some "patriot" assign him to further Navy service. His travels on a hired mule take him back to the Gien Peninsula, his birthplace, as far as he or anyone else knows. Stopping for refreshment at the Escampobar Farm, Peyrol is attracted to the young girl who serves him; strikingly beautiful, she seems strangely determined that her eyes will never settle on any one object. The Farm, Peyrol discovers, is the property of a sans-culotte named Scevola, generally hated by the peasants. The unimpressive Scevola came by that property as his reward for a civic-minded gesture: his renunciation of its Royalist owners, the parents of Arlette of the wandering eyes, a move that led to their inclusion in the Toulon Massacre.

Arlette's parents had come to Toulon with Scevola in their trim little tartane to claim Arlette from the convent that was in danger of being a revolutionary target. That night, father and mother were killed before the eyes of the child, and a night of terrors--"terrors comparable to those of Judgment Day"--began for the young girl. The terror-crazed girl was saved from the mob by Scevola, who coveted her as well as the Escampobar Farm. Placing a red hat on her head, Scevola, the "drinker of blood," dragged her along after him through a night of slaughter; Arlette waded through blood at his side, utterly uncomprehending. Since that night, Arlette's Aunt Catherine confides to Peyrol, her gaze roams, never fixing on anything for long, as though she feared

that a "mutilated vision of the dead" would rise again before her eyes. Like Flora, Arlette, "smitten on the very verge of womanhood," has her mystic wound. Scevola's presence on the Farm presents a constant danger to the stricken girl; consequently, Aunt Catherine welcomes the addition of Peyrol to the farm's family as a weary general welcomes reinforcements. Peyrol, the man of sound moral feelings, is contrasted with Scevola, whom Conrad regarded as "a pathological case more than any else . . . a creature of mob psychology; who, away from the mob . . . is just a weak-minded creature."⁸³

The paternal affection Peyrol felt at his first meeting with Arlette grew over the next eight years, and his rapport with her seemed to be a steadying influence in her life. Recently, Peyrol's affection was superseded by the love of Lieutenant Real, a young officer stationed at the Farm to observe, from its extreme situation on a thrusting peninsula, the activities of the British Fleet, and of one British corvette in particular. Both interests combine to restore emotional health and balance to the crazed girl, and Scevola, the evil embodiment of violence, fear, and lust, outnumbered by the opposition of Aunt Catherine, Peyrol, and Real, can only stand by and rage inwardly. Peyrol's affection for a human being, and for a young girl at that, is an ironic joke for life to play on a man who

⁸³Jean-Aubry, II, 326. Letter to Edward Garnett, December 4, 1923.

has avoided commitments of that kind all his life--"It is always the unexpected that happens." Arlette's youth and vitality make him strangely sad, as though there were things in life that he missed. Peyrol becomes conscious of his age; conscious that age is a factor barring him from those missed experiences now.

The crisis develops when Lieutenant Real announces his mission: to put to sea in a small boat and, bearing false messages to deceive the enemy, to allow himself to be captured. The dangerous mission means either capture and imprisonment, or death--either way, the removal of the strongest, soundest influence in Arlette's life. Peyrol feels himself confronted with a choice--another of life's jests--to perform Real's assignment for him, thus leaving him safe to protect Arlette and to guarantee her further improvement, or to allow the young officer to go, trusting, in the event of his death, to his paler affection to sustain Arlette, and living out his days in peace as he planned. His scepticism directs him to the later decision, and, in seeming harmony with that choice, he discusses Real's adventure with him. But when the time comes, he "flings his own life into the bargain," for the sake of Arlette, taking a reluctant and cringing Scevola with him on a journey that has, he well knows, no return. Peyrol undertakes his last journey with a fine sense of irony, that his old age should be torn by the touch of a sentiment "unexpected like an intruder and cruel like an enemy." Peyrol's heroic act, defying fate on the clear

sunlit waters off the Escampobar Penninsula, is an act of affirmation, guaranteeing life--in the union of Arlette and Real--its chance, a gesture in keeping with Conrad's decisions in those allegorical encounters that testify to his faith in the indomitable spirit of man. In an article on Henry James, Conrad said:

When the last aqueduct shall have crumbled to pieces, the last airship fallen to the ground, the last blade of grass have died upon a dying earth, man, indomitable by his training in resistance to misery and pain, shall set this undiminished light of his eyes against the feeble glow of the sun. The artistic faculty, of which each of us has a minute grain, may find its voice in some individual of that last group, gifted with a power of expression and courageous enough to interpret the ultimate experience of mankind in terms of his temperament, in terms of art . . . whether in austere exhortation or in a phrase of sardonic comment, who can guess?

For my own part, from a short and cursory acquaintance with my kind, I am inclined to think that the last utterance will formulate, strange as it may appear, some hope now to us utterly inconceivable. For mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity. It will sleep on the battlefield among its own dead, in the manner of an army having won a barren victory. It will not know when it is beaten."⁸⁴

⁸⁴Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 13-14.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

" . . . But the dwarf answered: 'No: something human is dearer to me than the wealth of all the world.'"¹

Conrad, discussing the basis of his popular appeal with his publisher, J. B. Pinker, had this to say:

. . . I don't get in the way of established reputations. One may read everybody and yet in the end want to read me--for a change if for nothing else. For I don't resemble anybody; and yet I am not specialized enough to call up imitators as to matter or style. There is nothing in me but a turn of mind which, whether valuable or worthless, cannot be imitated.²

This thesis, attempting in part to define Conrad's "turn of mind," has suggested that, rather than pessimism, fatalism, or nihilism--all of which have been advanced by one critic or another as Conrad's philosophical category--scepticism seems to offer the intellectual frame of reference that accomodates Conrad's mind. Certain parallels between the sceptical and the Conradian outlook--the emphasis upon life as a dream-like state, the initial reticence before, or stand against, the dogmatic in

¹Epigraph to Youth volume, a quotation from Grimm's Fairy Tales.

²Jean-Aubry, II, 54, dated July 4, 1907.

any sphere of thought or activity, and the reluctance to identify with a fixed moral position--are striking enough to suggest further that Conrad's scepticism may have been of a remarkably orthodox character. His awareness of the paradoxical quality of truth, his rendering of material in terms of antagonistic dualisms and of paradox--"that intellectual formula for an experience whose complexity is matched only by the complexity of the human being"³--his preoccupation with the ethical, and his approach to "things human" in a "spirit of piety,"⁴ are qualities that he shared, according to Margaret Wiley,⁵ with the creatively sceptical mind.

Scepticism, a habit of mind shared by many of his contemporaries, was, in the case of Joseph Conrad, recommended with unusual force by the quality of his personal experiences. When he began writing fiction, well past the age of thirty, and a man 'of formed character," scepticism provided the philosophical coloring. It was Conrad's sceptical view of contemporary society that accounted for his thematic concept of character: the self-divided, alienated isolato, cut off from any informing tradition. In a transitional age when none of the old truths seemed to apply, each man was faced with the task of shaping his

³Wiley, p. 37.

⁴Jean-Aubry, II, 83; letter to Arthur Symons, August 30, 1908.

⁵The Subtle Knot, pp. 14-38.

own philosophy of life, of supplying his own raison d'être. The "naked terror" of his loneliness made chillingly urgent his definition in terms more meaningful than Butler's naturalism or Pater's aestheticism, and yet--Conrad's own words apply--". . . where is the thing, institution, or principle which I do not doubt?"⁶ From his own psychological entrails, spider-like, modern man had to spin an illusion, in lieu of an absolute, strong enough to persuade him to a continuity of life. Pragmatic, certainly; but necessary--illusions were, after all, life-sustaining. Conrad's alienated men are motivated by such illusions, some true, leading to an "undying hope," some false, "inviting membership in the mad cult of despair." The difference lay in the "moral motive springing from the secret needs and the unexpressed aspiration of the believers." These motives, concealed in idealism (Gould), romanticism (Tuan Jim), fatalism (Flora de Barral), scepticism (Decoud and Dr. Monygham), anarchism (Verloc and fellow conspirators), and imperialism (Kurtz), come masked to the reader's attention and, were it not for Conrad's revealing use of imagery and irony, might remain so. The disparity between the apparent and the real reverberates through fictions in enlightening clusters of images whose truth counterpoints the apparent truth, rendered in ironic tones that range from amused to icy detachment.

⁶Jean-Aubry, I, 173; letter to Edward Garnett, March 8, 1895.

If Conrad's negative scepticism played upon the irony and paradox in the contemporary human condition and upon the political, social, and economic "heresies" that solicited the modern man's belief, his positive scepticism operated in a spirit of inquiry. "It is impossible to know anything," he declared to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, but then added, "tho' it is possible to believe a thing or two."⁷ His quest for the "thing or two" motivated the best of his fiction, the dramas of conscience that, as Guerard remarked "play subtly upon our sensibilities and tamper with our convictions." "How to live?" was the question that he raised for his alienated man, created partly in his own image, pursuing, as he had pursued, an illusion. Was he still bound by an absolute code, that "shadowy ideal of conduct" from the past, or was he free to evolve another code, answering to his own interior logic? Repeatedly and subtly, Conrad phrased the moral dilemma and left the answer to the conscience of every reader. If, as Lionel Trilling asserts, the greatness of the novel as a form lies in its "unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life,"⁸ then Conrad used that form in a manner that challenges us still. He was explicit about his attitude toward another dilemma, one that turned on the value of human existence in an increasingly mechanistic and

⁷Jean-Aubry, I, 208, written August 5, 1897.

⁸The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1953), p. 215.

materialistic age in which "beliefs shift like the mists on the shore . . . Faith is a myth," and where, one day when the sun fades, "humanity is condemned ultimately to perish from cold."⁹ His attitude, in Typhoon, Nigger of the "Narcissus," Chance, Victory, and The Rover was affirmative, not only because he demanded "undying hope"¹⁰ from himself as a novelist, but also because he believed that life was a spectacle fit for every emotion except the emotion of despair. Negative scepticism, pervasively present in those allegorical confrontations, has an aesthetic as well as a philosophical interest for the critic. Well-defined and ever present, scepticism seems, in the uneven battle against the frail human hope, the almost certain victor. When the human spirit grows in spite of it through ironic, somber, and sordid episodes which should have stifled it, scepticism has, by its intimidating presence, helped to define the essential quality of that spirit--its indomitability--and the natural disposition of the human personality to love, to hope, and to trust.

To an age that explained man in terms of naturalistic psychology, responsive to the ideal of Utility, Conrad opposed

⁹Jean-Aubry, I, 222. Letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, January 14, 1898.

¹⁰Notes on Life and Letters, p. 8.

his awareness of "a certain form of human grandeur."¹¹ He reasserted for his age the indomitability of the human spirit armored, as that spirit was, with its mysterious capacity for Faith, Hope, and Charity, a theological triumvirate secularized in his fiction to Fidelity, Illusion, and Solidarity with, paradoxically, no loss of religious feeling for human existence. In 1920, when Conrad was readying his novels for the definitive edition, he assessed his performance in the "Author's Note" to Chance:

. . . It may have happened to me to sin against taste now and then, but apparently I have never sinned against the basic feelings and elementary convictions which make life possible to the mass of mankind, and, by establishing a standard of judgment, set their idealism free to look for plainer ways, for higher feelings, for deeper purposes.¹²

¹¹ Andre Malraux, Prophets and Poets, translated by Hamish Miles (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1935), p. 210.

¹² Chance, p. xii.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Mary L. McGinnity has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 29, 1968
Date

Mark J. Saylor
Signature of Adviser