



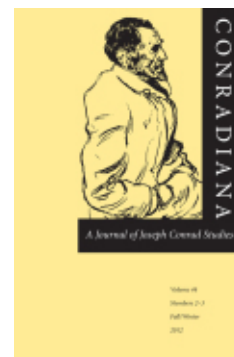
PROJECT MUSE®

## Conrad, Efficiency, and the Varieties of Imperialism

Valerie Kennedy

Conradiana, Volume 44, Numbers 2-3, Fall/Winter 2012, pp. 163-189  
(Article)

Published by Texas Tech University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/cnd.2014.0007](https://doi.org/10.1353/cnd.2014.0007)



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cnd/summary/v044/44.2-3.kennedy.html>

# Conrad, Efficiency, and the Varieties of Imperialism

VALERIE KENNEDY

BILKENT UNIVERSITY, ANKARA, TURKEY

## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad's attitude to the issue of imperialism is complex and contradictory. In his political essays and his letters he excoriated Russian and German imperialism, identifying Russia with life-denying autocracy and repression, and Germany with a brutal sense of racial, technological, and commercial will to power. However, he was much more moderately and ambivalently critical of British imperialism since, as I shall argue, he identified with a particular vision of English imperialism and Englishness.<sup>1</sup> He approved of what he saw as a particularly English tradition of service—the work ethic, duty, and efficiency—especially when it was embodied in the Royal Navy and the British Merchant Navy, but when efficiency took the form of German nationalism or imperialism his admiration turned to loathing. Moreover, his endorsement of the British maritime work ethic in his non-fictional writing largely disregards the commercial role of the Royal Navy and the British *Merchant Navy* in imperial global capitalism (my italics). His fiction, however, as Stephen Ross and others have argued, suggests that all types of imperialism are colored by the beginnings of the system of global capitalism (see pp. 168–169 and 184–185 below).<sup>2</sup>

I shall begin by discussing the vexed question of Conrad's attitude to Englishness, the work ethic, and efficiency, before considering some recent critical analyses of Conrad's fiction in relation to different conceptions of imperialism and capitalism, and then analyzing his representation of Russian and German imperialism in the political essays and the somewhat more nuanced but still stereotyped and generally negative depiction of Russian and German characters in his fiction. Finally, I shall suggest that Conrad's fiction undermines the opposition in his non-fictional writings between different types of imperialism since it

shows British imperialism to be governed by the same commercial imperatives as the imperialism of other nations.

#### CONRAD, ENGLISHNESS, AND EFFICIENCY

Conrad's self-description as a "Homo duplex" (*CL* 3: 89), a man with a "double life" (*CL* 3: 491) as he tells Robert Cunninghame Graham, or as Amar Acheraiou puts it, a "dual loyalty" to both Poland and England (56–57, and see 65, 67), has received a great deal of attention. In what follows I wish to focus on Conrad's identification with a certain version of English efficiency and service, arguing that Conrad's claim in the "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record* to have been "adopted by the genius of the [English] language" was partly but not only a means of asserting his linguistic credentials as a British writer (vii). I shall also argue that Conrad's continued descriptions of Poland as a fundamentally Western nation—like Great Britain—enabled him to reconcile fidelity to the idea of Poland with his idea of himself as a loyal citizen of Great Britain. Conrad's repeated denials after 1905 that, as a Pole, he was a Slav serve to differentiate him as a Pole from the members of other Slavic nations such as Russia.

Conrad had a dual allegiance to Poland and Great Britain. In 1883 he reassures Stefan Buszczyński that he has never forgotten and "never will forget" his words: "Remember [. . .] wherever you may sail you are sailing towards Poland" (Conrad, *CL* 1: 8). Yet two years later he can say to Spiridion Kliszczewski: "When speaking, writing or thinking in English, the word Home always means for me the hospitable shores of Great Britain" (Conrad, *CL* 1: 12). To his Polish correspondents, he consistently claims that he is a "compatriot, in spite of my writing in English" (Conrad, *CL* 3: 78). To his English or American correspondents, especially in later years, he insists that being a Pole does not mean being a Slav, since Poland is fundamentally Western, and that he is faithful to both Poland and (his vision of) England.

In his letters to his English friends and acquaintances Conrad identifies himself with different aspects of Englishness by using the metaphor of adoption. In his 1919 "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record*, Conrad claims "the right to be believed when [he] says that if [he] had not written in English [he] would not have written at all" (viii). Writing to Edmund Gosse from Capri in 1905, Conrad talks about his "state of honourable adoption," and his need for "the moral support, the sustaining influence of English atmosphere even from day to day" (*CL* 3: 227). Even more strongly, Conrad describes himself to Joseph de Smet in a 1911 letter as being "[possessed]" by the English language (qtd. in Ray 88). Finally, in the 1917 "Preface" to "Youth" Conrad says: "I have been all my life—all my two lives—the spoiled adopted child of Great Britain and even of the Empire;

for it was Australia that gave me my first command” (xii). While Conrad’s use of the metaphor of adoption clearly functions as a means of identifying himself with British values and culture, I do not think that it should be treated as purely cynical, especially since Conrad expresses his trust in England and the British people in letters throughout his career. In an 1885 letter to Spiridion Kliszczewski he sees “England [as] the only barrier to the pressure of infernal doctrines born in continental back-slums” (Conrad, *CL* 1: 16). Over forty years later, in 1919, interviewed by a Polish journalist, Anthony Czarnecki, Conrad calls himself “‘a real loyal Britisher;’” describing himself as “‘wedded with bonds of citizenship’” to the country (qtd. in Rude 77), while the next year he tells Michael Holland that he puts his trust in “the genius not of any class but of the whole English people” (Conrad, *CL* 7: 78).

Writing to fellow Poles, Conrad insists that his English residence and career do not mean any disavowal of his Polish nationality. In 1901 he tells his Polish namesake, Józef Korzeniowski:

I have in no way disavowed either my nationality or the name we share for the sake of success. It is widely known that I am a Pole and that Józef Konrad are my two Christian names, the latter being used by me as a surname so that foreign mouths should not distort my real surname—a distortion which I cannot stand” (Conrad, *CL* 2: 322–23).

Ironically, in order to show his fidelity to Poland by not allowing the English to distort his “real surname,” Conrad discards it, thereby perhaps inadvertently suggesting that his primary allegiance is to England. As Beth Sharon Ash suggests, perhaps the “Adoption of the English language and an anglicized surname may have allowed Conrad to follow his father’s vocation without becoming like his father (or consciously identifying himself with catastrophic passions)” (243). In other letters to Polish correspondents Conrad asserts that he is and will always be faithful to the memories of Poland and to his family and friends and that Poland is never forgotten (*CL* 1: 8, 359, 2: 132). Conrad’s continual assertion of his Polish identity to his Polish correspondents may be linked to his residual sense of guilt at not living in Poland or writing in Polish, exacerbated by the accusations of betrayal by Elizabeth Orzeszkowa and others (see Karl 9–13).

In letters to English and American correspondents, Conrad identifies himself as both a Pole (though not a Slav) and a loyal Britisher. Conrad’s attitude to being called a Slav changes over the years. As Christopher GoGwilt notes, in 1898 he does not object to Edward Garnett’s description of his birthplace as “the country that mingles some Eastern blood in the Slav’s veins” (qtd. in GoGwilt 26, and see 27). In a December 1899 letter to his Polish cousin Aniela Zagórska,

Conrad even refers to his “ultra-Slav nature” as an excuse for not writing more often (*CL* 2: 230). But later, with English correspondents, Conrad objects more and more strongly to the “Slav” label, since for him it is identified with Russia and, as such, as Ash points out, it was “an unbearable affront” since it denied Conrad the “British identity” he “had spent the years between late adolescence and mature adulthood constructing” (228). In October 1907, Conrad tells Garnett: “You remember always that I am a Slav (it’s your *idée fixe*) but you seem to forget that I am a Pole” (*CL* 3: 492).<sup>3</sup> Later Conrad consistently rejected the “Slav” label. A letter of December 1922 to George T. Keating denounces H. L. Mencken’s reference to Conrad’s “Sclavonism” as “mere parrot talk.” Conrad asks if Mencken means by this “primitive natures fashioned by [a] byzantine-theological conception of life, with an inclination to perverted mysticism?” (*CL* 7: 615) If so, says Conrad:

Then it cannot possibly apply to me. Racially I belong to a group which has historically a political past, with a Western Roman culture derived at first from Italy and then from France; and a rather Southern temperament; an outpost of Westernism with a Roman tradition situated between Slavo-Tartar Byzantine barbarism on one side and the German tribes on the other; resisting both influences desperately and still remaining true to itself to this very day. (*CL* 7: 615)

Both the denunciation of “Slavo-Tartar Byzantine barbarism” of Russia and “the German tribes” (the word “tribe” implying primitivism and savagery) and Conrad’s careful delineation of Poland as a Western entity in culture, temperament, and tradition, recall leitmotifs of Conrad’s political essays, notably “Autocracy and War” (1905). After the Russian revolution of 1905 and the establishment of Poland as an independent state after World War I, Conrad is determined to distinguish between Poland and Slavic nations like Russia, and to locate Poland on the side of the West.

Conrad’s rejection of the “Slav” label is motivated both by his anti-Russian feeling and his desire to be seen as a British writer, and not an alien. But it is his praise for British “efficiency,” service, and duty, which is most important in relation to his attitude to different national varieties of imperialism. For Conrad these ideals are embodied most obviously in the Royal Navy and the British Merchant Navy, perhaps partly because, as he says in the “Preface” to *A Personal Record*, “the merchant service [was] my only home for a long succession of years” (xvi). Late essays like “Well Done,” “Tradition,” and “Confidence” in *Notes on Life and Letters* as well as “The Dover Patrol” in *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays* praise the British Merchant Navy as an honorable and patriotic institution. All four essays are written in celebration of the role of the Royal Navy and the

British Merchant Navy in World War I. It is not surprising, therefore, that they strike a patriotic note of praise for these institutions and the men in them, or that Conrad reminds his readers in all of them that he himself worked in the British Merchant Navy for many years.

In “Well Done” (1918) Conrad asserts that “the main characteristic of the British men spread all over the world, is not the spirit of adventure so much as the spirit of service,” following this assertion with the statement: “A man is a worker. If he is not that he is nothing,” and an insistence that “what is needed is a sense of immediate duty. [ . . . ] seamen and duty are all the time inseparable companions” (189, 190, 191). In “Tradition” (1918) Conrad follows up this idea and begins with the declaration that British seamen have never failed to “answer the call [to duty]” (196). Their duty is defined as taking “ships trusted to their care from port to port across the seas; and, from the highest to the lowest, to watch and labor with devotion for the safety of the property and the lives committed to their skill and fortitude through the hazards of innumerable voyages” (Conrad, “Tradition” 197). Although Conrad himself does not emphasize the fact, it is surely significant that he puts “the safety of the property” before that of “the lives” committed to the British Merchant Navy. The final words of the essay sum up Conrad’s linkage of tradition, work, and duty; he refers to “the old tradition of the sea, which made by the work of men has in its turn created for them their simple ideal of conduct” (“Tradition” 201). “The Dover Patrol” (1921) commemorates the memorial erected to the men of the patrol. Conrad argues that there were “three imperative duties” which the patrol fulfilled during World War I, that is: “the safety of the troop-transport service, the protection of merchant shipping, and the closing of the Channel exit against the German submarines” (“Dover” 62). Once again “the protection of merchant shipping” is a central part of the duties of the patrol. The essay, “Confidence” (1919) extends the discussion to the role of the British Merchant Navy in the Empire. Conrad begins by stating: “the British Empire rests on transportation” (“Confidence” 202). He goes on to quote “the well-known view that trade follows the flag,” but then to contest it by asserting: “the British Red Ensign, under which naval actions too have been fought, adventures entered upon and sacrifices offered, represented in fact something more than the prestige of a great trade” (Conrad, “Confidence” 202, 203). He explains what he means by saying: “That flag [ . . . ] affirmed in its numbers the stability of purpose, the continuity of effort, and the greatness of Britain’s opportunity pursued steadily in the order and peace of the world” (Conrad, “Confidence” 203). Although the essay acknowledges the role of trade in the imperial world order, it is given second place, while “the order and peace of the world” under the British flag is foregrounded.

An 1898 essay, “An Observer in Malaya,” a review of *Studies in Brown*

*Humanity* by Hugh Clifford, makes a similar point about British global influence in relation to a civilian colonial administrator this time, and shows clearly that Conrad sees Britain as an exception to the cynicism of imperial motives. Conrad pours scorn on the “most excellent intentions” with which “every nation’s conquests are paved,” but he nonetheless asserts that “of all the nations conquering distant territories in the name of the most excellent intentions, England alone sends out men who, with such a transparent sincerity of feeling, can speak, as Mr. Clifford does, of the place of toil and exile as ‘the land which is very dear to me, where the best years of my life have been spent’” (“Observer” 58). Conrad sees Clifford as “the embodiment of the intentions, of the conscience, and might of his race” (“Observer” 58). Like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad here strives to distinguish between the lofty idea(l)s or moral sense (“conscience”) of British colonizers as opposed to those of other nations, although of course the work as a whole subverts that opposition (see below pp. 182–183). Conrad’s praise for Clifford may be seen as an excellent example of what Ash calls the “considerable slippage in [the] turn-of-the-century imperialist representation of the civilizing mission,” the slippage between “disinterested (*sic*) service and responsibility” to the colonized and “‘managing’ the countries of those who were unable to turn them to account” and “‘developing’ the people of those countries” in the interests of the imperial power (87). In his review of Clifford’s book Conrad focuses entirely on the first of these, the ideas of service and responsibility, and ignores the imperial context more or less completely.

#### CONRAD AND IMPERIALISM: SOME RECENT CRITICAL APPROACHES

Several recent critics have offered illuminating comments on the issue of Conrad’s relation to the evolution of imperialism at the turn of the century, and its relation to exoticism, modernization, and capitalism. In *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin de Siècle* (1991) Chris Bongie situates Conrad in relation to nineteenth-century exoticism as a reaction to the development of “the undifferentiated world” of colonialism and “the problem of a truly global modernity” (172, 149). He argues that in *Lord Jim* Conrad takes as “his point of departure the indifferenciation of a colonial world,” but still goes on in the Patusan section “to reappropriate the problem of difference and the space of the exotic” even though to do so is to reveal that they cannot exist (Bongie 173). Michael Valdez Moses’s *Conrad and The Globalization of Culture* (1995), similarly, examines *Lord Jim* from the point of view of Conrad’s “complex” attitude towards “European modernity and the heterogeneous traditional societies of non-Western peoples,” recognizing the technological superiority and domi-

nance of the former but also the worth of the traditional values of the latter (68). For Moses, the first part of the novel, dealing with the *Patna* episode, depicts the alienation of Jim in the “fluid, highly dispersed, bureaucratic, and impersonal organization” of the Merchant Marine engaged in “the global mission of Western modernity” (90). Like Ross after him, Moses argues that the “multicultural assembly of peoples” connected with the *Patna* as owner, charterer, crew, and cargo, “reflects the heterogeneous character of Britain’s world-wide imperium” and is “the predictable consequence of the globalizing tendency of modernity” (92). Beth Sharon Ash’s *Writing In Between: Modernity and Psychosocial Dilemma in the Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1999) evokes “the new context of global expansion [. . .] governed by the limitlessly destructive process of capital and power accumulation” in relation to Conrad’s novels (95). She argues that the “traditional ideals” of “loyalty, solidarity, duty, love of work” to which Conrad holds “are actually rendered problematic for him by the reified conditions of imperialism” (Ash 117). While Ash is more concerned with what she calls the “psychosocial” dimension of this problem than with its political one, she does relate the conflict between “the rhetoric of benevolent paternalism and the facts of despotism and exploitation” in the colonies to an idea emerging between 1910 and 1914 of “a more disciplined and regimented society based on ideas of “National Efficiency”” (Ash 87; Scally qtd. in Ash 184). Stephen Ross in *Conrad and Empire* (2004) is the most recent critic to locate Conrad at a turning point in the historical development of imperialism. Ross distinguishes between nineteenth-century nation state imperialism and what he calls Empire (following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri), that is “the supersession of national interests by commercial interests,” which involves “a reversal of imperialism’s drive to territorialisation and differentiation” (11). He argues that “the Conrad of the major phase almost obsessively presents us with a virtually unvaried depiction of imperialism as global-capitalist (rather than nation-statist), institutions in crisis, and international casts of characters whose hybridity often renders any accurate genealogy impossible” (Ross 14). Ross demonstrates convincingly the international dimensions of the Company in *Heart of Darkness*, the owners and crew of the *Patna* in *Lord Jim*, and Holroyd in *Nostromo* (34, 66–67, 117). However, he seems to disregard the way in which, despite their context of international commerce, all three of these novels (and other works by Conrad) nonetheless use national stereotypes which distinguish British from Belgian (in *Heart of Darkness*), British from German (in *Lord Jim*), British from American (in *Nostromo*), and British from German and Russian (in *The Secret Agent*). In all cases the British provide the positive pole, the Belgians or Germans or Americans the negative one. He also fails to note how German characters are singled out for particular opprobrium, both by Marlow and the narrators of these novels.



## THE POLITICAL ESSAYS

As Avrom Fleishman says, up to 1967 Conrad's political essays, "Autocracy and War" (1905), "Poland Revisited" (1915), "A Note on the Polish Problem" (1916), and "The Crime of Partition" (1919), "received remarkably little detailed analysis" (32). Recently, however, several critics have addressed "Autocracy and War." GoGwilt sees it as a pivotal point in Conrad's development, marking the transition from Empire to Europe as the central focus of Conrad's concern, and the emergence of the idea of "the West" both in opposition to Russia and as a replacement for the loss of European values (27–30). As GoGwilt argues, Conrad opposes the idea of the West to the "Slavonism" of Russia and also links Poland and the West both by arguing that Poland is a country with Western culture and values, and by opposing "Polonism" (which is Western) to Russia's "Slavonism" which is not (39). Wiesław Krajka's essay, "Joseph Conrad's Conception of Europe," discusses the political essays but it does little more than summarize Conrad's views, while Keith Carabine in "Conrad the European" reads Conrad's essay on Nelson, "The Heroic Age" through "Autocracy and War," with the emphasis on the former. "Autocracy and War" is clearly prompted by Russia's defeat in the war against Japan in Manchuria, and although Conrad sees that defeat as marking the end of Russian power, this does not lessen his antipathy towards the country. Of the three later essays, "Poland Revisited," "A Note on the Polish Problem," and "The Crime of Partition," the last is the most important. The first is a mainly autobiographical account of Conrad's visit to Poland in 1914 just as World War I was beginning, although it also includes a few incidental gibes at Germany (Conrad, "Poland" 147, 157, 159). The second, written as the war was in progress, proposes that Poland's political existence be in the form of a "Triple Protectorate" formed by England, France, and Russia (Conrad, "Note" 139, 138–40). In "The Crime of Partition," written after World War I, Poland's existence as an independent state causes Conrad to criticize Russia and Germany for their parts in the Partition of Poland, the "crude and rotten" methods of Russia's "barbarism" and "the cultivated brutality tinged with contempt of Germany's superficial, grinding civilisation," and Germany's action in opposing Polish independence (124). The political essays and especially "Autocracy and War" and "The Crime of Partition" are important for Conrad's violent denunciations of Russian autocracy and German imperial ambitions, and for his equally vehement denunciation of the link between imperialism and commercial principles.

## RUSSIA IN THE POLITICAL ESSAYS

In the political essays, Conrad represents Russia as an autocratic and barbaric empire, alien to Europe, destructive, inhuman, and even vampiric, using images of ghosts, spectres, ghouls, shadows, and so on. Conrad discusses Russia in relation to the Partition of Poland, as well as to the Russo-Japanese War in Manchuria and the relationship between Russia and other European nations.

In “Autocracy and War” Conrad begins from the position that the partition of Poland was “a moral outrage” (Rude 82). He declares that the “common guilt of the two Empires [of Germany and Russia] is defined precisely by their frontier line running through the Polish provinces” (Conrad, “Autocracy” 95). A typical vehement and emotional passage runs as follows:

And above it all—unaccountably persistent—the decrepit, old, hundred years old, spectre of Russia’s might still faces Europe from across the teeming graves of Russian people. 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 arrogance, stamping its shadowy feet upon the gravestone of autocracy [. . . ] (Conrad, “Autocracy” 89)

Conrad compares Russia to a ghoul, a blind Djinn, and the Old Man of the Sea elsewhere in the essay (“Autocracy” 93, 113). Conrad also uses the image of the grave in “Prince Roman” where Poland is seen as “suffering in its grave, railed in by a million of bayonets and triple-sealed with the seals of three great empires” (xi). The image of the shadow, present here in the “shadowy feet” of the Russian “ghoul,” also recurs later in the essay: “Under the shadow of Russian autocracy,” says Conrad, “nothing could grow” (“Autocracy” 97). A few pages further on he insists that “the shadow was indeed the mightiest, the darkest that the modern world had ever known—and the most overbearing” (Conrad, “Autocracy” 104). The same image appears in both *A Personal Record* and *Under Western Eyes*. In the former, Conrad recalls that “the oppressive shadow of the great Russian Empire” hung over his childhood (*Personal* 24). In the latter, the narrator refers to “the shadow of autocracy” which haunts Russians even outside Russia, “tinging their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances—haunting the secret of their silences” (Conrad, *Western* 107; Morf 187).<sup>4</sup> On the next page of “Autocracy and War” Conrad declares that “the apparition [of Russia] has vanished” after Russia’s defeat in the war against Japan

in Manchuria, but clearly his sense of its dangerous presence is unabated (90 and see 91).

In the same essay Conrad insists that Russia cannot be compared to Europe; indeed, he explains that Russian autocracy is a genus all of its own:

This despotism has been utterly un-European. Neither has it been Asiatic in its nature. [ . . . ] The Russian autocracy as we see it now is a thing apart. [ . . . ] It is like a visitation, like a curse from Heaven falling in the darkness of ages upon the immense plains of forest and steppe lying dumbly on the confines of two continents: a true desert harbouring no Spirit either of the East or of the West. ("Autocracy" 97–98)

Again, Russia is not human; it is "a visitation, a curse": "she is and has been simply the negation of everything worth living for" (Conrad, "Autocracy" 100).<sup>5</sup> As the letter to H. L. Mencken quoted above shows (p. 166), Conrad "considered Tsarist Russia a contemporary embodiment of Asiatic, Tartar, and Byzantine barbarism" (Najder 19; Wheeler 25).<sup>6</sup> It is in opposition to this vision of Russia as alien, otherworldly, destructive, and vampiric that Conrad asserts Poland's essentially Western nature. In "A Note on the Polish Problem" (1916), Conrad says: "The Poles [ . . . ] are in truth not Slavonic at all. In temperament, in feeling, in mind, and *even in unreason*, they are Western" (135 and see 137; see above p. 166, my italics).<sup>7</sup> In the same essay, Conrad refers to Poland as an "advanced outpost of Western civilisation," a somewhat unfortunate phrase considering the ironies surrounding the title of his earlier short story, "An Outpost of Progress" ("Note" 138).

#### RUSSIA AND RUSSIANS IN CONRAD'S FICTION

In *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes* Conrad's attitude to Russia is more nuanced and variable, although the country is still seen as autocratic, alien, and destructive. In *Heart of Darkness* the Russian sailor—or the "harlequin" as Marlow calls him—is a tragi-comic figure, but not a figure of evil like Kurtz (Conrad, *Heart* 122). The Russian sailor's childish enthusiasm for and adoration of Kurtz is both foolish and reprehensible. Yet his annotations to the book, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* by "Towser, Towson—some such name—Master in His Majesty's Navy" and his delight when Marlow restores it to him identify him as someone who is not all bad (Conrad, *Heart* 80, 124). Marlow says that the book is not "very enthralling," but he adds "you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work which made these humble pages thought out so many years ago lumi-

nous with another than a professional light” (Conrad, *Heart* 99). As a conscientious sailor who fetishizes a book by an officer in the Royal Navy and so shows his fidelity to the ideal of work and service, the Russian sailor is relatively sympathetic, if also pathetic and deluded. Yet like the other Europeans in Africa he has been an ivory trader on his own account, and so can be identified with the destructive exploitation carried out by Kurtz and the Company and, indirectly, by Marlow too.

In *The Secret Agent*, Vladimir is devious, dishonest, and alien: a worthy servant of Russian autocracy. When he threatens Verloc, his voice takes on “an amazingly guttural intonation not only utterly un-English but also utterly un-European” and, later, “guttural Central Asian tones” (Conrad, *Secret* 24, 36 and see 226). Ross argues that Vladimir is emblematic of the novel’s “cosmopolitanism” (155). However, in a 1922 letter to Harry Benrimo Conrad specifically identifies Vladimir as Russian. He says: “Polished continental society man, yes. That type is Russian in its underlying savagery and outward man-of-the-world aspect” (Conrad, *CL* 7: 532). Vladimir also shows the pathological effects of the autocratic system. When he encounters the Assistant Commissioner in an upper-class salon later in the novel, the narrator comments: “Descended from generations victimized by the instruments of an arbitrary power, he was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police” (Conrad, *Secret* 224). When Vladimir discovers that they have discovered Verloc’s connection to him, he is “almost awed by the miraculous cleverness of the English police” despite his normal contempt for them (Conrad, *Secret* 226). Finally, the fact that he represents a system alien to England is emphasized when he talks of being “‘good Europeans [ . . . ] I mean government and men,’” and the Assistant Commissioner tells him, surely with narrative approval: “‘Yes [ . . . ] Only you look at Europe from its other end’” (Conrad, *Secret* 227).

In *Under Western Eyes*, the dominant images of Russia are, as in “Autocracy and War,” autocracy, destructiveness, and alienness, here in the form of Russia’s incomprehensibility to Westerners. The narrator describes himself as “a dense Occidental,” and emphasizes his inability to fully comprehend the events or characters of those around him, because they are utterly different from anything known in or to the West (Conrad, *Western* 112, and see 4, 25, 104). The story concerns “things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes,” but not really fully understandable to his (or any) Western mind (Conrad, *Western* 381). Moreover, the narrator repeatedly characterizes Russian psychology as incomprehensible, veering from “simplicity” to “cynicism” or indeed, mingling the two (Conrad, *Western* 125).

The main reason for Russia’s alien inaccessibility to the West is autocracy. As the narrator says early on in reference to Razumov when Haldin arrives in his

rooms with the news that he has assassinated Mr. de P., no young Englishman would “find himself in Razumov’s situation,” or would think as Razumov does, because “He would not have a hereditary and personal knowledge of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence” (Conrad, *Western* 25). All the Russian characters in the novel are explicitly related to autocracy. Mr. de P, the “President of the notorious Repressive Commission” embodies “the principle of autocracy” while General T—is “the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible” (Conrad, *Western* 7, 84). Haldin is defined by his rebellion against autocracy, while Razumov is seen as an example of the “many brave minds [which] have [. . . ] turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience” as unbelievers sometimes return to religion (Conrad, *Western* 34). Mrs. Haldin says: “In Russia [. . . ] all knowledge [is] tainted with falsehood” while the church “is [. . . ] identified with oppression” (Conrad, *Western* 101, 103). Her daughter, Nathalie, adds that “Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel—perhaps blind—officials against a nation” (Conrad, *Western* 133). Nathalie’s sentiments echo Conrad’s words six years earlier in “Autocracy and War” when he says that reform in Russia has never been a possibility. “It is impossible to initiate a rational scheme of reform upon a phase of blind absolutism,” he declares, adding, even more strikingly: “There can be no evolution out of a grave” (96, 99). As Ash notes, “Conrad in *Under Western Eyes* (as in “Autocracy and War”) would make Russia the wellspring of evil, and banish it from the civilized world” (257).

Russians in Conrad’s fiction are presented as alien and incomprehensible at best (the harlequin and Razumov), or as devious and dishonest (Vladimir), or, at worst, vicious, corrupt, and depraved (Peter Ivanovitch in *Under Western Eyes*), while Russia represents autocracy and barbarism. In the political essays Russia is personified through images of Djinnns, ghouls, and vampires. Even when Russian characters are depicted with a measure of narrative sympathy, as are Nathalie and Mrs. Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*, it seems to be because they function primarily as critics (and victims) of autocracy. As for Germany and Germans, the political essays show Conrad to be almost equally vituperative about the country as he is about Russia, while in the fiction the citizens of Germany are depicted with varying degrees of opprobrium and ridicule.

#### GERMANY IN THE POLITICAL ESSAYS

In the political essays, Germany is as negatively as Russia, both in terms of the past, as one of the three powers involved in the Partition of Poland, and as a danger to European peace in the present. The only positive reference to Germany by

Conrad occurs very early, in an 1885 letter to Spiridion Kliszczewski where he declares that Germany is “the only Power with whom an Anti-Russian alliance would be useful—and even possible—for Great Britain” (CL 1: 12). After World War I, obviously, such a statement would make no sense, but even before, from 1905 onwards, Conrad’s view of Germany has changed dramatically, as “Autocracy and War” shows. Moreover, the change seems to have occurred even earlier, since it is clear from Conrad’s comments in his letters that he sees the Boers as related to the Germans and therefore as a “despotic people” (CL 2: 230). The later Conrad comes to see Germany as a power which was as dangerous as Russia, not a potential ally against it.

In “Autocracy and War” Germany is contrasted to Russia, but it is seen just as negatively. Indeed, Conrad argues that the collapse of Russia as a power in Europe means that “[T]he German Empire” is “a great and dreadful legacy left to the world by the ill-omened phantom of Russia’s might” (“Autocracy” 94). Conrad argues that “[T]he German Empire” “cannot but rejoice at the fundamental weakening of a possible obstacle to its instincts of territorial expansion” and the removal of “that latent feeling of restraint” of a powerful neighbor (“Autocracy” 95). It is significant that Conrad refers to “the German Empire” to underline the territorial ambitions of Germany, ready to exploit the weakness of its former ally, Russia (“Autocracy” 112–13). He says that “Since 1870 [. . .] *il n’y a plus d’Europe*’ [‘Europe no longer exists’],” and argues that “[T]he idea of a Europe united in the solidarity of her dynasties [. . .] has been extinguished by the larger glamour of less restraining ideals,” these being “the doctrines of nationalities much more favourable to spoliations” (Conrad, “Autocracy” 103). Germany is singled out a little later as bringing “a special intensity of hate [. . .] a new note in the tune of an old song” to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 (Conrad, “Autocracy” 105). For the country is not the “*néant*” (void) which Bismarck saw in Russia (Conrad, “Autocracy” 94). Conrad has characterized Germany a little earlier in the essay as a power-hungry and cannibalistic state: “a powerful and voracious organisation, full of unscrupulous self-confidence, whose appetite for aggrandisement will only be limited by the power of helping itself to the severed members of its friends and neighbours” (“Autocracy” 104, and see Carabine, “Conrad” 84, 88).

Conrad’s forebodings about the future of Europe—his sense that Europe no longer exists as a political entity—are linked to his perception of German ambition and its industrial power. The denunciation of Germany quoted above is followed by a vehement condemnation of the destructiveness of any democracy based on “industrial and commercial competition,” and Germany is implicitly linked with this “Industrialism and commercialism” when Conrad declares that the two terms may be disguised by “high-sounding names in many languages

(*Welt-politik* may serve for one instance)” (Conrad, “Autocracy” 106, 107). The denunciation of democracy based on commercialism which follows shows Conrad’s awareness of the connection between imperialism and commerce, and the negation of all human and humane values which this implies:

And democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end, on a mere pittance— unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth, on the model of the territorial spheres of influence marked in Africa to keep the competitors for the privilege of improving the nigger (as a buying machine) from flying prematurely at each other’s throats. (Conrad, “Autocracy” 107)

The criticism of a democratic system trusting in “material interests” for its basis of course recalls the critical use of that phrase as a leitmotif in the 1904 *Nostromo*, as Ross has pointed out (118). Ross rightly sees this passage as “laying bare the manipulative and mercenary motivations that underwrite the capitalist fantasy of a universally beneficial adherence to material interests” (118). However, he omits the part of the sentence which reads: “unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth, on the model of the territorial spheres of influence marked in Africa” (Conrad, “Autocracy” 107). By doing so he elides Conrad’s satiric vision of a world divided into “spheres of trade” like the imperial “spheres of interest” in Africa, a vision which sees capitalism in terms of nation-state influence rather than as a globalized system. The passage also reveals Conrad’s equal contempt for “the nigger” and for those who treat him only as “a buying machine,” the latter including by implication all the imperial nations and not just Germany. However, in “Poland Revisited” (1915) Germany is explicitly identified with industrialism, imperial exploitation, and the use of high-sounding rhetoric to conceal it. Germany is evoked as:

that promised land of steel, of chemical dyes, of method, of efficiency; that race planted in the middle of Europe, assuming in grotesque vanity the attitude of Europeans among effete Asiatics or barbarous niggers; and, with a consciousness of superiority freeing their hands from all moral bonds, anxious to take up, if I may express myself so, the “perfect man’s burden.” (Conrad, “Poland” 147).

Conrad’s rephrasing of Kipling’s “white man’s burden” as “the perfect man’s burden” emphasizes his view of German arrogance as well as their imperial ambi-

tions. Hunt Hawkins relates the comment on Germany and “the perfect man’s burden” to the massacre of the Hereros in German Southwest Africa in 1904, but he does not say whether Conrad was aware of this, and there seems to be no reference to it in Conrad’s letters of the time (Hawkins 375). Moreover, the distinction Conrad makes in “Poland Revisited” between “Europeans” and “effete Asiatics or barbarous niggers,” like the comment on “the nigger as a buying machine” in the passage from “Autocracy and War” quoted above, suggests Conrad’s own Eurocentrism, and racism.

Although Zdzislaw Najder says that “Poland Revisited” is the only place where Conrad expresses blatantly anti-German feelings (424), this is hardly true. Like “Autocracy and War” and “Poland Revisited,” “The Crime of Partition” shows considerable anti-German feeling. Conrad argues that no-one should be surprised at German action in World War I since “The Germanic tribes had told the whole world in all possible tones carrying conviction, the gently persuasive, the coldly logical; in tones Hegelian, Nietzschean, war-like, pious, cynical, inspired, what they were going to do to the inferior races of the earth, so full of sin and all unworthiness” (“Crime” 124–25). The phrase, “The Germanic tribes,” recalls Conrad’s discussion of H. L. Mencken (see p. 166 above); in both cases, the word “tribe” aligns Germany with non-European races and denies them full nationhood. For Conrad, both past and contemporary Germany is a brutal, commercial, and racist power to be opposed at all times.<sup>8</sup> Russia represents the alien barbarism and autocracy of the past, Germany the technological and industrial brutality of the future; both are to be feared.

#### GERMANY AND GERMANS IN CONRAD’S FICTION

As with the Russians, the German characters in Conrad’s fiction are depicted in a slightly more nuanced way than his view of Germany might suggest. However, all are associated with commercialism and trade, usually negatively, and they are often seen as grotesque and absurd if not malignant.<sup>9</sup> Schomberg in *Victory* and elsewhere, Captain Hermann in “Falk,” and the German captain of the *Patna* in *Lord Jim* are all condemned since they are motivated by ideas of personal gain rather than honest service, and even the enigmatic Stein in *Lord Jim* is or has been a colonial trader. Moreover, the German captain of the *Patna* is presented as ridiculous, grotesque, and utterly unscrupulous.

Schomberg appears three times in Conrad’s fiction: first in *Lord Jim*, then in “Falk,” and finally in *Victory*, becoming more vicious in each succeeding work. In *Lord Jim*, he is a relatively insignificant figure, described as “an irrepressible retailer of all the scandalous gossip of the place” (Conrad, *Jim* 198). In “Falk” Conrad presents Schomberg as the grasping proprietor of a hotel, and the narrator



discovers that he is “an untrustworthy humbug” when the Chinese “boy” he has recommended as “first-class” turns out to be “a confirmed opium-smoker, a gambler, a most audacious thief, and a first-class sprinter” (19). Later Schomberg slanders Falk, at first it seems simply because he rarely drinks and never eats in Schomberg’s hotel (Conrad, “Falk” 29, 47). Finally it is revealed that Schomberg’s complaints about Falk’s “Miserly and envious” nature, and his being too mean to get married are both untrue (Conrad, “Falk” 53, 56), suggesting that the German’s malignancy is, like Iago’s, largely unmotivated.

In *Victory* Schomberg emerges as both malicious and destructive: he is described initially as “a noxious ass” with “an ungovernable tongue” who “satisfied his lust for silly gossip at the cost of his customers” (Conrad, *Victory* 20). But the gossip quickly becomes slanderous as Schomberg accuses Axel Heyst of spying, of having robbed and murdered Captain Morrison, of stealing, and of having kidnapped one of the girls in the orchestra at Schomberg’s hotel (Conrad, *Victory* 61). All these assertions are lies: Heyst was Morrison’s benefactor, he has not stolen money from anybody, and Lena has left the orchestra of her own accord. Schomberg’s malice seems largely unmotivated, except for his jealousy of Heyst in relation to Lena, the girl from the orchestra. In the “Author’s Note” to *Victory* of 1915, Conrad refers to Schomberg’s presence in the two earlier works, and claims that, in this novel: “his deeper passions come into play, and thus his grotesque psychology is completed at last” (viii). He continues: “I don’t pretend to say that this is the entire Teutonic psychology; but it is indubitably the psychology of a Teuton. My object in mentioning him here is to bring out the fact that, far from being the incarnation of recent animosities [World War I], he is the creature of my old, deep-seated and, as it were, impartial conviction” (Conrad, *Victory* viii). As we have seen, while Conrad’s convictions about “Teutons” are “old” and “deep-seated,” they are scarcely “impartial.” The German characters in his novels are representatives of the commercialism, greed, and malignancy that Conrad associates with Germany and its citizens.

With Captain Hermann and the German Captain of the *Patna*, the adherence to commercial principles rather than to the nautical ideals of service and duty leads the narrators of “Falk” and *Lord Jim* to condemn them. Initially Captain Hermann seems to be a positive figure. At the beginning of “Falk” he tries to help the narrator catch the fleeing Chinese thief and his ship, the *Diana*, provides a place of escape for the narrator (Conrad, “Falk” 20–23). But even at the beginning the narrator is struck by the fact that Hermann does not look like a ship’s captain, but “a well-to-do farmer” with “the good-natured shrewdness of a small shopkeeper,” and as the action progresses Hermann is seen more negatively (Conrad, “Falk” 7). He is soon described as being “racially thrifty” and compared to “a caricature of a shopkeeping citizen in one of his own German

comic papers” in his fury at the damage Falk has done his ship in towing it (Conrad, “Falk” 39, 60). Finally, Hermann’s hysterical reaction to Falk’s confession of having indulged in cannibalism *in extremis*, makes him a figure not to be taken seriously, a man not equipped to deal with the vicissitudes of life at sea (Conrad, “Falk” 117–24).

The portrait of the German captain of the *Patna* in *Lord Jim* is the most negative, since in abandoning his ship and the eight hundred Muslim pilgrims on it he fails in his duty both to the code of the navy and to common humanity. It is of course striking that Jim also fails in his duty, and that he is treated with far more narrative sympathy than the German. The captain refers to the Muslim pilgrims as “dese cattle,” and his only decision when disaster strikes is to “Clear out,” the same expression being used by Brierly when the captain runs away in order not to face the inquiry, whereas Jim stays to face it (Conrad, *Jim* 15, 91, 66). But it is not simply that the German captain, who is never given a name, fails in his duty. He is presented by both Marlow and the third-person narrator as grotesque, ridiculous, and loathsome as well as unscrupulous. He first appears on the deck of the *Patna* in his pyjamas, and the narrator describes “something obscene in the sight of his naked flesh” (Conrad, *Jim* 21). He is an “odious and fleshy figure,” “the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love,” “a renegade” whose speech is described as “a torrent of foamy, abusive jargon that came like a gush from a sewer” or who expresses himself in “sulky grunt[s]” or in “very savage” speech, and who is seen, again on the deck of the *Patna*, as “a clumsy effigy of a man cut out of a block of fat” (Conrad, *Jim* 21, 22, 22–23, 23).

Marlow first refers to him as “the jolly skipper of the *Patna*,” “jolly” being apparently a term of ironic condemnation for Marlow here as in *Heart of Darkness* where he describes the German colonies in Africa as places where “the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer” (Conrad, *Jim* 36; Conrad, *Heart* 55). He relates that his first sight of the German captain was nine months earlier when he saw him “abusing the tyrannical institutions of the German empire, and soaking himself in beer all day long and day after day in De Jongh’s back-shop, till De Jongh, who charged a guilder for every bottle without as much as the quiver of an eyelid” would declare to Marlow that “Business is business, but this man, captain, he make me very sick” (Conrad, *Jim* 36–37). After this, Marlow’s first sight of the German before the inquiry makes him “think of a trained baby elephant walking on hind legs,” and wearing “a soiled sleeping-suit, bright green and deep orange vertical stripes, with a pair of ragged straw slippers on his bare feet, and somebody’s cast-off pith hat, very dirty and two sizes too small for him, tied up with a manila rope-yarn on the top of his big head” (Conrad, *Jim* 37). The fact that the German never appears in uniform but in pyjamas or a

“sleeping suit,” and, on the second occasion, barefoot and in other people’s cast-off clothes, makes him the antithesis of the professional merchant seaman. In addition to his own view of the German captain Marlow also quotes the words of Archie Ruthvel, the principal shipping master and another Englishman, who sees him as “something round and enormous, resembling a sixteen-hundred-weight sugar-hogshead wrapped in striped flannelette, up-ended in the middle of the large floor space in the office” (Conrad, *Jim* 38). On this occasion the German “snort[s] like a frightened bullock” before he is rebuked by Archie Ruthvel, afterwards complaining to Marlow: “‘That old mad rogue upstairs called me a hound,’” a comment which Marlow glosses with the ironic remark that “hound was the very mildest epithet that had reached me through the open window” (Conrad, *Jim* 39, 41). Later Marlow calls the German “that gaudy and sordid mass,” hears him “growling like a wild beast,” and describes him as drawing in his head “like a turtle” (Conrad, *Jim* 47, 91, 126). All of these descriptions of the German captain, comparing him to objects and animals, dehumanize him, and along with the outright condemnations, put him beyond the pale of narrative or readerly sympathy. The captain’s speech is also marked by deviant grammar and spelling which reflects his Germanic accent, again making him ridiculous. He tells Marlow that “‘I am well aguaintd in Apia, in Honolulu’” and “‘A man like me don’t want your verfluchte certificate. I shpfit on it [ . . . ] I vill an Amerigan citizen begome’” (Conrad, *Jim* 41, 42). The unnamed German captain of the *Patna* is both vile and ridiculous.

At first sight, Stein seems to represent the opposite pole from the captain of the *Patna*. Marlow calls him “one of the most trustworthy men I had ever known,” with “a simple unwearied, as it were, and intelligent good nature” (Conrad, *Jim* 202). Moreover, his generosity to Jim shows that Marlow’s comments are not unfounded (Conrad, *Jim* 247). Ross notes that in making Jim his agent in Patusan, Stein “cannily” brings together “Jim’s Protestant ethic with his own devotion to the spirit of capitalism” (85). But what Ross does not note is that in the novel Stein’s “devotion to the spirit of capitalism” is obscured by Marlow’s idealization of him, although it is Marlow who notes that “his firm was the only one to have an agency by special permit from the Dutch authorities” in Patusan (Conrad, *Jim* 227). Towards the end of the novel we are told that Jim has the only store of gunpowder on the island since “Stein, with whom he had kept up intimate relations by letters, had obtained from the Dutch Government a special authorisation to export five hundred kegs of it to Patusan” (Conrad, *Jim* 362). The opportunity Stein offers Jim is a matter of business as well as of generosity; as Marlow says, Jim is initially “appointed to be a trading-clerk, and in a place where there was no trade” (Conrad, *Jim* 236). As Ross notes he never changes or removes “the economic structure [of trade conflict] that gives rise to the strife

and inequity he finds upon his arrival there” (75). This means that the peace Jim brings to Patusan remains dependent on trade and the imperial power of the Dutch, and the island offers him not only the possibility of redemption but also of destruction when Gentleman Brown exploits the discontent of the Portuguese Cornelius whom Jim has displaced.

In *Nostromo*, once again the most significant German (or German-Jewish) character is a businessman: Hirsch. Hirsch is a personification of cowardice: he tries to escape from Sulaco by hiding in the lighter in which Nostromo and Decoud are removing the silver, and they become aware of him because they hear “[s]omething between a sigh and a sob” and then “the sound of stifled sobbing” (Conrad, *Nostromo* 262, 270). He is captured by Sotillo after a freak accident at sea, and in his confusion and terror he repeats “his entreaties and protestations of loyalty and innocence” to Sotillo in German “because he was not aware in what language he was speaking” (Conrad, *Nostromo* 329). He is tortured by Sotillo who believes that he knows where the silver is and is finally shot by him when he uncharacteristically defies him by spitting in his face (Conrad, *Nostromo* 449). There is one other, minor German character in the novel, the telegraphist, Bernhardt. Decoud describes him as “‘ridiculous, but the bravest German of his size [he is a “little man”] that ever tapped the key of a Morse transmitter’” (Conrad, *Nostromo* 233). Even when the German is a good German he must be miniaturized and ridiculed.

While the Russian characters in Conrad’s fiction are generally framed by the system of autocracy, his German ones offer examples of the selfishness, malice, stupidity, and cowardice of those who are concerned only with commercial imperatives. They are often ridiculed as well as shown to be lacking in moral sense. Even Stein, who is certainly a partial exception to the rule, is shown to be involved in the imperial order and commercial framework which first seems to offer Jim the possibility of redemption but then destroys him. While both the Russian and German characters in Conrad’s fiction are more nuanced than his denunciations of the two countries in his other writings, they are nonetheless either demonstrations of the power of autocracy or stereotypes of commercial bad faith and greed.

#### BRITISH IMPERIALISM AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

Compared to these vituperations about Russia and Germany, Conrad’s explicit attitude to British imperialism outside his fiction is more moderately critical. While he deplores some of its practices, he is often ready to give credit to its aims and achievements. Yet he cannot entirely ignore the commercial interests which both underlie and undermine the achievement of those aims.

In a letter to Roger Casement of 21 December 1903 where he excoriates Bel-

gium's actions in the Congo, Conrad also criticizes Europe as a whole and the English in particular: "It is an extraordinary thing that the conscience of Europe which seventy years ago has put down the slave trade on humanitarian grounds tolerates the Congo State to day. It is as if the moral clock had been put back many hours" (*CL* 3: 96). Searching for an explanation, Conrad says:

One is tempted to exclaim (as poor Thiers did in 1871) "Il n'y a plus d'Europe." ["Europe no longer exists."] But as a matter of fact in the old days England had in her keeping the conscience of Europe. The initiative came from here. But now I suppose we are busy with other things; too much involved in great affairs to take up cudgels for humanity, decency and justice. (*CL* 3: 96)

Conrad argues that Britain is failing to live up to its moral responsibilities since, as part of Europe, it has become "only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical (*sic*) contests for life and death, and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions" ("Autocracy" 112). It is the actions of this "armed and trading continent" which Conrad scrutinizes and criticizes in works like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo*.

*Heart of Darkness* does not only denounce Belgian imperialism in Africa, although Marlow differentiates between the British and other nations, and between British and Roman colonization. He describes the Continent as being "cheap and not so nasty as it looks—they say," the German African colonies as the place "where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer," and says that Brussels makes him think of "a whited sepulchre" (Conrad, *Heart* 53, 55). On his return from Africa Marlow describes Brussels as "the sepulchral city," with "people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams" (Conrad, *Heart* 152). This is obviously Marlow, and not Conrad, but in *Heart of Darkness* no European nation, even Britain, escapes condemnation of the conflict between commercial principles and progress and enlightenment (see Ash 320 n 18; Ross 34; White 187–88). There is a French ship shelling the African coast, and while Kurtz is German, his mother is half-English, his father half-French, he was "educated partly in England," and is described as the product of "All Europe" (Conrad, *Heart* 117). Although the "Company" that dominates the book is based in Brussels, Marlow, who also works for it, is English, and the Russian "harlequin" too trades in ivory.

Marlow's attempt to distinguish between British and Roman colonization is shown to be equally suspect. London too, says Marlow, "has been one of the dark places of the earth" (Conrad, *Heart* 48). He argues that the Romans' "administra-

tion was merely a squeeze” based on “brute force,” while what saves the British colonists is “efficiency—the devotion to efficiency” (Conrad, *Heart* 50). He adds that what makes the difference between conquerors like the Romans and colonists like the British is “an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (Conrad, *Heart* 51). However, what happens in the rest of the novel undermines Marlow’s distinction: Kurtz is nothing if not efficient, but he finally “bow[s] down before” the idea of his own god-like status rather than that of the civilizing mission with which he started. Moreover, “efficiency” is no guarantee of humanitarian aims, no matter how much Marlow (and, arguably, Conrad) would like to believe it is. In a 1898 letter to his publisher, William Blackwood about *Heart of Darkness* Conrad says that the “criminality” lies in the “inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa,” not the work itself (*CL* 2: 139–40), which suggests that Conrad would like to agree with Marlow about British imperialism as an idea(l), if not as a practice. Unfortunately, however, the text undermines that idea since its critique of imperialism includes all the major European powers.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen, in the later essay, “Poland Revisited,” the word, “efficiency” is given much less positive connotations when Conrad describes Germany as “that promised land of steel, of chemical dyes, of method, of efficiency” (147 and see p. 176 above).

If the value of efficiency is ultimately undermined in *Heart of Darkness* despite Marlow’s attempt to use the concept to validate British imperialism, in *Lord Jim*, efficiency is also seen equivocally. When the inquiry has ended by cancelling Jim’s certificate as mate, Marlow observes: “To bury him would have been such an easy kindness” because “It would have been so much in accordance with the wisdom of life, which consists in putting out of sight all the reminders of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality; all that makes against our efficiency—the memory of our failures, the hints of our undying fears, the bodies of our dead friends” (Conrad, *Jim* 174). Here “efficiency” at first seems a positive value, opposed on one side to “our folly” and “our weakness,” and on the other to “the memory of our failures, the hints of our undying fears.” But efficiency is also opposed to “our mortality” and to “the bodies of our dead friends,” and here it seems much less a positive value. As Ash rightly says: “Marlow understands that Jim is regarded simply as a faulty cog in the imperial machinery, and that he has been conveniently tossed away in the interests of the system’s ‘efficiency’” (106). What Ash does not note, however, is that the inquiry makes no distinction between Jim and the ship’s captain, cancelling both their certificates, whereas of course Marlow (and by implication Conrad) extends a somewhat irritated sympathy to Jim but only ridicule and opprobrium to the captain.

*Lord Jim* also undermines the notion that the duty of the merchant seaman is purely a matter of “decency” or “honour.” Brierly invokes decency when he says: “‘a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales’” (Conrad, *Jim* 68). The unnamed French lieutenant who was put on the *Patna* when she was being towed to safety expands on the idea of honour: “‘But the honour—the honour, monsieur . . . The honour . . . that is real, that is! And what life may be worth when [ . . . ] when the honour is gone . . . I can offer no opinion’” (Conrad, *Jim* 148). However, despite the French lieutenant’s adherence to honor, as GoGwilt says, Brierly’s words reveal that his “decency is [ . . . ] simple trading reason—old rags and pilgrims are so much cargo” since “The business of the sailor is as an agent of commercial imperialism” and the *Patna* inquiry is “the progressive revelation of the underlying material interests of an international capitalist imperialism” (94).<sup>11</sup>

*Nostramo* also shows that “material interests” may bring material prosperity and even political stability, but at the cost of honesty and even humanity in many individuals. In Doctor Monygham’s conclusive words: “There is no peace and rest in the development of material interests. They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle” (Conrad, *Nostramo* 511). Moreover, dependent as they are on American investment and control, English management, a native labour force, and the organizing power of an Italian sailor, the material interests in the novel, embodied most clearly in the Gould Concession, are an early example of global capitalism as well as “economic imperialism” (see Goonetilleke 124; İçöz 259–60; Ross 114). Here and elsewhere, Conrad’s novels show that commercial interests both underlie *and* undermine claims to progress and improvement, especially in the colonial context.

## CONCLUSION

Keith Carabine sees “the central informing idea” of Conrad’s fiction to be “‘the essential difference of the races’” (Conrad, *CL* 2: 402, qtd. in Carabine, “Irreconcilable” 93), and these differences, as I have tried to show, can be seen clearly in both his political essays and his fiction, especially insofar as Russian and German characters are concerned. Ultimately, no European nation, even Britain, escapes Conrad’s condemnation of the conflict between commercial principles and progress and enlightenment. Nonetheless, national distinctions are still made in the fiction, often by Marlow rather than Conrad, it is true, and despite his disapproval of the new commercial ethic dominating British and European imperial policy, Conrad still saw British imperialism as the lesser of several evils. As Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow say, Conrad was “keenly aware of the

moral ambiguities of empire” and its “exploitativeness,” yet he “nowhere questioned the superiority of the civilized European, the inferiority of the Africans, nor the British imperial role in Africa” (106–07 and see White 193). While *Heart of Darkness* shows the final claim to be questionable, Hammond and Jablow are surely right to point to Conrad’s belief in European racial superiority to Asia as well as Africa, as his comments on “barbarous niggers” and “effete Asiatics” in the political essays reveal. Conrad turned to the naval traditions of duty and service as guides to moral values, even though both the Royal Navy and the British Merchant Navy were basic to the functioning of the capitalist and imperialist systems which seemed destined to undermine those values. As Ross says, there is in Conrad an “engagement with the double bind of wanting to assert ideals and recognizing their fundamental inadequacy” (193). Although Conrad’s letters and essays distinguish between the abuses of imperial power by Russia and Germany and the moral positives of British imperialism, the fiction both insists on national differences and ironically reveals the similarities between nations in the imperial context of global capitalism.

#### NOTES

1. For brief mentions of Conrad’s preference for British imperialism compared to that of other countries, see Perter Edgerly Firchow 16; Guerard 326 n 1. Although this essay is not concerned with Dutch colonialism, *Almayer’s Folly*, *The Outcast of the Islands* and “Freya of the Seven Isles” show that Conrad is generally unsympathetic to the Dutch both as imperialists and individuals.

2. Andrea White and Michael Valdez Moses note Conrad’s “actual participation as a proud member of the British Merchant Marine in the business of empire” (White 2 and see Moses 69), while Ross demonstrates how in *Lord Jim* the nautical ideals of duty and service are “based upon and derived from commercial considerations” (69 and see 67–72; see also Eagleton 135; Moses 87–92).

3. Christopher GoGwilt gives two different dates for the beginning of Conrad’s challenge to the “Slav” label: 1905 (36) and 1907 (39, 133). The date of the beginning of the challenge is, however, less important than the fact that Conrad consistently rejected the label from about 1905 onwards.

4. In the 1919 interview with Anthony Czarniecki, Conrad also refers to “German autocracy” (qtd. in Rude 78, 79), but the phrase does not appear in the political essays.

5. For other examples of Conrad’s anti-Russian feeling see CL 2: 158, where Conrad refuses to attend a peace meeting to be addressed by his friend Cunninghame Graham because of the presence of Russians. Similarly, after World War I, Conrad refuses to serve on the International Committee for the Relief of Poland because the Russian ambassador is on it (see Rude 72–73, 76–77).

6. See also Conrad’s letter to *The Times* where he expresses his outrage at the “colossal stupidity or inconceivable malevolence” of the Russian fleet’s attack on a fishing fleet (CL 3: 175 and see 173–75) and the 1920 letter to John Quinn where Conrad sees Russia as barbaric and pestilential (CL 7: 40).



7. For other statements by Conrad of Poland's Western nature, see "The Crime of Partition" (133) and the "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record* (ix).

8. Conrad's anti-German feeling also emerges in his letter of 25 December 1899 to Aniela Zagórska about the Boer War, where he says the Germans have "forced the issue" (*CL* 2: 230). Some of Conrad's letters show that he hated Germany almost as much as Russia, as Sylvère Monod says (98, 99). In a letter to John Quinn in 1918 Conrad refers to Russia as an "infection" ready to make "the rest of the world" diseased (*CL* 6: 180). He adds: "the immense power of germanism . . . would be death too, but in another shape," also referring to "the rottenness of Russia and the soullessness of Germany" (*CL* 6: 180, 181). In a letter to Sir Hugh Clifford the next year, Conrad insults Russia as "the Russian mangy dog" and Germany as "the German learned pig" (*CL* 6: 349–50).

9. Although Kurtz might seem to be the most obvious example of this, he is not presented as specifically German; indeed, Marlow says that "All Europe" went into his making (Conrad, *Heart* 117). It is for this reason that I do not discuss him here.

10. Chris Bongie discusses Marlow's "double-barreled distinction" between "efficiency" and 'inefficiency' and 'conquerors' and 'colonists,'" arguing that the positive figure of the "efficient colonist" is absent from the text or only briefly glimpsed in Kurtz, at the beginning of his time in Africa (41, 43, 41–43).

11. Although Moses argues that the *Patna's* passengers "are valued only moderately higher than inanimate cargo," he is surely wrong; Brierly's words show that they are valued at exactly the same rate (89).

#### WORKS CITED

- Acheraïou, Amar. "The Shadow of Poland." *A Return to the Roots: Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe*. Ed. Wiesław Krajka. Boulder: East European Monographs/Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 2004. 47–70.
- Ash, Beth Sharon. *Writing in Between: Modernity and Psychosocial Dilemma in the Novels of Joseph Conrad*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Bongie, Chris. *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle*. Stanford, Ca. Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Carabine, Keith. "Irreconcilable Antagonisms': Reflections on Conrad, Poland, and the English Political Novel." *Conrad and Poland*. Ed. Alex S. Kurczaba. Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996. 89–111.
- . "Conrad the European: 'Autocracy and War' and 'The Heroic Age.'" *Conrad's Europe: Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Andrzej Cuiik and Marcin Piechota. Opole: University of Opole Press, 2005. 77–91.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Almayer's Folly*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926.
- . "Autocracy and War." *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 83–114.
- . "Confidence." *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 202–08.

- . “The Crime of Partition.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 115–33.
- . “The Dover Patrol.” *Last Essays. Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926. 58–65.
- . “Falk: A Reminiscence.” *Falk: Amy Foster, Tomorrow*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1914. 145–239.
- . “Freya of the Seven Isles.” *Twixt Land and Sea: Tales*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1926. 147–238
- . *Heart of Darkness. Youth: and Two Other Stories*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co. 1926. 45–162.
- . *Lord Jim*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1924.
- . *Nostromo*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1925.
- . “A Note on the Polish Problem.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 134–40.
- . “An Observer in Malaya.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 58–60.
- . *An Outcast of the Islands*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926.
- . “An Outpost of Progress.” *Tales of Unrest*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1920, 145–98.
- . *A Personal Record. A Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1926. 3–138.
- . “Poland Revisited.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 141–73.
- . “Prince Roman.” *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926. 29–55.
- . *The Secret Agent*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926.
- . “Tradition.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 194–201.
- . *Under Western Eyes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1926.
- . *Victory*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1924.
- . “Well Done.” *Notes on Life and Letters*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1921. 179–93.
- . “Youth.” *Youth: and Two Other Stories*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926. 3–42.
- . *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Vol 1. Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. [Cited as CL 1]
- . *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Vol. 2. Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. [Cited as CL 2]
- . *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Vol. 3. Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. [Cited as CL 3]

- . *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Vol. 6. Ed. Laurence Davies, Frederick R. Karl, and Owen Knowles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. [Cited as CL 6]
- . *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Vol. 7. Ed. Laurence Davies and J. H. Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. [Cited as CL 7]
- Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Verso, 1990.
- Firchow, Peter Edgerly. *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000.
- Fleishman, Avrom. *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.
- GoGwilt, Christopher. *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Goonetilleke, D. C. R. A. *Joseph Conrad: Beyond Culture and Background*. London: Macmillan, 1990.
- Guerard, Albert. "The Journey Within." *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Paul B. Armstrong. 4th Edition. New York and London: Norton, 2006. 326–36.
- Hammond, Dorothy and Alta Jablow. *The Myth of Africa*. New York: The Library of Social Science, 1977.
- Hawkins, Hunt. "Heart of Darkness and Racism." *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Paul B. Armstrong. 4th Edition. New York and London: Norton, 2006. 365–75.
- İçöz, Nursel. "Conrad and Ambiguity: Social Commitment and Ideology in *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*." *Conradiana* 37: 3 (Fall 2005): 245–74.
- Karl, Frederick R. *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives. A Biography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- Krajka, Wiesław. "Joseph Conrad's Conception of Europe." *Joseph Conrad and His Work*. Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2004. 19–24.
- Monod, Sylvère. "Conrad and European Politics." *Conrad's Europe: Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Andrzej Ciuk and Marcin Piechota. Opole: University of Opole Press, 2005. 93–104.
- Morf, Gustav. *The Polish Shades and Ghosts of Joseph Conrad*. New York: Astra Books, 1976.
- Moses, Michael Valdez. *Conrad and the Globalization of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Najder, Zdzislaw. *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Ray, M. S. "The Gift of Tongues: The Languages of Joseph Conrad." *Conradiana* 15 (1983): 83–109.
- Ross, Stephen. *Conrad and Empire*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri, 2004.

- Rude, Donald W. "Anthony Czarnecki's 'An Evening with Conrad': An Interview on Politics and Poland Recovered." *Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe*. Ed. Wiesław Krajka. Boulder: East European Monographs/Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 2004. 71–85.
- Wheeler, Marcus. "Russia and Russians in the Works of Conrad." *Conradiana* 12.1 (1980): 23–36.
- White, Andrea. *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.