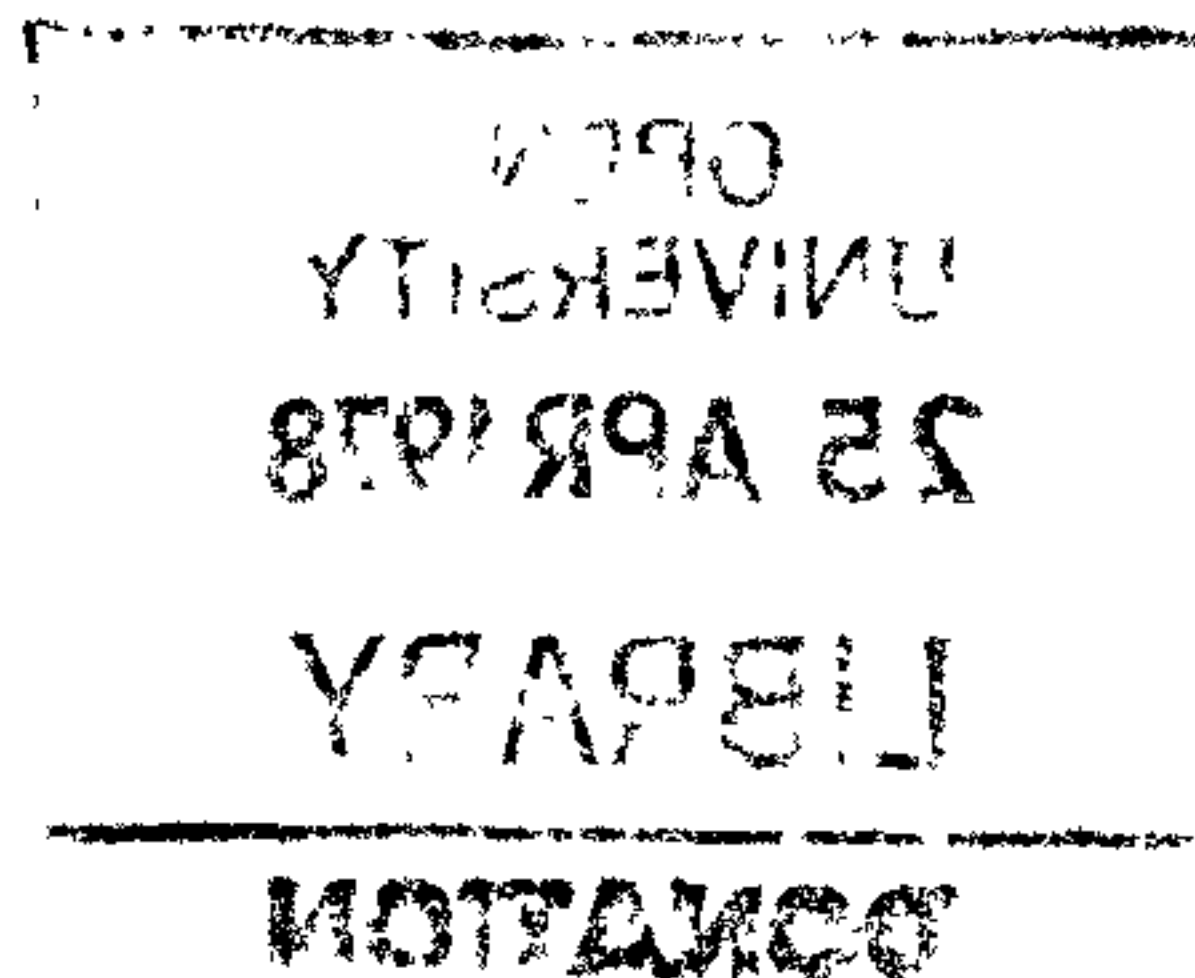


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FORM AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE FICTION OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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16th November, 1977

Dear Sir,

With regard to your letter of November 9th concerning the copy of my doctoral thesis deposited in the University Library, I have no objection to its being made fully available to readers, or photocopied.

Yours faithfully,

CR Tennant

Abstract

It is generally accepted that Conrad's fiction is something quite unique in English literature. An attempt is made to analyse the elements that give it this distinctive flavour. Emphasis is laid on a "confessional" aspect that is always disguised, but never absent from his major works, and this is shown to be related not only to his experience at sea, where his temperament made him unsuited to the life of action, but also to his experience as an expatriate from the "barbarism" of the East who could never feel at home in the bourgeois West.

In this way he came both to question all social values, and to develop an intense self-awareness. Avoiding any kind of explicit "self-revelation", he engaged in a continual vivisection of his own soul, and expressed it in his fiction by taking a character quite unlike himself in outward attributes, investing him with his own sensibility, and then analysing him through a narrator who represented his own critical intellect. This virtually creates the "form" of his major works, from "Youth" onwards, until in the last of them, Victory, the critical intellect becomes itself the object of interrogation.

Even in less complex works, where the "confessional" aspect is lacking, similar problems--problems of the conflict between social ideals and the irrational forces of nature, both within the psyche, and in the external world, are his governing interest.

Another distinctive element is an attitude of pessimism very close to that of Schopenhauer, whose works he admired, while his lonely life of "self-vivisection" has also parallels with that of Nietzsche, so that many of his themes and attitudes can be illuminated by reference to these philosophers. His childhood, French influence, and other lesser elements of the "Conradian flavour" are also discussed.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to Arnold Kettle of the Open University, under whose continuing guidance and encouragement certain vaguely formulated ideas about the nature of Conrad's "genius" have been given such thematic coherence as they may now possess. I am also indebted to Werner Pelz, now of Latrobe University, Victoria, for assistance in discerning some of the philosophical and sociological implications of Conrad's work.

Although I may have quoted from A.J.Guerard's Conrad the Novelist and F.R.Leavis' Conrad chapters in The Great Tradition mainly when I wished to disagree, I would not wish this to obscure the extent to which they have stimulated and enriched my appreciation of his work.

References

Numbers superimposed on the text refer to notes collected at the end of each chapter. In the case of abbreviated references incorporated in the text, the full title can be found in the bibliography. Where more than one work is listed by a single author, the abbreviated references are to the first of these only.

In applying the customary distinction by which the titles of short stories are put in inverted commas, and those of longer works are italicised, I have regarded stories of less than 30,000 words as "short", and those of more as "full-length".

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Introduction

As we recede with time and the foothills we thought to be mountains reveal the true peaks behind them, the solitary eminence of Conrad's achievement increasingly dominates the skyline of modern English literature. In 1936 Edward Crankshaw still thought it necessary to introduce his study of Conrad with words to the effect that he was not just a writer of good stories for boys, but by 1948 Leavis had placed him at the centre of The Great Tradition. We can catch the changing perspective at two significant points if we compare the 1960 edition of Daiches' The Novel and the Modern World with the original version of 1939: chapters on Galsworthy, Katherine Mansfield, and Aldous Huxley are omitted, while that on Conrad is re-written and expanded to leave him in the company of Joyce, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. In America, important essays by Morton Dauwen Zabel and Robert Penn Warren were followed, in the nineteen-fifties, by full-length studies by Thomas Moser and Albert J. Guerard, and from then on Conrad has probably received as much attention in America as any British writer.

If it is obvious enough that his work no longer needs defending, it may be that it does still need defining. As Marvin Mudrick emphasises in his introduction to a collection of essays on Conrad published in 1966, there is a surprising lack of a consensus as to what are his best books. There may be a general agreement that early works such as An Outcast of the Islands and late ones such as The Rover are not important, but others such as Chance or Victory are awarded a high place by some critics, and a low one by others; stories such as "The Secret Sharer" are acclaimed as profound or dismissed as trivial, and even among the half-dozen books most generally acknowledged as his best, there

is a great variation, from critic to critic, in the assessment of their relative worth. Leavis thinks that Lord Jim "doesn't deserve the position of pre-eminence among Conrad's works often assigned to it: it is hardly one of the most considerable", whereas for both Guerard and Moser it is the most important, and similar disagreements can be found among major critics in their views of Nostramo or The Secret Agent. Although differing personalities and differing priorities are always likely to produce such variations, there is probably no other writer of Conrad's status about whom there is so conspicuous a lack of agreement.

In a note on Conrad collected in Abinger Harvest E. M. Forster spoke of "the secret casket of his genius" as containing "a vapour rather than a jewel", and though the injustice of that particular assessment has been adequately dealt with by Arnold Kettle², it seems that the true contents of the casket have yet to be precisely defined. If this is due to something a little mist-like in their nature, it cannot be denied that nevertheless the vapour has a certain tang, an astringent odour that makes it quite unique, what Moser calls "that particular magic one thinks of as 'Conradian'" (p. 2).

If only its ingredients could be analysed, and their relative importance in contributing to the odour established, then Moser's "magic" would have been translated from alchemy to "science"; we would have a rough instrument, a kind of chemical formula, by which we might assess the extent to which any particular work could be expected to froth over the top of the test-tube and exhale the true "Conradian flavour". It is to this Faustean quest that the present study is dedicated: it follows a roughly linear course through Conrad's successive works while zig-zagging in and out of his correspondence, his biography, his sources and his critics,

In so far as it dares any chemical conclusions, they are that the

"flavour" will be most unmistakably present when the philosophical atmosphere is uninhibitedly pessimistic, honestly reflecting the author's own almost Schopenhaurian "world-negation"; when the subject matter is of some conflict between "ideal" and "reality", and more fundamentally, when the story itself is essentially the indirect spiritual autobiography of the author. This is meant not merely in the sense implied by Anatole France when he says, "each of our works speaks only of us, because it is only us it knows", but more specifically, as dealing with problems in which the author himself is deeply involved. Thus, even when the events and circumstances of a particular story have little apparent connection with the facts of his own life, there is always, in the major works, a strong emotional connection: there is always a character who is given analytical treatment, and in this way provides the vehicle for the "confession".

This element of "confession" is always disguised, and indeed is patently absent when Conrad is being explicitly autobiographical, as in A Personal Record--or a private letter. This does not necessarily imply that it is never conscious: Conrad's whole strength lies in his high degree of self-awareness which he uses both to put himself into his fiction and to keep himself out of his letters and memoirs. Indeed, as will be shown, the "disguise" adopted for the confession virtually creates in itself the "form" of his work.

At the same time, the problems and the aspects of personality with which he is primarily concerned are not so much the usual "confessional" ones of conscience or guilt, but something more "secular" and aesthetic, concerned with "honour" and reputation, with ideals and social codes, with finding meaning and vocation in a groundless world of "appearances", a world in which attitudes of nihilism or "world-negation" are not dismissed a priori, but faced and argued with on even terms. He is always concerned with what he calls les valeurs idéales, and these are questions

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of living up to an ideal, or fulfilling a dream, rather than matters of moral guilt, secret remorse, or sexual repression. Conrad does not appear to have been a man much troubled by conscience or by strong sexual drives, so that he is not a writer for whom Freudian analysis can be expected to provide great enlightenment. A thorough and judicious attempt has been made by Bernard C. Meyer in Joseph Conrad, A Psychoanalytic Biography, but the thinness of the crop, and its reliance on the least rewarding aspects of Conrad's work serves to emphasise the virtual irrelevance of Freudian concepts to the central questions of his life and art.

To express it in its most skeletal form, Conrad's method is to present his "autobiography" in terms of a character bearing little or no resemblance to himself in outward appearance or circumstances, but who carries the author's sensibility, and lives out his emotional or psychological predicament. This character is then seen through the eyes of a narrator who embodies the author's critical intellect, and thus allows him to conduct a kind of vivisection of his own soul. It cannot be known to what precise extent this was a matter of conscious intent--the fact that Conrad took great trouble to "cover his tracks" in this respect does not settle the question either way--but it is difficult to believe that both the method, and the concealment of it, were not largely conscious.

However this may be, it will be demonstrated that such a "form" can be seen to underly all of Conrad's best books, that the problems successively, and to some extent, repetitively dealt with have direct connections with the tensions of his own life and background, and that when the disguised "confession" was complete, there was little more for him to do. What he wrote afterwards, when he began to search for subjects, instead of being "found" by them no longer has the full "Conradian flav-

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our", for his own blood had been its chief ingredient.

It might appear that this use of an "outward form" put into perspective by a critical voice, being but a method, would not in itself determine the substance and quality of the work, and could not therefore be guaranteed to produce the true Conradian flavour, as it were, ex machina, but this theoretical question hardly arises as one finds in practice that, with the possible exception of Chance, Conrad never turns to this form unless he is about to lay some aspect of his own sensibility on the operating table, and it is only when he does that his work attains to its full depth.

If Lord Jim can be seen as the "norm", maintaining an ideal balance between the "outward form", Jim, embodying the author's sensibility and Marlow, the critical narrator, both given their appropriate weight as "characters" in the story, the requirements of both art and subject matter encourage, and usually justify, considerable variations in this balance. In the early Heart of Darkness there is a preponderance of the critical narrator over the vague form of Kurtz, who embodies some of the author's introspective nightmares, and this book can be seen as a half-way stage between the first invention of Marlow, in "Youth", and the fully developed form as it appears in Lord Jim.

In Under Western Eyes the balance is altered in the opposite direction: the "outward form", Razumov, embodies much of both the author's emotions and his intellect, and the narrator is used to point the contrast between East and West rather than as an analyst. In The Secret Agent, the narrator is disembodied, and becomes a cold ironic ghost of the author, while in Chance, for lack of an outward form in which the author can embody enough of his own soul, the narrator is as it were promoted to a higher rank, and provided with a Dr Watson-like assistant to take down his opinions and act as a foil for his wit.

In Nostromo, Decoud combines the task of both part-time narrator and embodiment of the author's sensibility, so that although he is only one of a large cast, his spiritual importance to the author tends to make some of the others appear a little hollow by contrast. Decoud can probably be "identified" with Conrad himself to a greater degree than anyone else in any of his major stories except Heyst in Victory. Here, the outward form is not dealt with by a critical narrator because Heyst becomes the final embodiment of the critical intellect itself, and places Conrad rather in the position of that French surgeon who with the aid of mirrors, performed an operation on his own brain. There are also two important late novellas, A Smile of Fortune and The Shadow Line, in which for the first time author, narrator, and "hero" become almost wholly one: in these stories, Conrad is concerned to convey his emotions, but not to analyse them.

Considered objectively, Conrad's task, the particular "subject matter" to which his natural talents, temperament and experience destined him to deal, is well expressed by David Daiches in The Novel and the Modern World, where he compares him with Joyce, Lawrence and Woolf:

In a confused civilisation where public standards of belief seem to be either declining or unreal the artist can stand outside all belief and with supreme yet human objectivity see all possible values as equal provided life still goes on, and this is what Joyce did; or he can cultivate a fresh vision and try to present it in his art as a source of new value, which is what Lawrence did. He can also cultivate a fresh vision not as a source of new value but as a mode of personal sensibility: this is what Virginia Woolf did. Or, with an honest, exploratory pessimism, he can take elemental values where he can find them and test them out by showing what happens when the individual is challenged by circumstances to which these values do not seem to apply, and this is what Conrad did. (pp. 185-186).

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This isolates what is probably the most important aspect of Conrad's work, though Daiches' final phrase must be qualified by emphasizing that Conrad is concerned not so much with "circumstances to which these values do not seem to apply" as of analysing what happens when they do apply, but are met by some critical challenge, either from the elements, or human nature, or those combinations of both most typically found in a crisis at sea. In Lord Jim, for instance, it is not that Jim's ideals do not apply, but only that, as it were, they do not work.

The End of the Tether, though not one of the more profound of his tales, is one that shows very clearly the kind of clash between "ideal" and "reality" that is his abiding concern. Captain Whalley is the very embodiment of that "fidelity" on which the corporate life of a ship depends, yet his instinctive love for his daughter proves stronger, and forces him to betray it. It is noticeable that in such conflicts Conrad does not take sides, or if he does, does it rather by using his art to counter the reader's moral prejudices. He does not share either the traditional view that moral values are "holy" and always in the right, or that more recent subversion by which "nature" and "Life" are preferred to ideals. He remains profoundly suspicious of both: he is always tentative and sceptical in relation to both "ideal" and "reality". Indeed, in using these terms in relation to Conrad's work it is important to keep them in inverted commas, for he does not see ideals in the manner of philosophical "Idealism", or "reality" as anything more substantial than "appearances". As Heyst says in Victory, "Appearances--what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have anything else" (p. 204).

Conrad's world is that world of appearances and perspectives that was heralded philosophically by Nietzsche a few decades before it was presented mathematically by Einstein, a world in inverted commas, and

although it may seem little more than an awkward necessity of his narrational methods, there is also something appropriately symbolic about the way that so much of Conrad's work—virtually the whole of Lord Jim or Heart of Darkness—is actually enclosed in inverted commas.

His very testing of values implies that none of them are absolute or unconditional, and his "results" are always presented in a way that tends to justify the implication. E. M. Forster's view that it was a vapour rather than a jewel in the secret casket was based on his inability to find in Conrad a "creed"—there are, he says, "only opinions". Perhaps this tells us as much about Forster as about Conrad. Only on his own longest journey did Forster reach the Caves of Malabar, but Conrad had to live there. It is not that he does not have any personal moral convictions, if that is what Forster means by a creed, but only that he is not so sure about his right to hold them; He sees that, as Nietzsche put it, "It is not a matter of having the courage of one's convictions, but of having the courage to question them".

Behind Conrad's analysis of social values, we are never allowed to forget that "Nature", the Cosmos itself, is also open to question: does it have the right to go on about its business regardless of the expense? Would "the Great Joke", the cosmic "knitting machine", which is Conrad's updated image for the Moirae of the Greeks, be better if it were not? Just as the social codes that test the characters are themselves also put in question, so also is the natural environment. "Life" also both examines and is examined.

It is these qualities that make him unique, at least in English literature—the way in which he does not merely present through his characters his own sensibility and values, but also a radical critique of them, and then reminds us that both are but a matter of "appearances" in a cosmos that might better disappear, analyses and decomposes until he has cut away the ground from under his own and everyone else's feet, or at least leaves us on the very edge of the abyss. As Bernard Bergonzi has

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said, "Such a view of life has something in common with the existentialist philosophers, and it was very much in advance of its time in Edwardian England."³ It is these qualities that put Conrad in the company of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche or Rilke, representatives of a new European sensibility with which his English contemporaries had yet to come to terms. It is no coincidence that the "re-discovery" of Conrad began in the nineteen-fifties, for this was the time when our full attention was turned to those great nineteenth-century "existentialists", post-philosophers who lived long before, and will long survive the fashionable phase of "Existentialism".

If what has been said above indicates the general nature of Conrad's achievement, it was probably only by hindsight, and fairly late in life, that he himself became at all aware of it. During his writing life he regarded himself as a professional writer, belonging to no school or movement, and always haunted by the question, "Is it saleable?" He had little or no private means and financial necessity prevented him from ever being indifferent to public taste. From the beginning he told Edward Garnett, representative of his first publishers, "I wont live in an attic"⁴. Thus he deliberately rejected the role of the "lonely genius", even though he was largely forced to live it out, for it was only late in life that he won financial success. His aim was to make a good living by writing good books that the public would understand and like. It saved him from becoming an aesthete, a "writer's writer", even to the degree that Joyce or Virginia Woolf were, but fortunately it could not overcome that powerful combination of intellect, experience and psychological imbalance that constituted his "genius", a genius that could not live with any financially conditioned underestimate of its potentialities, and forced him to transcend it.

In so far as he had conscious "ideals", it seems that they were related more to questions of literary craftsmanship than to the substance of what he wrote. In this connection, much has been written about Flaubert's influence, but it is doubtful whether this idea would have arisen merely from considering the books themselves: it is ~~much~~ more that it was put about by Conrad himself, and much more so by his one-time collaborator Ford Madox Ford (F. M. Hueffer). In fact, Conrad seems to have absorbed virtually the whole of nineteenth-century French fiction. In a detailed study of French influence on Conrad, Yves Hervouet lists as "minor influences", Garneray, Hugo, Vigny, Balzac, Baudelaire, Villiers de l'isle Adam, Zola, Daudet, Loti and Barrès, and as "major influences", Anatole France, Flaubert and Maupassant.⁵

For Ford, however, all literature was to be divided into two eras, Before, and After Flaubert, and he and Conrad had been responsible for bringing the new faith to England:

Perhaps better than elsewhere, Conrad with his "It is above all to make you see!" expressed the aims of the New World. And your seeing things became an integral part of your story. The matchless description of Charles Bovary's hat in the opening pages of Madame Bovary is not a mere example of descriptive gusto: it is the measure and prophesy of the fusionlessness that throughout the story Charles is to display. Parents sufficiently ill-omened to provide their offspring with a head-piece so mournful and grotesque could only beget a son who would be as mournful and grotesque as his hat. ^{{The} (The March of Literature, p. 801)

Nor are the miracles omitted from Ford's New Testament: "Conrad published his first novel--Almayer's Folly in England in 1895. But the book was begun--and the coincidence is one of the most curious in literary history--on the margins and endpapers of Madame Bovary whilst his ship was moored to the dockside in Rouen Harbour, and the port-

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holes of his cabin there gave a view of the house which Flaubert described as being the meeting place of Emma Bovary and Rodolphe. That would be in 1893..." (p. 802).

Conrad's earlier version in A Personal Record is less developed, and with a decimal difference in the chapter number: "I indulge in the pleasant fantasy that the shade of old Flaubert, who imagined himself to be (amongst other things) a descendant of the Vikings, might have hovered with amused interest over the decks of a 2,000 ton steamer called the Adowa, on board which, gripped by the inclement winter alongside a quay in Roen, the tenth chapter of Almayer's Folly was begun" (p. 2), while in Flaubert's version, it was Leon rather than Rodolphe whom Emma met at Rouen.

At least it can be admitted that the example of Charles Bovary's hat is very typical of the kind of realistic, unobtrusive symbolism that Conrad does so well—the use of Peter Ivanovitch's hat in Under Western Eyes provides a parallel. Even so, as Hervouet has shown, he was influenced by many other French writers, and his works are full of echoes and paraphrases of them, including passages that are plainly plagiaristic, notably the death of Wait in The Nigger of the Narcissus, which as well as having echoes of Flaubert, uses actual phrases from the death of Forester in Maupassant's Bel Ami, and must have caused Conrad to blush when one of them—"a scarlet thread hung down his chin"—⁶ was picked out by Stephen Crane for special praise.

The phrase of Conrad's that Ford quotes,—"to make you see", comes from his early preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, the importance of which, in assessing Conrad's real intentions has probably been overestimated. It belongs very much to his earliest days, and to the literary arguments of the time. Baines provides evidence that Conrad was probably reading Pater at the time (p. 231n.), and it reflects similar concerns. It has memorable phrases, most notably in the second line, "and

art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe..", and again, "~~my~~ my task is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, above all, to make you see."

The phrase about rendering "justice to the visible universe" goes on "by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its ~~of~~ every aspect", and the essay ends on a similar Platonic note: "And when it is accomplished—behold!—all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, and a smile." This shows a rather more sentimental attitude towards his task, and a rather less ironic attitude towards "truth" than those of his maturity. Indeed, it seems that almost at once he began to feel it was all a little too high-flown, and although it was published at the end of the serialisation of the ^{story} ~~book~~ in the New Review, it was omitted from the book, and not heard of again until in 1914 Richard Curle asked if he could use it in his study of Conrad. Conrad, after hesitating, requested him not to: "It isn't dans la note of your ~~to~~ book—it would sound declamatory, ^e~~v~~_n windy, against your pages." ⁷ One can guess that it was "my pages" more than "your pages" of which he was thinking.

It is quite possible that he had second thoughts not only about the style of this preface, but also about the substance. Despite its reservations on "art for art's sake", it expresses the novelist's task almost entirely in visual and aesthetic terms, it does not say anything about how he decides that it is to be one thing rather than another that he is to make you "see", and in the end Conrad was too much of a philosopher and a moralist, one might say, despite his own protests, too much "the son of a revolutionist", to be content with so purely aesthetic an aim. It is true that in the preface to A Personal Record (1912), as well as protesting against being called "the son of a revolutionist", he also says, "I, who have never sought in the written word anything

else but the Beautiful", but this is a phrase he had picked up from Anatole France, who seems to have been his favourite source of inspiration on occasions when he felt that he had to pontificate, and the whole book has to be seen as something of a smokescreen around his real concerns. *Leval*

Conrad spoke French from the age of five, and it seems obvious that he could have written in French with more initial ease, but he had become an Englishman, irrevocably, and most of the experiences that he wished to communicate had been mediated through, and meditated upon, in the English language. His life at sea had required him to study, and to give ready answers, and ready orders, in English, and he told Walpole, "When I wrote the first words of Almayer's Folly I had been already for years and years thinking in English". He goes on to say, "Is it thinkable that anybody possessed of some effective inspiration should contemplate for a moment such a frantic thing as translating it into another tongue?" (Aubry, II, p. 206)—a sentiment that is not entirely devalued by sounding a little as if it has been translated from the French. As Leavis says, "for all the unidiomatic touches and the suggestions of French, Conrad's English compels us to recognise it as that of a highly individual master, who has done his creative thinking and feeling—explored most inwardly the experience moving him to creation—in that language".⁹

Even so, to the end of his life we find him using French in his English correspondence to express an emotion or an idea. Sometimes, maybe, because it carried him one stage back towards his native Polish, and sometimes because only the French could exactly convey his meaning, as in the crucial comment on les valeurs idéales quoted below (p.).

Les valeurs idéales expresses both significantly more and significantly less than the more pragmatic term "moral values" which seems to be the nearest common equivalent in English. To catch in one's net a butter-

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fly such as Emma Bovary, for instance, "moral values" has too coarse a mesh, and the habitual use of this term in connection with Conrad's work has tended to obscure its finer shades.

Those shifts in time and perspective by which Conrad may temporarily bewilder the reader, but ultimately helps him to understand, are sometimes regarded as his greatest contribution to the art of fiction, though if they surpass the effects already attained by Emily Bronte's one masterpiece it is probably more in quantity than in quality. With Conrad, they probably developed as a kind of half-conscious by-product of his use of a narrator who is supposed to be spinning a yarn to a circle of listeners—they can be seen essentially as an application to the written word of the traditional style of the story-teller. A man's name is mentioned in the conversation; one begins to talk about him, and from there to go back to any relevant things one knows about his past, and then with a little recapitulation, to go forward again, always keeping an eye on the listeners to make sure they are not getting bored. This, essentially, is the method of Lord Jim, a method calculated both to hold the reader's interest, and to help him really to understand, for inevitably, it follows the basic pattern of the human mind, the manner in which our everyday knowledge is acquired. Of course, as a fictional device, it can be developed to produce stage effects and to keep up suspense—it had already been used in this way by the pioneers of the "mystery story"—but Conrad rarely uses it just for this purpose: his intention is the more serious one of analysis, of making us "see" in more than the visual sense. That it was not too carefully calculated a technique is best illustrated by the fact that in the most complex example, Nostromo, the time-shifts are made so carelessly that in fact, as Guerard has demonstrated, they don't "add up" (p. below).

Towards the end of his life, in a letter to Richard Curle, Conrad mentions that one critic had failed to find "any difference in method

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or character between my fiction and my professedly autobiographical matter, as evidenced in the Personal Recordⁿ, and that this was because his style was "purely historical". Conrad suggests that what the man "really meant" was that his manner is "aimed essentially at the intimacy of a personal communication, without any thought for other effects. As a matter of fact, the thought for effects is there all the same (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative) and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective, which are purely temperamental, and wherein almost all my 'art' consists."¹⁰

Conrad's statement that the "effects" are "purely temperamental", and the inverted commas he puts round "art" would seem to support the suggestion made above that this aspect of his art grew naturally out of a story-teller's method aimed at "the intimacy of a personal communication". Given Conrad's talent and professional skill, it was inevitable that with time this should become less "temperamental" and more consciously "done", but in Chance, where the effect seems most consciously sought, the time shifts seem hardly as successful, either as art or communication, as in the earlier Lord Jim.

That Conrad's work follows a path of "achievement and decline", a parabola with a high plateau covering the years 1897 to 1904—The Nigger of the Narcissus to Nostromo—a downward tilt through Under Western Eyes, (1911) to Victory (1915), followed by a steeper decline through the minor works of his last years—this is a general conclusion accepted by all of his major critics. It was first suggested by Galsworthy at the time of Conrad's death in 1924¹¹, endorsed by Leavis, Hewitt and Guerard, and demonstrated with detailed evidence by Thomas Moser in his Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, evidence from the texts themselves that stands quite irrefutable whether or not one admires the general effect of some of the later books, or whether or not one agrees with Moser's views as to the reasons. If further confirmation is required, one need only turn

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to a brave endeavour to refute the idea of "achievement and decline" by John A. Palmer in Conrad's Fiction. His up-grading of the later works, by treating them as metaphysical allegories, leads him finally to "The Tale", a trifling magazine story about warships in World War I, as the point at which "Conrad's autobiographical interests and allegorical ~~too~~ techniques fuse completely for the first and only time; and the story serves as a fitting climax to an account of his artistic growth." (p. 257), or one might rather say, a fitting confirmation of Moser's thesis by the method of reductio ad absurdum.

Perhaps the simplest and most satisfactory explanation of the shape of this parabola of achievement is that it runs very close to the shape of all human destiny—youthful learning, full energy, middle-age, and decline. Authors such as Fontane who write their best books as old men are so rare that they must be regarded as the exceptions rather than as a norm by which a natural decline is regarded as requiring an explanation. For a novelist, maturity and self-awareness are such important qualities that the peak of their achievement is likely to be a little further along the time-scale than that of pure natural force—the late forties and ~~ca~~ early fifties are frequently the most fruitful time. Conrad was not quite forty when he wrote The Nigger of the Narcissus and fifty-three when he completed Under Western Eyes—and he had been subject to recurrent illness since his return from the Congo at the age of thirty-four.

After Under Western Eyes comes Chance, a story in which Marlow ⁴ appears as over-talkative, and with not enough to do in the way of real analysis, and this is the last story in which he, or any other critical narrator is present. This can be seen as a clear sign that, perhaps more from a shortage of unexamined "soul" than from mere lack of energy, Conrad had largely completed that work of spiritual self-vivisection that produced his greatest books. It would seem to indicate that like most other men who survive to the age of fifty-five, he had attained some degree of psychological balance and self-acceptance. At the age

of forty, the age at which in "Youth", Marlow begins his critical investigation of his master's sensibility, most thoughtful men are ready to analyse the enthusiasms and achievements of their twenty years of youthful adult activity and begin to understand themselves: by the age of fifty they may well feel that they have done enough of this, and be ready to "affirm" what remains to them in the way of values, and for the rest to conform to what the World believes about itself and them. Perhaps it is a measure of the sharpness of Conrad's vivisectional knife that at the end he does not have very much left to affirm, and that therefore the works of what is called his "affirmative" period seem relatively flat and conventional.

It is extensively argued by Moser, supported, with some qualifications by Guerard, that as the latter puts it, "the uncongeniality of love as a subject, and Conrad's later determination to present it affirmatively" is "the most important cause of his serious anti-climax" (p. 55), but it is not at all obvious that in his later works Conrad is attempting simply to be affirmative, about love or life. For Heyst in Victory or Flora de Barral in Chance the problems of "love" are something to be argued about rather than affirmed, and the piquancy of their situations largely arises from the fact that they have ideas and attitudes that cut across conventional views on the subject. This is also the case in A Smile of Fortune, which is very far from being affirmative. When ~~the~~ Conrad wrote The Shadow Line he had, as he mentions in the Author's Note, special reasons for being affirmative, but it has no women in it. It is certainly true that The Rescue seems to have run aground on the shores of love, and Conrad never managed to re-float it, but it is not very affirmative. It is probably only The Arrow of Gold and The Rover that could be described as both affirmative and at all concerned with conventional ideas of love.

When, as in other books, Conrad deals with love from a less convent-

ional point of view, it is really missing the point to accuse him, as Moser and Guerard do, of such things as voyeurism, impotence or misogyny, for the value judgements implied in these terms may be just what Conrad wishes to question. Like Schopenhauer, he sees sexual attraction as a stratagem of nature that has nothing to do with the real welfare of the individual, and one must be willing to consider at least the possibility that sexual love is a matter of madness and delusion if one is to appreciate the point of view from which Conrad presents his insights on those occasions when, as in Victory or A Smile of Fortune, he is presenting them quite honestly.

Certainly, he was not a sensual man—this is as apparent in his scenic descriptions, in his neglect of colours, tastes and smells, as in his lack of interest in sex, a coolness that is quite free from the kind of puritan undertones that indicate a suppressed obsession with it. Thus we can find him accusing Tolstoy of being "anti-sensual"¹²—he hardly seems to realise that in so far as this may be true, it is a measure of the strength of Tolstoy's sensuality, a personal problem that for Conrad scarcely seems to exist.

In attempting to assess Conrad's apparent lack of interest in women as sexual objects, whether at the level of the primitive poetry of the barrack-room—the missing element from the forecastle of the Narcissus—or the more subtle intricacies of civilised romance, one must allow for the considerable degree of the feminine that he possessed in his own nature. In summing up his first impressions of Conrad, Garnett speaks of "a dark haired man, short but extremely graceful in his nervous gestures, with brilliant eyes, now narrowed and penetrating, now soft and warm, with a manner alert yet caressing, whose speech was ingratiating, guarded or brusque turn by turn. I had never before seen a man so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive." (p. 3).

Conrad's own awareness of this can be guessed from the way that he

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makes his surrogate, Marlow speak, in Chance, of possessing an "element of the feminine" which, he says, has "saved him from one or two misadventures" (p. 146). It is a gift that enables him to be equally successful with male or female characters, and it is the circumstances of his life rather than any trace of misogyny that accounts for the predominance of men in his books—they deal very largely with a masculine world. Such women as he gives us may not, with the exception of Flora de Barral, play major roles, but they are all thoroughly feminine—they could never be accused, as even Flaubert's *Emma* has, of thinking too much like men. At the same time, they seem somewhat lightly sketched if compared with such full and fascinating portraits as Hardy's Eustacia Vye or Sue Bridehead: it may be that Conrad's socially secluded life just did not give him much contact with memorable women.

It seems that as one of nature's ascetics, Conrad did not need to preach, or consciously to practice, the virtues of asceticism. The isolation of which he often complains in his letters seems to have been largely of his own choice, an instinctive taste for the conditions that best suited the practice of his art, which though very concrete in expression, is essentially contemplative and intellectual. In this respect his complaints ~~against~~ of loneliness must be balanced against his more vividly expressed complaints against those who relieved it, from his reference to the young officer on the Adowa who asked him what he was scribbling (p. below) to the magnificent four-page coating of amber that he gives to the female fly who buzzed through the door of Pent Farm one summer afternoon and destroyed the whole social fabric of Costaguana (p. below).

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His passion-less marriage to a kindly young typist was probably as much an aspect of this as retirement to a monastery might have been if he had lived in the middle ages, and accounts for his considerable sense of annoyance when a baby arrived (Baines, pp. 252-253). It was doubtless

for such reasons that English "reserve" suited his taste, even though it was not part of his Slavonic inheritance. But in emphasising this important aspect of his personality, one must also admit that he grew into a loving husband and an affectionate father to two sons, while his nervous vivacity could make him lively and entertaining. For short spells he could exert a high degree of both masculine charm and feminine charm, but all his friends seem to agree that the spells were brief and unpredictable—he was not by nature an extrovert.

With regard to the intellectual substance of his work, as distinct from questions of art and literary expression, there seems to be only one recorded occasion on which Conrad shows a real awareness of the nature of his own achievement. This is in a letter written quite late in his life (1917) to Sir Sidney Colvin:

I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer—and also a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the "ideal" value of things, events and people. That and nothing else. The humorous, the pathetic, the passionate, the sentimental aspects came in of themselves—mais en vérité c'est les valeurs idéales des faits et gestes humains qui se sont imposés à mon activité artistique.

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Whatever dramatic and narrative gifts I may have are always, instinctively, used with that object—to get at, to bring forth les valeurs idéales.

Of course this is a very general statement—but roughly I believe it is true. (Aubry, II, p. 185).

It is important to notice that Conrad is not saying that it has been his task to uphold or defend, or even to illustrate, les valeurs idéales, but to get at them, bring them forth, to drag them out of their hiding

places and hold them up for examination, and this is exactly what he did. In all his more serious works he is interested primarily in people who have the ideals of their society, in some form or other, indelibly written in their consciences, and then tested, contradicted, or devalued by their temperament or their circumstances. In this way, the ideal as much as the man comes up for interrogation, and in so far as the two can ever be separated, his interests can be seen as as much sociological as psychological.

An early Polish critic seized on the essential atmosphere of his work more effectively than any one before, and perhaps as well as anyone since. In August 1926, Stefan Napuski wrote in a Polish periodical:

It is not easy to picture to oneself that on breezy decks, leaning back in their easy chairs, white-clad gentlemen handle these volumes without the slightest sign of uneasiness. How provocative they are at bottom! It would seem that if ever anybody's work contained the maximum of unpopular elements it is Conrad's. How cultivated and sensitive—or how superficial—must his Anglo-Saxon readers be, to have accepted this fascinating and destructive artist! Do they not feel the despair lurking behind these truly nihilistic books? Few of the great of this age are so free from, and so opposed to, anything revolutionary in the accepted bourgeois sense of the word, and yet Conrad registers the smallest gestures and the imperceptible pauses separating them from each other with a cruel precision (as in some morbid film), creates the illusion of the flow of time, gives the very chemistry of life, the very process of becoming, and analyses and decomposes until conventional reality, the reality of people accustomed to mental and physical comfort and to certitude seems altogether an absurdity.

For a bolder and more explicit expression of very similar work carr-

led out by someone who seems to have been much more aware than Conrad ever was of what he was up to, we can turn to Nietzsche's later comments on his first collection of aphorisms, Human, All too Human:

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Examining the book more closely, you discover a relentless spirit acquainted with all the secret hiding places of the ideal--its strongholds and its last refuge. Torch in hand (and its light is by no means a flickering one), I illuminate this underworld with a penetrating gleam. It is war, but war without powder and smoke, without any warlike gestures, without pathos and contorted limbs--for these things in themselves would still be "idealism". One error after the other is calmly laid upon ice: the ideal is not refuted--it freezes. Here for instance "the genius" freezes; round the corner "the saint" freezes; under a thick icicle "the hero" freezes, and in conclusion "faith", so called "conviction", and also "pity" are considerably cooled. (Ecce Homo, VI, 1).

Conrad's intentions are less aggressive, and not intentionally nihilistic--for him what Nietzsche calls "this underworld" is rather an "overworld" of established values that should be given serious consideration as well as conventional obeisance, but whether the knife is wielded by surgeon or assassin, and whether or not Marlow is at hand with a local anesthetic, the effect on the living tissue is very much the same. Nietzsche has also emphasised that his insights came primarily from observation, or as he puts it, "vivisection" of himself, and in all the more subtle of his works there can be little doubt that Conrad is essentially dealing with himself, as Lord Jim, as Decoud, as Heyst, Razumov or Morygham--even as Verloc or Flora de Barral.

If, for example, things had not gone quite so well on that greatest described in The Shadow Line, if the choice had been saving his own life or throwing it away with a crew that had no chance of survival, what would he have done? Knowing Conrad, we would not have expected him to

have jumped—yet what do we know of Conrad, except what he reveals through his identification with Jim, the man who jumped? When an imaginative man is forced to wonder "how far" he will "turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's ^{pe} ~~self~~ personality every man sets up for himself secretly",¹⁵ then he cannot prevent his imagination from venturing into the worst of possibilities as well as the best. And it is only the worst that have dramatic interest and carry the promise of psychological revelation. It is hardly necessary to assume that Conrad must have performed some act of betrayal in order to generate that compulsive interest in the fate of Jim or Razumov, though it may well be that the shock of being accused of betraying Poland, like the shock that came from his voyage up the Congo, helped to stimulate his interest in that activity for which Mrs Verloc was too wise, looking beneath the surface of things.

Although this interest involves a great deal of "self examination", it is essential to recognise that it is very much an objective, analytical interest, and his books must not be seen as guilt-ridden acts of literary expiation such as Gustav Morf attempted to make of them in The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad. The accusation that he had betrayed Poland simply by leaving it, worried him, and naturally led him to try to justify himself, as he does, very good-humouredly, in A Personal Record, but there is no evidence to suggest that he felt any deep personal guilt about it, other than the evidence that has been read out of his writing by such bizarre methods as suggesting that Patna is a Freudian slip for ¹⁶ Patria. Even if it be granted that, like the Catholic Church, the Unconscious may well use Latin as its lingua franca, this particular inspiration has been, if not disproved, at least a little devalued by Sherry's discovery that Patna was the name of one of the ships using ¹⁷ Singapore when Conrad was there.

It has been a common view that, as Hewitt puts it, Conrad was concerned with "emotional and moral problems worked out in isolation", and

that "this distinguishes his work from that of many novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were for the most part, concerned to widen the scope of the novel, to act, in Balzac's phrase, as the natural historians of society".¹⁸ In the same way, in his Essays on Thomas Mann, Lukacs says that Mann's protagonists "are not lonely heroes who discover some abstract-moral position for themselves alone as in Conrad or Hemingway" (p. 113) But it is not that Conrad is not, in his own way, a "natural historian of society", but rather that he is a detailed anatomist rather than an encyclopediast. When he narrows the scene, and isolates his protagonist, it is always with a deep awareness of the social context, and in this way he can often gain a clearer insight into the nature of the society than could be achieved by a wider and more diffused approach. Nothing could be further from the centre of his vision than what Lukacs calls the "abstract-moral"; he rather uses the isolation of his heroes to demonstrate the impossibility of an "abstract-moral position for themselves alone"—it leads, literally, to death for Decoud and Heyst, and even Lord Jim cannot survive "outside the ranks".

Because of his own isolation as a seaman, and as an expatriate, Conrad could never write of people whom he had known from the days of their childhood, or be familiar with any one particular region of the earth in the way that Hardy or Faulkner were. Nor can he fill his pages with a host of friends and relatives, and tell us of their past, and how they became what they are, in the manner of Tolstoy or Thomas Mann, but this does not mean that he was less concerned than they with the social context of his characters—it rather gives him a sharpened sense of its cruciality. Instead of giving a panoramic "natural history" he has to look for the significant gesture, the revealing incident, the testing extremity, the points where social conditioning and human instinct

creatively respond or catastrophically clash.

In writing of "The Sociological Imagination", Richard Hoggart says, "I suspect that what the literary critics usually call a 'social insight'—the sense that such and such a gesture is 'significant'—is the result of the writer holding in his imagination an enormous amount of material, of facts about society. I believe he holds this material in a kind of suspension, and that it is at the moment of his finding a unifying image—a single gesture or a large theme—that we say he has had a significant insight".¹⁹ —and it is Conrad whom Hoggart chooses to illustrate this, with a quotation from the Author's Note to The Secret Agent.

In A Personal Record Conrad speaks of the necessity of the novelist to deal with "the reality of his time" (p. 95), a phrase that seems to anticipate the concerns of Marxist critics such as Lukacs, and one can note that in Nostromo he presents insights into "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" that antedate Weber's famous essay of this title. (p. below). Even in a book as early, and as little concerned with the outside world, as The Nigger of the Narcissus we are not allowed to forget the land that has shaped, or misshaped, the nigger, and provides the graceful ship with "the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage".

It is for this reason that Conrad does not care for Rousseau, who regarded man as "innocent" and only society as evil, a view which Conrad tells us in A Personal Record, is inspired only by the desire of "justifying his own existence." Man is made by history and his society, and it is only within them that he can find his destiny. Rousseau "had no imagination, as the most casual perusal of Emile will prove. He was no novelist, whose first virtue is the exact understanding of the limits traced by the reality of his time to the play of his invention. Inspiration comes from the earth, which has a past, a history, a future, not from the cold and immutable heaven" (p. 95).

A common failure to recognise this fundamental aspect of Conrad's

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vision may itself be largely accounted for by the "social reality" of the time at which interest in his works was reawakened--that period following the Second World War when a concern with psychiatric symptoms, guilt, anxiety and dark selves, was spreading like a second St Vitus' Dance over the Western World. In this respect, Conrad's critics have so soaked his pages with salty tears that it is not easy to dry them out and see them plain.

Although in the presence of liberal friends, Conrad liked to appear as an arch-conservative, it is their optimism, and the shallowness of their proposed solutions that he criticises rather than their ultimate ideals--these he takes for granted that any decent man would share. Like Tolstoy, he has the aristocratic, and within its limits doubtless accurate, view that if you put a peasant on horseback the devil rides, but this is balanced by his oft-expressed feeling for human solidarity, and evidenced in his determination always to write for the ordinary reader.

He values the hierarchy and the basic "democracy" of a ship, where it is the way that you do your job rather than your rank that ultimately gains you respect, but he is also very conscious of the way in which this little ideal society, with its limited aims and demands, where even the McWhirrs of this world are adequate, is corrupted and dissolved, almost made irrelevant by the complex "reality" of life on land. He is too intelligent to offer, or to be tempted by any simple solutions: "The architectural aspect of the universal city remains as yet inconceivable....the very ground for its erection has not been cleared of the jungle".

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It is obvious that Conrad cannot be labelled a "liberal": the only analogous term that might adequately catch him is "anti-bourgeois". The terms "bourgeois" and "anti-bourgeois" do not seem to have much general

relevance to English literature, and there has been a tacit, and on the whole, beneficial, agreement among English men of letters not to bandy them about, but in relation to Conrad, with his nineteenth-century Continental background, they can hardly be avoided.

It is only in some of his earlier works that Conrad is openly, and as it were, aggressively "anti-bourgeois", and "The Return" is the only story to which he explicitly refers in these terms ²¹, but it is the "anti-bourgeois" feeling that provides the undercurrent in The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes, and is sometimes the only distinctive quality in less successful stories such as The Planter of Malata. Inevitably, in English society, Conrad was something of an "outsider", but he did not relish the position, and acquiesced in a gradual assimilation that worked against the astringency of his art. As time passes one notices a slow change in Marlow's attitudes: in Heart of Darkness he is mocking his bourgeois listeners who have "starved their imaginations to feed their bodies", but by the time we come to Chance, he has acquired a "sense of humour", and largely limits his irony to an archetypical civil servant and Flora's lower-class relations.

In all of Conrad's major work the atmosphere is saturated with a powerful pessimism which, without any Schopenhauerian metaphysics to support it, he seems to share in temperament and outlook with the German philosopher. Galsworthy has testified to Conrad's taste for Schopenhauer, ²² and he had also deeply influenced many of the nineteenth-century French writers with whose works Conrad was familiar ²³. Such pessimism need not be regarded as an inevitable accompaniment of honest insight, for it is in essence an attitude towards the facts rather than the facts themselves, but undoubtedly it helped Conrad to see things about the Edwardian age that the age itself was determined not to see.

It may be that apart from any question of inborn temperament, Conrad's pessimism can to some degree be accounted for by his experience

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when young. He was the only child of unfortunate parents in a very un- fortunate country, and went with them into exile in Siberia when he was four years old. On the journey he almost died of pneumonia, and his mother died of tuberculosis two years later, leaving him alone with a despairing father: "The poor child does not know what it is to have a companion of his own age. He sees the sadness of my old age, and who knows, perhaps that sight may freeze and wither his young heart" (Aubry, I, p. 15). A few months later his father writes again, "I shield him from the atmosphere of this place, and he grows up as in a monastic cell. For the memento mori we have the grave of our dear one, and every letter which reaches us is the equivalent of a day of fasting, a hair shirt or a discipline. We shiver with cold, we die of hunger" (Aubry, I, p. 16). His father died, very slowly, when he was twelve, and while awaiting the death, Conrad refers to "moments of revolt which stripped me of some of my simple trust in the universe"²⁴

There is a certain kind of childhood experience that can lead quite naturally to the expectation that if you ask you will receive, if you knock it will be opened unto you, and if you give, you will be given back even more than you gave—and there is another kind. It was no doubt with an awareness of what he himself had lost that Conrad makes the dying Heyst say, "...woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!" One need not be very surprised that at nineteen Conrad apparently attempted to commit suicide, and that a deeply pessimistic view of life pervades all his most genuine work.

"Never confess!" says Marlow in Chance: "'Never, never! An untimely joke is a source of bitter regret always. Sometimes it may ruin a man: not because it is a joke, but because it is untimely. And confession ~~is always untimely~~ of whatever sort is always untimely. The only thing which makes it supportable for a while is curiosity...' I

had seldom seen Marlow so vehement, so pessimistic, so earnestly cynical before" (p. 212).

With Conrad himself one feels that more than a voluntary withholding of a final confession, it was a literal incapacity—he just did not, and could not know his own final opinions. In this respect, Richard Curle's The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad provides an interesting portrait. The recurring themes of the book are the power and fascination of Conrad's personality, the warmth of his affection, and the impossibility of knowing his final opinions, the doubt as to whether there were any final opinions—the impression is rather of a perpetual "agonizing but fruitful ferment", of a swimmer in nihilistic depths who kept himself afloat in the "destructive element" only by a conscious and continuous effort:

Nobody ever really discovered what went on inside Conrad's brain, or pierced very profoundly—even the friends for whom he had fewest reservations—into the isolated silences of his ultimate convictions. All that one caught were glimpses of the stirring pool, but beneath the surface there was a solitary Conrad, inexplicably removed from any human being. The deepest layers lay far out of sight. One could but guess at them by his moods of ironic despondency, aristocratic contempt, or exasperated disillusionment. (p. 38).

We may better appreciate the nature, and the inevitability, of this "fruitful ferment" if we consider some of the ingredients that went into it. Of these, the most obvious, apart from his unhappy childhood, is the simple fact that all his adult life he was an outsider, "a bloody foreigner", a man who could speak no English when at the age of nineteen, after a few years in France, his predicament as a subject of the Czar, and liable to military service, more or less compelled him to board a British steamer at Marseilles.

He was doubtless fluent enough in French, but he was not merely a foreigner in the sense that a Frenchman or a ~~West~~ German are foreigners in England: he was a Pole, a central European and a Slav, bringing with him into the "protestant, bourgeois world" what Thomas Mann in his essay on The Secret Agent has called ironically "the advantages of barbarism." (p. below). They were not advantages that he consciously prized; indeed, from behind the mask of a painfully adopted English persona he would profess to deplore them. He would not have even Tolstoy in the house, let alone that "grimacing haunted creature" Dostoevsky, who "sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages" (Aubry, II, p. 140): only Turgenev, exile in Paris and friend of Flaubert was acceptable. But the emotions of the East, and the values of a still medieval culture were never far below the surface. One of the more superficial aspects of this is illustrated by Wells, when he recalls that a piece of ill-timed humour by George Bernard Shaw almost led to a duel:

"Does that man want to insult me?" he demanded.

The provocation to say "yes" and assist at the subsequent duel was very great, but I overcame it. "It's humour", I said, and took Conrad out into the garden to cool. One could always baffle Conrad by saying "humour". It was one of our damned English tricks he had never learned to tackle. (Experiment in Autobiography, II, p. 620).

In Under Western Eyes, and to a lesser degree, in The Secret Agent, it is the underground conflict between a rational acceptance of English values, and an emotional preference for "barbarism" that give the books their subversive air of unease. And although Mann attributes the "black comedy" of The Secret Agent to "robust Anglo-Saxon humour", it seems nearer to an ironic despair that can hardly be classed as "humour". In Lord Jim, although the hero's concern at the loss of his "character"

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is not at all un-British, no doubt a Polish sense of honour tends to sharpen and clarify an issue that might easily have faded into a more English compromise: "A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain, it would have come to terms with itself, with a sigh, a grunt, or even with a guffaw" (Lord Jim, p. 177). Conrad may sometimes like to think that he can show us the East under Western eyes, but much more fundamentally, he is seeing the West with Eastern eyes.

It is a fertile source of ferment in any man's mind to be subject to a succession of wholly different cultures, to find that what, in one society are basic convictions are in another but outlandish opinions, that social accomplishments that in one world command instinctive respect are, in another, comic eccentricities. This acquiring of many perspectives, mixing of moralities and division of loyalties may lead, ideally, to a kind of god-like maturity, but more easily, as in the half-castes that shadow some of Conrad's Eastern scenes, to cynicism and demoralisation. This must have been for Conrad a life-long battle in which the balance and "justice" of his art are a "victory" achieved at the cost of those moods of "ironic despondency, aristocratic contempt, and exasperated disillusionment" to which Curle refers.

There has been much discussion of whether or not Conrad was a "nihilist", rather as if this was some kind of religious denomination to which one either did or did not belong. In fact, of course, he was merely struggling alone, and ahead of his time, with problems that have since come to be shared by all those who are to any degree intellectually sophisticated. And he gave, in Victory, as thorough an analysis of them as has yet been offered by any of our academic philosophers.

He tried very hard to become, in spirit and sympathy, an Englishman, with English habits and tastes, English friends, and even English limitations on his sympathy, and yet whenever, in his autobiographical or journalistic productions, he writes in this vein there is always

something superficial and eunuch-like about it: underneath, he could never cease to be a Pole, a Slav, a "barbarian", a pessimist, an anti-bourgeois and an unbeliever. One often finds in Conrad echoes of, or parallels to the thoughts of Nietzsche, who ironically claimed Polish ancestry as a source of his "genius", and words from the latter's preface to Human, All Too Human can illuminate Conrad's position in nineteenth-century England:

My writings have been called a school of suspicion... Indeed I myself do not think that anyone has ever looked at the world with such a profound suspicion... and he who realises something of the consequences involved in every profound suspicion, something of the chills and anxieties of loneliness to which every uncompromising difference of outlook condemns him, will also understand how often I took shelter in some kind of reverence, or hostility or scientificity or levity or stupidity, in order to recover from myself and as it were obtain temporary self-forgetfulness.

In this connection, it is important to recognise that as an observer of the English scene, Conrad is not simply evaluating us in terms of some alien, but securely held, cultural scheme of his own: he is not like de Tocequeville, surveying America, or Manchester, with serene eyes and an assured scale of values. He is rather in that precarious position to which, in Nostromo, Father Corbelan dismisses Decoud: "A sort of Frenchman—godless—a materialist. Neither the son of his own country nor of any other"—to which Decoud comments, "Scarcely human, in fact" (p. 198). Behind this ironic remark lies the whole agony and triumph of Conrad's "fruitful ferment". In an age in which, in England much more than on the Continent, in terms of traditional values as distinct from formal religious creeds, nearly everyone believed everything, Conrad could not believe anything, and if he escaped the fate of Decoud, who "disappeared without trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things", it

was only by lonely dedication to his art, his form of that action "in which alone is found the illusion of a mastered destiny".

If the books that represent his own "mastered destiny" are something more than "illusion", or at least remain in this world of "appearances" as an infinitely fascinating, symbolic and resonant assembly of "illusions", it is because he used his art not as an escape from these existential problems but as the means of wrestling with them. His central task, his "destiny", can be seen as the testing and examining of les valeurs idéales against the unstable human material they have been created to mould or contain, contradict or fulfil, and contrasting them with the indifferent and irrational world in which, precariously, they flower. Moreover, his works can be seen to rise to their highest level in both style and substance when the aspects of this central theme are also ones in which his own experience has given him a high degree of personal involvement. In this sense, his works could be distributed within a series of concentric circles, the inmost of which would contain those such as Lord Jim, in which Conrad is deeply involved, the next circle those in which, while the problems are similar, the personal involvement is not so direct—Typhoon, Falk, or The End of the Tether would come in this area, and finally an outer circle, merging into outer darkness, for magazine stories such as those in A Set of Six, of which he said, "They are just stories in which I've tried my best to be simply entertaining" (Aubry, II, p. 66).

In the pages that follow, the degree of attention given to individual works is roughly in proportion to their closeness to the point from which these concentric circles radiate, the only exception being certain early works which although they may not be quite within the inner circles, are meaningfully moving towards them.

Thus, Part I deals with these early works, and Part 2 with the discovery, in "Youth" of the method and form of using a narrator to put in perspective a character who embodies the author's sensibility,

and the works that follow, in which this "form" is developed with a combination of experience and analysis that provides, in Lord Jim, the "Conradian flavour" in what is perhaps its purest and most astringent form. Part 3 deals with stories in the second circle, where a conflict between "ideal" and "reality" is presented in a more objective manner, and Part 4 with Nostromo which combines the personal involvement with more generalised experience, and two other "political" works that exhibit Conrad's unease as a "barbarian" in the bourgeois West. Part 5 considers later, largely autobiographical, stories that convey experience without any deep analysis, and consequently do not require any separation of the narrator and the protagonist. Finally comes Victory, in which the critical intellect that in earlier stories has put other things in perspective becomes itself the object of investigation.

The stories are dealt with roughly in the order in which they were written, in order to make of Conrad's development a continuing narrative, the main exceptions being in the case of Chance, which though written long after the other "Marlow stories", is linked by his presence, and Victory, which although it was completed before two of the shorter tales considered in Part 5, as Conrad's last important novel, and in some senses his ~~poit~~ philosophical "last testament", seemed the most appropriate work with which to conclude.

Notes

1. Marvin Midrick, Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 1-11.
2. An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. 2, p. 71
3. The Twentieth Century, The Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Vol 7, p. 27.
4. Edward Garnett (Ed.), Letters from Conrad, 1895 to 1924, p. 9.
5. Yves Hervouet, "French Linguistic and Literary Influences on Joseph Conrad", p. 235.
6. Hervouet, op. cit., pp. 406-409 and R.W.Stallman (Ed.), Stephen Crane, An Omnibus, p. 666.
7. Richard Curle (Ed.), Conrad to a Friend, p. 14.
8. Hervouet, op. cit., pp. 300ff.
9. "The Shadow Line", Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p. 94.
10. Curle, op. cit., p. 118.
11. Castles in Spain, pp. 80-81.
12. Garnett, op. cit., pp. 244-245.
13. ibid., p. 3.
14. Quoted, Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, app., p. 237.
15. "The Secret Sharer", 'Twiixt Land and Sea, p. 94.
16. Czeslaw Milosz, "Joseph Conrad in Polish Eyes", R.W.Stallman (Ed.), The Art of Joseph Conrad, A Critical Symposium, p. 43.
17. Conrad's Eastern World, p. 46.
18. "Conrad, Joseph", Encyclopedia Britannica, 1967 Edn.
19. Speaking to Each Other, Vol. 2, p. 264.
20. "Autocracy and War", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 107.
21. Garnett, op. cit., p. 111.
22. Castles in Spain, p. 91.
23. "Poland Revisited", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 168.

1 Preparation

Almayer's Folly

Although, for much of his sea-going life, Conrad was compelled to follow the trade-route between England and Australia, his boyhood reading of travel books and adventure stories and his incurably romantic temperament made him eager for more exotic climes—Central Africa or the Far East. His most fortunate period in this respect began in August 1887, when, after an injury had kept him in Singapore for six weeks, he was signed on as mate in the Vidar, a small Arab-owned steamer that did a regular three-week run from Singapore, the furthest point being on the East coast of Borneo. Here a tiny trading post, threatened by the jungle, was kept by a Dutchman called Olmeyer. This "outpost of progress" deeply impressed itself on Conrad's imagination, and became the scene for his first two books, as well as for The Rescue, the latter part of Lord Jim, and several shorter stories.

For the youthful Conrad it was the height of romance; for Olmeyer it was the hell from which he dreamed of escape, and for both of them, the dream was more important than reality. It seems that this paradox, fermenting slowly in Conrad's mind, inspired him to begin, two years later, a novel in which his own illusion, suspended in solution, would provide the acid in which to pickle Almayer's.

How, and where, he wrote this first book, though not why, is a major theme of A Personal Record, which was written another twenty years on, in 1908. The latter begins with a ship at anchor in Rouen, "the shade of old Flaubert" overhead, and a curious young ship's officer at his elbow:

"What are you scribbling there, if its fair to ask?"

"It was a fair enough question, but I did not answer him, and simply turned the pad over with a movement of instinctive secrecy."

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From there we go back to the lodgings in London where it was begun, to the Congo, Geneva, and Poland with the manuscript in his baggage, and finally sail on the Torrens for Adelaide. Among the passengers is "a first-class classical man from Cambridge", just down, and dying of tuberculosis. He becomes such a friend that Conrad dares to show him the manuscript, and the story of the story reaches its tight-lipped classical climax:

"Well, what do you say?" I asked at last. "Is it worth finishing?"

'Distinctly.'

'Were you interested?'

'Very much!'

'Now let me ask you one more thing: is the story quite clear to you as it stands?'

'Yes, perfectly.'

"We never spoke together of the book again." (p.18)

Shortly after, the young man died. What else? At least Conrad said so. When, in 1917, research revealed that in fact he had travelled home again round the Cape with Conrad, he had to say, "Strange lapse of memory!"¹ The trail of his allegedly autobiographical writings is littered with such creative lapses; and it is only when, as in The Arrow of Gold, the lapses become larger than the memories that there is artistic failure.

Although Conrad has so much to say about how Almayer's Folly was written, he claims to be wholly agnostic as to "why", and perhaps he was. At least one can guess that the loneliness of his childhood gave him an initial stimulus to the creation of imagined worlds, while the slow tempo of a seaman's life in the days of sail gave seeds of contemplation time to grow.

Almayer and his dreams of gold, reacting on Conrad's dreams of romance, had given him something to contemplate, and finally something to say, something that could not be said to his fellow seamen, but only to a more sophisticated world. Back in his lodgings in London, he called for the breakfast cups to be cleared away and sat down to write. If Almayer was partly a problem to be written out, he also fitted very well within the limits of what it was then possible for Conrad to write. Almayer and his world were outside the familiar bounds of Empire, within which Conrad could not hope to compete with Kipling; he did not have to be regarded as thinking or speaking like an Englishman, and he was suitable for treatment in the manner of those French authors who had given him his initial ideas of what a novel should be.

The problem of Almayer's identity has a certain complexity. There is the fictional Almayer, a presumably more "real" Almayer described by Conrad himself in A Personal Record, and finally there is the "historical" Almayer, more commonly spelt Olmeyer—Conrad probably never saw the name in writing—who has been the subject of much research, of which the fullest summary is to be found in Jerry Allen's The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad (Chapters XVI—XX). It reveals that Conrad's "Almayer" is very much his own creation, but it is quite common for his fictional characters to keep the names of the real people, however briefly glimpsed or libellously extrapolated, who provided him with his starting point. Inevitably, this often led to his tales being regarded as more factual than they were, a misapprehension that Conrad seems rather to have encouraged (see p.000 below).

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It is always difficult for a foreigner to remember names, and it seems that once Conrad had a man and his name firmly fixed together, the very effort he had put into it made it difficult for him to part

them again. It is common enough for writers to describe a man they have known and change his name; Conrad preferred to keep the name and change the man, making an exception only for himself, and that only after eleven years had convinced him that no Anglo-Saxon would ever make a go of Korzeniowski.²

In his day, the laws of libel did not provide such regular sustenance for the legal profession as in recent times, and in any case he does not seem to have expected anyone east of Suez ever to read his books, though he was not at all disconcerted when he found that they did. After a visit from one of his former acquaintances on the Borneo run, he wrote to his agent that they "even read my books and wonder who the devil has been around taking notes. My visitor told me that Joshua Lingard made the guess. 'It must have been that fellow who was mate in the Vidar with Craig.'"

He also told Pinker in the same letter that they "feel kindly to the chronicler of their lives and adventures"³, but one can hardly imagine that Olmeyer, for instance, would have been very pleased to read of his descent to opium and suicide (He died in Surabaya in 1900), or to find his wife Johanna (nee Van Lieshout), daughter of a Dutch officer, suffering a sea-change into the creature who burned the furniture to cook rice for Babalatchi. Nor did the five-year old daughter Wilhelmina, whom Conrad may well have heard Olmeyer calling "Nina", have the good fortune to be carried off by a princely pirate --she married a Dutch official, and her elder sister a Scottish trader. But as if truth were making a lame attempt to catch up with fiction, Olmeyer's son, Willy, did, just after Conrad's book was written, marry a Javanese girl called Nina.⁴

It is estimated that in his four trips to Berau in the Vidar, Conrad could not have spent more than a total of twelve days at anchor there, but it seems that he forgot little and wasted nothing. He tried as hard as Flaubert to live by Stendhal's dictum, "Never write of anything that you have not seen with your own eyes", and he will adapt over and over again some piece of personal experience rather than resort to invention (see, for example, p.000 below).

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With his own eyes he would have seen Olmeyer and his houses, and the compound round about, the Chinaman's dwelling, the Arab fort from outside, and Almayer's hanger-on, who seems to have been the basis for both Willems in An Outcast of the Islands and Cornelius in Lord Jim. For the Malays, who can hardly have been more than shadows among the huts and trees, he used the best eyes he could borrow, making A.R. Wallace's The Malay Archipelago literally his bed-side book, along with a few others that the literary detectives have duly noted.

Although Almayer's Folly contains a great deal of scenic description, "nature" does not seem to have much appeal for Conrad. He never shows any of that joy in the scene, and in sharing the scene, that shines, for example, from Hemingway's day of fishing at Burguete in The Sun Also Rises. Galsworthy remarked that he "was not what we should call a 'lover of nature' in the sense of one who spends long hours lost in the life of birds and flowers, of animals and trees".

In his two Malayan books, the characters, with their houses and their utensils have a vivid precision that never seems quite to join up with the painted backcloth behind. There are no doubt monkeys in the forest, but the only monkey that we see is the one chained to Almayer's verandah. Blossoms are there, and birds, in general, but no particular flower is described, no bird sings, no smell or texture is ever concretely present. There is little to compare with that

sensuous imagery by which Lawrence, in the opening pages of The Rainbow, makes the English countryside feel more like a jungle than Conrad's Borneo.

At the same time, as J. I. M. Stewart has emphasised, the back-cloth is used with skill, it is not simply "there", but is manipulated as stage machinery to suit each scene. Almayer's Folly opens with the sinking sun spreading gold on the waters of the Pantai, for Almayer's dreams are of gold, and then the tree carried on the flood raises "a denuded branch like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven", which is a marvellous summary of Almayer's psychology. As Stewart remarks, "Conrad acquires quite early an almost dangerous facility in the creation of atmosphere", but continually he refines it: in Heart of Darkness or Nostramo the scenic effects are used in essentially the same manner, but with more subtlety and economy. At the same time, it emphasises the point that in none of his books is there any fruitful exchange between man and nature, and in Lord Jim, Stein says, "Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him." Nature, by its cruel indifference, shows itself as alien to man, or else by its corruption and decay, reflects his transience and instability.

If the scenic descriptions in Almayer's Folly are an example of something that takes up much space, without being the object of much enthusiasm on the part of the author, there is another subject which although it seems of interest to the author, is not allowed much development—the politics of the situation. As Guerard has emphasised, the over-lapping settlements of Malays, Bugis and Dyaks, the nomadic pirates and the Chinese traders, the colonial rivalry of Arab, Dutch and British interests make a complex pattern which, for lack of full explanation—such explanation as there is comes rather late—can be

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confusing for the reader. Thus, although politics are not very relevant to the story he has to tell, the casual references make it clear that he has it all in his mind as he writes, and his subsequent books will become increasingly concerned with "politics", with the full social context of his characters.

On the whole, it would appear that with *Almayer*, Conrad has not found a character with whom he can sufficiently "identify" - he is not one of those "outward forms" that Conrad can infuse with his own feelings and measure against his own ideals. Whatever Flaubert may have meant by saying, "Madame Bovary is me", there is no substantial way in which Conrad could have said, "Almayer is me", or that Almayer's problems--the finding of a gold mine and the keeping of a daughter--were Conrad's problems. A great deal of his sweat went into the book, but not enough of his blood.

Emma Bovary has qualities such that the conflict between her romantic and aristocratic ideals, even though they are no more than the ideals of light literature, and the reality of her petit-bourgeois environment is intensely moving. Almayer hardly carries such possibilities. His dreams lack even the butterfly beauty of romantic literature: his marriage is mere financial calculation, and not, like Emma's, a combination of ignorance and force of circumstances, and only in relation to his daughter can he be at all sympathetic. And the book's other main theme, the love between Nina and Dain Maroola, is something for which Conrad was not equipped in taste, temperament or experience, so that it is obviously derivative, though the fact that some of its cliches are French rather than British may have given it a certain novelty to his first readers.

Thus, if Madame Bovary was in some sense, his starting point, he has moved off in a direction the exact opposite of that in which

his true vocation lay. In Flaubert's book we have the psychology of an essentially irresponsible person, and in *Almayer*, one even less responsible; with *Emma Bovary* we have a conflict between ideal values and "reality", in which the ideal values are somewhat dream-like, feminine and aesthetic, and with *Almayer* we have a character in whom they are even weaker—little more than dreams of avarice, whereas Conrad's real task was to deal with men carrying heavier burdens and faced with stronger standards, ideals of a more public, masculine, and morally serious kind, men who could express his own inner emotions and experiences.

In the meantime, he was tempted to go further in the wrong direction, with *An Outcast of the Islands*. In the Author's Note to this book he says:

"A phrase of Edward Garnett's is, as a matter of fact, responsible for this book... 'You have the style, you have the temperament; why not write another?... The word 'another' did it... On getting home I sat down and wrote about half a page of *An Outcast of the Islands*." (p. viii)

Perhaps what he wrote was the opening sentence of the book: "When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with the 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." If it be accepted that with *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad was facing in the wrong direction, in relation to "the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty", then this was a further step into the wrong direction, the wayside quagmire of popular "exoticism".

The book begins well: the picture of Willems poised before the moment of his fall has wit, style and atmosphere, but the man himself, a boastful bullfrog blowing himself up on the edge of a tropical pond, is not sufficiently interesting to hold the author's attention, or ours. Moreover, the tendency to identify sex with corruption and decay, though it may be a valid aspect of Conrad's particular vision of life, is here given a moralistic emphasis that suggests simple hypocrisy, and in the end we are all but buried in a riotuous growth of jungle vegetation. As he says in the Author's Note, "The mere scenery got a great hold on me as I went on, perhaps because (I may just as well confess that) the story itself was never very near my heart."

One can apply to both Almayer and Willems, and with much more justice, James' criticism of Flaubert's Frederic Moreau and Emma Bovary: that they are "defective" because they are "such limited reflectors and registers" and "if it be objected that they were addressed to his purpose better than others would have been, the purpose itself then shows as inferior."⁹

Notes

1. Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 290.
2. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
3. G. Jean Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II, p. 103.
4. Allen, p. 221.
5. Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World, p. 139
6. "Reminiscences of Conrad", Castles in Spain, p. 85.
7. Eight Modern Writers, The Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. XV, p. 192.
8. Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, pp. 71-72
9. Henry James, The Art of Fiction and Other Essays, pp. 135-136.

Tales of Unrest

From his boyhood days Conrad had dreamed of "darkest Africa," and by persistent lobbying, through an influential aunt in Brussels, he eventually obtained a contract to command a steamboat on the Congo. This experience, during which, he says in A Personal Record, "I had the time to wish myself dead over and over again with perfect sincerity" (p. 14), was one of those times of sickness and shock that can, for the artist, turn out to be a kind of good fortune.

He had already begun to write—the manuscript of Almayer's Folly was in his luggage—so that Aubry's theory that it was the Congo that provided the critical awakening that turned him from seaman to novelist is hardly supportable. Aubry quotes Conrad as saying to Garnett, "Before the Congo I was just a mere animal",¹ but according to Garnett's own recollections, it was of "his early years at sea" that Conrad said, "I was a perfect animal".² It seems rather that what this experience did was to give his natural pessimism a further twist towards nihilism. It made him physically ill, and also induced a mood of cynicism, a complete disillusion with "civilisation", that seems to have been written into some of the short stories that he wrote after An Outcast of the Islands and more or less written out by the time he came to The Nigger of the Narcissus. It marks the beginning of a running battle with nihilism that helps to give his works their existential depth.

These short stories, which he wrote between April 1896 and September 1897 are collected in Tales of Unrest, a title that well expresses their mood. In all of them we find attitudes of pessimism, determinism, and a feeling that all is "illusion". When later, these attitudes come to be modified by after-thoughts, and controlled by more positive energies, they will give his books their depth and astringency, their essentially modern sense of the human condit-

ion. But in Tales of Unrest, the effect is rather of a certain shallowness and cynicism, and Conrad himself told Aubry, in 1910, that this was "of all my works the one that I like least." ³ Nevertheless, these stories allow us to see, in their skeletal form, certain important qualities that in the later works will be more adequately fleshed with humanity and inspired with a breath of existential concern.

The first to be written was "The Idiots". It was triggered off by the sight of the actual idiots on a road in France, and a little anecdotal information about them, without that period of meditative reflection that Conrad needs for his deeper themes. The voice is rather the voice of Zola, and its political and anti-clerical tones are hardly those of Conrad himself--in the Author's Note he refers to it as "an obviously derivative piece of work." His next story, "An Outpost of Progress", can probably be regarded as the first in his own true post-Congo voice. Its original title, "An Outpost of Civilisation", ⁴ suggests a larger target and a more radical mood than "An Outpost of Progress", and it ^{is} "civilisation", and not merely its "progressive" aspects that is, in the conclusion, described as "a rubbish heap".

It sets out an essentially "sociological" view of man that in a less extreme form will be a chief source of Conrad's strength. Early in the story, we are told, "Few men realise that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion." (p. 88).

We are all sociologists now, but at the time at which Conrad

wrote, probably no other English novelist except Hardy was quite so much of one— it can be seen as one of Conrad's main debts to the literature of France. "An Outpost of Progress" is told in such a way that we never think of saying of Kayerts or Carlier, "Really, in the circumstances, they should have behaved better than that!" Their conditioned character is their destiny, and circumstances have the initiative. And this effect is achieved not by any easily detectable exaggeration of the extent to which the two men are socially conditioned, but simply by the depth and fulness with which their conditioning is presented, and the way in which their every action and their every item of conversation illustrate it.

At the same time, by their obvious limitations as examples of the human race, they also demonstrate the deficiencies of the doctrine as an all-embracing summary of the human condition. The thesis that "every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd" cannot adequately be demonstrated by dealing only with people whose thoughts are so obviously insignificant. The vision of man as totally entrapped in and conditioned by his society is one that cumulative works of statistical sociology can make ever more convincing; it is only when it is balanced against the evidence, and the equally confident assertions, of the psychologists that social institutions and historical events are but a reflection of the inner conflicts of the human soul that the perspective is restored. It is the strength of Conrad's later works that he can, with a full awareness, hold the balance between the two. It will cause him, virtually, to divide humanity into two classes, classes that bear no relation to wealth, race or social rank—the interesting ones who live by the "idea", and so become psychologically complex, and those others,

like the captain of the Patna who are fit only to be kicked out into the Pacific Ocean and heard of no more. It is because Willems, in The Outcast of the Islands is essentially in this class that the book lies outside the line of Conrad's development. After a certain stage not only the Kayerts and the Carliers, but the whole crew of the Narcissus become too "simple" to interest him further. As a boy, his tutor called him "a Don Quixote", and it is the Don Quixotes, not the Sancho Panzas, with whom he will choose to wrestle.

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In "An Outpost of Progress", Conrad's objectivity, applied to characters who are themselves hardly sympathetic, gives it all a rather cold-blooded atmosphere, which can be seen as a combination of sought effect and of his mood at the time. In The Nigger of the Narcissus, with no loss of objectivity, more warmth appears, and in all his subsequent works until The Secret Agent, where a conscious withholding of it sets the whole tone of the book.

The story also shows admirable economy, an economy not in the number of words—Conrad's "economy" never consists in mere brevity, that modern tendency, as one critic has put it, "to pare things down to the barest inessentials", but rather in putting in nothing that is not relevant, nothing that does not contribute to the total effect. There may be too many words between the lines of conversation for modern taste, but they all carry their weight and add to the psychological conviction. Here Conrad has a quality that often goes with emotional detachment, an ability for the acute observation of gestures and expressions of the kind that makes for good direction in cinema or television: it was perhaps sharpened by his early days in British ships, thrown among tough characters whose language he could hardly understand.

First arrived at the Outpost,

Kayerts and Carlier walked arm in arm, drawing close to one another as children do in the dark; they had the same, not altogether unpleas-

ant, sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary. They chatted persistently in familiar tones. "Our station is prettily situated," said one. The other assented with enthusiasm, enlarging volubly on the beauties of the situation. Then they passed near the grave. "Poor devil!" said Kayerts. "He died of fever, didn't he?" muttered Carlier, stopping short. "Why," retorted Kayerts, with indignation, "I've been told that the fellow exposed himself recklessly to the sun. The climate here, everybody says, is not at all worse than home, as long as you keep out of the sun.." (p. 89).

This first happy walk bringing them at once to the grave of their predecessor, on the cross of which Kayerts is to hang himself at the end of the story, is an early and not very subtle example of Conrad's skill with symbols that are, in Hewitt's phrase, symbolic, "without ceasing to be facts that are perfectly convincing in naturalistic terms."⁵ One never finds Conrad introducing any symbolic act or object that is not fully justified in naturalistic terms, and his integration of the "literal" and the "symbolic" is so perfect that one suspects that its creation was often almost as unconscious a process as its absorption by the reader, so that until the publication of Hewitt's study in 1952, this aspect of his work had largely escaped attention.

"Society, not from any tenderness but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on the condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what to make of their freedom." (p. 90) That Conrad here speaks of the needs of society as "strange needs" is typical of the mood that

pervades the story.

Fortunately, "their predecessor had left some torn books", and so the two agents discover literature:

In the centre of Africa they made the acquaintance of Richelieu and of d'Artagnan, of Hawk's Eye and of Father Goriot, and of many other people. All these imaginary personages became subjects for gossip as if they had been living friends. They discovered their virtues, suspected their motives, decried their successes; were scandalized at their duplicity or were doubtful about their courage. The accounts of crimes filled them with indignation, while tender or pathetic passages moved them deeply. Carlier cleared his throat and said in a soldierly voice, "What nonsense!" Kayerts, his round eyes suffused with tears, his fat cheeks quivering, rubbed his bald head and declared, "This is a splendid book. I had no idea there were such clever fellows in the world". (p. 94)

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Conrad wrote to Garnett, to whom the story was first sent, "This story is meant for you.... I am sure you will understand the reason and meaning of every detail, the meaning of them reading novels..."⁶ One meaning of this scene is doubtless a kind of manifesto, the promise that Conrad will never seek to manipulate the reader's emotions in this kind of way. Certainly, he seems to have taken more trouble than most to ensure that what were potentially the most moving scenes in his books should never be guilty of actually bringing a tear to anyone's eye: it is rather in subsequent meditation that one is moved to thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Kayerts and Carlier also read about the merits of those who go out "bringing light and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth", and begin "to think better of themselves": "In a hundred years from now, there will be perhaps a town here. Quays, and warehouses,

and barracks, and—and—billiard rooms. Civilisation, my boy, and virtue—and all. And then chaps will read that two good fellows, Kayerts and Carlier, were the first civilised men to live in this very spot!" (p. 95).

"Light and faith and commerce", or in practical terms—ivory. Their de-moralised African agent is the "realist" who fully understands the system. He takes over, in their new context, the role of the men with pens behind their ears or gold lace on their sleeves. When the moment comes, he sells their villagers as slaves, and brings in the ivory.

"We can't touch it of course", said Kayerts.

"Of course not," assented Carlier.

"Slavery is an awful thing," stammered out Kayerts in an unsteady voice.

"Frightful—the sufferings," grunted Carlier with conviction.

They believed their words. Everybody shows a respectful deference to certain sounds that he and his fellows make. But about feelings people know nothing. We talk with indignation or enthusiasm; we talk about oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice, virtue, and we know nothing real beyond the words. Nobody knows what suffering or sacrifice mean—except, perhaps, the victims of the mysterious purpose of these illusions (p.105).

Philosophically, semantically, the final paragraph hardly stands up, and even if it did, the concluding word "illusions" would seem to make it fall down again, but it conveys a mood, and as in a rather similar passage in The Nigger of the Narcissus, it also fulfils a very precise literary purpose in covering a rather sudden transition in the story itself—the transition from the agents' indignation at the transaction to their passive acceptance of it:

"As they were going back to the house Kayerts observed with a sigh, 'It had to be done.' And Carlier said, 'Its deplorable, but, the men being Company's men the ivory is Company's ivory. We must

look after it." (p. 106).

The ivory in "An Outpost of Progress" is seen in very much the same way as "the silver of the mine" will be seen in Nostromo, not ^{as} a natural resource destined for some creative purpose, but in a fusion of the symbolic and the literal, a kind of pure essence of "capitalism", so concentrated that wherever it touches there is instant corrosion. From this point, "it was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the post that impressed them so much as the inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts." The local tribesmen no longer come to see them—"There was nobody there; and being left alone with their weakness, they became daily more like a pair of accomplices than like a couple of devoted friends. They had heard nothing from home for eight months. Every evening they said, 'Tomorrow we shall see the steamer.'"

But the Director, in the steamer, is also concerned with the ivory, and he does not expect much from this place—"the useless station, and the useless men, could wait."

The morning after Kayerts has, in the panic that comes as the convincing culmination of increasing strain, killed his companion, the steamer is heard in the fog:

A shriek inhuman, vibrating and sudden, pierced like a sharp dart the white shroud of that land of sorrow. Three short, impatient screeches followed, and then, for a time, the fog-wreaths rolled on, undisturbed, through a formidable silence. Then many more shrieks, rapid and piercing, like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature, rent the air. Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilisation and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap

]from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done" (p. 115).

When, three years later, Conrad came to write Heart of Darkness, he saw the issues as less clear-cut. His own self-awareness had forced him into more feeling of kinship with the darkness of both the exploited primitives and the exploiting Europeans, bringing many more shades of after-thought and ambiguity. Marlow is dragged reluctantly into a kind of complicity with it all, his reluctance and half-comprehension serving to drag the reader in as well.

In Heart of Darkness the shrieks "rapid and piercing, like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature" are transferred from the steamboat, the symbol of civilisation, to the "savages" in the jungle, while the steamer, like the book of nautical rules that Marlow finds in the harlequin's hut, comes to represent a more positive side of civilisation, and it is by losing himself in the labour of repairing the steamer that Marlow preserves his sanity.

What Heart of Darkness is to lose in the sharpness of its social criticism, it gains in depth, in universal justice and psychological insight. It would appear that in "An Outpost of Progress" Conrad stands nearer to the radical left, more overtly in opposition to all the gods of Western man than, he will ever do again. To continue in this direction, he would have had to become a complete outsider, and perhaps, like his friend Cunninghame Graham, an activist for an alternative vision, but he chose rather that way of self-analysis that makes a man increasingly reluctant to abuse "the world" for expressing qualities that he finds within himself.

"The Lagoon", which Conrad wrote at about the same time as "An Outpost of Progress", is in complete contrast—very much an "inward" story. Guerard suggests that a Jungian reading might find in it "a night journey into the unconscious" (p. 66), while a Freudian reading might well provide evidence of birth trauma and a symbolic return to the womb. Whatever value one may put on these kinds of interpretation,

the story certainly suggests subliminal associations and the qualities of a dream.

It has become indissolubly associated with a parody of it, "The Feast", by Max Beerbohm, collected in his A Christmas Garland. He hardly needs to exaggerate some of Conrad's more obvious faults, but he makes no attempt to catch the basic rhythms of "Conradese"— at that time Conrad's reputation was hardly great enough to justify that much attention from Beerbohm.

Guerard has pointed out the interesting contrast that "The Lagoon" makes with "An Outpost of Progress", in that the latter is intellectual, explicit, and carefully planned, and "as a result, the most personal voice of the early Conrad, with its unpunctuated running rhythms and overloaded syntax is rarely heard, and never speaks with distinction" (p. 65), while in the other less coherent and more dream-like story, there is "the very originality and personal accent that provoke parody", suggesting that "the true Conradian style was, like certain other great styles, achieved through the disciplining of initial excess" (p. 67). It also suggests that at this period, at least, Conrad had not attained to that psychic unity of intellect and emotion by which the best formulations of his thought could be expressed in a spontaneous personal style. Perhaps those strongly contrasted masculine and feminine qualities that had so impressed Garnett at their first meeting (p. above) had not yet made their marriage in his art.

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The last sentence of "The Lagoon" describes "the white man" as "He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless world into the darkness of a world of illusions." Conrad seems to have returned from his travels, and more particularly, his Congo experience, with the feeling that very much of the interpreted world that his contemporaries took for granted was but "illusion", a feeling that he often expresses in imprecise overstatements that seem to rob the word "illusion" of any real meaning,

and provide Beerbohm with his stars reflected in the water, "creating an illusion of themselves who are illusions", and his mosquito net that was "itself illusory like everything else, only more so."

A general tendency to attribute illusiveness to large areas of the visible world was part of Schopenhauer's legacy to art, but the claim made by certain Eastern sages, and powerfully echoed by Schopenhauer, that "all is illusion" depends for its meaning on the conviction of there being some higher reality behind the veil of Karma. Without such metaphysical presuppositions, then the "real world" and the "un-real world" disappear together, and one is simply left with the world as it appears to us, with nothing else in relation to which it can be more or less illusory.

In his next story, "Karain", Conrad does come to terms with this in a more satisfactory way. The story is still full of "illusions", but there are no more suggestions that all is illusion. In "Karain", and subsequently, his position seems to be nearer to that of Nietzsche—that it is essentially illusions that make man "human", something without which he cannot survive, but that modern man is in the paralyzing position of being aware of his own dependence on illusion, and therefore, for the intellectually aware, the illusions can no longer fulfil their purpose. A man must feel that his "God" has imposed an order upon him; if it is something that he has created or chosen, its raison d'être would seem to be already gone.

And so "Karain"—"I thought of his wanderings, of that obscure Odyssey of revenge, of all the men that wander amongst illusions; of the illusions as restless as men; of the illusions faithful, faithless; of the illusions that give joy, that give sorrow, that give peace; of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene, inspiring, tormented or ignoble" (p. 40).

The whole philosophy of the story is summed up in the final scene, in which the great natural leader, Karain, who has been thrown off

his balance by seemingly irrational fears, fears of the ghost of a friend whom he betrayed, proposes to run away to "civilisation", where, it seems, the death of a friend betrayed would not haunt a man for the rest of his life—"To your land—to your people. To your people who live in unbelief; to whom day is day and night is night—nothing more, because you understand all things seen and despise all else! To your land of unbelief, where the dead do not speak, where every man is wise, and alone—and at peace!"

His problem is discussed by the three Englishmen to whom he has made his appeal, and eventually one of them, Hollis, produces his box of souvenirs and charms, and from it takes a sixpence, "a Jubilee sixpence. It was guilt; it had a hole punched near the rim. Hollis looked toward Karain.

"'A charm for our friend," he said to us. 'The thing itself is of great power—money you know—and his imagination is struck....'

"'This is the image of the Great Queen, and the most powerful thing the white men know,' he said solemnly."

Hollis sews the coin in leather, puts it on a ribbon, and approaches Karain. "Karain bent his head: Hollis threw lightly over it the dark-blue ribbon and stepped back.

"'Forget and be at peace!' I cried.

"Karain seemed to wake up from a dream. He said 'Ha!', shook himself as if throwing off a burden. He looked round with assurance. Someone on deck dragged off the skylight cover and a flood of light fell into the cabin. It was morning already." (p. 50).

But this flood of rational "light" is not the end of the story. There is an epilogue that seems to bring us to the edge of Eliot's The Wasteland, and recalls Nietzsche's saying that the destruction of an old belief does not add anything to the realm of truth, but merely extends our "empty space" and adds to our "waste". Two of the story's

Englishmen meet again in a London street:

Our ears were filled with a headlong shuffle and beat of rapid footsteps and an underlying rumour—a rumour vast, pulsating, as of panting breaths, of beating hearts, of gasping voices. Innumerable eyes stared straight in front, feet moved hurriedly, blank faces flowed, arms swung. Over all a narrow ragged strip of smoky sky wound about between the high roofs, extended and motionless, like a soiled streamer flying above the rout of a mob. ... A clumsy string of red and yellow omnibuses rolled swaying, monstrous and gaudy; two shabby children ran across the road; a knot of dirty men with red neckerchiefs round their bare throats lurched along, discussing filthily; a ragged old man with a face of despair yelled horribly in the mud the name of a paper; while far off, amongst the tossing heads of horses, the dull flash of harnesses, the jumble of lustrous panels and roofs of carriages, we could see a policeman, helmeted and dark, stretching out a rigid arm at the crossing of the streets.

"Yes; I see it," said Jackson slowly. "It is there; it pants, it runs, it rolls; it is strong and alive; it would smash you if you didn't look out; but I'll be hanged if it is yet as real to me as... as the other thing...say, Karain's story" (pp. 54-55).

This is essentially Eliot's London, as also the London of Conrad's later The Secret Agent. With a rather similar awareness of the modern predicament, and therefore faced with a similar choice of visions, Eliot, in essence, chose "Karain's story", in its more refined and sophisticated Anglo-Catholic form: Conrad had to continue the conquest of nihilism a harder more agnostic way. Much of his work as a writer can be seen as the search for stepping stones through the swamp, the testing of values to see whether they will bear a man's weight, the inspection of illusions, to see if perchance there is one that does not dissolve. ©

Last to be written, longest, and least readable of these tales is "The Return", a mountainous failure in the rocks of which are scraps of ore that later will gleam in the works of Eliot, and perhaps also in those of Lawrence, though the latter, unlike Eliot, does not seem to have been aware of any debt to Conrad. "The Return" opens with a London scene that, like the briefer one at the end of "Karain", reads rather like an awkward trial run for one of the passages of Eliot's The Wasteland: the men on the escalators—"their backs appeared alike—almost as if they had been wearing a uniform; their indifferent faces were varied but somehow suggested a kinship, like the faces of a band of brothers who through prudence, dignity, disgust or foresight would resolutely ignore each other...

"Outside the doorway of the street they scattered in all directions, walking fast away from one another with the hurried air of men fleeing from something compromising; from familiarity or confidence; from something suspected and concealed—like truth or pestilence." (pp. 118-119).

The next paragraph, describing Alvan Hervey, sounds like a hint to Lawrence, a preliminary sketch for Gerald Crich of Women in Love: "He was tall, well set-up, good-looking and healthy; and his clear pale face had under its commonplace refinement that slight tinge of overbearing brutality which is given by the possession of only partly difficult accomplishments; by excelling in games, or in the art of making money; by the easy mastery over animals and over needy men." His tall strong wife "who strode like a grenadier" bears a similar resemblance to Daphne of Lawrence's "The Ladybird".

Her dissatisfaction and boredom, his masculine will, and their sterile sexual relationship—"he did not hesitate for a moment to declare himself in love. Under the cover of that sacred and poetical fiction he desired her masterfully, for various reasons; but principally for the satisfaction of having his own way. He was very dull and

solemn about it— for no earthly reason, unless to conceal his feelings —which is an eminently proper thing to do" (p. 120)— all this indicates that Conrad's view of the kind of people who do well out of capitalism, and of what is wrong with them, is quite close to that of Lawrence, but he lacks any positive vision with which to contrast it. A realisation of some of the shams in that "sacred and poetical fiction" called "love" challenged Lawrence to create some alternative expression of the polarity of the sexes, but Conrad seems to remain simply "dis-illusioned". Suspicious of sensuality, he appears to have accepted "love" as a sham, and personally committed himself to the "illusion of disillusion" by making, at the very time that he was writing these stories, a marriage of convenience to someone who would do his typing:

Her name is Jessie and her surname is George. She is an inconspicuous little person (if the truth must be told, she is, unfortunately plain) who is nonetheless very dear to me. When I first met her, eighteen months ago, she was earning a living in the City as a type-writer in the office of an American firm called Calligraph. Her father died three years ago. There are ten in her family. The mother is a very decent woman (and, I have no doubt, very virtuous). But I admit that it is all the same to me—vous comprenez?—I am not marrying the whole family." ⁹

It worked well enough, and a few months later he wrote to Garnett, "She is a very good comrade and no bother at all. As a matter of fact I like to have her with me." ¹⁰ At the same time it would be misleading to think of it as pure calculation on Conrad's part, or to ignore the "nonetheless very dear to me". One can hardly doubt that something of the rather arrogant idealism of Heyst rescuing Lena, or Roderick Anthony saving Flora de Barral was also involved, along with all its dangers.

Conrad can say of his man and woman in "The Return" that they disdainfully ignore "the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the

stream of life, profound and unfrozen", which sounds like a true Laur-entian insight expressed in words that Lawrence himself might have used, but one doubts whether Conrad has really earned the right to use them. At least, in his relationship with the other sex, which for Lawrence was so crucial, Conrad himself seems to be rather diffident about approaching "the stream of life."

If this is one reason for the failure of "The Return", the other is simply his lack of familiarity with the general background of English life, and his inability to provide the light and satirical touch that are needed to make the thing readable. He was attempting to do something that perhaps only Lawrence was capable of doing-- the latter's story, "The Two Bluebirds" is a directly comparable example of how this kind of thing can be done with success.

Conrad recognised, if not the deeper reasons beneath it, at least the fact of failure, and wrote to Garnett, "Well! Never more! It is evident that my fate is to be descriptive and descriptive only. There are things I must leave alone."¹¹ Although he does leave alone any further attempts at this kind of "psychological drama", he cannot altogether abandon the theme. Even in The Rescue, on which he was then at work, and which was to be "Pictures--pictures--pictures... I can do that. Can't I?"¹² -- we see him attempting to bring two such people as Alvan Hervey and his wife, on a yacht, into the heart of the Conrad country to be confronted with the "primitive" Captain Lingard and his pirates.

Notes

1. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II p. 141.
2. Edward Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, p. 8.
3. G. Jean-Aubry (Ed.), Joseph Conrad: Lettres Françaises, p. 103.
4. J. D. Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist, p. 276
5. Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment, p. 13.
6. Garnett, pp. cit., p. 62.
7. See below, p.
8. The Will to Power, II, 603.
9. Quoted, Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography, p. 209.
10. Garnett, op. cit., p. 50.
11. Ibid., p. 107.
12. Ibid., p. 110.

The Rescue

Although it was not completed until 1919, The Rescue was begun, as "The Rescuer", in 1896, immediately after An Outcast of the Islands, and belongs in spirit to this period. Having determined to make his living as a writer, lost his legacy in a South African gold mine, and taken a wife as well, Conrad doubtless felt compelled to listen to the advice of those who knew what the public wanted. Set in the same area as the two earlier novels, it was to be a romantic adventure, even "a kind of glorified book for boys". He was quite incapable of making it no more than that, but what he did try to make it, a story of love between a heroic man and a beautiful woman, was not something that his talents or experience were capable of doing at the level of serious literature. Perhaps the thing itself is hardly "real" enough to be possible—the rise of the novel has accompanied the growth of industrialism and the decline of heroic man.

The woman who fails to find a worthy mate is a dominant theme in the European novel. In England, from Jane Austen's *Emma*, through George Eliot and James to E. M. Forster, the heroines go on searching, perhaps persuading themselves that a Mr Knightley or a Mr Wilcox will do, but not entirely persuading the reader. Only in America, where the idea of a "man" demanded a little less in breeding or intellect, and where the all-pervading values of the "Wild West" carried a whiff of manliness even as far as the Eastern ivy, could there still be "heroes", until in the deaths of Gatsby, Willie Stark and Colonel Cantwell they breathed their, and its, last. In England, Lawrence seems almost alone in providing men worthy of his women, without reducing the women to any kind of "perfect darling", and he was mining his heroes from the unspoilt strata of the working class.

It is notable, therefore, that in The Rescue Conrad also turns to

the working class for his hero, Tom Lingard, and it is evident that this is done deliberately, for the real Captain Lingard who provided his source came from the kind of middle-class family from which ship's officers were usually recruited,¹ and in order to explain how he acquired the money to buy his ship, Conrad gives him "a run of luck in the Victorian gold-fields", which was something that had actually happened to another trader in the area, John Dill Ross.²

Even so, it is difficult for Conrad to make much of him. Lawrence could identify himself with Mellors or Aazon Sisson and make them almost as complex and interesting as himself,—in the successive versions of Lady Chatterly's Lover we can see the process in action as Mellors is changed from a simple member of the working-class to someone with a sensibility closer to that of the author. Such a development was hardly possible for Conrad, for in the two earlier books he had already established Lingard as a simple extravert adventurer, so that the only aspects of his own sensibility left for Lingard to express are his sexual diffidence and a certain hostility towards the bourgeoisie. At the same time, Lingard has also been shown to have quixotic qualities that could have been made interesting if Conrad had chosen to analyse them.

When Conrad was starting the book, and sending the first passages to Garnett for criticism, he wrote, "As to the 'lyrism' in connection with Lingard's heart. That's necessary! The man must be episodically foolish to explain his action."³ In fact, Moser shows that when Conrad began in 1896 he had much more serious intentions than he did when he returned to finish it off in 1918: "The most significant alteration of 'The Rescuer' is the simplification and emasculation of Lingard. Through certain crucial cuts from the manuscript, the later Conrad obscures the most important and interesting facts of Lingard's psychology:

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the subtle difference between himself and other seamen, his egoistic longings for power, his lack of self-knowledge, his moral isolation." (p. 146). The change of title from "The Rescuer" to The Rescue can be seen as reflecting this shift of emphasis from the man to the simple adventure, and one suspects a gleam of irony in Conrad's eye when he also changed the sub-title, to "A Romance of the Shallows"—originally it was to be "A Tale of Narrow Waters".⁴

Even apart from this question of lowered aim, it seems that as a story of "passion", it was something beyond Conrad's competence. Although Lingard is thought of as "primitive" against the representatives of "civilisation" on the yacht, and although his passion is presented as a "dark power" that has a paralyzing effect on his political plans, all this high temperature is rather cooled by his combination of social and sexual inhibitions, through which, it seems, he can hardly dare the thought of physical contact with the upper-class Edith Travers. This might well be the way in which a man from a Puritan working-class home would behave, but it does not make for a popular tale, or match the trend of the time—it is at the opposite pole from Lawrence's approach.

Conrad and Lawrence were both "discovered" by Edward Garnett, published in the English Review by Ford Madox Ford, and shared the services of J. B. Pinker as confidant and literary agent, but it does not appear that they ever met. There is no recorded comment of Conrad's on Lawrence's work, and Lawrence is merely contemptuous in his brief references to Conrad. When Lawrence was born in 1885, Conrad was twenty-eight, but that hardly measures the gap between The Rescue and Lady Chatterley's Lover as variations on the theme of an affair between a lady and a man from the working class. "On or about December 1910", says Virginia Woolf, "human character changed... All human relations

have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children...⁵ Anyone else but Virginia Woolf would have said "1914-1918", but that does not affect the general validity of the insight, and if one wished to present a kind of literary cartoon to illustrate the shift, one could hardly do better than to juxtapose Lieutenant Mellors stroking Lady Chatterly's tail and Captain Lingard dreaming of the moment when his "rescue" is completed: "I shall shake hands. Yes. I shall take her hand—just before she goes. Why the devil not? I am master here after all—in this brig—as good as anyone—by heavens, better than anyone—better than anyone on earth." (p. 178).

Even so, the two books are not quite so far apart in their total effect as this one comparison might suggest. Not only do they both deal with a confrontation between a man who is from, but no longer of, the working class and a woman of the upper class, but they also seem to share a common idea, which might be crudely summed up by saying that because women have been excluded from the activities and the power-structures of industrialist society, one can still find in the upper ranks of that society "real women", but that these "real women" can no longer find among their own class any "real men". There is inevitably some difference between their ideas of what a "real man" is like, but also some common ground, a remarkable agreement in their insight into what is wrong with the kind of man who is "successful" in this kind of society. And as "outsiders", there is a rather similar undercurrent of resentment that provides their art with some of its energy.

When Lingard tells Mrs Travers that his Malay friends fear that he will betray them for the sake of the party on the yacht, because they are "his people", he swears, and says,

"My people! Are you? How much? Say—how much? You're no more mine than I am yours. Would any of you fine folks at home face black

ruin to save a fishing smack's crew from getting drowned?'

"'And yet you have come?'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'to you—and for you only'" (pp. 164-165).

Later, when she appeals to him to try to save her husband, because he is a fellow countryman, and speaks of his memories of England,

"'Do you know what I remember?' he said. 'Do you want to know?' She listened with slightly parted lips. 'I will tell you. Poverty, hard work—and death,' he went on very quietly. 'And now I've told you, and you don't know. That's how it is between us. You talk to me—I talk to you—and we don't know'" (p.218). This may not be as interesting as what Mellors whispers to Connie, but there is surely a sense in which it is nearer to "real life?"

Both Conrad and Lawrence have a full awareness of the gap created by "class", that awareness that the "outsider" has painfully branded upon him, and the virtual impossibility of bridging it. In Lawrence's book the "impossibility" comes to pass only because both the characters, and more particularly the man, are unusual and untypical people, though real and convincing. In Conrad's story, the people being more ordinary, it is only the extremity of circumstance that throws them together, and although Lingard's abandonment of his reserve in the almost child-like confession that he makes to Mrs Travers wins him her trust, we are never led to believe that the relationship could have any possibility of permanence.

It was natural for Lawrence to know that working-class people can have delicate feelings or artistic sensibilities, even though they may not have the vocabulary by which people in the higher ranks of society can express, or counterfeit, them: Conrad had learned it a harder way, and perhaps against his natural bias, in the fore-castle of sailing ships. Added to this, there was his position as "a bloody foreigner", which to

many of those in the middle ranks of English society, would have given him the effective status of "working class". If his short story, "Amy Foster", can be seen as something of a blow of vengeance for a lifetime of suffering as a "foreigner", the more specific kind of resentment that he felt when young, and an officer, at being put spiritually below the salt is well conveyed in the early part of The Shadow Line: "Hamilton, beautifully shaved, gave Captain Giles a curt nod, but didn't even condescend to raise his eyebrows at me; and when he spoke it was only to tell the Chief Steward that the food on his plate wasn't fit to set before a gentleman." Later, when the Chief Steward whispers to Hamilton about the chance of beating Conrad for the command of the ship at Bangkok, he is heard to say loudly, "Rubbish, my good man! One doesn't compete with a rank outsider like that. There's plenty of time." (pp. 15-17).

There may well have been comparable incidents when Conrad was an officer on the Torrens, which carried passengers between London and Adelaide, and provided his first meeting with Galsworthy. Because of his working-class origins, and his role as an "adventurer", Lingard is just such a "rank outsider", and he is treated in the same way by Travers as Conrad was by Hamilton. After their first quarrel, which Mrs Travers enjoys, because it is the first time she has seen her husband genuinely angry—"something real at last!"—d'Alcacer, their Spanish guest, attempts to make peace, but Lingard says, "I owe nothing to a man who couldn't see my hand when I put it out to him as I came aboard". When d'Alcacer attempts to apologise, Travers breaks in, "My dear d'Alcacer, you are absurd. I did not come out all this way to shake hands promiscuously and receive confidences from the first adventurer that comes along."

"I am an adventurer," he burst out, "and if I hadn't been an advent-

urer, I would have had to starve or work at home for such people as you. If I weren't an adventurer, you would be most likely lying dead on this deck with your cut-throat gaping at the sky!" (p. 133).

Conrad's main source for the Lingard of his Malayan novels was obviously the real Lingard, who had first established the trading-post that Conrad had visited on the Vidar, and of whom he must have heard many anecdotes, though as Sherry shows, it is unlikely that they ever met.⁶ The idea of the "rescue" itself was presumably inspired by an occasion on which the real Lingard rescued a Dutch steamship, the Reteh, that had run ashore on the east coast of Borneo, for which he was made an Officer of the Order of the Netherlands Lion.⁷

By changing the steamship to a yacht carrying three people from high society, Conrad brings in his "anti-bourgeois" theme, and also reduces the number of the cast to something more like the kind of "isolation" that he likes. It is set against a great and quixotic political adventure into which Lingard has thrown the whole of his material and emotional capital, the recapturing of a small kingdom on behalf of his friend Hassim. For this purpose he has assembled at the very spot where the yacht has run aground an arsenal of weapons and a great gathering of Malayan and Arab rulers, adventurers and pirates, who can be prevented from attacking each other, or anything else in sight, only by the power of Lingard's personality.

It sounds like a wonderful plot, but its very romantic richness makes it difficult for Conrad to digest. The two themes, the meeting of Lingard with Mrs Travers, and the recovery of Hassim's lost kingdom, having no organic connection, tend to cancel each other out. The story never quite lives up to the great promise that is given at the beginning, in the conversation between Lingard and his Mate, about

love and women, where the Mate remembers "we had once a passenger—an old gentleman—who was telling us a yarn about them old-time Greeks fighting for ten years about some woman."

"I have read the tale in a book," said Lingard, speaking down over the side as if setting his words gently afloat on the sea. "I have read the tale. She was very beautiful!" (p. 20).

The Trojan War was about Helen, but Lingard's war is not about Mrs Travers, it is simply cancelled by her interruption of it. The treatment of their love may be "classical" rather than "romantic", in the sense that love does not inspire Lingard to great deeds—he is rather one of those ancient Greeks for whom love is an irrational force that destroys a man. His inarticulate passion for Mrs Travers simply paralyzes him as a man of action. He completely loses control of the situation. The brig that he has abandoned without even appointing any one to take charge of it is taken over by the zealous young officer of the yacht, and its guns used pointlessly to fire at the Malayan praus, after which his arsenal is blown up and his protege Hassim is captured. This thunderstorm of disaster quenches all the fire of his passion, and he can no longer speak to Mrs Travers: the rescued yacht departs leaving Lingard as blasted as Lear. Thus all the development of the political plot, and the many colourful characters, gorgeous assemblies, and torch-light processions are rather devalued by the fact that in this direction nothing happens, while the passengers on the yacht have never been realised in sufficient depth or detail to justify their final dominance.

One can see that the destruction of the noble Hassim, who is as Kettle says, one of Conrad's rare "idealised" figures, by the accidental intervention of the ambitious and insensitive political businessman,

Martin Travers, is a kind of parabolic presentation of Conrad's attitude to the exploitation of the archipelago, as he gives it on the first page of the book:

The race of men who had fought against the Portugese, the Spaniards, the Dutch and the English, has not been changed by the unavoidable defeat. They have kept to this day their love of liberty, their fanatical devotion to their chiefs, their blind fidelity in friendship and hate—all their lawful and unlawful instincts. Their country of land and water— for the sea was as much their country as the earth of the islands— has fallen a prey to the Western race— the reward of superior strength if not of superior virtue. Tomorrow the advancing civilisation will obliterate the marks of a long struggle in the accomplishment of its inevitable victory.

But in conveying this point, the story is hardly as effective as, for example, the arrival of the Dutch gunboat at Sambir in Almayer's Folly. The difficulty is that Travers and his two companions lack any kind of organic connection with the scene, and one cannot but feel that the arrival of such utterly alien and unprotected outsiders in a yacht off the wildest part of the Borneo coast has a kind of musical-comedy improbability that conflicts with the detailed realism of Conrad's method. It is plain from his correspondence with Garnett at the time that he was himself aware of this basic weakness in the plot:

Your commendation of part I plunges me simply into despair—because ~~for~~ part II must be very different in theme if not in treatment and I am afraid that this will make the book a strange and repulsive hybrid, fit only to be stoned, jumped upon, defiled and then held up to ridicule as a proof of my ineptitude. You see I must justify—give a motive—to my yacht people, the artificial, civilized creatures that are to be

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brought into contact with the primitive Lingard. I must do that--or
have a Clark Russell puppet show which would be worse than starvation,

Conrad never did solve this problem, but by the time that it came finally to be completed and published, his reputation was such that no one dared to stone, jump upon or ridicule it. Moser attributes Conrad's abandonment of the book at this stage to his fears of any kind of sexual encounter, which may have some validity at a subconscious level, but the fact that even at the level of his conscious literary concern, he was faced with a problem that he never really succeeded in solving would seem reason enough for the postponement.

Considered also from its conscious social attitude, the book does less than justice to the depth of Conrad's insight. A really effective critique of the capitalist entrepreneur can be done only by choosing one of its best and most idealistic representatives, as Conrad does later with Charles Gould in Nostromo, and not, as with Martin Travers, one of its meanest and most unimaginative.

Notes

1. Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 209.
2. Ibid., p. 210
3. Edward Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, p. 55.
4. Ibid., p. 46.
5. Collected Essays, I, pp. 320-321.
6. Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World, p. 95.
7. Allen, op. cit. p. 212.
8. Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, II, p. 65.
9. Garnett, op. cit., p. 63.

The Nigger of the Narcissus

If Tales of Unrest provide evidence of Conrad's internal struggles at this time, one must not forget also the things that oppressed him from without—poverty and ill-health. For Almayer's Folly he received £20, for An Outcast, £50, with twelve guineas, or at the most thirty for his short stories, and this was virtually all that he had to live on. For eighteen years or so, until in 1913 the royalties from Chance began to come in, he had to live always in advance of his "advances", in continual debt and anxiety, sometimes in desperate hardship. There was also chronic ill-health—malaria, gout and insomnia. He estimated that of the years between 1895 and 1909, "a full third must be taken off for illness alone—not speaking of other pieces of bad luck."¹

Obviously, it was these financial pressures that had caused him to listen to Garnett's suggestion that he should try to produce a "popular" story of the sea, and so begin the uncongenial "Rescuer": "You have driven home to me the conviction and I shall write the sea-story— at once (12 months). It will be on the lines indicated to you. I sur-² render to the infamous spirit which you have awakened within me."

In following Almayer's Folly with An Outcast of the Islands, Conrad had not consciously compromised his artistic integrity— the suggestion made above that it was not in the line of his true development does not imply that it was done in bad faith, but with The Rescue there is a more conscious surrender to "the infamous spirit", and this no doubt contributed to his ensuing sterility.

Conrad did not abandon his true vocation, but he had to practise it as a kind of spare-time activity. Even while some of the symptoms of his internal unrest were being written into his shorter tales, he seems to have been attempting to allay them with work on a novel that involved the recollection of emotions from a more stable period of his life, and to this he was able to bring also those deeper qualities of

artistry and philosophical contemplation from which The Rescue was distracting him. This book, The Nigger of the Narcissus, he began in June 1896, just when having completed the first part of The Rescue, he was faced with "despair" at "the strange and repulsive hybrid" that Part II threatened to make of it (p. above), and was at the same time earning a little with successive short stories.

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In September he finally set aside The Rescue and gave his full attention to "my beloved Nigger", almost finishing it by the end of November. The speed with which it was written does not, however, reflect any easy or inevitable flow of words, but simply the nervous intensity with which he worked. Almost every line of the manuscript is corrected, revised or re-written. Of the many examples given by Gordan, one will suffice, from the scene where Donkin is with the dying Nigger. The italics indicate words crossed out:

looking away

Jimmy's chest heaved. Donkin
The rattle stopped. Donkin bent his ear to Jimmy's lips and
 heard a sound like the rustling of a single leaf dancing on the
 driven sand along the smooth sand of a beach.

—on which Gordan comments, "The death rattle has been made audible by the perfected simile. The addition of Donkin's looking away while he determined that Wait was dying has great psychological force" (p. 134). As noted above (p.), for other effects in this scene, he obtained help from the death of Forester in Maupassant's Bel Ami, but this also can be seen as part of his struggle for perfection.

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By thus standing back from the battle to produce something instantly saleable, he was able to exercise "the infamous spirit". He frees himself not only from the demands of "drama", plot, "exoticism" and love-interest, but also from the accompanying cynicism that is reflected in Tales of Unrest, letting it grow into a stoic pessimism that does not leave unquestioned men's ideals and moral standards, but fully recog-

nises that in attempting to live by them their efforts can be sincere and admirable. In The Nigger of the Narcissus there are not only no women, jungles or "plot", but no extremes of cruelty, greed or stupidity, and no repeated references to "dream" and "illusion": the characters have solidity and human warmth, and from the very first page the documentary detail convinces the reader that this is real experience of life at sea: "The carpenter had driven in the last wedge of the main-hatch battens, and, throwing down his maul, had wiped his face with great deliberation, just on the stroke of five. The decks had been swept, the windlass oiled and made ready to heave up the anchor; the big tow rope lay in long bights along one side of the main deck, with one end carried up and hung over the bows in readiness for the tug ..." (p.4).

Conrad's conclusion, after "The Return", that he must be "descriptive and descriptive only" is here accepted, and fully vindicated, but in a manner quite different from that in which The Rescue attempts to be "pictures, pictures, pictures". We have in The Nigger not a collection of "impressionist" south-sea landscapes, but something both more photographic and more continuous, like a well-edited documentary film. At every critical moment of the voyage the reader virtually knows what day it is, and what hour of the day, and just where every significant object and person is to be found. By the time that Donkin throws his belaying-pin at the Captain, the reader almost feels that he should have already noticed that it was missing from its place.

We also find Conrad, almost unconsciously it seems, using an inconspicuous narrator, who is the eye of the camera, and can also reflect the general mood of the crew. It can be compared with the way in which Madame Bovary begins with a "we" that embraces Charles Bovary's schoolmates and ends as if written by one of the inhabitants of Yonville,—

in both cases the author regards the whole community in which the events take place as one that will not be familiar to his cultured readers, and uses his narrator as a kind of "link man". It bears little relation to the form of narrator and protagonist that Conrad will develop in later works--it is only when he comes to more introspective themes that he will need the mind of Marlow as analyst. Also, Conrad is not here dealing with an isolated character who needs to be chased up and investigated. When a novelist takes a group of people in a fixed community, such as the world of Jane Austen, or the nineteenth-century Russian novelists, any one character can be seen through the eyes of several others, so that "justice" can be done, new insights added, and sometimes, the reader's sympathies reversed, but where the character is "one of us" in an alien world, his very isolation makes it impossible for him to be seen through the eyes of his peers, and the narrator takes their place.

In The Nigger of the Narcissus the narrator is a faceless and anonymous member of the crew, but one of the inner circle of the fore-castle, who shares the "collective psychology", and is one of the chosen five who rescue Wait when the ship has turned on its side. His comments are obviously more sophisticated than one would expect from a member of the crew, and the logic is occasionally violated by reports of conversations that he could not have overheard, or thoughts that he could only have guessed--Conrad has obviously slipped into this method without much serious consideration of it as a formal device, but at least it is entirely consistent, in spirit, if not in the letter, in the sense that it always implies the viewpoint of the crew, rather than that of the officers, or of the outsider.

Throughout the book there runs an almost super-human and super-moral sense of justice: everyone's "virtues" have their corresponding

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limitations, and except perhaps for Donkin, everyone's vices are shown to be as necessary as their virtues. The qualities presented as admirable are as much aesthetic as moral, and physical rather than intellectual. There are no saints, heroes or villains--everything is "human, all too human", and as in Nietzsche's book of that title, quoted above (p.), the "hero", "faith", and "pity" are somewhat cooled. Faith is represented by the cook with "a benign serenity that was altogether imbecile and touching"; "pity" is cooling throughout the story, and for "hero", the more obvious candidates are given their due, but no more.

Mr Creighton is the kind of young man a conventional novelist might easily have idealised, and even Conrad feels the temptation: "Young Creighton stood leaning over the rail, and looked dreamily into the night of the East. And he saw in it a long country lane, a lane of waving leaves and dancing sunshine. He saw stirring boughs of old trees outspread, and framing in their arch the tender, caressing blueness of an English sky. And through the arch a girl in a light dress, smiling under a sunshade, seemed to be stepping out of the tender sky" (p. 21-22). But Conrad does not forget either the touch of cruelty that is the converse of his cheerful public-school courage, and more than once Mr Allistoun has to restrain him--"Mind you keep your hands off them Creighton".

"He was a hard young officer, but many of his watch used to say that ^{they} liked him well enough because he had 'such a gentlemanly way of damning us up and down the deck.' Others unable to discern such fine shades of refinement, respected him for his smartness," (p. 62). Conrad had the advantage of having served under such men as well as alongside them.

Singleton's stoic serenity is shown to have been achieved at the cost of that human warmth and liveliness that make "Belfast" so memorable and absurd; Belfast's over-enthusiastic devotion to Jimmy's wel-

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fare is shown to be compensated by over-aggressiveness towards the rest of the crew: "Belfast's crying fits generally ended in a fight with someone", and Mr Allistoun's one slip into sympathy with the Nigger—even though he tries to hide it—leads to a mutiny.

Only towards Donkin does Conrad seem to show a kind of animosity—he is loaded with a weight of contempt and irony that his starved and scraggy shoulders can hardly carry. The reader is almost forced on to Donkin's side, and Mrs Conrad, perhaps also the victim of a more gentle contempt, says that she gave him "a share of my affection". Perhaps we have here a sign that this olympian author is also "human, all too human". Donkin's habit of rating against "furriners" may point to wounds received by Conrad in his own days in the fore-castle, of which the scars still pricked when he came to write the book:

[Donkin] gathered the gifts at his feet, pressed them in a bundle against his breast, then looked cautiously at the Russian Finn, who stood on one side with an unconscious gaze, contemplating perhaps, one of those weird visions that haunt the men of his race. "Get out of my road, Dutchy", said the victim of Yankee brutality. The Finn did not move—did not hear. "Get out, blast ye!" shouted the other, shoving him aside with his elbow. "Get out, you blanked deaf and dumb fool. Get out." The man staggered, recovered himself, and gazed at the speaker in silence. "These damned furriners should be kept under", opined the amiable Donkin to the fore-castle. "If you don't teach 'em their place they put on you like any-think." He flung all his worldly possessions into the empty bed-place, gauged with another *shrewd* look the risks of the proceeding, then leaped up to the Finn, who stood pensive and dull. "I'll teach you to swell around," he yelled. "I'll plug your eyes for you, you blooming square-head... (p. 13).

Morf has suggested that throughout the book, the Finn represents Conrad himself, Finland being like Poland, a country under Russian rule,

and the Finn, like Conrad, presented as having a dreamy temperament.⁵
 This is not a point of much significance, as the Finn is certainly not the narrator, and indeed never speaks, but in this one incident one can well imagine that he stands in for Conrad, who in his early days in English ships could hardly have made answer to such acts of aggression.

Towards that imaginative sharing of the suffering of others known as pity, sympathy or compassion, Conrad shows throughout the book a critical attitude rather uncommon in modern times, though it had been shared by Nietzsche. In The Dawn of Day the latter traces its history from the Greeks, who regarded it essentially as a vice, to the French free-thinkers from Voltaire to Comte, who in their eagerness to outbid Christianity, began to extol it as the greatest of virtues. He goes on to question its value—it can be bad for both pitier and pitied; it increases the total quantity of suffering without necessarily doing anything to alleviate it; it may humiliate the sufferer. And he also suggests that its roots are essentially egoistic. Of course those who are more hardened to pain, and ashamed of showing sympathy, are also egoistic—"their selfishness differs from that of the compassionate, but to call them evil, and the compassionate ones good, is nothing but a moral fashion, which is having its run, as the reverse fashion had its run, and a long run too" (par. 145). Whether or not Conrad was influenced by such ideas, his own attitude, as conveyed in The Nigger of the Narcissus seems rather similar. He speaks of the "latent egoism of tenderness to suffering", and almost everything that he relates tends to devalue it.

This whole trend of thought goes rather against the grain of modern feeling, but to some extent it must be understood in terms of the time, a background of stability in Europe and the spread of Western commerce over the world. Both Conrad and Nietzsche, at a certain stage of their

thought, felt that the taming, pacifying and vulgarising influence of those "material interests" for which Charles Gould speaks in Nostromo, and which, as in the passage quoted above from The Rescue, Conrad expected soon to replace the pagan virtues even in Borneo, would turn all the world into a kind of Switzerland: from a superfluity of sympathy for all sufferers, mankind would degenerate into creatures who would understand no more of such things as sailing ships or the men who sailed in them than the clerk who at the sight of Singleton mutters, "What a disgusting old brute."

It must also be added that in the cases of both Conrad and Nietzsche, their criticism of compassion is not based on any personal lack of this "virtue", but rather arose from their awareness that they possessed it to a dangerous degree. As a young man, Nietzsche ruined his health nursing the wounded in the Franco-Prussian War, and his final mental collapse was precipitated by a fall incurred in trying to rescue a horse that was being flogged by its Italian driver. In Conrad's case this is equally obvious, not only from the records of his friends, but also from his books. The Captain in "The Secret Sharer" and Lord Jim in his confrontation with Brown, are both undone, the latter fatally, by a sympathetic identification with the plight of the other man, and it is hardly possible that Conrad could have written with this kind of insight unless it was an experience that he had shared.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine how a man could be a novelist without possessing this "negative capability" to some degree, and if, as seems probable, Conrad had it to an extent that might almost be classed as pathological, it can also be seen as one of the obvious sources of his strength— it provides that ability to see life from a multiplicity of perspectives, and to dissolve one's ego in conflicting souls: it is not surprising that he was also forced to be aware of its dangers, and to subject it to the kind of analysis that shows up its pre-moral orig-

ins and its ambiguous consequences.

In The Nigger of the Narcissus, the prime dispenser of sympathy is Belfast, the one who has the most riches to bestow. Young, and full of fierce energy, he likes to pose as the champion of the oppressed. The opening scene shows him relating, with suitable exaggeration, how he stood up to one of the mates, causing Archie to remark, "I wonder any of the mates here are alive yet with such a chap as you on board! I conclude they ain't that bad now, if you had the taming of them, sonny." (p. 9).

A man like Belfast can welcome someone on whom he can dispense his benevolence: it is only when we feel powerless to help that we try to avoid the sight of another's suffering. This is one aspect of the "latent egoism of tenderness". Another lies in the threat that some sight of suffering seems to pose to the man who faces it, and to the whole community, like a source of danger that may spread. When Jimmy is moved to the sick-bay, "We grieved for him, and we were delighted to have him removed from the fore-castle." Sick-bays and hospitals are needed not only for the treatment of the sick, but also for the concealment of them.

Among the crew of the Narcissus, apart from Donkin, only the primitive Singleton, the "incarnation of barbarian wisdom", is impervious to the claims of compassion--primitive people prefer to be tortured by their enemies, and demonstrate their courage rather than become objects of pity. Singleton has lived through greater hardships in the past, and survived more terrible events; it does not seem unfair to him that others should suffer, but only indecent that they should make a fuss about it:

Singleton lived untouched by human emotions. Taciturn and unsmiling he breathed amongst us--in that alone resembling the rest of the crowd. We

were trying to be decent chaps... Singleton seemed to know nothing, understand nothing. We had thought him till then as wise as he looked, but now we dared, at times, to suspect him of being stupid—from old age. One day however, at dinner, as we sat on our boxes round a tin dish that stood on the deck within the circle of our feet, Jimmy expressed his general disgust with men and things in words that were particularly disgusting. Singleton lifted his head. We became mute. The old man, addressing Jimmy, asked "Are you dying?" Thus interrogated, James Wait appeared horribly startled and confused. We were all startled. Mouths remained open; hearts thumped, eyes blinked; a dropped tin fork rattled in the dish; a man rose as if to go out, and stood still. In less than a minute Jimmy pulled himself together. "Why? Can't you see I am?" he answered shakily. Singleton lifted a piece of soaked biscuit ("his teeth"—he declared—"had no edge on them now") to his lips. "Well, get on with your dying," he said with a venerable mildness; "don't raise a blamed fuss with us over the job. We can't help you" (pp. 41-42).

Singleton's explosion of callous candour lights up the situation: it forces on Wait the disconcerting truth of his own self-deception, it underlines the fact that he cannot really be helped; the vicarious sufferings of the rest of the crew are simply multiplying the ship's totality of suffering without relieving it, and it also shows how Wait's exploitation of the crew is depriving him of the kind of genuine friendship that could be a real source of comfort. The egoism of indifference, the egoism of sympathy, and the egoism of malingering are put side by side with a fine objectivity.

Wait's attitude to sympathy is more complex, but presented with equal psychological insight—or accuracy of observation, for in a finished work of art it is not always possible to distinguish the one from the

other—one is reminded here of Dostoevsky's remark, "I am called a psychologist. It is not true. I am only a realist in the highest sense of the word." But it is difficult to believe that writers who have such an instinct for the significant word or gesture are not, consciously or otherwise, inspired by deep psychological insight.

Wait hates to be the object of sympathy—in this respect he is as tough as Singleton, and that is why he has to treat the rest of the crew with such scorn. On the other hand, he cannot resist shamelessly exploiting their sympathy, both to ease his own condition, and to persuade himself that he is only putting on an act, and not really dying. Donkin is the only man on whom he can bestow any signs of friendship, because he is the only one who to his face calls him "a black fraud." Towards those who make the most heroic efforts to help him, his natural pride forces him to be most hostile. When Belfast risks everything to steal the officer's Sunday pie for him, he gets no gratitude: "Did I ask you to bone the dratted thing? Blow your blamed pie. It made me worse—you little Irish lunatic, you!"

As he first appears in the fore-castle, in a slightly more healthy state, Wait seems to show a reasonable combination of dignity and friendliness. When Donkin first addresses him as if he is a fellow outcast, as in a sense he is, "the nigger stared at him like a man addressed unexpectedly in a foreign language. Donkin changed his tone: 'Give us a bit of baccy, mate,' he breathed out confidentially. 'I haven't had smoke or chew for the last month. I am rampin mad for it. Come on, old man!'

"'Don't be familiar,' said the nigger. Donkin started and sat down on a chest nearby, out of sheer surprise. 'We haven't kept pigs together', continued James Wait in a deep undertone. 'Here's your tobacco...'" (p. 23).

Whether or not Conrad entirely intended it to be so—the title rather suggests that he did—Wait is the centre of the book, its Prince of Den-

mark. Retrospectively, even the great storm seems to have been subservient to him—it only sets the stage for his rescue and clashes the cymbals for his death. He is the one on whom all eyes are turned:

You couldn't see that there was anything wrong with him: a nigger does not show. He was not very fat—certainly—but then he was no leaner than other niggers we had known. He coughed often, but the most prejudiced person could perceive that, mostly, he coughed when it suited his purpose. He wouldn't, or couldn't, do his work—and he wouldn't lie up... He was scornful and brooding; he looked ahead upon the sea, and no one could tell what was the meaning of that black man sitting apart in meditative attitude and as motionless as a carving" (pp. 44-45).

What is the meaning of the black man? Here lie many temptations for the mythologically-minded, who will never be discouraged by Conrad's assertion that none could tell. On any occasion when a brooding character goes on board a ship, the shade of Jonah, and of Melville's Ishmael too, can be spewed forth from the taxidermic whale; anytime the nigger goes below deck, his descent can be archetypal, and there are enough members of the crew down there to make it a collective unconscious, if that is what is required; the nigger is dark, very dark, and can therefore conveniently symbolise any aspects of human behaviour that do not suit the current taste—but to use him thus is precisely to destroy all those shades of moral doubt that give Conrad's work its depth.

One can however recognise another kind of "myth" which the author, consciously or not, creates from his material by giving it symbolic resonance and wider references, what one might call a "prophetic myth" that refers externally to the social reality of his time, and perhaps also of ours. There is always a danger of overestimating the author's own awareness, and of crediting him with concerns that really belong to a later age, but at least it brings him into dialogue with the modern

world, and any work that has attained the status of a classic is inevitably destined to such privileges and dangers.

As Conrad quietly understates it in the preface to the American edition of the book, "A negro in a British fore-castle is a lonely being", and anyone who focusses light on this isolated figure cannot fail thereby to illuminate the whole problem of the black man in an Anglo-Saxon culture. It is not the problem that is being consciously considered by the particular meditative black man "sitting apart" in the paragraph quoted above, or by the meditative author who is watching him, but it is the problem at the bottom of the black man's soul, and in the accuracy with which he portrays words and actions, Conrad reveals something of the soul and lights up a whole landscape.

The problem itself was not part of the intellectual currency of Conrad's day—it was still as far below the surface of society as the black man himself. The simplicity with which Conrad calls him "the nigger" is like the disregard with which he treats Olmeyer—one does not expect the subject ever to hear tell of the book, let alone protest at anything you may say about him. But whereas, for the purposes of art, Conrad did degrade the character and circumstances of the real Olmeyer, it is doubtful whether he could be accused of being similarly detrimental to James Wait.

As a picture of the effect on an intelligent negro of life-long relegation to the rank of second-class citizen, not only life-long, but inherited, born with "the repulsive mask of a nigger's soul"—the psychology of Wait carries the air of something that has been accurately and objectively observed. As doubtless it was. Not only had Conrad shared the fore-castle with other negroes in earlier days, but in 1884 he sailed from Bombay to Dunkirk as second officer in a ship called the Narcissus, with an American negro in the crew, James Barron, born a slave near Jacksonville, and he died at sea, just after a storm.

If Conrad had still been in the fore-castle on this occasion, his own sympathetic involvement in the "collective psychology" might have led him to steal the officer's pie, be cursed by the nigger, and lose his objectivity: as an officer, and a particularly busy one, because he was "acting mate of her (the proper mate crazy-melancholic)"⁷, he was able to keep his distance and observe.

Wait is really ill, but he has to get home from Bombay; he cannot do much work, but he cannot afford to lie up either, for that would lose him his pay. When it is a matter of preserving his rights, he has to insist, and over-insist: when it comes to his duties, apart from his illness, he may very well feel, this is a white-man's world, so let them get on with it. Thus he has both contempt and fellow-feeling for the white second-class citizen, Donkin; they have reached rather similar attitudes of non-cooperation towards the society in which they live, though for different reasons, and ^{with} different degrees of justification. With Donkin it has been a combination of a crippling environment and a fundamental weakness of character; with Wait it appears to be a massive strength corrupted by social circumstances.

Wait is a personality of power; with Othello's opportunities, one feels, he might have reached Othello's rank. He is a natural leader of the kind that all lack of power tends to corrupt and absolute lack of power has corrupted completely. Lying on his back, coughing himself to death, he extends his rule over the ship until even the hard and imperious captain is shaken, and survives only because a belaying-pin cannot be thrown quite accurately by the white trash, though as the deaths of some American presidents have shown, sometimes it can.

The implication is there from the beginning. When Wait first appears on the ship he involuntarily, and yet as it were inevitably, calls the whole ship's company to attention, as if this were really the captain coming aboard. Even the fact that Conrad has to use a kind of coincid-

ental pun to achieve this effect does not seem to weaken it all, just because it carries such a weight of artistic inevitability. No doubt this whole scene gains conviction from the fact that it "really happened" on one of Conrad's ships, with a West Indian called White, who pronounced his name as "Wait".

On land, the negro could be kept on the other side of the rail-road track, a place from which he could be criticized or championed according to the taste of one's conscience: when he comes into the fore-castle of a ship, he is a human problem that has to be faced in human terms, but it proves an insoluble problem, because he comes not as an equal, not as a simple individual, but as the representative and the product of all the social forces of "the land". Because he has been moulded by the land, and through generations of injustice, he comes on board with all the weight of his dark destiny, already diseased, a monstrous cuckoo who will eat up all the ship's spiritual sustenance.

Conrad suggests all this when Wait first appears, with a kind of brutal frankness that is almost embarrassing to our modern sensibilities: "He held his head up in the glare of the lamp—a head vigorously modelled into deep shadows and shining lights—a head powerful and misshapen with a tormented and flattened face—a face pathetic and brutal: the tragic, the mysterious, the repulsive mask of a nigger's soul" (p. 18).

This is not the language of committees for better racial relations, but it is language that does poetic justice to the black man and the black man's history. One does not need to suppose that Conrad himself was very much concerned with the problems of Wait as a negro, or even as a man—he remains too distant for that. As he says in the American preface, "he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action", but if we stop to ask some of the questions that Conrad may not have done, we can see that it is only because Wait

is a negro, as well as a dying man, that he can become the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action.

Conrad served on another ship, the Tilkhurst, in which one of the crew, after being injured on the head in a brawl, was confined to his bunk, where he proved difficult to manage, and eventually committed suicide by jumping overboard in the darkness.⁹ One might easily suppose, and it might even have occurred to Conrad, that this man would provide a more dramatic case for exhibiting a collective psychology, but evidently it was only the actual case of Barron and the Narcissus that did, and could provide him with the kind of material that he needed. Only a man with a powerful personality that was also a sane, though twisted, personality could so make himself the pivot around which the whole ship revolves, seem to move even the wind and the waves, and generate a whole system of collective psychology. Unless he were a negro, such a man would not have Wait's humble rank, or Wait's particular spiritual abnormality.

On the decks of the Narcissus the problem of Wait is beyond solution; the solution must come, as the origin of the problem has, from the wider world. But the problem has come aboard—here perhaps there is a genuine analogy with Jonah, for he also came aboard with a sociological problem from a wider world—it has come aboard, and not all the officer's Sunday pies will appease it, not all the water of the ocean will wash it away, not even tipping the ship on its side will tip it out. Only when Wait is dead and, reluctant to the last, has finally disappeared beneath the surface of the sea, can wind return to the sails and the crew go about their business.

How was it that with perhaps hardly any conscious intention of doing so, Conrad could provide so excellent a paradigm of a problem that at the time had hardly reached the surface of society? Primarily one must say, by the accuracy of his observation, which lays all the psychological data before us, together with an instinctive sense for the things that are

humanly significant. One is tempted here to say that sociology is too important to be left to the sociologists, that it is the novelists who so far have provided us with far more, both in quality and quantity, of that genuine understanding that is presumably the sociologists aim.¹⁰ Conrad was helped here, no doubt, by being a Pole, a foreigner, who whatever sympathies he may have had with the British way of life, had not been moulded and conditioned by it. He can see the situation without any emotional "for" or "against". A British or American writer in the same situation would be more likely to see Wait's laziness and his barrack-room lawyer's mentality simply as evidence of his intrinsic inferiority, or else to sympathise with him, and thereby to sentimentalise him, or at least to blur the outlines of his pathological condition.

And of course, mere objectivity is not enough; it is in the selection of the detail, and in particular, the selection of those items that can become unobtrusively symbolic, that Conrad achieves his effect, an effect that gains its power from the way in which the symbolism is never allowed to break the surface of the naturalistic narrative. In this respect he is very different from Melville, where the symbolism often sticks out and stretches the reader's credulity. James Wait, the negro of the Narcissus, is wholly real, whereas Queequeg of the Pequod seems to come from some south-sea island invented by Rousseau. James Wait's superstitious fear of the cook's religious enthusiasm is real; Queequeg's private devotions before his idol are simply Protestant individualism in South-sea dress. Even in a story such as Benito Cereno, in which the whole effect depends on the "realism" provided by the factual sources, which themselves threaten to become stranger than fiction, Melville cannot resist improbable touches of fantasy, such as the hatchet-polishers who "two and two, sideways clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din."

One never hears a barbarous din of this particular kind on any of

Conrad's ships, and it is not surprising to learn from Richard Curle that he "disapproved altogether of the type of symbolism represented by such a work as Herman Melville's Moby Dick, a book which he detested." ¹¹ This may be seen as a limitation, a limitation that provides insight into Conrad's own psychology, but it is a limitation that marks the boundary of his own particular strength.

He never uses a symbol or an image that has the least suspicion of contrivance, and he never produces an artistic "effect" without providing a full and sufficient natural "cause". The picture of Singleton as the shamanistic wise man of the tribe, with his ambiguous wisdom that usually turns out to be a kind of higher stupidity, is given its image at the outset when we see him sitting on the deck, "right under the lamps, stripped to the waist, tattooed like a cannibal chief all over his powerful chest and enormous biceps", but it is not just because he is "the incarnation of barbarian wisdom" that he takes off his shirt, it is also, as we learn a dozen pages later, because "he suffered much from prickly heat".

At the burial of the nigger, when the planks are raised higher and higher to plunge the coffin into the sea, and still it does not move, there is almost a panic at this supernatural and truly ghostly accord with the whole saga of Jimmy:

All the men looked profoundly disturbed; from their midst a faint humming noise spread out—growing louder...."Jimmy!" cried Belfast in a wailing tone, and there was a second of shuddering dismay.

"Jimmy, be a man!" he shrieked passionately. Every mouth was wide open, not an eyelid winked. He stared wildly, twitching all over; he bent his body forward like a man peering at a horror. "Go!" he shouted, and sprang out of the crowd with his arm extended. "Go, Jimmy—Jimmy, go! Go!" His fingers touched the head of the body, and the grey pack-

age started reluctantly to whizz off the planks all at once, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning. (p. 160).

Belfast, the most "human" of the crew, is the one who has always maintained a passionate faith in the "humanity" of Jimmy, and a tragic sense of the humanity of his death— and only by his passionate faith does he move Jimmy at the end, to "be a man!" And with adequate irony, in that only when he has ceased to be, can he be man. One would be more than satisfied with the perfection of this "symbolic" climax to the story, just as "effect", but Conrad does not forget the "cause" either: later in the evening we overhear the boatswain and the carpenter in the petty officer's berth: "'The chap was nothing but trouble,' he said, 'from the moment he came aboard—d'ye remember—that night in Bombay? Been bullying all that soft crowd—cheeked the old man—we had to go fooling all over a half-drowned ship to save him. Dam' nigh a mutiny all for him—and now the mate abused me like a pickpocket for forgetting to dab a lump of grease on them planks. So I did, but you ought to have known better, too, than to leave a nail sticking up—hey, Chips?'" (p.161).

It is not merely that something was forgotten, but the forgetting itself is seen to be part of the general demoralisation that the Nigger has caused, so that at every level, everything finds its justification.

To the modern reader it may seem a little odd that what he might expect to have been, after the state of the Nigger's health, the chief subject of conversation in the fore-castle, receives no mention. This is no doubt partly a question of what the Victorian age permitted, but probably more of the author's lack of interest. There was here a quite accidental agreement between what Conrad wanted to write about and what the age was allowed to read about. Nevertheless, when he does touch on sex, in the last scene with Donkin before the nigger dies, it is done with quite a sure and delicate hand:

"'There is a girl,'" whispered Wait.... "Canton Street girl.... She chucked a third engineer of a Rennie boat.... for me. Cooks oysters just as I like.... She says... she would chuck... any toff... for a coloured gentleman.... That's me. I am kind to wimmen," he added, a shade louder. Donkin could hardly believe his ears. He was scandalized—" (p. 148).

Although, in polishing the dialogue in this book, Conrad may well have had help from his London-born wife, as a foreigner who by all accounts spoke English himself with a fierce accent, he has an amazingly sharp ear for accents and idioms. There are places where he captures a certain strain of working-class humour as well as it has ever been done by a writer English-born, as for example, after Wait's interview with the captain: "There were wild rumours. It was said he had checked the old man; it was said he had frightened him. Charley maintained that the 'skipper, weepin', 'as giv' 'im 'is blessin' an' a pot of jam."

Beyond both descriptive truth and symbolic "idea", the book also conveys very powerfully the author's tragic vision, his balance on the borders of nihilism, his concern with those ultimate questions that threaten to turn the upright masts of our social order on their side along with those of the ship. The crew, tried beyond the limits of human endurance by a storm that has broken one man's leg, sent another mad, and produced for them an impossible cup of coffee—"While she swims I will cook!"—are then called upon to make another impossible effort, with the ship on its side, to rescue the negro, who has already exploited them, spiritually, beyond the limits of their endurance, and they rescue him, in order that he may die.

What is it that holds all these men on the rack of pain and toil, while the cruel sea breaks their legs, and the Nigger's cough their hearts, and the storm washes their bedclothes out of their bunks and soaks their last ounce of tobacco? What is the meaning of it all? At one level, the narrator gives them a hearty answer and a hearty send-off, at the end: "Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from

our sinful lives? Goodbye, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale" (p. 173). This is an answer that has a certain validity, even though to grant it validity is to question many of the values on which our life is based and our politics conducted. It suggests that at least on a sailing ship, it was possible for simple men to find a meaning in their lives: their days have not been divided between unrewarding work and the watching of un-real life on a little screen.

But there is a place where the author tries to go further than this, at the risk of becoming almost unintelligible, a passage at the beginning of chapter four, which he uses as a sort of curtain—or verbal smoke-screen—behind which he is shifting the scenery between the two acts, and actions of the book—the storm, and the rescue of Wait:

On men reprieved by its disdainful mercy, the immortal sea confers in its justice the full privilege of desired unrest. Through the perfect wisdom of its grace they are not permitted to meditate at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence. They must without pause justify their life to the eternal pity that commands toil to be hard and unceasing, from sunrise to sunset, from sunset to sunrise: till the weary succession of nights and days tainted by the obstinate clamour of sages, demanding bliss and an empty heaven, is redeemed at last by the vast silence of pain and labour, by the dumb fear and dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring (p. 90).

The passage has inverted ironies and short-circuited metaphors of a kind more common in poetry than in prose: if this is the meaning the good crowd have wrought out upon the immortal sea, it seems to be only a kind of anti-meaning "given back yell for yell to a westerly gale", and yet one can feel that by going behind our usual logical formulations, and

our usual emotional affirmations of them, Conrad may be getting nearer to our human bedrock than he could have done by using their terms.

The ship is seen as set in an indifferent and meaningless universe whose scale renders it insignificant: it runs as part of a web of land-based commercial operations that are both ugly and indifferent—we are never told what her cargo is, and those who profit from the cargo will never know anything of what the crew have done; it is a society in which neither the fidelity of the crew nor the beauty of the ship have any organic relationship with "the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage" (p.30).

And even if they did, that would hardly solve the basic human problems as Conrad sees them. He will not take any "humanitarian" answer—the ironic treatment of the "Plimsoll man" is evidence of that; although the life of the crew is one of perpetual hardship, life without hardship, with time to "meditate at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence" would be a greater pain. Such relative happiness as the crew may find is more or less in proportion to their own lack of imagination or intelligence, and even then depends on their being drugged by unceasing action. The man who has the leisure or the imagination for sympathy will soon be overcome by the weight of the world's suffering; the man who has the time or the intelligence for analytical thought will be equally unbalanced by the weight of the world's indifferent absurdity. The occasional moments of sunshine and grace may be just enough to keep despair at bay, but never allow us to put off the stoic mask: it is better, like Singleton, to have the stoic mask as one's natural face.

Only in physical hardship and adversity, his vision seems to say, is man at all admirable or attractive. Remove the pressure, and he becomes quarrelsome, decadent and purposeless, a problem equally insoluble at the level of personal fulfilment or political philosophy. The storm is the time of heroic endeavour: with the

calm comes a meaningless mutiny, followed by a return to work that, in terms of ultimate justification, is almost equally meaningless—the mutiny ends because the weather changes:

The Narcissus, left to herself, came up gently to the wind without anyone being aware of it. She gave a slight roll, and the sleeping sails woke suddenly, coming all together with a mighty flap against the masts, then filled again one after the other in a quick succession of loud reports that ran down the lofty spars....It was as if an invisible hand had given the ship an angry shake to recall the men that peopled her decks to the sense of reality, vigilance, and duty. "Helm up!" cried the master, sharply. "Run aft, Mr Creighton, and see what that fool there is up to." "Flatten in the head sheets. Stand by the weather fore-braces", growled Mr Baker. Startled men ran swiftly repeating the orders (pp. 124-125).

Only "an invisible hand" that keeps men's noses in their work, whether it be the challenge of the elements and hard work, or of war, or of a struggle for political justice—it is only under the pressure of this "hand" that men can appear in any way morally or aesthetically admirable: this is the only environment, he seems to say, in which the human animal can fulfil its nature. For the man who can be wholly absorbed by the struggle, for the healthy, simple-hearted and single-minded, for Singleton, for Mr Creighton with his aggressive loyalty to the master, for the master himself, "one of those commanders who speak little, seem to hear nothing, look at no one—and know everything, hear every whisper, see every fleeting shadow of their ship's life"—but who know of nothing outside their ship; for whom anything that does not keep the ship driving hard towards its next port of call, is dismissed as "nonsense"—even the belaying pin that is thrown at his head—for men such as these, while they are healthy and not too old, a certain kind of satisfaction is possible.

But woe betide them if they become old— Singleton discovers this, and there is a terrible pathos in his discovery. Singleton who by his stoic conformity to nature seems to have made himself invulnerable, suddenly becomes aware of his age: his hard-won indifference to human emotions that seems to match the indifference of the sea, is suddenly changed to an awareness that this boundless indifference of nature is beyond all human scale:

Old! He moved his arms, shook his head, felt his limbs. Getting old... and then? He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perception of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatient voice calling for him out of the pitiless vastness full of unrest, of turmoil, and of terror. He looked afar upon it, and he saw an immensity tormented and blind, moaning and furious, that claimed all the days of his tenacious life, and when life was over, would claim the worn out body of its slave (p. 99).

Conrad's adventurous and magnificently idealistic friend, R. B. Cunninghame Graham evidently wrote suggesting that an educated Singleton would be the answer, and was asked, "Would you seriously, of malice propense, cultivate in that unconscious man the power to think? Then he would become conscious—and much smaller—and very unhappy. Now he is simple and great like an elemental force. Nothing can touch him but the curse of decay"¹²

One is reminded of Schopenhauer's picture of "the gentle and serene expression on the face of the man who is blind" as an illustration of his view that "we are happy in proportion as our range of vision, our sphere of work, our points of contact with the world are restricted and circumscribed."¹³ But perhaps Conrad does not see things quite in terms of Schopenhauer's rather plebian ideas of "happiness". He seems to be

saying not so much that men can never find happiness, as that happiness is not what they really want, not if they are really men, as he appreciates them. Throughout the book, and indeed throughout his works, there is an implied contempt for those who play safe—one only has to look at their pants, as Knowles has done: "The backsides of them—he had observed—were thinner than paper from constant sitting down in offices." Similarly, in Under Western Eyes, there is only contempt for the citizens of Switzerland—better Russian tyranny, he seems to suggest, than Genevan happiness. Even such villains as Brown in Lord Jim or Ricardo in Victory are allowed a few good lines about freedom, and the limitations of the "tame". Conrad may be very sceptical about the positive possibilities of freedom, once acquired, but at least he recognises a kind of right for the man who lacks it, or is threatened by the loss of it, to take it, as Natalia Haldin says in Under Western Eyes, "as a hungry man would snatch a piece of bread."

Notes

1. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II, p.104
2. Edward Garnett, Letters from ~~Joseph~~ Conrad, p. 46.
3. J. D. Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist, pp. 226-228.
4. Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, p. 121.
5. Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, p. 57.
6. Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, pp. 165, 168.
7. Unpublished letter, quoted Gordan, op. cit., p. 55.
8. Allen, op. cit., p. 101.
9. Ibid., pp. 172-173.
10. For discussion of this, by a sociologist, see Werner Pelz, The Scope of Understanding in Sociology.
11. Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad and His Characters, p. 171.
12. Aubry, op. cit., I, p. 214.
13. Essays: Counsels and Maxims, p. 21

 Youth

Conrad wrote "Youth", quite quickly, as a kind of parenthesis within a parenthesis. After The Nigger of the Narcissus he returned to The Rescue only to interrupt it with the first few pages of Lord Jim, and then interrupted Lord Jim to write "Youth", and then Heart of Darkness, and thus it so happened that he was able to invent, in "Youth", and to develop, with Heart of Darkness, that very form that he needed to change Lord Jim from a fairly simple short story to a full-length masterpiece. "Youth" has fairly simple connections with the background material of Lord Jim to explain its appearance at this point. As he tells us in the Author's Note to that book, his original intention with Lord Jim was of "a short story, concerned only with the pilgrim ship episode". This would have made the court of enquiry the centre-piece of the story, and Conrad's only experience of such a court was at the conclusion of the voyage that he uses as the basis for "Youth".

The Paletine, called the Judea in the story, caught fire, and was abandoned, on the last stage of an extraordinary voyage from London to Bangkok that spanned the years 1881-1883, followed by an enquiry at Singapore. The enquiry itself had no elements of drama, and concluded "that the vessel was not prematurely abandoned and that no blame is attached to the master, officers or crew",¹ but it provided Conrad with the stage-machinery for the Patna enquiry, while the preceding events he uses for the substantially autobiographical "Youth".

In the light of his subsequent achievements, the story is important as marking the entrance of Marlow, the narrator who is to be the representative of Conrad's intellect probing his own sensibility in several

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"outward forms". In the case of "Youth" the outward form is simply himself when young. It seems that this quite natural way of looking back at one's own past was to provide Conrad, more or less accidentally, with something ready to be developed into the exact form that he needed for his greatest works. The story also marks the first appearance of something that will always be Marlow's concern, les valeurs idéales and the complex relationship of illusion and "reality", in which for Conrad, one can never be quite sure which contains the more "truth".

"It is a record of experience", he says in the Author's Note, "but that experience, in its facts, in its inwardness and in its outward colouring, begins and ends in myself". This may be philosophical sophistication, but it is not solipsism. Many authors of quite good books do this naturally, unconsciously, and all the time, through a central character who conveys their own sensibility; for Conrad this claustrophobic tendency is something unusual, to be done here, for once, with conscious intention. This is the strength of the story, though also of course its limitation, and explains why it is quite different from Typhoon or The End of the Tether. There is little attempt to convey, by conversation or incident, the characters of the captain or crew; the feelings of youth and the egoism of youth dominate the story, and govern the selection and the re-creation, ~~and~~ exaggeration, of the "facts", and are naturally reflected in a youthful indifference to others. It is the moment when Marlow looks back at himself as he first sees Lord Jim—"he looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look." The self-examination that Conrad begins in "Youth" will grow into the complex, probing analysis of Lord Jim, but what we are given here are rather the surface feelings of youth, as seen and judged by the surface feelings of middle-age.

The central idea seems to be the contrast between the vitality and

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the suffused sexuality that generate the illusions of youth with the altered biology, the "disillusion" of age. "Age" in this case is forty-two for the narrator, the author's age at the time being forty, while "youth" for Marlow is "just twenty", and was for Conrad himself, on that voyage, twenty-four for most of the time, though such were its Homeric vicissitudes that he was twenty-three when it began and several months more than twenty-five before it ended.² The age of forty is perhaps the point at which a man is most conscious that youth has gone, and he reacts with an emotional violence that at the age of sixty he will probably regard as only another aspect of "youth".

As well as the contrast between Marlow as he was and as he is, twenty years on, there is also the contrast between his youth and the age of the other two officers of the ship. The names of the actual captain and mate of the Palestine, Beard and Mahon, are not changed, but as well as dropping a few years from his own age, Conrad also adds a few to theirs. The captain, who was fifty-seven, becomes "sixty if a day", and the mate, who was fifty,³ is described as another "old chap" with "a snow-white long beard", so that "between those two old chaps I felt like a small boy between two grandfathers."

This effect is further enhanced by the motherly treatment that the young man receives from the captain's wife, and the "romance" of the captain ineptly rescuing his wife when the ship is in a collision before it departs: "Not bad for a sixty-year old. Just imagine that old fellow saving heroically in his arms that old woman--the woman of his life" (p. 9). There is no record of the Palestine being involved in a collision at this point, and Conrad may have been inspired by the fact that at that time he had just survived a similar collision in another ship.

This incident is connected with the other main theme of the story, the glamour of the East. It is evident that at the time of which he is writing, Conrad had seen enough of Australia, and was determined to get

to the Far East. As Marlow puts it, "Melbourne and Sydney, very good places, charming places in their way—but Bangkok!" To this end, Conrad had joined the Annie Frost at Deal, on the last stage of its homeward way to Le Havre, in the hope of being signed on for its next outward journey to Indo-China, but he was thrown overboard in a collision at Le Havre, and had to go into hospital. As his name had not yet been registered as a member of the crew, it has been suggested that he invented the whole story in order to get some money out of his uncle in Poland, but Jerry Allen provides some circumstantial evidence of its truth⁴.

Such was Conrad's determination to get to the Far East that, back in London, he did not hesitate to enlist, for £4 a month, on an ancient wooden ship of only four hundred tons that was to pick up a cargo of coal from Newcastle and deliver it to Bangkok, and he stuck to it through months of leaks, repairs and delays. At one stage his uncle wrote, "I advise you not to sail in such a lamentable ship... Both your Captain Beard and you strike me as desperate men, who go out of their way to see knocks and wounds, while your ship-owner is a rascal who risks the lives of ten brave men for the sake of a blackguardly profit."⁵

Whether the once-gilded motto "Do or Die" that is scraped to life from under the "rust, dust, and grime" of the Judea's stern, or the ship's great company of rats deserting her by moonlight for the rotten coal-bulk alongside are selected facts or created facts, they are part of the magnificent way that the thing is done, and sufficient to carry the unabashed rhetoric of the rhapsodies: "O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it!"— "Oh, the glamour of youth! Oh, the fire of it, more dazzling than the flames of the burning ship.."

The endless endemic hardships of the journey are comparable to those of the Narcissus, but their presentation is quite different—they are seen and felt not as the test of a ship's company, but as the inward

experience of a romantic young man. When the storm has gone on for days, only ceaseless pumping keeping them afloat, and they have "forgotten how it felt to be dry", "I was pleased. I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation, Whenever the old dismantled craft pitched heavily with her counter high in the air, she seemed to throw up, like an appeal, like a defiance, like a cry to the clouds without mercy, the words written on her stern: 'Judea, London. Do or Die'". (p. 12).

Youth is presented as a biological condition that colours the whole of existence, almost like one of Lawrence's "allotropic states" which he wanted to put in place of "the old continuous ego". Marlow at forty and Captain Beard at sixty are two other allotropic states, but in the case of Beard there appears to be a little distortion that arises from the way in which Conrad thought it necessary to increase the hardships of journey's end, compared with its factual source.

All through the story one can notice blobs of colour added to the "facts" of the Palestine, but the only sizeable divergence comes in Conrad's making the fire on the ship begin in the middle of the Indian Ocean, at a point where Australia would be nearer than Java, so that the subsequent abandonment of the vessel leaves the crew with many nights and days in open boats, whereas the Palestine caught fire in the Banka Strait on the east coast of Sumatra, and the boats reached harbour at Muntok on their first evening.

One can appreciate the artistic reasons for heightening the ordeal; one can also note that Conrad wrote the story in the period of his short but close friendship with Stephen Crane, who had then just published his most famous short story, "The Open Boat", which Conrad particularly admired. It describes Crane's own experience of two days and a night between shipwreck and shore, so it may well be that with Conrad, as well as

the needs of art, there was also an element of rivalry. Unfortunately this poetic exaggeration subtly distorts the whole story: Captain Beard who has been presented as a rather querulous and child-like old man, in contrast to the "do or die" of young Marlow and the ship, has to become a sort of Allistoun of the Narcissus, who will not take the safer course of making for Australia, "even if we all get roasted", who even when the ship has blown up, and they have taken to the boats, will not go aboard a ship that wants to pick them up, because he must stay and see his ship go down. For the sake of his saga in an open boat, which not surprisingly, he does not do very well—"I need not tell you," says Marlow, "what it is to be knocking about in an open boat"—Conrad has rather ruined the "allotropic state" of his old man.

The hard masher who drives his ship on regardless of weather or humanity seems to be, for Conrad, a kind of Platonic form of the "Captain" to which many of his fictional incarnations tend to conform, and it may be that his own temperamental inability to match this image is one source of his questioning of the "ideal" that lies beneath so much of his work.

The final arrival at Muntok also needed some mutation: it had to represent all the glory of the East, but the actual place was not at all adapted for the purpose, it was as Conrad admitted, "a damned hole without any beach and without any glamour". Consequently, when Richard Curle went off to the east to do some early detective work, and published the results, including the identification of the last scene in "Youth" with Muntok, their friendship was greatly strained:

It is a strange fact that everything that I have, of set artistic purpose, laboured to leave indefinite, suggestive, in the penumbra of original inspiration, should have that light turned on to it and its insignificance (as compared with, I might say without megalomania, the ampleness of my conceptions) exposed for any fool to comment upon or even for average minds to be disappointed with. Didn't it ever occur to you, my dear Curle, that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my

life and even of my tales in the background? Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion. You seem to believe in literalness and explicitness, in facts and also in expression. Yet nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from the things that matter in the region of art.⁸

It is obvious enough that in his use of experience, the artist cannot be tied to mere facts. For Conrad, realism is not the end, but the means by which one gives conviction to the poetic truth. The East had its beauty and glamour, and they had captivated his youthful soul, or his youthful soul had invested them with it, and either way, this was a "truth" for the conveyance of which the accidental ugliness of Muntok was irrelevant. At the same time one must admit that in his indignation, he rather ignores the point that had he not himself called "attention away from the things that really matter" by giving out that this, and other stories, were autobiography and "true", the contretemps could hardly have occurred, and the hunt for his sources might at least have been delayed until after his death.

Notes

1. Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 159.
2. Ibid., pp. 318-319.
3. Ibid., p. 154.
4. Ibid., pp. 151-153.
5. Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography, p. 96.
6. Allen, op. cit., pp. 156-157
7. "Stephen Crane", Last Essays, p. 91.
8. Richard Curle, Conrad to a Friend, p. 89.

Heart of Darkness

Hindsight makes it plain that with the invention of Marlow in "Youth", Conrad had happened upon something of great importance for the future of his art: it is equally obvious that he was not immediately aware of the possibilities of this form. "Youth" had come as an interruption of the beginning of Lord Jim, then conceived of as a short-story, told in the third person. It seems that the idea of bestowing his own sensibility upon Jim, and using Marlow to analyse himself under this disguise did not immediately occur to him, but the value of Marlow as a means of both putting his own experience into perspective, and presenting it in thoroughly British terms obviously did, so that he again postponed the continuation of Lord Jim to use Marlow to convey the experience of the critical Congo voyage that he had made in 1890.

Thus, between the rudimentary beginning of this form in "Youth" and its full exploitation in the final and extended version of Lord Jim, we can see Heart of Darkness as a half-way stage, in which Marlow is still at the centre, the essential hero of the story, and Kurtz, the figure he is in pursuit of, is not so fully realised. As one of Conrad's major works, it deserves of course to be treated as an end in itself rather than merely as a half-way stage towards Lord Jim, but nevertheless, seeing it in this way may help to explain certain limitations or weaknesses that have been conceded even by its keenest admirers.

In Lord Jim, we have in Marlow and Jim, two fully realised characters, each complete in himself, so that any division between analytical intellect and emotional sensitivity that the author may have made within himself in order to produce them is kept completely out of sight. In Heart of Darkness there is only one fully realised character, Marlow, and the other, Kurtz, seems more like a sort of ectoplasm projected by Marlow's soul, the substance of his nightmares, powerful and frightening, but not quite convincingly incarnated in a human form. This limitation

is not entirely loss: indeed it might be said that if Kurtz had been made more "real", the story would lose much of its haunting mythological effect. At the same time, if Kurtz was to be given an aura of the supernatural or the elemental, it might have been better if he had been left even more indistinct—in the final scenes, brought right under the eyes of the sceptical narrator, he is inevitably diminished in this respect, and what Leavis has called the author's "adjectival insistence"² quite fails to repair the damage.

Even so, the myth was given life enough to capture the imagination of at least one great poet. In the epigraph to The Hollow Men Eliot gave wide circulation to the news that Mr Kurtz was dead, and only the dissuasion of Pound had prevented him from using his dying cry, "The horror! The horror!" as epigraph to The Wasteland. As a major source for the ideas and images of both these poems, Heart of Darkness has attained as Trilling says, "a kind of canonical place in the legend of modern literature", and Trilling himself may be said to have confirmed the canonisation by choosing it for a course of studies as "one of three key works of the age that immediately preceded our own", the other two being Frazer's Golden Bough and Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy¹. Conrad himself saw all this aspect of the book as in being in danger of giving it "L'air rigolo"² and would probably have been as astonished at being put in such company as he was at being described as a "neo-platonist"—"What on earth is that?" he asked of Edward Garnett. And more specifically, of Kurtz, he wrote, "What I distinctly admit is the fault of having made Kurtz too symbolic or rather symbolic at all. But the story being mainly a vehicle for conveying a batch of personal impressions I gave run to my mental laziness and took the line of least resistance."³

We can see that in these comments Conrad shows a full awareness of where certain dangers lay, but also that what he saw as no more than "mental laziness" or a "line of least resistance" was in fact the releasing of an inspiration deeper than he knew. His grounding in Contin-

ental literature enables his work to provide, as Bergonzi puts it, "a combination of metaphysical extremity and political understanding" that was "very much in advance of its time in Edwardian England" ^{(p. above).} Bergonzi cites Dostoevsky as the nearest parallel, but it is doubtful whether Dostoevsky can be seen as possessing, or desiring to possess, quite the kind of political understanding that Conrad can provide. At the time of its production, Heart of Darkness was something quite unique, a combination of, or confrontation between, Continental existentialism and English empiricism that does not come to any clear conclusions, but sets up disturbing echoes in all directions, and gives mythical form to contradictions that lie deeply hidden in the heart of our civilised darkness, contradictions that had already been indicated, in quite different ways, by the social insights of Marx and ^{were to be illuminated by} the psychological insights of Freud.

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It seems that for the creation of such a myth what is required of the author is not so much any clear psychology or philosophical scheme, but rather the opposite, that he should surround some intensely felt, but not too private, experience with a penumbra of poetry, with seminal suggestions and images. If "the secret casket of Conrad's genius" contains, as Forster says, "a vapour rather than a jewel", so much the better to envelop us with. Here at least, Conrad seems to have had some awareness of what he was doing. At the beginning of the story he tells us that for Marlow, "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze."

We may apply to Heart of Darkness says Guerard, "Thomas Mann's words on Death in Venice: a little work of 'inexhaustible allusiveness'," and Guerard here refers to, without endorsing, works of scholarship that have found in it parallels to Virgil and Dante (p. 309). Here it must be emphasised that there is no reason to believe that Conrad had any great learning in these directions. His references to the Fates in the

office in Brussels, or the Inferno in his "grove of death" are the kind of thing that could easily be caught by the middle-brow readers for whom he wrote, and it is gratuitous to see them as anything more. What lies at the centre of the story is not a plasma of classical scholarship but a sturdy skeleton of physical facts, the journey to a particular place at a particular time by a very common-sensical type of man, and it is only at the circumference that the symbolic resonance is generated. Even for the writer of the primal myths of Genesis, the Garden of Eden was a place with a very exact location, the source of the four rivers that he knew: "The name of the first is Pishon, it is the one that flows round the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold", and so on. The name of Conrad's river is Congo, and it "flows like a serpent" round the whole land of "The International Association for the Suppression of Savage Customs."

The King of that country is Leopold, a Solomon in his wealth and wisdom, an idealist whose aims, the suppression of slavery, and the maintenance of free trade, were the two great moral commandments of the nineteenth century. The writer of the ninth chapter of the twelfth volume of the Cambridge Modern History had nothing but praise for "his remarkable personality", for "his strength of character, his trained experience, his diplomatic skill, and his varied culture", for his "patient diplomacy, capacity for organisation, and undaunted resolution in the face of difficulties that seemed insuperable"—in every way, one is made to feel, a worthy patron for Mr Kurtz, who dying, dreamed of being welcomed by him at the railway station—and what, for the Victorian age could be a better substitute for the gates of heaven than a railway station?

In 1876 Leopold had summoned to Brussels the Geographical Congress which led to the formation of the International Association for the suppression of slavery and the opening out of Central Africa. Of this International Association King Leopold was the moving spirit." The

spirit moved upon the waters of the Congo, but somewhere below the surface those suppressed or forgotten aspects of the human psyche or the social conglomerate added their footnote to the royal proclamation, in very much the same terms as the note that was found to be scribbled at the bottom of Mr Kurtz's eloquent memorandum-- "Exterminate all the brutes."

"Going up that river", says Marlow, "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world", and in this way it so happened that the external journey that Conrad had made in 1890 exactly paralleled the intellectual journey on which the anthropological, psychological, and sociological pioneers of the time were setting out. Thus in ^{an} age that is still trying to order and assimilate their discoveries, an age in which fascination with primitive culture accompanies a widespread disillusion with industrialism, in which "the discontents of civilisation" are balanced against conflicting views of the darkness, or not, of man's inherited nature, Conrad's work has been given a relevance and a resonance beyond anything that he himself could have imagined at the time.

Like a craftsman carving in black ivory, his skill is working upon fabulous riches in the raw material itself. It is a journey through the world's greatest equatorial jungle, inhabited by some of its most primitive people, inspired by the last, most conscious, and therefore, most demonic, act of colonial conquest, and in the name of the nineteenth century's most universally admired ideals. On such a journey one can hardly imagine any incident, however carelessly observed or crudely recorded, that would not have some prophetic echo in the era ahead. When the observing eye is Conrad's, and not merely an observing eye, but a physical involvement that marked his body with its scars, the selection done with his sure instinct, and the myth produced from his rich mental ferment, one has every essential requirement for a prophetic masterpiece.

His gunboat, with its limp flag, rolling on a greasy swell, and

firing into a dark continent, his desert landscape littered with upturned railway trucks and lost rivets, his starving savages at the feet of the impeccable accountant, his dying steamboat threading its way through a primeval forest towards a liberal ideal that has suffered a Kafka-like metamorphosis--all this seems so fine a parabolic presentation of the age ahead that any criticism of occasional literary lapses or factual distortions seems almost as frivolous as criticizing the style of the Greek in which St Mark wrote his gospel.

A similar sense of triviality can be aroused by attempts to interpret the book too simply in Freudian terms. Historically, sociology began to develop before the modern forms of psychology, but in the literary world, at least, the Freudian revolution came first. And although in virtually ending that split between body and mind that has bedevilled western thought from the time of Plato, Freud's insights were profoundly revolutionary, his patients, and the formulations based on their case-histories, came from the Austrian middle-class. Thus his theories, if not his basic insights, could easily be adapted to the needs of bourgeois culture rather than providing a fundamental critique of the culture itself such as appears in successors like Marcuse.

This is particularly relevant to a consideration of Conrad's work, for although his themes of isolation and psychic conflict seem to invite psychological interpretations, they are always set in a full social context, a context that is active in the author's mind even when it may be out of sight in the actual scene of which he is writing. Thus for both Hewitt and Guerard, the imagery of Heart of Darkness is to be interpreted almost entirely in terms of the narrator's inward discoveries. Both of them quote his description of the Congo affair as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration" only in order to say, in effect, that this is not what the story is about.

One can agree with Hewitt that "the voyage is both into the impenetrable darkness of Africa and into the darkness of Marlow's thoughts", but when he goes on to say that "the reactions of the originally rather naive Marlow to his meeting with Kurtz and to the strange country should hold our attention rather than what in "Geography and Some Explorers" Conrad describes as 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration'" (p. 18), he is asking us to choose between these things as if they were alternatives when the whole significance of the story lies in their obvious and intimate connection.

Thus, one can fully sympathise with Raymond Williams when he says in The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence, that "a whole school of criticism has succeeded in emptying the Heart of Darkness of its social and historical content, about which Conrad is in no possible doubt" (p. 145), and yet not be quite satisfied with his own reduction of it to moral and political terms— "What from a distance is calculation, the calculation of company policy, is under pressure a nightmare: 'the horror! the horror!' on that ivory face" (p. 147). It is evident that Conrad does not believe in "evil" as an abstract absolute, but at the same time he sees it embracing complexities, and even having justifications, that go beyond the calculations of companies, beyond both political understanding and traditional moral judgements, and so he stands with Kurtz and "the party of unsound method" in a way that makes Williams seem a little too obviously on the side of the rational and the righteous. It is the greatness of Heart of Darkness that it can sustain, and still transcend, the exegesis of its "metaphysical extremity" that Eliot gives it in The Wasteland and The Hollow Men as well as the sensitive political understanding of Williams.

With Kurtz, it is the social context that is important, and perhaps the wideness of this context—"all of Europe went into his making"—

justifies a certain vagueness in the details of his character. He is not so simple a figure as Kayerts or Carrier in "An Outpost of Progress", but his removal from one social environment to another involves him in a similar situation: the difference lies in his more active and ebullient nature. Instead of being the passive tool of a native agent, he makes the natives his tools for even more aggressive activity. It is interesting to note that of another almost comparable figure, Rajah Brooke, whose life Conrad closely studied, a modern historian has said, "He thought of himself as a man whose aim was to uplift the natives of the Indies to the level of Europe, but in fact he was himself being lifted up to their level. He made war like the Malays, conducted diplomatic negotiations like them, and came in time almost to resemble a Malay." Even so, there is an enormous gap between a simple adventurer like Brooke, and the kind of demonic force that Kurtz embodies. He has not simply exchanged European values for African values: he represents rather aspects of the human psyche that Europe has so suppressed that when they are finally released, they can appear only in an aggressive and demonic form. In this respect he seems to be almost an incarnation of Freud's fears about the drives of the libido, fears that can be seen as an aspect of Freud's own social conditioning.

It is doubtful whether any mere human could have quite the intensity of Kurtz, who even when ill to the point of death, instead of welcoming the ministrations of his fellow-whites, will crawl on all-fours towards his perverted kingdom of the spirit. As Marlow says on a more sober occasion, and in Chance, a more sober book, "He was but human, and the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition. Mediocrity is our mark" (p. 23). It is of course the particular distinction of Mr Kurtz that he transcends the mediocre; like Stein in Lord Jim he is one of the few Conrad characters who for the purposes of philosophical significance are made a little larger than

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life. When Trilling calls him a "hero of the spirit" he is not using a term that Conrad would have used, unless it were with an irony rather heavier than Trilling's, but at least it makes the point that in some ways Kurtz is more spirit than flesh—if not Yeats' Bethelhem-slouching beast, at least its Voice crying in the wilderness.

For this reason, it is arguable that the story might have been more successful if Kurtz had been kept at a greater distance from Marlow, if he had remained more indistinct in the "white fog" that surrounds his den. If one compares it with that classic embodiment of elemental "nature", Emily Bronte's Heathcliff, then one notices that Bronte never makes the mistake of coming too close to her "demon". She would not bring even Lockwood into Heathcliff's death-chamber, let alone a narrator as close to her own viewpoint as Marlow is to Conrad. It is because Heathcliff's "supernatural" aspects always come to us through the coarse screen of Nelly's consciousness—her reporting of village gossip, or of a wild light in Heathcliff's eyes that she cannot understand, that they sustain their invisible power—there is never the kind of fatal "show down" by which Conrad tempts fate, and rather loses out. What Leavis calls the "adjectival insistence" might not have been necessary, or in any case would disturb us less, if there had not been this attempt at something too explicit. Even the shrunken heads on Kurtz' stockade might have been better if they had remained a rumour: when Marlow focusses his binoculars upon them, their power is diminished in direct proportion to the optical enlargement. One feels rather as if the "metaphysical extremity" and the "political understanding", after keeping a necessary distance, have been forced into a shot-gun marriage that is not to the ultimate benefit of either.

In these directions, Conrad's art may have been to some degree inhibited by the audience for which he was writing. Not only was he writing for a nineteenth-century British public, but more specifically, "Youth", "Heart of Darkness", and "Lord Jim" were all written for "Blackwood's Magazine".

which specialised in well-written stories of adventure. Its "explorers" were not those of whom Kafka wrote, its deeps not those on which Kirkegaard splashed, nor its night skies those against which Rilke cried to the angelic powers. Even if Conrad had wanted to be an Anglo-Polish Dostoevsky, this was hardly the place to do it: and so, with Mr Kurtz, he peered into an existential abyss, and retreated under an adjectival smoke-screen.

In so far as Marlow returns with deeper knowledge of himself, his experience is not unlike that which Dostoevsky conveys in his "Notes from Underground". Conrad is fortunate in having a real-life adventure to provide a lurid and spectacular vehicle to carry and symbolise the spiritual one, but he cannot fully exploit it because he has nothing like Dostoevsky's willingness to reveal his spiritual nakedness: he does not want to involve either Marlow or himself too deeply with "the party of unsound method", as Kurtz and his associates are called.

It seems that in his own personality Conrad allowed the metaphysical extremity to co-exist with Victorian propriety, and towards the end of the book it is the latter that comes to the surface. There is a rather Victorian combination of reticence and melodrama that puts one in mind of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, or Henry James turning the screw. As Leavis says, "we have an adjectival and worse than supererogatory insistence on 'unspeakable rites', 'unspeakable secrets', 'monstrous passions', 'inconceivable mystery' and so on."

One can agree with Leavis as to its "tending to cheapen the tone", but when he speaks of Conrad as trying to impose "a significance that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce", that "the insistence betrays the absence, the willed 'intensity' the nullity" (p. 197), one feels that Leavis has not reached quite to the heart of this adjectival darkness. Is it not rather that Conrad, faced with the "nullity", is a little afraid of what he might produce, that he is wrapping up in a fog of adjectives a radical self-understanding that he is forced to share with Kurtz, of which, indeed, Kurtz is

the embodiment, but which would not be quite in character with his British narrator or quite suitable for his British public? One notices that a rather similar, though more poetically muted, murkiness develops in Lord Jim, when Stein plunges us into "the destructive element", and Marlow immediately produces the same symptoms of moral mal de mer: "The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn, or was it, perchance, at the coming of night?" and so on. (p. 215).

We are told that Marlow chooses the nightmare of Kurtz, that he is a member of the "party of unsound method", but the full implications of this choice are something that Conrad is too tactful to put before his readers in so many words. Mr Kurtz has gone into the wilderness, with great gifts, and it has "found him out:" his ideals have not brought light to the darkness, they have been extinguished by it. If we stray beyond the shelter of society's collective coercion, what is there, in the end, to stand between us and "the horror"? One suspects that for Conrad, in his conservative pessimism, there was nothing, or nothing but certain fragile accidents of temperament by which a man might keep his balance on the edge of the abyss—or a highly conservative ethic of "marching in the ranks". These are the two alternatives that are to be presented in Lord Jim, through the example of Stein, on the one hand, and the opinions of the "privileged man" in the "lofty building" on the other (p. below). As Marlow follows the trail of Kurtz through the darkness, he says:

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And don't you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head—though I had a very lively sense of that danger, too—but in this, that I had to deal with a being ~~to whom~~ whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it..."

Then follows one of those passages that Leavis quotes as being most

objectionable, though it probably sounds rather less so when left in its context: "...I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced—but what's the good? They were common everyday words—the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares." (p. 144). This is the authentic voice of nineteenth-century existentialism as we hear it in Kirkegaard, Dostoevsky or Nietzsche—but for Blackwood's Magazine, perhaps even for Cambridge in 1948, it was a little ahead of its time.

There is here a limitation that, no doubt willingly, Conrad has imposed upon himself by choosing to tell the story wholly in inverted commas. By entrusting the narration entirely to Marlow, he has prevented himself—saved himself—from providing any comment not consistent with Marlow's own limitations as a thoughtful English seaman. In Lord Jim, though he accepts the same limitation, he escapes it on one or two occasions by introducing, first of all Stein, the Nietzschean "over-man", and then at a later stage, a second narrator, perhaps more directly identifiable with the author, the retired adventurer with rooms in the highest flat of a lofty building, who having been one of Marlow's audience, receives the report of his last encounter with Jim.

The only man who could fill this role in Heart of Darkness would have been Kurtz himself, who rather resembles "Zarathustra's ape" (III. 7), but here Conrad is not willing to make the necessary sympathetic identification. He insists on making Kurtz someone who^v he can despise even while he sympathises. Conrad disliked journalists and orators, and by putting Kurtz in this class, he rather turns the reader against him and detracts from his effectiveness as a "hero of the spirit" whose death is the death of a Western ideal. The triangular relationship between the author, Marlow and Kurtz has complexities which perhaps because they

were never explicitly resolved in Conrad's own mind, are not quite satisfactorily resolved in the story itself.

Conrad spoke to Garnett of the story as something he had "tried to shape blindfold as it were", and we can see that the shapes that come out are very much those that floated as yet unformulated in the intellectual atmosphere of the time, largely mediated for Conrad through the literature of nineteenth-century France—^Caspects of Nietzsche's thought, early anthropology, and theories of the subconscious mind, with behind them the influence of Schopenhauer and Marx, but expressed wholly in terms of Conrad's own thought and experience. In this respect, we can see that what is given shape, "blindfold as it were" is essentially a mythic dimension to that conflict between "ideal" and "reality" that runs through all of his major works and creates a tension in the hearts of all his more interesting characters.

Kurtz carries the "light" of civilisation into the darkness, the darkness out of which, and against which the ideals of civilisation have been created, but no longer is this the clear-cut conflict between "good" and "evil" that such imagery might at first suggest: it is a highly sophisticated complexity, in which the light is both false and true, the darkness both good and evil. The light is carried by the self-deceiving representative of a corrupt society, yet represents also some of the positive aspects of civilisation, and the darkness is a positive and natural darkness, and yet also the darkness of dangerous primitive drives, akin to the Freudian concept of the "Id". Before Freud, and with little conscious sympathy for Marx, Conrad seems to interweave themes from them both: the "Id" is seen dancing in the jungle in all its horror and half-hidden fascination, while against this dark background the "white men" dance with even less dignity as the puppets of economic compulsion.

It was boyhood dreams engendered by Marryat's tales that sent Con-

rad to Africa, and earlier in the same year that he began Heart of Darkness (1898) Conrad had written an essay, collected in Notes on Life and Letters, in which he described Marryat's work "as the disclosure of the spirit animating the stirring time when the nineteenth century was young. There is an air of fable about it. Its loss would be irreparable, like the curtailment of national story or the loss of a historical document" (p. 53). Marryat, he says, presents reality with "a grandeur that has all the reactness of an ideal." In his own book, with conscious art replacing what was for Marryat "a completely successful expression of an inartistic nature", Conrad also aims to provide both fable and history, of a later and less happy time. He has seen Marryat as unconsciously conveying a social significance that he is more deliberately to bring out.

That conflict and contradiction felt already in the background of The Nigger of the Narcissus between the beauty of the ship, the fidelity of the crew, and "the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage" is given, in Heart of Darkness, out of the throes of a journey that almost cost the author his own life, an apocalyptic vision of its end that gains much of its power from the very intensity of its realism, though as the steamer goes further towards "the earliest beginnings of the world", and the end of an era, the dark continent begins to become more a country of the European mind, and out of the white fog that surrounds the Inner Station there grows the mythical figure of Kurtz—almost a kind of post-Platonic anti-Prometheus carrying the torch back to dark gods. The turning point here, perhaps, is that place where we see a piece of Kurtz's art:

Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister.

It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr Kurtz had painted this—in this very station more than a year ago—while waiting for means to go to his trading post. "Tell me, pray," said I, "who is this Mr Kurtz?" (p. 79).

In this respect one can say that Marlow as explorer in the Congo has more affinity with the explorer of Kafka's "In the Penal Settlement" than with Stanley or Mungo Park—it is rather that the detailed realism that it took Kafka all the pains of genius to construct in a world entirely of the mind, Conrad found ready-made, and ready decayed, along the reaches of the Congo. And the "metamorphosis" of Mr Kurtz, after "the wilderness had patted him on the head", though it be a scorpion that lies on its back and waves its legs, rather than a harmless black beetle, makes an almost comparable appeal to our emotions, with its human pathos in a less than human form.

With the invention of Marlow, Conrad found a form and created a character, and with the character a style, a kind of ^hrythmic "spoken" prose that is quite unique. In The Enemies of Promise Cyril Connolly was able to divide the styles of English prose into "the Mandarin" and "the vernacular", but this distinction, which works so well with his contemporaries, seems to break down when we come to Conrad. If one considers Connolly's description of how Mandarin is made up—"by long sentences with many dependent clauses, by the use of the subjunctive and ~~the~~ conditional, by exclamations and interjections, quotations, allusions, metaphors, long images, Latin terminology, subtlety and conceits" (pp. 29-30), much of it fits Conrad, yet the "vernacular", the colloquial idiom of the age is also present. There is a conversational ^hrythm, by which however long the sentence, one can still imagine it being extemporised by Marlow, whereas one could hardly conceive the sentences of Henry James being used in conversation except, as Leavis records, by James

himself (p. 184n). In Heart of Darkness words from the seaman's world like "fluke" or "funk" jostle with the "Latin terminology" and they do their work together as well as the different ranks on the storm-bound Narcissus. It is not enough to say with Connolly that Conrad "tried to pep up the grand style": whatever his French, or even his Polish background may have contributed to it, it is essentially the style of a man who has read good books and lived with seamen, and learned from both.

The book was written at the time when Conrad was beginning his collaboration with Ford, and sometimes uses a technique that they discussed together. The idea was that in scenes of action, one should not present the reader with the condensed conclusions of the percept^Pive process, but rather with the raw materials so that he could do the work himself. Instead of saying, "the sword cut his arm", one provided a bounding movement, a flash of steel, and a red patch spreading on white skin. No doubt it was the conscious formulation rather than the thing itself that was new. It can obviously be effective in conveying some sudden and unexpected event. There is an example in the attack on the steamboat in Chapter 2: "Sticks, little sticks were flying about—thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods were very quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at!" Or again, when the helmsman is speared:

Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared to be a long cane clattered around and knocked over a little camp stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from some-

body ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. (pp. 111-112).

The long-lived, but quite erroneous impression that the book was "autobiographical" must have been greatly strengthened by this kind of writing. Conrad seems to have done his best to sustain the impression, and it is only in recent times that investigation of his sources has revealed the true scale of his creative effort. In the first thirteen chapters of Conrad's Western World Norman Sherry provides a detailed study not only of Conrad's sources, but of the whole state of commerce and "civilisation" on the Congo at the time, and demonstrates that the whole story is much further removed from "autobiography" than anyone had previously imagined.

It seems, for example, that Stanley Falls, the furthest point of Conrad's journey, was a large and well-established settlement with plantations, warehouses, soldiers, and at least a dozen Europeans, and the whole navigable portion of the river up to this point was much busier with stations, ships, and missionaries than the primitive scene of Conrad's tale (pp. 62-71). His own relatively prosaic journey was used only as the raw material for a romantic reconstruction of what it might have been like to travel up the Congo at an earlier period, or an exploration of yet uncharted tributaries, such as Conrad had been promised in Brussels, but was denied by "the Manager", Delcommune (p. 82). Moreover, as well as the white men and the primitives, there was in the whole of this part of Africa a powerful, and largely hostile third force, the Arabs, whom Conrad, for obvious artistic reasons, entirely ignores.

There are indications that his decision to make the whole fictional

journey more "primitive" than his own may have been made only after he had begun to write. A lengthy, ironical account of Boma, at the mouth of the river, with its hotel, trams, civil servants and general "advanced state of civilisation" that appears in the original manuscript was removed entirely so that Marlow is made to pass through it with no other comment than "as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up"—and also, it seems, ten years or so further up the river of time.

It can safely be said that Conrad does not exaggerate the death and cruelty involved in the colonisation of the Congo, though with the exception of a few sadistic figures, it was not intentionally induced—the attitude was rather that expressed by Marlow when he mourns the death of his native helmsman—"perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara" (p. 119). Sherry doubts whether "from the hygienic point of view alone", a "grove of death" such as Conrad describes "would have been allowed to exist within the bounds of a community such as Matadi then was" (p. 32), but quotations he gives from other writers indicate clearly enough that there were such scenes even if they were a little further from Matadi.

It may be that Conrad does exaggerate the inefficiency of the administration. It seems that he felt a kind of blasphemous incongruity in the whole affair that he helps to convey by a Kafka-esque treatment of the apparatus of civilisation:

I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails.

To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything: but this objectless blasting was all the work going on. (pp. 63-64).

The same point is made with the lost rivets, and with the comedy of the warehouse fire a few pages later: "the stout man with moustaches came tearing down to the river, a tin pail in his hand, assured me that everybody was 'behaving splendidly, splendidly', dipped about a quart and tore back again. I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail." This is not how it appeared in the official reports sent to Brussels, and Sherry, studying these, and the Mouvement Geographique, is able to tell us that the railway was very necessary, that it really was built, that the first rails having arrived on the same ship as Conrad himself, could hardly have had time to get rusty, and so on. Sherry sums it up:

Disentangling fact from fiction in the actual journey up river, we are left not with a mysterious and dangerous journey into the unknown and the primitive during which the passengers are beset by an ignorant greed for ivory, and the captain, Marlow, is the isolated and dedicated workman intent on the immediate difficulties of his job, but with a routine, highly organised venture along a fairly frequented riverway linking quite numerous settlements of trading posts and factories, and with a number of competent and busy men on board, and with Conrad there to learn the route under the guidance of a skilled captain. (p. 61).

Or in other words, "everybody was behaving splendidly"; but the

"disentanglement" may not be quite as easy as Sherry suggests. What was in the minds of the passengers, for instance, is hardly a question on which he can claim to be more "factual" than Conrad, or even the degree of their competence. The world of public relations, with which Sherry's Belgian sources are largely concerned, has its own distinctive approach to truth, and its own elements of art.

In order to convey his significance and create his myth, Conrad not only turns back the clock, simplifies the politics, and confounds the engineering, but also, much more fundamentally, he transmutes the whole scene. If we consider for a moment how a journey up the Congo would appear in the pages of the National Geographic Magazine, what a riot of camera-truthful colour and exotic splendour it would be, then at once we become aware of how little it would resemble the scenery of Conrad's nightmare. The story is told entirely in black and white. On the journey out, as the ship approaches Africa, we see "the edge of a colossal jungle so dark green as to be almost black" (p. 60), and that is the last touch of green; after that, all is black, against which the river "glitters" or has "silvery sand", but no other colour. Moreover, the black and white are never any direct contrast of positive and negative, good and evil, but rather of black and off-white, the white of ivory, of eyes and teeth in black faces, of the whited sepulchre of Brussels, of pale faces in unlit rooms. Most of the scenes—the scene of the fire where Marlow first hears of Kurtz, the scene where he overhears the Director and his nephew discussing Kurtz, and the final scenes with Kurtz himself, are in dusk, moonlight or darkness.

Thus, although Conrad's symbolism may start from the conventional idea of Africa as the "dark continent", and black bodies in the jungle shadows, the darkness that develops around Kurtz is essentially a Western darkness, an unnatural darkness that invites us to relate it to the

artificial light of his ideals, the ideals of the International Association, enthusiastically humanitarian and fundamentally inhuman. The Africans may be primitive and barbarous, but their dark energy is "as natural and true as the surf along their coast." They are not, by themselves, given to the "unspeakable" acts of Mr Kurtz, or if Conrad is not quite sure about this, at least they are not given to the unspeakable hypocrisies of Mr Kurtz. It is primitive energies repressed or misdirected by European ideals that produce the unhealthy darkness of Kurtz. If this is interpretation, it is an interpretation that the author's parabolic use of "light" and "darkness" clearly invites, and one can hardly doubt his intuitive, if not entirely conscious, awareness of such implications. Just as his poetic African landscape reflects the psychological darkness of Kurtz, so also the sepulchral paleness of his Belgian scenes and characters matches the paleness of white lies and bloodless ideals near to death, most movingly in the final scene with Kurtz's intended, where luminous in dark clothes and dusk, the paleness is granted its own kind of dignity and grace as it accepts the white lie.

At the same time, Conrad is, like Freud, too thoroughly conditioned by his own social background to admit the possibility that the "darkness" of primitive life might be simply a healthy darkness. The primitive world, like the destructive appetite of the Freudian "id", is seen as a world of savagery and lust which has for over-civilised man both its horror and also--Marlow is made to feel this--its fascination. The primitive tribesman is thought of as being only one remove from the gorilla, and the gorilla for the Victorians, and through the Edwardians to the Georgians, is always a figure of nightmare, an incarnation of lust and aggression. Freud did not so much dispel this illusion as give it an intellectual frame: the gorilla became the standard cartoonists symbol of the "id", and received its final apotheosis in the figure of King Kong. If now-

days we see the gorilla more as a sensitive and socially inhibited animal threatened almost to extinction by the lust and aggression of civilisation, this is a complete reversal, and a very recent one.

Research has shown that for Kurtz, Conrad had two probable sources, who bear about as much relation to the finished creation as A. P. Williams, the mate of the pilgrim-ship Jeddah bears to Lord Jim, that is to say, in terms of personality and inner life, virtually no relation at all. In the original manuscript Kurtz is called "Klein", which was the name of an unimportant subordinate agent who did die on the steamer on Conrad's voyage down from Stanley Falls. Sherry provides a photograph of his grave, a facsimile of his death certificate, and finally lays his ghost with the conclusion that "there is no suggestion of his being outstanding or eccentric in any way, and he merits only the conventional, passing mention in contemporary accounts. Nothing suggests Conrad's conception of Kurtz" (pp. 74-75).

The other more important source was Klein's superior, a man called Hodister, whom Conrad almost certainly never met, but of whom he must have heard very much the same envious gossip, and may well have felt very much the same interest and sympathy as Marlow is made to feel for Kurtz, before they meet. He was, like Conrad/Marlow, a man with influence in the higher circles in Brussels, and one of his patrons, Wauters, was also a friend of Conrad's aunt, Madame Poradowska. He was a leading member of the Anti-slavery Society, which in terms of the Congo, was essentially an anti-Arab society, for whom he wrote eloquent reports, an explorer, and a highly successful collector of ivory. Sherry shows convincingly enough that feelings of jealousy such as are aroused by Kurtz in the minds of the Manager and his pilgrims are likely to have been shown by Delcommune and his subordinates in relation to Hodister. But the "unsoundness" of his methods seems to have been limited to try-

ing too aggressively to out-trade the Arabs rather than any more radical "fall" in the manner of Mr Kurtz. Eventually, in attempting to establish new trading posts in the Arab-dominated area of Katanga, he was killed, so that instead of, like Mr Kurtz, putting the heads of others on posts, he himself suffered this fate (Sherry, pp. 95-118).

Thus one can see that Hodister has some of the attributes of Kurtz, but only the more superficial ones, for Kurtz has all the attributes—he is lover, with a high-minded "intended" in Brussels and a "gorgeous" mistress in Africa, very expressive of a certain split in the European mind; he is musician, poet, and creator of the remarkable painting that Marlow sees on the Manager's wall; he is entrepreneur, idealist and orator. "All of Europe went into his making", and if nevertheless there is "something missing", if he is "hollow", then the implication is that this is the one thing that modern Europe fails to provide.

Mr Kurtz is something of a nightmare, and one can hardly doubt that he had been met by the author in his own lonely nights. He is a kind of modern, intellectual European Everyman, not so much someone whom Conrad found in the heart of Africa as someone whom he took there. As an imaginative, intellectual, atheistic European, Conrad travelled up the river with the hopeful possibilities of Mr Kurtz, the highest possibilities of Europe, and by the honesty of his own observation and of his own introspection, enlarged, exaggerated a little, perhaps, by the gifts of his own imagination, he returned to be haunted by all the negative possibilities of Mr Kurtz. This is what Marlow means by saying that he was faced with "a choice of nightmares", and was compelled to choose Kurtz, rather than the other nightmare of the greedy, simple-minded "pilgrims" who think they know what they want, but do not know themselves.

Although Conrad never allows Marlow to make any overt apologia for

Kurtz, he does it subvertly by surrounding him with people who are by implication more despicable, who will lose nothing because they risk nothing, a method that is also used with great effect in Lord Jim. In this way, without committing himself to any expressed approval of the doubtful hero, he inevitably creates for him an atmosphere of sympathy. When we hear the Manager and his nephew plotting against Kurtz, automatically our sympathy, as well as Marlow's, is aroused, and, less obviously, we are invited to compare him with a variety of other less than attractive people—not only the flock of "unappetising" pilgrims, but also the "pale plumpness in a frock coat" who runs the whole thing from Brussels; the young clerk who takes Marlow to the doctor, who "glorified the Company's business," but does not intend to give the wilderness a chance to find him out—"I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples"; the old doctor for whom sending men to their death is a congenial means of pseudo-scientific research, another split in the European mind, a type that like the impeccable book-keeper, will also reappear in Nazi Germany; and on Marlow's return, the whole respectable population of Brussels, together with their "infamous cooking" and "their unwholesome beer".

Against this all the "good people" in the story, Marlow himself, the young Russian harlequin with his pure flame of adventure, as unaware as many other brave explorers of the true nature of the interests he serves, the innocent girl in Brussels, even the ambiguous efficient accountant, wittingly or not, are on the side of Kurtz, regarded as members of "the party of unsound method." They all live for something more than commercial calculation and have become the victims of a civilisation in which the vital word "interest" has degenerated to mean, primarily, ~~to mean~~ the calculation of a financial percentage.

In this sense the book has an element that can justifiably be called "romantic", a tough persistent romanticism of Marlow, and Conrad, that

can outlast, like Polish patriotism, endless betrayal and disillusion. Just as in "Youth", Marlow still shows so strong a nostalgia for the ostensibly lost illusions of youth that one cannot believe them altogether to be lost, so also in Heart of Darkness, he still keeps a youthful, confessedly illogical, hope, a readiness to be seduced by a new illusion that might after all turn out to be valid. It is given powerful expression when Marlow is led to believe that after all they will not find Kurtz alive, a passage that presents Kurtz as "the voice", the word, almost the logos--the word that creates the illusions by which we live, or are destroyed--"the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness". And so, for Marlow:

There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr Kurtz. Talking with....I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to--a talk with Kurtz.... I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life....Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever--Here, give me some tobacco" (pp. 113-114)

It would be naive to imagine that for Conrad himself, the end of the actual journey coincided with the philosophical conclusions, or even that the latter were necessarily connected with this particular journey at all, but by making, for Marlow, the outer journey and the inner journey coincide he produced a parable as penetrating as Kafka and as readable as Rider Haggard . Just as William Golding's

Lord of the Flies is what one might call a schoolmaster's nightmare rather than a convincing study of how boys might really behave, so at a deeper level, Kurtz is a civilised man's nightmare of how he himself might behave, a nightmare that was too effectively made real by the Nazis, and elsewhere, to allow it to be lightly dismissed. Where Conrad's emphasis would seem to be mistaken is in associating the "horror" with a return to the primitive, where in fact it may well be due rather to our moving too far, and too fast, away from the primitive. The horrors of Nazism did not occur in the centre of Africa, nor primarily as a return to primitive or instinctive human behaviour, but as the result of complex, but not ultimately inexplicable economic and social stress that was also the culmination of some hundreds of years of perhaps fundamentally misdirected civilisation.

In this respect, Conrad's Africa is not quite that of the modern anthropologist: its darkness is deepened by being seen through a dark Victorian window. This applies also to his early Britons, whom we now know to have been comparatively cultured, as well as preserved by a cool climate from extremes of disease in either their bodies or their imaginations, so that Marlow's fellow-feeling for the young Roman officer tempted by the "utter savagery" around his camp by the Thames seems to the modern reader a little misdirected. We can see that Conrad is doing it with the best of intentions: all through the story he is trying to emphasise the common humanity of Roman, Briton, Belgian and African, but this common humanity is now so generally recognised, and seen to go so much deeper than was apparent in Conrad's time that emphases that might once have seemed daring now seem over-hesitant.

In describing his Congo tribesmen, Conrad with his "common-sense" nineteenth-century views, was in great danger of writing things that would rapidly be "dated", for he was dealing with just those materials

on which the sociologists and anthropologists have provided so many new insights. Every inch that he went beyond his actual experience, he was liable to fall into some trap of contemporary ignorance, prejudice or misconception. That, with certain reservations, he can be said to have avoided them must be attributed largely to the fact that, here at least, he did keep very close to experience.

If his Africans who "howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces" are not quite the Africans of the modern anthropologist, this is more a matter of the way in which they are looked at than in the details of what is observed. Nowadays, we know that the African does not, like Henry Price, "the Sierra Leone nigger" of "An Outpost of Progress", "cherish in his innermost heart the worship of evil spirits", but worships the "good" in the forms that his own culture has created, but the actual behaviour of Henry Price as a de-tribalised African is convincing enough.

Similarly, with cannibalism, Conrad is not aware of its religious significance, and the many taboos that operate in relation to it, but his tact and honesty save him from putting his foot wrong. He finds it hard to understand the wonderful restraint of the allegedly cannibalistic crew in not eating the white men when they are pressed by hunger, but simply expresses his agnosticism as to the reasons: "something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come to play here. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest... I perceived in a new light as it were—how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped that my aspect was not so—what shall I say?—so—unappetising" (pp. 104-105).

There is a rather similar Victorian flavour about the story's treatment of "evil" and its symbolic use of darkness. In considering any nineteenth-century writer, whatever their beliefs, or lack of them, one must remember that for them, the great stockpile of abstract but emotionally powerful "Evil" accumulated by generations of Christian

belief was not yet exhausted, even though the popular "romantics" had been squandering it pretty recklessly. Much of this great deposit still stood there, offering an artistic resource that few writers could resist, and others as sophisticated as Conrad—Henry James for instance—also cashed their cheques against it.

Greater resonance, a kind of subterranean energy, was given to all this by the contemporaneous suppression of sexuality. The unspeakable evil of "The Turn of the Screw" is usually taken to refer to some kind of sexual hocus-pocus, and that rhythmic "beat" that has become the background music of a later generation was for the civilised explorers who heard it in Africa, the very voice of Hell. Conrad shares the feeling, but his sceptical intelligence saves him: "the tremor of far off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint, a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild—and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country" (p. 71).

Not only was there such a thing as "Evil", but Equatorial Africa, with its fierce climate, its dark forests, and its coastal natives already de-tribalised and demoralised by the slave trade, was the place where for the European imagination this evil could be located with something like the confidence with which early cartographers located the Garden of Eden; and in the face of its fatal diseases, and the state of tropical medicine, the European body could easily share the same conviction.

If one considers Heart of Darkness with this background in mind, one can see that Conrad uses it with great skill—greater than he knew as he "struggled blindfold", to convey a deep subconscious awareness of a darkness in the heart of Europe. At a time when Africa, the past, and the primitive were thought of as just such a darkness, it was the obviously appropriate, one might say the artistically inevitable, way to do it.

The subsequent, and gradual, realisation that inhibition and social order did not begin with urban civilisation, but if anything, began

then to degenerate, that social restraint is found not only among primitive humans, but even more rigidly in the less complex animal forms that preceded them, does not remove, but rather makes more urgent the problems of dissolving social order that threatened the world in which Conrad wrote, and of which his sensitive appreciation exceeded the capacity of the contemporary concepts with which he attempts to express it. The social restraints that in less complex species are programmed by genetic inheritance, and in less sophisticated human societies are imposed by religious belief and the force of custom, had, at least at certain intellectual levels of the Western world, reached that stage of dissolution where "everything is permissible". Mr Kurtz is the de-tribalised native of Europe, with "nothing either above or below him."

The book begins with a darkness that lies over London, and Marlow's remark that "this also has been one of the dark places of the earth", and it ends again on the Thames—"the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness." Mr Kurtz is alive, and everywhere.

Notes

1. Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture, p. 14.
2. G. Jean-Aubry, (Ed.), Joseph Conrad: Lettres Françaises, p. 48.
3. Letter to Elsie Hueffer, quoted, Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography, p. 277.
4. Robert Payne, The White Rajahs of Sarawak, p. 162.

Lord Jim

Lord Jim was begun as a short story based on a dramatic real-life incident that had no direct connections with Conrad's own experience, yet expressed that experience in a ~~kind of~~ paradigmatic form. And so it grew, grew into a ~~sort~~ of spiritual autobiography that became Conrad's longest book, and in the opinion of many, his best. In terms of the criteria discussed in the Introduction above, it is the book in which one might expect to find at its strongest and most pure, the "Conradian flavour". If the exposition that follows tends towards the upholding of this conclusion, it is in order to put the question rather than to prove the point, for it must remain, of course, in more metaphorical senses than one, a matter of "taste".

Recalling the court of inquiry at the end of his journey on the Palestine in order to use it in the original version of Lord Jim presumably led him to deal with this voyage in "Youth" (p. above), and in doing so he stumbled on Marlow, a narrator analysing a character, the very form that was needed to exploit to the full the potentialities of his art and experience. Instead of continuing with Lord Jim he used the new form to express the emotions of his Congo journey, producing thereby a work of art with an existential excitement, with a depth of symbolism and a wealth of imagery such as nothing that he had written before had given more than the vaguest hints. When, after the completion of Heart of Darkness, he returned to Lord Jim, he introduced Marlow into this story also and let its hero become the "outward form" into which he could pour all his own "fine feelings" and display for analysis all the tensions of his own nautical experience.

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In speaking of the "autobiographical basis" of Heart of Darkness, Guerard calls it "Conrad's longest journey into self", but although this might be true in the sense that it reaches the darkest corners, in ~~the~~ general sense the remark would seem to be more appropriate to Lord

Jim, for this is indeed Conrad's great, half-hidden exploration of himself, using an "outward form" more "British" and less complex, but one who can carry the essential qualities of his sensibility, and so reveal a little of the mystery of his own personality—and of ours. It is the intensity of this quest, with the promise that the reader also will thereby discover something of the roots of his own existence that gives the book its urgency and excitement, an excitement that is heightened in the most "static" scenes, such as Marlow and Jim at dinner in the Malabar Hotel, a dinner at which seven chapters are swallowed, and seems to "slow down" when it turns to pure action, as in the attack on Sherif Ali's stockade. It is action, certainly, that sets the problems, but the analysis that compels.

If the book does in fact involve a deep personal concern of the author, it might seem that the obvious way to do it would have been to tell the story in the first person, to give us Jim's very thoughts and feelings in the most direct and personal manner. But apart from the fact that such an appearance of "confession" would not have suited Conrad's own complex and evasive personality, there is the more important point that it might easily have begged the prime question with which he is concerned, that sense, as Conrad puts it in one of his letters, that "one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown". He is intensely aware of the extent to which even our most private and uninhibited thoughts and feelings may still be an unconscious and inescapable rationalizing and schematizing of material that is fundamentally irrational and mysterious. It seems that he does not accept the hidden, and dangerous, presuppositions of the Cartesian Cogito ergo sum. "I think...", but what is this "I" that the grammar of the extravert ancient Romans so conveniently kept out of sight? As Nietzsche puts it, all one can say is "Something thinks", and it is this psycho-somatic "something" that is interesting, that sets the problems.

In this respect, to have given us Jim's own thoughts would not further our understanding, and might easily have made the story too much of an apology; our shared assumptions would too easily escape investigation, and the story's marvellous air of objectivity would be endangered. Everything is organised to help us to understand—even the time shifts can be seen in this light—yet it seems that ultimately the author wants us to understand Jim only by understanding that we cannot understand: for that purpose nothing can be too much trouble, no sentence, paragraph, or "digression" can be too long. "I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce—after you've read. There is much truth—after all—in the common expression 'under a cloud'" (p. 339). But not, here, in quite its "common", moral, meaning: the cloud under which Jim moves is very much a kind of secular "Cloud of Unknowing". In trying to understand Jim the author and his readers are to be engaged in an effort of mutual self-understanding. Marlow needs his audience, and needs to goad them from time to time to remind them of this—"I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows have starved your imaginations to feed your bodies." (p. 225).

Conrad wants to get at the instincts, the desires, the hidden pre-suppositions, the unquestioned social values and the unfulfilled dreams that condition Jim's thoughts and actions, and ours; to bring to light, or at least to our awareness, "that side of us which like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge" (p. 93). It is a misunderstanding to imply, as many commentators have, that this is a question of moral darkness, or of guilt, or even of a Freudian "id". There may be some of this in Heart of Darkness, but very little in the cloud that surrounds Jim.

Even if, by conventional standards he ought to be, Jim is not, as Marlow makes clear, concerned with his guilt—his deepest conviction is his own guiltlessness. It is much more a question of his "honour", in

in his own eyes, and in the eyes of others; it can very nearly be reduced, as Marlow at one moment suspects, to a question of "not being found out", a question which the French captain, who knows something about honour, prefers not to answer (p. 149). The darkness is the darkness of ignorance rather than a moral darkness. The qualities in Jim that might be judged as morally good are as much a mystery, and in this sense, as "dark" in their origins as his less commendable aspects. Conrad does not regard man as someone essentially "good", for whom his evil acts are a metaphysical mystery, or as "bad". For him, both aspects being equally plain, empirically, and equally mysterious, moral distinctions can hardly be relevant to the basic problem.

For such purposes, a first-person narrative, or indeed any appearance of sympathy between author and protagonist would not do: only the most rigorous-seeming objectivity, almost a kind of "behaviouristic" approach, can produce the desired effect. This is not to suggest that Conrad initially planned the story to be like this; it is rather that having begun the tale as a simple short story, told in the third person, when he returned to it, with Marlow in his mind, he found the means at hand. In this respect it is vital for Conrad's purpose that Jim should be, as he says in the Author's Note, "a simple and sensitive character". The simplicity is most important. He is presented as a man without guile, a man who, to Marlow's expressed embarrassment, always speaks as he thinks, and so from his reported speech, his gestures and his blushes, we can know what he thinks. Jim's thoughts are not clear and rational, they are full of evasions, self-justifications, and unimaginative egoism, but it is this that demonstrates their essential sincerity. As the cunning Cornelius says, "He is like a child." His words do not hide his thoughts—even though his thoughts may hide the truth—they always attempt to express them, and it is because of this that our understanding

of Jim, as far as it goes, can be attained without any effort by the author to express the invisible workings of his mind.

One is reminded here of Ryle's demonstration, in The Concept of Mind that, despite a popular superstition to the contrary, we have no way of knowing what happens in our own minds that differs fundamentally from the means by which we know what happens in the minds of others. Thus, for example, if Jim is to be called a "coward", he has no way of discovering this that differs from those available to the people who see his actions and hear his words. In fact, as Conrad ably demonstrates, because of a fundamental difficulty in being objective about ourselves, he may be rather less successful in this direction than the observers.

An author who deals with characters as subtle as those of Henry James can hardly afford to relinquish his omniscience, for it is difficult to present a "double-minded man" if only the public half of his mind can be recorded, but given a character as "single-minded" as Jim, there is no evident loss of understanding in treating him externally, and there is a great gain in the feeling of "objectivity", the appearance of justice being done.

This is not to deny that the author may subtly tilt the scales in Jim's favour, but we tend to connive at this because it is hardly possible to be aware of this without realising also that they are being tilted in favour of all of us, unless we are super-men in the mould of Stein. Jim is "not good enough"—and again it must be emphasised that "good" is used here colloquially rather than in a moral sense—but as Marlow hastens to add, "none of us are good enough" (p. 319). Jim is "one of us", if we have ever had an ideal of conduct or a dream of glory, and there are certain illusions without which civilisation might not survive—Captain Brierly was also "one of us".

The relative simplicity of Jim, and the everyday language that

Conrad uses, tend to conceal the intellectual range and depth of the book.

It works round the whole edge of that dark continent that with inescapable imprecision we call the "soul", a term that in this context must not exclude the body, that area of cloudy peaks and hidden valleys, jungle and swamp, on which successive philosophical imperialists have set up their flags, and successive map-makers of psychology decorate with imaginative details, a darkness in which the areas illuminated by a Freud or a Durkheim serve only to emphasise the extent of the unknown.

The mysterious unity of mind and body, in which the mind, for all its pretensions, may not be much more than a telephone exchange, the coils and the tensions of social ideal and social reality, private ideal and personal reality, and in and around them all the "malevolent providence" as Conrad likes to call it, of an irrational, or at least, non-human, universe, make a quivering knot with a thousand loose ends to tempt, and baffle the approaching intellect, an intellect that is itself a part of the knot, so that even the attempt to put the problem in a metaphor runs out of rationality before the end of the sentence. Conrad, disdainful of the short-cuts and the conflicting maps of the system-makers, goes on light feet to make short sharp forays into the ultimately impenetrable. His modesty in the face of "the inscrutable" can easily lead us to underestimate the penetration of his scrutiny. The book demands to be read and re-read in the manner of that friend of Marlow's who receives his last report, "deliberately, like one approaching with slow feet and alert eyes the glimpse of an undiscovered country" (p. 338). As Robert E. Kuehn says in an editorial introduction to a collection of essays on Lord Jim, "When Marlow asks himself 'if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself' he is not giving in to mere rhetoric, he is hinting at the philosophical magnitude with which Jim's case may be viewed". It is one of those works that like Hamlet, Don Quixote and Goethe's Faust, are milestones

along the track of Western man's understanding of himself.

On almost every page of the book Marlow starts up some intellectual hare, and perhaps fires after it a shot of conventional wisdom or personal insight, but what he fired at, or whether he really hit it, the reader is left largely to judge for himself. The earlier critics, who saw their task largely in moral terms, were able to drag a few little corpses out of the undergrowth and tell us that Jim had, or had not, "redeemed himself", that he was "a coward", or an "egoist", a non-lover of his work, or the victim of a morbid sense of honour. The later ones saw larger and vaguer shapes in the background--Conrad betraying Poland, the evils of Colonialism, or the "ego" failing to deal with the "super-ego". None of them are necessarily wrong within their own terms of reference, and all of them may contribute something to our understanding, but they generally fail to appreciate the extent to which the book brings the very terms of reference themselves into question. In the end, they seem as the small dust in the balance against the full human gravity of Jim: he will outlast as many theories and support as many interpretations as Hamlet, which is perhaps to say that he embodies a great deal of the intractable stuff of Conrad, and of all of us, and that such stuff is got at only by a rare combination of introspection, insight, and imagination, insight that can be reflected outwards on the whole of Western society and its "Platonic conception of itself."

For Jim, as a water-clerk and for the Patna as a pilgrim ship, Conrad had a source in real life, but it can be seen that this source had no real connection with the problem of Jim's sensibility. As long ago as 1923 in a letter to The Times Literary Supplement by Sir Frank Swettenham, an origin for the Patna (was established) and for Jim himself, in the case of the Jeddah, a pilgrim ship abandoned by its crew in the Indian Ocean in 1880, but later research has shown that in this letter

Sir Frank had already assimilated his vague memories of the incident to Conrad's story to a misleading degree.³ In fact this incident, in whatever hearsay versions Conrad may have received it, provided him with only the barest outline of the plot, and a suggestion for the physical shape of Jim.

The Jeddah, like the Patna, was a ship carrying Arab pilgrims from Singapore to the Middle East, but it was not an old ship with a rusty bulkhead, and the occasion of its crippling in no way resembled that of the Patna—it came as the result of violent storms, and not in the midst of "a marvellous stillness". All that Conrad took from this incident was the basic idea of a ship abandoned by its crew that turns up again to confound their story of its sinking. That wholly realistic, wonderfully symbolic, crippling of the Patna with "a faint noise of thunder infinitely remote" as if for an instant "the earth had been checked in her course" that makes "suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud" appear "formidably insecure in their immobility"—all this, and all that follows on the ship, was entirely the creation of his art.

And the connections between the mate of the Jeddah, Augustine Podmore Williams, and Jim are equally superficial—psychologically speaking, a relation of opposites more than resemblances. The contrast between Jim's outward appearance, large strong and loud-voiced, like the very incarnation of John Bull, and his inner sensitivity and dreaminess give added force and meaning to Conrad's presentation, but this fruitful contrast was something created entirely by Conrad—and then disowned. In the Author's Note added to the book in 1917 he answers the criticism that Jim's sensitivity is "artificial and morbid" by claiming that he really existed: "I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern mists either. One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by—appealing—significant—under a cloud—

perfectly silent" (p. ix).

In the light of what has subsequently been discovered about the "form" that Conrad saw passing by, this is a statement quite extraordinary in its apparent modesty, its attempt to disown the responsibility for all the inner life, the creative "perverted thinking" that Conrad put into Jim. It seems that rather than give any hint that the brilliance and power of this psychological portrait had its origins in his own personality, he preferred to give it all away to a ship's chandler called Augustine Podmore Williams, who by all accounts was rather less than worthy of it.

There can be no doubt that Williams provided the form, for Conrad once confirmed this himself in a conversation with a lady admirer, Mrs Viola Allen:

"I used to see him in Singapore—a ship's runner he was—nearly six feet tall,"

"Yes, an inch, perhaps two under six feet", I interrupted. For a moment he gazed at me—not recognising the opening words of Jim!

"Yes," he said, "and he had an expression like this—" and he gave a rather lowering frown. "He was a fine looking man of about forty—his name was Williams—but I used that name somewhere else, and so I called him Jim." (quoted, Sherry, p 85n.)

It does not appear that Conrad ever had used the name of "Williams" elsewhere, and the fact that he never gave him a surname, although Conrad was a man who kept to surnames even in his most intimate conversations or correspondence can be seen as an unconscious indication of his closeness to Jim—no other Conrad character is treated thus. As "Jim" he has a kind of intimacy and a kind of anonymity that reinforces the polarity of the presentation, like the voice in a telephone receiver that whispers so intimately in one's ear from a distance so forbiddingly far.

In contrast to the "Jim" whom Conrad put inside him, Williams appears to have been neither more, nor less, than his bull-like exterior suggested, a strong, insensitive character whose behaviour did not in anyway resemble that ascribed to Jim, either on board the ship, or afterwards. When the Jeddah, with a leak, and its engines not working, seemed in danger of sinking, all that was needed was for the captain to organise men to work the pumps. But the pilgrims, unlike those of the Patna, became aware of the situation, and frightened by their unrest the captain seems to have lost his nerve, and the crew to have panicked. Williams, the mate, took charge of the situation, and arranged for the crew to escape in three lifeboats. He was apparently particularly concerned for the safety of the captain's wife, a white woman at risk among unruly natives, and felt himself to be acting like a gentleman and a hero.

Although the subsequent court of enquiry condemned the whole affair and suspended the captain for three years, Williams himself was never brought to trial, nor did he have his certificate taken away. He remained in Singapore, and after serving in other ships as mate, including the Vidar, in which Conrad later served, he settled down as a ship's chandler, eventually owning his own business (Sherry, p. 78).

During his own lifetime Conrad seems to have had no difficulty in concealing the elements of "confession" in the book, and the first critic clearly to emphasise this aspect appears to have been Gustav Morf in his brilliant book, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad published in 1930.

He grasps the importance of the conflicting heritage of idealism and practicality that Conrad received from his father and the maternal uncle who became his guardian; he grasps the essential link between Jim and Conrad in their both being "creatures of light literature"; he emphasises "sympathetic identification" as a quality that contributes to Jim's fatal actions, both on the Patna and in Patusan, and its connection with the theme of "The Secret Sharer", and Conrad's own psyche, and he notices the ~~parallel between Jim's "jump~~

parallel between Jim's jump from the Patna and Conrad's "jump" out of Poland, which could also be regarded as a kind of betrayal, though it had not appeared so to Conrad at the time. Thus, although some of Morf's conclusions are very doubtful--he relies too heavily on feelings of guilt, from which both Conrad, and Jim, seem to be relatively free--most subsequent discussion of the book has been little more than a refinement, or exaggeration, of his primal insights.

Morf was also the first to attempt to apply Freudian concepts to Conrad's work, though he admits their final inadequacy. Anyone who wished, for example, to illustrate the concepts of "ego" and "super-ego" might find that Jim's attitudes, and their relation to his love and respect for the authoritarian father to whom, having failed, he cannot return, provided an example that would help one to understand Freud's intentions, but it hardly works the other way, for this is only one aspect of the richness and complexity of Jim.

There have been attempts to interpret the book in terms of the Christian system of Fall and Redemption, and other less doctrinal but equally orthodox "psycho-moral" schemes, but it escapes them all. Its scenes and characters are real and solid enough, but always judgement is suspended until the flux of Heraclitus has carried them away: they will not "stay". Perhaps because, subconsciously at least, Conrad is aware that he is working outside of any pre-existing moral scheme or metaphysical system, that he is in a region where nothing can be taken for granted, he created his own strictly empirical and, as it were, sociological, terms of reference by surrounding his central portrait of Jim with a ring of sharp, colourful vignettes, a multitude of minor characters and scenes, every one of which reflects on Jim's case without ever finally judging it. They cover the whole spectrum of the human condition, from Stein, the romantic existentialist, through the French captain, the English gentleman, the satanic-romantic Brown, the Moslems, the primitive Malays, down to the "beetles", the crew of the Patna, or

Chester and the cannibalistic Robinson. If they make moral points, they make them aesthetically: one may prefer butterflies to beetles, but the choice is not normally regarded as a moral one, though it may be indeed a very "human" one.

An essay by Tony Tanner has emphasised the manner in which Stein's beetles and butterflies are used to symbolise the qualities of two classes of character in the book, and also how Conrad reflects Jim's "Platonic conception of himself" by emphasising his "whiteness" against dark backgrounds.⁴ Both these points are important in that they indicate the way in which Conrad, unable to accept the old terms of reference at their face value, is both forging his own post-Darwinian mythology and using the older concepts only with a gentle irony. The beetles and butterflies have their parallel in the way that Thomas Mann repeatedly uses biology to reflect on humanity, as for example in Hans Castorp's researches into evolution, or Felix Krull's visit to the Lisbon museum. One notices also that Conrad's use of references to the Passion at Jim's death, like Mann's less restrained Last Supper in The Magic Mountain, are more for purposes of irony than of exposition. In all these ways Conrad is a pioneer in adapting the novel to a world where there is no longer any moral or metaphysical frame that can be taken for granted, and his trails have become highways of twentieth-century literature.

Although his sophisticated sensitivity and his pathos are essentially modern, in his sceptical, stoic attitudes Conrad has obvious links with the classical world, and an essay by Dorothy van Ghent, collected in the same volume as Tanner's, draws parallels with the pre-Socratic literature of Greece. Here also, the tragic conflict between personal need, social law, and a pitiless universe are faced with the same kind of clarity, but in the case of the Greeks, with an over-riding social commitment that is no longer possible in the bourgeois world, even though Conrad is reluctant, consciously to admit it: "the tale Conrad prepared to narrate was a tale in the manner of the older classical

dramatists, wherein law—whether divine, as with Aeschylus, or natural, as with Sophocles—is justified to the self, whatever its agonies of discovery. But he managed to do a tale that puts both the law and the self to question, and left them there.”⁵

The subtle qualities of Jim's soul do not lie on the surface, and indeed the author seems to be intent on initially obscuring them, or at least at preventing us from too quickly coming to appreciate them. It is possible, of course, that this is not so much conscious art as a measure of the manner in which Conrad was drawn into deeper identification with Jim as the story developed. It is not any delicate creature who comes at us as the story opens, it is simply Augustine Podmore Williams: "He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion"—but there comes immediately the qualification, the first hint of complexity—the self-assertion "seemed a necessity, and it was directed at much at himself as at anyone else." "It seemed", "apparently"—these continual assumptions of agnosticism provide the essential tone of the story, and imply that nothing is as simple as it "seems". The first paragraph also emphasises Jim's spotless neatness, "immaculate white from shoes to hat", which is to re-echo through the story as a reflection of Jim's view of himself, and the role he is attempting to play.

The second paragraph reiterates Jim's "simplicity": a good water-clerk with "ability in the abstract", and ends up with a kind of punch-line that despite the obvious irony, re-asserts the complexity: "They said 'Confounded fool!' as soon as his back was turned. This was their criticism of his exquisite sensibility" (p. 4).

It is part of the story's effectiveness that not only the reader, but Marlow himself, is allowed only gradually to apprehend Jim's compl-

exity, although this is masked, to some extent, by the fact that Mar-
 low's narration, when it begins in chapter four, is done wholly from
 hindsight. That Marlow does not appear before chapter four is presum-
 ably because, as noted above, the first chapters had been written as
 part of a short story, possibly as early as 1896, long before the in-
 vention of "Marlow".⁶ Accidental or not, it provides the book with
 an effective visual prologue to the analysis that probably holds the
 reader's attention rather better than Marlow lighting his cigar and
 passing the bottle might have done, though it does leave the first four
 chapters with their generalised, omniscient, point of view, rather in-
 determinate in relation to the rest of the tale.

At Marlow's first glimpse of Jim—knowing the truth about the fate
 of the Patna, although it will be many pages before the reader really
 knows—Marlow looks at him with the same cool eyes and natural indignat-
 ion as everyone else. He sees someone who is "outwardly so typical of
 that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching to right and left of us
 in life, of the kind that is not disturbed by the vagaries of intellig-
 ence and the perversions of—of nerves, let us say. He was the kind of
 fellow you would, on the strength of his looks, leave in charge of the
 deck—figuratively and professionally speaking" (p. 44). Marlow goes
 on to speak of all the youngsters he has turned out, and the satisfact-
 ion it has brought him, and so comes back to what seems like a simple
 condemnation of Jim: "I tell you I ought to know the right kind of
 looks. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength
 of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes—and, by Jove! it
 wouldn't have been safe. There are depths of horror in the thought. I
 He looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal
 alloy in his metal" (p. 45).

This passage has sometimes been referred to as if it were intended

as a final judgement on Jim, but that is to see it not only out of its context in the author's scale of values, but also out of its context in the development of the story. This is a judgement, in character, by Marlow who at this point, at least, is very British, and it does not really say much more than that Jim is not so stupid or insensitive as he looks, and, more importantly, it must be seen as expressing Marlow's feelings only before he has attended the court of inquiry. Mere curiosity, plus the desire to see Jim squirm, takes him there, but then their glances meet: | "Jim's eyes, wandering in intervals of his answers, rested upon a white man who sat apart from the others, with his face worn and clouded, but with quiet eyes that glanced straight, interested and clear. Jim answered another question and was tempted to cry out, 'What's the good of this! what's the good!' He tapped with his foot slightly, bit his lip, and looked away over the heads. He met the eyes of the white man. The glance directed at him was not the fascinated stare of the others. It was an act of intelligent volition.... This fellow--ran the thought--looks at me as though he could see somebody or something past my shoulder" (pp. 32-33)

Thus is established the silent bond that is to be the flexible nerve-laden spine of the book. It creates a form that is to have flattering imitations. Guerard has pointed out the resemblance of Carroway, narrator of The Great Gatsby, even to paraphrases of Marlow's remarks (p. 136). Camus, in The Outsider, although he uses first-person narration, establishes a link between hero and author in a court-room scene that reads almost like a paraphrase of Marlow's contact with Jim:

| The journalists had their fountain pens ready; they all wore the same expression of slightly ironical indifference, with the exception of one, a much younger man than his colleagues, in grey flannels with a blue

tie, who, leaving his pen on the table, was gazing hard at me. He had a plain, rather chunky face; what held my attention was his eyes, very pale, clear eyes, riveted on me, though not betraying any definite emotion. For a moment I had an odd impression, as if I were being scrutinized by myself" (p.87, Penguin edition).

In this way Camus provides a kind of explanation, if not quite an artistic justification, for the articulate philosophy of his supposedly inarticulate hero. The social commitment that Conrad questioned, but retained, the hero as "one of us", is abandoned by Camus: his "Marlow" dives inside "the outsider", leaving only this court-room incident like a hat bobbing on the surface.

It may well be that not only Marlow, and the reader, but also Conrad himself came only slowly to realise the full possibilities of Jim as someone who could bear the whole of his creator's sensibility without sharing his intellectual power, "a simple and sensitive character", as he says in the Author's Note, for whom the event of the Patna could "colour the whole 'sentiment of existence'". The study by Eloise Knapp Hay referred to above shows, for instance, that the incident of the rescue on the training ship in the first chapter, which finds Jim unable to bridge the gap between dream and reality, and provides a kind of paradigm, was added to the original "short story" only after Conrad had restarted with the idea of colouring "the whole 'sentiment of existence'", and colouring it with his own blood.

Thus is Jim's essence refined until it is volatile enough to convey the author's own ironic analysis of himself—"his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings—a sort of sublimated, idealized selfishness. He was—if you allow me to say so—very fine; very fine—and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have come to terms with itself—with a sigh,

a grunt, or even a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting" (p. 177).

It may seem obvious enough, on reflection, that the author is the source of the "exquisite sensibility", but by cutting the umbilical cord, by purporting to deal with Jim wholly from the outside, and with all the apparatus of ironic perspective and judicial objectivity, the obviousness of the obvious is fairly well concealed. Jim is also convincingly English, and Marlow also, however much he may represent Conrad's intellectual complexity, remains, with his outspoken, empirical common-sense, consistently British. Jim's soul may in the end be more of a Polish soul than an English one, but it is this extra touch of "fineness"—or "touchiness" as Marlow might put it—that makes him "interesting". He shares too much of a common European sensibility to be in any danger of irrelevance, he is unmistakably "one of us".

Conrad, and Jim, are Western, romantic, masculine, and middle-class, or above, which means that they are also very much "creatures of light literature". Here the "light" can be seen with a shade of irony, for Jim's minimum of luggage is said to include, like Conrad's own, a one-volume set of the works of Shakespeare (p. 237, cf. A Personal Record, p. 72). And the Bible, that great Jewish romance of the love of Yahweh for his people, is also part of the "light literature" that has formed Jim, the son of a parson, Conrad and ourselves—hence, for instance, the delicate echoes of the New Testament in the account of Jim's final "passion".

But if these heavier works of "light literature" are at the ground of the story's philosophical symphony, both Conrad and Jim are also, more specifically, and literally, "creatures of light literature". Conrad is quite unashamed of his debts in this respect. Writing of Marryat and Fenimore Cooper, in the same period (1898) that Lord Jim

was begun, he says:

Perhaps no two authors of fiction influenced so many lives and gave to so many the initial impulse towards a glorious or a useful career. Through the distances of space and time those two men of another race have shaped also the life of the writer of this appreciation. Life is life, and art is art—and truth is hard to find in either. Yet in testimony to the achievement of both these authors it may be said that, in the case of the writer at least, the youthful glamour, the headlong vitality of the one and the profound sympathy, the artistic insight of the other—to which he had surrendered—have withstood the brutal shock of facts and the wear of laborious years. He has never regretted his surrender. (Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 56-57)

For Jim also, at an appropriately lower, but strictly parallel level, it is "a course of light holiday literature" that creates his "vocation for the sea", and continues to condition his inner life.

Ford Madox Ford wanted to find, through Flaubert and the French tradition, a more respectable literary lineage for his friend, and though at the time Conrad may have submitted to the treatment, we find him towards the end of his life, in 1920, in an Author's Note for Within the Tides reaffirming what he had written earlier about this source of his inspiration. "A romantic feeling for reality", he says, "in itself may be a curse, but when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear endowed with an internal glow... It is none the worse for knowledge of the truth: it only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty (pp. v-vi).

To appreciate this is not of course to deny Flaubert's influence on

Conrad, for indeed it points to a certain affinity. Madame Bovary herself is supremely a "creature of light literature" and it may be that Flaubert's rather strange ability to identify himself with her was due to his being, like most of us, rather more of a fellow-"creature" than he ~~his rationally-conditioned mind~~ was ready to admit.

Before considering the ways in which Conrad goes beyond the ordinary limits of light literature, it may be useful to consider the degree to which all codes of civilised behaviour, and all works of literary art have, necessarily, their irrational roots and their share of illusion, and consequently their links with light literature--in this respect it may be that "light literature" often gets nearer to our real desires and our basic humanity than more sophisticated forms--one can note that Kafka expressed his love of "trash", and the products of Hollywood's "Dream Factory" in the nineteen-thirties and forties seem to have universal qualities that time does not stale.

"The pictures" are but pictures, and the rest is words, and what are words? For Marlow in Heart of Darkness, they were "the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetratable darkness" (p. 112). For Marlow, in Lord Jim, they "belong to the sheltering conception of light and order", that human "arrangement of small conveniences" without which the world seems "to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder" (p. 313).

Conrad's love of the word "illusion", and his sometimes seemingly illogical use of it, convey a sense that more things maybe than we realise are created by "the word": "the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous Palaces, the solemn Temples, the great Globe itself..." To admit the possible dream-like quality of them all can help us to realise the importance of Don Quixote to Cervantes, and to us, the importance of "the idealised reality of a boy's daydreams" of Africa to Heart of Darkness, and the importance of Marryat to both Jim and his creator.

This is not of course to deny the great difference of degree, the gulf in depth and imaginative understanding between a Shakespeare and those authors of light literature who gave to both Conrad and Jim their "initial impulse towards a glorious career". Such a gulf remains, all through the story, between Jim, whose limited intelligence and limited imagination keep him within the bounds of light literature and conventional ideas, and within the egoism of his own point of view, and the author, who stands as it were, on Shakespeare's side of the gulf and produces a book of almost Shakepearian dimensions. But linking them, and making the whole enterprise possible, is a shared romanticism and a shared sensitivity.

Jim is "one of us" in a sense much more profound than the obvious one implied by Marlow when he presents him to his fellow-seamen as a Conway boy, a member of the club. In his choice of vocation, and in the manner of his choice, in his refusal to acknowledge mere "facts", in his commitment to certain ideals at the expense of his own and everyone else's comfort, in his persistence in the dream of "a glorious career", and in his choice of death rather than the destruction of the idea, Jim can be seen as one of an "us" that embraces the whole of Western culture, a culture that has been propelled on a cumulative course of titanic achievement by its "Platonic conception of itself". "Stein's words, 'Romantic!--Romantic!' seem to ring over those distances that will never give him up now to a world indifferent to his failings and his virtues" (p. 393).

The "idea" by which Jim lives compounds both a code of honour and a dream of glory. The first part of the book deals primarily with the first, and the Patusan episode with the second, so that for a full revelation of Jim's psyche, the latter is if anything the more important, and the criticism of the book that is sometimes made on formal literary grounds that it falls into two halves, of which the first is usually preferred, quite fails to appreciate its essential spiritual unity.

This "idea" by which he lives comes into conflict with the irrational disorder of the universe both in Jim's own nature, and in the external world, for these also must ultimately be seen as one. Any division of the universe into "man" and "nature", or even "self" and "external world," is itself no more than one of those "small conveniences" by which we keep at bay "the vast and dismal aspect of disorder."

This link between the irrational in Jim's nature, and in his dreams, with the larger disorder of the universe is realised, with great dramatic power, in the appearance of Captain Brown. This "Satan" who comes to put Jim to the test clearly embodies, and quite realistically, all those aspects of psychic reality that social convention, and the kind of "Honour" that make up Jim's ideal repress and relegate to an underworld, from which they must inevitably emerge again to restore the balance of nature.

Every ideology or religion, every civilised code or romantic construction has to work by selection, by absorbing and colouring as much of the irrational raw material of the universe as it can, and excluding the remainder, which usually in some form or other it classifies as "evil" or "illusion". And any or all of the material that it despises or expels may, like Heathcliff, return to wreak its one-sided vengeance. Jim, by his dream of honour and glory, by his insistence on his respectability, by his spotless white suit and shoes, and his public-school justice for the natives, by his "toying with the sword" in a way that identifies "righteousness" with the Bugis, to the exclusion of the "rights" of Sherif Ali, the Rajah, or Cornelius—all this necessarily excludes and opposes a great deal of humanity, and human complexity, and a great deal of disorderly "nature", and even of the darker and deeper side of "romance". There is therefore, in the appearance of Captain Brown a certain inevitability, a restoration of the balance of nature. There is, as Marlow says when he introduces his account of these last events, "a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it, as if it were our imaginat-

ion alone that could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny. The imprudence of our thoughts recoils on our own heads: who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword" (p. 342).

Brown is as Conrad says, "a satanic figure", not only in the obvious "romantic" sense, but in a necessary, "Shakespearean" sense, as an aspect of the total scheme of things. He is very close here to Satan as he appears in the Old Testament, most notably in the Book of Job, where he is not, as he later became in Christian mythology, a pure incarnation of evil, but simply "the adversary", one of God's necessary creatures, an aspect of "reality".

On the cosmic scale, like Satan, Brown also has his rights; his right to freedom, for which he makes a tenable apologia, his right to fight for his life, and his own inverted, but equally logical, ideal of "justice", and Marlow says, after the massacre, "Thus Brown balanced his account with evil fortune. Notice that even in this awful outbreak there is a superiority as of a man who carries right—the abstract thing—within the envelope of his common desires. It was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution" (p. 404).

Any division of the characters of the book in terms of Stein's butterflies and beetles obviously breaks down in the case of Brown—such biological parables inevitably involve a great deal of "reductionism". Brown is not a "beetle" like the captain of the Patna—Tanner, who wants to fit everyone into the "butterflies and beetles" scheme, calls Brown "the most notable beetle"—but goes on to compare him with Iago, (pp. 59–60). He belongs more to the world of Shakespeare or Goethe, with perhaps a touch of Dickens—in many minor characters one can see how Dickens' eye for the grotesque may have sharpened Conrad's vision.

Throughout his history Western man, much more than the products of Eastern civilisations, seems to have been goaded, inspired and bamboozled by what Scott Fitzgerald, speaking of Gatsby, calls "his Platonic

conception of himself". Consciously or not, Conrad brings out this point by making Jim's intelligent half-Asian wife quite incapable of understanding his motivation, both at the time of Marlow's visit, and finally, in the house of Stein. Our Platonic conception of ourselves and our society has raised the achievements of Western man to almost super-human levels, but at great cost in inward, and outward, aggression, and in the troughs has degraded it to the sub-humanities of the Inquisition, the Congo—or Captain Brown. With an awareness ahead of his time, Conrad lived in the age when this "Platonic conception" was beginning to dissolve into conscious self-analysis, the Decline of the West.

In this respect, Jim has, and is clearly intended to have an indistinct but universal significance; as Marlow leaves him in Patusan, "he dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal... I don't know why he should have always appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps that is the real cause of my interest in his fate" (p. 265). As a representative figure of the West, as "one of us", he is worthy of a place "on a pedestal", beside, or perhaps a little below, Hamlet or Don Quixote.

As part of these universal aspects, Jim also embodies certain particular qualities of excessive imagination and sympathy that are often the marks of artistic creativeness and which, one can hardly doubt, he shares with the author. He has ^a limited but powerful imagination that inhibits him as a man of action, and a facility for sympathetic identification with others that is the main immediate cause of his two disasters.

On the Patna, his full imaginative grasp of ~~the situation,~~ of all the consequences of the flooding of the ship, is enough to convince him that nothing can be done, and therefore there is nothing that he can do. "He was not afraid of death, perhaps, but I'll tell you what, he was afraid of the emergency." An unimaginative man such as Captain McWhirr

of "Typhoon" would have gone on performing simple, useless tasks, and whether he survived or not, would not have lost his "honour". Nor are the effects of Jim's imagination wholly negative; the first thing he does is to cut loose the remaining life-boats so that they will float when the ship sinks, which no one thought of doing in the real-life case of the Jeddah.

The adequacy of Jim as a human being, if not as a man of action, is testified by his reactions after he has jumped: "'It seemed to me that I must jump out of that accursed boat and swim back to see—half a mile—more—any distance—to the very spot...?' Why this impulse? Do you see the significance? Why back to the very spot? Why not drown alongside—if he meant drowning? why back to the very spot, to see—as if his imagination had to be soothed by the assurance that all was over before death could bring relief? I defy any of you to offer another explanation. It was one of those bizarre and exciting glimpses through the fog" (pp. 113-114).

That other imaginative quality, sympathetic identification, which Guerard has described as "the central chapter of Conrad's psychology" (p. 108) is also central to Jim. It is this more than anything that triggers his "jump". The others, having jumped, call in chorus for Jim to jump, and in the end, "I had jumped—it seemed" (p. 111) "... but I tell you they were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over. Can't you see it? You must see it? Come, Speak—straight out" (p. 123). This is the "infernal alloy", or seam of gold, that might make a man a great novelist or a dangerous officer. In Patusan, Captain Brown, by a combination of insight and luck, finds this fatal "flaw" and uses it both to un-nerve Jim by recalling the Patna incident, and to gain his sympathy.

Whether or not Jim's acute sense of honour is typically English, it is typically imaginative and typically European, and the French captain has no difficulty in understanding it--it is only life without it that he finds impossible to understand (p. 148). The complaint of the lady in Italy that "it is all so morbid", which Conrad counters in his Author's Note with the question, "I wonder whether she was European at all?", has been reiterated more recently by J.I.M. Stewart: "to an English reader there is likely to seem something excessive, even obsessed, in the concept of honour upon which it turns....It has been declared... that Jim is less a good man gone wrong than a compulsive neurotic: and that the novelist must be indited as having written a morbid book. Conrad appears to represent Jim's loss as absolute. Honour is conceived almost as a physical possession, say a pocket watch: at a lurch of the ship it drops into the sea and is gone for good."⁸

Given a choice of the phrases "a good man gone wrong" or "a compulsive neurotic" one might indeed have difficulty in deciding which was the less inadequate, but on the question of "honour" it may be doubted whether we are quite such a nation of shopkeepers as this anonymous declaration would suggest. Schopenhauer, for example, regarded it as a general European obsession, and pointed in particular to the English use of the word "character" as representing something, "credit, reputation, honour", which "once lost, can never be recovered, unless the loss rested on some mistake, such as may occur if a man is slandered or his actions viewed in a false light."⁹ This is indeed Jim's position, and accounts for his pathetic insistence that in fact his action has been "viewed in a false light."

For Conrad himself, his "surrender" to the dreams created by light literature had "withstood the brutal shock of facts and the wear of laborious years", but he was well aware that he had never met with such a

brutal shock as the Patna incident, or Captain Brown, nor had his "laborious years" included anything as soul-destroying as life as an insurance agent or a water-clerk. What might have happened if they had? At one level, Lord Jim can be seen simply as an attempt to give an answer.

And as well as the nightmares of what might have happened to him when tested by such a shock, Conrad had also his day-dreams of a "glorious career", of which the white man who establishes a kingdom in the wilderness, typified by Rajah Brooke, seems to have been the most captivating, as he reveals in the Author's Note to The Rescue, and in the subject of the book itself. What might have happened if that dream had been given the chance of fulfilment?—the second, and equally necessary, part of Lord Jim again gives the imagined answer. Marlow's last rhetorical farewell to Jim can easily be read as an expression of the author's feeling for his own youthful self and the dreams that were its substance: "Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments, too, when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades" (p. 416).

For such brutal shocks, or glorious dreams, "none of us are good enough", and the more we have of intelligence and imagination, the less "good" we are likely to be. Is it better therefore not to try? Is it better not to have had the dreams at all?—this is the question with which Marlow goads his listeners in "Youth", Heart of Darkness, and Lord Jim. And because the author himself, divided between romantic heart and sceptical intellect, really does not know; he is never tempted to preach in favour of ideals, intelligence, imagination or any other of the ambiguous "higher qualities" of man. His sympathies are entirely with the butterflies rather than the beetles, but he has no illus-

ions about their fate, and cannot be accused of overtly encouraging any emergent insect rashly to stretch its wings towards the sun.

Who could be good enough? To give us a sketch of the answer, he creates the book's one character who is perhaps a little larger than life and almost too good to be true, the incarnation of the ideal, Stein, the intellectual man of action, the dreamer who can jump out of the ship of social convention without even the life-line of metaphysical belief and by his own exertions keep himself afloat in the destructive element. He can create his own values, and also live by them; shoot a man with one hand while he captures his dreamed-of butterfly with the other; he is worthy to marry the Princess, and direct the fate of Jim. He is probably the best fictional portrait of Nietzsche's "over-man" that has yet been given to us.

The effective man of action who is also a man of intellect and imagination is an ideal that seems hardly to be attainable in the world of reality. Plato's "philosopher-king", Nietzsche's "Caesar with the soul of Christ", is not it seems, a psycho-somatic possibility. One cannot have the soul of Christ in any other body but the sensitive body of Christ, and it is not the tough body of the soldier who throws the dice at the foot of his cross, the poetic mind that spins forth the parables is not the administrative mind of Pontius Pilate. The man who, like Stein, operates a successful trading fleet, rules an archipelago, and gains a world reputation as an entomologist, does not also recreate the philosophical foundations of the world. No man has sufficient resources, nor do the temperaments match.

The dream remains, and any man who remotely approaches it has a fascination that goes beyond the simple appeal of either the "tough guy" or the creative dreamer. The writings of men like Hemingway or Malraux have been treated with a respect, almost an indulgence, that might not have been so readily granted to them if they had not lived

adventurously as well as written "adventures", though this is not to deny that their books have positive qualities that depend on this experience of both worlds. And beyond them all, there is Tolstoy, who in his prime might have been a match for Stein.

Conrad also, is one of those rare men who embraced both worlds, but he was not, like Hemingway, physically robust, but rather an imaginative intellectual whose romantic dreams, helped by strange circumstances, pushed him further into the world of action than such men usually go. He probably got out of it just in time to save himself from shipwreck, as a writer, and perhaps literally also—"the pensive habits" that sometimes made him "dilatatory about the rigging" were not likely to be decreased by the isolation of command. He retired with an experience of action that made him acutely aware of the dangers, in that world, of both intellect and imagination, and fascinated by the conflict.

Obviously, he had not found himself one of "that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching to right and left of us in life"; he also had been liable to be "disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence and the perversions of—of nerves, let us say"—and so, "it wouldn't have been safe. There are depths of horror in the thought" (p. 45). Nor can Conrad have looked, as Jim did, "as genuine as a new sovereign" and the "horror in the thought" seems to have occurred also to Delcommune, in the matter of giving him a steam-boat on the treacherous Congo, and to other employers who were applied to, or solicited on his behalf. The accidental luck, described in The Shadow Line, that got him the Otago was his only command, though it cannot be denied that he fulfilled it with adequate success and retired with a good testimonial from the owners.

And he retired with a deeper grasp, perhaps, than any other man before him of the conflicting demands of the two worlds, able to express what Jim could not; to complete that "last testament" that Marlow

finds when Jim is dead: "After a while he had tried again, scrawling ~~it~~ heavily, as if with a hand of lead, another line. 'I must now at once. . .' The pen had spluttered, and that time he gave it up. There's nothing more; he had seen a broad gulf that neither eye nor voice could span. I can understand this. He was overwhelmed by the inexplicable; he was overwhelmed by his own personality" (pp. 340-341).

The man of sensitivity who is bruised by reality may reject it in favour of a world of imagination, or he may capitulate to "reality" and betray the imagination. But if he is tough enough to face reality with unimpaired imagination, to allow, as Conrad puts it "the romantic feeling to be disciplined by a recognition of the hard facts of existence", then the tension will give his bow great power. In the first creative years that followed his retirement from the sea, this tension between romance and reality is felt and expressed with an intensity that gives to these books an intellectual excitement and a nervous energy that make them compulsive reading. As long as men dream dreams, and fail to realise them, they will turn to these works to find a classic expression of their experience.

Jim is also "one of us" in the simplest sense of the phrase, English and middle-class, and so very largely is Marlow: it is only the author who is fully aware that their conventions, codes and formulae may conflict quite radically with both nature and human nature, that they are not, as they seemed to most of his contemporaries, built into the foundations of the universe. He can transcend the whole social environment far enough to make us aware of "the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion", "the irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion", threaten us with the loss of "that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy", make us doubt "the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct", make us "look at the convention that

lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood", and see that "the truth of every passion wants some pretence to make it live", and do it without making the book as far removed from the world of every-day "appearances" as this conglomerate of widely-scattered aphorisms might at first suggest.

Marlow remains firmly anchored in the realm of common-sense, "one of us", and by so doing keeps us with him, even the least imaginative of us, but every so often the author grabs him and pushes him up to the edge of the abyss. On such occasions one notices that his emotions are expressed in language very like that of the poetic "existentialists" of the nineteenth century—images of loneliness, darkness, fathomless deeps and limitless horizons, the experience of men who started life safely at home in the interpreted world and came to discover that our deepest truths and convictions may be no more than illusions conducive to the survival of one particular cunning, but not very reliable species. The butterfly may be "a masterpiece of Nature—the great artist", but what of man? "Man is amazing," says Stein, "but he is not a masterpiece. Perhaps the artist was a little mad, Eh?" (p. 209).

One does not feel that in his use of these images, Conrad is at all derivative, but rather that they are the product of his own mind, echoing philosophically the "destructive element" on which he sailed, the mirror of the unruly sea. This dimension is most obvious in Marlow's interview with Stein, crowded confusingly with German exclamations and images that seem to echo Kirkegaard or Nietzsche, "the deep, deep sea", the "illusion" that is "true", the darkness "with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames", "the uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon" (p. 215) And if these images seem to us a little too emotional it may be that it is only because, with "metaphysical extremity" as with the atomic bomb, which a mind sufficiently poetic might see as its "objective correlative", living with it for long enough dulls the heart's first indignation.

The other figure in the story who appears to transcend the limits of Marlow's vision is the "privileged man" in the high tower who receives Marlow's final report on Jim. He is the converse of Stein, another adventurer who has travelled "beyond good and evil", but who rejects Stein's answer, the acceptance of one's own heart's dream as "true", and stands for an intensely conservative, disciplinary code. We must not encourage Jim in his romantic dreams, but send him back to march in the ranks. There can be little doubt that this man stands for another aspect of Conrad's personality, and a very important one; he represents very largely the persona that Conrad himself presented to the public and helps to explain his careful dissociation of himself from Jim, merely a man he once saw passing by in Singapore.

It is certainly appropriate that before Satan appears, in the form of Captain Brown, there should be, as in the Book of Job, or Goethe's Faust, a preliminary scene in Heaven. Conrad's scene is not quite in the heavenly places—they were already banished from his world, he tells us, by the age of twelve. But if God no longer exists, then he must be re-invented as soon as possible, and housed "in the highest flat of a lofty building." From here the glance of the "privileged man" who is to study the final report on the case of Jim "could travel afar beyond the clear panes of glass, as though he were looking out of the lantern of a lighthouse" :

The slopes of the roofs glistened, the dark broken ridges succeeded each other without end like sombre, uncrested waves, and from the depths of the town under his feet ascended a confused and unceasing murmur. The spires of churches, numerous, scattered haphazard, uprose like beacons in a maze of shoals without a channel; the driving rain mingled with the falling dusk of a winter's evening; and the booming of a big

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clock on a tower striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core. He drew the heavy curtains.

The light of his shaded reading lamp slept like a sheltered pool, his footfalls made no sound on the carpet, his wandering days were over. (pp. 337-338).

Even Marlow approaches quite deferentially: "You ought to know—you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly without singeing your wings....I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce—after you've read" (p. 339).

This, we are made to feel, is the highest court to which the case can come, this is K. reaching the Castle—a wise man who has wandered the earth and returned to contemplate it from a high place above "the murmur" of the town, where the spires of an older wisdom and authority are seen as not quite valueless, perhaps, but as no more than beacons set haphazard among "shoals without a channel". And what is the judgment? Not as Stein would have said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Thou wast faithful to the dream, even unto death." No, it is "Back to the ranks! If you had not left them you would not have found yourself among those rogues on the Patna. And your adventures in Patusan—"illusory satisfaction", "unavoidable deception", "selling your soul to a brute"—"in other words, 'we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count'" (p. 339).

Thus does the oracle speak. Here, by implication, is a condemnation not only of Jim, but also of Marlow for all his doubts and sympathies, and of Stein as the romantic arch-deceiver. It is perhaps what Conrad wanted to believe, and fits his public face, but it is very important to notice that these judgements are given not only well before the end of the story, but even before the study of Marlow's last

report. The condemnations of Jim for leaving the ranks have been made by this gentleman on some previous occasion, and are merely quoted by Marlow in his introductory letter—"You said, etc.." Then Marlow adds "Perhaps you may pronounce—after you've read". There is no reason to think that this man would have changed his attitudes, and his worst forebodings have been fulfilled, but nevertheless, no pronouncement comes. We are just given Marlow's last report with all its sympathy and its ambiguity. It seems as though Conrad's moral conscience, having set up on a grand scale all the machinery for a divine pronouncement, is finally overruled by his artistic conscience, with its insistence that the Tale must speak and not the Artist.

He sees, perhaps, that his moral court would be as futile as the original court of enquiry, whose object was "not the fundamental why, but the superficial how of the affair....They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything". And perhaps for this purpose "moral facts" are of as little help as legal facts.

In this way, it is Stein who seems to have the last word. When Jim's heart-broken wife says, "He was false", Stein breaks in, "'No! no! no! My poor child...'" He patted her hand lying passively on his sleeve. "No! no! Not false! True! true! true!" (p. 350) Perhaps one can say that where the author's greatest number of exclamation marks are, there his heart is also.

And so the book ends: "Who knows? He is gone inscrutable at heart, and the poor girl is leading a sort of soundless inert life in Stein's house. Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave...' while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies."

Whether or not the man who is put in the high tower to judge the

world is meant to represent the Author's last word, or merely, like the builders of the tower of Babel, the impious pretensions of the civilised in the face of forces more elemental and divine, is of little consequence: "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale", and the tale preserves the ambiguity, the complexity, and the richness of life on a scale that puts it among the very greatest works of art.

Notes

1. Edward Garnett, (Ed.), Letters from ~~Joseph~~ Conrad, p. 46.
2. Robert E. Kuehn (Ed.), Twentieth Century Interpretations of Lord Jim, Introduction, p.8.
3. Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World, Ch. 3, and also, Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, pp. 120-150.
4. Kuehn, op. cit., "Butterflies and Beetles—Conrad's Two Truths", pp. 53-67.
5. Ibid., "On Lord Jim", p. 81.
6. Ibid., "Lord Jim: From Sketch to Novel", by Eloise Knapp Hay, pp. 22-23.
7. Ibid., p. 15
8. Eight Modern Writers, Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. XV, p. 197.
9. Essays, The Wisdom of Life, p. 63

Chance

If we come to Chance looking for that prime ingredient of the "Conradian flavour", an "outward form" to enclose the author's sensibility and a critical narrator, then the opening sentence introducing Marlow as "my host and skipper" will raise our hopes. We then meet a Mr Powell who seems destined to be the "form". His first appearance is presented with as much care and conviction as that of Jim, and contrasted with that of Marlow, as if to suggest that these are the two poles between which the current will flow.

He tells us that Marlow, "lanky, loose, quietly composed in varied shades of brown robbed of every vestige of gloss, had a narrow veiled glance, the natural bearing and the secret irritability which go together with a predisposition to congestion of the liver", while Mr Powell is "compact, broad, and sturdy of limb", and seems "extremely full of sound organs functioning vigorously all the time in order to keep up the brilliance of his colouring, the light curl of his coal-black hair and the lustre of his eyes, which asserted themselves roundly in an open manly face." (p.32).

Marlow's ectomorphic physique suits the destructive insight with which he probes the apparent generosity of the Shipping Master who gave Powell his first chance, and finds a little malice at the bottom of it, while the sound and vigorous organs of Mr Powell insist to the end that the action was simply "something uncommonly kind". This rather Nietzschean suggestion that one's moral values are at bottom, a question of biology, has the true "Conradian flavour", and his use of Powell to convey what was Conrad's own experience of the qualifying examination for a ship's officer, and his subsequent difficulties in finding a berth, suggest that once more he has found an unlikely "outward form" into which to stuff some of his own inner emotions. After which, Mr Powell sails away in his little cutter across the mud flats of Essex,

and does not appear again until more than half way through the book, and then only as a witness to help us to understand the man and the woman who have become the real protagonists, Flora de Barral and Roderick Anthony.

It could be said that Powell's instrumental role towards the end of the story, and his final winning of the widowed Flora's ^{TV} had justify the attention he is given at the beginning, but it would appear that in the actual writing, the process was more or less the other way round: that the end was engineered to suit the beginning. The whole problem of Powell's position in the story seems to be related to the fact that the beginning of Chance is probably an unfinished novella about Powell called "Explosives", which Conrad started in 1905 (Aubry, II, p. 18), and which may itself have developed from a short-story called "Dynamite" to which Conrad refers in a letter of 1898 (Garnett, p. 130).

Thus, in writing to Pinker when Chance was completed in 1913, Conrad says that the part of the novel done in 1907 "did not belong to that novel—but to some other novel which will never be written now I guess" (Aubry, II, p. 145).

In the first chapter, the reason for Powell's luck in getting a berth at such short notice on the Ferndale is that the ship has a cargo of explosives that could not be delayed, but subsequently the exciting nature of the cargo does not either materially affect the plot or receive any kind of symbolic emphasis. The moment of intimacy that it provides when Flora helps Powell to light the flare seems hardly sufficient justification for carrying so much non-productive dynamite on board; it would appear that the fact that both Mr Powell and the explosives have a role in Chance was itself rather a matter of chance.

Meanwhile, a desire to find a popular issue on which to base a novel, such as "labour, or war," to which Conrad refers in another letter written to Pinker at this time (Aubry, II, p. 49), may have led him, in the case of Chance, to seize on the problem of "woman" as one

on which the public was eager for enlightenment. "It is the sort of stuff that may have a chance with the public. All of it about a girl, and with a steady run of references to women in general all along.. It ought to go down"(Baines, p. 458).

It was the time of the Feminist movement, suffragettes, and even of generally inexplicit, references to Lesbianism, and on all this Chance has rather too much to say "in general" and "all along". It must be emphasised, however, that much of this is very well embodied in character and incident, as for instance the ruthless governess, or the inexplicitly Lesbian Mrs Fyne, her girl friends, and her relations with her unimaginative husband, and the effect of both these women on Flora is basic to the development both of the girl and of the plot. There is excellent irony in the way in which Mrs Fyne's "feminism", which justifies women in acting unscrupulously in a world dominated by men, expounded so eloquently to her girl-friends, and so necessary to be written about that it justifies her in neglecting her brother, is completely forgotten when Flora, by seeming to act upon it, injures Mrs Fyne's own interests.

Although the presence of Marlow may also appear to be rather by "chance", if Powell was to be the original object of his attention, the very fact that he is kept at the centre of the story implies that Conrad has for him some "outward form" in which a part of his own sensibility can be analysed, and if it turns out in the end to be a female form, this need not surprise us too much.

Speaking of his first meeting with Conrad, Garnett said that never before had he seen "a man so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive" (p. above). One can say that if Lord Jim does justice to the "masculine keenness", Flora de Barral is hardly less successful in demonstrating Conrad's "feminine sensitiveness". No doubt these hermaphrodite qualities help to explain both Conrad's understanding of

women, and his lack of aggressive sexuality. Thus, against the views put forward by Moser, one can say that his lack of interest in love between the sexes does not necessarily imply any dislike of women, or any inadequacy in understanding them—rather the reverse. There is probably no other male writer whose women are so entirely free from masculine traits, masculine logic, and masculine forms of idealism. In Nostromo, apart from Decoud, Mrs Gould is probably the character who has the most conviction and "inner life", and the values by which she judges her husband's great achievements to be a kind of ultimate failure are thoroughly feminine ones—or at least they were when the book was written, for since that time we have all become rather more "feminine", and consequently tend to accept Mrs Gould's judgement as ultimate, though we cannot assume that it was so for Conrad. Flora de Barral is an even greater triumph, for here we have a woman with whom Conrad ventures on a degree of sympathetic identification comparable to that given to the male protagonists of his earlier books, and who yet remains thoroughly and convincingly feminine.

Evidently Conrad is aware of possessing this quality, for he also bestows it, to a lesser degree, upon Marlow: Mrs Fyne, he says, "had scented in me that small portion of 'femininity'; that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware; which, I gratefully acknowledge, has saved me from one or two misadventures in my life either ridiculous or lamentable" (p. 146). After which Marlow goes on to discuss the difference between being feminine and being a "feminist" and so on. One feels that Conrad must have rather over-estimated the intellectual thirst of the public if he thought that these kind of digressions would make his book more popular, but as it was more popular than any of his others, perhaps, after all, the book-buying public of his day did appreciate this kind of compliment to its intellectual capacities, and it is only a more fastidious posterity that it puts out of humour.

Among the aspects of his own sensibility with which Conrad endows Flora, one can see below the surface his doubts about sexual attraction, his suspicion that it is simply a form of "illusion", one of those "achievements" that, as he says in Victory, are "accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog". If from her first meeting with Anthony, Flora could simply have forgotten herself, acted according to the stereotype, and "fallen in love", all her problems would have been solved. But hard experience, and the undermining of her self-confidence, have made her too thoughtful and clear-eyed. She has "an expression of dreamy, unfathomable candour." At the moment when Anthony has quite decidedly fallen in love with her, she is put off by "the elated light in his eyes, the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips" (p. 223), but it is not for young women to look on the face of the beloved with such "unfathomable candour"—they must close their eyes and share the madness.

Because she cannot, Flora is condemned to see things too clearly: she can see that her real problem is not that of "love", but of finding security for herself and her father. That is what she tries honestly to convey in her misunderstood, or too well understood, letter to Mrs Fyne. And when that problem is solved, her problem then becomes one of natural pride, and again it is for her, as doubtless it was for Conrad, a stronger and clearer feeling than sexual attraction.

One might have expected Captain Anthony, who is like Conrad, both a seaman and "the son of the poet", to be the one character above all others to be chosen for an act of "sympathetic identification", but presumably because Conrad is already so fully identified with Flora, this expected symbiosis never occurs. Anthony remains relatively opaque, a "case" who becomes the object of quite convincing psychological speculations by Marlow, doubtless based on Conrad's own self-knowledge, but he is never to any degree the person from whose point of view

things are seen.

As if conscious of the complications it would involve, and the rather dangerous loss of the reader's identification with Flora, if he were to change sides in the battle, Conrad takes the rather extreme measure of forbidding any contact at all between Marlow and Anthony: they never meet. It is hard to escape the feeling that this, perhaps justifiable, limitation condemns Chance to be less impressive than it could have been, just as, in Nostromo, the virtual limitation of author-identification to the one figure of Decoud has led to the charge that the other characters are a little "hollow".

Thus, with Powell out of the way, and Anthony and Marlow kept apart, the one outward form on which Marlow is left to concentrate is Flora. While it cannot be denied that she promises to be more interesting than the "open manly face" of Mr Powell, there is the difficulty that she cannot always provide Marlow with enough to do. Nevertheless, there develops between Marlow and Flora a relationship very much like that between Marlow and Lord Jim, and with almost equal success. Only twice do they meet, but the first occasion, on which Marlow happens to save her from suicide, establishes a bond between them very much like that which comes in the courtroom between Marlow and Jim, and enables Marlow's subsequent meeting with Flora outside the hotel in which Anthony and Fyne are arguing to develop into the same kind of long, exciting, and subtly revealing confrontation as occurs between Marlow and Jim, inside a hotel, in chapter seven of Lord Jim.

It is in this chapter (.I, 7) that the whole essence of the relationship between Flora and Anthony is conveyed, and Flora's soul revealed in a delicate, but unsentimental way that ensures, as with Lord Jim, that the reader can never again be indifferent to her fate. She also is "under a cloud"—"that woman under a cloud, in a manner of speaking. For under a cloud Flora de Barral was fated to be, even

at sea".

Once again that necessity of dealing with his characters in the same way that he has had to deal with most of the real people in his life—as fellow members of his crew or fellow guests in a hotel, looking for the significant gesture, the fleeting light in an eye, the faded picture brought out of a wallet, serves him well—an unavoidable limitation turned into an artistic triumph.

If this chapter is less successful than its equivalent in Lord Jim or if that is arguable, at least, if the book as a whole is less successful, it would seem that it is not only because Flora's "problem" could not quite be Conrad's own in the way that Jim's was, but also because there is not so much direct action, not so much to be talked about, and consequently Conrad is tempted to fill up the space with all sorts of pauses, interjections, and philosophical chatter between Marlow and the "I" of the book.

It is a significant moment when Marlow refers to the plot as "this affair of the purloined brother, as I had named it to myself" (p.148). There is more than a suggestion of Holmes and Watson in the whole method of narration, and one fears that Conrad has been seeking instruction on how to be popular in dangerous directions. Typical of the tone is the comment by his "Dr Watson" on Marlow's method: "You are the expert in the psychological wilderness. This is like one of those Redskin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always liked such stories, Go on." (p. 311). This is both a colourful summary of Conrad's methods, and also a vulgarisation of them.

However, the cheapening effect of much of the chat between "I"

and Marlow is only one aspect of the larger problem of the multiplicity of narrators through which the facts struggle to reach us. Marlow is not only denied any direct access to Powell, but also to de Barral, and for much of the time to Flora herself. Most of what we learn about them is screened, either through Powell, or the two Fynes, all three of whom are expressly shown to be incapable of understanding. This "game of multiplying narrators" as Guérard has called it (pp. 261-262), may hardly be noticed by the ordinary reader, but it has attracted considerable critical attention, much of which, taking its cue from Henry James has gone off in what appears to be the wrong direction.

James' essay on "The New Novel" in Notes on Novelists is, of course, remarkable for its wit and ingenuity, but perhaps equally remarkable for its fundamental misunderstanding of what Conrad's real difficulties were. He seems to see Conrad as a kind of god-like being who rejoices so greatly in his powers of omniscience that he deliberately indulges in the "game of multiplying narrators" in order to make things more difficult for himself, to provide a literary spectacle such that the combined imagery of the Trojan War and the Epistles of St Paul are hardly sufficient to convey it: "a drama in which his own system and his combined eccentricities of recital represent the protagonist in face of powers leagued against it, and of which the denouement gives us the system fighting back in triumph, though with its back desperately to the wall, and laying the powers piled up at its feet. This frankly has been our spectacle, our suspense and thrill".

More specifically, of the multiple narration, James says that it is like "the successive members of a cue from one to the other of which the sense and interest of the subject have to be passed on together, in the manner of the buckets of water for the improvised extinction of a fire, before reaching our apprehension: all with whatever result, to

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this apprehension, of a quantity to be allowed for as spilt by the way." Here again, James speaks as though Conrad was beginning with a bucketful of "omniscience" about each character—that was perhaps, the way that James felt before he began—and with reckless bravery, allowing some to be spilt on the way, whereas it is surely obvious enough that Conrad's problem was that he felt, in regard to Anthony, Flora, or de Barral, that he had very little in the bucket. Consequently, he finds himself with a kind of instinctive cunning, setting up the spilling apparatus in order to justify the lack of water reaching the fire. And having set up this elaborate system, a system of defence rather than attack, he sometimes finds it a little too restrictive, so he allows Marlow to sally out and speculate as to what must have been going on in people's minds, or even happening inside closed doors. Sometimes he tells us that it is speculation, and sometimes he does not bother, no doubt trusting that the interested reader, unless he is a critic, would hardly be likely to complain.

Conrad certainly knows something about Fyne, his wife, his walking boots, and his dog, and rather a lot of our time is spent in their company—their originals had probably been Conrad's neighbours somewhere in Kent. They are done with a whimsical humour that is very "English"—since the time of Wells' remark Conrad has at least learned to tackle this (see p. above), but not really to integrate it as part of his artistic vision. The Fynes belong to the spiritual "Switzerland" of Under Western Eyes rather than those wilder shores where for Conrad the real action lies, but in this respect they make a good foil for Flora's extremity, and their various quirks, their early well-intentioned interferences, and their later unconsciously malicious ones, are all essential to the development of the story.

Conrad's claws are glimpsed only in relation to the Governess and Flora's lower middle-class relatives, but though they may be, as

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he would put it, "fair game", they are hardly adequate as prey for the old lion. One feels that if only Anthony could have been chosen ~~for~~ as the "outward form" the self-vivisectional knife might have gleamed to some purpose, but perhaps in relation to "love" Conrad did not have enough spiritual innards to make the operation interesting—it never appears to have struck him with the force of an existential problem. Wherever they appear—early in The Outcast of the Islands, or late, in The Planter of Malata, his attempts at depicting "passion" are the most derivative, and dated, part of his work.

Even so, he can be good at the distant view, the outer edges of love, ~~as it were~~ as for instance, in Chance—"it is a fact that in every man (not in every woman) there lives a lover", a lover who is called out in all his potentialities often by the most insignificant little things—as long as they come at the psychological moment: the glimpse of a face at an unusual angle, an evanescent attitude, the curve of a cheek often looked at before, perhaps, but then, at the moment charged with astonishing significance." (p. 217).

Judging from his essay on James in Notes on Life and Letters, probably the best of his few pieces of literary criticism, Conrad had a better understanding of James than James did of Conrad. It was Conrad who called James "the historian of fine consciences" (p.17), and certainly in this respect Chance is the most Jamesian of his books. If in some ways it seems by comparison, a little coarse-grained, this may be partly due to the fact that it is a little nearer to "real life", at least in the sense that it does not deal with people of whom it is a necessary presupposition that they have to offer, or need in order to blossom, at least a million dollars.

It also seems that with his deliberate renunciation of omniscience, Conrad can suggest depths that James closes off with a cobweb of casuistry which saves him from ever having to question his own fine, but

limited bourgeois values. Whereas in James the more exquisite of the fine consciences appear to represent the author's own ultimate values, those of Flora and Anthony are not the given values of Conrad's book, but the subjects of its analysis. Conrad is a decomposer of consciences rather than a historian of them, and even if in Chance the consciences, and the presentation of them, do not have the subtle artistry of James, the analysis of what remains in the buckets has its own interest, rather different from the distillation in the golden bowl.

There is a general critical opinion that the structure and the time-shifts in Chance, though they resemble those of Lord Jim, do not reach the same level of meaning and art. Even if this be true, it can hardly be denied that they serve very adequately to achieve what was probably Conrad's main intention, to turn the screw, successively, on Flora's plight up to that point in chapter four of the second part, where she comes on board the ship to realise that she is again, and irrevocably, the object of pity, and never to be loved:

They went on board in silence, and it was after showing her round and when they had returned to the saloon that he assailed her in his fiery, masterful fashion. At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody could love her. (p. 335)

This is the emotional climax of the book, and in its quiet way, one of the most moving moments in all literature. It has the true quality of tragedy, because it has arisen not from any obvious conflict of good and evil, but from the conflict of high ideals in a man and fine sensibility in a woman. We know that Flora has been trapped like this because of her combination of womanly instinct, which encourages her,

in a desperate situation, to trust in Anthony, and her honesty, which caused her to write to Mrs Fyne explaining an action for which the latter's feminist arguments had appeared to provide the moral justification.

Anthony also has a fine conscience, though hardly to that exaggerated degree that is sometimes suggested. The arguments presented to him by Fyne, as a result of his knowledge of Flora's letter, are such that any decent man of Anthony's upbringing would be more or less bound to act in the way that he did. When Anthony becomes the object of Marlow's psychological investigation—which is another way of saying Conrad's self-investigation—we are made aware that as with Lord Jim, "his fine sensibilities" represent "a sort of sublimated, idealized selfishness". His idealistic behaviour can be seen as the sublimation of strong aggressive and sexual impulses: he is "intoxicated with pity and tenderness... for you know that love and desire take many disguises". But this is simply Conrad's view of the subtle bio-chemical basis of morality; it should not be interpreted as if it were some kind of moral criticism of Anthony, as though some other, better, man could have had these ideals without any physical substance out of which to generate them—as if non-alcoholic whisky were superior to the genuine beverage. Conrad's treatment of his platonic attitudes must be seen primarily, not as a criticism of Anthony as an individual, but as an attempted analysis of this whole aspect of social life, almost a critique of Plato himself.

It is no doubt true that any author who decomposes the ideals of his heroes and heroines in this way runs the risk of cooling the reader's emotions, but that is a criticism of the reader's naivete rather than of the author's art, a criticism that Conrad himself has already made, very early, through the smiles and tears of Kayerts and Carlier, in the passage quoted above (p.). Things truly human are not less moving for being, in the sense of Nietzsche's title, "human, all too human".

Having reached its tragic climax in Flora's joyless marriage, the book runs on quickly, in continuous action, to its end. Not too quickly, but perhaps a little crudely. There may be a "Dickensian" shallowness about de Barral—Conrad rather gives it away in one place by describing scenes with de Barral and his daughter as "pictures from Dickens—pregnant with pathos" (p. 162). But he is consistently presented, and his shallowness is an essential ingredient of Flora's tragedy; if she could have got more from her father, she would have needed Anthony less; her sacrifice might have been bearable if her father had been worthy of it.

The shallowness can also be seen as consistent with Conrad's view of high finance, reflected in the fate of The Tropical Belt Coal Company in Victory and the Travancore and Deccan Banking Corporation in The End of the Tether. He had some bitter experience, not only in losses of his own, but in attempting to help friends, experience that no doubt is used to provide the convincing vignette of the high-class money-lender in Chance. Moreover, de Barral is given his due share of sympathy—he is presented as being as much a victim of the system as those who entrusted him with their savings, and provides the occasion for an eloquent attack on the prison system that is one of the better of the books rather frequent digressions (pp. 352-355).

The mechanics of Powell's discovery of the poison plot may creak with sounds that strain our credulity, but his developing relationship with Flora is done with delicacy, and the final picture of their autumnal romance is greatly helped by that "chance" acquaintanceship with Powell that we have made in the opening chapter. It would be even more satisfying if it had not involved so arbitrary a disposal of Anthony.

It can hardly be argued that by ending the book at its tragic climax, and leaving Flora and Anthony eternally estranged, the story would have been strengthened. An artificially unhappy ending is no better than an artificially happy one. We already know enough about

them to know that fundamentally they are well matched, and capable of providing each other with happiness: the misunderstanding is of a kind that must, inevitably, find a resolution.

On the other hand, the suggestion has also been made that the instinctive powers of eros would have brought two such people into each others arms rather more quickly than Conrad allows, but this is a matter of autre temps, autre moeurs, and of a man, "the son of the poet", in whom the "ideal" has more than usual power over the forces of nature. In a world where virile men can still choose monasteries there is no reason to regard Anthony and Flora as anything less than the adequate possessors of "fine consciences", and if such fine consciences are open to criticism, Conrad has not neglected that either. There is for him no ultimate value in that kind of "renunciation" before which James always seems rather too ready to go on his knees.

As to why Anthony then has to die in so arbitrary a manner—well, there we return to the problem of Mr Powell. Having come in by chance, along with a cargo of explosives, how else to dispose of him but by "chance", and where else but into the arms of that dear lady about whom he has always been so "enthusiastic"? At least it is consistent with Conrad's general view that in this world the prizes go to those who are not cursed with intellect and imagination, who have "sound organs functioning vigourously" to keep up the curl of their hair and the lustre of their eyes in "an open manly face".

One can hardly defend the conclusion of Chance: in view of the quality of much that goes before, one can only deeply regret it. It must be seen as one of those rather shocking failures of discrimination that Conrad sometimes makes, the price perhaps of working in isolation, and pressed by financial need. That he himself really knew better is evidenced by his praise for James' way of concluding things— "a certain lack of finality, especially startling when contrasted with

the usual methods of solution by rewards and punishments, by crowned love, by fortune, by a broken leg or a sudden death."(p. 18). It is fairly obviously a simple desire for popularity, enforced by the size of his debts, that causes Conrad, to use a whole cornucopia of what he calls "the usual methods".

The very title of the book, and the many sighs, ejaculations and pseudo-philosophical digressions put in to support it provide a comparable lapse of taste. As Leavis says, "Chance plays no notably different part from that it must play in any story offering a novelist a study of human nature" (p. 245).

When Chance was completed Conrad wrote to his agent Pinker, "Its the biggest piece of work I've done since Lord Jim. As to what it is I am very confident. As to what will happen to it when launched-- I am much less confident. And its a pity. One doesn't do a trick like that twice--and I am not growing younger--alas! It will vanish in the ruck" (Aubry, II, p. 145). He needed not to worry: Chance was well received, not only by the critics, but by the public. It was his first really popular book, and finally turned the tide of his financial troubles. There is something of his own kind of irony in the fact that it also marked the virtual end of his creative life.

As the success began to become apparent, Conrad wrote to Galsworthy, "Chance had a tremendous press. How I would have felt about it ten or eight years ago I can't say. Now I can't even pretend I am elated. If I had Nostromo, The Nigger, Lord Jim, in my desk or only in my head I would feel differently no doubt" (Aubry, II, p. 152). With these words Conrad himself has fairly accurately "placed" the book in relation to his best work. Coming as it does, after such books rather than before them, it can be seen only as a point, still high, on the descending side of a parabola. Ease, Anglo-Saxon humour, and technical competence cannot balance a lack of compulsive energy that seems

to indicate that Conrad has mined out the best ore of his emotionally weighted experience.

It is not so much that he has lost his interest in les valeurs idéales and their conflict with the stubborn chaos of "reality", as that he has apparently used up those specific instances that had for him the nature of a personal problem. There are no longer unexpressed aspects of his own sensibility for which he must seek some "outward form" in which to bring them into court for Marlovian interrogation. Instead of being "found" by some problem that forces him to drop everything else and get it written out, he is now in the position of searching for subjects. Thus, although it has been said that in his later books, Conrad chose the wrong subjects, and in particular, convincingly argued by Moser that in attempting to deal with love between the sexes, he was bound to fail, it would appear that there being no more "subjects" that could choose him with the inescapable grip of an inner compulsion, any subject that he chose was bound to be relatively "wrong". At the same time age was wearying him, not only carrying him further away from that adventurous life that provides the solid background for his earlier achievements, but even depriving him of the kind of intellectual energy needed to assimilate and exploit the experience of others in the way that he did with Nostromo or Under Western Eyes.

3 Ideals and Appearances

Typhoon

After Lord Jim it was to be several years before Conrad produced his next major work, Nostramo, but in the shorter tales that he wrote in this period, though the complex analysis is absent, the ferment of his philosophical mind gives them depths and meanings that echo beyond the immediate context and reflect his continuing concerns. "Typhoon was begun in September 1900, a month or so after the completion of Lord Jim, and comes as a no doubt necessary relaxation, "my first attempt at treating a subject jocularly so to speak". It finds Conrad relaxed, but at the height of his powers. As Guerard says, it "requires no elaborate interpreting. But it is the work of a true professional, professional seaman and professional writer both" (p. 294).

In Lord Jim Conrad had plenty to say about "the vagaries of intelligence and the perverseness of nerves": imagination is "the enemy of men, the father of all terrors", ideas are "tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance." Happy then, the man that lacks them! Captain McWhirr of the Nan Shan is the victim of no such vagaries; the back-door of his mind is securely locked, and there is nothing that can subtract from his solid substance, "so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs". And "having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself, and for the very same cause he was not in the least conceited" (p. 4).

Admiration, as well as imagination was necessary to deal so adequ-

ately with a man as unimaginative as MacWhirr, and it is evident that admiration, even envy was there. A couple of years before, Conrad had written to Garnett that his ambition for his son Borys was to make a bargeman of him, "strong, knowing his business and thinking of nothing. That is the life my dear fellow. Thinking of nothing! O! bliss", and in more philosophical style to Cunninghame Graham, "...if only we could get rid of consciousness. What makes mankind tragic is not that they are victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it." This is of course one of Schopenhauer's favourite themes.

Thus, although it is generally true, as noted above (p.) that it is the Don Quixotes rather than the Sancho Panzas with whom he chose to wrestle, we can see that in between his bouts of wrestling he liked to relax a little with simple cheerful people, of whom Captain MacWhirr is perhaps the most winning example.

He may not be a typical Conrad ~~hero~~ subject, but nevertheless he is a minor "hero of the spirit" and not a mere "beetle": his voice saying "All right" above "the black wastes of the gale" is "the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution, and purpose". As Guerard says, "He is the unconscious servant and product of a certain training and tradition" (p. 296), seed that has been planted in good soil. He has a soundness and solidity that holds fast to such qualities of the "ideal" as his limited mind has absorbed, and a fundamental decency that is well conveyed by his unsentimental, all-but inarticulate feeling about the disturbance among the coolies—that "you can't have fighting board ship". As he says when Jukes comes back, "Had to do what's fair by them", even though his idea of what's fair by them had been outraged by Juke's suggestion that they could be regarded as "passengers".

The story ends with Jukes' remark that "he got out of it very well for such a stupid man", and one feels that he would not have got into

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it at all if it had not been that Conrad, having decided to take up a remembered anecdote, and meditating on the mindless fury of the storm, had suddenly seen the appropriateness of confronting it with the all-but mindless force of Captain MacWhirr: "Both the typhoon and Captain MacWhirr presented themselves to me as the necessities of the deep conviction with which I approached the subject of the story. It was their opportunity" (p. vi). Without this opportunity, it would have been the fate of MacWhirr "to sink gently into a placid grave ignorant of life to the last... There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate—or thus disdained by destiny or the sea" (p. 19), or less cosmically stated, to die in some attic of the author's mind. But the cosmic statement is worthy of notice, for it sums up an important aspect of the author's philosophy—that it is better to be put to the terrible test than to be "disdained by destiny".

MacWhirr takes his name, though not, it would appear, his ignorance, from the captain of the Highland Forest on the voyage from Amsterdam that Conrad describes in The Mirror of the Sea (pp. 48-56). His actual nature seems to be composite, or perhaps one should say, cumulative: to the victims of imagination and intellect, the completely unimaginative man has great fascination, and Conrad has obviously studied him. His remarks in the Author's Note suggest that MacWhirr is based not on one particular man, but on a life-time's observation of the type—he "is not an acquaintance of a few hours, or a few weeks, or a few months. He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life. Conscious invention had little to do with him" (p. vi).

The essential quality of the man, both his virtues and his limitations are brilliantly conveyed in his inspection of the new ship before the voyage begins. To the panorama of his future fortune painted by the junior partner, MacWhirr "mumbles an acknowledgement" while "his eyes happening at the moment to be at rest upon the lock of the cabin door, he walked up to it, full of purpose, and began to rattle the handle vigorously, while he observed, in his low earnest voice, 'You can't

trust the workmen nowadays. A brand-new lock, and it won't act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?" (p. 8). The junior partner doesn't think much of MacWhirr, but his uncle gives him a quick rebuke and sends for the man who put on the lock.

If Typhoon can be seen, in a sense, as a critique of the Imagination, it is also a remarkably balanced one. There is no sentimentalising, or romanticising, of its absence in MacWhirr. If it is true that "You don't find everything in books", it is equally plain that you can find some things in books, including the way to circumvent a typhoon. The unimaginative man may be useful in action, but it is also suggested that he will probably fail to make a success in marriage, or to establish a human relationship with his crew. The "bliss" has its price.

Even so, such a critique is a remarkable thing to come from a great novelist, for imagination being the distinctive quality of the artist, his natural tendency is to elevate it, to make it the queen of human qualities and mark of the elite. For the religious artist, it is seen as man's most God-like attribute, while for the unbeliever it becomes god, the source of all creation—such has been a popular belief of the creative artist from the eighteenth century onwards.

But "you don't find everything in books", and in Typhoon, though there is some brilliant humour at the expense of MacWhirr, such as in the exchanges with Jukes about the Siamese flag, its subtler irony is weighted not so much against him as for him. To the degree that he is more imaginative, Jukes is that much less of a seaman, and after listening to him for a while, our sympathy is more with MacWhirr when he says,

"Was that you talking just now in the port alleyway?"

"Yes, sir."

"With the third engineer?"

"Yes, sir."

And when the Nan Shan comes into Fu Chau with "the breeze chasing her smoke far ahead", and all her coolies, and the dollars too, it is

not so much the Captain as the Intellect and the Imagination that have been made to look a little absurd.

Falk

Conrad followed Typhoon with Falk, a story of similar length, but very different in mood and atmosphere. It has more ideas in it, but it lacks the poetic unity and sustained suspense of Typhoon. It deals again with a relatively simple man, of a more interesting type than MacWhirr, but one that gives the impression of a character created rather than as with MacWhirr, a character observed. Falk has not been "the product of twenty years" of Conrad's "own life", and so he cannot present him with quite the same warmth and conviction.

If there is something of the Bulldog Breed in MacWhirr's silent obstinacy, he is nevertheless a highly domesticated animal. The son of a small shopkeeper, he carries with him to the China Seas the virtues and the limitations of his background. The Scandinavian Falk has a richer provenance. He comes of "good parentage" in his native town, and is made chief-mate of the first iron ship to be built there, launched by the Burgomaster, as once they might have launched a piratical long-boat. The descendant of Vikings, he has their physical strength and carries within him something of their elemental force. Under extreme conditions, he survived because he is "the best man" in terms of fitness for survival. But he is also the product of many generations of civilisation, and it is significant that Conrad gives him the baptismal name of "Christian". His baptismal nature is as real, if not in the end as strong, as his primitive nature, and exacts its full price. For anyone familiar with the coming of Christianity to the Norsemen, as it is pictured in Njal's Saga, Falk provides a convincing footnote.

It was Christian Falk's misfortune to have to reassert the most primitive virtues, and to survive by eating human flesh, after an attack by the second-best man among the survivors. The wound to his con-

science forces him into isolation, and finds outward expression in the gesture by which "he would, now and again, draw the palms of both his hands down his face, giving at the same time a slight, almost imperceptible shudder". He makes his living as the owner of a tug, living as a vegetarian, and eating alone on board his ship behind closed shutters.

When he meets the girl who seems destined to be his natural mate, his desire simply to carry her off finds itself trapped not only by the external conventions of society, most adequately represented by her ultra-respectable relatives, but also by their inner ally in his conscience, which demands that he must first make known the truth about his past, a confession they are quite unfitted to receive.

Conrad finds an excellent symbol for this combination of animal force and human complexity: "He reminded me somehow of an engraving in a little book I had as a boy, which represented centaurs at a stream, and there was one especially, in the foreground, prancing bow and arrows in hand, with regular severe features and an immense curled wavy beard flowing down his breast" (p. 162). Not the satyr, but the centaur, agile, war-like, half-civilised, "a composite creature", which Conrad translates from man-horse to man-boat: "There was the white-clad man's body, and the rich brown patch of hair, and nothing below the waist but the thwart-ship white lines of the bridge-screens, that led the eye to the sharp white lines of the bows cleaving the muddy water of the river. Separated from his boat, to me at least he seemed incomplete. The tug herself without his head and torso on the bridge looked mutilated as it were" (p. 162). The boat, as bodily extension of Falk, can be seen as both weapon, lovingly painted and cared for, and also as phallic symbol, as Falk steams aggressively on the trail of Hermann's ship—his nature, his history and his situation are brilliantly conveyed by this one wholly realistic image.

The conflict is also conveyed by the contrast between Falk's physique—"with one muscular arm thrown ~~back~~ over the back of the chair, and his big shapely legs, in very tight white trousers, extended far out and ending in a pair of black shoes as roomy as punts"—and his bearded ascetic face, the true aspect of which the narrator appreciates only towards the end of the story: "I discovered this through the bush of hair, as you may detect the gnarled shape of a tree trunk in a dense undergrowth. These overgrown cheeks were sunken. It was an anchorite's bony head fitted with a Capuchin's beard and adjusted to a herculean body" (p. 201)

The girl, who set one "musing in the strain of pagan piety", who "could have stood for an allegoric statue of the Earth", matches Falk both in her primitive power, and in the convincingly realistic way that she is fitted into the homely life of Hermann's ship, an effect that is powerfully aided by the way in which, without any apparent contrivance, she never has occasion to speak. As Conrad mentions in the Author's Note, this touch of instinctive genius was actually used by one editor as his reason for rejecting the story.

With his imagery already adequately making his point, almost to the verge of appearing a little contrived, it is unfortunate that Conrad is tempted to underline it with philosophical comments that, if anything, tend to blunt it. In reading the tale we hardly feel that for Falk "self-preservation was his only concern", nor does he seem so separated from the rest of us that one can say, "in us the instinct serves a complex conception, and in him this instinct existed alone", or that his desire for Hermann's niece is no more than "the obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need, the first shoot of that tree bearing now for a mature mankind the flower and the fruit, the infinite gradation in shades and flavour of our discriminating love" (p. 224). Such comments show that Conrad is well aware of the kind of iss-

ues with which he is dealing, but do less than justice to the subtlety and sympathy with which Falk is actually presented. He has some of the bitter-sweet fruits of les valeurs idéales as well as the soil for their seeds, and it is this that makes him interesting.

It is true of course that these less than adequate comments are made by the narrator, "a man of more than fifty, that had commanded ships for more than a quarter of a century", rather than by the author as author, but it seems unlikely that there was any such conscious distinction in Conrad's mind between his own opinions and those of the narrator. The age of the latter is presumably emphasised in order to justify his own indifference to the girl, which is a necessary part of the plot.

There is one place in Typhoon also where Conrad makes a comparable underestimate of his own powers. His presentation of MacWhirr's unimaginative nature is such that it adequately explains, rather than leaves as a mystery, his finding his way to distant seas, for it is only to the imaginative that such a course presents either fascination or terror. But as if he doubts the adequacy of his own conception, Conrad adds a piece of supernatural prestidigitation, "the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt of directions" (pp. 4-5).

Of the real-life sources for Falk little is known apart from what Conrad himself says in the Author's Note, which confirms that like "The Secret Sharer" and The Shadow Line, it is based on his trip to take command of the Otago at Bangkok in 1888. The legacy of administrative confusion, an empty violin case, and a photograph of himself with "a female in strange draperies" left by the former captain provide a link with The Shadow Line and the abominable Schomberg makes

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unless the second of his several appearances.

In Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him Jessie Conrad mentions that the story of the starving men on Falk's drifting ship was "culled from a short paragraph in a newspaper which had some relation to an episode known to Conrad many years before, while he was at sea" (p. 118). This would seem to indicate that even if the outward appearance and some of the attributes of Falk are based on a tugboat owner with whom Conrad had dealings in Bangkok, the cannibalistic episode came from elsewhere, so that its psychological effects, the whole inner nature of Falk, are, as with the outward forms that Conrad used for Jim or Kurtz, the author's own creation. It can be seen as another aspect of his concern with les valeurs idéales, traced from "seeds in the soil of unconscious need" to their "flower and fruit and infinite gradation in shades and flavour".

Amy Foster

"Amy Foster", a short story written immediately after Falk, tells of the heart-break of a man thrown ashore in a strange land under the most extreme conditions of shock and mental isolation. The theme was not a new one, but the extremity of the case gives it great power, and the fact that the alien land that treats the intruder so cruelly is England strengthens the shock for the English reader.

The story has been seen, no doubt correctly, as a hyperbolic expression of Conrad's feelings towards England, and his marriage, which helps to balance, though it does not of course annul, the expressions of affection that he made at other times. As Leo Gurko says in Conrad, Giant in Exile, it "should put an end ~~at~~ once and for all to the notion that Conrad was an uncritical Anglophile. The England that emerges here is as dour, unfeeling and barren a society as any ~~one~~ on earth" (p. 237). What is for Yanko Gocrall an abiding and unbearable condition may have been for Conrad a recurrent mood, but hardly a dominant one.

Whatever therapeutic value it may have had for the author, the job is not done hastily. The minor characters are drawn with care and conviction as well as a little cruelty, and there are places where the descriptions of the countryside are excellent. The large landscapes with lonely figures against the skyline may owe something to Hardy, whom Conrad is known to have read. He was intrigued by the way that Hardy could write books that were both good and popular, while he could only write books that were good.

The central character, Yanko, is not someone with whom Conrad could identify in any real depth—he is a light-footed and delicate Sancho Panza rather than a Quixotic carrier of les valeurs idéales, and he seems to be somewhat hurriedly disposed of in the last few pages. The story was placed with the Illustrated London News, which one can see also as a kind of critical "placing" of it. For a writer of Conrad's depth a mere criticism of England's "vices" is too easy; it was the more disturbing task of criticising our "virtues" to which he was really called.

Tomorrow

Conrad's fourth and final contribution to the Typhoon volume is "Tomorrow", a short story of psychological power that haunts the memory. That men cannot live without hope, and that very probably their hopes will be betrayed—this is an essential element of the human state, a universal pathos that needs only a turn of the screw to become pathological. To live at all, we must have the promise of "tomorrow", and to shift our attention to an eternal "tomorrow" that can no longer come to terms with today is an aberration we can all too easily understand—the turning of the screw instantly touches a nerve. That the one we long for to fulfil our tomorrow can, when he comes, appear as the enemy who threatens to take away our hope, is another universal aspect

of the theme: if we betray the "messiah" it is often because he seems to betray us.

The story illustrates Conrad's essentially "classical" view of hope. Christianity, with its therapeutic cheerfulness and its genius for "turning the world upside down", made of hope a great virtue, sustained by faith and energised by love, but for Conrad, as for the ancient Greeks, it is more in the nature of a vice. The story shows an unfulfilled hope turned to madness, an almost reasonable hope, and an intelligible madness that we cannot but feel almost as a personal threat, a threat that is made more real and effective by being seen to spread next-door to the very sane and sensible daughter of the madman's landlord. It spreads inevitably because the girl, trapped in a situation that is truly hopeless, still cannot live without hope, and is thereby rendered defenceless against the contagion. Melville, haunted by a comparable vision, made a full-length fantasia, The Confidence Man, out of essentially similar psychic material: Conrad, as always, chooses the way of "realism". The sail-cloth garments that symbolise the provisional character of Captain Hagberd's existence in the world of "today" are a good example of Conrad's talent for providing a poetic image without going beyond the bounds of a credible "reality".

Conrad was collaborating with Ford in writing Romance at this time, and it seems that Ford at least provided something of the son, Harry, of whom Conrad remarks in a letter to Ford, "All your suggestion and absolutely my¹ conception." How, on this basis, one might apportion the blame is not very clear, but in terms of realism, Harry is probably the least successful figure. His words adequately convey his "significance", but his style of speech hardly seems to match his nature and rank, more particularly in his lecture on the Gambucinos—he is nothing like as memorable or convincing as Henry in Lawrence's story, "The Fox". It is the kind of tale about the lower middle-class that Lawrence obviously could

could have done with more ease and conviction, though in the matter of hope, as a kind of Christian heretic he could probably never have slammed the door in its face quite as firmly as Conrad does.

With its minimum of characters, its unity of time and simplicity of place—everything, virtually, happens in a couple of days, and in the gardens of a pair of semi-detached cottages—the story is almost a ready-made play, and two years later, in 1903, Conrad was persuaded to turn it into a one-act play, renamed One Day More. The Stage Society gave three performances in London, and Conrad wrote to Galsworthy, "I've heard that some papers praised it and some ran it down. On tuesday when we went (like the imbeciles that we are) there was some clapping but obviously the very smart audience did not catch on. And no wonder! On the other hand the celebrated 'man of the hour' G. B. Shaw was ecstatic and enthusiastic. 'Dramatist!' says he."²

Conrad had no intention of fulfilling Shaw's prophecy. He seems³ to have felt an intense antipathy towards both stage and cinema, and they are fundamentally unsuited to the kind of subtle, long-winded and very literary analysis that gives his best books their distinctive flavour. It may be that he saw the stage as a kind of temptation, for one notices that when he writes simple stories of adventure such as Gaspar Ruiz or "Because of the Dollars" they tend to become rather stagey and "powerful", like scripts for old-time Hollywood movies.

Notes

1. Undated letter, quoted Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography, p. 325.
2. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II, p. 21.
3. Baines, op. cit., pp. 349-350.

The End of the Tether

In July 1900 Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham, "Youth, Heart of Darkness and some story of the same kind which I shall write before long are to form a vol of Tales which (unless forbidden) it is my intention to dedicate to you".¹ The attempt to write this third story of novella length, to be serialised in Blackwood's Magazine, and then published by them in book form resulted, first of all in a return to Lord Jim, but "Lord Jim" became Lord Jim, so Conrad began again with Typhoon, but he had just appointed Pinker as his literary agent, and Pinker sold it elsewhere, so immediately he wrote another novella, Falk, but this was not acceptable to Blackwood. Thus it was not until 1902, after all the stories collected in the Typhoon volume had been written, that Conrad finally returned to producing a short novel for Blackwood--The End of the Tether.

By this time he had also reached the end of Blackwood's tether. As Baines has shown, their relationship was based on a fundamental misunderstanding, by Blackwood, of the nature of Conrad's art, so that at the end both sides felt hard done by. Blackwood had lost money on Conrad, so far, and deeply offended him by telling him so, when, with the first instalment of the new story, he asked for a further advance. It was the last story he sent them. (Baines, pp. 339-344).

Probably for these reasons, The End of the Tether is not in fact quite "of the same kind" as the other two in the volume Youth. The essential difference is that it lacks the presence of Marlow, and as we have seen, at least at this stage of Conrad's career, the absence of Marlow implies that we shall be kept largely on the "outside" of the story's main character, we shall not be given an aspect of the author's own sensibility, and an analysis of it. Blackwood liked his writers to spill some blood, but he did not particularly want them to write in their own.

Even though it is not a tale that offers us any subtle analysis, it has its own kind of depth and drama; it suits Conrad's talents and makes good use of his nautical experience. As with the crew of the Nan Shan in Typhoon, the officers of the Sofala are acutely observed, and as the course of the ship is made to follow that of the Vidar, on which Conrad had experienced the routine of regular trips round the Malay archipelago, the background is always convincing. It is in this sense that he can say in the Author's Note that this story, like the other two, in the volume, is "the product of experience".

If its protagonist, Whalley, is also "the product of experience", it is in the sense in which Conrad could say that Captain MacWhirr was "the product of twenty years of life." Though Whalley may be, like MacWhirr, something of a composite, constructed from contact with a number of individuals of the same general type, he is no less authentic, though possibly, for the purposes of art, a little idealised. He probably owes quite a little to the Captain Paterson, called "Giles" in The Shadow Line, which Conrad claimed to be a portrait from life (p. ; below). He embodies more completely than any other of Conrad's characters the seaman's ideal, and nowhere else is this ideal brought into so harsh a conflict with nature.

Indeed, we can see that to gain the full effect of Whalley's one physical disability, incipient blindness, and his one irreconcilable heart's desire, the welfare of his daughter, it was necessary to make him in all other respects the perfect seaman. If, nevertheless, he remains convincing as a character, it is because Conrad also shows how the attainment of this perfection has involved corresponding limitations. The ideal captain, by keeping a distance between himself and those below him, isolates himself from any possibility of receiving aid and comfort in his own need. Whalley is honest, brave, and competent, with a simple unthinking acceptance of health, marital happiness and material

success. This is reflected in his complacent piety: God is in his heaven, men are not evil, and nothing very much is wrong with the world--and yet he can be driven by strong instinctive affection to a betrayal of that fundamental "fidelity" on which his whole life has been built.

Despite its comparative thinness in characters and incident, this book is, surprisingly, the longest of Conrad's novellas, almost half as long again as Heart of Darkness. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Blackwood's asked for at least thirty thousand words to make up the volume in which it was to appear. Even so, the slower movement and the dignified style seem to match its theme, and throughout the story the suspense is brilliantly sustained.

The denouement depends on both the other leading members of the crew of Whalley's ship having their own good reasons for not divulging, or even admitting to each other, their discovery of the Captain's blindness--no one, perhaps even not even the author, knows whether the Malay serang has also guessed--and in this way the tension is kept up right to the end of the story. It is perhaps the best example of Conrad's technical skill as a story-teller, a skill that usually, for deeper reasons he disdains fully to exploit.

A first hint of the story's secret is given in the opening paragraph--"The sunrays fell violently upon the calm sea--seemed to shatter themselves upon an adamantine surface into sparkling dust, into a dazzling vapour of light that blinded the eye and wearied the brain with its unsteady brightness", but it is not until the penultimate of the story's fourteen chapters that the reader is told, in so many words, that Whalley is almost blind. We are allowed to make our own gradual discovery in the same way as the other white men on the ship, an effect of the kind that requires a great deal of the art that conceals art. And even after the full discovery, we are kept in sharp suspense as to the outcome.

At its deeper level, the book invites comparison with Greek tragedy in its dramatisation of a conflict between instinctive love and social law, and it also carries obvious Biblical echoes. Whalley is like Job in his combination of perfect righteousness, physical health and material success, and like Job he is visited with a disaster that is inexplicable in terms of his own theodicy; like Job, though he fails to comprehend, he refuses to curse God. But unlike Job, he is not permitted to retain his integrity, and though the book deals with these ancient themes, it is very modern in its implicit attitudes, in its moral ambiguity and its refusal to reinforce traditional values.

The issue of the Book of Job—the question of how the cruelty of nature is to be reconciled with trust in a righteous and all-powerful creator—is not, for Conrad, a live issue, and it is hardly so even for Whalley himself, whose habitual piety has not been a matter of either personal passion or theological argument: "—because, I suppose the blessed know the secret of grace in God's dealings with his created children!" He swayed a little, said with austere dignity, "I don't. I know only the child he has given me."

Moreover, the primal disaster that has put Whalley into this tragic situation is not any "act of God" such as the lightning and disease that struck Job and his family, or the Lisbon earthquake that inspired Voltaire's Candide, but a disaster produced by that "Economic Necessity" that seems to rule in the modern world in a manner quite as arbitrary as that of Jehovah in the Old Testament—"the crash of the notorious Travancore and Deccan Banking Corporation, whose downfall had shaken the East like an earthquake." Thus we are made to see that in Captain Whalley's regular morning devotions, the "sustained deep murmur of the Lord's Prayer recited in a loud earnest voice", he has not been directing them towards the correct deity.

It is only after this, as a secondary cause, that there comes the

other, natural, disaster of incipient blindness. These in themselves are quite adequate to provide the dramatic machinery for the tragedy, and it seems as though Conrad rather weakens the effect by compounding them with the petty villainy of the owner-engineer in putting the compass wrong. No doubt he wanted to make the point that not only society and nature, but mankind also, has betrayed the aged captain's trust in them.

The social theme is developed again in the chapters that describe Captain Whalley's wanderings through Singapore after he has sold his ship and is searching, hopelessly, for work. Once he had been a kind of king in this place, but now, like Verloc in The Secret Agent, viewing "the opulence of hygienic idleness" through the railings of Hyde Park, Whalley has to watch the long line of carriages, proud horses, and Indian servants taking the wealthy to a ball, all of them overshadowed by the exceeding elegance of the Governor's landau, leaving in its trail "an expression of fixed stares and impassive vacancy".

It turns Whalley's thoughts to the early days of the settlement, when only courage and hard work had been necessary:

It struck him that it was to this port, where he had just sold his last ship, that he had come with the very first that he had ever owned, and with his head full of a plan for opening a new trade with a distant part of the Archipelago. The then governor had given him no end of encouragement. No Excellency he—this Mr Denham—this governor with his jacket off; a man who tended night and day, so to speak, the growing prosperity of the settlement with the self-forgetful devotion of a nurse for the child she loves; a lone bachelor who lived as in a camp with a few servants and his three dogs in what was called then the Government Bungalow.

Individuals were of some account then. Men like himself: men, too,

like poor Evans, for instance, with his red face, his coal-black whiskers, and his restless eyes, who had set up the first papent slip for repairing small ships, on the edge of the forest... Mr Denham had encouraged that enterprise too, and yet somehow poor Evans had ended by dying at home decidedely hard up... There had been a time when men counted: there were not so many carriages in the colony then, though Mr Denham, he fancies, had a buggy" (pp. 193-194).

Whalley then meets Captain Elliot, the Master Attendant, another man as old as himself, who has worked hard, but cannot afford to retire, and the same thoughts that have been forced upon Whalley's mind by the onset of poverty are expressed more ironically by the other man. As they survey the Gothic glory of the new cathedral, he says;

"I tell you what they ought to do next, Whalley..."

"Well?"

"They ought to send a real live lord out here when Sir Frederick's time is up. Eh?"

Captain Whalley perfunctorily did not see why a lord of the right sort should not do as well as anyone else. But this was not the other's point of view.

"No, no. Place runs itself. Nothing can stop it now. Good enough for a lord," he growled in short sentences. "Look at the changes in our ~~time~~ own time. We need a lord here now. They have got a lord in Bombay."

Conrad adds conviction to his sketch of the Master Attendant by letting him relate a typical incident to show that though in other respects the city may "run itself", there is still trouble in the marine department, and this incident turns out to be yet another reference to the ship at Saigon, or Bangkok, that needs a captain to bring it home, which had given Conrad his own chance of command. Even the name of the other

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candidate at the Sailor's Home, "Hamilton", is the same as in The Shadow Line, to be written thirteen years later, and is doubtless the real name of this idle officer who has been given such generous immortality. It is an interesting example of the way that Conrad prefers to re-use carefully husbanded fact or experience rather than risk the lack of conviction that an invented incident might involve; it helps to explain also the terrible lack of conviction in certain stories such as The Planter of Malata or Freya of the Seven Isles that are almost entirely invention.

The End of the Tether not only lacks Marlow; it also lacks any of those comments on the cruelty of the universe, the irony of fate, and the general perversity of things that are sprinkled through many of his other stories. This absence can also be seen as part of the story's art, for it is presented primarily from Whalley's point of view. It adds emphasis to his simple faith, his refusal to curse God or blame others, and so adds to the effect of the actual curse with which he is burdened, and increases his stature in contrast with the whining attitudes of the other two officers, Massey and Sterne.

In this way, it becomes impossible for us not to sympathise with Whalley, and so to connive at his terrible deception. He betrays most blatantly that "fidelity" that Conrad has, quite genuinely, extolled as the virtue most essential to corporate endeavour, but without for a moment losing our sympathy-- and the performance of such subversions can be seen as one of the true functions of art.

Although Whalley's simple piety is not something that Conrad could share, it is not, as in the case of Podmore on the Narcissus, or Davidsof in Victory, treated with ironic humour, for this again would weaken the reader's identification with Whalley; it is rather balanced by giving Whalley other more aristocratic qualities, notably a pride which will not allow him to seek sympathy or ask favours, even from an old friend

like Elliott, will not allow him to be frank with Massey about his financial situation, and which keeps the Malay serang, who could easily have saved him, at the level of a non-human instrument. This pride, and the isolation it brings, are neither praised or criticised, but treated with an implicit sympathy that probably reflects fairly accurately an aspect of Conrad's own personality. Thus, although Whalley is not one of those characters with whom Conrad is deeply identified, there is sufficient sympathy to keep the reader wholly on Whalley's side. As with Kurtz, Lord Jim, or Razumov, this effect is partly attained by filling the background with other people who are wholly unsympathetic.

Despite the seeming slowness of the movement, the story does not lack its own kind of economy. As in Lord Jim, every minor incident or apparent diversion can retrospectively be seen as having its justification and necessity. The anecdotal interludes or geographical detours always add to the weight of either one or other of the two conflicting forces, human feeling and social code. And indeed, though one might hesitate to regard it as entirely intentional, the climactic event, the wrecking of the ship, as social artefact and social unit, on the partly hidden rock of "nature" can itself be seen as symbolic of the story's theme. Honour, and fidelity to a code are brought into dramatic conflict with the bedrock of human instinct through the portrait of a man in whom both these forces are present to the highest degree, and the outcome is left to echo in our minds with no authorial weighting of the scales on either side.

Notes

1. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, I, p. 297.
2. William Blackburn (Ed.), Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David J. Meldrum, p. 127.

The Planter of Malata

During Conrad's friendship with Stephen Crane, they had begun in 1899 to collaborate on a play to be called "The Predecessor". The idea was Crane's, and in his preface to Thomas Beer's Stephen Crane, collected in Last Essays, Conrad says, "the general subject consisted in a man personating his "predecessor" (who had died) in the hope of winning a girl's heart. The scenes were to include a ranch at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, I remember, and the action, I fear, would have been frankly melodramatic. Crane insisted that one of the situations should present the man and the girl on a boundless plain standing by their dead ponies after a furious ride (a truly Crane touch)" (p. 115).

Conrad then tells us that "thirteen years afterwards I made use, half consciously, of the shadow of the primary idea of 'The Predecessor' in one of my short tales which were serialised in the Metropolitan Magazine... the mere distorted shadow of what we two used to talk about in a fantastic mood" (p. 118). "The distorted shadow of a fantastic mood" is perhaps the best description of this story, The Planter of Malata, written in 1914 and collected in Within the Tides. It is weak both in background and plot, and often verges on, indeed attains to, absurdity, yet nevertheless it has a haunting quality that makes it memorable. Its protagonist Renouard is a ghost of Crane with just enough of Conrad's blood in him to give it a faint aura of the old Conradian "magic".

As a Conrad story, it is too much "invention" and "psychological drama," lacking that solid background of real experience without which he cannot be convincing. It is supposed to take place in "a great colonial city somewhere in the Southern hemisphere" but we would be hard put to say where. The appearance of "a poet from the bush" implies Australia, and the reference to "the only literary newspaper in the

"Antipodes" was not lost on the editor of the Sydney Bulletin, who complained about some of the happenings supposed to have taken place in its offices. Conrad could only reply that, "They do happen in London though, where—as you know—everything happens" (Aubry, II, p. 171). At the same time, the general atmosphere of the tropics, and the nearness to some presumably Polynesian islands are not consistent with Sydney as locale, and none of the scenes or characters have any distinctive flavour of life in Australia: the city is merely a kind of "spiritual Babylon".

Such strength as the story has lies rather in the way it conveys the impression of a personality alienated from the everyday world of compromise, commerce, and "common sense", partly as the result of a self-imposed isolation, and partly from some temperamental quality that cannot come to terms with the bourgeois world. In this way it no doubt reflects something of the personalities of both Crane and Conrad, and it is this that makes it interesting.

Renouard, who is, of course a "foreigner", a French-Canadian "brought up in England", carries within him some alienating depth that causes him completely to reject "the great colonial city": he feels wholly at unease with all its institutions and people. This may well reflect something of Conrad's own feeling about nineteenth-century Australian cities, with their lowest common denominator of Anglo-Saxon culture. Although he went to Sydney often enough, unlike Lawrence, he seems to have carried nothing away except a vague distaste.

Renouard resembles Heyst of Victory in having a high degree of self-sufficiency, but at the expense of being unable to deal with "life" in its more vulgar aspects. He has proved that he can live alone, and prefers to do so. He dislikes his unavoidable visits to the city, and had resisted the suggestion that he should have a companion on his island, where "I see no one consciously. I take the plantation boys for

granted." There is of course the suggestion that Renouard is "finer clay", but even so, he is not unduly "idealised".

Although some of this effect may be obtained simply by making other people physically repellent—"he holds the paper in both hands, hunches his shoulders up to his ugly ears and brings his long nose and his thick lips on to it like a sucking apparatus"—these descriptions of others as seen by Renouard are quite consistent with the impressions of a man who lives alone and sees everything with "the fresh eye he had brought from his isolation". The story does not minimise the dangers of such isolation, and it also conveys the unjustified suspicions that gather round a man who chooses to live alone. His uneasy relationship with the newspaper editor who is his nearest approach to a friend is well done: "Geoffrey Renouard did not tell his journalist friend that the suggestions of his own face, the face of a friend, bothered him as much as the others. He detected a degrading quality in the touches of age which every day adds to the human countenance", while the journalist, "doubting very much if Renouard really liked him, he was himself without great sympathy for a certain side of the man which he could not quite make out. He only felt it obscurely to be his real personality—the true—and, perhaps, the absurd." (pp.5-6)

Renouard then meets a girl from English high society, the world of "Fashion and Finance", whom he gratuitously endows with every quality of a masculine romantic ideal. He is convinced that he has found a soul-mate, and is quite impervious to the girl's dead-pan reactions to his inward fire. The pathos of the story lies in the fact that the girl's magnificent appearance is no more than "appearance", and her fervent idealism is cold at heart. This is a theme that also appears in different forms, in both A Smile of Fortune and Victory. The narrator in the former story discovers that his fascination with the girl is hardly more than a "delusion" created by his own masculine idealisation, mis-

interpreting her signs of fear (see p. below). In Victory, Heyst is teased with the question of whether or not Lena is anything more than "appearance", but is finally convinced, too late, that she is "genuine" (p. below).

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As a "psychological drama", the story is rather reminiscent of Conrad's early "anti-bourgeois" story "The Return". It has rather the same kind of stilted conversations that do not adequately match the depth of what he is trying to say, and there are lengthy attempts to convey a mood of "passion" that is apparently too far from his own experience to enable him to avoid the use of cliches. Renouard not only thinks and feels in Victorian cliches—"Directly he saw her in the distance at the other end of the terrace he shuddered to the root of his hair"—but also acts them out: "He got down on his knees in silence, bent low to her very feet...he remained bowed to the ground pressing the hem of her skirt to his lips." Such things were done, and it is no doubt the kind of thing to which readers of the Cosmopolitan Magazine were well accustomed, but it lacks that irony and "distancing" that would be needed to make it tolerable to the sophisticated taste of any age.

The girl, finding that she has unjustly rejected a fiance whom she hardly loved, and determined to make amends, is an extreme example of that egoism sublimated into idealism with which Conrad so often deals. Her father, "the fashionable philosopher of the age" is clever, sophisticated, and vulgar. He "sees through" his daughter, and would be grateful if Renouard could win her away from her abstraction, but he is too much of a hypocrite himself to be able to deal honestly with her. She will not listen to him, and he cannot really help her to break out of her false idealism because he is a popular writer and lecturer who no doubt makes his living by justifying this kind of things, while his "man of the world" approach to Renouard is equally

misjudged—"to Renouard the philosopher appeared simply the most treacherous of fathers." Renouard, having endowed the girl with his own more noble kind of unreality, imagines her to be a superior being of whom he is not worthy, and is quite incapable of uttering a word that might turn her from her fixed idea. He completely lacks that "wisdom of the world" of which her father has too much.

The girl herself, the divinity of whose outward appearance is much acclaimed, remains opaque. Almost until the end of the story we are allowed to doubt her father's cynical assessment of her, by which Renouard has been so shocked, but in the denouement we are presumably intend^{ed} to see that she is incapable of anything but a conventional reaction to Renouard's over-delayed confession. This cannot be made very clear because Renouard has managed things with such reckless clumsiness that in their final confrontation it is virtually impossible for him to justify himself. If he has not murdered the victim, he has inexcusably lied about it, and a better girl than Felicia might well feel nothing but horror at the moment of revelation.

Early in the story there are hints of Renouard's ruthlessness, and of his rumoured involvement in the deaths of other men, almost as if Conrad had been intending to make him in some way responsible for the death of Felicia's former fiance. This would have given more meaning to his attitudes, and made an adequate substitute for Crane's original idea. As it is, the victim has been allowed just to fade away from a wonderful concurrence of "natural causes"—an injury from a horse, drugs, and a fall down a ravine, followed by a long illness during which "he ailed and ailed".

Thus there never seems to be any real reason why Renouard could not just have said so, instead of carrying on the pretence of his continued existence until there is no longer any way in which to save his face. The man having been so tiresome and "worthless", it seems

that at the beginning, Renouard just cannot be bothered to talk about it—he shrinks from "certain forms of vulgarity—like a man who would face a lion and go out of his way to avoid a toad", and afterwards he is ready to "give the last shred of his rectitude to secure a day more of her company".

It is perhaps an understandable, even pardonable, quirk in a man so "unworldly", but hardly on a level to justify the rhetoric by which it is apotheosised:

What was truth to him in the face of that great passion which had flung him prostrate in spirit at her adored feet!

And now it was done! Fatality had willed it! With the eyes of a mortal struck by the maddening thunderbolt of the gods, Renouard looked up at the sky, an immense black pall dusted over with gold, on which great shudders seemed to pass from the breath of life affirming its sway. (p. 57)

As with Lingard in The Rescue, Conrad describes his protagonist's passion as if he were a hero of Ancient Greece, but instead of then sending him to launch ships, burn Sydn^e and steal his bride, he puts him in a state of nervous paralysis. As far as modern man is concerned, the pathology may be accurate, but it hardly seems suited to such Homeric language.

In the Author's Note, Conrad discusses fairly frankly some of the story's shortcomings—"indeed the task of the translator of passions into speech may be pronounced 'too difficult'," but still manages to congratulate himself on a "nearly successful attempt at doing a very difficult thing." The real difficulty would seem to be that he had not himself any experience of what he was trying to translate, and has to rely too much on the authorised versions of the Edwardian age.

To a critic who suggested that "false realism" had denied the story a happy ending, he says, "I should like to ask him what he

imagines the, so to speak, lifelong embrace of Felicia Moorsom and Geoffrey Renouard could have been like? Could it have been at all? Would it have been credible? Nô!" (p. viii) Maybe not, but we have hardly learned enough about the girl to be able to ask the question. We have seen her only through the cynical eyes of her father or the idealising eyes of Renouard, and have not been encouraged to put much trust in either. We can hardly be moved as Renouard, stubborn idealist to the end, swims out to sea his eye, as always, "fixed on a star": the story, continually balancing on the edge of absurdity, has too often fallen in.

4 Exile and Existence

Nostromo

In the Authors Note to Nostromo, written in 1917, thirteen years after the publication of the book itself, Conrad recalls that "after finishing the last story of the Typhoon volume it seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about" (p. xv). Indeed, it seems that so much of his own inner substance had gone into Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim that never again will he write with quite the compulsive energy that went in to the latter, but even so it was not by any means the end of his inner ferment, or his remembered experience. Even on the assumption that he felt the need for a base in personal experience, there were still his early years at sea when he had sailed from Marseilles to Latin America, three voyages, each of about six months, covering the period from December 1874 to February 1877, of which a detailed itinerary can be found in the appendix to Jerry Allen's The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad (pp. 314-316).

The feeling that "there was nothing more to write about" may also have been connected with the fact that in all his major work so far he had been using experience, and information, mediated to him in terms of his second adopted language, English. His adolescent experiences "in French", which had ended, apparently, in bankruptcy and attempted suicide, seem to have provided very little material for his creative analysis. Perhaps they were shut off by some psychological barrier that was never to be fully overcome—his early collaborative production, Romance and the late The Arrow of Gold use them only in a fanciful and essentially un-revealing manner. One must not forget in this connect-

ion that Conrad was also very young at the time—sixteen to eighteen—and not looking at things with a mature awareness.

But even if this experience could not be used in any deeper way, there must have been a considerable store of atmosphere, character, and minor incident ready to be exploited. It has been suggested that whereas in his earlier tales, Conrad was writing of places with which he was familiar, and using "experience", in Nostromo he was creating a world he had never seen. Robert Penn Warren describes it as "the story of a part of the world that Conrad had never laid eyes on, the West Coast of South America....There were books and hearsay to help, the odds and ends of information. But in the end, the land, its people, and its history had to be dreamed up, evoked out of the primal fecund darkness that always lies below our imagination"¹. Similarly, Norman Sherry, in the introduction to Conrad's Western World, contrasts it with his earlier study of Conrad's Eastern sources by saying that "the biographical element must of necessity be smaller" as "the world of a South American republic or of the London anarchists was not in any substantial way part of Conrad's experience either at the time of writing Nostromo (1904) and The Secret Agent (1906) or at any period earlier in his life" (ppl-2).

It may be however that Warren's trust in "the primal fecund darkness" and Sherry's opposing predilection for the light of public records have led them both to underestimate the importance to an author of moving through an area and absorbing its atmosphere, however briefly or unobtrusively. Given the remarkable unity of Spanish-American culture, the fact that Conrad did not actually visit "the West Coast" as distinct from the western area north of the central isthmus is hardly relevant—the countries that he did briefly visit, Venezuela and Colombia, are the two that in scenery, climate, and politics most resemble the "Costaguana" of the book.

Moreover, the information assembled by Jerry Allen shows that in fact Conrad spent more time ashore in Latin America than he did in the Far East (pp. 314-323), and from the accounts of these early voyages from Marseilles, it seems likely that he had more opportunities for making contacts ashore than as a foreigner among Englishmen^{by} in Asia. In The Author's Note to Victory he refers briefly to some of these experiences, and on the third voyage, in which he touched at ports in South America, he was in the company of that very Dominic Cervoni who was, as he states in the preface, the prototype of Nostromo himself.

Jerry Allen claims that Dalestang, the royalist owner of the ships in which Conrad sailed, was involved in supporting a right-wing rebellion in Colombia, and that Conrad's voyage on the St Vincent from Martinique to Colombia and Venezuela in 1876 was to carry arms for this uprising in which "the Conservatives in the rich gold and silver mining states of Antioquia and Tolima declared war on the Federal government" (pp. 22-25). This may be largely conjecture, but it has so many correspondences with the plot of Nostromo that one cannot but regard it with sympathy. Certainly, the son of the then President of the Federation, Santiago Pérez Triana, whom Conrad subsequently came to know in London, and whom he states to be the basis for Don José Avellanos in the book, must have been involved in these events (Aubry, I, p. 338).

Thus, if Costaguana seems more real to the reader than Lord Jim's Patusan, it is probably because there was more real experience of Latin America in Conrad's memory than there could have been of Borneo, though both of these countries are constructed from little more than glimpses filled out by background reading. In neither instance does the reading seem to have been very extensive, though happily chosen and fully exploited. Sherry read about two hundred nineteenth-century works on South America in his search for the sources of Nostromo but was forced

to conclude that Conrad used but "a handful", chiefly two (p. 148n).

These memories of Conrad's were to be used not to re-create a semi-autobiographical tale of a similar voyage, but to provide the atmosphere for a work of creation that would deploy in a new way his now fully developed resources as a novelist--the history and politics of a whole country. That the need to look back as far as his Latin American experiences should come just at this moment when his powers were fully matured and his more urgent problems written out can be seen as a most fortunate coincidence, a "destiny". Such an endeavour, in which people and events are to be interrelated on the grand scale, a history rather than a "historical novel" in the usual sense, requires a "typical country" rather than any real one, and there is probably nowhere in the world except Spanish America where such a concept can be credible. One cannot imagine a "typical" European country, a "typical" state of the U.S.A., or even a "typical" English county.

The racial homogeneity of the Indian tribes of South America, together with their essentially "pre-historic" culture--even the Incas, though they had an empire, had no alphabet or other form of written communication--and the clear-cut outlines of the Catholic culture of Spain, so rapidly and forcefully imposed upon it, gave to the whole continent, with the exception of Brazil and the southernmost tip, a unity of culture and life that was divided into separate states by the limitations of distance and natural barriers rather than by the differences of race, history and culture that usually distinguish one country from another.

At the same time, for the writer, the relative brevity of South American history, and the brutal simplicity of much of its politics, made the raw material manageable in a way that would hardly have been possible in a European context. There was the added advantage that Conrad's own background in the Polish Ukraine had something of the same mediaeval atmosphere, in which the catchwords of the West sound hollow

because there is no social reality to match them: there also, one was liable to be disillusioned of bourgeois ideals before ever the original "illusion" had had time to grow. It was a situation that Conrad could comprehend and organise in a way that he could hardly have hoped to do with a story set in Western Europe.

Admittedly, to a native of South America, a "typical Spanish-American state" might seem a doubtful proposition, and the ninety odd years that have passed since Conrad's Don José completed his Fifty Years of Misrule must have greatly increased the individuality of the various states, but at least for the outsider, and for the period of which Conrad wrote, the concept seems acceptable enough. One needs to assume that Costaguana is to be fitted somewhere between Venezuela and Colombia in the north-west of the continent, for this is demanded by the tropical climate and the Cordilleras that Conrad describes. His own brief visit was here, and Edward B. Eastwick's Venezuela was one of his main sources. The other one, Masterman's Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay, was used for incidents and "characters" rather than for references that concern climate and geography.

Colombia is in fact the only South American state that, like Costaguana, has its maritime provinces on the West coast and its main centre on the other side of the mountains, a feature that suits Conrad's purpose, for it gives to his Sulaco a degree of isolation that reduces the cast of characters and the scale of operations to manageable proportions, and makes its declaration of independence seem both tactically possible and logically probable.

Gustav Morf, the pioneer Freudian analyst of Conrad's work, guessed that he derived the name of the state from Costa Rica and guano—manure (p. 14), as an expression of his contempt for its politics, but this hardly fits his obvious pride in this misruled country of his own creation. In view of his known interest in the Elizabethan adventurers, Jer-

ry Allen is more convincing when she links it with the legendary wealth of the "Coast of Guiana" for which Raleigh searched, particularly as the name that Conrad gives to Gould's mine—San Tomé—comes from the same source, as also the phrase that echoes in Mrs Gould's waking nightmares, "The Treasure House of the World" (Allen, p. 6).

If it is true that only South America could supply the writer with a "typical state", it is also true that only such a completely fictional state can serve the purpose of such a book. To write a fictional "history" of any actual state is virtually impossible—there is too much pre-ordained reality on the stage to allow the fictional characters any space to move, unless their scale is very small. Only a realistic but imaginary state can allow the author to manipulate both people and events on the grand scale and convey a complete historical destiny. Even so, the complexity is likely to overwhelm him unless he is extremely skilful. One way in which Conrad manages to control his material is well brought out by Arnold Kettle:

Nostromo is, from the technical point of view, an amazing tour de force. The method Conrad uses is of particular interest because his problems are the characteristic problems of the modern novelist—to present a wide canvas in which essentials are not lost in too great detail; to convey political and social movement on various levels (conscious, unconscious, semi-conscious); to suggest the almost infinite inter-relatedness of character and character, character and background; to give each character a real individuality and yet see each as part of a concrete whole: in short, to show man in society. Conrad's method is to over-simplify somewhat individual character in the sense of giving each individual very sharply defined personal characteristics, frequently reiterated, so that each stands out clearly, not only in contrast to

the others, but against the clear, concrete, surface-objective background of the whole. Thus the girl Antonia is invariably associated with a fan, Nostromo with silver and the epithet "illustrious", Dr Monygham with a lame leg, a twisted body and scarred cheeks, the Garibaldino with his "mane" (it is , in a sense, the old "humours" theory developed poetically). What at first appears a somewhat irritating insistence is seen after a time to be a conscious and essential method. In fact, of course, the characters are not simple at all: by the end of the book their depths and complexities are well established: it is their presentation that is simplified.²

This "simplicity" underlying and making possible the complexity may contribute to an understanding of the book in other ways. The sub-title "A Tale of the Seaboard" suggests an overall simplicity that is not perhaps as wholly deceptive as an academic analysis of the novel can lead one to assume. The idea of Conrad as a teller of tales, the old sea-dog spinning his yarns, often deliberately invoked by the setting of Marlow and his friends, was fully accepted by his contemporaries, and could still be echoed by Frank Swinnerton in 1935 when in The Georgian Literary Scene he says that Conrad uses "the form of a yarn in which the subtle and omniscient narrator has power to hold hearers as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest, diverging, doubling, speculating, bringing to his elucidations all sorts of other yarns" (p. 157).

In recent times this "common-sense" view has been rather buried beneath a sophisticated discussion of Conrad's techniques as "high art", but perhaps it needs to be resurrected to gain an insight into the apparent complexities of Nostromo. Its perpetual shifts of time that so baffle the analyst—"it has been my experience," says Guerard, "each time I have tried to disentangle the time-scheme of Nostromo, to come up with a different result" (p. 211)—cannot credibly be explained as part

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of a preordained plan of infinite ingenuity: they can more reasonably be regarded as a natural growth within the mind of a story-teller with a simple basic plot who at every moment finds himself digressing in order to help the listener to understand—a "listener", rather than a "reader".

The man who is telling a story to a circle of friends has not only to keep digressing in order to introduce each new character or circumstance, and then remind his listeners of where he thinks they were before he digressed—he also has to keep alert for restive movements or opaque eyes amongst his audience, and it is very largely these instinctive skills that one can see at work throughout the winding length of Nostromo—as also, one may add, in Lord Jim. It helps to explain how it is that the ordinary reader can follow a book that the critic finds baffling. In rather the same way that the historically-minded critic has to read two hundred books on South America to find that Conrad used two, the analytically-minded critic can find a hundred difficulties where the writer, and his reader may have hardly any.

Conrad tells us in the Author's Note that the story is based on an incident from "a shabby volume picked up outside a second-hand bookshop", the stealing of a lighter of silver, and it is to this incident that the story sticks, digressing a little to tell us where the silver came from, and why. Although it can hardly be said to have any "present time", the virtual present time is the two or three crowded days in which the revolution on the other side of the mountains reaches Sulaco: riots break out, the fleeing Liberal leader arrives, the silver is sent out, and the province declares its independence. That is all that happens, but as each actor appears, his history is given, and each time he reappears some other relevant aspect of his past can be introduced, so that by the most primitive of methods, the method of "oral tradition", there is

built up, by a most sophisticated intellect, an illusion of stereoscopic depth, of infinite complexity, and of omniscient knowledge. In this respect, "the sharply defined personal characteristics, frequently reiterated" to which Kettle refers may have been as mnemonically helpful to the author as they are to the reader. If, against all seeming probability, the reader does not lose his way it is because the author never forgets him, and knows just when to raise the pitch of his own voice, just when to let the listener relax, and when to prod his memory: Homer may nod, but his listeners are never allowed to.

Thus when Guerard denies that Nostramo is the "controlled performance" that Leavis claims it to be, he is no doubt right in the sense in which he understands it, a controlled performance as "a further movement towards the sophisticated 'art' novel": it is rather a highly controlled performance in a different sense, almost one might say, in the opposite direction.

It is probably this lack of pre-meditation in regard to the time-scheme that produces the novel's one noticeable inconsistency. Apart from the "present time" of the critical two or three days, the only important event that is roughly dated is the banquet on the Juno, which is said to have been six months before the beginning of the revolution, and eighteen months before its climax in Sulaco (p. 34). This twelve months of civil war on the other side of the mountains is filled out by references to continuing life in Sulaco: "every three months the silver escort had gone down to the sea", and the ships, the railway, the provincial assembly, and Decoud's Porvenir are seen to be carrying on (pp. 135-136), but then this twelve months seems to be virtually annihilated by the fact that General Barrios' embarkation with the Sulaco soldiers who are to support Ribiera, said to have been sent at an early stage, is made to occur on the actual eve of the final events. The

author seems to "flash back" to Barrios' embarkation, and then forget to flash forward again, and yet this is not a mere inconsequential slip, but necessary to the plot, for it is only by inconsistently delaying the embarkation to the last moment that Barrios can consistently be recalled from Cayta to defend Sulaco's declaration of independence. If one tries to explain it away by assuming that other troops were sent before, then other minor inconsistencies arise: there is here a ripple in the chronological carpet that can be shifted around but never quite eliminated. But then if one considers how Conrad, with his hypnotised hypothetical reader in front of him, carried the whole thing in his mind for something like twenty-four months, the only astonishing thing is that there are not more such moments when he nods his Homeric head.

If he had committed himself to a detailed plan on paper, no doubt he could have produced a work of equal, or even greater complexity, and perfect logic, which probably no reader would ever quite unravel: by keeping it in his head, and so following the natural pattern of the human mind, he produces something that as it were fits the reader's head, so that provided the latter is reasonably intelligent, and not too forgetful, the task of "handing over" this great piece of "oral tradition" can safely be completed: what was the writer's headache becomes the reader's headache, and the state of Sulaco enters his eternal possession.

That this is more or less the way that Conrad did it, and nearly died of the headache in the doing of it, is fairly evident from the letters that he wrote at the time: to Galsworthy, "the book is, this moment half done and I feel half dead and wholly imbecile....I feel myself strangely growing into a sort of outcast. A mental and moral outcast" (Aubry, I, p. 317); to Rothenstein, "and I am tired, tired as if I had lived a hundred years...I am not myself and shall not be myself till I am born again after Nostromo is finished" (p. 330); to Wells,

"I, my dear Wells, am absolutely out of my mind with the worry and apprehension of my work. I go on as I would cycle over a precipice along a 14 in. plank. If I falter I am lost" (p. 311). These are not the words of a man who has a plan, and ticks off a steady thousand words a day, but of a man who balances the whole two hundred thousand words in a solution of lactic acid as he rides along each line. And what happens if a casual visitor should interrupt him? He tells us in A Personal Record:

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The whole world of Costaguana, men, women, headlands, houses, mountains, town, campo (there was not a single brick, stone or grain of sand of its soil that I had not placed in position with my own hands): all the history, geography, politics, finance; the wealth of Charles Gould's silver mine, and the splendour of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, whose name cried out in the night (Dr Monygham heard it pass over his head—in Linda Viola's voice), dominated even after death the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love—all that had come crashing down crashing about my eyes. I felt I could never pick up the pieces—and in that very moment I was saying, "Won't you sit down?"

"I am afraid I interrupted you."

"Not at all." (p. 98).

Conrad finally summed it up in a letter to Garnett: "Nostramo is finished, a fact upon which my friends may congratulate me as upon a recovery from a dangerous illness!" (Aubry, I, p. 335).

To picture thus a whole country at a critical moment of its history, on a canvas crowded with detailed scenes, teeming with significant incidents, all in their mutual perspectives, and to use it as the backcloth for a cast of powerful characters whose conflicting ideals, interests and ambitions are disposed of with a kind of divine justice—this is an achievement that, with hindsight, can be seen as a promise implicit in

Conrad's earlier work.

In Almayer's Folly one noted an interest in the economic base and the political structure of the environment that was hardly justified by the hero's own rather tenuous grasp of such realities (p. above).
 Even if these interests had been entirely absent, it would not have seriously affected the success of that particular novel, but their presence is interesting as a harbinger. In The Nigger of the Narcissus he demonstrated his ability to present a whole cast of characters with an objective "justice" that gives every one his say, recognises that every virtue has its balancing "vice", every kind of knowledge its own particular "ignorance"—and all seen as subject to the overriding "fate" of social conditioning, and set in an indifferent world that finally condemns all human audacities or cowardices, ideals or compromises to a tragic end.

In Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness these gifts are deepened by centring the interest on a single figure, with a single commentator, to produce a kind of dialogue on what are pressing problems for the author himself. In Nostromo, though Decoud can still be seen as the central consciousness of the book, very close to the author, whether as narrator or as subject of analysis, the light is not focussed on a single character but moves over a crowded stage to catch each figure or group at a significant moment. The "form" has changed, but not the method, and below the surface even the stretched and broken outlines of the form can still be discerned.

If Nostromo has no central "hero", this is not so much from any lack as from a superfluity: it has whole^a cast of heroes—Nostromo, the schoolboy's hero from the world of "light literature"; Gould, the older-schoolboy's hero, the energetic, idealistic Anglo-Saxon man of action; Holroyd, the evangelical American man of business; Sir

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John, the urbane engineer-director; Decoud, the man of culture and intellect; Viola, the brave idealistic revolutionary; Father Corbelan, the ascetic missionary saint; Don Avellanos, the wise and righteous statesman, Captain Mitchell, the resourceful seaman, Barrios, the tough honest soldier, Hernandez, the Robin Hood of the Cordilleras, Don Pepe, the "good shepherd" of the industrial flock, and with their heroines behind them—Emilia Gould and Antonia and Signora Viola and her daughters—and below them a supporting cast of less admirable or less important figures who are all consistently convincing even if they are not often surprising.

Many of them, admittedly, are "types", familiar to us all, but perhaps in so complex a piece of social machinery, a certain standardisation of the minor components is necessary in order to make it work. In all the more important figures there are sharp details to give them individuality: they live and breathe. Few readers of the book would accept Marvin Mudrick's dismissal of it as "a prodigiously ingenious wax-works museum which in certain lights and to certain innocent minds, appears to be an assemblage of live human beings." It is not so much that one does not know what Mudrick means as that he is demanding too much of a book that is done on this scale: even War and Peace does not go up and down the social scale and dodge across the barriers of race and culture in quite the way that Nostromo does. In such circumstances, to give his creations the appearance "in certain lights" of "live human beings" is as much as the reader can demand, and a certain "innocence" of mind may be his own rightful contribution to the collective success of the illusion.

If there is a problem here, a limitation, it may be that it can be illuminated a little by considering the book in relation to that particular form that we have seen to suit Conrad so well, the author self-divided into analytical narrator and the subject of analysis. In

Nostromo, Decoud can be seen in both these roles. As narrator he provides some analysis of Nostromo, Gould and others, but he is also presented as a character to be analysed, like Heyst in Victory, the victim of an ultimate scepticism which the author also shares. Just because Decoud embodies so much of the writer's own personality, he is presented with a depth and fullness that is hardly granted to the others. Thus, Conrad's familiar "form" can be seen below the surface, but it is not adapted to the mastery of such a mass of complex material: it can be seen, positively, as enriching the book without controlling it, or negatively, as providing a certain justification for accusations of "hollowness" in these characters with whom the author cannot so easily "identify".

If in its political or philosophical implications, the overall effect of the book is pessimistic, it is certainly not from any cynicism in relation to the characters: since Shakespeare's time there can have been few fuller celebrations of all the most admirable qualities of mankind. If one could see the numerous "heroes" of Nostromo paraded apart from the tragic web in which they are entrapped one might cry with Miranda, "How many godly creatures are there here! O brave new world that has such people in't."

Are they so admirable only because nothing is safe and danger lurks at every corner? Is it only in adversity that these brave colours have their chance to shine? As we have noticed with The Nigger of the Narcissus, the suggestion that this is so is one aspect of Conrad's tragic vision (p. above). With Nostromo it appears also that, in so far as the two can ever be considered apart, it is more in the nature of the social environment than in the human material that the roots of tragedy are seen to lie, even though Conrad himself might have been reluctant to acknowledge so Rousseau-like a conclusion (p. above).

If the total effect is tragic, it is certainly not an effect that is imposed by any obtrusive manipulation of events, nor can it be seen as necessarily inherent in the human condition, but rather as inherent in a particular environment at a particular moment in its history. This point needs to be made because the book has sometimes been treated as if it were a powerful refutation of liberal ideals, but a nineteenth-century South American state is not the place where the "Liberal Imagination" was created, or where anyone could reasonably expect its values to be viable. The irony with which Don José's ideals, or Viola's, are treated is aimed more at the inappropriate context in which they are advanced than at the ideals themselves. Decoud says as much when he describes the politics of his own country, seen from Paris, as une farce macabre—"Imagine an atmosphere of opéra bouffe in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest..." (p. 152).

This is not to deny that Conrad's scepticism goes much deeper than this, that he also profoundly questions the whole Western bourgeois structure of "material interest" by which such ideals are given life, and to a certain degree, made to work—but these questions are largely put to the future, to what lies ahead of that victory for the "material interests" with which the book concludes. That life in the Western hemisphere has since justified Conrad's doubts, and brought us all rather nearer to the world of Nostramo need not obscure the point that for Conrad there was also a certain standard of bourgeois stability that he regarded as preferable, even if not as interesting, as the farce macabre of Costaguana.

That probing concern with valeurs idéales that Conrad saw, looking back on his work, as his abiding interest, achieves in Nostramo its widest deployment, and it also goes deep. Each of the protagonists is

seen in his social context, as a member of a group which out of economic necessity and collective pride has made its own ideal, and each from a more or less sublimated egoism lives by the ideal, and may betray or be betrayed by it. At the bottom are the betes or "beetles", led by the gran' bestia, who use the ideals as labels for such simpler things as greed or vengeance, and the peasants for whom "ideals" are hardly a conscious problem. At the next level, there is the seaman's ethic of Captain Mitchell, admirable enough, and adequate for the performance of his duties in ^a stable society, but only marginally relevant to life in Costaguana, and of ^a similar kind, though better adapted to local conditions, are the differing loyalties and virtues of Barrios or Don Pepe, and of Father Corbelan, whose medieval vision of social justice cannot adapt to change, but will not relinquish its claims. There are the Western democratic ideals of Don José and the Risorgimento ideals of Viola, looking a little absurd outside the contexts in which they originally flourished; there is the more solid and up-to-date idealism of Charles Gould, who believes that "material interests" will eventually produce stability and thereby justify themselves, at least in terms of Holroyd's "purer form of Christianity".

As Decoud admits, "those Englishmen live on illusions that somehow or other help them to get a firm hold of the substance", for they are the "illusions" that belong to the ascendant forces. Indeed, something like Gould's "illusion" now has so firm a grip on the substance of the world that it has become our generally accepted norm. It is here that the depth of Conrad's vision, as expressed largely through the comments of Decoud, reveals itself. To be able to regard that whole Western scientific-technological-economic way of looking at and manipulating things that has become our taken-for-granted form of "reality" as something that ultimately, can be seen as no more than one of the "illusions"

by which a society chooses to live is the kind of escape from the conditioning of one's own environment that is achieved but rarely. In our own time such an awareness is more easily come by, but in the age in which Conrad wrote it was shared by few.

To attain to such an understanding at such a time was to be forced into an extreme of intellectual isolation, and this is conveyed, in Nostromo, through the consciousness of Decoud, whom Corbelan sees as "a sort of Frenchman—godless—a materialist. Neither the son of his own country nor of any other." (p. 198). As Rilke puts it, "Every slow turning of the world has its disinherited/ to whom the past does not belong, nor yet the future." For Decoud, the generous, intelligent sceptic for whom none of the old ideals are adequate, and none of the general convictions of mankind ring true, there can only be the emptiness that awaits the coming of a new "god". And as Conrad seems to share the view that such metaphysical meanings are the creation of society rather than the creators of it, this must be for Decoud a real and utter emptiness. The emptiness of sea and sky that accompanies his suicide must be seen as the symbol and reflection of this social and psychological emptiness, and not as themselves the cause, as if mere physical isolation were the only problem with which his soul must contend.

For Conrad this great—and sometimes beneficial—"illusion" which Western man has allowed to become his imprisoning "reality" is summed up in the term "material interest", which echoes through the novel with "the silver of the mine" as something close to its "objective correlative". Kettle refers to "a failure ever to define at all clearly the meaning of 'material interests'" (p. 71), but perhaps this can be seen as an indication of the magnitude of meaning that the term must embrace—not only so much of our world, but also the spectacles through which we see it, and impossible therefore to define with precision: it is rather defined negatively, by what it ignores, excludes or cripples—all those human needs and qualities that are represented by the gener-

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ous, but unrewarded bravery of Nostromo, the humanitarianism of Viola, the primitive but organic life of the peasants, the ascetic virtues and moral concerns of Corbelan, the cultural values of Decoud, and above all the sensitive and sympathetic nature of Mrs Gould, through whose eyes, for the most part, the human needs of the others are seen, and for whom it becomes, almost literally, a nightmare:

An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. 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. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words:

"Material interest." (p. 522)

We are close here to Lawrence's vision as it is conveyed in Women in Love or Lady Chatterley's Lover. The poetic intensity is less than with Lawrence but perhaps the social understanding is more exact. The parallels between Clifford Chatterley and Charles Gould, both seduced by the machinery and the machinations of a mine was referred to above, in discussing The Rescue, ^{but}. Gould is both a more typical and more admirable representative of his kind than Chatterley, and more realistically presented. Attractive and unconventional in his youth, worthy of Emilia's love, she still loves him, still sees him as "perfect" at the end of the book. He is entirely convincing as a middle-class English expatriate, but he can also be seen as the archetype of the capitalist entrepreneur imposing a new spirit upon a medieval culture. Early in the book he states his creed:

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 alone 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" (p. 84). [In a Latin-American context such a creed could be expected to produce only a kind of fascism, and it plots with remarkable accuracy the future of the continent. From the author's point of view the "ray of hope" seems effectively to be extinguished at the end of the story with Dr Monygham's prophecy that "the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily on the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back." If there is anything to re-light the ray, it can only be that these words of Monygham's follow his disclosure that Nostromo, now known as Captain Fidenza, and "greater with the populace than ever he was before", "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 wealth for the people" (p. 511).

As author, Conrad gives them no blessing and obviously does not care for the "small, frail, bloodthirsty hater of capitalists" who is left alone with Nostromo at the end of the book. No doubt he is nearer to expressing his own values when Mrs Gould speaks of that "care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present" that she sees as the condition of a life that is to be "large and full", and yet the very fact that he presents us with the Catholic leader and the quixotic soldier, along with "our man" and the enduring "people" as the co-conspirators against the reign of "material interest" would seem to indicate a hope for the future in which the past is not dead, or uncared for.

If there is any substance in the suggestion made, with reference to "The Lagoon" (p. above), that what Garnett called Conrad's "feminine sensitiveness" and "masculine keenness" had not quite made their marriage in his art, we can see a sign of its achievement, almost a symbolical presentation of it, in the marriage of Charles and Emily Gould. It is not put before us as an "ideal" marriage, but as a picture of the possibilities and the tensions in about the best kind of marriage imaginable in the social context in which it occurs. It carries great promise when it begins in Italy, both partners having a complementary touch of the unconventional in their essentially British natures. The two of them can be seen as representing with remarkable clarity and fullness the masculine and feminine roles as they had polarised in Western society at the time—as clearly as in a Taoist diagram of "yin and yang we see the combination and opposition of male and female.

Gould is a good Englishman of his time, a recognisable relative of Forster's Mr Wilcox in Howards End. He has that combination of engineering skill and administrative ability that after the Industrial Revolution and with the growth of Empire, had become an increasingly acceptable allotropic form of the English gentleman, together with a belief in the inevitability of "progress" and masculine ideals of the kind that can adjust themselves to the corruption of a backward country without losing their conviction. They allow him to feel a comfortable moral superiority over the means he manipulates to the unquestionable end of greater prosperity for all. He is not bothered with performing individual acts of kindness, or tending to the wounded in the industrial battle—that is the task of his female partner: he must fight and prevail. If he has a certain hollowness it is because that is what such a man is like, rather than because Conrad has omitted anything in his presentation of him.

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In this kind of society the cultivation of the inner life is left to the ladies.

Though he may have something in common with Henry Wilcox, Gould has also some of the tougher material of Gerald Crich in Lawrence's Women in Love. He lives in riding breeches and enters and leaves to the click of spurs; he is the horseman, that favourite masculine image of Western man, going back, perhaps, to the days when Mongol invaders indelibly imprinted it on our consciousness. Gould rides "like a centaur", and at his first appearance in the story he is matched against the equestrian statue of his predecessor as "King of Sulaco", Charles IV of Spain, known to the peasants as "The Horse of Stone": "The other Carlos, turning off to the left with a rapid clatter of hoofs on the disjointed pavement—Don Carlos Gould, in his English clothes, looked as incongruous, but much more at home than the kingly cavalier reigning in his steed on the pedestal above the sleeping leperos, with his marble arm raised towards the marble ruin of a plumed hat" (p. 49).

Mrs Gould represents just as fully and as naturally the feminine ideal of her time, with her water-colours, her care for the past, her love of her house, and sensitive concern for all around her. Again, she can be compared with the best of Forster's women: a little less fey than Mrs Wilcox, one could easily imagine her at Howards End. Indeed, if Nostramo had been published six years after Howards End instead of six years before, one might have been attempted to see Forster's influence in the Goulds, their Italian courtship, and the whole presentation of their marital relationship.

At the same time there is more objectivity, less open commitment, in Conrad's treatment of the theme. He can present Mrs Gould's vision with full understanding, but without implying that it is his own, and with no suggestion that the forces of the cosmos must be on her side. And while Forster seems to commit himself to the "feminine" forces more

completely than Conrad, he also shows in himself, as author, a rather feminine tendency to capitulate to the masculine charm of Mr Wilcox, so that in the end, as a defender of his "creed", he seems rather less successful than the man he had accused of lacking one (p. above).

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Conrad's experiences on the Saint Antoine that took him to South America included his first acquaintance with its mate, the Corsican Dominic Cervoni, who seems to have impressed himself upon Conrad's imagination more deeply than any other human being, and became not only the hero of Nostramo, but also Peyrol, hero of The Rover, the fictional "Dominic" of The Arrow of Gold, the perhaps more factual "Dominic" who fills the liveliest chapters of The Mirror of the Sea, and was still to make a last appearance as Attilio in the unfinished Suspense. Aubry suggests also that Tom Lingard in the Malayan novels has "the soul and moral outlook of Dominic" (I, p. 37).

Conrad's lasting fascination with Cervoni seems to be based on an emotional attachment of which nevertheless intellectually, he was inclined to be critical. In Nostramo, for instance, lavish authorial tributes to "the illustrious Capataz" are balanced by rather cruel comments from just those characters with whom Conrad is intellectually identified, Monygham, and more especially, Decoud, who seems to see Nostramo as almost entirely vain and empty.

Conrad never attempts any kind of deep identification with Cervoni, though he comes a little nearer to it in The Rover where as an old man, Peyrol becomes also a vehicle for some of Conrad's own middle-aged self-indulgence as a "retired adventurer". Cervoni is not the kind of intellectual, flawed, or sensitive character with whom Conrad could naturally identify. His devotion to Cervoni seems to be more like that of the zoologist to the animal on which he has chosen to specialise: he observes it with loving attention, but he is wary of "anthropomorphizing"

it by trying to guess too closely what it feels or thinks.

It is probably for this reason that Cervoni seems most alive in those chapters of The Arrow of Gold or The Mirror of the Sea where we see him more as Conrad actually saw him, and perhaps least convincing in Nostramo where he has to both change his nationality and lose his ancestral pride. Whereas Cervoni, we are told in The Mirror of the Sea, was a Caporali and "the Caporali family dates back to the twelfth century" (p. 163), Nostramo is an expatriate and an orphan. It is not unlikely that such a lack of background would make a man more empty and vain, and in this respect Nostramo may be quite authentic, so that as Conrad puts it in the Author's Note, "Dominic would have understood the younger man perfectly—if scornfully" (p. xx). But it also makes him less interesting, less of a character, and so less able to bear the weight of half-ironic glory with which Conrad wants to load him.

It is not altogether surprising therefore that in the face of a great deal of partially justified, but largely superficial, criticism, Conrad was tempted to disown Nostramo: "I don't defend Nostramo himself. Fact is he does not take my fancy either.... But truly N. is nothing at all—a fiction, embodied vanity of the sailor kind—a romantic mouthpiece of the 'people' which (I mean 'the people') frequently experience the very feelings to which he gives utterance. I do not defend him as a creation" (Aubry, I, p. 338). But this is to give away too much, and even when his author, too, has betrayed him, something of "the genius of the Capataz de Cargadores" still dominates "the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love."

Cervoni's importance to Conrad would seem to lie in his relation as anti-type to the author's own nature. Just as Marlow reflects something of Conrad's own cerebral fever, Cervoni in his several metamorphoses represents the opposite, the kind of unreflective man

of action whom Conrad could not help envying and admiring. Cervoni has the "perfection" of the creature that acts from "instinct", untroubled by the arriere pensées of the intellect. In The Mirror of the Sea we are told that "there was nothing in the world sudden enough to take Dominic unawares.... He had the physical assurance of strong-hearted men. After half an hour's interview in the dining room during which they got in touch with each other in an amazing way, Rita told us in her best grande dame manner: "Mais il est parfait, cet homme." He was perfect" (p. 164).

Although his role as Nostromo may be the least effective of Cervoni's several appearances, taking him furthest from that natural habitat in which he moved with such perfect assurance, one suspects that it was Conrad's original intention to set him as "Our Man", the man who is a man as an apple is an apple or a tiger is a tiger, at the centre of the story, and use him as a measure of the "manliness" of others. Only thus can the corruption even of the incorruptible Nostromo, the man who would have "preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism", attain to tragic proportions. And only thus, one might add, can one explain the lengthy treatment of Nostromo's career after the establishment of the state of Sulaco, with the "symbolical" lighthouse and the full description of his last hours, which because the story did not turn out to be so much centred on Nostromo as Conrad originally intended, now reads rather like an unjustifiably long-winded epilogue.

His name—"Our Man"—also suggests all this, though it is typical of Conrad's insistence that his symbolism must always have a realistic base that he permits himself this suggestive title only because nostromo is also Italian for "boatswain", which Nostromo was before he came ashore.

Conrad's remark in a letter to Cunninghame Graham, in the early stage of writing the book, that it was to be "concerned mostly with Italians" (Aubry, I, p. 315), as also his earlier remark to Galsworthy that it would belong to "the 'Karain' class of tales"^(p. 308) can be seen as clear indications that originally it was intended to be much shorter than it turned out to be, and much more centred upon Nostromo. The survival of at least the spirit and intention can be seen not only in the title of the book but also in the repetition of Nostromo's name in a kind of litany that runs through the book, often at the close of a chapter not otherwise concerned with him, until at the end of the last chapter of all, his name uttered in a "cry of undying passion" passes over Dr Monygham's head to dominate for ever "the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love". In fact the final structure of the book rather suggests the possibility that what we now have as its main substance was a kind of parenthesis which Conrad inserted between the beginning and the ending of the original short story.

If there is unmistakeable irony in this litany of the "illustrious Capataz" it does not entirely cancel out the ring of a genuinely felt romantic emotion that is attached to every appearance of Cervoni. A vain man, perhaps, but then "all is vanity", and at least one can say that some kinds of vanity are aesthetically, even morally, preferable to others. A man who is, as Monygham says, capable of "the most absurd fidelity," or as his other critic, Decoud puts it, "preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism", can be seen as more admirable than Gould, who is merely prepared to blow up his mine, or even Viola, who is willing to survive by frying onions: it is a definition that in suitably sublimated form can be extended to embrace all those whom mankind have regarded as saints or heroes, and it is Nostromo's "tragedy" that he is cheated of true tragedy because fate does not allow him so to die.

It may be that something of what Nostromo was intended to be survives in the contrasts made between him and other more important people, notably Decoud and Monygham. Both of them treat Nostromo with the kind of condescension that their social rank and superior intelligence may justify, yet both are made to feel a little uncomfortable in his presence, and a little ridiculous in their assumptions of superiority, which may have been very much how the young Conrad felt in the presence of Cervoni's animal "perfection". The fact that in this particular instance Nostromo's triumph is hollow does not entirely devalue the kind of contrast that Conrad emphasises at the end of the story, when Monygham sees Nostromo as the incarnation of all that life has denied him-- the reputation for courage, the achievement of adventure and the love of beautiful women. Even in relation to Mrs Gould, "that woman whom he loved with secret devotion, he had been defeated by the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, the man who lived his own life on the assumption of unbroken fidelity, rectitude, and courage!" (p. 561).

But if there was the intention here to do full justice to the power and charm of Nostromo, there is a failure to give it sufficient substance. His appearances, though numerous, are brief, and often with more rhetoric than evidenced reality: if we believe in his powers it is more because of the litany of invocation than because we see him exercising them. His fabled leadership, as it is actually set before us, whether of the cargadores or of Decoud and Hirsch on the lighter, seems to consist of little more than pushing a revolver under their noses, or into their backs, and threatening instant death, while his methods of "security" are equally individualistic and primitive: "I have sat alone at night with my revolver in the Company's warehouse time and again by the side of that other Englishman's heap of silver, guarding it as though it had been my own very own" (p. 125).

Napoleon, we remember, was a Corsican, and Cervoni, as he appears

in The Mirror of the Sea, can be seen as something of a small-scale Napoleon in his self-dramatised powers of leadership, but as Nostromo he becomes too much of a "loner" and a "bosses' man". In his relations with women also, he seems to show rather less of the generosity, or the virility that one might expect of such a man, and more of the kind of indifference that one finds in so many of Conrad's male characters: "I don't care for cards as a pastime; and as to those girls that boast of having opened their doors at my knock, you know I wouldn't look at any one of them twice except for what people would say. They are queer, the good people of Sulaco, and I have got much useful information simply by listening patiently to the talk of women that everybody believed that I was in love with" (p. 297).

It was probably some such points as these that inspired criticisms of Nostromo by Cunninghame Graham, to which Conrad's general disavowal was quoted above, while on this particular point, he replies, "As to his conduct generally and with women in particular, I only wish to say that he is not a Spaniard or S. American" (Aubry, I, p. 338). One might also add that this aspect of Nostromo is quite consistent with the fact that, almost as much as Lord Jim, he is concerned with his "Platonic conception of himself", or rather one might say, a "sub-Platonic conception" that stands in rather the same relationship to the finished product as we see it in Jim as do the Shamanistic oracles of early Greece to the visions of Plato.

Although on the surface, as a man who lives only for the good opinion of others, Nostromo may seem to be almost the opposite of an "idealist", he is also shown to be in his own primitive way, very much a hero of the "ideal". He lives not by the "idea" as a finished formulation, stable and internalised, but rather by the raw material of the ideal, the unfinished flux of it, expressed through the approval of his superiors or the worship of his followers. His attitudes are those of the

kind of primitive hero out of which, among such people as the early Greeks, an aristocratic ideal developed.

This can be clearly seen when he is contrasted, for instance, with one of the book's minor characters, Gamacho, who has had similar origins and opportunities. Gamacho, by thieving and small-shopkeeping, has become a deputy, and is destined for high office if the Monterists succeed. "And do you think that Gamacho, then, would have ever become a hero with the democracy of this place, like our Capataz? Of course not. He isn't half the man. No, decidedly, I think Nostromo is a fool" (p. 321)—Dr Moyngham, whose consistent cynicism forces him to call Nostromo a "fool" is thereby conferring on him the title of "idealist".

As the Doctor says to the Chief Engineer earlier in the same conversation, "--he's not grown rich by his fidelity to you good people of the railway and the harbour. I suppose he obtains some, how do you say that?—some spiritual value for his labours, or else I don't know why the devil he should be faithful to you, Gould, Mitchell or anybody else." In this brief conversation Conrad not only illuminates the characters of both Moyngham and Nostromo, but also shows up in a couple of sentences the superficiality of the Chief Engineer and all that he stands for: "The doctor's talk was distasteful to the builder of railways. 'It is impossible to argue that point,' he said philosophically. 'Each man has his gifts. You should have heard Gamacho haranguing his friends in the street...'" (p. 321).

It is because these superiors take him for granted, and cannot even reward him fairly, let alone appreciate the "spiritual value" by which he lives that Nostromo is tempted in the end to accept the implicit values by which they live rather than the values they preach. Only Mrs Gould seems to understand, and saves his reputation by letting his secret die with him— it is interesting to note that it is only by an otherwise not very much exploited authorial "omniscience" that the reader knows.

It may be that Signora Viola also understands Nostromo, but because the "spiritual value" with which he is absorbed conflicts with her own possessive attitude towards him, and also with the higher, but for Nostromo quite insubstantial, values that she takes from the Catholic Church, she pretends to despise him. The whole of their relationship, with its complexity of maternally and sexually possessive loves and jealousies, conveyed in vivid dialogue, is convincingly done. The cumulative effect of a whole series of such vignettes—the incident of Gould's father and the courtesan in the capital is one brilliant example, and the affair of Captain Mitchell's missing watch another—is one source of the book's extraordinary richness.

The wealth of authentic detail is another. Although Decoud's sceptical disillusionment with the world represents one side of the author's nature, another quite opposite aspect of it is reflected in his ability to immerse himself in every tiniest detail of his South American state, details so complete and convincing that just as when one travels through a landscape for the first time, one notices and remembers ~~very~~ very few of its features, and collects more on each successive journey, so each time one re-reads Nostromo one can notice many little things that had escaped attention before.

Not only, for example, are we given every detail of the working of the mine, but all these details come to us through their effects on the people. "The great clattering, shuffling noise" of the ore shoots is heard as Don Pepe stands still for a moment to listen to it (p. 164). As well as learning about the use of water in the process, we are also told about the waterfall that once existed, when it was "the very paradise of snakes", and the memory of this ironic other Eden is preserved in Mrs Gould's water-colour sketch: "she had made it hastily one day from a cleared patch in the bushes, sitting in the shade of a roof of

straw erected for her on three rough poles under Don Pepe's direction" (p. 166). The creator was there "in the beginning" before ever his world came to be, and he is miraculously present in all his creatures at every moment. He gives us not so much a "selection" of significant details as an overwhelming and interlocking abundance of them, from which unconsciously, according to his need or capacity, each reader makes his own selection. There is hardly anything that is not relevant, but there are many things that are more or less relevant according to the degree to which one is willing to give them one's attention, to whether one wishes to hurry through Sulaco or spiritually to dwell there.

Or take these concluding lines of Chapter Four, which has mainly described Viola and his cafe:

No native of Costaguana intruded there. This was the Italian stronghold. Even the Sulaco policemen on night patrol let their horses pace softly by, bending low in the saddle to glance through the window at the heads in ^athe fog of smoke, and the drone of old Giorgio's declamatory narrative seemed to sink behind them into the plain. Only now and then the assistant chief of police, some broad-faced, brown little gentleman, with a great deal of Indian in him, would put in an appearance. Leaving his man outside with the horses he advanced with a confident, sly smile, and without a word up to the long trestle table. He pointed to one of the bottles on the shelf; Giorgio, thrusting his pipe into his mouth abruptly served him ~~himself~~ in person. Nothing would be heard but the slight jingle of spurs. His glass emptied, he would take a leisurely scrutinizing look all round the room, go out, and ride away slowly, circling towards the town. (p. 33)

The writing may not be so remarkable, but the "authenticity" is compelling: one wants to ask, How did Conrad know about this? It is not the sort of thing one would expect to get from travel-books, or

even from a casual visit—one would have to have been born and bred on the continent to know such things—or so one might think if one did not know that Conrad had a few hours in such a country, and read a few books—one can almost believe in Warren's "primal fecund darkness".

Viola himself, "the idealist of the old humanitarian revolutions", is one of the books most vivid and attractive characters. It is part of Conrad's mundane skill, with his eye on the "listener", that having begun with an Englishman, Captain Mitchell, and the British-owned O.S.N., he then presents an immediately sympathetic character, Viola, to whom also he gives strong English sympathies, and a dependence upon a bible supplied by the British and Foreign Bible Society—and at the same time has him in a situation of danger, waiting to be rescued by Nostromo. Only then do we get down to something with more political substance—the banquet on the Juno, for which the references to Mitchell have prepared us. And on the way we have acquired an enormous amount of background information—as Hewitt says, "Every fact given in the first ten pages or so is to play a vital part in the book" (p. 49).

It is a little startling to find from Sherry's Conrad's Western World that Viola, in both character and appearance, is based not so much on Garibaldi's cook as on Garibaldi himself, whose autobiography was one of Conrad's sources (pp. 156-158). But although the leonine face, the white mane, and the "austere contempt for all personal advantage" may come from Garibaldi, Viola's ideas and conversation are entirely consistent with the kind of man he is supposed to be, and his personality, which sounds important notes in the overall symphony of valeurs ideales is quite consistent and convincing.

His idealism is attractive, and yet it is shown to be, in the context of Costaguana, almost as ineffective as that of Don José. Like the latter's, it is based on an idea of "the people" that the real people

of this primitive country can hardly live up to, and more than once Viola's mystical belief in "the people" is contrasted with his contempt for the "mob" that actually confronts him. His ideals are focussed and symbolised by the highly coloured portrait of Garibaldi on his wall, but when he opens the door, after Nostromo has rescued him from "the people", "the crude colours of the Garibaldi lithograph paled in the sunshine" (p. 23).

This attitude to Viola's ideal, which sees it as paled by the sunshine of reality, should not be forgotten when it comes to considering that larger piece of symbolism by which, at the end of the story, Viola comes to be the keeper of the lighthouse, and the unwitting judge and executioner of Nostromo. Leavis describes Nostromo's "return to find the new lighthouse standing on the lonely rock hard by his secret, and his consequent betrayal into devious paths of love" as "magnificent triumphs of symbolism" (p. 212), but this symbolic use of an artificial light must not be interpreted as if it implied some moral absolute by which Nostromo may justly be condemned. The lighthouse, we remember, has been erected by the "material interests" for very practical purposes, and that Viola, representative of liberal ideals, has become the devoted keeper of it, as well as the jealous guardian of his own daughters, has its own deep ironies.

In considering Conrad's relationship to Decoud, ^{a combination} ~~who is the subject~~ of both a critical insight and a sympathetic identification that makes him intellectually the book's most important character, and perhaps also its most attractive, Guerard has discerned "a marked discrepancy between what Decoud does and says, and what the narrator or omniscient author says about him"—both his words and actions have a positive quality that seems to belie the repeated descriptions of him as dilettante, sceptic

and boulevardier. Guerard amply illustrates the point, and suggests that "if we subtract the ironic epithets, authorial summaries, and solitary suicide, a quite different person emerges. So far from believing or caring about nothing, he has an ideal of lucidity and of intellectual honesty, he is very much in love, and he is (quite apart from ^{his} attitude toward the current political situation) a patriot". Guerard concludes from all this that it is difficult to accept his early suicide—"the remarkable thing is that we believe as much as we do. For the two Decouds are, indeed, two very different men, two different 'potential selves'" (pp. 199-202).

Guerard seems here to be missing the double edge of the author's irony which, ultimately, is directed against good people like Corbelan who see Decoud as nothing but a "materialist" and a monster because he cannot share their convictions. One might also suggest that if Decoud represents two "potential selves" of the author, this does not imply that they are "indeed, two very different men", but rather that they must be, as two aspects of the one author, so closely related that it is not altogether incredible that they should inhabit one body. It seems in fact, that with Decoud Conrad has done very much the same thing as he did with Lord Jim. He has on the one hand subjected him to the kind of critical analysis, coming from his own self-awareness, that inevitably involves an aspect of apparent cruelty, while at the same time allowing him, in action, to live out the kind of romantic adventure that was the subject of his own youthful day dreams, and in the case of Decoud, to do it before the eyes of Antonia, who represents, as Conrad tells us in the Author's Note, the girl on whom he had longed to make just such an impression in his own youth.

This inevitably leads to both Jim in Patusan, and Decoud in the Sulaco rebellion, achieving rather more in the world of action than the

author's analysis of their characters might suggest as probable, but the credibility of this success is largely saved by allowing their vulnerable sensitivity to undo them in the end. In this sense, one might say that Decoud's death preserves, rather than reduces, his overall credibility.

Even though, with Decoud's suicide, Conrad may almost appear to be making a philosophical point rather than producing a psychologically probable event, the more one ponders the depth of the ^{philosophy} ~~the~~ spiritual isolation of Decoud as well as the physical, as outlined above (p.) msp
250 the less one is likely to doubt the psychology. The actual circumstances of his death are described with convincing insight into the disintegrating effects of such a combination of physical emptiness added to a pre-existing intellectual isolation, not least in the appearance of Antonia, like a secularised version of Dante's Beatrice, "gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness" (p. 498). One can well imagine that the author himself had been near enough to such an end to know what he was talking about.

This, and the whole treatment of Decoud and his situation amply demonstrate the way in which Conrad's atheism transcended the simple and optimistic "rationalism" with which in his day it was usually associated. He never suggests that one is a happier man, or a better man morally, for being an atheist: one cannot even assume that the world itself would be a better place as a result of universal intellectual honesty, for that would imply that "truth" has some kind of ultimate divinity, and this is something that Conrad's kind of thorough-going scepticism cannot logically accept—a great deal of camouflage and deceit lies behind man's evolutionary "success" just as a great deal of illusion lies behind his social development. If Conrad's interest in "ideals", and his acknowledgement of their power, perhaps of their

primacy, in human society makes him sound after all, as Tony Tanner has suggested, like something of a "neo-Platonist" (Kuehn, p. 61), it is only because he is viewing them from the opposite pole—an attitude of intense, sceptical inquiry rather than uncritical adoration.

As a victim of "the disillusioned weariness that is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity", Decoud is a character whom the modern world can appreciate with more sympathy than most of Conrad's contemporaries were able to do. There was probably no other English writer of Conrad's time who could really have understood such a man, and to find his literary like one must turn perhaps to Robert Musil's The Man without Qualities, whom he antedates by two decades. Joyce did not want to take it too seriously—"life still goes on" (p. above), while Lawrence's extremely unsympathetic treatment of Leorke, the German sculptor in Women in Love—"a gnawing little negation at the roots of life"—suggests that the challenge of ultimate scepticism was something that Lawrence simply refused to face—he retreats into pulpit oratory rather as Carlyle did in the earliest days of "metaphysical extremity".

Dr Monygham becomes a more prominent figure in the later part of the book, after the death of Decoud, taking over something of his role as sceptical commentator, though his scepticism lacks Decoud's metaphysical dimensions, being limited to a cynicism in regard to human behaviour. It is only at this late stage (Part III, Ch. 4) that we are given the full account of the torture and false confession that have twisted him in body and soul. Conrad bases this quite closely on G. F. Masterman's account of his own experience in Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay. Masterman was himself a doctor, and provides another example of the way in which, as with A.P. Williams and Lord Jim, or Hodister and Kurtz, Conrad can take the adventures and the outer-shell of a relatively simple man and invest them with something of his own sens-

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itivity. Masterman's experiences were probably less extreme, and certainly are described with less pathos than Conrad uses, while Masterman's subsequent story makes it obvious that he was not permanently affected by them in the manner of Monygham.

One cannot but notice that by doing this kind of thing to his chosen characters, Conrad not only makes them more interesting, and more effective as prototypes of the "ideal", but also, intentionally or not, makes them powerful instruments for conveying a kind of criticism of life. By pushing such people into brutal circumstances for which they are so ill-adapted, and in real life, would probably succeed in avoiding—as Conrad himself avoided them—he tends to make the world seem a crueller place than it does to average experience. And all the more so because of the self-awareness that allows Conrad to maintain an attitude of critical irony towards people such as Decoud or Monygham who express what is essentially his own sensitivity.

Not only are they treated with no trace of sentimentality, but the social dangers of such characters are fully acknowledged. The fact is faced that in a tight corner Jim could not be trusted; Dr Monygham's cynicism is compassionately understood yet not condoned. It makes him suspicious of everyone else: "really it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself"—an aphoristic summary of what is both the cynic's justification and his condemnation. Moreover, his one remaining unconditional loyalty, to Mrs Gould, makes him, as Nostromo sees, "a dangerous man". His assertion that the treasure has been concealed: made in what he takes to be Mrs Gould's cause, leads to the torture and death of Hirsch, and so to Monygham's final feeling of utter degradation.

It must be admitted that these scenes in the Custom House, with the exception of the comedy of Captain Mitchell's watch, are rather below the general level of the book. Guerard, who has made a detailed analysis

of them, refers to "amateurish and clumsy shifts" in "the post of observation", of which "many seem inadvertent; others are made for transparent reasons of convenience. Either way they would suggest indifference to technique; an indifference to harmonious and skilful management of the reader" (p. 207). It is not surprising if at this stage of his effort Conrad was growing a little tired.

The economy, pathos, and subtlety with which Monygham's torture and confession are conveyed, or the imprisonment of Don José, can be contrasted with the relative crudity of Hirsch's interrogation and death. Sherry shows that the latter is largely based on the torture of Garibaldi in Italy, as described in his autobiography, but made lengthier and more harrowing than the original (p. 76). It is done in the "historical present", rather than distanced in the past, and provides an apt illustration of Guerard's point, made first in relation to Almayer's Folly, that Conrad "cannot dramatize important physical action occurring in the present; he recovers his normal stylistic energy only when a distancing, whether of time or irony, is possible" (pp. 158-161). It is as though the invention, and visualisation, of present action uses up the energy that could otherwise be given to shade and subtlety.

Although Hirsch is a minor character, he is a memorable one, and plays a significant part not only in the plot, but in the pattern of valeurs idéales. As an "Israelite", he is the only intelligent character in the story who makes no claim to an "ideal", and no pretence of courage, for he has no social context in which to acquire or display these things, only a "private life" which may be admirable, but does not enter the story. As with Shakespeare's Shylock, his plight is presented with an objectivity that should not be confused with any kind of anti-Semitism. Exclusion from society forces people into unattractive shapes, and confines them to purely "commercial" roles. For Hirsch, the fate of Costaguana is understood only in terms of rotting hides that he should be exporting; Nostromo's magnificence is seen only as a threat to his purse;

Gould's determination to resist is an inexplicably lost opportunity to do business in dynamite, and his ruthless interrogation by Sotillo is an utterly mysterious fatality that forces him finally to make his explosive human gesture of spitting in his persecutor's face. That in the source that Conrad used, this act of courage was made by the noble Garibaldi does not reduce the credibility of its performance by Hirsch, for one feels that at this point there has been reached a common bedrock of humanity. And so Hirsch dies, and the predicament, and the fate, of the Jew in the Western world up to Conrad's time, and beyond, has been expressed with concise but comprehensive art.

Nostramo, with its richness, presents to any reader with philosophical, psychological or sociological interests so many talking points, there is, as Leavis puts it in speaking of Conrad generally, so much work "addressed to the adult mind, and capable as such of engaging again and again its full critical attention", that any critic who is not content to limit himself to questions of literary craftsmanship is liable to lose himself among the trees of the intellectual forest: no doubt the present essay is but one such circular trail of broken twigs.

For Leavis, "the question that we feel working in the matter of the novel as a kind of informing and organising principle is 'What do men find to live for--what kinds of motive force or radical attitude can give life meaning, direction, coherence?'" and he goes on to say, "Charles Gould finds his answer in the ideal purpose he identifies with the success of the Gould Concession" (p. 211). This may be a legitimate interpretation, but in the end it sounds a little too reminiscent of Holroyd's "purer form of Christianity"; it seems to imply a rather simplistic view of man as an independent moral agent, and tends to obscure the questions that "inform and organise" the book at a deeper level, such as in the case of Gould, whether he has not been "chosen" by a destiny larger than himself, rather than being one who has chosen an

ideal purpose. Although he seems nearest to being the "hero" of the book, in the sense that he is the man around whom things revolve, the wielder of the greatest power, he is also seen as the most obvious "victim" of the "material interest" represented by the silver, and justifying in this sense, Conrad's own claim that "Silver is the hero, the pivot of the moral and material events" (Aubry, II, p. 296). Gould may be the "King of Sulaco", but as in Greek tragedy there is a divinity that shapes his ends.

Not that silver can be entirely adequate as a symbol for something as complex as "material interest" in the sense that Conrad uses it—nor can terms such as "imperialism" or "capitalism" be regarded as wholly synonymous with it—but "the silver" does have a certain effectiveness in this respect because it is only the system of "material interest" that gives it its power as arbiter of events and its right to demand unlimited human sacrifices. For the Indians before the Spanish Conquest, gold and silver were valued merely as decorative materials, or as offerings to the gods, and they were incapable of understanding the Westerner's lust for it. Thus if "the silver of the mine" represents in one sense the "ultimate reality" around which the novel's events and characters revolve, it is also in another sense, the ultimate illusion. That Raleigh's eldorado of San Thomé was an illusion may well have been the major reason for Conrad's choice of it for the title of his fictional mine.

All this is well conveyed by the little parable with which the story opens—the two men, "Americanos perhaps, but gringos of some sort for certain," who with their native follower disappear in search of treasure on the barren peninsula. "The sailors, the Indian, and the stolen burro were never seen again. As to the mozo, a Sulaco man—his wife paid for some masses, and the poor four-footed beast, being without sin, had probably been permitted to die; but the two gringos, spectral and

alive, are believed to be dwelling to this day amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success... They are now rich and hungry and thirsty..." (p. 5).

The book can be seen as a "history" recorded with such objectivity that it lies ready to receive almost as many interpretations as history itself has done: the author himself is so free from ideology that his work lies open to be claimed by any of them. The Christian can find what doubtless seems to him good evidence for his belief that the conflicts of history can be resolved only from beyond history, while the death of Decoud provides a cautionary tale on the fate of the unbeliever. The Marxist can see, in Gould formulating his ideals as his mine gets its grip on the country, and Holroyd, the financier of it all, sending his Protestant missionaries, the very process of the cultural epiphenomena rising like a mist from the grinding of the economic forces, The fascists are there from the beginning, and with what Kettle describes as "an astonishing stroke of intuition", Nostromo dies at the end of the story with a representative of the revolutionary proletariat alone at his bedside.

Although in certain of its sympathies the book might appear to support a right-wing interpretation, in its social and political understanding it comes very close to what might be called a Marxist interpretation. In his view of the relationship between ideals and the forces that shape them, and which they in turn serve to sustain—and also to criticise, Conrad appears to have reached conclusions very close to those of Marx and Engels, even though he may have reached them by different paths, and be far from sharing their optimism as to the final resolution. Nostromo antedates by one year the publication of Weber's essay, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, and provides in fictional form what can be seen as essentially similar insights, but presented from

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the opposite, or Marxist, viewpoint. But if the book provides what in this sense might be called a Marxist interpretation, it is certainly not with any revolutionary intentions. The Marxist has his eye on the future, and wishes to change the world: Conrad, if not altogether as a conscious attitude, at least by temperament, is inclined towards a Greek, or cyclic view of time rather than the Western Biblical, or Marxist, view of history as moving towards a goal.

Thus the successive strata of a South American state—the primitive Indians, the feudal Blancos, the liberal democrats, and the socialist movement are treated not as part of an on-going historical process, but rather as aspects of an "eternal recurrence", different chemical combinations of essentially unchangeable elements, a world condemned to futility by "the passions of men, short-sighted in good or evil". It seemed to Decoud that "every conviction, as soon as it became effective, turned into that form of dementia the gods send upon those they wish to destroy." This is the fate of ideals, while the fate of "intellectual audacity" is "disillusioned weariness", and the reward of "audacious action," as represented by Nostromo, is "disenchanted vanity"(p. 501).

Conrad accepts as inevitable the triumph of those material forces that for most people in his generation were identified with progress and the betterment of the human condition, symbolised by "the sparse row of telegraph poles.... bearing a single, almost invisible wire into the great campo, like a silent vibrating feeler" that will "enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land", but "All is vanity", the heart is weary, and that these forces will win is no cause for celebration. We are made to feel as sceptical as Mrs Gould when the builder of railways promises that "you shall have more steamers, a railway, a telegraph cable—a future in the great world which is worth infinitely more than any amount of ecclesiastical past." One can hardly doubt that Dr Monygham speaks with editorial authority when he says,

"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 moral principle"(p. 511). The "moral principle" implied here, if it is to mean anything at all, must be a principle of social justice other than that kind of "law" and "justice" associated with the "material interests" in which Gould saw his "ray of hope", and which Monygham has just dismissed as based on expediency and lacking humanity, but on the nature of this moral principle Conrad does not seem to have anything explicit to say.

If there is little hope for the future, there is no sentimentality about the past either—that was "barbarism, cruelty, and misrule". Although he has chosen an epigraph from The Tempest—"so foul a sky clears not without a storm", it hardly fits either the geography of Sulaco with its unchanging cycle of equatorial weather, or the spiritual atmosphere of the story, which seems to come nearer to reflecting Schopenhauer's conclusion, "He who has made the doctrine of my philosophy completely his own knows that the whole of our existence is something that were better if it were not, and which to negate and reject is the greatest wisdom."⁴ But a man's philosophy, intellectually apprehended, is one thing and his life and art are, fortunately, another. Schopenhauer did not commit suicide—he was too busy trying to drive the rest of us to despair, and Conrad also seems to be kept alive by the fervour of his artistic endeavour, and not only kept alive, but giving life to his characters, and through them to his readers. Only when his intellect is "free-wheeling", as it is imaginatively allowed to do with Decoud, does it free itself from the body's tenacious will to continue the struggle of existence.

Indeed, the book seems to be given an extra vibration of life from the very tension between these opposing poles of Olympian detachment and warm personal interest. Nothing is really of importance on this cooling planet, but it is important to take note of the contents

of Anzani's store"—boots, silks, ironware, muslins, wooden toys, tiny silver arms, legs, heads hearts (for ex-voto offerings), rosaries, champagne, women's hats, patent medicines..."(p.), Anzani's stores, next door to the house taken over by Decoud's Porvenir, and the place where Hirsch lodges, where Sotillo comes to boast of his chances with Antonia, and the source of the Swedish punch that is drunk at the Amarilla Club.

The result is that the sense of despair, as Kettle has emphasized, is not allowed to dominate the whole: "...he expresses that despair most powerfully.. But though the theme is so poignantly done it retains the status of a theme, overtopped by the prevailing vitality, the sense of life developing"(p. 71).

Orthodox Marxism, like the faith of the Biblical prophets, is intensely optimistic, even at times against the logic of its own analysis, for only thus can the energy be generated to change the world. In Nostromo we see a very similar analysis of historical forces used to create what might almost be called the "Marxism of Pessimism": Conrad is the Jeremiah among the prophets of Historical Necessity, for the "Necessity", if it exists, has not chosen to reveal itself to him.

Jocelyn Baines has noted the aptness of certain passages in an essay "Autocracy and War" that Conrad wrote in the ^{same} year (1904), as comment on Nostromo, (p. 376), and in one of them Conrad writes: "The true peace of the world... will be built on less perishable foundations than those of material interests. But it must be confessed that the architectural aspect of the universal city remains as yet inconceivable—that the very ground for its erection has not been cleared of the jungle" (p. 107). He does not deny the possibility of the New Jerusalem, but he sees it as very far away.

Notes

1. Robert Penn Warren, "Nostromo", Selected Essays, p. 33.
2. Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel,
Vol. 2, pp. 65-66.
3. Marvin Mudrick, (Ed.), Conrad: a Collection of Critical Essays, p. 10.
4. Essays: Counsels and Maxims, p. 12.

The Secret Agent

To read The Secret Agent and fully to lay oneself open to its impact must be one of the most painful experiences that literature can offer. It is a book about "the human condition", a criticism of the cosmos, much more than a book about anarchists. The original suggestion for the story may well have come, as Conrad says in the Author's Note, from the "utter absurdity", to his rational minds, of an actual attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, something that "could not be laid hold of mentally in any sort of way, so that one remained faced by the fact of a man being blown to bits for nothing even most remotely resembling an idea, anarchistic or other" (p. x), but having begun this venture into an underworld where the concepts of the rational mind are set at naught, he finds himself being carried beyond the simple absurdity of anarchist belief into the deeper irrationality that lies everywhere beneath the order of society and the conventions of day-to-day living. It is this that makes the theme congenial to him, and gives the book its power. It is rather as though that explosion at the roots of a tree in Greenwich Park had opened a cave into the whole subterranean workings of the city, and of the mind of man.

The book seems to go ever deeper beneath the social foundations, boring, mining and undermining, until the apparent absurdity of anarchism seems little more than a paradigm of the anarchic absurdity of the cosmopolis, and even of the cosmos, a tragic absurdity that is acted out in the domestic drama of the Verloc family in a way that is only incidentally, and as it were symbolically, connected with the ideas of anarchy.

It seems that Conrad never consciously came to understand why the

the apparent absurdity of this explosion should force itself upon his attention, should demand that a novelist capable of writing on the epic scale of Nostromo should unexpectedly concentrate his attention upon the back-parlour of a shop in Soho. But when we see what happened, and how far he was carried by that determination, referred to in the Author's Note, to pursue his "ironic treatment... right through to the end", we can appreciate that that investigation into les valeurs idéales that receives its widest exploration, above ground, in the "crude sunshine" of Costaguana, needed, perhaps by the logic of its own necessity, to go underground, and wearing a mask of irony, bury itself in the bowels of the city. We come to suspect also that when the Assistant Commissioner, one of Conrad's more superficial "other selves", goes out in disguise and darkness to find the "secret agent", this is the author seeking another more subversive self struggling within the "burly, fat-pig" form of Mr. Verloc.

When in 1948, F. R. Leavis wrote, "Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad and D. H. Lawrence: the great tradition of the English novel is there" (p 37), the inclusion of Conrad probably contributed more than anything else to the fuller recognition that he has since received. It is interesting to note, therefore, that while for Leavis, Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness count as "minor works", The Secret Agent is "one of Conrad's two supreme masterpieces, one of the two unquestionable classics of the first order that he added to the English novel, and in its own way, it is like Nostromo in the subtle and triumphant complexity of its art—like, too, in not having had due critical recognition"(p.242).

This is not a view that the mainstream of subsequent criticism has endorsed. Deceived, perhaps by the ironic tone, the comedy, and the complete dissociation that Conrad himself proclaims not only in the Author's Note but also in his private letters, few critics seem to have

appreciated the degree to which it is both a cry from the author's heart and a logical extension of his political and philosophical concerns. This attitude is typified by Guerard's rather surprising verdict that it is "a work to be enjoyed, and to be enjoyed thoughtfully. But it is not an experience to be shared and survived, nor a political treatise to be endlessly reread and debated"(p.222). Given a willingness really to "share", The Secret Agent can prove more difficult to "survive" than any other of Conrad's works, and although none of them can adequately be classed as "political treatises", it is difficult to regard The Secret Agent as less so than Heart of Darkness or Nostromo--they all tend to be sub-political, or pre-political, in the sense that they never approach the question of what, in political terms, we must do to be saved: Conrad rather sticks at the preliminary question--not usually asked, of whether any kind of salvation is conceivable.

In this respect, it seems that even Leavis' high evaluation of The Secret Agent may be partly based on a kind of misunderstanding. "The great tradition" is, primarily, for Leavis, a tradition that implies moral concern, and although one cannot deny Conrad's "seriousness" in this respect, he differs fundamentally from the other names on the roll in that where they all--even Lawrence, put their trust in life, and largely take certain values for granted, being concerned that "the good" should prevail, be understood, and done, Conrad seems to question the very morality of "morality" and the ultimate validity of life itself; in this respect he might almost be classed as an "immoralist".

One feels that Leavis, in putting The Secret Agent so high among Conrad's works, has been influenced, on the one hand, by formal considerations of the kind that he brings against Lord Jim, in terms of which The Secret Agent can no doubt be seen as flawless, and on the other, by his own moral interests, which approve of the subtlety with which such things as "egoism" and social hypocrisy are exposed, without

perhaps appreciating the extent to which all this is undercut by the ambiguity and the ironic despair of the whole: one suspects that Leavis has been unconsciously supplying from his own moral energy those positive values that Conrad fails to offer. One notes a similar generosity in his high evaluation of Victory, where Leavis seizes on Heyst's dying words, "woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life", without fully considering to what extent they are supported or justified by what has gone before.

In considering the ironic tone of The Secret Agent, Leavis says that "the effect depends upon an interplay of contrasting moral perspectives, and the rich economy of the pattern they make relates The Secret Agent to Nostromo: the two works, for all the great differences between them in range and temper, are triumphs of the same art--the aim of The Secret Agent, of course, confines the range, and the kind of irony involves a limiting detachment (we don't look for the secrets of Conrad's soul in The Secret Agent)" (p.231).

This is to accept Conrad's "detachment" as something willed for a moral or artistic purpose, and enabling him to preserve quite intact, and elsewhere, the secrets of his soul, which is just what he himself protests, rather too much, in the Author's Note. But to read the book in this way is to limit one's ability to be moved by it, or to put it in another way, if one is, inescapably, moved by the book, then one can no longer see it in this way.

The suggestion that we are not, here, to "look for the secrets of Conrad's soul" may appear to be justified in the sense that there is no particular character who expresses the author's sensibility as obviously as Lord Jim, but there is another sense in which the book can be seen as coming from so deep in the author's soul, and wrenched out so painfully, that like the author himself, when it is done we hardly like to gaze upon it, and in none of his Author's Notes do we see Conrad looking away so steadily as on this occasion.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that authors who write in their blood should use some cooler and less expensive liquid when they are merely writing about what is written, but in the Note to The Secret Agent Conrad is even more evasive than usual. There are comments on his own cleverness at solving the mystery of the Greenwich explosion, though research has shown that his "solution" had already been canvassed in Anarchist journals and pamphlets; there are testimonials from American visitors and from "an experienced man of the world" as to the accuracy of his anarchists, which as he took them fairly straight from the newspapers, is not difficult to imagine; avowals of his "detachment from the squalor and sordidness which lie simply in the outward circumstances of the setting", and two seemingly irrelevant protests about the depth, the truth and the unreserved sincerity of The Mirror of the Sea--irrelevant until one sees that this is the one image of himself that Conrad wants the public to gaze upon, even though, in writing to Wells he called it "rubbish" and "bosh" of a kind that he could "dictate without effort at the rate of 3,000 words in four hours"(Aubry, I, p.327); there is a dissertation which "a student of chemistry would best understand" on the processes of precipitation and crystallization that occurred in the author's mind, and if you are still not satisfied, there is the final plea that he has "not intended to commit a gratuitous outrage on the feelings of mankind".

All of which may be taken as evidence that the book does in fact have considerable capability of outraging the feelings of mankind, and that the author himself is far from coming to terms with some of the insights and emotions that he has put on paper. Like Stevie letting off fire-works outside the office door, he may not have been consciously intending to send "silk hats and elderly business men rolling independently down the stairs", and no less than Ossipon he is rather horrified by the way things have turned out--"nothing short of criminal!" In the

one case, Mr Vladimir can be blamed, in the other, perhaps ultimately, some of those earlier compatriots of Mr Vladimir who sent Conrad and his parents to Siberia.

Even so, the lengthy Author's Note does provide one or two valuable hints as to where the book's real power is to be found. Referring to the scene of its predecessor, Nostromo, and to the sea, "the mirror of heaven's frowns and smiles, the reflector of the world's light", he goes on to say, "Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents, and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light"(p. xii).

Conrad spent a few months in the Congo; he spent many more in London, walking lonely through its streets to return to some lodging house, and it is this experience, not directly reported, but distilled into dark poetry that helps to make the scenery of The Secret Agent less romantic, but in a sense, more authentic than that of Heart of Darkness. "I had to fight hard to keep at arm's length the memories of my solitary and nocturnal walks all over London in my early days, lest they should rush in and overwhelm every page.."(p. xiii).

Conrad cannot easily express the atmosphere of London through its people, as Dickens could, because he does not really know them, and this gives his vision of it an impersonal austerity; it is an outsider's view, with none of that human warmth and light that must inevitably soften the picture, even if it does not sentimentalise it, for anyone who is "at home" there. Conrad does not need its darkest corners to convey this feeling—a clean and prosperous street will do as well: "In its breadth, emptiness, and extent it had the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies. The only reminder of mortality was a doctor's brougham arrested in august solitude close to the kerbstone. The polished knockers of the doors gleamed as far as the eye could reach, the clean

windows shone with a dark opaque lustre. And all was still"(p. 14). But it is the corners dark with poverty, as in the Verloc's cab-ride, that bring the vision to the cold intensity of "truth more cruel than caricature".

In the last line of Heart of Darkness, it is the Thames, not the Congo, that "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness", and it is here that Conrad finds the material for his darkest book, a darkness that needs no "adjectival insistence" because it is not any kind of metaphysical darkness such as he attempted to conjure up from hints of horrid rites and poetic associations with the "dark continent", but an urban and domestic darkness, the distilled essence of acres of London streets, the darkness that put the passion into Marx's dull researches in the library of the British Museum and kindled a fire of confused indignation in the mind of Dickens, and many other good men of the nineteenth century, the foggy darkness in which underfed cab horses are flogged by underfed men, a darkness of which nihilism and anarchy seem to be almost the most appropriate expression.

In this sense The Secret Agent is as much the portrayal of an explorer's personal experience as Heart of Darkness, but whereas the latter was also concerned with disenchantment from boyhood dreams, and carries an air of inverted romance, with The Secret Agent disillusioned irony is as it were the premise from which it begins. It may be true, as Conrad confesses, and others have largely confirmed, that he had little real knowledge of anarchists, and their complex and varied motives, but it is not this limited, technical anarchy that lies at the centre of the book, but the larger lunacy of a civilisation and a city, and a domestic drama that though it be acted out, melodramatically, with bomb and knife, is very much a "private life" such as might have been lived in any of those dark streets without being extrapolated to such extreme conclusions.

In the paragraph that follows his reference to the "cruel devourer of the world's light", Conrad goes on to speak of this other source of

the novel's power. "Slowly the dawning conviction of Mrs Verloc's maternal passion grew up to a flame between me and that background, tingeing it with its secret ardour and receiving from it in exchange some of its own sombre colouring"(p. xii). Not only the maternal passion of Mrs Verloc, but her husband's stolid simplicity, his belief that he loved for himself, his indignation at the ways that others treat him, his genuine panic, and in the last scene, his genuine weariness, his genuine hunger, both for something to eat, and for sympathy, are very moving despite all the weight of irony, guilt and absurdity that have been stacked against him, just as moving as the simplicity of Stevie or the real unselfishness of Mrs Verloc's mother, more so, perhaps, because the reader can more easily share Verloc's feelings. Conrad's ironic attitude not only tends to lessen the pain, but having served to carry us safely beyond the conventional limits of good and evil, it is used to pay a human dividend: it shows itself strong enough to bring back to the human fold the blackest of its sheep, and does it better perhaps than Dostoevsky might have done, for Conrad does it without making Verloc grovel in self-abnegation.

The Secret Agent is sometimes described as a comedy, but if it can be called that, it is only a comedy within a tragedy, in the sense in which Schopenhauer says, "The life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general, when only its most significant features are emphasised, is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy...Thus, as if fate wished to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our life must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assume the dignity of tragic characters, but in the general detail of life, are inevitably the foolish characters of a comedy". The writer of high tragedy has to take great care to preserve his characters from any appearance or incident that might threaten their dignity—"the hero must look like a hero"; the writer of ironic intent, while dealing with events no less tragic, is free to do the opposite,

and so give the tragedy a comic surface, but it is only the most insensitive who could see the result as merely "amusing".

One notices also that Conrad achieves his effects, whether of comedy or horror, not by exaggeration, but by the closeness of the detail in which he observes those tiny things that turn life's general tragedies into comedy, as for instance Verloc's upturned bowler beside his death-bed "as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr Verloc in the fulness of his domestic ease reposing on a sofa"(p. 285).

Halfway through the story, and very much at the centre of it—it is the moment when the Assistant Commissioner is about to confront Verloc with the evidence of Stevie's label - there comes as poetic interlude a cab-ride through London with Stephen, Winnie and her mother. It may appear, as early critics of the book pointed out, wholly superfluous in terms of the plot, but it is in every sense central to the total effect, and it is interesting to note that although the original serialised version was much shorter—Conrad added more than 30,000 words for the book—the cab-ride was there in full.² Its nightmarish quality, its atmosphere of Schopenhauerian pessimism, is attained not by exaggeration, or caricature, but simply by objective description.

Of the cab in which they are to ride, Conrad says, "The conveyance awaiting them would have illustrated the proverb that 'truth can be more cruel than caricature', if such a proverb existed". It applies not only to the cab, and the cab-ride, but to the larger vehicle of the book itself—truth so "cruel" that one tends to think of it as caricature until one looks more closely, and sees that, essentially, nothing is exaggerated or "written up", apart from the occasional ironic comment.

There is no element of fantasy such as Dickens might have used; it is not creation or invention, but simple description. Schopenhauer's massive indictment of the universe in The World as Will and Idea pro-

ceeds in the most common-sense manner, illustrated with simple "facts" gleaned mostly from his reading of The Times, and Conrad's method is very similar, using everywhere factual sources, and probably sticking closer to them than in any other of his books.

The overall effect of the book is obtained not so much by providing any new interpretation of the world, as simply by removing certain existing, unconsciously held, interpretations by which we make life bearable and protect ourselves from its cruelty. Where other writers, avowedly more radical than Conrad, can unconsciously cover everything with a bourgeois gloss, as Galsworthy does, Conrad's invisible acid eats it away until something too uncomfortably close to naked truth is set before us. We seem to be seeing the world of the Verloofs as it might be presented in a glass case in an inter-galactic museum for the observation of some creatures totally alien, evolved on a different and rather greater scale of size and time than ourselves. Homer saw the Trojan War as a spectacle arranged for the amusement of the gods, but in this case one feels that the gods have come not so much to be amused as with a genuine, but rather hopeless, intention of trying to understand. Although the ironic mode tends to remove compassion, it may be perhaps that it holds it at bay until it is truly needed, and elicits it from the reader rather than supplying it ready-made. In any case, compassion is for Conrad something suspect, something that needs not necessarily condemnation, but strict and slow enquiry. Thus compassion is not only held off, but rather strongly undercut and devalued by concentrating it all in the one gaumed form of Stevie who is both the subject and the object of its extremes. And Stevie's purely instinctive compassion is shown to involve a reaction of equally mindless violence—he is the archetypical anarchist. This is one way in which the book tends to "commit an outrage on the feelings of mankind".

The manner of Stevie's death is also somewhat outrageous, although

doubtless it seemed necessary to Conrad for his dark purposes. It is one place where, unintentionally, the book approaches a caricature of reality, for it seems hardly possible that so small an explosion should cause such butchery. Sherry quotes a newspaper headline at the time of the Greenwich explosion which referred to the victim, Martial Bourdin, as "Blown to Pieces"(p. 232) and Conrad seems to have accepted this piece of journalistic poetry rather too readily. In fact Bourdin was suffering from multiple wounds, of which one in the stomach proved fatal. It is not possible for a small bomb of this kind to blow anyone into fragments resembling "the by-products of a butcher's shop"—there can merely be wounds from the disintegrating container. Conrad betrays a similar exaggerated idea of the effects of such explosions with Haldin's bomb in Under Western Eyes, where we are given a picture of the mangled corpses of horses, a sledge "practically annihilated", and "a small heap of dead bodies"(p. 10). It serves to emphasise that Conrad's sources for The Secret Agent were largely journalistic.

The assumption implicit in Norman Sherry's relentless search for his sources—that Conrad did virtually no creation ex-nihilo, has been largely vindicated by the results. As Sherry says, "'Invention' in the sense of making up or devising themes, plots and characters had never been his method, which was generally one of close and imaginative analysis"(p. 337). Nowhere has this been so amply demonstrated as in the case of The Secret Agent. In twelve chapters of Conrad's Western World, Sherry accounts for virtually every character and incident in the book, as well as some of its opinions, and to a degree that makes one feel that much of it could have been put together with scissors and paste. Its dark vision of life, expressed in terms of a vision of London, "cruel devourer of the world's light", and the family drama of the Verlocs are what give the novel its depth; for the rest, there is plot and unity of ironic structure, but for filling them out, it seems that scissors and

paste were almost enough.

The several anarchists who meet in Verloc's back room are used as the mouth-pieces for extreme but stereotyped views such as were to be found in Anarchist journals, and magazine articles about them, and their conversation is largely limited to the expression of these views, undiluted by any gossip suggestive of private lives, a sense of comradeship, or any kind of organisation. Their physical appearance is made as repulsive as possible without much apparent attempt at any particular correlation between their views and their attributes, except that their general tendency towards excessive fatness is presumably related to their alleged laziness. Yundt's eyes, though unseeing, are malevolent to match his malevolent remarks, and Ossipon has traditionally "sensual" features to fit his sensual nature.

One can understand why friends of Conrad, such as Galsworthy and Cunninghame Graham, who had more sympathy with the anarchist movement, felt dissatisfied (Aubry, II, pp. 37, 60). On Conrad's side, Ian Watt in his Case Book has shown that the anarchists of this period did hold such mutually inconsistent views, express such extreme disagreements, and share this kind of philosophical inconsistency: "What was most striking in all this to Conrad, we can assume, was the extraordinarily wide spectrum of persons and motives which composed the anarchist movement and its sympathisers. In every country they ranged from high-minded sympathisers who were mainly concerned with the degrading injustices of the social order, to the most marginal criminals and psychotics who sought economic or social emotional satisfaction in casual destruction" (p. 246).

Although mere lack of interest may partly account for Conrad's lack of imaginative sympathy in dealing with them, one must also allow for the fact that the book did not issue from an ivory tower, but from extremely difficult financial circumstances that dictated the production of something instantly saleable. If its fundamentally subversive attitudes towards the police and the whole structure of society had been

accompanied by open sympathy with the anarchists, it is fairly obvious that the book would not have been published by Methuen, or if published, acceptable to the press or the public.

Karl Yundt, based as Sherry shows, on the style of the German anarchist Johann Most, "the most famous example of a modern ogre, the Victorian's most frightening spectre", is the only real "villain", and it seems that Conrad does not exaggerate the violence of his language, the deformity of his appearance, or his reluctance actually to engage in any dangerous activity (pp. 253-259). One can hardly blame Conrad for wishing to include in his gallery the most obviously photogenic specimen.

His other anarchists are unattractive more in appearance than in character. Michaelis, although he lacks any full psychological background to account for his saintly nature, is presented as a victim as holy, in all but appearance, as the Christ, and presumably this accounts for his archangelic name. Although his vision of what society should be is treated with the rather crude irony with which Conrad always approaches any kind of Utopianism, it expresses ideals and hopes that carry their own kind of ultimate validity, and serves as a powerful criticism of the actuality that is put before us. The Professor, with his psychology of "resentment" and his sub-Nietzschean views on "the weak" and "the strong" is even more than the others a prototype rather than a person.

Ossipon, intended to be shallow, suffers rather less from shallow treatment. As the homme moyen sensuel his half-educated pseudo-scientific attitudes provide the perfect foil to the Professor's dedication and to Winnie Verloc's extremity and passion. His ordinariness also serves as a bridge between reader and anarchists, and provides some fine humour, as when reflecting on the effect of the explosion on his own safety, he remarks, "Under the present circumstances its nothing short of criminal". For, as he goes on to explain to the Professor, "one must use the

current words" is the central, and for his time, quite original, theme of Conrad's presentation of them. He is promoting them to something of the same acceptable status as that already granted by the police to the common thief.

One can see, in fact, that at the deepest level, Conrad does not really wish to argue against the anarchists: he simply relies on abusive adjectives and physical unattractiveness as sufficient counterweight against the sympathy for them that his amoral treatment inevitably tends to arouse. When he feels that he must, after all, strike some note of moral condemnation, he blames them for being lazy.

Nowhere more strongly than in The Secret Agent does one sense in Conrad the hidden subversive, so carefully and energetically contained that his signals are always cryptically disguised, a subversive attitude that is not a matter of mere emotion, but is based on a sophisticated understanding of his own social experience. One can notice rather similar effects in the works of James Gould Cozzens, another writer of upper-class background and overtly conservative views, who nevertheless in books such as The Just and the Unjust, leaves us with rather more indignation at the just, and sympathy with the unjust, than he pretends to do.

The overt beliefs against which the ironical treatment of both anarchists and police can be contrasted are fairly clear: a belief in British justice and democracy as being the best, at least for the British and those who depend upon them. "Social morality for him is roughly equivalent to English law (to be sharply distinguished, of course, from English lawyers or English-law-enforcement officers or English public opinion... Conrad's commitment to democratic law is plain throughout The Secret Agent, by a kind of reverse irony. The Machiavellian Mr Vladimir, for example, deplures the 'sentimental regard for individual liberty'; and the dedicated anarchist Professor equates a 'worship of legality' with the 'old morality'.³"

These unexceptionable positive values serve the necessary purpose of providing a base for the irony, a genuine common ground between Conrad and his average reader, but there are still underground echoes that question them, not least in the way in which no actual person, or organisation is allowed simply to possess them, or even to show itself capable of defending them.

In the Author's Note Conrad says, "Even the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as in pity. It is one of the minor satisfactions of my writing life that having taken that resolve I did manage, it seems to me, to carry it right through to the end"(p. xiii). The "purely artistic purpose", the "deliberation", "scorn" and "pity" sound deceptively cool, but here one must allow for the generally defensive, not to say deceptive, nature of this Author's Note referred to above. If one accepts that the ironic method was not merely a matter of artistic purpose, but a necessity enforced by the author's own sensitivity, and by a deeper "moral" purpose, that of probing the fundamental immorality of public morality, then one can appreciate the full force of the next point, "the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as pity." If the irony were reserved only for the anarchists the book might be as trivial as Conrad seems to be trying to persuade us that it is, but having established the mode of universal irony, he is able to "carry it right through to the end", to draw into it every character in the story, and it is the way in which no one escapes the irony that gives the book its classic stature.

This general atmosphere of irony allows Conrad to say things that he does not permit himself to say anywhere else, particularly in relation to England, where he finds it difficult to escape the feeling that he is

a guest. Under the cover of his "scorn and pity" for the anarchists, he can allow Verloc, in the second chapter, to survey "through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country; the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour.." (p. 12). Only after this has been said, are we introduced to the "unhygienic idleness" of Mr Verloc -- "or it might have been that he was the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort" -- a philosophical unbelief that the author is inclined to share -- "Such a form of indolence requires, implies, a certain amount of intelligence. Mr Verloc was not devoid of intelligence -- and at the notion of a menaced social order he would perhaps have winked to himself if there had not been an effort to make in that sign of scepticism" (p. 12).

Thus, right at the beginning of the story, under the cover of the irony, the reader is manouvered into a radical attitude towards society, and having shared a wink with him, even to a kind of sympathetic complicity with Verloc -- and neither attitude is directly relevant to the question of anarchy, which merely provides a convenient ambush for a sharp-shooter whose sights are set on large targets.

A similar instance can be noticed in the course of Winnie Verloc's cab ride, when Stevie asks her what the police are for:

Winnie disliked controversy. But fearing most a fit of black depression consequent on Stevie missing his mother very much at first, she did not altogether decline the discussion. Guiltless of all irony, she answered yet in a form that which was not perhaps unnatural in the wife of Mr Verloc, Delegate of the Central Red Committee, a personal friend

of certain anarchists, and a votary of social revolution.

"Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have" (p. 173).

Here, although the reference to anarchists is carefully "planted", the reader knows well enough that Mrs Verloc as well as being "guiltless of all irony", is also guiltless of any knowledge of, or sympathy with anarchism--it is simply as a working-class woman that she speaks.

Irony is of course a dangerous weapon, and only the very mature and self-aware can pick up this two-edged sword without endangering their own necks--even if they escape in their own generation, the changed perspectives of the next will probably perform the role of Damocles. Usually one asks, can the author apply the irony not only to others and to his age, but to his own point of view, and to himself? This is a test that The Secret Agent seems to pass very much by means of evasion, for the author ventures so little, and so risks so little, in the way of positive values.

On the surface, a blow is struck for British justice and British tolerance: the villainous Vladimir will never again darken the doors of that "building of noble proportions and hospitable aspect", the Explorers' Club. But the blow has been struck not by character or conviction on anyone's part, but by the coincidence of the name-tag on Stevie's coat, and an old woman's sentiment for Michaelis, and several other slender contingencies of space, time and psychology; one feels it as one of the story's higher ironies rather than as the ground on which the author stands. Or perhaps one can say that he puts one foot there, remaining ready to leap elsewhere, but as Mikulin is to say to Razumov in his next story, "Where to?"

Universal irony is the defensive weapon of those who are, by Lawrence's standards, the old and defeated. Lawrence guessed that

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Thomas Mann was already an old man when he wrote "Death in Venice", though in fact he was thirty-eight. Conrad was forty-eight when he wrote The Secret Agent, but Lawrence will not forgive him either—"But why this giving in before you start, that pervades all Conrad and such folks—the Writers among the Ruins. I can't forgive Conrad for being so sad and for giving in"⁵.

At least one can say that, forgivably or not, having adopted the ironic mode, Conrad spared no one, and if it appears on the surface that he is sparing himself, there is evidence enough to show that in fact this is far from so. As Sherry has shown in some tentative but very revealing suggestions in the last chapter of Conrad's Western World, it is through the unlikely person of Mr Verloc that Conrad turns the knife upon himself. That egoistic absorption in his own problems that makes Verloc so insensitive to Winnie's feelings, while secure in the faith that he is loved for himself, Winnie's silence, and her reluctance to look into things too deeply, are as Sherry shows, with revealing quotations from Jessie Conrad's memoirs, and those of his son Borys, remarkably close to Conrad's own domestic drama (pp.363-371), even if, through his growing self-awareness it was saved from a tragic conclusion. Here we can find a comprehensible source, an explanation, for the inexplicable pathos and conviction that Verloc and Winnie arouse in spite of the superficial "scorn and pity" with which they are treated. It gives an added twist of irony to Moser's remark that "Conrad succeeds with Winnie... because he views her story through the heaviest protective screen of irony he ever employed" (p. 92). Conrad could not populate his story with a whole cast of Londoners, as Dickens could, but he had married one Londoner with a widowed mother, and lived there himself as a foreigner, and this is enough to provide the whole effective cast of the story. Once again, as with Williams and Jim, Hodister and Kurtz, or Masterman and Monygham, Conrad has invested a most unlikely form with his own sensibility: Verloc, also, is "one of us".

One notices here the manner in which Conrad undercuts the heavy irony

with which he distances the Verlocs by conveying also their deep and essential humanity. If the original purpose of irony is to establish one's superiority over lesser beings, as when Aristotle says that the noble-souled man will use irony in speaking to inferiors, one can see that while Conrad is bestowing irony in the Aristotelian sense with one heavy hand, he is stealthily reversing its effects with the other. He refuses to display any sympathy himself, but he will be very disappointed if he does not draw some from the reader.

For the physical form and general style of Verloc, Sherry suggests that Conrad may have used A. P. Krieger, a man born in America of German parents who appears to have been Conrad's best friend in his early days in England (pp. 325 - 334). Krieger who worked for a shipping company, obtained jobs for Conrad, on land and sea, helped with his naturalization, and got him into the German hospital when he returned from the Congo. It seems that in the early days, Conrad lent Krieger money, and then, after his own marriage, began to borrow from him, and this led eventually to a breaking off of the friendship.

Krieger's possibilities as a model for Verloc are suggested not only by his personal appearance, but also by some aspects of his general background. "When he married he gave his occupation as a commercial clerk. A year later he was a foreign correspondent, two years later a commercial clerk again, and finally a continental courier. The extent of his journeys on the Continent is shown by the number of postcards he sent home while he was travelling...Mrs Ogilvie told me a story which her mother, still alive but very old and infirm now, told her. It was that her father-in-law had once been employed as a spy." (p.329).

The further questions raised by Sherry of whether the relationship between Verloc and his wife in any way reflects that of the Kriegers, or whether Winnie's feelings for Stevie reflect Mrs Krieger's devotion to a son who had suffered from meningitis (p. 328) cannot be conclusively answered, but one feels in any case that it is the reflection of Conrad's

own marital experience that provides the real source of that inwardness and genuine humanity that give the domestic drama of the Verloc its disturbing power.

Such a theory seems to justify itself by the way in which it enables us to see where the real strength of the novel lies. It cannot lie, principally, in the mere multiplicity of ironies, for one could compile an equally formidable list of interlocking ironies in many of the novels of Graham Greene, none of which would be put on the same level. Nor does it lie in the treatment of the relations of police and anarchists, for although this is subtle and amusing, it is not entirely original nor very deep. Sherry shows that Blackwood's Magazine, during the period in which Conrad was a regular contributor, gave considerable space to the problem of anarchism, and supplied most of Conrad's ideas—the methods of police surveillance (pp. 248-252), and even the accusations of laziness, while his essay on the conventional morality of the common thief appears to echo a contribution to the Contemporary Review in 1896, which also discussed and criticised the ideas of Lombroso about the existence of a "criminal type" (p. 310).

Thus Conrad's whole treatment of anarchists and police, though unified by irony and a consistent philosophical attitude, has to be seen as essentially derivative and journalistic, and even the contest of wits between Heat and the Assistant Commissioner hardly rises above the standards one would expect of a well-written "thriller". Such weight of the book's indubitable greatness as cannot be accounted for by the overall poetry of despair is borne by the Verloc household, and largely in terms that do not ultimately depend on their connections with anarchism: it is rather that the theme of anarchy provides a kind of orchestral background to amplify the notes of a domestic drama that had in more subdued form, been part of Conrad's own experience and must be to some degree the experience of every one who ventures on matrimony in the modern world.

Although, as the book moves downwards in the social scale the irony becomes heavier, it is tempered with pathos and balanced by social indignation: as we move into the higher levels of society, the irony in the atmosphere inevitably grows rarer, for one can expect those with a better environment to be healthier specimens, and the more educated to be less absurd, but it is never entirely absent.

The patroness of Michaelis, though a minor character whose whole history has to be encapsulated in a single, two-page, paragraph, is nevertheless a credible representative of the best kind of aristocratic English-woman. We can admire, as Conrad genuinely admires. The portrait may be based on the mother of Conrad's friend Cunninghame Graham, an aristocrat of the Scottish royal line whose letters indicate that she deeply sympathised with her son's radical views (Aubry, I, pp 250, 255). But Conrad does not let her escape the irony:

The humanitarian hopes of the mild Michaelis tended not towards utter destruction, but merely towards the complete economic ruin of the system. And she did not really see where was the moral harm of it. It would do away with all the multitude of the parvenus, whom she disliked and mistrusted, not because they had arrived anywhere (she denied that), but because of their profound unintelligence of the world, which was the primary cause of the crudity of their perceptions and the aridity of their hearts. With the annihilation of all capital they would vanish too: but universal ruin (providing it was universal, as it was revealed to Michaelis) would leave the social values untouched. The disappearance of the last piece of money could not affect people of position. She could not conceive how it could affect her position for instance. (p. 110).

Her attitude would seem to come very near to Conrad's own sense of values, but he cannot for that reason let it escape his irony. Conrad has also had to live without money, so he knows well enough how the blooming complexions of those who live "above the play of economic conditions"

come from the soft colouring of the money in their veins. But because he also values these complexions, and the generations of art and suffering that have gone to produce them, he will never give his consent to the chopping down of the cherry orchard. So perhaps, to answer the Commissar's question, irony is the only place to which one can go.

The tendency for the irony to weaken as it climbs the social tree is most obvious in the case of the Assistant Commissioner. With Lord Jim and Decoud, by identifying with them, Conrad could both analyse them mercilessly, and also give them an hour of romantic glory: in The Secret Agent, although Verloc may be the man in whom aspects of Conrad's own sensibility suffer vivisection, he is, in this respect very much of a "secret agent", and not in the position to be rewarded by any identification with the author's daydreams. It may be that this privilege is granted to the Assistant Commissioner, who might be seen as a slightly glamourised version of the author, though he is certainly not sentimentalised. His determination to protect Michaelis from further injustice is shown to stem from fear of displeasing a valuable connection in high society rather than from disinterested zeal for justice, and his enthusiasm for taking a hand in the game himself is, as V. S. Pritchett has pointed out, "at the last moment, made real to us by one of those sardonic afterthoughts by which Conrad saves himself from sentimentality. The Assistant Commissioner, we are told finds "the sense of loneliness and evil freedom rather pleasant."⁴ This is indeed why he is an Assistant Commissioner: he is a hunter. (It is always, in Conrad, the small additional comment that puts on the rounding and convincing touch.)"⁶

The Home Secretary, based as Sherry shows on Sir William Harcourt (pp. 286-295), is only briefly sketched, for Conrad's chief worry here was not so much to satirise him as to make him credible, and we hear him breathing a sigh of relief to Cunninghame Graham: "I am extremely flattered to have secured your commendation for my Secretary of State and for the Revolutionary Toodles. It was very easy there (for me) to go utterly

wrong" (Aubry, II, p. 60). And yet the irony is not entirely missing, for what is "revolutionary" to the Home Secretary is a Fisheries Bill, and the cosiness of "Toodles", only a cab-ride away from the world of Stevie, and Mrs Neale scrubbing the floor, does not need any heavy underlining.

By the end of the book, we can appreciate that indeed the irony has been "carried right through to the end". With the immorality of the defenders of morality, the extreme conventionality of the most immoral, the equal futility of good intentions and bad intentions, irony has been piled on irony until the norms of the sane citizen are buried so deep that we have almost completely lost them as we toss on the channel steamer with Winnie Verloc to the refrain of "The drop given was fourteen feet", or wander the streets with Ossipon, perhaps the most sane and ordinary man in the story, "feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound...a human brain pulsating wrongfully to the rhythm of journalistic phrases ... an impenetrable mystery ... will hang for ever over this act... of madness or despair" (p. 311)—as in Joyce's Ulysses, journalistic phrases are used as the hollow echo of a deeper disquiet, but in Conrad the disquiet is a kind of ultimate despair that makes his "comedy" perhaps the blackest ever written. The pain of the universe played on his nerves: he wants us to feel it too, and he succeeds.

There is social criticism in The Secret Agent, and of a very radical kind, as radical as that in "An Outpost of Progress", but it cannot easily be separated, or considered apart from a criticism of the cosmos that seems to question the validity of any kind of reform or revolution. There is for Conrad, no God to accuse, but there is in the bourgeois atmosphere of the literature and life of his time enough general optimism to make him react against it with an "inspiring indignation" of "pity and contempt" that bring this book very near to what he claims it not to be, an "outrage on the feelings of mankind."

The "pity and contempt" are ostensibly directed at the anarchists and it might seem that by making them the subject of these experiences, the pain, for the reader, would be reduced, for after all, they are anarchists and different from us. But as the book goes on, and the pain increases, we are also increasingly made aware that anarchists are not so different from us, and in any case the Verloc family are none of them anarchists, though Stevie represents, perhaps, what Conrad feels to be the pure spirit of anarchism freed of all intellectual concepts. The rest of the family are, like us, would-be defenders, and unwilling victims of convention, protectors of an opulence that we see through the railings, or even share.

Verloc is an active defender of convention, Stephen pathologically instinct with compassion, Winnie maternal, and devoted to a romantic ideal, personified by the son of a butcher—they collect in caricature, or rather "truth more cruel than caricature", the most favoured valeurs idéales of society and bring them to a cartoon catharsis without ever losing enough of their humanity to save us from sharing the pain.

The author has done everything he can to distance the pain from us, and perhaps also from himself, for the surgeon is human as well as the patient. He distances it with emphasis on the absurdity of "anarchism", with irony, with humour, with clinical objectivity, with philosophic disdain, with physical unattractiveness on the part of those who suffer—yet the final and cumulative effect on the sensitive reader may be all the more powerful just because of these attempts to shield him—he is likely to find the effect of the anaesthetic wearing off just at the point where it is needed most. The only defence against The Secret Agent is a thick skin, and the original distillation has had to be thinned with considerable doses of soda water before it could be taken more easily from the hands of some of Conrad's imitators.

Notes

1. The World as Will and Idea, I, p. 322.
2. Ian Watt (Ed.), The Secret Agent: a Case Book, p. 81.
3. John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction, pp. 100-101.
4. Anthony Beak (Ed.), D. H. Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism, p. 260.
5. Ibid., p. 132.
6. V. S. Pritchett, "An Émigré", Books in General, p. 222.

Under Western Eyes

Under Western Eyes is a work of great emotional complexity--the ambivalence may be less obvious than in some of Conrad's other works, but it goes deep. It creates in the reader feelings of unease and leaves him with them unresolved, and perhaps even unable to trace them to their source: one can hardly doubt that it reflects a corresponding unease in the heart of the author.

At one level, this can be seen as part of the inevitable predicament of a Polish writer of naturally conservative sympathies who finds the very essence of "conservatism" embodied in a Russian state of whose oppression he is the victim. He cannot avoid a hostile attitude towards this repressive power that has destroyed his parents and virtually forced him into exile, even though the arguments it uses to justify itself are ones to which he might otherwise be sympathetic.

But the conflict is more complex than this. As the son of a Pole who was not only a patriot but a poetic revolutionary, he can appreciate all that is imaginative, romantic and adventurous, but his mother was of more stable stock and he has also been moulded by the affectionate guardianship of conservative maternal uncle. From the inward conflict inevitably aroused by these contradictory influences, one sees an aristocratic contempt for unrest and revolution, intent on dismissing it as the work of envy, ignorance, and dislike of honest toil, maintaining a precarious balance over more imaginative sympathies that see revolutionary activity as heroic, romantic, and eliciting qualities of compassion, endurance, and comradeship.

And even this does not quite reach to the root of the novel's unease, which seems to reflect also a conflict within the author that arises from his life-long attempt to graft the English virtues, and the general outlook of the bourgeois West, onto a Slavic temperament, a temperament that sees life as much more problematical, the signposts as less reliable, everything in more of a flux. In this respect the ques-

tion of French influence on Conrad is hardly relevant, for in France as much as in England there were fixed values, a measure for success or failure, even when the two are subtly mixed. In most Russian, and much German literature—the whole world of the Bildungsroman—the hero is less sure of where he is going, society is both more malleable and more frightening, and a man can be measured not so much against the relatively static values of society as against the haunting aspirations of the heart. If Jane Austen represents one extreme, and Dostoevsky or Kafka, the other, then Conrad can be seen with Janus—face and divided heart trying to live on the outskirts of Mansfield Park and keep at bay the anarchic visions of the East.

The book seems to have been begun as an attempt to write an anti-Dostoevskayan novel that will avenge the Russian's contemptuous view of the Poles with a Poles-eye view of Russia that can also be put forward as a "Western" view. Its chief protagonist is to be a practical, common-sense, almost English, young man who will serve to show up not only the absurdity of Russian despotism, and those who offer it mystical worship, but also the equal absurdity of the futile rebellion that it provokes, yet the final result is far from being as simple as this. It is probably rather more Slavonically subversive than the author would have cared to admit, even to himself.

Conrad was sent into exile in Siberia with his parents in 1862, when he was only four years old, so that his first memories must have been of this period. In The March of Literature Ford Madox Ford tells us that "the earliest sight his eyes could remember was of a Siberian prison yard in which Cossack guards rode slowly up and down through the falling snow amongst women and children in furs, in woollens, in rags or half-nude—the wives and widows and orphans of the survivors of the leaders or of the rank and file of the Polish Revolution of 1863" (p. 870). Although the literal truth of Ford's anecdotes is always suspect, their

poetic truth is often exact, and the substance of this one probably comes from his conversations with Conrad. As Conrad would then have been six years old, it could easily have been his first unaided memory, of which many other tragic ones, including the death of his mother, were associated with their time in Russia.

Although his father was allowed to return to Poland at the end of 1867, when Conrad was ten, the latter continued to be a citizen of Russia, liable eventually to military service. He virtually ceased to be a subject of the Russian Empire in 1886, when he obtained British citizenship, but still could not safely return to Poland, and it was not until three years later, in 1889, when he was thirty-one, that he was finally freed from allegiance to the Czar (Aubry, I, p. 117).

Thus, when Conrad sailed up the Bosphorus to Constantinople in 1878 on the steamer Mavis, under the protection of the British fleet, and saw the tents of the Russian army at San Stefano, he must have been nervously aware that as a twenty-year-old subject of Russia, he might well have been in one of those alien tents, and aware also of how different they would appear to the Western eyes of his fellow seamen (Aubry, II, p. 124). Thirty years later he would, through Razumov, a Russian with "an English soul", attempt to take the English imagination into the Russian encampment.

Although he had thus lived long under the shadow of Russian autocracy, Conrad had not been materially harmed by it after his escape to Marseilles at the age of sixteen, but he was constantly kept aware of its effects on his friends and relatives. In particular, successive letters from his uncle Thaddeus Brobowski in 1891 and 1892 described the predicament of Conrad's cousin Stanislaw, who was arrested in January 1892, "accused of some political or rather social propaganda".

In May, Thaddeus wrote, "He is still under lock and key in the Warsaw citadel. It seems to be nothing more than simply a case of unauthorized teaching of artisans—but as there is about it a tint of

nationalism, it becomes complicated. The exceptional ad hoc procedure is carried out in secrecy and an exceptional penalty may be imposed on the poor devil, ruining his present life—for he was just about to finish the University—and possibly even his whole future." ¹ In another letter written later in 1892 his uncle again emphasises the lost future: "Whichever way it goes he is a lost man—especially as he has studied law—he could never become either a government official, a solicitor, or a notary—not even in Kamchatka!! His whole life has gone off the rails—together with all the hopes and confidence I had placed in him." ²

It would be natural for Conrad to imagine himself in his cousin's situation, and it is essentially this situation, made more extreme and more dramatic, that he gives us in the novel that was, originally to have been entitled Razumov. In the first of the letters from his uncle quoted above, this cousin is described, in comparison with other relatives: "Stanislaw has a worthy character and is already a man, but less pleasant—very presumptuous and rather a doctrinaire. Possibly he has, in fact, ultra-democratic notions which, however, he keeps to himself either out of consideration for his paternal uncle or else not wishing to 'cast pearls before swine'. He is rather reserved and cold." ³

Razumov is not "a doctrinaire", or given to "ultra-democratic notions" but the "rather reserved and cold" may have contributed to Conrad's idea of him—and this is an essential idea, as it is only Razumov's reserve that allows the other students to credit him with radical beliefs. A Slavic temperament modified in the direction of an English reserve would appear to correspond very well with Conrad's own character, and might even have led to his being the victim of a similar misunderstanding among the patriotic Polish students in those days, described in the Author's Note to Nostromo, when "we, a band of tallish schoolboys... used to look up to that girl just out of the schoolroom herself, as the standard-bearer of a faith to which we were all born but which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope! ...an uncompromising Puritan of

patriotism with no taint of the slightest worldliness in her thoughts" (p. xiv) This girl seems to have provided the inspiration for Natalia Haldin even more directly than for Antonia Avellanos. It is obvious enough that Conrad himself did not really share the patriotic fervour of the group, so that he may well have felt the germs of a guilt not unlike that of Razumov when he has to move among the Russian exiles, and Razumov's "reckless volubility and snarling uneasiness" could be an external extrapolation of some of his own inner feelings at the time.

In this, as in other ways, Under Western Eyes has links with Lord Jim. In both books certain vague feelings of guilt concerning his inherited Polish background, and his "jump" out of it, can be inferred in the background, and in both a character who in no way outwardly resembles the author can nevertheless be used very effectively as the vehicle of his inner questionings and his psychological conflicts. If there is more freshness and conviction, more feeling of direct involvement, in Lord Jim, this can possibly be accounted for by the fact that with Razumov, Conrad is going back, for the personal involvement, to an early and indistinct period of his youth, and for the general background of the story, to the impressions of a short visit to Geneva, and the reading of stories about Russia, whereas the seamanship and scenery of Lord Jim, and fears about his own adequacy as a ship's officer, had all been part of his own personal, and recent, adult experience. And Lord Jim has the added advantage of being a comparatively clear-cut issue and essentially a romantic theme, in which the ironic view-point does not entirely destroy the glamour: Razumov can never appear, like Jim, as a figure in dazzling white against a dark background.

Moreover, Lord Jim had been written in the earliest period of Conrad's marriage, and with more youthful vigour and persistent illusions of romance than its author had been willing to admit, whereas Under Western Eyes was completed slowly, in middle-age, to the accompaniment of almost overwhelming difficulties with the health of his wife and children

as well as his own, and with his finances.⁴ There is a corresponding change in the style: the vigorous oceanic swell of "Conradese" that fills out the long paragraphs of Lord Jim gives way to a more concise and rational manner, with shorter sentences that are less demanding on both author and reader. This is balanced by an abundance of well-written realistic dialogue, and in this respect, one can say that Conrad's facility in English is greater than ever before.

One notices also that the book is not so rich in that exact, unobtrusive symbolism that adds so much to its predecessors. There are a few memorable examples, such as Peter Ivanov's hat at the end of a long corridor, and the "quarter-life-size smooth-limbed bronze of an adolescent figure, running" that fills a corner of the General's room, causing Prince K--to murmur, "Spontini's 'Flight of Youth'. Exquisite", (p. 43), but the more exquisite perhaps because in this book such examples of smooth-limbed art are rather rare. The description of "the effigy of Jean Jacques Rousseau" that is "enthroned" above Razumov as he writes his diary on the island is no doubt an accurate rendering of the Genevan scene, but does not appear to have much real relevance to the theme. Razumov's choice of this island, like the rain storm that too explicitly "washes him clean" at the time of his confession, has a banality that is not Conrad at his best, though it is to become more common in what he writes from this time onward, notably in Chance.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that somewhere between Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes, possibly at the end of Nostromo, the high plateau of Conrad's achievement begins its inevitable decline. Increasing age, chronic illness, and crippling family and financial troubles, and a consequent preoccupation with the question, "Is it saleable?", may be one half of the answer, and the using up of his own more deeply felt experiences the other

It would seem that the increasing ease with which Conrad can write conventional "good English", and with it an increasing assimilation to

the style of his better contemporaries must also, unfortunately, be counted as a force tending to work against his "native genius". This is to be most evident in Chance, where the style is usually impeccable, but the qualities most distinctively and disturbingly "Conradian" seem to be rather diluted.

Much of the strength of Lord Jim comes from the fact that Marlow is almost as important as Jim, both as a character in the story, and as a carrier of the author's own sensibility. The narrator of Under Western Eyes, though possibly introduced with similar intent, has no opportunity to fill such a role. Unlike Jim, Razumov is himself intellectually sophisticated, and unlike Marlow, the teacher of languages is not a man of the same race competent to understand and analyze him; the narrator is reduced to being the editor of that never-directly-quoted diary that has to be regarded as the source of everything. The "Englishness", and the common humanity, of Razumov rather than the insight of the editor, are used to make the bridge between the Slavonic soul and the English reader.

This abnormally "English" nature of Razumov is explicitly emphasised by Haldin at the opening of the story—"To be sure, I cannot expect you with your frigid English manner to embrace me," and a few pages later he says, "Ah! You are a fellow! Collected—cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman. Where did you get your soul from? There aren't many like you" (pp. 21-22). It is plain enough where Razumov gets this soul from, and he gets the whole of it to a degree that inevitably shoulders out the narrator.

Although Conrad wishes to deny it, and to insist that Poland, with its Catholic culture, is an outpost of the West, it is fairly obvious that it is as a Slav that he is able to enter the soul of Razumov and to reveal it sympathetically to the English reader. Indeed, it appears that even that degree of "Englishness" with which he endows Razumov is

not something to which he can give his whole-hearted support. His mind and his heart are split not so much between hatred of the Russians, and the desire to be just to them, as between an intellectual dislike of extremism, and an even deeper emotional contempt for the kind of compromise that is the only alternative to it; between identification with a conservative viewpoint that hates democracy, newspapers, and every kind of popular revolt, and a temptation, despite it all, to commit oneself to a radical cause, and either way, an instinctive preference for drama and extreme conditions that expresses itself in an almost irrational contempt for security and compromise. All this produces a great complexity in which, as it were, an intellectual thesis and an emotional anti-thesis compete for the reader's allegiance.

Razumov is the "hero" of the book, the man in terms of whose predicament and emotions the story is told, so that both author and reader are inevitably involved in sympathetic identification with him, and yet, until his final repentance and confession, there is also something very unsympathetic about him. Haldin is, by all conventional standards, a more noble and attractive figure, but as the cause of Razumov's suffering, he has to be regarded as the "enemy". Haldin's sister Natalia is an almost flawless heroine, and yet in so far as we identify with Razumov, she is the greatest obstacle in his attempt to come to terms with his predicament. Her final commitment to alleviating the misery of the poor is treated with the irony it demands, from a revolutionary point of view, but the revolutionary point of view has been equally undermined by continual hostile comment, and the reader is left with no resting place in a continuing tragedy that has its most representative figure in the helpless Mrs Haldin. It seems that too much "spirit" has done for her what too much "material interest" did for Mrs Gould.

The hero finally resolves his predicament by seeking the forgiveness of the revolutionaries in a manner that wholly carries the reader's

sympathy both for him, and for those of the revolutionaries who are genuine in their aims, but even here there can be no whole-hearted commitment by the author. It resolves, to some degree, the emotional anti-thesis, but is still contradicted by the intellectual anti-revolutionary thesis. The reader's natural lazy desire to identify with one side or the other, wholly to sympathise with at least one character in the story, or to find, at least, the final resolution morally satisfying, is at every point, frustrated and denied.

A similar ambivalence surrounds many of the other characters in the story. Councillor Mikulin is the sinister figure whose ruthless plot puts Razumov in the trap, and yet he is essentially a puzzled, idealistic man who later reveals to the revolutionaries that Nikita is a double-agent, and eventually becomes himself a victim of the bureaucracy. The teacher of languages is introduced as though he were a pair of wise ironic Western eyes through whom we may be able to see things in perspective and resolve them into common-sense, but as the story progresses he becomes increasingly unable to comprehend. As the representative of "a people which has made a bargain with fate and wouldn't like to be rude to it", he is brushed aside by the whole cast of Eastern actors who with their larger passions and wilder adventures make his presence seem increasingly irrelevant. At the end of the story, he stands unnoticed as Razumov confronts Natalia with the truth, not so much because the author needs him as an eye-witness as because that has become his necessary role. "How did this old man come here?" says Razumov, in astonishment, at the end.

Thomas Mann in his introduction to the German version of The Secret Agent, written in 1926, refers to Conrad's choice of England in terms that suggest that he sees this very much as Conrad's own "bargain with fate", though he does not appear to see, as the reader of Under Western Eyes is likely to do, that underneath, Conrad is compelled to be "be rude to it". Mann assumes, on the basis of Conrad's treatment

of Mr Vladimir, in the earlier book as a Central Asiatic and a "hyperborean swine", that he is now whole-heartedly committed to English virtues and English limitations, thereby losing his chance of ever rivaling the great Russians:

Every open-eyed Westerner today envies the Central European on purely geographical grounds, for advantages that would doubtless have to be surrendered in going over completely to the bourgeois West... More form, with more limitations--was that the alternative the Slav faced when he made his choice? No, that puts it badly. What he gave up were the advantages of barbarism, which he did open-eyed. What he got was reason, moderation, the open-minded attitude, intellectual freedom, and a humour that is saved by its Anglo-Saxon robustness from falling into the sentimental and the bourgeois.⁵

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Mann's use of the word "barbarism" to suggest those qualities and opportunities that Conrad stood to lose by adopting an Anglo-Saxon attitude is typical of his habitual irony but it provides a brilliant insight into the nature of this particular "Bargain with fate", the key insight for understanding the personal conflict that lies below the writing of Under Western Eyes and creates that atmosphere of unease that the reader finds so difficult to trace to its source. Mann was equipped to see to the heart of this for he had just written The Magic Mountain, in which, throughout, a similar question is more patiently pursued, both in the arguments of Settembrini and Naptha and in Hans Castorp's fascination with Clavdia Chauchat. It is interesting to note that although this temperamental divide between East and West is nowadays treated almost entirely in terms of propaganda for, or against, Communism, neither Conrad nor Mann see it at all in this way.

Conrad's fatal choice when, at the age of twenty, he climbed on

board the Mavis at Marseilles, probably more with the idea of escaping from conscription in France than of turning to England, may have been much less rational and "open-eyed" than Mann suggests, but that does not affect the truth of his final situation, and the emotional tone of Under Western Eyes is evidence enough that underneath his rationalisations Conrad was far from satisfied with the bargain.

So it is that a story that begins with an Englishman pitying the poor Russians seems to end with the Russians pitying the poor English in the same way that all through the tale, for similar reasons, the Swiss are treated with contempt. Intellectually, the author stands for safety, democracy, and a "bargain with fate": emotionally he prefers danger, passion and the truth of the heart. It is a terrible thing to be the object of the attentions of the secret police, yet how much worse not to be the object of anyone's attentions, to be "disdained by destiny or the sea" ! One feels that it is not so much the effigy of Rousseau as that of John Stuart Mill that should stand, mocked and mocking, above the tortured Razumov.

In a letter to Galsworthy written when he had already completed the first part of the book--the story of Haldin's crime and Razumov's betrayal of him--Conrad indicates that the original plot was intended to be even more black and melodramatic, with a violent conclusion comparable to that of The Secret Agent:

Listen to the theme. The Student Razumov (a natural son of a Prince K.) gives up secretly to the police his fellow student, Haldin, who seeks refuge in his rooms after committing a political crime (supposed to be the murder of de Plehve). First movement in St. Petersburg. (Haldin is hanged of course.)

2d in Geneve. The student Razumov meeting abroad the mother and sister of Haldin falls in love with that last, marries her and, after a time, confesses to the part he played in the arrest of her brother.

The psychological developments leading to Razumov's betrayal of Haldin, to his confession of the fact to his wife and to the death of these people (brought about mainly by the resemblance of their child to the late Haldin), form the real subject of the story. (Aubry, II, pp. 64-65).

There is no mention here of Razumov's being recruited as a counter-revolutionary agent, so that it would appear that the story, as originally intended, was less "political", and more purely psychological. One can see the attraction, for Conrad's macabre imagination, of having the tormented Razumov strangle the child that resembles Haldin, but it would have made the "hero" even less sympathetic to the reader, and Conrad may well have balked at the task of making the love-affair convincing. One can agree with Moser's comment that, "in view of Conrad's usual bad luck in trying to dramatize courtship and marriage, we must admit that he was probably wise to scrap these plans" (p. 94).

By slowing down the growth of Razumov's affection for Natalia, and making it an influence for good upon him, if his confession can be regarded as a "good" amidst the general ambivalence, the book becomes more moving, and more genuinely human than it promised to be, but leaves a gap that causes it to sag a little in the middle. This gap is largely filled with the doings of Peter Ivanov and his "painted Egeria", the victims of repetitive epithets and heavy irony.

Conrad claims in the Author's Note that they are "fair game", but one sometimes feels that they are more like overweight birds that the author has reared in his own reserve just for the pleasure of shooting at them. The fact that Ivanov's importance for Conrad seems to be rather greater than either the plot or the psychological drama requires may be due to some connection with what has been described as the book's "emotional anti-thesis"—an instinctive preference for the values of

"barbarism" to those of the bourgeoisie.

In his native Russia, escaping in chains across a continent, "his naked tawny figure glimpsed vaguely through the bushes with a cloud of mosquitoes and flies hovering about the shaggy head" (p. 122), Ivanov has a certain magnificence, and his escape is told in a way that attracts the reader's sympathy. But in Geneva, dressed up in the trappings of bourgeois culture, he becomes a clown, and sometimes a petty and vindictive one. This is heightened by the extreme tawdriness of the chateau on the pretty lake, and its mistress, and summed up, symbolically, when Razumov leaves the presence of Madame de S--- : "The landing was prolonged into a bare corridor, right and left, desolate perspectives of white and gold decoration without a strip of carpet. The very light pouring through a large window at the end seemed dusty, and a solitary speck reposing on the balustrade of white marble--the silk top-hat of the great feminist--asserted itself extremely black and glossy in all that crude whiteness" (p. 226).

The name of Tolstoy is far from the first that would suggest itself as a source for this bizarre figure, but there was undoubtedly some connection in Conrad's mind. Peter Ivanov is said to be, among other things, "a great writer", and Razumov describes Russia as filled with his young disciples. It would appear that originally Conrad intended the resemblance to be more marked--a cancelled passage in the manuscript refers to Ivanov as the author of "The Resurrection of Yegor" and "the thrice famous 'Pfenning Cantata'".⁶

In a letter to Garnett, Conrad refers to his dislike of Tolstoy's puritan morality and "anti-sensualism"--which suggests that he is familiar only with Tolstoy's later works.⁷ We know from Nostromo that this kind of piety is for Conrad very much associated with a virtual surrender to "material interests," and consequently appears in his eyes as a form of "cynicism", what the teacher of languages calls "a terrible

corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and help-
 less cynicism" (p. 104). This would apply particularly to Dostoevsky's
 kind of mysticism, but Tolstoy's quietistic "purer form of Christianity",
 though not so subservient to the state, involves the abandonment of ac-
 tion, and of any belief in liberal political progress, and to abandon
 such belief, for whatever reason, is for Conrad indistinguishable from
 "Cynicism"—he brings the same accusation against the leaders of anarch-
 ism. Indeed, whether a man abets, or accepts, social injustice from
 religious idealism or merely from cynicism, the results are very much
 the same. Any atheist or agnostic who has never experienced the compul-
 sion of religious belief is tempted to assume that the kind of intellec-
 tual paradoxes it involves must be at the bottom insincere, and there-
 fore cynical, a feeling that is encouraged by the fondness of reaction-
 ary politicians for Christian orthodoxy. Thus, when the teacher of lan-
 guages, reviewing the Russian combination of religion and reaction, is
 seeking "some key word" to "help the moral discovery which should be
 the object of every tale," he can find "no other word than 'cynicism'"
 (p. 67).

However far Conrad may have felt himself justified by these views,
 it cannot be admitted that Peter Ivanov is worthy of representing Tol-
 stoy, or any other great Russian: in effect, one is presented with a
 caricature of which it is rather difficult to feel that anything very
 real or intelligible is being caricatured. Perhaps the best comment on
 his inadequacy is that implied by the fact that in the final scene of
 Razumov's confession to his fellows, where the emotional and psycholo-
 gical integrity of the story are at their highest level, it was necess-
 ary to ensure that Ivanov was absent.

If it be accepted that the "Bargain with fate" and all that it in-
 volves in the conflicting claims of Eastern "barbarism" and bourgeois
 security, is the basic emotional issue of the book, then the much can-

vassed question of Conrad's racial prejudice against the Russians must inevitably be seen as a minor issue. His claim, against Garnett, in his correspondence, and in more general terms in the Author's Note, that he has leaned over backwards to be fair to them, seems to be largely justified, at least as far as his treatment of individuals is concerned. Apart from the double-agent Nikita, there are no nasty Russians in the story; the women are treated with great sympathy, and there is no more thoroughly admirable character in any of Conrad's fiction than Sophia Antonovna.

This sympathy for all of its victims tends of course to heighten the feeling against the state, and it is against this political system that Conrad directs his powerful hatred—here, indeed, one can say that there is a Pole's-eye view of Russia. It is not the triumphant Russia of War and Peace, the human Russia of Turgenev, or the mystical, fruitfully suffering Russia of Dostoevsky, but a cold, alien oppression that devours its opponents and its faithful servants alike, "an enormous seething mass of sheer moral corruption."

The view of Russia presented in Under Western Eyes closely corresponds to that already given by Conrad in his essay "Autocracy and War", published in 1905^{and} collected in Notes on Life and Letters. This had been begun as "a sort of historical survey of international politics from 1815 (the Vienna Congress), with remarks and conclusions tending to demonstrate the present precarious state of that concord and bringing the guilt of that precariousness to the door of Germany, or rather of Prussia" (Aubry, II, p. 13), but the final result was to be more concerned with the guilt of Russia. As a Pole, Conrad was entitled to as much animosity to the Germans as to the Russians, and one notices that in The Secret Agent, the embassy that employs Verloc is represented as a rather fantastical combination of both—Mr Vladimir, with his Central Asian accent, had as his predecessor a Baron Stott-Wartenheim. In

the case of the essay, the sudden defeat of Russia by Japan diverted Conrad's attention from Germany, and it became very largely a song of triumph not unlike that of Isaiah at the fall of Babylon:

This dreaded and strange apparition, bristling with bayonets, armed with chains, hung over with holy images; that something not of this world, partaking of a ravenous ghoul, of a blind Djinn grown up from a cloud, and of the Old Man of the Sea, still faces us with its old stupidity, with its strange mystical appogance, stamping its shadowy feet upon the gravestone of autocracy, already cracked beyond repair by the torpedoes of Togo and the guns of Oyama... The task of Japan is done, the mission is accomplished; the ghost of Russia's might is laid' (pp. 89-90).

At the time of the abortive Russian revolution later in 1905, Conrad seems to have had temporary hopes of a re-birth:

I am greatly moved by the news from Russia. Certainly a year ago I never hoped to live to see it all. It is just $\frac{1}{2}$ century since the Crimean War, forty-two years since the liberation of the peasants—a great civic work in which even we Poles were allowed to participate. In the words of my Uncl's Memoirs, this great event opened the way to a general reform of the state. Very few minds saw it at the time. And yet the starting point of orderly rational progress in accord with the national spirit was there (Aubry, II, p. 28).

But the great rising of 1905 was eventually suppressed, and Conrad seems to have been confirmed in that view of Russia that is the essential presupposition of Under Western Eyes, "a grave of corruption from which there can be no rebirth". Events were to prove him wrong.

In the Author's Note, added to the book in 1920, three years after the Russian Revolution, Conrad begins by saying, "It must be admitted that by the mere force of circumstances Under Western Eyes has become already a sort of historical novel dealing with the past", to which

one might add that it is, moreover, a historical novel that notably fails to foreshadow or explain those world-historical events of 1917 which are for Conrad "the mere force of circumstances". Even at the time when the book was first published, in 1911, or indeed when it was begun in 1907, it could already have been said, with almost equal force that it was "a sort of historical novel dealing with the past", that past of Utopian ideals, petty jealousies, and amateur revolutionaries that Lenin had castigated in 1902 in What is to be Done?

It was noted, in discussing The Secret Agent that Conrad made no attempt to study, or depict, the general background of the Anarchist movement in England, that it is primarily a psychological study and a private tragedy. This may not be a matter of importance in regard to that particular book, for anarchists in England were not in any case very numerous or politically significant, nor their ideas worthy of much analysis. But in the case of Under Western Eyes, a similar attempt to limit a study of Russian revolution to a small group, without giving much attention to what was really happening, or any attempt to fit them into the pattern of history, inevitably affects the relevance and the overall credibility of his picture, particularly when this group is, by implication, a serious revolutionary force, feared by the State, and having at its head a man who is to be regarded as the future leader of Russia.

This may not affect the power and impact of the story as a "psychological thriller"—under this classification it can be given the highest marks—but it does raise the question of whether it can justifiably be regarded as much more. Although numerous critics have dealt with it as a political novel, it cannot be said that Conrad himself makes any such claims: after referring to it as having become "a sort of historical novel", he goes on to say, "this reflection bears entirely upon the events of the tale; but being as a whole an attempt to ren-

der not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself, I venture to hope that it has not lost all its interest"(p. vii).

Conrad also tried to avoid these historical and political difficulties by making the story as "timeless" as possible: no dates are given, and apart from a slightly misleading reference to the assassination of "Mr de P——"(p. below) there are no reflections of any actual events. As he adds in the Author's Note, "the various figures playing their part in the story owe their existence to no special experience but to the general knowledge of the condition of Russia and of the moral and emotional reactions of the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness, which in general human terms, could be reduced to the formula of senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny"(p. viii).

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When one considers that the mutiny on the Potemkin had taken place in 1905, with the first Soviet all but ruling Russia for fifty days later in that year, and that both the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of this continuing revolution were philosophically based on differing, but equally sophisticated, interpretations of Marx, it is quite obvious that all this was something more than could be adequately summed up as "Senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny". Conrad can be regarded only as writing a historical novel about some earlier period in the nineteenth century, and one which shows a total unawareness not only of the direction in which history was moving, but even of where it had already moved to at the time at which he was writing. But then, for Conrad, history does not move: there is for him "a general truth which underlies its action", a general "Russian psychology", in which "the oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together; and the world is brought once more face to face with the truth of the saying that the tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots." This misquotation from Jeremiah with which Conrad concludes his Author's Note expresses very well both the strength, and the limitations of the book.

Facts that ask for historical and political understanding quite as much as for a psychological one he is willing to see only in terms of a slightly simplistic "national psychology".

It cannot be denied that subsequent events in Russia have given Conrad's view a certain appearance of validity, and it is not surprising that in America, at least, it has continued to be regarded as a "prophetic" work. Whatever stripes or spots the Russian bear may have had, it could not be expected to change them all at once. A revolution cannot change all the personnel of a police force or a bureaucracy, and even less can it change their habits and traditions. A long-established despotism such as had ruled Russia under the Czar was bound to continue with the only methods that it knew, and force to the top rulers who could manage it.

If Stalinism was inevitable, on the grounds of Russian "psychology", then one must give Conrad some credit for insight and prescience here, for even if his views do seem to fit all too conveniently the strategy of the "cold war", they also illuminate it. But this "psychology" can be fully understood only in terms of history and sociology, and it can be totally misleading if what was, inevitably, a long-enduring situation be thought of as an eternal and unchanging necessity grounded in some mysterious quality of the Russian nature that forbids it any kind of political development.

Under Western Eyes must thus be seen as an "historical novel" that examines the psychology of a group of Russian exiles in Geneva at some period in the second half of the nineteenth century. That this was more or less Conrad's intention is supported by the fact that the unspecified real-life incident which gave him the stimulus to begin came, according to Aubry, from "a casual conversation he had had with a stranger at Geneva as long ago as 1895" (Aubry, II, p. 5). This is also sup-

ported by the fact that the assassination in which Haldin is involved closely reproduces the circumstances in which Alexander II was killed in 1882. Conrad's suggestion in the story itself that it represents the assassination of the Minister of the Interior, de Plehve, which occurred in 1904, seems to be merely an attempt to "up-date" the story and make it appear more relevant to contemporary affairs, for as Fleishman shows in Conrad's Politics, the actual circumstances of de Plehve's death in no way resemble those of the story (p.219).

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Although Fleishman's study of the sources of Under Western Eyes is used to support the theory that Conrad had a sophisticated knowledge of Russian revolutionary affairs, such evidence as he produces tends rather to the opposite conclusion (pp. 218-220). Conrad did not, like Thomas Mann, masticate whole libraries of factual information before he started—his talent lay rather in the opposite direction, that of building a fully—fleshed creation on a minimal skeleton of facts. In the case of Under Western Eyes, a few hints and stories, together with an article on the double-spy Azeff in the English Review (Fleishman, p. 219) seem to account for as much general knowledge as he displays. For the rest, his own experience of Russia, and of Polish patriotism, and that of his relatives, and his common Slavonic background, provide the emotion and the conviction that carry the story through.

Conrad's decision to limit himself to an unspecified period in the recent past may also be connected with the fact that he wishes, in a sense, to combat Dostoevsky and even to devalue Tolstoy, and by dealing with the same period as theirs he is able to use what he learns from them as well as to challenge their vision of Russia with his own. But Conrad could not speak Russian, and his knowledge of these Russian writers, apart from anything he may have read in French, was limited, like that of most Englishmen, to his reading of Constance Garnett's translations (Aubry, II, pp. 140, 192).

Thus, if Conrad's pictures of low life in Leningrad strike the English reader as reasonably convincing, we have to recognise that this is largely because both Conrad and the reader are relying on what they have learned from the great Russians. To recognise this results inevitably, in certain suspicions: one can readily imagine Dmitri Karamazov thrashing the peasant Ziemantch almost to death, and repenting in tears, or seeing hallucinations of the man he is to betray lying solid in the snow before him, but are these attributes of a character created by an epileptic genius really consistent with the sober almost-English soul of the hard-working Razumov? His wild and aggressive way of talking to all those who seem to threaten his security is well done as what Guerard calls "a Dostoevskian dedoublement and consequent reckless volubility and snarling uneasiness"(p. 234), but again one can ask whether the nature of Razumov, as it is objectively described to us by the author, entitles him to behave in so Dostoevskian a style. Certainly, his aggressive outbursts do not have quite the poetic power of Dmitri Fyodorovitch in full flight, but one suspects that this may be as much because they are derivative, and not a natural expression of Conrad's personality, as because they are intentionally muted.

In Aspects of the Novel, E.M. Forster has spoken of English novels that seem "little mansions, not mighty edifices", if "we stand them for an instant in the colonnades of War and Peace, or the vaults of The Brothers Karamazov". Conrad has deliberately chosen to put his edifice in this geographical position, and although it may not be entirely dwarfed, it cannot be said to put its rivals in the shade. He wrote to Galsworthy, "I am trying to capture the very soul of things Russian"--but who but a Russian could be expected to do that?

It would appear that the true strength of Under Western Eyes lies not in its avowed intent of capturing "the very soul of things Russian",

for the soul of things Russian had already found expression in a group of native nineteenth century novelists whose insight and eloquence are unmatched by anything written anywhere, before or after, but in its largely unconscious expression of a Slavic soul repressed by a "frigid English manner" and imprisoned in the forms and formalities of the bourgeois West, a document in which the Western eyes of the narrator, by their very inability to "see", serve to reveal to us something of the price we have paid for our "bargain with fate". And in this respect it is something quite unique, and uniquely valuable, in English literature.

Notes

1. Zdzisław Najder, Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends, p. 162.
2. Ibid., p. 168.
3. Ibid., p. 149.
4. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II, pp. 45-109 passim.
5. Thomas Mann, "Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent", Past Masters, and Other Papers, p. 240.
6. Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: a Critical Biography, p. 446.
7. Edward Garnett (Ed.), Letters from ~~Joseph~~ Conrad, p. 244.

5 Art and Autobiography

The term "autobiography" is here used somewhat loosely to describe a group of his later works in which the narrator or protagonist is plainly identified with the author, and there is no attempt to analyse his sensibility in the manner of those earlier stories in which he is put under the eye of a critical narrator. Such minor self-revelation as occurs in these stories is largely incidental, and not motivated, one feels, by that urge for self-vivisection that is most apparent in the case of Lord Jim. Three of these stories are based on the period in which Conrad was in command of the Otago, and two of them, A Smile of Fortune and The Shadow Line, are quite close to autobiography, without being very self-revelatory. Philosophically, they show him at the opposite extremes of "negation" and "affirmation".

In speaking of The Shadow Line to Sidney Colvin, Conrad said that the story is a "confession", but "its object is not the usual one of self-revelation. My object was to show all the others and the situation through the medium of my own emotions" (Aubry, II, p. 85). This was also the expressed intention of "Youth" (p. above), which in some ways it resembles, and the same remark could also apply to, A Smile of Fortune. "The Secret Sharer" may be less serious in intent, but full of its own kind of art, and in the way that it expresses Conrad's strong tendency towards "sympathetic identification" it does provide a degree of self-revelation.

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The Secret Sharer

If as Guerard says, "sympathetic identification is the central chapter of Conrad's psychology" (p. 108), then "The Secret Sharer" is that very chapter spelt out in print. Collected in 'Twixt Land and Sea (1912), it was written near the end of his best period, and combines straightforward suspense with rich symbolic echoes. The style also is pleasing, written when Conrad's English had become a little more polished and conventional, but still with colour and rhythm of a kind that is often lacking in his later works. And it has for background just enough of that real experience that he needs to make his work convincing.

After completing The End of the Tether in 1902, Conrad wrote nothing more about the Far East until, in 1909, he went back to his experiences on the Otago from Bangkok, already used in Falk, and due to be given their fullest treatment in The Shadow Line, as the setting for "The Secret Sharer". That piece of good fortune that brought him his first and only sea-going command, and his success in dealing with it, seems to have lived on in his memory more vividly than any other event in his life. And in each of the stories that grew out of it, the incidents chosen for emphasis or development differ to such a degree that they hardly overlap.

In "The Secret Sharer", the weight of new responsibility involved in taking command, and the uneasy relationship with an already established crew are used, not as in The Shadow Line to provide the main colouring of the story, but merely to heighten the effect of a temptation to break that code of "fidelity" which the captain can expect the crew to keep only because he himself is loyal to it. In this respect, we can see it as a companion piece to The End of the Tether. Like the earlier story, it deals with a man who with the responsibility of command, is expected to uphold a strict code, and who nevertheless breaks it—in one case, as the result of instinctive parental affection, and in the other from the effect of "sympathetic identification" with a man in trouble,

an identification that is presented as being so compulsive that it cannot be regarded merely as a problem of ethics. At the same time, the narrator of "The Secret Sharer" is obviously seen to have stronger moral foundations for his action than Whalley, and is rewarded by not having to suffer any tragic consequences. The whole story is lighter in tone, and more conventional in outlook.

In The End of the Tether the code was broken in the interests of an instinctive affection that, at least in Edwardian times, if not so unanimously in our own, could be seen only as on a lower scale of values than that of public duty. In "The Secret Sharer" it is broken in obedience to what can be regarded as a higher value, the claims of "poetic justice" over legal justice. Thus Lewis links it with the Captain's decision in The Shadow Line to take on board the ailing mate, as an example of "a finer ethic" prevailing over mere legalism.¹

The story opens as if we were interrupting at some quite arbitrary point the private meditations of the narrator—"On my right hand there were lines of fishing stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned for ever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean." It sets the scene perfectly for the arrival of the mysterious naked man from the sea:

The side of the ship made an opaque belt of shadow on the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea. But I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play

of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a green cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the rope ladder. He was complete but for the head (pp. 97-98).

It is little wonder that this is a story in which has been found a wealth of sub-conscious symbolism. Who could resist the temptation to go fishing in such dark phosphorescent waters? When Hewitt wrote his Conrad: a Reassessment in 1952, he could say well enough that the story's "extraordinary virtues have attracted surprisingly little attention", but it happened to suit the psychiatric interests of the nineteen-fifties so well that when he came to write a preface to the second edition in 1969, he felt compelled to modify his enthusiasm in reaction to the rather excessive attention it had since received, and the criticisms of this kind of approach made by Baines (pp. 427-431).

One cannot question the international fishing rights, but there must be an inspection of the catch, and when there is held up for us by Hewitt, Guerard and others, a species called the "darker self", doubts arise. The theme is obviously attractive to those who are interested in secret journeys and dark selves, and one cannot say that these things were entirely out of the author's mind, but it would seem that they may have been more in his conscious mind than his unconscious.

When the author himself puts "secret" into the title, it is surely a warning that the secret is likely to be rather an open one? And when the narrator keeps telling us that the "secret sharer" was just the same age as himself, and the same size, went to the same school, and had a sleeping suit of the same pattern, and in fact that, "with our dark heads together and our backs to the door, anybody bold enough to open it stealthily would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain

busy talking in whispers to his other self", it all becomes so canny that one rather loses the inclination stealthily to open the door. If one is really going to catch Conrad talking to one of his other selves, this, obviously, is not the door to open. He does not even pretend that it is—"he was not a bit like me really" (p. 105).

In his pyjama suit, that is to say, superficially, Leggatt is the narrator's double, and at a deeper level of superficiality, the author, or the reader, given the courage, the strength, the occasion, and the extreme provocation, might have killed a wicked and worthless man. Leggatt can be sympathised with without stretching very far or very subversively our qualities of imagination: he would have had to have been of a more genuinely murderous disposition to provide this kind of interest at a serious level.

If one looks at Conrad's source for the incident, one sees that he has not, as in the cases of Olmeyer, Hodister, or Williams, made his "outward form" into something more subtle and complex than the original, but only more admirable. The story is based on an incident in the Cutty Sark in 1880, in which the chief mate, John Anderson, killed a negro seaman with a capstan bar after he had allegedly disobeyed an order. It was sudden, but probably not entirely unpremeditated, as there had been a vendetta between the two men all through the voyage, and reminiscences of another seaman, referred to by Guerard, suggest that Anderson was a violent man (pp. 27-28). The captain who assisted in the mate's escape subsequently committed suicide, which does not suggest a man who felt that he had done an act of poetic justice.

Thus it would seem that Leggatt is less promising material for a "dark self" than was his original. In the midst of a storm that has continued beyond the limits of human endurance, and after the captain has lost his nerve and cannot even give orders, Leggatt performs an act of heroic courage, and, almost incidentally, kills a man who has

been represented as completely worthless—"the same strung up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence" (pp. 124-125).

"I'm not an angel", Leggatt says, but he is a Conway boy, and mentions twice that his father is "a parson in Norfolk", which is about as near to seraphic status as Conrad could bring him without testing our credulity. Thus although as a "dark self" he is something of an arctic fox, if he is considered from the point of view of Conrad's concern with valeurs ideales, we can see that this coat of white is essential to the whole theme of the story. It is only if Leggatt is poetically just, representative of some basic human right, that he can be seen as presenting the narrator with an ethical problem, or as a likely candidate for "identification". His nakedness, on arrival, while fully justified in realistic terms by the circumstances of his escape, has also symbolic relevance in presenting him at this level of basic human values.

At the same time, the story gains its real depth from the fact that Leggatt's arrival is not presented simply as an ethical problem, as if the narrator were "a free moral agent" whose decision is to be made merely by weighing one scale of values against the other. This is one aspect of the situation, but the narrator's feeling of identity with the other is obviously of equal, or greater importance, and this is not a question of morality, but rather of that kind of conflict between a social code and the forces of nature that appears in so many of Conrad's stories.

Although we may be left to decide for ourselves to what degree the Captain's decision to conceal Leggatt is a free one, and to what degree it represents the compulsive force of "sympathetic identification", Conrad gives the aspect of compulsion its full weight, along with a wealth of symbolic support. From this point of view, the emphasis on the id-

entity of the two in size, colouring and schooling, which at first sight might seem rather trivial, now appears as essential to the effect of the story, the physical correlative of the psychological identification, As in the case of Lord Jim and Captain Brown, to condemn the other would be to condemn oneself, and to save the other is to save oneself. To see the story this way is not to deny the poetic symbolism of Leggatt's arrival, nor its qualities of sub-conscious suggestion, but to rather to recognise in the psychological aspects of the story a unity of theme that otherwise might appear to be lacking.

Even though this emphasis may appear as rather stronger, all through the story, than the question of a "finer ethic", the basic goodness of Leggatt can still be seen as a very necessary element, for it is only this that turns the scales in his favour with the narrator, and, as it were, triggers off the act of "identification". The Captain does not have, as Lord Jim had, a guilty secret in his own past to which the other can appeal, and so his giving in to the force of sympathy does not bear such a dubious aspect—it is rather a joining of the forces of true virtue against hypocrisy and lack of imagination. It would seem that after being rather ruthlessly unsympathetic towards "sympathy" in some of his earlier tales, most notably in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Conrad is here restoring the balance and showing it also as a benevolent aspect of "human solidarity". He does it, however, without abandoning his radical insight that it is essentially something instinctive, rather than a matter of rational ethics. In this respect it is, as much as Captain Whalley's feeling for his daughter, a piece of "nature" that can come into direct conflict with the "ideal". Just as the rocks can wreck Whalley's ship, so the deep-sea domain of fishes is hardly ruled by the bamboo fences of human artifice.

The story gains much of its strength from Conrad's power of vis-

alising, and imaginatively living in, every scene that he writes, so that the details of the story's continuing crises are always consistent and convincing. In the scene in which Leggatt's commander comes on board, the behavioural embarrassments of the narrator are described with the same kind of skill that Melville uses in his treatment of the Spanish captain in Benito Cereno. Although he has no guilty secret in his own past, through his compulsive identification with Leggatt, the narrator is now sharing the guilt. He can receive the master of the Sephora only with an exaggerated and unnatural politeness:

And yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his enquiries, Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was the danger of his breaking through my defence bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test! (p. 120).

Much Freudian significance has been seen in the captain's borrowed hat floating on the water after Leggatt's final dive from the ship, but it is good at any level, subconscious or merely supermarine. After this, the concluding sentence, "a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny", is smart, but hardly worthy of what has gone before. It is not really in Conrad's nature to regard one's destiny as so easily swapped—"a clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (Lord Jim, p. 186). Even at the level of simple realism, Leggatt leaves as a "wanted man", due to be recaptured as Anderson was, or else to live out a life of isolation somewhere even further beyond the

bamboo fences than Lord Jim.

From some of the emotions that are expressed in his final account of this particular voyage in The Shadow Line (see pp. below), it would appear that probably the true "secret sharer" that distracted Conrad at this time was not a "darker self" of the moral kind, but rather that artistic self which, now that the clamour of his relatively superficial ambition to be a sea captain had been silenced by achievement, was increasingly raising its voice to call him away from action and the sea.

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The volume 'Twixt Land and Sea in which "The Secret Sharer" appears contains also two longer stories, one of which, A Smile of Fortune, is dealt with below. The other one, Freya of the Seven Isles, hardly repays detailed consideration, being poor in style and unconvincing in both its characters and its background. The story has no roots in Conrad's own experience, and happens in a kind of oriental "no man's land" that makes it depend on the sort of "psychological drama" that Conrad had demonstrated, and admitted his inability to carry off in "The Return".

The Malayan background, so strong in the early stories, is here reduced to a kind of musical-comedy stage-set: the interior of a bungalow with a piano, and a window through which can be seen a white ship on a bright blue sea. On to the stage come Jasper, a sort of "bright young thing", a fat foreign villain to be booed at every appearance, and a plump voluptuous girl who slaps the villain on the cheek, all described with a kind of false jocularity, and then given a "tragic" ending that asks us suddenly to substitute tears for laughter. According to the Author's Note it moved a man in America, who wrote to say that it had "intolerably harrowed his feelings". Conrad carried the letter in his pocket "for some days", but never, he confesses, got around to answer-

ing it, As with "The Return", he humbly accepts his friends dislike
of the story,² but seems to find it impossible to believe that some-
thing into which he had put so much effort could really be as bad as
they said it was.

Notes

1. F. R. Leavis, "The Shadow Line", Anna Karenina and Other Essays,
p. 111.
2. Edward Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, pp. 231, 243.

A Smile of Fortune

Commenting on the final union of Roderick and Flora in Chance, Marlow says: "Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the--the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred" (pp. 426-7).

Or perhaps not. This is the "received doctrine" to which, in his later works, Conrad feels more and more compelled to subscribe, but there can be little doubt that his own real feelings are less orthodox. He may accept that it is "the fate of mankind", the "necessity" that can be resisted only at the cost of "committing a sin against life", but nevertheless he has some sympathy with the sinners, as also some deep suspicions about the "life" against which they sin. It is important to recognise that it is the latter consideration that is, for him, primary--he is very sceptical about the claims of life itself to get on with its business regardless of the expense. It is not that he is a misanthropist or even a misogynist--it is the cosmic "knitting machine", the "Great Joke" itself that arouses his mistrust, and sex being one of its subtlest tricks, his sympathies are with the poor mortals who are lured by the bait.

We know of his affection for the writings of Schopenhauer (p. --- above), and if we look for a moment at the philosopher's views on sex, it may help to clarify our understanding of Conrad's. Schopenhauer certainly does not underestimate the problem:

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Next to the love of life, it shows itself as the strongest and most active of all motives, and incessantly lays claim to half the powers and thoughts of the younger portion of mankind. It is the ultimate goal of almost all human effort; it has an unfavourable influence on

the most important affairs, interrupts every hour the most serious occupations, and sometimes perplexes for a while even the greatest minds. It does not hesitate to intrude with its trash, and to interfere with the negotiations of statesmen and the investigations of the learned. It knows how to slip its love-notes and ringlets into ministerial portfolios and philosophical manuscripts. Every day it brews and hatches the worst and most perplexing quarrels and disputes, destroys the most valuable relationships, and breaks the strongest bond. It demands the sacrifice sometimes of life or health, sometimes of wealth, position, and happiness. Indeed it robs of all conscience those who were previously honourable and upright, and makes traitors of those who have hitherto been loyal and faithful. Accordingly it appears on the whole a malevolent demon, striving to pervert, to confuse, and to overthrow everything. If we consider all this, we are induced to exclaim: Why all this noise and fuss? Why all the urgency, uproar, anguish, and exertion? It is merely a question of every Jack finding his Jill. (I have not dared to express myself precisely here; the patient and gracious reader must therefore translate the phrase into Aristophanic language)." (II, pp. 533-534)

And what it is all about, says Schopenhauer, is nothing to do with the real interests of Jack and Jill themselves, but simply Nature's concern with the next generation. Love is a trick played by Nature, an illusion by which the end, the continuation of the species, is made to appear as an individual end: "Nature can attain her end only by planting in the individual a certain delusion, and by virtue of this, that which is in truth merely a good thing for the species seems to be a good thing for himself, so that he serves the species under the delusion that he is serving himself. In this process, a mere chimera, which vanishes immediately afterwards, floats before him, and as motive, takes the place of reality." (p. 538).

It is this awful "truth" that is to paralyse Heyst in Victory When Lena has almost won his love. On the last night before the denouement, as he sits under the portrait of his father, a portrait with a marked resemblance to Schopenhauer, he takes up one of his father's books to find, "Of the strategems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love—the most subtle too; for the desire is the bed of dreams." (see p. below)

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Conrad is not a world-denier or a misogynist on the scale of Schopenhauer, who benefiting from his own philosophical discoveries, remained a bachelor, but there is little doubt that, intellectually at least, he was strongly pulled in this direction. This problem—is life itself worth the price? Should the world be negated?—this is for Conrad a central question that shows itself in all his writings, from the Tales of Unrest and his earliest letters to Cunninghame Graham, right up to its embodiment in Heyst in Victory, and even in those works where for the sake of popularity, he attempted to be more conventional, it tends to undermine the affirmation.

Obviously, it would be absurd to suggest that Conrad was a healthy virile male turned from his natural course merely by the arguments of a German philosopher. Nietzsche's saying that every great philosophy is but the autobiography of the philosopher contains enough truth to justify our expectation of some personal, and as it were, biological basis both for Schopenhauer's views, and for Conrad's sympathy with them. We have noted Garnett's remarks about Conrad's mixture of masculine and feminine qualities (p. above), and this hermaphrodite aspect doubtless had its biological base. It was not enough to deter him from marriage or deprive him of children, but he was nearly forty before he married, and after that two years before the first child came.

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Moser provides ample evidence of symbolically, and sometimes almost literally, expressed fears of impotence in many of his books

(e.g., pp. 50-56). This would seem to be supported by his behaviour before his marriage. He began his proposal by telling Jessie that "he had not very long to live and no intention of having children", and his face wore an "expression of acute suffering".³ This sounds very much like the prefatory attitude of a man who has fears of impotence, even though, in the event, they may have been groundless. Although his two sons came to be given their full share of parental love, he always seems to have^{had} a great aversion to babies, and his fictional marriages are almost always childless. This may well have been, however, both in his own life, and in his stories, merely an aversion to extra complications that get in the way of the "action", and a variety of writers can be seen to avoid, or kill off, infants for this purpose: in imagination, at least they can be free of Nature's obsession with the continuation of the species. Whatever the exact relationship of "cause and effect" between Conrad's biological bias and his philosophy of life, the result, as expressed in his works, shows a strong distrust of "life", and of those "stratagems" by which the continuation of the species is secured.

All this is a necessary preface to consideration of A Smile of Fortune, the first of three tales collected in 'Twiixt Land and Sea (1912). In style, and art, it probably deserves even higher rank than that other excellent semi-autobiographical novella of Conrad's later years, The Shadow Line. That it has been so cursorily dismissed by most of his critics is probably due to the way in which its extremely suspicious attitudes towards life cut across our favourite convictions. If one tries to approach it with an open mind, as an expression of a minority view, it can be seen to be both a complex work of art and an honest expression of experience.

Like Chance, of which it was an interruption, and perhaps a necessary relaxation, it tells of "two beings thrown together, mutually attracted", but regards the "call" as being very far from

"sacred", and expresses the author's misgivings about life more openly, perhaps, than in any other of his works. The story is narrated by the captain of a trading vessel, with every indication that he can be wholly identified with the author, and is obviously based on Conrad's own voyage to Mauritius on the Otago in 1888.

That the world appears fair, from a distance, but hardly bears looking into, is the theme from the beginning. The "land", which as a subsequent reference to the dodo establishes, is Mauritius, is seen from the sea as a "blue, pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against the sky, a mere emanation, the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar", but as the ship anchors, there come night, clouds and a rising wind: "The agitated water made snarling sounds round the ship", a "wild gust of wind..struck on our rigging a harsh plaintive note like the wail of a forsaken soul." (pp. 3-5)

As a prelude to the theme of sexual attraction that is to be story's main concern, three short chapters deal with incidents, otherwise unrelated, that set the mood. Firstly there is the death of a baby, the child of another sea-captain, whose funeral the narrator feels impelled to attend. "I listened with horribly critical detachment to that service I had read myself, once or twice, over child-like men who had died at sea. The words of hope and defiance, the winged words so inspiring in the free immensity of water and sky, seemed to fall wearily into the little grave. What was the use of asking Death where her sting was, before that small dark hole in the ground?" (p.16)

Then comes the second thematic image, that of the other captain also present in the harbour, and at the cemetery, who has been in love with the painted figurehead of his ship: "Did I know, he asked anxiously, that he had lost the figurehead of his ship; a woman in a blue tunic edged with gold, the face perhaps not so very, very pretty, but her bare white arms beautifully shaped and extended as if she were

swimming? Did I? Who would have expected such a thing!... After twenty years too!"

He has been deeply shocked by an offer from Jacobus, the ship's chandler, and father of the daughter who is to be for the narrator the object of attraction, to "procure" him a new figurehead: "Procure indeed! He's the sort of chap to procure you anything you like for a price. I hadn't been moored here for an hour when he got on board and at once offered to sell me a figurehead he happens to have in his yard somewhere. He got Smith, my mate, to talk to me about it. 'Mr Smith, says I, 'don't you know me better than that? Am I the sort that would pick up with another man's cast-off figurehead?' And after all these years too! The way some of you young fellows talk —" (pp. 18-19).

There is still a third scene to disillusion us with Nature's stratagems, in the form of the narrator's visit to the other Jacobus, the brother who is a wealthy merchant, and of whom, before their meeting, the narrator has had visions of magnificence. He is shocked to find that this reputedly wealthy man has his office in a disreputable shack "among a lot of hovels", and finds among the litter inside it, "a lank, inky, light yellow mulatto youth, miserably long necked and generally recalling a sick chicken." When this lad enters Jacobus' office to announce the visitor, he is sworn at, cuffed and kicked out, which upsets the narrator so much that he quarrels with Jacobus, who is in a bad temper because he has been woken up from his siesta.

As he leaves, the captain stops to sympathise with the youth when, suddenly, he sees in his face the family likeness of Jacobus himself: "Now I saw in him unmistakably the Jacobus strain, weakened, attenuated, diluted as it were in a bucket of water—and I refrained from finishing my speech. I had intended to say, 'Crack this brute's head for him!' I still felt the conclusion to be sound. But it is no trifling responsibility to counsel parricide to any one, however deeply injured." (pp. 28-29)

We are now ready to discover that the other, and even meaner, Jacobus whose life seems to be nothing but the most sordid kind of commercial calculation has in fact been the most absurd victim of life's stratagems for the continuation of the species. Although already married, he had been blinded by an irrational passion for a lady rider from a wandering circus: "He followed that woman to the Cape, and apparently travelled at the tail of that beastly circus to other parts of the world, in a most degrading position. The woman soon ceased to care for him, and treated him worse than a dog. Most extraordinary stories of moral degradation were reaching the island at the time. He had not the strength to shake himself free." (p. 36)

When he does return, he perpetuates the scandal by bringing with him the daughter of the circus-woman. He insists on keeping her as his daughter, instead of treating her as "a scullion in the his household," which would have enabled him to return to respectability. As a result of this, they both continue to live as outcasts. Thus, Jacobus' only hope of marriage for his daughter must be from a complete outsider, and to this end he makes business difficulties that give him a pretext for bringing the narrator to his house, and leaving him in the company of his daughter. Whether he is using the daughter to sell the captain a cargo of potatoes, or vice-versa is never quite clear: he keeps both options open.

The atmosphere of fair illusion that covers nature's cruel stratagems is again suggested by the garden in which Alice is discovered:

It was really a magnificent garden: smooth green lawns and a gorgeous maze of flower-beds in the foreground, displayed around a basin of dark water framed in a marble rim, and in the distance the massed foliage of varied trees... It was a brilliantly coloured solitude, drowsing in a warm voluptuous silence. Where the long, still shadows fell across the beds, and in shady nooks, the massed colours of the flowers had an ex-

traordinary magnificence of effect. I stood entranced. Jacobus grasped me delicately above the elbow, impelling me to half-turn to the left...

"This is Alice", he announced tranquilly; and his subdued manner of speaking made it sound so much like a confidential communication that I fancied myself nodding understandingly and whispering: "I see, I see." (pp. 42-43)

The impression is rather of "life" and Jacobus working their spells together like a pair of shady salesmen, the former victim now a junior partner, and the rest of the story is of their stratagems setting to work. The Captain's resources in the struggle against the "sacred necessity" lie in that complex combination of fastidious taste and philosophical sophistication that colours the whole story, and which, in the introductory scenes, has already put the reader into a mood of acceptance that will probably last at least until the story is over. The girl, who is described in terms that recall the incident of the figurehead, has on her side very similar defences and inhibitions, which have been put into her mind by the aunt who looks after her. She has been treated to a sort of vulgar "crash-course" in Schopenhauer's philosophy by her aunt's insinuations as to the wickedness of the outside world, reinforced by the newspapers that her father brings home:

"As her mind could not grasp the meaning of any matters treated there except police-court reports and accounts of crimes, she had formed for herself a notion of the civilised world as a scene of murders, abductions, burglaries, stabbing affrays, and every sort of desperate violence. England and France, Paris and London (the only two towns of which she seemed to have heard), appeared to her sinks of abomination, reeking with blood.." (p. 60)

From behind these barriers, Alice and the Captain feel for each other a strong attraction. The Captain cannot resist returning daily

to look at Alice, indulging himself with "dread, self contempt, and deep pleasure":

I looked her over, from the top of her dishevelled head, down the lovely line of the shoulder, following the curve of the hip, the draped form of the long limb, right down to her fine ankle below a torn soiled flounce; and as far as the point of the shabby, high-heeled, blue slipper dangling from her well-shaped foot, which she moved slightly, with quick nervous jerks, as if impatient of my presence. And in the scent of the massed flowers I seemed to breathe her special and inexplicable charm, the heady perfume of the everlastingly irritated captive of the garden. (p. 62)

The narrator eventually discovers, however, that this tension in the girl which, added to her physical attraction, he finds so alluring and provocative, is solely due to the fear that with her father's connivance, he is about to kidnap and murder her, so that when, by the loudness and sincerity of his disavowals, he finally removes her fear, she relaxes, and "that black, fixed stare into which I had read a tragic meaning more than once, in which I had found a sombre seduction, was perfectly empty now, void of all consciousness whatever, and not even aware any longer of my presence; it had become a little sleepy in the Jacobus fashion." (p. 68)

Thus the real attraction of Alice, despite its obvious physical base, has been very largely the creation of a masculine idealisation, and when the illusion has been destroyed by the Captain's sincerity, "instead of rejoicing at my complete success, I beheld it with astounded and indignant eyes. There was something cynical in that unconcealed alteration, the true Jacobus shamelessness. I felt as though I had been cheated in some rather complicated deal into which I had entered against my better judgement." (p. 68)

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It is only this "supreme indifference" on the part of the girl that finally provokes the Captain to attempt an embrace, which the girl does not resist, but to which she makes no response, until finally she violently breaks away. When they meet again the girl's interest in the Captain has been aroused, but his desire for her, he finds, is gone. At the end of the story, he is unable to face a return to the island, and has to resign his command: "How could I go back to fan that fatal spark with my cold breath?"

Meanwhile, during the period of his infatuation with Alice, in order to go on seeing her, the Captain has had to invest all his private savings in a cargo of Jacobus' potatoes, and all through the return trip to Australia, "whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me on the poop, they mingled with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams." In this way earth, corruption and the sting of death follow the track of "romance" right to the end. When the ship reaches Melbourne, there is a potato famine there, and the Captain makes the profit that gives the tale its title, and the final touch to an impressive and unconventional work of art.

The story, as a whole, tends to offend modern taste, and it is interesting to note that although Conrad tended to be both sensitive to public feeling and anxious to avoid any kind of direct "confession" of his sensibilities, he never seems to have had any hesitation about identifying himself with a character who for post-Freudian critics has come to be regarded as a revelation of "misogyny", "sexual inadequacy", "voyeurism", "revenge on life", "major vulgarity", and so on--these are from Guerard, (pp. 51-54) but a similar set could be made up from Moser. On the contrary, Conrad seems to have wanted to present it as being more closely "autobiographical" than it really was. In Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, Jessie says that it was "largely founded on fact", and used to accuse her of being jealous of Alice (p. 139). He also spoke of it in the same way to his official biographer, Aubry, who says that

Conrad once asked him, "Do you think that Jacobus had seen something?" When I confessed that for my part I could not decide, and, in my turn asked him the same question, he answered, 'I never knew.'" (Aubry, I, p. 113)

These suggestions that Alice is drawn from life were probably made in the hope of concealing the fact that as Hervouët shows, she is largely drawn from the girl in Maupassant's Les Soupers Rondoli, another "Miss Don't Care" who is described, often with virtually identical phrases, as sensuous and slovenly. After the girl has casually given herself to the protagonist, on a train, she remains indifferent, while his affection is aroused. Thus Conrad virtually reverses the reactions of male and female, but as he is describing the preliminaries, and Maupassant the aftermath, and with obviously very different kinds of men, one cannot make any claim, a priori as it were, that Conrad's psychology is less convincing—it is merely less conventional.

In subsequently allowing himself to be identified with the Captain's "voyeurism" Conrad seems to have been lulled by the general popular feeling of the age into a little harmless, but probably unintentional, self-revelation. At the popular level the story was very well received—"I have been patted on the back for it by most unexpected people, personally unknown to me, the chief of them of course being the editor of a popular illustrated magazine who published it serially in one mighty instalment." (p. viii). In fact, the story, almost accidentally as it were, provides the exact degree of sexual titillation acceptable to the editor of an Edwardian "popular illustrated magazine", and so was gladly snapped up in "one mighty instalment".

This incident is typical of Conrad's relation to the taste of his time in matters of sex—a kind of convenient mutual misunderstanding. The age was fascinated by sex, but could not read about it, while Conrad was restrained in writing about it for the opposite reason, the net result being fairly satisfactory to both sides. Thus we find the para-

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dox referred to above (p.) of Conrad criticising Tolstoy for his "anti-sensualism": what was for Tolstoy too much of a personal problem—even while he was conscientiously trying to educate his peasants he found himself seducing their wives—was for Conrad something that could be seen with a cool objectivity. In relation to sex, as with most other things, Conrad is interested in les valeurs idéales, and an idealised view of the woman one loves is part of the whole concept of "sex", even in the most primitive forms of society. As civilisation become more complex, so do the "stratagems of life". No doubt a high degree of "idealisation" can also be a source of impotence, and of the even more widespread fear of impotence, that seems to increase as the sophistication of civilisation increases. And if, on the other hand, sex is to be coolly divested of its glamour and regarded merely as an aspect of zoology, an objective appraisal is likely to lead to rather Schopenhauerian conclusions. In both these respects, A Smile of Fortune, provides the kind of insight that comes only from an uncommon honesty, and accuracy, in portraying private emotions. From this point of view, Conrad can be regarded as something of a converse of, or antidote to, Lawrence, just as, at the philosophical level, Nietzsche's more positive view of sex as the motive power of art, and his enthusiastic embrace of even the worst that life can bring, provide the antidote to Schopenhauer.

Notes

1. Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I knew Him, pp. 104-105.
2. Yves Hervouet, "French Linguistic and Literary Influences on Joseph Conrad", pp. 413-420.

The Shadow Line

The Shadow Line, written in 1915, is generally acknowledged to be the best of Conrad's later works, a point on the graph well above the general curve of the declining parabola. As a story based directly on his own experience at sea, it is closely comparable to "Youth", written seventeen years before, and there is a rather similar heightening of of the "facts" of the actual voyage upon which it draws. It recollects the emotions of the most memorable moment of his nautical career, the attainment of command, and perhaps because the meditation has been so long—it is written twenty-seven years after—there is a kind of clarity about the basic emotions, and at the same time a wealth of symbolism in the expression of them, that combine to give it both subtle depths and clear outlines, like looking into waters that are still but deep.

Conrad passed the final examination that made him a master mariner in 1886, at the age of twenty-eight, but it was an overcrowded market, and as a foreigner, young, and without influential connections, his chances of actually attaining the command of a ship, even in places like Singapore, were remote. Moreover, he was "a sailing ship man", and with the growth of steam, the demand for his kind of experience was growing less. Nevertheless, the arrival of the opportunity was an ever-present possibility for which he needed to be prepared, until, suddenly, in 1888, and in circumstances very close to those described in the earlier part of the story, the testing opportunity came.

In the two years that preceded it, while still serving as a mate, there had been plenty of time for him to wonder "how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal of his personality every man sets up for himself secretly". The articulation of the thought occurs in his earlier "The Secret Sharer", based on the same journey as that of The Shadow Line, and Lord Jim is a more imaginative and extended exploration of

the same question. In the latter book it is dealt with in terms of a challenge more extreme than Conrad ever had to face, and answered by tragic failure, while in The Shadow Line the events are closer to his own experience, and the outcome is success: one can hardly doubt that to his own nervous temperament, failure or success were possibilities between which in imagination he walked as on the edge of a blade.

Extremity and failure usually provide more fruitful themes than success, and in this respect Lord Jim is the more compelling tale. It may be that there is also a question of values here: every "success" necessarily involves an affirmation of those generally accepted values by which it was attained, and in terms of which it is judged; a failure allows one to question the values, and as we have seen it is in such questioning that much of the interest of Conrad's work would seem to lie. This is no doubt one reason why such connoisseurs of the "Conradian magic" as Guerard and Hewitt are unwilling to give The Shadow Line their full approval: to their taste, an essential ingredient of the "flavour" is missing.

Unlike those stories in which his emotions are transferred to an "outward form" and analysed by Marlow, there are no subversive notes, and no real critical cruelty towards the protagonist—he avenges all insults, confounds all his critics, and wins the final battle in the manner of the traditional story-book hero. In this respect the story is unashamedly "affirmative", but it is affirmative with a sophistication and a self-awareness that do not make it too easily so, and it gives a symbolic expression to areas of universal experience. Just because the "I", the controlling consciousness of the story, is essentially Conrad himself, it has, built in to it, as it were, its own subtle critique of the ideal against which he is measuring himself.

That question of how a man may turn out in relation to his "Platonic conception of himself" that is asked in "The Secret Sharer" and analysed so exhaustively in Lord Jim is, in The Shadow Line presented in terms of a less romantic, a more public and objective "ideal"—simply that of the

good captain, and very satisfactorily presented through incidents and images in the story itself. As soon as the new captain comes aboard his ship, he finds himself sitting in his predecessor's chair and confronted by a mirror: "Deep within the tarnished ormulu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except of some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty" (p. 53).

It is not impossible that such a physical reflection might induce in the young protagonist a moment of inward reflection, but even if one doubts whether these were likely to be the thoughts of the moment, this is part of the whole mood and effect of the story—that it is distanced by detached retrospection, and when he wishes to convey the actual feeling of the moment, Conrad gives excerpts from a notebook that the narrator is said to have written at the time.

It is a story of "initiation" and ordeal, and allied to this there is the theme of the passing of the "shadow line" between youth and maturity. In retrospect the narrator sees his attainment of command, and the events that immediately followed, as marking the moment at which he left behind his youth and attained to full adulthood—in this respect, we are presumably intended to think of him as being rather younger than Conrad's actual age of thirty at the time. Perhaps the most impressive feature of the story is the way in which this metaphorical shadow line is given a geographical latitude, located on the map as $8^{\circ} 20'$, in the Gulf of Siam. This is where the ordeal reaches its height and passes through its climax, an ordeal in which the protagonist is stretched to the limit physically, doing almost the whole work of the crew, not sleeping, and hardly eating for days on end, and spiritually as well, by the weight of

responsibility, and with the mate's persuasive madness threatening to engulf his mind.

The idea of "initiation" is an ancient one, and Conrad does not miss out a single aspect of the tribal rite. It is ordained by the tribal god, Captain Ellis, the Master Attendant:

"You want to see Him?"

All lightness of spirit and body having departed from me at the touch of officialdom, I looked at the scribe without animation, and asked in my turn wearily:

"What do you think? Is it any use?"

"My goodness! He has asked for you twice today."

This emphatic He was the supreme authority, the Marine Superintendent, the Harbour Master—a very great person in the eyes of every single quill-driver in the room. But that was nothing to the opinion he had of his own greatness.

Captain Ellis looked upon himself as a sort of divine (pagan) emanation, the deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas. If he did not actually rule the waves, he pretended to rule the fate of the mortals whose lives were cast upon the waters. (pp. 29-30)

The initiate is blessed by the god, even to the extent of the use of his own launch: "'I say! His own launch. What have you done to him?' His stare was full of respectful curiosity. I was quite confounded. 'Was it for me? I hadn't the slightest notion', I stammered out. He nodded many times. 'Yes. And the last person who had it before you was a Duke. So there!'" (p. 34). But he has to face the jealousy of the other elders of the tribe, all of whom seem to be hostile to him, notably the captain of the ship that delivers him to Bangkok, and the mate of the ship to be taken over; his only support comes from the man who fills the role of his father, Captain Giles.

But although there may be a discernible pattern here, it is never insisted on at the expense of common sense or psychological probability. It is made clear that whatever the man himself, or the crowd of "quill-drivers may think, the narrator himself does not grant the Harbour Master any special status; the motives that encourage Captain Giles to help, such as his petty insistence on knowing everything that goes on in the Sailor's Home, are given their full emphasis, as also the reasons why the Captain of the Melita resents him—he has to delay his hour of sailing, and take in a passenger, and "such a thing had never been done for him". The mate of the ship he is to take over has even more reason for discontent, as he had expected to be given the command himself, and had deliberately brought the ship unto this out of the way port in the belief that this would make his promotion inevitable—"but his naive reasoning forgot to take into account the telegraph cable reposing on the bottom of the very Gulf up which he had turned."

Perhaps the author's greatest achievement is the way in which he makes the ordeal into something more than merely a struggle against physical obstacles or opposing personalities. Like the apostle, he must wrestle "not against flesh and blood", but against "powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world", but in a way that never presupposes any belief in the literal existence of these invisible forces. They rather represent those aspects of the universe, whether in the elements or the human psyche, that are beyond our control—things such as Shakespeare conveys through witches, sibyls and spirits of the air. It is plainly not a story of the "supernatural", and Conrad is quite justified in protesting, in the Author's Note, against those critics who reviewed it as if it was.

This atmosphere is conveyed with great skill, in the description of the darkness that surrounds the lonely ship, the opposition of the elements, the ravages of disease, the despairing comments in the narrator's notebook, and above all in the apparent haunting of the ship by its dead

captain through the mind of the fever-struck mate. It is important to note that it is only through the medium of his mind that the powers of spiritual darkness are made present, and the effect on the crew is not the effect of anything more than the combination of physical extremity and the madness of the oracle.

Much of the effectiveness of this aspect of the story lies in the way that Conrad not only portrays the ailing mate as the kind of man capable of such an illusion, and of fighting it in his own tenacious way, but also provides the deceased captain with exactly those bohemian qualities that might be expected to have such an effect. He has been photographed in Haiphong in the company of a woman "disguised in some semi-oriental, vulgar, fancy costume. She resembled a low-class medium or one of those women who tell fortunes by cards for half-a-crown. And yet she was striking" (p. 59), and he would "go below, shut himself in his cabin, and play on the violin for hours—till day break perhaps". Here are exactly the right materials to convict him of utter immorality in the mind of the puritanical lower middle-class mate.

At the same time, Conrad wants the evil power of the former captain to represent much more than a mere lack of sensitivity on the part of the mate, so he fully emphasises his failings as a seaman and as a commander, his appearance in the photograph "recalling a wild boar", with a "fierce soul which seemed to look out at one out of the sardonically savage face", and his probable guilt in the matter of the false bottles of quinine—he can be seen as the enemy of the whole ship and the whole code by which she sails. He sums up and symbolises everything that must be faced and overcome in the passing of the shadow line, and he is buried precisely in the mouth of the gulf from which the ship must escape. It is all presented in such a way that we cannot but admit that for anyone with the slightest grain of superstition in them, it must seem that it is his invisible influence that is slowly squeezing the life out of the ship.

Yet because the story is being told in retrospect, long after the

shadow line has been passed, these aspects of horror can be looked back upon with humour and set out with a suitably British kind of understatement. The total effect can be brilliant, as in the combined horror and humour of the occasion on which Burns, the mate, finally succeeds in crawling out of bed, in darkness and an old woolly coat, to arrive on the poop as a four-legged monster, a very incarnation of all the narrator's fears. Then, because he believes that it was only because he was able to laugh at the old captain that he was able to stand up to him, he orders the all-but dying crew to exorcise his spirit with laughter: "Aha! Dog-gone ye! You've found your tongues—have ye? I thought you were dumb. Well, then—laugh! Laugh—I tell you. Now then—all together. One, two, three—laugh!" (p. 120).

Because this ironic distancing of the scene allows the reader also to laugh, it threatens to slacken the tension, to weaken the immediacy of the horror, and therefore, to counteract it, Conrad puts in, on two occasions, passages from a notebook that the narrator is said to have kept at the time. In this way he annihilates the "distance", and brings us back into the actual torment of the hour. As "confession" they provide no self-revelation in the usual sense, for that is not their purpose, but they are not the jottings of a typical young officer, and must be seen as belonging very much to the unique "I" of the "autobiography", for they read more like the notebooks of Rilke:

It ^t strikes me that if there exist an invisible ear catching the whispers of this earth, it will find this ship the most silent spot....and as I emerge on deck the ordered arrangement of the stars meets my eye, un-^uclouded, infinitely wearisome. There they are: sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable work of the Seven Days, into which mankind seems to have blundered unbidden. Or else decoyed. Even as I have been decoyed into this awful, this death-haunted command....

(pp. 97-98)

What these quotations do, by their poetic and emotional contrast with the main body of the story is to take us straight into the immediacy of the still undecided struggle.

Throughout the story, the steward, Ransome, is the one calm, rational presence, and this despite—or is it because?—he is really the most deeply threatened, with a heart condition that may kill him at any undue physical effort. In the last scene of the story the narrator listens to him "going up the companion stairs cautiously, step by step, in mortal fear of starting into sudden anger our common enemy it was his hard fate to carry consciously within his faithful breast" (p. 133). The word "consciously" is important here, reflecting back on the whole of the symbolic and "supernatural" aspects of the story. "The last enemy is Death"—as with sickness or storm, it is natural for men to give its seemingly malignant power a personality, and yet when even the deepest threat comes, one must preserve one's rationality, and this is Ransome's significance and his role. When the mad mate finally collapses, it is into the arms of Ransome (p. 120). Not only does he preserve his own perfect reasonableness, but also the narrator's. More than once the young captain feels that he too is going mad, and it is always Ransome who saves his sanity:

"You are holding out well, sir."

"Yes", I said. "You and I seem to have been forgotten."

"Forgotten, sir?"

"Yes, by the fever-devil who has got on board this ship," I said.

Ransome gave me one of his attractive, intelligent, quick glances and went away with the tray. It occurred to me that I had been talking somewhat in Mr Burns' manner. It annoyed me. Yet often in the darker moments I forgot myself into an attitude towards our troubles more fit for a contest with a living enemy. (pp. 103-104).

Traditional mythology provides as well as devils, angels—guardian

spirits who though good, are of a lower order than men because they do not have powers of choice, and this seems to be rather the role in which Ransome is seen. It is not so much a matter of deciding whether Conrad consciously gives Ransome something of this angelic status as of recognising the full spectrum of his vision, in which all the voices of the universe seem to find a place in the chorus.

A steward is but a kind of butler at sea, and Ransome, with his slightly obsequious good manners, is not presented as more than a brave and competent butler, but he is also a kind of secular guardian angel, and with exactly the qualities one would expect of a Conradian angel—courtesy, rationality, and not eternal, but carrying within his breast a clock that is the measure of our mortality. For all his pessimism, Conrad never quite lost his faith in the light of human reason, and in his most notable essay, "Autocracy and War", he says, "It will be a long time before we have learned that in the great darkness before us there is nothing that we need to fear." It is as though, in the closing lines of the story, he is saying, despite his occasional emotional exclamations in favour of an opposite view, that a conscious awareness of our tragic fate is our best defence.

We can see also that at the time that he wrote this story, Conrad had particular reasons for turning out as affirmative, loyal, and a good seaman. It was in the darkest days of the First World War, and his own son Borys was soon to depart for the Western Front—it was a time when the values upheld by the story really did mean something for Conrad, as they did for almost everyone else in England. He says in the Author's Note that it was "of all subjects of which a writer of tales is more or less conscious within himself, the only one I found possible to attempt at this time... the mood with which I approached it is best expressed perhaps in the dedication which strikes me now as a most disproportionate thing" (p. vii). The dedication is, "To Borys and all others who like himself have

crossed in early youth the shadow-line of their generation."

Research into the actual journey of the Otago from Bangkok to Singapore by Sherry, Allen, and others, generally supports Conrad's contention that the story is autobiographical, but to nothing like the extent that he sometimes claimed. Thus in writing to Sir Sidney Colvin, who was to review the book, he said:

The locality doesn't matter: and if it is the Gulf of Siam it's simply because the whole thing is exact autobiography... The very speeches are (I won't say authentic—they are that absolutely) I believe, verbally accurate. And all this happened in March-April 1887. Giles is a Capt, Patterson, a very well known person there. It's the only name I've changed. Mr Burns' craziness being the pivot is perhaps a little accentuated. My last scene with Mansome is only indicated (Will tell you more when we meet)... Here I'll only say that the experience is transposed into spiritual terms—in art a perfectly legitimate thing to do, as long as one preserves the exact truth enshrined therein! (Aubry, II, p. 182).

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In fact, it happened in 1888, and the crew list shows that Conrad "changed" everybody's name—he could hardly have been expected to remember them all (Allen, p. 322). More fundamentally, it seems that he entirely invented the illness and the madness of the mate, and transferred the incident of his pleas not to be left behind from somewhere else. In the interests of the ordeal he magnified the size of the ship, the hardships of the journey, the size, and the sickness of the crew, and the general extremity of the situation (Sherry, pp. 218-249).

More interesting as art, is the way in which, beginning from "the dusty old violin case" and the photograph mentioned in Falk as left by the previous captain (p. above), Conrad builds him up into a fine example of the romantic evil genius, and then plants his dead body in the path of the ship. No doubt it is all a little unfair to the original

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captain, a harmless inhabitant of Australia called Snadden, who, according to Sherry, was not so old, did not die from a mysterious illness, was not in a bad relationship with his wife, or with the other owners of the ship, of which he was himself a part owner, and was not buried in the Gulf of Siam. to which a clerk from his Australian office added that "he was not an uncommunicative man; he was rather loquacious and never kept his ship loafing at sea." And as, in Falk, the "dusty old violin case" is said to have been used only for the purpose of storing documents, it would appear that if Captain Snadden ever had been a violinist, he had not recently been practising this evil art.

One cannot but wonder why, as with his insistence on having seen the "real" Lord Jim, Conrad so constantly tried to devalue his art by insisting that it was nothing but "facts". It seems to have been the particular kind of "madness" to which his genius was akin, an aberration that was a necessary aspect of his creative power. Particularly in relation to his "autobiographical" tales, such as Heart of Darkness, The Shadow Line, or The Arrow of Gold, it seems to have been a psychological impossibility for him to contain in his mind two parallel versions of the same experience: once it had been "transposed into spiritual terms", then the original facts were altogether banished, and the "spiritual" version alone lived on as the one and only truth about the affair--if loopholes appeared, he would improvise at any length, and quite ruthlessly, to cover them up. Moreover, by making a friend of Jean-Aubry, the man who was to be his official biographer, and constantly chatting to him about his past, entirely in terms of the spiritual versions, he virtually ensured that their "truth" would endure for ever. If only his subsequent fame had been a little less, he would never have attracted the intensive research that has gradually revealed the full extent of his creative power at the expense of his personal veracity.

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The early part of the story, the long prelude at the Sailor's Home, is probably the part that is most candidly autobiographical. It reflects more clearly than the sequel the prickly personality of the young Polish gentleman, sensitive to insults from snobbish Englishmen, and it is also interesting in the way that it conveys Conrad's feelings of unrest, feelings that were to continue, and grow, until finally he recognised his vocation as a novelist. This is another "shadow line" that is not consciously crossed in the story, but can be sensed beneath its surface. That in terms of simple seaman's ethics, the artist, as represented by the former captain, with his violin and his irregular life, belongs to the realm of "evil", is an aspect of the story which may well reflect a conflict within the author's own mind, rather like that which Thomas Mann portrays in "Tonio Kroger"

In A Personal Record, Conrad professes to have been greatly surprised to find himself sitting down to write Almayer's Folly: "Till I began to write that novel I had written nothing but letters, and not very many of these. I never made a note of a fact, of an impression or of an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write" (p. 68). This may well be so—Conrad's art was not of the kind that needed notebooks, but rather meditation on what was already branded on the memory. But when he goes on to say that "the ambition of being an author had never turned up amongst those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself in the stillness and immobility of a day dream" we begin to suspect that once again the facts are being transposed into "spiritual truth".

The extent to which Conrad's contemplative temperament was really compatible with a captain's life can fairly well be guessed from an account of him by a Frenchman in Mauritius, a few months after the events of The Shadow Line, and a few weeks before he resigned: Ces jours-là, il avait un tic de l'épaule et des yeux et la moindre chose inattendue, la

chute d'un objet sur le plancher, une porte qui bat, le faisaient sursauter. C'était ce qu'on appellerait aujourd'hui un neurasthénique; à cette époque on disait un névrosé" (Baines, p. 125). In The Mirror of the Sea Conrad confesses to "pensive habits which made me sometimes dilatory in my work about the rigging" (p. 122), a seaman on the Tilkhurst testified that he was "a queer feller for books", and his captain on the Malayan voyages told Aubry that when he went to Conrad's cabin he usually found him writing (I, p. 98).

This was the berth that Conrad threw up in the manner described in the opening pages of The Shadow Line. It may have seemed, as he says, that "I left it in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch", but at certain seasons birds have a compulsive instinct to begin building nests. If we look at the first pages of the story in this light, we can see that they concentrate the emotions of a man who feels compelled to change his life in some direction that he cannot clearly see, and the ostensible outcome of the story—that the new captain becomes an integrated man of action, tested and complete, hardly matches the more complex mood of its beginning. This atmosphere is expressed in one way by Guerard when he says that the story "seems to dramatize the throwing off of an immobilizing neurotic depression",^(p.254) but the real feeling of it is more adequately brought out by Leavis:

He (the narrator) is possessed, in fact, by a state like that of Lawrence's characters when they find themselves faced with the question: what for? Has life, has my life, no more meaning to it than is promised by a continual succession of days like those in which I have passed out of youth, beyond the shadow-line? Can I conceivably be fulfilled in a mere career—days passing as they pass now, with the prospect of professional advancement to make up for what is lost and gone? Is that the meaning of life—my life? Is that living? Questions such as these suggest the

young Captain's state—a state that is potently communicated to us.

(Anna Karenina and Other Essays, p. 102)

If this is an adequate summary of the personal question that the first part of the story poses, it is fairly obvious that what follows does not really answer it. It was a very personal question, and the complete and final answer to it lies before us as the Collected Works of Joseph Conrad.

The Arrow of Gold

The Arrow of Gold published in 1919, is the last story in which Conrad attempted to use directly his own experience, but he uses it merely to create a romance, not seriously to analyse himself. Memories of his youth in Marseilles, more than forty years before, mix with dreams of what he had wanted to be, while gossip of the Carlist war in Spain mingles with echoes of the many French novels he had read, to make a strange confection, continuously entertaining, but not always convincing, and never reaching the level of his best books. If, as Marlow says in Chance, "we are all the creatures of our light literature", it would seem that in this book Conrad is allowing himself to be rather more so than might be expected of so acute a psychologist.

As light literature, it would appear to have the raw material for a truly glamorous tale, and the imagery to give it resonance, but the images are left to lie around like unrelated treasures in the storehouse of a museum, while the events that should bring it to an exciting climax, the duel and the consummation of love, are allowed to fizzle out from sheer lack of conviction. It seems to be a mixture of a little fact and much fiction, of which the chief facts, the smuggling experience in the Tremolino, had already been dramatised in The Mirror of the Sea, leaving only a dream-like romance that needs more brio than Conrad can bring to it.

Although it would appear that hardly a word of it was true, the story was laughed as "autobiographical", and having committed himself to this, Conrad stood by it, and even used it as an excuse for some of the book's shortcomings. To a dissatisfied lady he wrote, "You will easily understand that of this affair not everything could be set down" (Aubry, II, p. 232), while to others he suggested that

it was the force of emotion that had made his hand unsteady: "The fact is, between you and me, that I have never been able to read these proofs in cold blood. Ridiculous! My dear (as D. Rita would have said), there are some of these 42-year-old episodes of which I cannot think now without a slight tightness of the chest—un petit serrement de coeur. What a confession!" (Aubry, II, p. 229)

In the Author's Note added in 1920, a year after the book was published, he reiterates its factual basis, and concludes:

I venture this explicit statement because, amidst much sympathetic appreciation, I have detected here and there a note, as it were, of suspicion. Suspicion of facts concealed, of explanations held back, of inadequate motives. But 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. And all that I could not help. In the case of this book I was unable to supplement these deficiencies by the exercise of my inventive faculty. It was never very strong; and on this occasion its use would have seemed exceptionally dishonest.

In the light of subsequent revelations, this somewhat tautological statement can now be regarded as hardly more than an admission that having relied too largely on invention, Conrad had failed to make the book convincing. This is the key to the failure—that the author's "inventive faculty was never very strong". His strength lay in the analysis of facts and experience, "pushed" a little perhaps in the interests of poetry, but not pushed too far. If, as seems probable, his presentation of the Pretender and his mistress and the whole Carlist plot in The Arrow of Gold are mostly based on hearsay and reading, and some of the other events on invention, this would account for the way in which, despite the effort that is put into visualizing

some of the scenes, they often fail to carry conviction.

Discoveries about the background of the book have served progressively to enlarge the areas that must be regarded as fictional, and the facts seem to be few and brief. In 1876, after three voyages to the West Indies one as a passenger, one as as "apprentice," and one as a steward, Conrad, then eighteen years old, was prevented by illness from sailing again, and proposed to wait in Marseilles until the ship returned. It then came out that his Russian nationality, and consequent liability for military service, made it illegal for him to serve on French ships, and he told his uncle that he might go to America, or even Japan (Baines, pp. 62-63). A little over a year later—the year covering the supposed events of The Arrow of Gold, his uncle in the Ukraine received a telegram, "Conrad blessé envoyez argent - arrivez". In a letter to a relative the Uncle tells of what he found when he arrived:

Having the 3,000 francs I sent him for the voyage he met a former Captain of his, a Monsieur Duteil, who persuaded him to participate in some affair on the coast of Spain—simply some kind of smuggling. He invested 1,000 francs and made a profit of over 400 francs: this pleased them greatly, so he thereupon engaged all he had in a second venture—and lost all... He borrowed 800 francs from his friend Mr Fecht, and set off for Villa Franca where an American squadron was anchored with the intention of entering the American naval service. Nothing came of this, and wishing to repair his finances, he tried his luck in Monte Carlo where he lost the 800 francs at the gaming tables. Having so excellently managed his affairs, he returned to Marseilles, and one fine evening, he invited the aforesaid friend to tea; but before the time fixed, he attempted to kill himself with a revolver shot (Let this detail remain between us; for I have told everyone that he was wounded in a duel). The bullet went durch und durch near the heart,

{not injuring any important organ. Luckily he had left all his addresses on top—so that the good Mr Fecht could immediately notify me and even my brother who again bombarded me in turn. That is the whole story." (Baines, pp. 63-65)

If that is one "whole story", it is obvious enough that The Arrow of Gold is another wholly different one. It pictures "M. George" as a wealthy young dilettante and adventurer of such reputation in Marseilles that the highest foreign representatives of the Carlist court, a Southern aristocrat and an English nobleman, seek him out, and introduce him to the Pretender's youthful mistress in the hope that her beauty will win him to their cause, for only he could undertake the desperate gun-running mission on which the fate of the Pretender's army depends. He accomplishes the task, off-stage, and after he has rescued her from a psychotic attacker, the royal favourite declares her love. He carries her off to a rose-embowered retreat, from which he emerges again to fight a duel with the jealous American—also off-stage. Meanwhile the girl, feeling that her soiled past makes her unworthy of him, goes away—"she has sacrificed the chance to the integrity of your life—heroically". She leaves him the golden arrow, which the narrator tells us, prudently, in the last paragraph of the book, he subsequently lost "in a storm at sea".

This is the romantic day-dream that Conrad made out of the mere facts, and such was his reputation by 1917 that except for "here and there a note, as it were, of suspicion", the hoax was completely successful. Apart from its inherent incredibility, the story is undermined by the fact that at the time at which Conrad was doing his smuggling, the Carlist war in Spain was over. Regionalist groups did survive in the hills, and may have been customers for his smuggled guns, if guns were what he smuggled, but the Pretender had already renounced the struggle, and been expelled from France. (Baines, p. 73)

The war had still been going on, however, while Conrad was making his trips to the West Indies, and in between, visiting the house of the ship's owner, Delestang, who was a legitimatist sympathiser. Thus he must have heard some gossip about these affairs, and must have known Blunt, for here his picture of the American fits well with other accounts of him, and he is the strongest and most convincing character in the story."

Conrad may also have been enchanted by some girl with a peasant background, and connections with oranges and Spain, for his early unfinished novel, The Sisters introduces a girl of the same name and a similar background, who is presumably to meet the hero, Stephen, but the fragment ends before more than her early childhood has been described. In The Arrow of Gold this girl is promoted to the position of Carlos' mistress, and given some of the attributes, and the arrow of gold, that belonged to the real favourite, a Hungarian peasant called Paula de Somogyi, whom Carlos did not take up with until after he had abandoned the struggle in Spain (Baines pp. 77-80, Allen, pp. 45-99).

The story of Rita's life in Paris with the artist Allegre, and the visit of a Balzacian journalist to the house in Marseilles, are the kind of things not too difficult to be imagined by anyone as familiar as Conrad was with French novels of the period. It is noticeable that apart from this one visit, which is quite inconsequent to the plot, the novelette of Rita's life in Paris is completely insulated from the rest of the story. It is well enough written by the standards of light literature but belongs to the realm of what Conrad wrote "because of the dollars"^{rather} than to his more serious work.

If he had made an attempt simply to convey the emotions of his youth, distinguishing between the reality and the day-dreams, and using the one as counterpoint to the other, so that "M. George" could be seen

be recognised as a spiritual younger brother of Lord Jim, the story might have had both charm and conviction. As it is, the two aspects of dream and reality are confused in a kind of "double-take". While he is to some extent recording the real emotions of the time, he is also trying to make M. George into a much more sophisticated figure, such as he had wanted to be, and these two figures, Conrad as he was and as he dreamed of being, continually get in each other's way and trip each other up, so that the final picture is of neither a sensitive adolescent nor a successful adventurer, but a somewhat inconsistent and unconvincing mixture of the two.

Or at least so it seems, when one is in possession of the "facts", for it is an unfortunate result of Conrad's claim that the story was true, and the subsequent undermining of the claim, that it is more difficult to see the book simply as a work of fiction in its own right. One cannot divest oneself of these stereoscopic lenses^{es}, which show up seams that might not have been so noticeable to the innocent eye. It may, however, be a valid comment on the quality of the story that whereas to know the "facts" of Conrad's Congo voyage only increases one's admiration for what he created out of them, the effect with The Arrow of Gold is rather the reverse.

When Rita and "M. George" first meet we are told that "that woman was revealed to me young, younger than anybody I had ever seen, as young as myself (and my sensation of my youth was then very acute); revealed with something peculiarly intimate in the conviction, as if she were young exactly in the same way in which I felt myself young; and that therefore no misunderstanding between us was possible, and there could be nothing more for us to know about each other." (p.68)

This is, unfortunately, true—the book provides virtually nothing further, it merely back-pedals from this original sense of intuitive intimacy. It suggests that it is perhaps an expression of the

seventeen-year old Conrad's genuine feelings on first meeting the original of Rita, and that the relationship did not develop much further, though it may well have been the subject of intense longing of the kind that a sensitive youth may feel at such an age, and to that degree provide the symptoms of un petit serrement de coeur. The rather artificial note that the book sometimes sounds hereafter when Rita and the hero meet is well suggested by the contention in the Author's Note that it tells of "initiation (through an ordeal that required some resolution to face) into the life of passion", rather as if after passing some unpleasant preliminary test, one was then licensed to practice "passion" for the rest of one's life.

A glance at the Tremolino chapters in The Mirror of the Sea, written fourteen years earlier, shows Rita in a form much less idealised than in the later book. There, she is a Basque peasant "with something of a lioness in the expression of her courageous face (especially when she let her hair down), and with the volatile little soul of a sparrow dressed in fine Parisian feathers." (p. 160) She is chiefly noted for giving imitations of highly-placed personages, and the question of her possible relationship with Don Carlos is a piece of gossip that the narrator does not take very seriously (p. 162). Nor is there any hint that Conrad did anything more than observe her from a distance, except for one moment of public jubilation at a Carlist victory, when she embarrasses him by seizing him round the waist. (p. 161).

In The Arrow of Gold she is changed into both a more noble and a more mannish figure, looking very feminine, but brave, physically tough, logical, given to intellectual ^{triumph} ~~foundations~~ of her predicament and to the organisation of the arm's supply. At home she is seen "sitting cross-legged on the divan in the attitude of a very old idol or a very young child", which is not a traditional female pose, and indeed, in relation to the usual female garments of the time, a virtual impossibility. In

this Rosalind-like role she certainly gives an impression of vitality, and as Guerard says, "she is created, as a person, by her rhetoric: by the economy and biting precision and intelligence of her diction, by her often elaborate sentence structures and by the speeding rhythms of her occasional passionate outbursts" (p. 281). In view of the comparative dullness of M. George, it would seem that in writing the book, Conrad paradoxically tended to identify himself more with Rita than with "himself", gallantly giving her the best lines, and making the hero with his bashfulness, languid feelings, and tendency to swoon in some ways almost the more feminine of the two.

Blunt always speaks convincingly, and in character, and remains as quite unforgettable. A quotation provided by Jerry Allen from a book by Blunt on life in the Phillipines shows the cavalryman speaking very much in character with Conrad's presentation:

The Phillipino may be described as short, thick set, well built, of good muscle, and very active. For his size and weight he is very powerful. He has straight black hair, thick nose and lips, high cheek bones, good teeth, large intelligent black eyes, and a well developed forehead. In colour he varies from dark brown to almost white. (Allen, p. 95)

As a boy, Conrad had thought of himself as "Pole, Catholic, and gentleman" (Baines p. 28), and it may be that as an adolescent in Marseilles he approached the older man, self-described as "American, Catholic, and gentleman" ready to admire and worship, but only to be deeply disillusioned by his spiritual emptiness. This would account for the way in which he is so carefully observed, and faithfully presented, but with a strong emphasis on his hollowness. Allen's researches show also that Conrad's picture of Blunt's mother is almost certainly drawn from life. (pp.64-74)

In contrast with this, the hero's final duel with Blunt comes as a terrible anti-climax. If Conrad had really fought a duel with the

American--by all accounts a formidable opponent--the preliminary trepidations of such a sensitive man, and the actual event, would have given him some of the best "autobiographical" material he possessed, and it would probably have appeared in his fiction as often as does the taking command of the Otago. As it is, the duel occurs entirely off-stage, referred to in a postscript, in the third person, in a few perfunctory sentences. It rather suggests that having finished the book, he suddenly remembered that he had to have a duel because he had already told his friends and family that a scar on his chest was the result of it.

Leavis speaks of the book as "a bad novel, one of Conrad's worst things" (p. 202), and analyses of it made by Guerard (pp.278- 284) and Moser (pp.180-198) in pursuance of their psychological interests are inclined to the same conclusion. Even so, it has strengths, of which the portraits of Blunt and his mother, and the way in which it conveys the feeling of the time and the place must be counted as the chief--there are short spells of "atmosphere" and some of the genuine feelings of youth.

The treatment of Rita's second house in Marseilles, with its peasant stove, its Venetian goblets, and the articulated dummy that had worn the Byzantine robes in which she had been painted, is moving and memorable. It may well be that Conrad visited Blunt at such a house, and listened in on the conversation between him and a well-placed English supporter, for the Carlists had an English circle, backed by the Duke of Norfolk (Allen, pp.49-50). This would explain the way in which, although Blunt and Mills are supposed to be trying to win the famous "M. George" to their cause, they virtually ignore him, while he sits and listens, "open-mouthed", with the wine going to his head, and finally goes home to oversleep. These two early chapters at least, may be largely autobiographical, but the conviction they

encourage is slowly dissipated by the more wholly invented scenes that follow, sometimes subtle, but often inconsequent and naive.

"Woman and the sea revealed themselves to me together, as it were: two mistresses of life's values. The illimitable greatness of the one, the unfathomable seduction of the other, working their immemorial spells from generation to generation fell upon my heart at last: a common fortune, an unforgettable memory of the sea's formless might and of the sovereign charm in that woman's form wherein there seemed to beat the pulse of divinity rather than blood" (p. 88)—there is a touch of the old "Conradian magic": in the style but banality in the substance.

One's fear that Conrad is writing with his tongue in his cheek is checked by the more terrible fear that perhaps he is not—that in certain directions he maintained a great naivety. Leavis thinks that this is so, and quotes this passage as evidence that Conrad was "in some respects a simple soul" (p. 201). He was perhaps a man with several souls, not all of them in full inter-communion. However it may be, this is the level at which much of The Arrow of Gold is written—a young man's dream told by an old man who fails to put it into a mature perspective.

As if realising that such of his own experience as he could profitably use had been used up, Conrad began in his later years an intensive study of the last years of Napoleon. This was a period that had always fascinated him, and of which he had, in 1907, written a competent, and very amusing short novel, "The Duel". The catalogue of his library indicates that he had more books on this subject than on any other (Baines, p. 412).

He began a full-length historical novel on this theme in 1921, to be called Suspense. It is the story of a young English nobleman who becomes involved in Napoleon's escape from Elba, with the help of a Dominic Cervoni—like Genoan called Attilio and a Tremolino-like

felucca. He worked at it intermittently until his death in 1924, leaving about 80,000 words, written with care but following very closely his historical sources, and not making much progress with the plot—in this respect, he might well have made cuts, had he lived to complete it.

He interrupted it to write The Rover, published in 1923, which uses material from the same period for an adventure story about a Dominic Cervoni-like Frenchman, Peyrol, who has retired from the sea, but is tempted back to use his Tremolino-like tartane for a last suicidal attempt to trick the English. It has some fine, simple descriptions of the French countryside, in an area where Conrad had lived, and it conveys something of the emotions of an ageing adventurer, but hardly with the honesty and insight of Hemingway's Across the River and into the Trees. Both these last stories had to be dictated rather than written, because of cramp in his hands and though the average style is better than that of The Arrow of Gold, they are inevitably lacking in the ingredients, and the effects, of the true "Conradian magic".

 Victory

Of the stories that come after Chance, only Victory and The Shadow Line have been generally considered worthy of a place with their great predecessors, a claim supported by Leavis, who while regarding Victory as of "decidedly a lesser order than Nostromo," puts it "among those of Conrad's works which deserve to be current as representing his claim to classical standing." (p. 230). One cannot deny that Victory has the "Conradian flavour"—most of the main ingredients are there, not only such obvious things as an exotic setting and maritime adventure, but even most of those that, in terms of the present investigation, are regarded as crucial: the sceptical attitude, the philosophical pessimism, and the use of an "outward form" who does not resemble the author in appearance or circumstances, but who embodies his emotions. The one thing that is missing is the critical narrator to probe his sensibility.

What we have in Victory is in fact the Conradian flavour coming to us in a way that exactly fits the contention that the author's work of self-analysis was largely finished. For what we have in Victory is a character, Heyst, whose sensibility can be identified very closely with that of Conrad himself, but presented not so much as a case for analysis as simply the picture of a man in a predicament, a predicament that undoubtedly reflects the author's own, a man by whom "no decent feeling was scorned", but for whom no convictions, no public positive values remain. There can be no Marlovian interrogation of Heyst, for he is not so much a subject that Conrad's intel-

lect can analyse as an embodiment of the final state of that intellect, a presentation in exotic and adventurous circumstances, of the author's own predicament, a predicament from which, it seems, only death can deliver him.

"Continual deception and disillusionment, as well as the general nature of life, present themselves as intended and calculated to awaken the conviction that nothing whatever is worth our exertions, our efforts, and our struggles, that all good things are empty and fleeting, that the world on all sides is bankrupt, and that life is a business that does not cover the costs." If this sounds like the wisdom of Heyst the elder, it is because he owes an obvious debt to its author, Schopenhauer (II, p. 574). Heyst's father has attained to this conviction, and as it colours not only the expressed statements of father and son, but also much of the authorial comment in the book, one can hardly doubt that it is also Conrad's conviction. But he never loses the ability to question his convictions, and it is the questioning of this conviction that makes the real excitement of Victory, an excitement that is maintained despite what is, by his own best standards, a relative poverty of style, characterisation, and plot.

In an essay written at the time of Conrad's death, and collected in Castles in Spain, Galsworthy said, "of philosophy he had read a good deal, but on the whole spoke little. Schopenhauer used to give him satisfaction twenty years or more ago" (p. 91). This probably provides a good indication of the relationship of Schopenhauer's philosophy to the writing of Victory: it is not that Conrad was necessarily "influenced" by Schopenhauer, for he had quite enough inborn, or self-generated pessimism of his own, but one can well imagine Schopenhauer giving him "satisfaction", the satisfaction of finding one's own natural tendencies reinforced by the arguments of a powerful intellect. At the same time, he shows no interest in the "positive" side of

Schopenhauer—the ascetic, "super-Christian" ideals—in this respect Conrad is plainly more of a Nietzschean, in the sense that he appears to have absorbed Nietzsche's critique of asceticism, which became common currency around 1910, when the Levy translation of his works appeared. In the essay mentioned above, Galsworthy also mentions as one of Conrad's favourites, William James, the psychologist brother of the novelist, who echoes some of Nietzsche's insights.

The "twenty years ago" of 1924 would imply that his main reading of Schopenhauer had been some eight years before the writing of Victory. This is consistent with the way in which the atmosphere of the book suggests a general assimilation of Schopenhauer's thought rather than any direct quotation, or even paraphrase. He does not reproduce any of the vivid images and parables that the philosopher uses, but he does create things that are very much in the same style. When Heyst is trying to explain his father's ideas to Lena, he says:

"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." (pp. 195-196) This is just the kind of practical illustration that Schopenhauer, the son of a business man, liked to use, but perhaps because he thinks more as a business man than as an employee, the nearest that he comes to it is to say that "life is a business that does not cover the costs".

At the same time, in its context in Victory, Conrad's little parable also shifts Schopenhauer's emphasis in the direction of his own particular interest in the problem of "ideals". Whereas for Schopenhauer it is the whole activity of the "life force" that is subject to the charge of "illusion" and "bankruptcy", Conrad here associates it with taking "fine words for good ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes", although the other quotations from Heyst or his father, about the "stratagems of life", the "barbed hook of action",

and so on, are nearer to Schopenhauer's more general inditement of the universe.

In this way, that atmosphere of pessimism that we have seen to be an important ingredient in the "Conradian flavour" becomes in Victory the main ingredient, and largely explains why the flavour seems to be well maintained despite the absence of a critical narrator. The narrator is internalised in Heyst, and as it were objectified, by the portrait of his father that dominates the house and seems to make its own silent comment on every thought or incident.

Heyst's embodiment of the author's mind and sensibility guarantees him a depth and subtlety that is not to be found in any of the other characters. Indeed, he is almost unique among Conrad's protagonists in giving us that feeling, which one always has, for instance, with Tolstoy's--that the author knows everything about his people and is just choosing the essential things to tell us, where often, with Conrad it seems the other way round--that he is stretching a few glimpses to cover empty spaces.

For Heyst, the "real world" has become a world of shadows: "I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow'. And, by Jove? it is so! ... Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades.." (p. 350). Because things are seen so much from the viewpoint of Heyst, the shade-like quality of the other characters seems almost appropriate, as does also the somewhat sketchy treatment of the background. The hotel is in "Surabaya", but unlike Conrad's earlier scenes in Singapore or Bangkok, there is no local colour to distinguish it from anywhere else, and the island is equally vague. As J. I. M. Stewart says, "Heyst's predicament is the sole urgent interest: it is as if, under the impulsion of this, Conrad had taken up his old Malayan brush and rapidly sketched, in strong colours and bold masses, a sufficient theatre in

which to exhibit his protagonist" (p. 219).

Most of the other characters, if one stops to consider them, begin to look rather like cardboard cut-outs. Wang is "one piecee Chinaman" on a string who "materialises" to lay the table, steal the revolver, and tidy-up at the end by shooting the one left-over villain, though his implied philosophy plays its part in the novel's theme. Pedro swinging his arms like an ape, belongs to some early Darwinian concept of the "missing link", and has even less human quality or social context than Shakespeare's Caliban. Ricardo, starting from his base as a renegade seaman, and with his dislike of "tameness", has possibilities of sympathetic treatment, but receives rather less of it than Captain Brown in Lord Jim. If Hemingway had been the author, he might have been presented as the right man to run off with Lena, for his plea that they are "two of a kind" would seem to have some justice, at least at the outset, but Conrad makes them develop away from "realism" in opposite directions. Ricardo is progressively "de-humanised", and becomes more and more of a simple carnivore, described only in repetitive images of "feral" and "cat-like" behaviour, even to twitching whiskers, and "a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits to give before charging home" (p. 288). These representatives of the animal force of the world that Heyst has denied are led and organised by the cultivated "spectral" intelligence of Mr Jones. He may not be incredible, as a perverted gentleman, but we are given no real information about his background and he seems the least rooted in reality.

Like his two companions, he is represented as being amoral rather than "evil", in the traditional sense. Schopenhauer denies most of the positive qualities that the world calls "good" just as strongly as those it calls evil: the Jehovah of the Old Testament is a false god who calls the world he has made "good", when it is in fact

the worst of all possible worlds—exactly so, for if it were only a little worse it would entirely perish, either from volcanic upheavals, or from starvation and pain (II, pp. 583-584). There can be little doubt that Conrad's concept of Mr Jones arises from a rather similar idea of "world-negation", for he takes to himself not only the attributes of the biblical Satan—"he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth" (p. 318), but even before this, he describes himself as "I am he who is.." (p. 317), the fundamental biblical title of God himself. Or in more secular terms, "I am the world itself come to pay you a visit" (p. 379).

Indeed, although it could hardly have been Conrad's conscious intention, one could almost see the invaders of his isolation as the creatures of Heyst's own imagination—the kind of forms which the "world" might assume in the mind of such a man: "Here they are before you—evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back" (p. 329). Lena also, though ordinary enough in Surabaya, seems to take on a rather similar "enchantment" when she reaches the island to become older and larger than life, but not before she and Heyst have had some moving, revealing and convincingly "realistic" conversations. The book would seem to have vague and distant echoes of both Hamlet and The Tempest, but hardly strong or consistent enough to be easily analysed.

For Schopenhauer, although everything that can be seen and known upon earth is bad, and to be denied, there remains beyond it all an attenuated and indefinable metaphysical "nirvana" of which the ascetic can become aware through extremes of self-denial, but Conrad is not a mystic or a metaphysician.. All that he can find with which to oppose "the world" is an idea of human "decency". This is the fundamental quality of Heyst, and is shared by such characters as Morrison and Davidson. It does not equip them to overcome the world; it simply

makes them vulnerable. Morrison, when he is about to lose his ship, is "so representative of all the past victims of the Great Joke... He was really a decent fellow, he was quite unfitted for this world, he was a failure, a good man cornered--a sight for the gods; for no decent mortal cares to look at that sort" (p. 198).

Thus the philosopher, Heyst's father, is not simply modelled on Schopenhauer, but is rather an up-dated, secularised, version of the early nineteenth-century philosopher, for whom the metaphysical "Ideal" has also disappeared, and nothing at all remains but a great intellectual scorn, pity, and contempt. Such a man would indeed be a terrible phenomenon, of a kind that has yet to appear on the earth, or if he has appeared, the preservative instincts of mankind have served to suppress his writings in the manner that Conrad suggests in relation to Heyst's father.

This is the "philosophy" of Heyst, and it would appear to be very much the philosophy of Conrad, in purely intellectual terms, but it is not entirely the philosophy of the book. Just as Lawrence's novels are more acceptable than his essays because in the novels the representative of Lawrence's "gospel" comes into creative conflict with other points of view, so also in Victory, Conrad not only allows another point of view, represented by Lena, but allows it to win the pyrrhic "victory" of the title.

In the counter-argument, the forces of decency may be thinly spread, yet they can create a network of secular "Providence" by which Heyst rescues Morrison, and Lena and Davidson rescue Heyst. Moreover, in Lena herself there is more than this--she may begin as a lost Cockney musician, but she grows, a little improbably perhaps, into a sort of Earth-mother who embodies all kinds of ancient, positive forces that Heyst is gradually forced to recognise as a valid alternative to his negative attitudes, and she can even defeat the

tiger-like Ricardo in a wrestling match. Even if, in the end, she seems to grow a little larger than life, we are encouraged to accept it by the way in which her growth is shown to spring from the new security that Heyst has given her.

After one of his early conversations with Lena, we are told of Heyst that "that human being so near and still so strange, gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life", and later, when she repeats some of her Sunday-school wisdom, he wonders "whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world". Thus, although Lena has to die, if one can believe in her reality, then her "victory" in finally converting Heyst from "world-negation" is a genuine one, and Heyst's last affirmation, "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!" is moving, and at the same time, realistic, in the sense that it does not suddenly make Heyst a different man, able to go out and face the world, like the swimmer at the end of "The Secret Sharer", but merely makes him realise that his life could have been different, if what he had learned about life had been different. Thus, the father's philosophy, although it is treated as intellectually irrefutable, and is never argued against, is nevertheless finally "refuted" by life, in that it has failed to save the son, and is justifiably abandoned by him in the light of Lena's courageous love, which has shown him at least the possibility of a better way.

This, it would seem, is very much Conrad's own final position: considered rationally, life is a business where the rewards do not cover the expense, and where the more sensitive and "decent" you are, the greater the cost. Nevertheless, man is not a rational animal and ideas are dangerous, so one must act decently and soldier on.

Conrad's affirmations are always tentative and ambiguous, but when the "for" and "against" seem to be tottering on the balance he shrugs his shoulders and casts his chairman's vote on the side of "Life". This is an attitude we find consistently expressed in all his books from The Nigger of the Narcissus onwards, and supported by his essays and letters: it is demonstrated, with its full ambiguity, in the fate of Decoud in Mostromo, and its contrast with the final summing up by Captain Mitchell, in which the moral value of his affirmations can stand even though we are made aware of the limitations of intellect and imagination that underly them. If intellect and ideas force us to deny the world, then this is a kind of judgment on their danger and decadence: it is the simple-minded who get on with the world's work "in a blessed, warm mental fog", so let us give them our blessing, and share the warmth—for without it we die, unblessed and alone.

If the free-wheeling intellect must reach the conclusion that life should be denied—and the Platonic insistence on a "true world" elsewhere can be seen as little more ^{than} another form of the denial—then the intellect makes itself suspect, and yet paradoxically, the conclusion that the intellect is decadent and suspect must itself be an intellectual conclusion. If I reach the conclusion, in relation to my intellect, that I must not be "taken in" by it, it becomes a little difficult to decide in this context, which is the "me" and which is the "it".

To doubt everything, intellectually, and then to doubt the intellect itself, is the paralysing situation in which the "Last Man" finds himself. When Heyst has wondered of Lena, "Whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world", she says,

"Well—and what about you?"

"I? 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 the last? I have been out of it for so long that I am not certain how far the hands of the clock have moved--since--"

" He glanced at the portrait of his father, exactly above the head of the girl, and as it were ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling" (p. 359).

The father, representative of the pure, corrosive intellect, weighing up life and finding that its wages are counterfeit, can ignore the girl, but Heyst who is human, with instincts such as sympathy and sexual desire, and by whom "no decent feeling was ever scorned", cannot believe in anything, but he can still be moved by instinct, and instinct can move the intellect.

Earlier in the story, when Heyst is pacing up and down at night in the garden of Schomberg's hotel, contemplating the rescue of Lena, the author tells us that he was "accustoming his mind to the contemplation of his purpose, in order that by being faced steadily it should appear praiseworthy and wise. For the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices and follies, and also our fears." (p. 83). This also, is Schopenhauerian doctrine: the "Will" is the master, and the intellect its servant, the only exception being the "philosophical genius" who can attain to a kind of pure "will-less" knowledge, by which he discovers that the "will", and the world, which is but the phenomenal "appearance" of the "will", must be denied and negated. This is the final "truth" which Schopenhauer believed that Buddha had discovered, whereas Christianity dragged down by its Old Testament "earthiness" had got only half way there.

But Heyst is not, like his father, a pure "genius". He still possesses some of "the original Adam":

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not so easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father, with his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort; but apparently he could not. There was in the son a lot of that first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frames from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose. (pp. 173-174)

Under the influence of his father, Heyst had once attained to the "will-less" knowledge of true "genius"—"he had been used to think clearly, and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional 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". (p. 82) In Schopenhauer's adopted Indian terms, Heyst had "pierced the veil of Karma", and attained to salvation, but now, as once before when faced with Morrison's plight, he is tempted to fall back into the world of delusion, to act, and "a light veil" hangs "before his mental vision".

Unfortunately, the veil is never opaque enough to allow him any pure instinctive movement towards Lena. For a simple man such as Schomberg, the deception of his intellect by the "will" is complete, so that he can be genuinely convinced that Linda really desires him, and it is only by some evil magic that Heyst has won her, but for Heyst, the consciousness of the veil prevents him from ever giving Lena a full affirmation of love. He cannot escape from his father, and so he cannot believe in "love". On the last night before the

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denouement he sits "with a vivid consciousness of the portrait... above his head", and reads from his father's book, "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" (p. 219).

Here the Schopenhauerian belief that sexual love is a delusion by which nature attains her ends has added to it a post-Freudian post-script that makes it also "the bed of dreams", an insight that essentially undermines Schopenhauer's belief that there is another kind of love above that of the "world", expressed in the saint's selfless love of others. The second passage that Heyst reads from his father's book about the psychological insight that is given to "men of tormented conscience or of a criminal imagination" sounds like a reflection of Nietzsche's comments on Dostoevsky in Twilight of the Idols (9. 45.). It is another example of the way in which the ideas of Heyst and his father are, as it were, Schopenhauer brought up to date, with further insights from Nietzsche or Freud, making it all more thoroughly nihilistic: Heyst is truly the "last man".

That even Hebrew thought was not immune to Schopenhauerian suspicions is evidenced by the story of the Flood, which postulates Yahweh also as coming to the conclusion that the world must be negated. At the beginning of the book we are told that "An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea," (p. 4), and this feeling of living "after the deluge" is picked up by Lena as she looks out from the hill that they have climbed. In their subsequent conversation about "the deluge" Conrad has rather brilliantly seized upon the one point of contact between Lena's sunday-school education and Heyst's "world-view"--and it also foreshadows the invasion, and the destruction of their own private world that is to begin that very

night. (pp. 191-192)

Although the general supposition of Heyst's philosophy is that nothing keeps its promise, that everything is counterfeit, we are asked to believe that in Lena he meets, as it were, the genuine article.

Although there can be nothing but "appearances"—as Heyst says, "Appearances—what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have anything else" (p. 204)—this, all we "last men", successively enlightened by Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, know well enough, yet in Lena, if Heyst's last affirmation is to be accepted, it seems that we must be able to determine some "substance" behind the appearances, some justification for saying "yes" to the world. For the novelist, this is not a matter of philosophical logic, but of making us believe in Lena.

It is on this that everything depends, but our answer to the question of whether we think that Conrad himself believed, and whether he makes us believe, is likely to depend very much on our own previous convictions as to the nature of the universe. It cannot be said that we are made to believe in the possibility of what Lena becomes by any convincing analysis of her past, but then this, if presented in terms of naturalistic psychology, would be only another demonstration of ultimate unbelief: we have to be won over, if we can be won, by simply accepting Lena as the representative of "something as old as the world", and, by believing in her, be persuaded to accept the universe in all its terror and joy. If she cannot be entirely justified in realistic terms, it is because she is intended to represent some order of reality that we cannot justify because, if it exists, it is precisely that which justifies us.

Conrad is sometimes very provocative in the way what he teases us with the question. For Heyst, Lena is becoming ultimately

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"genuine"; her "reality" justifies life, and therefore justifies hope, love and trust in life, and yet perhaps even Lena is nothing but deception and "appearance"? When they are about to part after one of their conversations in the music hall, Heyst tells her, in order to allay Schomberg's suspicions, to pretend to smile:

"Get away now," he said rapidly, "and try to smile as you go."

She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him, and yet it conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was new to his experience.

(p. 81).

So is Lena's "reality", which gives him the "ardour to live" just one of Nature's tricks with the bone structure of the human jaw? But in case we are too easily tempted to say "yes", he returns to the question when Lena and Heyst meet later in the garden, and we learn that Lena had not really understood what Heyst had meant, so the smile could have been "genuine", for he had after all given her something to smile about. But even if at this level it is genuine, is it not but "the consolation of love", the "most cruel of the stratagems of life"?

If one goes through the book, assembling its scraps of philosophical comment, they can, when put together, appear quite weighty, as well as remarkably consistent, but if they are put back, and the work is viewed as a whole, what is most remarkable is the lightness with which Conrad conveys his learning, his ability to carry the ordinary reader along with him. The philosophy comes only in the occasional comment, clothed in poetic imagery: "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 sheals of unnumbered generations" (p. 174). "Progress" is not perhaps the perfect word in the context, but even so, the shade of Schopenhauer might well say, "I wish I had written that!" Or else it is conveyed in the playful conversation of Heyst and Lena, in terms that with her "sunday school" education she can readily understand: and yet, essentially, it represents a degree of epistemological sophistication that probably could not have been found in any English academy of Conrad's time. It can make some of Bertrand Russell's preoccupations look quite naive, and one is not surprised to read in his Portraits from Memory that a conversation with Conrad left him "half appalled and half intoxicated....I came away bewildered, and hardly able to find my way among ordinary affairs" (p. 84). As if in the hope of transferring some of the numen, Russell subsequently named his son John Conrad.

In its setting, and the outward circumstances of its "love affair", Victory seems to have much in common with popular romantic fiction, and in the way that it concludes, Conrad seems to be deliberately mocking the conventional adventure story. It is part of their standard mechanism that the author should plant, not too conspicuously, somewhere in the story, the possibility of a last-minute rescue, and Conrad does this with a kind of ironic "over-kill". There is the possibility that Wang will repent and come back with the gun, that Ricardo and Jones will quarrel and destroy each other, that Lena will capture Ricardo's knife, or that Davidson will return with his ship. Everyone of these unlikely bets comes off: time and again the U.S. Cavalry arrives, but still no one wins. Lena must die, perhaps because death is part of what it means to represent the Earth and its "unnumbered generations", and Heyst is not in the position to accept a happy ending, only to conceive the possibility of it, if he had had a happier beginning.

Victory is not the kind of story for which one can expect there to be much in the way of factual "sources", or to gain much from them in understanding of Conrad's art. Most of what could be known is given in the Author's Note, in which he tells us at some length of where he met the originals of Jones, Ricardo and Pedro, perhaps in the hope that this will make them seem more real, but the contacts were brief, and at that time—his voyages to Latin America—Conrad did not speak English. Ricardo, based on a type of seaman, is the one who is trusted to do most of the talking, and his half-educated style and his admiration for the forms of gentility are convincing enough.

Conrad declines to tell us where he met "the flesh and blood individual who stands behind the infinitely more familiar figure" of Heyst, "because I fear to give my readers a wrong impression, since a marked incongruity between a man and his surroundings is often a very misleading circumstance" (p. xi). Whatever we are meant to make of this, the "infinite familiarity" sounds like a hint that he can be seen as the author's alter ego. But that there was at least a real "outward form" is confirmed by a letter he wrote in 1917 in which Conrad says that Heyst dated back to "my visual impression of the man in 1876; a couple of hours in a hotel in St Thomas (West Indies). There was some talk of him after he left our party; but all I heard of him might have been written down on a cigarette paper. Except for these hints he's altogether 'invented'". Thus, Heyst's provenance is in fact the same as that of his three visitors—Conrad's third voyage to the West Indies, when he was only eighteen years old. He was not therefore observing them with the eyes of a mature curiosity, and it is inevitable that their characters had to be largely "invented", and a little cursorily, except for Heyst, whose inward nature becomes very much Conrad's own.

In the Author's Note, Heyst is remembered as "a mysterious Swede right enough. Whether he was a baron, too, I am not so certain. He

himself never laid claim to that distinction. His detachment was too great to make any claims big or small on one's credulity" (p. xi). It must be said that from this "cigarette-paper" sketch, one's impression is not so much of a man who, like Heyst, wished to slip through the world unobserved, as of a man rather concerned with making an impression of aristocratic detachment, and in the case of one young mariner at his table, succeeding so well that thirty-seven years later it was still vivid enough to become the basis for a book, and he may even have also contributed to the formation of Conrad's own personal style.

In regard to Lena, Conrad says that the incident of "the pinch" occurred in a cafe in the South of France, but he was not tempted to do anything about it, so that the girl's look of "dreamy innocence" was all that he carried away as an endowment for Lena (p. xviii). It may be that throughout the story she remains a little indistinct, but in so far as she represents the power of instinct and emotion, in contrast to Heyst's precise but destructive intellect, a certain vagueness in the outline of her psychology is justified: to make her too clear, to psycho-analyze her, would be to destroy her very raison d'etre.

In Conrad's Eastern World, Sherry provides a fascinating glimpse of the possible origin of Zangiacomo and his band, and perhaps even into the mood of Heyst when he contemplates the rescue of Lena. Amongst contemporary journals in Singapore, Sherry found references to "the celebrated Tingel Tangel", which was "kept by an old Austrian named Hackmeier, with a ladies orchestra. The girls were Austrian and Poles." They "played in a string band and danced for the guests wearing white muslin frocks and blue sashes" (pp. 244-245). Sherry admits that the girls in Victory wear red sashes, but "Conrad could quite easily have changed the colour of the sashes from blue to crimson", a suggestion that does not unduly strain our faith in his powers of invention.

"The girls were Austrian and Poles": we could meditate long on the

thought of the lonely young Polish exile going into the Singapore "Tingel Tangel" and finding Polish girls. Perhaps they were all as ugly as Lena's companions? Or was there one pitiable young face that tempted him to walk at night, like Heyst, and wrestle with "the obscure desires that move our conduct"? Vain meditation, for it is not the kind of thing that Conrad gives away in an Author's Note, or in any other kind of note, but only, transmuted, in the books themselves.

The house-boy, Wang, is not a character of the kind that presupposes any particular source, but no doubt represents the residue of Conrad's casual observation of his race, to the brief extent of which he refers in an essay on "The Merchant Marine" in Notes on Life and Letters (pp. 181-182). Wang is not romantic, ~~like~~ and cannot see Lena as a damsel in distress. He is not saintly, like Davidson, nor evil like Jones, nor savage like Ricardo; he is outside the whole mythology and psychology of the West. He is "tame", cool, and logically selfish. He obtains his wife not by "rescuing" her, but by making a mutually advantageous bargain with the "savages", grows vegetables for the only available market, behind a wooden fence, and deserts his employer as soon as he appears to be on the losing side, taking with him the only weapon on the island. Even his final return is not motivated by concern for Heyst, but only for the village on which he now depends. His shooting of Pedro seems to say that this is one way of dealing with the "brute force" of this world, while the more sophisticated powers can be left to destroy themselves. At the end, only Wang survives, not by consciously affirming, or denying, the world, not by being accidentally "good" or "evil", but by being Chinese. It may be an oversimplified view of what it means to be "Chinese", for to Conrad, orientals do not seem to be very much more substantial than they are for Ricardo and Schomberg: "a play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs" (p. 167). Even so, Wang represents the

essential truth of an attitude that is not limited to the Chinese, though once it did seem most typical of them.

In terms of literary technique, Victory offers problems of "viewpoint", in which, it appears, the urgency of what Conrad has to say is allowed to override the demands of strict consistency. After a witty opening on the fate of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, it presents us with a picture of Heyst as "an inert body", smoking his last cigar with only the distant volcano as company—"he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away" (p. 4).

With its paradoxical—and prophetic—associations of both peace and possible eruption the image has rightly been praised, but it also serves to illustrate a certain vagueness in the manner in which the story is told. From what viewpoint would the glow of the cigar and the glow of the volcano appear of "the same size"? Presumably from some point very close to, but not quite identified with Heyst, and that rather imprecise position seems to sum up very well the "point of view" of the tale. It begins with an unspecified narrational "I", representing "we, out there", but this attempt at distancing is not maintained very rigorously, or for very long. We are told at once, for instance, that Heyst never sat outside in the evenings, and that he never talked to himself. From there we go back to a Marlow-type gathering of information—"I met a man once—the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca—to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard room of the club) 'I am enchanted with these islands!'" (p. 6). This, followed by the description of Heyst moving in an enchanted circle with a radius of eight hundred miles from "a point in North Borneo" is excellently done in the best "Marlow" style. It is followed by an account of Heyst's relationship with Morrison written in the same manner, but giving details of Heyst's feelings and so on

that could hardly have been known to the narrator. In this way Part I of the story ends after about fifty pages, and then with Part II, we change to an "omniscient" point of view which tells us of Heyst's inmost thoughts, but can still dōdge back to to an external point of view at the beginning of the second chapter. The story then drifts back into omniscience, and the narrational "I" never appears again, not even at the end of the story.

Judged by the previous standards of Conrad's art, and particularly by the lengths to which he went in Chance to preserve at least the appearance of consistency, it seems a strange lapse. It is as if James' witticisms about the spilt buckets in Chance (p. above), which Conrad admitted to be "the only time a criticism affected me painfully" (Baines, p. 46^{On.}), has not stimulated him to improve the apparatus, but simply to abandon it. One can well believe that Conrad was hurt by the criticism, for James' suggestion that the real interest and excitement of the story lay in seeing how he overcame the difficulties caused by his own technique is a particularly cruel thing to say to an author who, if he consciously used techniques at all, had always used them to overcome limitations or to illuminate the real substance of what he had to say. Unlike James, no stenographer ever parenthetically recorded him referring to "the climax of the romantic hocus-pocus of my sought total effect"². And so in Victory, rather than be pilloried as "absolutely alone as a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo the most doing", he will show that he can get along alright without any of this kind of "doing" at all.

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Although the absence of a narrator for the main action of the story can, in one sense, be "explained" by the fact that there is not much analysis to be done—one cannot imagine a narrator even more sophisticated than Heyst to "analyse" him, unless it were his father—this absence deprives Conrad of what was always a very valuable by-product of the method, the opportunity to describe the action in distanced retro-

spect. As Guerard says, the story has to take on "that presentness Conrad found so hard to manage. An occasional sentence suggests that he tried to view or imagine his material retrospectively. But he obviously did not succeed" (pp. 273-274).

In view of the particular nature of what Conrad wants to do in Victory--to give us some of his own thoughts through the mind of Heyst, whilst keeping him at the centre of the action--and, in any case, the difficulties of finding a post for an outside observer on such an isolated character, a kind of qualified omniscience does seem to be the most practical solution, even though in terms of art it may seem a little primitive compared with the accomplishment of Lord Jim. Whether or not, as suggested above (p. above) Conrad's "high art" was largely an unconscious product of the traditional story-teller's skills, and a means of overcoming certain limitations, he certainly shows himself ready enough to abandon it when it does not help him to get on with what he wants to say.

If one acknowledges the power of what he has to say in Victory, and can grant that ultimately, to say what one has to say in the most effective manner is the highest art, then questions of consistency in "viewpoint" may seem less important. Thus, although for the most part the book is written from what might be called an "omniscient" viewpoint, it is not a simple, unconditional omniscience, but one that is primarily concerned with revealing the mind of Heyst; the thoughts are the thoughts of Heyst, from whose viewpoint, whenever he is present, the others are seen. This is particularly noticeable, and effective, in relation to Lena. If Heyst represents the intellect, and its predicament, the girl represents those other qualities of instinct and emotion that are needed to save the intellect: it is most appropriate therefore, that while Conrad may often tell us what Heyst is thinking, with the girl we are told only what she feels, or more often, how she appears, as her body express-

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es her emotions. In this way we can see that in so far as Conrad uses "omniscience", he uses it not so much as a way of escape from the problems of the "doing" as a method of "doing" that assists in the contrast between intellect and emotion that is the main theme of the story.

Thus, in the scene in which Lena tells Heyst about Schomberg's allegations that he murdered Morrison (III, 4), what we know of Lena's thoughts we learn only from her words, so that we are left, like Heyst himself, quite uncertain as to whether she regards him as "guilty": this is a logical, almost legal, problem that for her simply does not exist. Similarly, in the final scenes, and when she dies, Lena is treated in terms of her emotions, Heyst in terms of his thoughts. She dies, happy, believing that the paralysing barriers of thought have broken down, that "he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart—for ever!", but the reader knows that it is not so: that Heyst is "cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of life" (p. 406), and Davidson guesses that his decision to die must have been because "he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body" (p. 410).

Although Victory has its particular strengths, they are hardly such as to refute the general theory of "achievement and decline" (p... above). As Guerard shows in some detail, there are stylistic lapses that compare badly with the best of his earlier work (pp. 254-278). And even if one accepts the stereotyped form of the three invaders as being to some degree justified by the philosophical conception of the book—what its defenders call its qualities of "allegory"³—it is nevertheless written in a wholly "realistic" style that it is inevitably weakened by any lack of a corresponding realism in the events and characters. Thus Leavis says that "melodramatic as is the action of the latter part of the book, it is so seen—and this is true of the whole book—as to invite the cinematographer" (p. 227), but this serves only

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to underline the weakness, for the eye of the camera is not the instrument for capturing mythology. It has always been Conrad's great strength that his symbolism stays wholly within the rules of "realism", and if Victory falls below his past standards, it is doubtful casuistry to try to represent it as rising above them to a level of allegory. Leavis does not make this particular claim, but the more subtle, though ultimately equally indefensible one, that the "melodramatic boldness of the art" is "Elizabethan" (p. 229). The unusually lengthy Author's Note, referred to above, in which Conrad tries to give more factual substance to his three visitors would seem to be a tacit admission that he himself is aware of a weakness here.

If Heyst on his lonely island, which is also the top of a mountain, after the deluge, symbolises well enough Conrad's intellectual isolation, it also symbolises his position in English literature: he seems to have neither predecessors nor followers. No Englishman could see us from outside quite as he does, and no other foreigner has mastered our language as he did. His methods of "time-shift" and narration may have been imitated, and indeed have permanently affected the way the world writes its fiction, but in his task and his outlook, there are no obvious followers. One may see traces of his style and his methods in Scott Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and many lesser writers, but none of them are as philosophically sophisticated or as free from sentiment, as tough, sceptical and humanely "anti-liberal" in the overall texture of their work. Conrad belongs to "world literature" more obviously than to English literature--like Kurtz, "all of Europe went into his making", including the nightmares, and all of Europe can appreciate what he made.

V. S. Pritchett has called Conrad "our great exotic", and even if, as seems possible, he should come to be regarded, in other lands, as the greatest English novelist, it is unlikely that he will ever be granted that title in England itself--he remains too much of "a bloody

foreigner". If it is true, as Goethe said, that Shakespeare's Romans are Englishmen in togas—but he added, "And what magnificent Englishmen!"—then no doubt some of Conrad's best Englishmen can be seen as Slavs in spotless ducks, and thinking of Jim, we can say, What fine Slavs! It is probably true that it is only when, like Captain MacWhirr or Charles Gould, they are seen almost wholly from outside, that they are unequivocally English. His first two books are about Dutchmen, then Belgians in "An Outpost of Progress", the "all-European" Kurtz, the Norwegian Falk, an Italian and a "boulevardier" among Latin-Americans, Verloc, Razumov, Renouard, Heyst—a host of foreigners who have in common that they are not at home.

Conrad is not evangelical enough, or common-sensical enough, not affirmative, humorous or didactic enough to fit the tradition of English literature, not even the Great Tradition. He comes nearest to it in Chance, and it marks his decline. The enlightened snobbery of Jane Austen, the Middlemarch moralism of George Eliot, the cheerful expectations of Dickens, the Non-Conformist didacticism of Lawrence, may be "limitations" from some distant world-embracing point of view, but it is these limitations that provide the frame for their art, that give them their flavour and make them English—and save them from the mere frivolity that seems to be the fate of the English writer who loses his moral frame. Being English, it was part of their birthright that they could take for granted certain moral and social foundations that give a reassurance to even their most rebellious gestures. For them, the social crust over the world's chaos was thicker than it was for Conrad, and if they had any curiosity about what lay beneath, it had something of the innocent curiosity of the child: they were not in danger of disappearing "without trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things".

At least we can be grateful, if also a little perplexed, that by

certain accidents of destiny and inclinations of character this "world-historical" figure came to our island and chose to wrestle with our illogical language, for in so doing, he added to our literature philosophical depths, sociological insights and psychological subtleties that no writer native-born could have hoped to provide.

Notes

1. Conrad Collection, Yale University Library, quoted, Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 37.
2. Quoted, in contrast with Conrad's attitudes, by Edward Crankshaw, Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel, p. 7.
3. See, for example, John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction, Ch. 5.

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