THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Conrad regarded life as the pursuit of a dream which gives man a sense of purpose in life. The individual's attempt, through action and communication, to make this dream real to himself and to his fellow men constitutes the quest for identity in Conrad's works.

Chapter I explores various aspects of the quest. Because life is a "destructive element", the individual must struggle to justify his existence and make his dream come true. To be successful in this struggle, man needs self-knowledge. This, in turn, requires a commitment to the community. The quest is, therefore, ethical rather than metaphysical.

Chapter II is a study of the egoistic dream. The sense of superiority over the rest of mankind causes Jim, Heyst, and Kurtz to dissociate themselves from their fellow men. Consequently, they lack a clear sense of their moral responsibility and of the destructive tendencies in their own nature. Rather than help these individuals to find meaning in life, the egoistic dream becomes the cause of their failure.

Chapter III concentrates upon the "saving illusion", a sense of self involving a moral commitment to the community. Through involvement, the individual becomes concerned with
fulfilling his moral obligation, rather than vindicating an ideal of himself. Therefore, he seeks the self-knowledge which will enable him to guard against defeat. Obedience to the claims of love and conscience in *Under Western Eyes*, the sense of duty towards the ship in "The Secret Sharer", and the sense of solidarity in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* enable the protagonists in these stories to fulfil their obligation to the community.

Finally, Chapter IV deals with Conrad's artistic endeavour as his quest for identity. Conrad's aim was to communicate his truth to the reader. The achievement of his artistic goal required self-knowledge which he, like his characters, acquired in the struggle of life. The hard realities of life become the "terms of his appeal". Conrad's vision of life evokes in his readers the sense of solidarity which testifies to the success of his quest for identity.
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ABBREVIATIONS


MS = The Mirror of the Sea (New York: Doubleday, 1926).


PR = A Personal Record (New York: Doubleday, 1926).


UWE = Under Western Eyes (New York: Doubleday, 1926).

I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance I have received from Mr. Andrzej Busza in the formulation and completion of this thesis.
CHAPTER ONE: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

Although Conrad described himself as a "chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdoms of the earth," his primary motivation for writing was not the taste for adventure which "is but a phantom, a dubious shape without a heart." Rather, he was motivated by a desire to discover and unveil the truth of life. "Whatever dramatic and narrative gifts I may have," he explained in a letter to Sir Sidney Colvin (March 18, 1917), "are always, instinctively, used with that object—to get at, to bring forth


In his artistic credo, the Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', he defines his aim as the attempt to find in the aspects of life "what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence" (NN, vii).

Conrad's fiction can be likened to the quest for the Holy Grail. In the course of this quest, the hero of romance confronts hostile forces which appear unexpectedly and often in disguise. By struggling to overcome these hostile forces, the hero acquires knowledge about himself and the world in which he lives. This knowledge helps him to attain his goal. Similarly, the artist descends into a "lonely region of stress and strife" (NN, viii) where he confronts situations "that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to others but also to himself" (LJ, 10). Accordingly, the artist discovers the "terms of his appeal" (NN, viii) which make the artistic endeavour successful.

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Through the conflict, the artist, like the hero, proves himself worthy of his goal. For Conrad, the value of an achievement was integrally related to the personal meaning and value which man discovered through his conflict. "You must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp" (LJ, 222). Thus, the quest becomes a search for personal meaning and value, or identity. This quest for identity is one of Conrad's fundamental themes, manifesting itself in the lives of his fictional characters as well as in the author's pursuit of artistic achievement. Interpreted in terms of existentialism, the search for identity in Conrad's fiction follows the premise that "existence means freedom, but this freedom is the nothingness in man's heart which compels the human reality to make itself, instead of be itself." A christian apologist would draw a parallel between Conrad's quest motif and Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount: "By their fruits ye shall know them," and, one might add, "Ye shall know yourselves." This simply means that man has no identity or meaning apart from his existence.


St. Matthew, 7: 20.
Recognizing this fact, the chief engineer in Nostromo argues: "Things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which every one discovers in his own form of activity" (Nos, 318). In a letter to his aunt, Mme. Poradowska, September 4, 1892, Conrad wrote: "When one well understands that in oneself one is nothing and that a man is worth neither more nor less than the work he accomplishes with honesty of purpose and means, and within the strict limits of his duty towards society, only then is one the master of his conscience, with the right to call himself a man. Otherwise . . . [he] is only a despicable thing sunk in the mud of all the passions."

Because identity is not an abstract, inherent quality such as man possesses in a metaphysically structured universe, but a matter of man's performance, the quest must be ethical rather than metaphysical. "In this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How" (PR, xx1). Conrad's advice parallels the words of a

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character in Pirandello's drama, Six Characters in Search of an Author: "Every true man, sir, who is a little above the level of the beasts and plants does not live for the sake of living, without knowing how to live; but he lives so as to give a meaning and a value of his own to life." 7

As Marlow says to Stein, "The question is not how to get cured, but how to live" (LJ, 212). Marlow means that man must learn to live with consciousness, or what Stein calls the fact that man "not always can keep [his] eyes shut" (LJ, 213). The inexperienced man who has not met with failure or who is able to rationalize his failure lives with an exalted sense of importance. Ignorant of the realities of the world which he inhabits and ignorant of his own capacity for failure, "he sees himself as a very fine fellow—so fine as he can never be" (LJ, 213).

Experience brings disillusionment. "It is not good ... to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough" (LJ, 213). When rationalization fails to appease the conscience, and the

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individual becomes conscious of failure, he feels alienated from the world which he inhabits and loses his sense of identity. Stein calls this awakening "the heart pain—the world pain" (LJ, 213). Conrad, in his letter to Robert Cunningham Graham, January 31, 1898, called it human tragedy and attributed it directly to consciousness: "What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature. It is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well—but as soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife,—the tragedy begins. We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it."

The individual faces a choice between clinging to his preconceptions about himself, or accepting the human condition of personal insufficiency and beginning to look for his identity by allying his will with the stronger and more effective will of the community. Stein defines the alternatives as the choice of a man who falls into the sea: "If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns—nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destruc-

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tive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up" (LJ, 214).

The choice between trying to "climb out into the air", or clinging to an illusion of inherent identity, and submission constitutes the moral crisis which Conrad's characters encounter on their quest for identity. "The test," argues Thomas Lorch, "always involves a conflict between the character's romantic conception of himself and 'a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind'." Stein's metaphor simplifies the results of the individual's decision. Like the conflicts facing a hero of romance, success becomes a matter of survival. Failure means death, or "drowning".

Conrad did not leave the idea of drowning as a metaphorical abstraction uttered by Stein in a moment of truth. For example, the floating hat, symbolic of either physical or spiritual drowning, frequently accompanies failure and alienation. Leggatt leaves a hat bobbing on the water when he has to abandon the ship and his society, because "it would never do for [him]

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to come to life again" (SS, 131). Heyst, seeking detachment from the evil world, "drowns" when he becomes the victim of the worst desperadoes and most slanderous tongues operating in his far-easterne world. The premonition of his drowning appears early in the novel when Davidson, upon leaving Samburan after his first visit, sees "all but the top of [Heyst's] white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea" (Vic, 29).

In Conrad's sea stories, The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', "The Secret Sharer", and "Typhoon", the failure or success of the quest depends upon keeping the ship afloat.

Conrad's preoccupation with survival in the water, of course, reflects the influence of his years as a sailor. As a symbol for life, struggle on the water is particularly useful because it concentrates the reader's attention upon the hazards of the quest. "Everything can be found at sea, according to the spirit of your quest--strife, peace, romance, naturalism of the most pronounced kind, ideals, boredom, disgust, inspiration--and every conceivable opportunity, including the opportunity to make a fool of yourself--exactly as in the pursuit of literature" (PR, 109). Conradian man contests the furies of the sea, as the hero of romance contests the fury of dragons and the beguilement of magic, aided only by his skill, courage, endurance, and qualities which he has acquired through
experience. Unaided by technology, or gods who bestow favors because of inherent and unearned qualities, the success of the quest and the discovery of identity depends solely upon the individual's conduct. Furthermore, the alternative of survival or drowning eliminates the shades of morality that would become confusing in a universe devoid of absolutes. Morality posited in these terms becomes a matter of survival and not philosophical judgment according to abstract dogma. Identity then becomes a matter of how a man acts rather than why he acts in a certain way when faced by a moral crisis. In a letter to Mrs. Aniela Zagórska, (December 25, 1899) Conrad used the proverb "hell is paved with good intentions" to suggest that unless noble aspirations are followed up by action they are meaningless.

Clinging to the illusion of inherent identity results in failure since, in order to continue believing in his exalted self-concept, the individual must repudiate self-knowledge. He fails not only because "nobody is good enough" (LJ, 319), but also because he remains ignorant of and unguarded against his own destructive tendencies and the annihilating powers

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that surround him. Consequently, he becomes vulnerable. Jim, for example, regards the wind and sea as an "inefficient menace" (LJ, 8), to protect his sense of superiority over the men who rescue their drowning shipmate. Repressing knowledge of his own paralysis in the face of danger, he is no match for the crippling fear which overpowers him when he believes that the Patna is sinking. Although he wills to be heroic, Jim deserts the ship.

The egoistic dream is fatal for Conrad's characters because it blinds them to the importance of exertion in the "destructive element". Tom Lingard in The Rescue is a good example. "He had no doubt of his existence; but was this life—this profound indifference, this strange contempt for what his eyes could see, this distaste for words, this unbelief in the importance of things and men?" (Res, 431-2). Lingard has the "sublime indifference of a man who has had a glimpse through the open doors of Paradise and is no longer careful of mere life" (Res, 433). The experiences of life become "a base intrusion on [his] memory [of the Paradise he has seen]" (Res, 415). Not only does indifference to life make man careless and vulnerable, but, as the crew of the 'Narcissus' demonstrates when it becomes fascinated with death, indifference gives man a sense of futility and meaninglessness. Although
Lingard does not doubt his existence, "it was as to being alive that he felt not so sure" (Res, 431). Similarly, Heyst sees only meaninglessness in life because he does not become involved in life. In "Prince Roman", Conrad writes "It is only to vain men that all is vanity; and all is deception only to those who have never been sincere with themselves" (PRom, 43). Because exertion alone gives man a sense of purpose in life, the egoistic dream which causes man to seek escape from the predicaments of life is fatal.

Man can be sincere with himself and recognize the importance of toil only when he submits, or accepts the human condition. "I think that the proper wisdom is to will what the gods will without, perhaps, being certain what their will is—or even if they have a will of their own" (PR, xxi). Describing this attitude of submission to and acceptance of reality as "resignation", Conrad says that it "is the only one of our feelings for which it is impossible to become a sham" (PR, xxi). Because of its radical sincerity, "resignation" enables man to make his exertion in the "deep, deep sea" effective. On the artistic level, effectiveness means expressing oneself through communication. Thus, resignation helps the artist to become an effective "voice". "Resignation is not indifference."
I would not like to be left standing as a mere spectator on the bank of the great stream carrying onward so many lives. I would fain claim for myself the faculty of so much insight as can be expressed in a voice of sympathy and compassion" (PR, xvii). Were he writing as a sailor, he would refer to the success which becomes possible through resignation as the able performance of duty for the sake of the ship.

The quest for identity thus involves a paradox. Identity is not the end, but the reward of the quest. "If we are ever becoming—never being," Conrad argued in a letter to Edward Garnett (March 23, 1886), "then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that." Discussing the art of sailing yachts, he argues: "The skipper . . . who thought of nothing else but the glory of winning the race would never attain to any eminence of reputation. The genuine masters of their craft—I say this confidently from my experience of ships—have thought of nothing but of doing their very best in the vessels under their charge" (MS, 29-30). In his eulogy for men of the sea, the essay entitled "Well Done," he advises:

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"The only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort." Conrad's attitude may have been influenced by his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski. Replying to Conrad's appeal for counsel, Bobrowski wrote a long letter in which he explained his philosophy of "resignation":

"Certainly humanity has a lesser need of producing geniuses than of the already-existing modest and conscientious workers who fulfill their duties; nobody has the right to call himself the former until he has proved it by deeds, just as nobody has the right to withdraw from the work of the latter because of his conviction that he is not part of the team."

Bobrowski went on to mention the belief which sustained him through the tragedy of life. "The devotion to duty... this constitutes my practical creed. The uncle's belief is the kind of "saving illusion" to

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14 Ibid., p. 155.
which Marlow refers in "Heart of Darkness". Every individual requires a sense of who he is or, like Decoud, he loses the will to live. He acquires the feeling of individuality when he relates, through communication or action, to the world around him. Self-expression becomes possible when the sense of self is bound up in a role or function which commits the individual to the community. Man is unable to achieve purposes that vindicate an exalted sense of identity because his will is not strong enough to overcome the hostile elements of life. However, when he integrates his purposes, and his sense of self, with the will of the community, man can survive the conflict with the "destructive element" and thereby earn a personal meaning and value for his life. "In this ceaseless rush of shadows and shades, that, like the fantastic forms of clouds cast darkly upon the waters on a windy day, fly past us to fall headlong below the hard edge of an implacable horizon, we must turn to the national spirit, which, superior in its force and continuity to good and evil fortune, can alone give us the feeling of an enduring existence and of an invincible power against the fates" (MS, 194).
Accordingly, Zabel argues: "Love, or the sense of honor, or the obligations of duty, or even the social instinct itself enters [Conrad's] novels as a means whereby the individual is lifted out of his isolation and morbid surrender [to himself]. . . . It is finally the world which saves us—the world of necessity and duty."

The sense of duty towards his ship enables Marlow to resist the fascinating appeal of savagery which, like the song of the sirens in The Odyssey, draws Kurtz to destruction. Similarly, the crew of the 'Narcissus' escape the appeal of corruption and despair when they are forced to rescue the ship from the storm, and when the desire to complete the voyage compels them to affirm the bond of solidarity in obedience to the tradition of seamanship. Haldin's intrusion into Razumov's life awakens the social instinct which ultimately frees Razumov from his meaningless "solitary and laborious" (UWE, 82) existence. "Thus he saves me. . . . He himself, the betrayed man" (UWE, 362), Razumov admits to himself.

The "saving illusion" therefore helps Conrad's characters to succeed on their quest for identity. Their practical creed enables them to change the world in which they live, and, in so doing, earn an identity and a place in that world.

The young captain in "The Secret Sharer" is able to make his actions meaningful when he forgets his secret ideal of self, and assumes responsibility for his behaviour as a captain. Only then does he find "the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command" (SS, 143). Similarly, when the crew of the 'Narcissus' cease demanding "rights", they are able to complete their voyage, and wrest meaning from their trials on the sea: "Hadn't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives?" (NN, 173)

The majority of Conrad's characters must seek for their identity through physical toil. For Conrad himself, the quest involved mental labor. His task was "to carry justification in every line" (NN, vii), "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make
you feel, . . . to make you see" (NN, x). The expression of self by communication is as difficult as the expression of self in action. Frustration and despair in his letters reflects the immensity of the obstacles which Conrad had to overcome before communication became possible. In a letter to his aunt, Marguerite Poradowska, for example, he discussed the writing of *Almayer's Folly*, calling it "a struggle to the death. . . . If I let up, I am lost!"

In a letter to Kazimierz Waliszewski (December 5, 1903), Conrad described the difficulties of the writer's task:

"It is difficult to depict faithfully in a work of imagination that innermost world as one apprehends it, and to express one's own real sense of that inner life (which is the soul of human activity). However, absolute sincerity is always possible—I mean sincerity of intention. One does what one can."

If successful, the artist creates "for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be otherwise than in his own image."

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16 Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, p. 64

17 Conrad's Polish Background, p. 240.

In other words, the artist creates a world which embodies the truth and meaning of his life. In *Nostromo*, this truth is the corruptibility of man; in "Heart of Darkness", it is man's demonism; in *Victory*, Conrad shows the importance of love; in *Under Western Eyes*, he unveils the need to obey the promptings of conscience "without knowing what [its] will is, or even if [it] has a will of [its] own" (PR, xxi). In addition to the moral truths which he has discovered in life, Conrad conveys the truths of the human condition, the loneliness, dreams, joy, sorrow, aspirations, illusions, hope and fear, "which bind together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn" (NN, viii).

The illusory world of the novel serves as a symbol for the manner in which man's struggle transforms a world devoid of meaning into a world that is meaningful. The sense of identity therefore gives man the feeling that the world is part of himself. Alienation results in the loss of identity, as Conrad indicates when discussing his relationship to the seamen with whom he spent his youth. He refers to "a very vivid comprehension that if I wasn't one of them I was nothing at all." He draws his readers' attention to "Well Done," *Notes*, p. 183.
to a similar feeling which possesses Razumov: "Being nobody's child he feels rather more keenly than another would that he is a Russian—or he is nothing" (UWE, ix).

Just as the hero in search of the grail must prove himself worthy before his quest can be successful, Conradian man must earn the sense of belonging which gives him an identity. Razumov must earn his place in the Russian community, just as Conrad had to earn the feeling of belonging to the craft which united seamen in a bond of solidarity.

Reflecting on his years as a sailor, Conrad wrote to Kazimierz Waliszewski (December 5, 1903): "With no connexions, contacts or influential friends, I can nevertheless look upon the past with satisfaction. . . . In what seems to me were pretty difficult situations, I think I always remained faithful to the traditions of the profession I had chosen." Like their author, none of Conrad's fictional characters have the fortune of being born into a station of life which would assure them meaning and value without toil. Conrad extends this cardinal rule to all

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Conrad's Polish Background, p. 240.
mankind when he comments on Nostromo: "He is a man with the weight of countless generations behind him and no paren­tage to boast of. . . . Like the People" (Nos, xii).

The quest for identity in Conrad's fiction is, there­fore, the pattern of existence which can be compared to a journey into the unknown. Born into an egoistic dream, the inexperienced individual has an exalted sense of identity and meaning. Experience and failure, however, bring disillusionment and alienation. The individual can try to escape the realities that threaten his sense of identity, but, in doing so, he "drowns". The "way to be" is to submit and make the "destructive element . . . keep you up." The realities of life, hardship, suffering and struggle are, therefore, instrumental in man's discovery of meaning and purpose in life. They help him to discover his true identity and awaken to the sense of solidarity which "binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible universe" (NN, x). "For suffering is the lot of man, but not inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end—suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity like a jewel set in iron . . ." (Rom, 541).
CHAPTER TWO: THE EGOISTIC DREAM

In *A Personal Record*, Conrad relates the occasion on which his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, tried to impress upon him the difference between fidelity to a purpose whose end was the vindication of an exalted conception of self, and fidelity to the community: "Practically, after several exhaustive conversations, he concluded that he would not have me later on reproach him for having spoiled my life by an unconditional opposition. . . . And I must not only think of myself but of others; weigh the claims of affection and conscience against my own sincerity of purpose. 'Think well what it all means in the larger issues, my boy,' he exhorted me finally with special friendliness" (*PR*, 42).
At this time Conrad was fifteen, and did not immediately take his uncle's words seriously, as the record of a subsequent summer tour with an English tutor indicates.
The tutor flattered young Conrad by calling him an "incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote" (PR, 44). "Alas," Conrad writes, "I don't think there was anything to be proud of. Mine was not the stuff the protectors of forlorn damsels, the redressers of this world's wrongs are made of" (PR, 44).

Experience, however, taught Conrad the value of his uncle's advice. By resigning himself to the fact that "most of the working truths on this earth are humble, not heroic" (PR, xiv), Conrad was able to recognize the value of accomplishing tasks nearest to hand and heart in obedience to the sense of duty. Because, as he writes, "one's own dignity... is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work" (PR, xviii), success in the faithful performance of duty enabled Conrad to give a personal meaning and value to life.

Conrad's romantic nature made the surrender of egotistic dreams extremely difficult. Reminiscing on his youth, he writes: "I went through agonies of self-conflict and shed secret tears not a few" (PR, 110). In "The Return,"
he describes the yielding of individual purpose and accep-
tance of moral responsibility as "an awful sacrifice. . . .
the cruel decree of salvation" (TU, 184). It is, therefore,
natural that most of the crisis situations in his fiction
are focused upon the choice an individual must make between
clinging to his egoistic dream and accepting his moral
obligation to the community.

Man finds it difficult to yield his egoistic dream
because it involves his self-concept. For example, even
though Lingard feels "like a swimmer who, in the midst of
superhuman efforts to reach the shore, perceives that the
undertow is taking him to sea," he cannot "sacrifice his
intention, the intention of his life. . . . The adventurer
held fast to his adventure which made him in his own sight
exactly what he was" (Res, 219). In trying to save his
sense of self, however, Lingard loses the sense of his
own reality (Res, 431).

The egoist tries to escape the realities which threaten
his self-concept by evading self-knowledge, and disavowing
affinity with the rest of mankind, of whose gross faults
he is most conscious, in the characteristic manner of
egoism. Because "the inner truth is foreshadowed [only]
for those who know how to look at their own kind" (PR, xxi),
he remains ignorant and unguarded against the destructive
forces which, as Zabel suggests, leap "from unknown coverts:
sometimes from the hiding-places that fate or accident
has prepared, but more often and seriously, like the beast
in the jungle, from the unfathomed depths of our secret
natures, our ignorance, our subconscious and unconscious
selves."

In *Lord Jim*, the difference between following an
egoistic dream and fidelity to the community becomes evident
in the discussion which Marlow and Stein have on the "way
to be". Stein argues: "That was the way. To follow the
dream, and again to follow the dream—and so—and so—
usque ad finem" (LJ, 215). Stein is either admitting
failure, for he has in his own lifetime given up "many
dreams. . . . [that] would have been very fine—if [he]
had made them come true" (LJ, 217); or, he is using the
word "dream" in two different senses. Marlow's comments
and Stein's linking of submission with following the
dream suggest the latter. Stein begins his advice on

1 Zabel, "Chance and Recognition," *Critical Symposium*,
p. 21.
following the dream with the often quoted phrase: "In the destructive element immerse" (LJ, 215). Marlow's response suggests that the dream to which Stein refers differs from the dreams which he has had to forfeit: "His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret" (LJ, 215). Stein's life indicates that he believes in the individual's responsibility towards the community. True to this belief, he has tried and succeeded in establishing a kind of order for the community. The dreams which Stein has had to give up are possibly the "ideas of greatness" to which Bobrowski refers in a letter dated October 28/29, 1891, in which he discusses the romantic curse afflicting both Conrad and the Polish nation. Bobrowski wrote: "If both Individuals and Nations were to make 'duty' their aim, instead of the ideal of greatness, the world would certainly be a better place than it is!"

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2 Conrad's Polish Background, p. 154.
The ideas of greatness which the egoist does not surrender prove to be the cause of his downfall. Because Jim does not give up his exalted self-concept, he has to rationalize a series of minor defeats to avoid accepting his own weaknesses. Not learning from his minor failures, he succumbs in the major crises which confront him.

Jim's first test comes when a shipmate falls overboard. Although he imagines himself "saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line. . . . Always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book" (LJ, 6). Jim watches ineptly while the other men proceed with the rescue. He tries to rationalize his failure by responding contemptuously: "The tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils. He would do so—better than anybody" (LJ, 8). By suppressing knowledge of the sea's peril, Jim maintains his egoistic notion of superiority over his fellow men. Thus, he regards the rescue performed by his shipmates as a "pitiful display of vanity" (LJ, 9).
Jim's rationalization is common to most of Conrad's romantic protagonists. To be or not to be a sham is not a matter of insincerity. It is rather a matter of knowing how to look at one's fellow men and the cosmos. Only resignation allows the individual to perceive reality correctly. The romantic egoists, argues Bancroft, "are incapable of perceiving those accidents of common life that best reveal the profound significance of the 'solidarity' of human fellowship." Just as he cannot see the value of his mate's rescue, Jim is also incapable of recognizing the importance of assertion in the real world. After studying the art of seamanship, he goes to sea and finds "regions so well known to his imagination . . . strangely barren of adventure" (LJ, 10). Because of his egoism, which is an insistence on inherent rather than earned identity, he does not realize that the cosmos, like the sea, is the "indifferent, neutral, potential out of which man moulds the issues of his individual life and out of which man wrests meaning and identity." Believing in his

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3 Wm. Wallace Bancroft, Joseph Conrad: His Philosophy of Life (Boston: Stratford, 1933), p. 3.

Ibid., p. 3.
innate heroism, Jim does not know that "life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions ... must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable" (UWE, 106).

A second test occurs when the falling spar injures Jim. He succumbs to the pessimism of youth to which Bobrowski's letter refers: "Pessimism develops ... during the early youth of one who is still ignorant of all the obstacles and failures that life brings, one who is still childishly over-sensitive. ..." Rather than accept the fact that he too is subject to failure and must struggle to succeed in the quest of life, Jim tries to escape, or, in Stein's words, "climb into the air": "The unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of the feeling that the cosmos has a "sinister violence of intention," fills him "with a despairing desire to escape at any cost" (LJ, 11). Fascinated with the "decadents" determined to lounge safely through existence (LJ, 13), the Conradian Jonah takes a berth as chief mate on the Patna.

5 Conrad's Polish Background, p. 153.
Because he is unable to tolerate the threat to his dream, Jim unwittingly runs headlong into the destiny he is trying to evade. Having formerly repressed knowledge of his own capacity for fear, Jim becomes paralyzed by the belief that the ship is sinking. Consequently, he becomes the victim of his weakness and deserts the ship in response to a call not even intended for him. Jim's unconscious inner separation from the community, characteristic of egoism, becomes a conscious sense of exile. Forced to recognize his failure, Jim experiences the anguish of alienation: "His mind positively flew round and round the seried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round" (LJ, 31). Marlow later describes Jim's incapacity to escape the sense of failure, alienation, and futility in terms suggesting the loss of identity, or the loss of the dream: "I had forced into his hand the means to carry on decently the

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serious business of life, to get food, drink, and shelter of the customary kind while his wounded spirit, like a bird with a broken wing, might hop and flutter into some hole to die quietly of inanition there" (LJ, 184-5).

Jim recovers his sense of individuality when he finds a context for his romantic dream. The prospect of Patusan fills him with confidence: "He left his earthly failings behind him and that sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. Entirely new, entirely remarkable, And he got hold of them in a remarkable way" (LJ, 218).

In archetypal terminology, Jim is reborn. Patusan is a region well known to Jim's imagination; it is the romantic world which vindicates his ideal self-concept: "The seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the

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7 John Oliver Perry, in an essay entitled "Action, Vision, or Voice: The Moral Dilemma in Conrad's Tale-Telling," MFS, X (Spring, 1964), stresses the necessity for belief in some private or shared illusion because, in a universe devoid of objective meaning, "clear sightedness leads only to the vacuous agony of solitude, confusion, and despair" (p.3).

soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement" (LJ, 272).

However, the reward of success is tarnished by Jim's awareness that the inhabitants of Patusan "can't be made to understand what is going on in me" (LJ, 306). "They can never know the real, real truth" (LJ, 305). Severed from his own kind by failure, and severed by inheritance from Patusan, Jim looks forward to regaining the sense of belonging when his own community, for him, the real world, recognizes his achievement: "I've got to look only at the face of the first man that comes along, to regain my confidence" (LJ, 306).

The test comes in the person of Brown, "a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers" (LJ, 354). Jim is vulnerable to Brown's deception because he fails to accept his capacity for failure. Like Spenser's Red Cross Knight who is beguiled by the disguised loathly Duessa into leaving Una, or truth, Jim forgets that his noble intentions have been rendered meaningless in former crises by the weakness of his nature. He correctly argues that "men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others" (LJ, 394). However, his argument is a meaningless definition of life, offered as an
excuse for his own failure, because it does not prompt him into trying to avoid acting badly. As Dorothy Van Ghent insists, Jim's leniency towards Brown amounts to "a blind repudiation of the other-self that had been revealed to him." The overt consequences of Jim's decision, therefore, again belie his intentions and facilitate, for a second time, the disintegration of the dream which he follows.

Jim grasps the dream but only through death which severs all his roots within the community and the visible universe. Because the dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace (LJ, 409), he sacrifices his existence: "With the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit... [rises] above the ruins of existence" (LJ, 410). The powerful scene in which he leaves Jewel, insisting "I should not be worth having" (LJ, 412), reveals both the splendour and the vacuity of his success. In believing himself not worth having unless he grasps the dream, Jim demonstrates the immensity of the dream he seeks. However, his belief also demonstrates the emptiness of his dream: he becomes "a

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9 On Lord Jim, p. 145.

disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades" (LJ, 416). It is Jewel and not Jim whose agony constitutes the sacrifice. She must continue to inhabit the real world which reflects her suffering:

"The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the treetops, and the forest had a black forbidding face" (LJ, 413). Jim's victory is solely his own, and draws the life out of the community which trusted him. Dain Waris is dead, and Jewel lives, lifeless and inert, with an ageing Stein.

Axel Heyst has a different temperament from Jim. Whereas Jim tries to justify his self-concept through action, Heyst tries to drift passively through life. Were it not for the fact that Conrad permits the reader to view the intense conflict of Heyst's spirit, Heyst could be regarded as a prototype of Edwin Arlington Robinson's Richard Cory who "one calm summer night, /Went home and put a bullet through his head."

Heyst seeks detachment from life because he believes that involvement will corrupt him. Donald A. Dike argues:

"Utopist Heyst... is ruled by the perennial dream of radical innocence, an abstraction from experience that is to be defended by remoteness of experience." Like his father, Heyst believes that "the wages [of life are] not good enough. That they [are] paid in counterfeit money" (Vic, 196).

Heyst's attempt to evade the threat of experience is most evident in his relationship with Lena. In contrast to Jewel, whose belated entry makes her a subsidiary element in the exploration of Jim's dream, Lena appears early to play a crucial role in Victory. As a result, the destructive effect which "trying to climb out into the air" has upon personal relationships is more pronounced in Victory than Lord Jim.

Heyst denies the value of personal attachments on the premise that "he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul" (Vic, 199-200). The pity which prompts him to help Lena and Morrison is the feeling which his father advised him to exercise because "it is... the least difficult form of contempt" (Vic, 174).

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However, he is not contemptuous enough: "His detachment from the world [is] not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble" (Vic, 31). Thus, Heyst regrets taking Lena to his paradise where, he believes, "we can safely defy the fates" (Vic, 57). He confirms his regret when telling Davidson: "I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again" (Vic, 54). Later, he explains his indignant laughter at the world's interpretation of the Morrison affair: "When one's heart has been broken into in the way you [Lena] have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter—shame, anger, stupid indignations, stupid fears—stupid laughter, too" (Vic, 210).

Heyst's relationship with Lena parallels the relationship between Jim and Jewel. The two egoists regard their sexual partners not as real women, but as ethereal complements of their unreal world. The Jewel Jim wants to be worthy of is a shadowy ideal. Heyst, who, "like most dreamers . . . is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres"
(Vic, 66), is seduced by Lena's voice (Vic, 74). He advises her to forget the past because "your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says" (Vic, 83). He responds to Lena with an offer to take her to his paradise, not because of who she is, but because he can mentally dissociate her from the physical realities of life. This becomes apparent from the way in which Conrad presents Lena from Heyst's point of view on the night when Heyst decides to take her to Samburan. Lena appears as a "white, phantom-like apparition" (Vic, 83). Momentarily struck with jealousy when Lena mentions competitors unknown to him, he quickly relents when "the vaporous white figure before him sway[s] pitifully in the darkness" (Vic, 85). Lena intuitively recognizes that Heyst does not love her real self. This becomes evident when she pleads: "I am not the sort that men turn their backs on—and you ought to know it, unless you aren't made like the others. Oh, forgive me! You aren't like the others... Don't you care for me?" (Vic, 86) Heyst's response confirms the fact that he is not attracted by Lena's real self: "what he saw was that, white and spectral, she was putting out her arms to him out of the black shadows like an appealing ghost" (Vic, 86). He is, indeed, not like the
"other men" who are drawn to Lena by her natural charms. Heyst later admits to himself that he spoke the truth in complimenting Lena on her voice and smile, "for the rest—what must be must be" (Vic, 90).

Although Heyst has moments when he loves Lena for her real self, moments when "he [has] no illusions about her, but his sceptical mind [is] dominated by the fulness of his heart" (Vic, 83), he does not give Lena the love she wants while she is alive (See Vic, 247). When he finally wants to give her his love, it is too late: "He considered himself a dead man already, yet forced to pretend that he was alive for her sake, for her defense. He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust—warm, living, sentient, his own—and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body" (Vic, 354-4).

Heyst has no "heaven" for Lena because he is unable to recognize the importance of love. As in Lingard's case, the glimpse of Paradise blinds Heyst to the importance of the ordinary experiences of life. Consequently, Lena must seek entry into the "sanctuary of his innermost heart" (Vic, 407) by sacrificing her life to prove her love for Heyst.

13 Ibid., p. 110.
She finds her meaning in a "blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose" (Vic, 367), and, for the first time, Heyst faces a real meaning which he cannot refine away. In anguish and regret he confesses the truth which he has discovered too late: "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!" (Vic, 410)

Heyst can have Lena only in death, and to have her he commits suicide: "He couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body—and fire purifies everything" (Vic, 410). Suicide by fire which leaves only ashes is ironically appropriate for Heyst who has toyed too long with cynicism, or the repudiation of meaning in life. "The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword" (LJ, 342).

Cynicism reduces life to dust. "Evaporation precedes liquidation" as crawling into the air precedes drowning. "These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst" (Vic, 3).

Kurtz too is a victim of his egoism. Narcissistically, he drowns mesmerized by his reflection. However, in the myth of Narcissus, the drowned egoist becomes a flower. Although Jim's death is futile, it has an illusory love-
liness. Lord Jim tempts the reader to defend romantic egoism by asking, with Marlow: "Is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all?" (LJ, 349-50) Conrad did not let his readers rest long with any notions that this truth absolved man of responsibility and liberated him to abandoned experiment and invention. He jolted them to wisdom with "Heart of Darkness". This novel offers no balm of consolation. Shuddering inwardly at the collapse of his expectations, Marlow mutters in despair: "Destiny. My destiny! Droll think life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets" (HD, 150).

"Heart of Darkness" takes the reader into a community ravaged by man's single-minded pursuit of an egoistic ideal. Marlow's face, "worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids" (HD, 114), testifies to the spiritual destruction brought about by Kurtz's egoism. Kurtz's report for the 'International Society for the Supression of Savage Customs' is "eloquent, vibrating with eloquence" (HD, 117), and would
presumably provide the same spiritual uplifting for the naive philanthropists for whom it was written, as the code book provides for Marlow. However, the impaled heads and terrified natives testify to the emptiness of the eloquence, the gift Kurtz presumptuously offers to Africa. In "Heart of Darkness", misdirected moral purpose becomes more destructive than lack of purpose. The greedy men of the Eldorado Mining Company "tear treasure out of the bowels of the land... with no moral purpose" (HD, 87); for ivory, Kurtz destroys the people he has come to redeem.

Kurtz dreams of civilizing Africa. He wants "each station [to] be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (HD, 91). Marlow interprets the presumption underlying Kurtz's intention: "He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity... By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded". Marlow suggests "it gave me the notion of an exotic immensity ruled by an august Benevolence" (HD, 118).
But according to Conrad, man derives his "inner strength" to "do good" only from the community. Detachment from the community, in purpose and fact, proves disastrous for Kurtz. "Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want deliberate belief" (HD, 97). What exactly Marlow means by "belief" is difficult to define, but it has to do with duty. Marlow has no time to respond to the "fiendish row" because he has to keep the ship afloat (HD, 97), a symbolic action demonstrating the need for constant vigil in the defense of civilization. Marlow's attitude to duty is similar to that Conrad professes for the English language when he argues: "a matter of discovery and not of inheritance . . . lays the possessor under a lifetime obligation to remain worthy of his good fortune" (PR, viii). Kurtz, in contrast to Marlow, has an undue sense of security in his conviction that civilization is not earned but inherent in the nature of the white man (See HD, 118). Egoism deludes him into thinking that his influence will eliminate the savagery of the African people.

Detachment from civilization proves the error of Kurtz's assumption. His magnificent eloquence is insufficient against the savagery of his own heart in conjunction with
the savagery around him. The wilderness "whisper[s] to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core" (HD, 131). "The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there [in the fiendish row] after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet the truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength" (HD, 97).

As in the case of Jim and Heyst, Kurtz's relationship with his Intended is the measure of his severance from the human community. "You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, 'My Intended'," Marlow tells his audience. "You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it" (HD, 115). Kurtz regards his Intended as a possession rather than as a human being: "I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—-, everything belonged to him. It made me
hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own" (HD, 116).

The world that claims man also defines his meaning and identity. For the egoists, this world becomes a prison. Jim is locked in his "own world of shades" (LJ, 416); Heyst must die to join Lena in the "sanctuary of his innermost heart" (Vic, 407); Nostromo is claimed and held, like the "impious gringos", by the silver that symbolizes the reputation he seeks; Kurtz is held by ivory in the world of savagery and demonism where he has earned his place. He cries out in anguish at the imprisonment: "Save me!—save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save me! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet—I will return. I'll show you what can be done" (HD, 137). He cannot return, however, and with a glance "piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness . . . peep[s] over the edge" (HD, 151) at the world which claims him. In "that
supreme moment of complete knowledge" his eloquent voice fails him, and he can only whisper: "The horror! The horror!" (HD, 149)

The egoists who seek escape from the "destructive element" thus drown in it. Victims of themselves and fate, the "imprudence of [their] thoughts recoils upon [their] heads" (LJ, 342). Constancy to an invented, static self-concept requires that they enter the unchanging, static, and imprisoning world of their dreams. But they are, nevertheless, part of the human community in their blindness, desires, fears, and needs. "[They] have straggled in a way; [they have] not hung on; but [they are] aware of it with an intensity that [makes them] touching, just as a man's more intense life makes his death more touching than the death of a tree" (LJ, 223). Thus, like the fallen heroes of romance who are rejuvenated by emissaries of truth and magical waters of life, Conrad's tragic characters are brought to life again by an author whose vision of life enabled him to recognize that, even in failure, they are "one of us."

14 Marlow uses the phrase several times to suggest that Jim belongs to the craft. In the "Preface" to Lord Jim, Conrad uses the phrase in a broader sense than Marlow to suggest that Jim's experiences are universal: "It was for me with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning ... [because] he was one of us" (Conrad's Prefaces to His Works, ed. Edward Garnett (London, 1937), p.67.
CHAPTER THREE: THE SAVING ILLUSION

The concentration upon alienation in late nineteenth and twentieth century western culture reflects the sense of emptiness and futility which came with the disintegration of belief in moral and metaphysical absolutes. Action becomes virtually meaningless when man has no universally recognized end towards which to strive: communication becomes nearly impossible when the interpretation and understanding of experience is not hinged upon a universally accepted belief in an ordering principle which guides all mankind towards a common destiny. Any basis of communication and action which modern man is able to conjure into existence tends to be regarded with the scorn and doubt.
of an audience viewing Beckett's tramps waiting for Godot. The tramps may communicate, and may have a common reason for waiting, but the price of their faith is the total dissolution of individuality. Vladimir's lines in Act I become Estragon's lines in Act II. They live, but only as puppets of the absurd faith that unites them.

Conrad might possibly have approved of Beckett's sardonic comment on life as a portrayal of futility, having himself compared human activity to the punishment enacted upon Sisyphus. However, Conrad did not accept the human condition as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. "What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance," he writes concerning modern artists in the essay "Books". Conrad goes on to argue: "To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so."

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3 Ibid., p.9.
Again, Conrad's words echo his uncle's letter of October 28/29, 1891: "My assertion is: that although this world is not the best that one could imagine, it is nevertheless the only one we know and it is tolerable to the extent that we neither know any other nor are we able to create one; that society is not quite as bad as some seem to think and that it can't be different from the people who constitute it; and that it is open to improvement provided that individuals try to improve themselves, which in turn is bound to take place provided that with the idea of duty (already recognized as the guiding star in human ethics) they will combine...the thought and conviction of the satisfaction arising from fulfilling altruistic duties."

In addition to its comments upon the necessity for the individual to become involved in society, Bobrowski's letter contains a highly significant reference to social development as "an historical evolutionary compulsion which is slow but sure, and which is governed by the laws of cause and effect derived from the past and affecting

Conrad's Polish Background, p. 154-155.
The idea of an evolutionary social progression is inherent in Conrad's philosophical idea of the community. He writes concerning the legacy of the past which governs mankind: "Who can tell how a tradition comes into the world? We are children of the earth. It may be that the noblest tradition is but the offspring of material conditions, of the hard necessities besetting men's precarious lives. But once it has been born it becomes a spirit. Nothing can extinguish its force then. Clouds of greedy selfishness, the subtle dialectics of revolt or fear, may obscure it for a time, but in very truth it remains an immortal ruler invested with the power of honor and shame."

Here, then, is Conrad's answer to the problem of alienation and futility. The world may well be deprived

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5 Ibid., p. 154.
6 In his book, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967), Avrom Fleishman discusses the organicist tradition which incorporates the idea that social progress is evolutionary. His discussion of the organicist tradition (Chapter 2) is particularly illuminating on Conrad's views concerning the individual's relation to his community.

of metaphysical absolutes, but mankind has an absolute in the past which it has created. By fulfilling his duty towards the community, the individual becomes instrumental in determining its future. This participation gives his life a historical significance as well as "the warm glow of the love for one's fellow men [and] . . . personal satisfaction and appeasement."

In a world plagued by the disintegration of traditional values, it becomes difficult to understand where one's moral obligation lies. Traditional values help man to define to whom or to what he owes his allegiance. Accordingly, Eloise Knapp Hay suggests that Conrad's political scrutinies "are manifestations of a mind laboring to distinguish among the ashes of a dying, self-preoccupied and self-annihilating national tradition and spirit, those sparks of genuine and universal truth which make fidelity a rational principle." Although her comments evoke the vision of an artist engrossed in an attempt to unravel

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a Gordian knot, Conrad was more intent on creating situations that showed "how" rather than "why" the sense of duty saved man. The primary necessity for the individual faced with a moral choice is resignation. "The proper wisdom is to will what the gods will without, perhaps, being certain what their will is--or even if they have a will of their own" (PR, xxi).

Conrad's contemporary, Kafka, provides an illuminating and pertinent analogy of the river to illustrate the need for resignation. Like Conrad, Kafka advises resignation because he is aware of the limits of the use of reason: "Consider . . . the river in spring. It rises until it grows mightier and nourishes more richly the soil on the long stretch of its banks, still maintaining its own course until it reaches the sea, where it is all the more welcome because it is a worthier ally.—Thus far may you urge your meditations on the decrees of the high command.—But after that the river overflows its banks, loses outline and shape, slows down the speed of its current, tries to ignore its destiny by forming little seas in the interior of the land, damages the fields, and yet cannot maintain itself for long in its
new expanse, but must run back between its banks again,  
must even dry up wretchedly in the hot season that presently  
follows.—Thus far may you not urge your meditations. . . ."

Besides being a brilliant analogy for the error and weakness  
of the single-minded pursuit of explanation, Kafka's  
parable complements Conrad's idea of how to show fidelity  
to an undefined, but real, community. In "Well Done",  
Conrad discusses the seaman's fidelity in terms similar to  
Kafka: "Those men understood the nature of their work,  
but more or less dimly, in various degrees of imperfection.  
The best and greatest of their leaders even had never seen  
it clearly, because of its magnitude and the remoteness  
of its end. This is the common fate of mankind, whose most  
positive achievements are born from dreams and visions  
followed loyally to an unknown destination. And it doesn't  
matter. For the great mass of mankind the only saving  
grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest  
at hand and heart in the short moments of each human  
effort. In other and in greater words, what is needed is  
a sense of immediate duty, and a feeling of impalpable  
constraint."

10 "The Great Wall of Peking," Selected Short Stories  

Conrad's insistence upon the "sense of immediate duty" and "fidelity to what is nearest at hand and heart" indicates that he came to recognize the importance of his uncle's advice to "weigh the claims of affection and conscience against [his] own sincerity of purpose" (PR, 42). The emphasis in this type of philosophy is upon form rather than content, where content refers to theoretical morality or law which determines beforehand how an individual must act in any given situation, and form merely refers to the fact that an individual is under a moral obligation at all times. Conrad's deeply sceptical view of theory, particularly as it pertains to law, is most vividly presented in "Heart of Darkness" where the sight of emaciated human beings punished by an "outraged law" reminds Marlow of ships aimlessly firing into a continent (HD, 64). "Principles [and theory] won't do" (HD, 97) because "life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be" (HD, 150-1). "You want a deliberate belief" (HD, 97).

This belief is the "saving illusion", or sense of duty. As an attitude towards life, it enables the individual to make his moral decisions according to the necessities of the situation. Like Kant's categorical imperative
the practical creed enjoins the individual to "act as if the maxim of thy will were to become, by thy adopting it, a universal law." Kant goes on to postulate a second and third qualification, or formula, of the categorical imperative, concluding: "Act from maxims fit to be regarded as universal laws of nature."

The difference between the sense of obligation to one's fellow men and reliance upon principles becomes very evident in Under Western Eves. Razumov finds his identity, or place in the Russian community, only when he ceases to act under an egoistic obligation to his ideal of self which he rationalizes on the basis of abstract political dogma, and begins acting out of a sense of duty towards the immediate community in which he lives. Razumov's test comes when he is forced to decide whether he will betray or help Haldin.

Razumov exposes Haldin because involvement with the young revolutionary would threaten his personal ambitions. "A simple expulsion from the University ... was enough

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13 Ibid., p. 51.
to ruin utterly a young man depending entirely upon the development of his natural abilities for his place in the world. He was a Russian: and for him to be implicated meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths amongst the hopeless and the destitute—the night birds of the city" (UWE, 25-26). In order to justify his betrayal of Haldin, Razumov tries to convince himself that he owes allegiance to the government: "What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary—every obligation of true courage is the other way" (UWE, 37-38).

Razumov uses his isolated condition as an excuse for ignoring his fellow men. He is described as "lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea" (UWE, 10). Confronted by Kostia, he responds with contempt (UWE, 82); trusted by Haldin, he betrays the trust. Like Kurtz, Razumov lacks a clear sense of moral values because he sees himself apart from his community. But, as Zabel points out, "if isolation is the first condition of
[life], it is never an isolation that brings independence or liberty. Freed by choice from normal human ties and obligations, Conrad's men find themselves in the inescapable presence of conscience. Conscience, like the "will of the gods", defies explanation. But it is the "heirloom of the ages, of the race, of the group, of the family, colourable and plastic, fashioned by the words, the looks, the acts, and even by the silences and abstentions surrounding one's childhood; tinged in a complete scheme of delicate shades and crude colours by the inherited traditions, beliefs, or prejudices—unaccountable, despotic, persuasive, and often, in its texture, romantic" (PR, 94).

As Allan O. McIntyre points out ("Conrad on the Functions of the Mind"), Conrad's idea of conscience is not to be mistakenly identified with the traditional Victorian view. Conrad did not equate conscience with the diminutive voice of God, or an absolute standard of morality. "A thing of dignity and sensitivity, it spoke not from the ghost of the supernatural, but from the best of those human traditions of honor and illusion, the

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15 MLQ, 25 (1964), 190.
racial legacy and residue of past experience. . . .

Conscience pointed to and distinguished our acts of fidelity, love and courage."

In violating his conscience, Razumov's "solitary and laborious existence" is destroyed, and he becomes initiated into the moral universe. The initiation redeems him from the kind of a life which Mikulin exemplifies. "All the powers of Razumov's intellect, all the forces of his self-seeking cannot dispel his unconscious apprehension of the solidarity of mankind." The intensity of his anguish becomes apparent in his face which "was older than his age" (UWE, 181); in the sleepless nights whose "complex terrors . . . are recorded in the document" (UWE, 192) which the teacher of languages later receives; and in his feelings as he looks at water flowing "violent and deep" under the bridge:

16 Ibid., p. 190.

17 Ted E. Boyle, Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (London, 1965), p. 208. Like Razumov, Mikulin avoids expressing the intuitive emotional sense of solidarity with his fellow men. He is a lonely sceptic and becomes the victim of the politics which he serves. Just as Marlow is an older and a wiser Jim, so also Mikulin is an older, though unchanged, Razumov.

18 Ibid., p. 205. Boyle analyzes in some depth the psychological manifestations of Razumov's guilt, including the recurring appearance of Haldin's ghost (p. 209).
"Had it flowed through Razumov's breast, it could not have washed away the accumulated bitterness the wreckage of his life had deposited there" (UWE, 198). "Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised" (UWE, 167).

Razumov's attempts to assuage his guilt by rationalization indicates both the human tendency to use reason for self-justification and also moral blindness. In the Conradian universe, man acquires a clear sense of moral values only when he commits himself to someone besides himself: "The inner truth is foreshadowed for those who know how to look at their kind" (PR, xxi). Accordingly, when he begins to love Natalia, Razumov begins to understand the nature of his crime. He confesses: "What could I have known of what was tearing me to pieces and dragging the secret forever to my lips? You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace. You! And you have done it in the same way, too, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence" (UWE, 358). He concludes: "You have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate—the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me" (UWE, 361).

Love for Natalia, thus, enables Razumov to understand the nature of his responsibility. He discovers that his
identity, if he is to have one, is inseparable from his
obligation to mankind. As he confesses to Natalia: "In
giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I
have betrayed most basely. You must believe what I say
now, you can't refuse to believe this. Most basely.
It is through you that I came to feel this so deeply"
(UWE, 361). When he subsequently vindicates Ziemianitch's
honor, Razumov also vindicates himself.

Razumov is not an outstanding man, as Conrad indicates
in the "Author's Note," but in fulfilling his moral obli-
gation to Ziemianitch, he earns his place within the Russian
community. Sophia Antonovna surprises the sceptical
western teacher of languages when she tells him that Razumov
has not gone out and perished, as the narrator believed
(UWE, 361): "Some of us always go to see him when passing
through. He is intelligent. He has ideas. . . . He talks
well, too" (UWE, 379). In the act of duty, Razumov has
become freed of living "in a world without air" (UWE, 360).
He confesses the anguish of assuming responsibility for
his acts, "but there is air to breathe at last—air"
(UWE, 361). In the words of Sophia Antonovna: "It was
just when he believed himself safe and more—infinitely more—
when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl
first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him" (UWE, 380). Thus, Razumov acquires true identity when his love for Natalia makes him aware of the nature of moral responsibility. In asserting his responsibility, he finds his place among the Russian people.

Before he completed Under Western Eyes, Conrad wrote "The Secret Sharer". The two narratives contain numerous parallels, the most obvious being the conflict between obedience to a theoretical law, political and naval, and the need to help an outlaw. In both stories, Conrad emphasizes the fact that men use the theoretical law as a means of pursuing an egoistic purpose by evading moral obligation to the community. Since such a course is doomed to failure, it results in the loss of identity. However, whereas in Under Western Eyes, Conrad stresses the necessity to regain identity through love, in "The Secret Sharer", he emphasizes the need for a sense of duty towards the ship.

The narrator's introduction indicates that he is the typical Conradian character about to be tested. He has little knowledge of other men, particularly his crew.
He feels a stranger to the ship, and, more seriously, a stranger to himself. Confronted by a new world, he wonders "how far [he will] turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly" (SS, 93-94). He is, however, serenely confident that "the ship was like other ships, the men like other men, and that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture." Like Jim after he takes a berth on the Patna, the narrator feels safe: "Suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and the singleness of its purpose" (SS, 96).

But the feeling of security is always dangerous. Accordingly, the captain's solitary reflections are shattered when Leggatt appears "as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea" (SS, 98). The sea which appeared so benevolent to the captain now becomes inimical. Consequently, "a mysterious communication [is] established already between [the] two—in the face of that silent darkened tropical sea" (SS, 99). The rest of the narrative develops their
relation as that of a captain to the secret self which he must hide from the crew if he is to maintain authority on deck: "My double breathed anxiously: ... I was constantly watching my self, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality."

Leggatt makes the captain aware of the dangers of the sea and of the destructive tendencies within himself. The captain realizes, like Leggatt, that he is "precious little better than the rest" (SS, 124). "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" (SS, 124-125). Recognizing that he is not the "secret ideal" he has set up for himself, the young captain flounders in the "destructive element", facing the alternatives of "trying to crawl into the air" or submitting and exerting himself to make the deep sea keep him up.

His strange identification with Leggatt becomes a way of attempting to escape. Not a matter of solidarity, but, as he realizes later, of "sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice" (SS, 132), the identification indicates extreme self-consciousness, the loss of confidence in himself, and the loss of a sense of individuality and purpose. The
captain's nervousness and fear jeopardizes Leggatt and it destroys his authority on deck.

As the situation on the Sephora clearly indicates, a captain's lack of confidence and authority is a dangerous threat to his command. Leggatt is the scapegoat for Archbold's insufficiency. Although Archbold has been the captain of the 'Sephora' for fifteen years, his knowledge of the sea, the ship, the men, and most seriously, himself, is no more advanced than that of the inexperienced narrator. Like the young captain, Archbold is "afraid of [his] men, and also of that old second mate of his" (SS, 107). His ineptitude results in a constant turnover of chief mates (SS, 107). He shows complete lack of courage before his men: "All his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather" (SS, 107). Expecting no dangers from the sea, he allows his wife to accompany him on the voyage. "A seaman labouring under an undue sense of security," Conrad writes in "The Mirror of the Sea, "becomes at once worth hardly half his salt" (MS, 18). An inept representative of the law, he shakes "like a leaf" while insisting "I represent the law here" (SS, 107). Without an understanding of duty and courage, he attributes
the saving of his ship to divine intervention: "God's
own hand in it. . . . Nothing less could have done it.
I don't mind telling you that I hardly dared give the
order. It seemed impossible that we could touch anything
without losing it, and then our last hope would have been
gone" (SS, 118). Archbold's argument indicates that he
has lost all sense of purpose: the gear is useless unless
it is used.

Archbold's absurd fear of losing his gear parallels
the young captain's fear of losing belief in his secret
ideal. Willingness to test an ideal self-concept indicates
the assumption of responsibility for one's actions. This
sense of responsibility comes with acceptance of the
fact that personal dignity and identity are "inseparably
united with the dignity of one's work" (PR, xviii).
Unwilling to forfeit his egoistic concern for the self,
Archbold fails as a captain. Like Razumov, who uses
theoretical considerations to rationalize his crime,
Archbold tries to escape the fact that he has failed as
a captain by clinging to the law: "To the law, His
obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incom-
prehensible and a little awful; something, as it were,
mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not
be suspected of 'countenancing any doings of that sort.'

Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over
twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the
'Sephora', seemed to have laid him under some pitiless
obligation (SS, 118-119).

The young captain learns from Archbold's mistake.

Like Marlow, he escapes the paralyzing hold of his fear of
failure because he becomes concerned with his duty towards
the ship. Realizing that Leggatt is not an extension of
the self, but a man who must follow his own destiny, the
narrator returns to the deck and displays the authority
that comes with a full sense of responsibility. First
he demands order and obedience from the second mate. He
then shows remarkable self-possession in giving the mate

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19 Guerard's chapter I entitled "The Journey Within,"
is important for the clarity with which the author dis-
tinguishes between loyalty to self and loyalty to community
in the situations of doubles. Guerard says: "It is, at
our first response, a dramatic outward relationship. But
as a double Leggatt is also very inwardly a secret self.
He provokes a crippling division of the narrator's per-
sonality, and one that interferes with his seamanship"
(p. 24). On the decision to free Leggatt, Guerard com-
ments: "Leggatt is perhaps a free man in several senses,
but not least in the sense that he has escaped the nar-
rator's symbolizing projection. He has indeed become
"mere flesh" (p. 25).
an order which he knows will be considered sheer lunacy.

The difference between concern for self and concern for the ship becomes most apparent during the dangerous sailing maneuver. Looking for accomplishment rather than security, the captain realizes the need to understand the nature of his task. "And now I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship. I did not know her. Would she do it? How was she to be handled?" (SS, 141) The sense of solidarity allays the loneliness and responsibility of command. Having broken his narcissistic identification with Leggatt, the captain can now regard Leggatt as a man who will perhaps understand "why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close--no less" (SS, 141). The captain's expression of solidarity with Leggatt then aids him in the most crucial moment of the maneuver. When he must know whether the ship is moving, the hat, his expression of humanity towards Leggatt, appears beside the ship. It "was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness" (SS, 142).

The young captain presumably becomes a very able commander, having submitted his will to the needs of the community. The "vision of humanity has broken in
upon the impersonal regimen of his days—upon the 'ideal conception of one's own personality,' abstract, illusory, and therefore insecure and perilous, which 'every man sets up for himself secretly.' The 'sharing' has recreated him, stirred him to a sense of his latent moral insecurity, and so enforced in him the necessity of human community—that 'unavoidable solidarity' which Conrad persistently invokes as the inescapable commitment of men." By turning to the community, the young captain finds the reconciliation and identity which every man seeks.

"Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command" (SS, 143).

In The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Conrad shows how the harmony on board a ship is destroyed when men lose their sense of duty towards the ship. It is only when they regain the sense of solidarity by fulfilling their obligations towards the ship, that the voyage can be completed successfully.

The men of the 'Narcissus' face "a problem that has

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arisen on board a ship where the conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it stand out with a particular force and colouring." The situation Conrad selects thus serves to emphasize man's total dependence upon his own resources. The success or failure of the ship's journey depends upon the conduct of the crew. It is this kind of responsibility which Archbold attempts to evade by attributing the saving of his ship to divine intervention and the murder to "some disease". Similarly, the crew of the 'Narcissus' want to evade their responsibility. This becomes evident by their response to the captain's question concerning their dissatisfaction: "They wanted great things. And suddenly all the simple words they knew seemed to be lost for ever in the immensity of their vague and burning desire. They knew what they wanted, but they could not find anything worth saying" (NN, 134).

Donkin's and Wait's appeal to their "naive instincts" (NN, 12) causes the crew to lose their sense of fidelity to the ship and the tradition of the sea. A violent storm temporarily makes them forget themselves, restoring the sense of solidarity. After the storm, however, Donkin's

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Letter to Henry S. Canby, April 7, 1924. Life and Letters, II, 342.
appeal become even stronger. Like Heyst's father, the men begin to believe that their efforts make them "indubitably good men; our deserts were great and our pay small. Through our exertions we had saved the ship and the skipper would get the credit of it. What had he done" (NN, 101-102). Donkin's eloquent demands for "rights" appeal to their inherent egoism, and James Wait becomes the "emblem of [their] aspirations" (NN, 122) not to be "put upon".

Because the sailors do not resign themselves to the purposes of the ship, they become vulnerable to the "destructive element". In losing their sense of purpose and meaning, they become corrupted with arrogant pessimism, and begin to think of mutiny. "Through [Jim] we were becoming highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathized with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions--as though we had been over-civilized, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life" (NN, 139).

The men have, in fact, lost the sense of personal dignity that comes with the faithful performance of duty. This becomes apparent early in the novel when, like the
young captain in "The Secret Sharer", the crew awakens
to its inherent weaknesses: "[Jim] trampled on our self-
respect, he demonstrated to us daily our want of moral
courage; he tainted our lives. Had we been a miserable
gang of wretched immortals, unhallowed alike by hope and
fear, he could not have lorded it over us with a more
pitiless assertion of his sublime privilege" (NN, 47).
The crew's feelings are comparable to those of the corrupt
and despicable immortals whom Gulliver meets in his third
voyage. Like the Struwwelbrü he whose immunity from danger
and death results in corruption, Conrad's characters suffer
moral disintegration when they fail to recognize the dan-
gers of life and the necessity for exertion. Lacking
this sense of purpose in exertion they become fascinated,
like Decoud, with death.

As Dain Moroola in Almayer's Folly realizes, death
has terror for a man only when his commitment to some-
body else causes him to cherish life. This commitment
enables man to realize the necessity for exertion which
alone gives life meaning. For this reason, there is so
much intense conflict in Conrad's fiction. "On men
reprieved by its disdainful mercy, the immortal sea con-
fers in its justice the full privilege of desired rest.
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" (NN, 90). The later Hemingway whose heroes find their meaning in the match of strength with bulls or the crucial life and death struggle with a giant marlin echoes Conrad's philosophy.

The keen sense of honor in struggling with a champion, and the brotherly love he displays for his opponent who represents the forces of nature, make Hemingway's Santiago an interesting parallel of Conrad's Singleton. Like Singleton, Santiago returns from his struggle with "completed wisdom" (NN, 99). Both learn the value of life from their confrontation with death. Therefore, they abhor cowardice: Santiago, the scavenger sharks; Singleton, the scavenger Donkin. Both men become representatives of the noblest traditions of their community: Santiago of the historical sense of a fisherman people towards the sea; Singleton of the historical tradition of seamanship. As representatives of the only qualities that unite man with his past and his future, they demonstrate what Conrad meant by the invincible conviction of solidarity that unites the "dead to the living and the living to the unborn" (NN, viii).

Singleton resembles a "learned and savage patriarch,
the incarnation of barbarian wisdom serene in the blasphemous turmoil of the world" (NN, 6). His wisdom links the initiate Charley with the generations of sailors who "knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity" (NN, 25). Like a prophet, the ancient sailor appears "colossal, very old; old as Father Time himself, who should have come there into this place as quiet as a sepulchre to contemplate with patient eyes the short victory of sleep, the consoler" (NN, 24).

By developing Singleton's individuality, Conrad emphasizes the fact that the tradition which Singleton represents and which redeems man is a purely human achievement. Unlike Merlin and other figures who rescue the heroes of medieval romance with magic and super-human powers, Conrad's Singleton experiences the dangers and suffering of existence. His anguish is intensely individual: "He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perceptions of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatience voice calling for him out of a 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. . ." (NN, 99).

The grace that enables Singleton to appease his anguish also originates, not in divine intervention, but in the human sense of duty. Singleton does not succumb to passive despair when the storm makes him aware of his own mortality (NN, 99) but "at midnight. . . turn[s] out to duty as if nothing had been the matter" (NN, 98).

When the other sailors, like Singleton, recover their sense of duty towards the ship, they are able to complete the voyage. If separation from the land suggests the loneliness of human responsibility, the return to shore signifies the kind of reconciliation and solidarity that becomes possible in the Conradian universe. This solidarity manifests itself in the feeling that binds the sailors together, and in the feeling that causes Singleton, like Santiago, to regard with affection and respect, the sea with which he has struggled. The "destructive element" then becomes a hospitable element. As Conrad says, "Water is friendly to man. . . . And of all the elements this is the one to which men have always been prone to trust themselves, as if its immensity held a reward as vast as
itself." (MS, 101). When Singleton is claimed, he takes "with him the long record of his faithful work into the peaceful depths of a hospitable sea" (MN, 172).

Thus, the individual who escapes the egoistic shadow and commits himself to something greater than himself, finds reconciliation, meaning, and identity. Conrad's philosophy reminds one of Dame Philosophy's advice in The Consolation of Boethius. In the Boethian universe, only men who learn to regard themselves within the larger framework of a chain of love can escape the anguish and tragedy of fortune. The closer man can approximate, in his thoughts and hopes, the divine, unchanging centre of the chain, the less he becomes the victim of fortune and the more his will becomes influential. In the Conradian universe, the larger framework is the commonwealth of mankind. Man finds his sustaining hope in the sense of solidarity which results, paradoxically, from the loneliness and anguish of responsibility: "Hadn't we, together and upon the immortal sea wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives?" (MN, 173).

Razumov, the captain in "The Secret Sharer", and the crew of the 'Narcissus' are able to find their identity by successfully engaging the hostile forces which they encounter on their quest through life. The forces which
Conrad's characters confront are not of the elaborate and supernatural type normally encountered by heroes of romance. This fact does not reduce, but rather intensifies the dramatic conflicts of the quest. However, not being a heroic world, Conrad's universe "rests on a few very simple ideas" (PR, xxi) like the devotion to duty, the conviction of fidelity, the belief in the value of work which gives man—the chance to find [himself]. [His] own reality—for [himself]" (HD, 85). Although humble, these truths are exacting, and the individual who is equal to them becomes successful in his quest for identity.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE MOMENT OF VISION

It was natural for a writer of romantic and adventurous temperament, who spent most of his youth and early manhood in travel, to use the metaphor of the journey when writing about the search for truth, meaning and purpose in life. For Conrad, "any task undertaken in an adventurous spirit acquires the merit of romance" (PR, 96). He not only used the journey as a structure for many of his stories, but also used the idea of the pilgrimage in his discussions of the artistic endeavour. For example, in the "Preface" to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Conrad writes: "The sincere endeavour to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength
will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering, weariness or reproach, is the only valid justification for the worker in prose" (NN, ix). In A Personal Record, he refers to the literary pursuit as "something for which a material parallel can only be found in the everlasting sombre stress of the westward winter passage round Cape Horn. For that too is the wrestling of men with the might of their Creator, in a great isolation from the world, without the amenities and consolations of life, a lonely struggle under a sense of over-matched littleness, for no reward that could be adequate, but for the mere winning of a longitude" (PR, 98-9).

The parallel is illuminating. For the artist, like the sailor, the struggle is a matter of survival: "The artist in his calling of interpreter creates . . . because he must. He is so much of a voice that, for him, silence is like death." Consequently, both artist and seaman must relinquish egoistic purposes. "The good artist," Conrad writes, "should expect no recognition of his toil and no admiration of his genius." Rather than concerning himself with the reward, the good artist concerns himself with his task. The task is to "carry . . . justification in every line"

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2 "Books," Notes, p.9.
in a "single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect" (NN, vii).

Just as the crew of the 'Narcissus' finds meaning in successfully completing the voyage, Conrad felt convinced of his own reality and identity when his art had meaning for other men. In a letter to Edward Garnett dated April 20, 1897, Conrad wrote: "My dear fellow you keep me straight in my work and when it is done you still direct its destinies! And it seems that if you ceased to do either life itself would cease. For me you are the reality outside, the expressed thought, the living voice! And without you I would think myself alone in an empty universe."

To Richard Curie he wrote (July 14, 1923): "Without mankind, my art, an infinitesimal thing, could not exist."

Discussing Nevalis' comment that "it is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it," Conrad argues: "And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow-men's existence strong enough to take

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upon itself the form of imagined life clearer than reality" (PR, 15).

As Marlow's experience indicates, belief in the existence of one's fellow men comes with the realization that the hard realities of life are shared by all mankind. Marlow believes most strongly in Jim's reality whenever Jim's hope, despair, sorrow, and exuberance reminds him of his own experiences. The conviction of solidarity persuades Marlow that he can make Jim exist for his listeners. Similarly, the belief in human solidarity is the "saving illusion" which enables the artist to "convey the life-sensation of [a] given epoch of . . . existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence" (HD, 82).

Thus, Conrad's artistic quest involves the test which Conrad describes by again using the metaphor of the journey: "The artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal" (NN, viii). Like his characters, Conrad must accept the human condition, or submit. In doing so, the artist appeals "to our
capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery
surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty,
and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all
creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of
solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable
hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in
aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds
men to each other" (NN, viii).

Marlow's despair over the impossibility of communicating
in a world where truth is relative because "we live, as we
dream—alone" (HD, 82) indicates the difficulty of the artist's
task. In a letter to Edward Noble dated November 2, 1895,
Conrad wrote: "No man's light is good to any of his fellows.
That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of
life,—a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas, and prin­
ciples of other people's making. These are only a web of
illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only
5 a dismal lie to me." Nevertheless, although the meaning
of life may differ for every individual, the basic realities
of life are universal and make communication possible.
Accordingly, for Conrad, as for Marlow, the meaning of an

5 Life and Letters, I, 184.
episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (HD, 48). The meaning in Conrad's fiction, therefore, exists in the reader's imagination where, alone, truth can find an "effective and undeniable existence" (PR, 25). Conrad's role as an artist was to present the events and aspects of life in a manner that would elicit an imaginative response from the reader.

Conrad's words serve as a "medium for meaning, an enveloping fact or action which makes visible a halo". Concerning his method, Conrad wrote: "It is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage" (NN, ix). "The artistic

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aim when expressing itself in written words must . . .

make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is
to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions" (NN, ix).

"My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of
the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is,
before all, to make you see" (NN, x).

In his perceptive study of Conrad's art, Ramon Fernandez
suggests that the art of Conrad "does not trace the reality
before man but the man in face of reality; it evokes subjectively integrated experiences because the impression is
equivalent to the totality of the perception and because man
suffers it in its entirety and with all his might." Because
Conrad's appeal is made to the reader's subjective faculties,
the reader participates in the confrontation with reality.

He, too, subjectively integrates the experience and the
reality "with [its] true meaning" by "creat[ing] the moral,
the emotional atmosphere of the place and time" (NN, ix).

In other words, the reader participates in the quest for
meaning. Francis Cutler writes: "With Conrad we
actually enter the creative process: we grope with him

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through blinding mists, we catch at fleeting glimpses and thrill with sudden illumination."

_Nestromo_ is one of the best examples of Conrad's ability to communicate through the appeal to the senses. Although the novel deals with an imaginary situation, its reader confronts the reality of human experience which is "based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena." The novel's "accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history" (PR, 15). The illusion of the novel acquires meaning and truth for the reader just as the dream of Conrad's characters becomes real when it is transformed into action.

Through his appeal to the senses, Conrad makes the imaginary world of Costaguana exist for the reader. For example, in the opening paragraph he provides the historical details of Sulaco in a manner that allows the reader to feel its Latin American atmosphere: "In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards, the town of Sulaco --the luxuriant beauty of the orange gardens bears witness to its antiquity--had never been commercially anything more

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important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade in ox-hides and indigo" (Nos, 3). The slow cadence of the sentence, established by its regular breaks, and the specific details which suggest that historically, Sulaco has been economically insignificant are particularly effective in creating a feeling of the somnolent tranquility which characterizes isolated and backward tropical and semi-tropical countries.

The first chapter of Nostromo is a good example of how Conrad uses natural description to create a desired effect upon the reader. By gradually becoming more specific in the use of adjectives and detail, he creates the effect of diminishing distance from the vantage point and the coastline of Costaguana. The reader feels as if he himself is entering Costaguana. The historical details, superstitions, legend, and rumors associated with the natural landmarks which Conrad describes not only create atmosphere, but also convey the sense of time elapsing during the approach to Sulaco.

Conrad first describes the entire coastline from the point of view of a person seeing Costaguana from a distance:
"On one side of this broad curve in the straight seaboard of the Republic of Costaguana, the last spur of the coast range forms an insignificant cape whose name is Punta Mala" (Nos, 3). Upon crossing the "imaginary line" connecting the "two outermost points of the bend which bears the name of the Golfo Placido" (Nos, 5), the eye is able to see landmarks in greater detail because the shoreline is closer. The adjectives become more specific: one sees the "towering and serrated wall of the Cordillera, a clear-cut vision of dark peaks rearing their steep slopes on a lofty pedestal of forest rising from the very edge of the shore" (Nos, 6). The description becomes even more particularized as the imaginary ship passes the three islets that stand opposite to Sulaco harbour. Specific details like dead leaves on coarse sand, bushes, an old ragged palm, and the smooth trunks of trees create the effect of proximity. And "from that low end of the Great Isabel the eye plunges through an opening two miles away, as abrupt as if chopped with an axe out of the regular sweep of coast, right into the harbour of Sulaco" (Nos, 7). Next, the eye is able to pick out the cupola, the "white miradors on a vast grove of orange trees" and the "tops of walls" (Nos, 8), which suggest the entry into the port. With the description of
activity in the port (Chapter Two), the reader's point of view is from within Sulaco and he becomes an involved observer in the unfolding drama.

The drama centers upon human aspirations which are constantly threatened by the "destructive element". Conrad uses the concrete situation of man's struggle for economic prosperity to present the difficulties man encounters in making his dream come true. Economic prosperity depends upon trade. But natural forces have, in the past, kept Sulaco from being an important port. The Golfo Placido cannot be penetrated by deep sea galleons or their fleet successors: "Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple open to the ocean, with its walls of lofty mountains hung with the mourning draperies of coulds" (Nos, 3). Ships entering the bay become the prey of "capricious airs that play with them." The "head of the calm gulf is filled on most days . . . by a great body of motionless and opaque clouds" (Nos, 5). At night, the sky "smothers" the "quiet gulf" with an "impenetrable
darkness" (Nos, 6). The ship "floats" and her sails "flutter" (Nos, 7).

In addition to making the reader sense the placidity of the bay, which is an obstacle to the fulfillment of human aspirations, Conrad introduces the legend of treasure seekers who were unable to leave Azuera with their "forbidden wealth". By introducing the story of the "implious gringos" as a legend, Conrad surrounds its truth with an air of mystery and superstition. Certain human desires are unattainable, or "forbidden", and best not pursued. Recurring allusions to the legend make the reader sense it as a pervading truth with which the major characters in the novel must contend.

Technological advances in mining techniques and transportation, and sophistication of world trade and finance appear to repudiate the truth of the legend. Gould's idealistic dream of improving the human conditions in Costaguana on the premise that social progress accompanies economic prosperity seems attainable. The "forbidden wealth" of the San Tomé silver mine becomes the symbol of men's dreams and aspirations. The mine "was to become an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live. Security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain-gorge" (Nos, 110). The mine
does, indeed, become a rallying point, but not in the way Gould intended. Silver, like Donkin's "rights", stands between the people of Costaguana and the sense of moral responsibility, the only dream that enables social progress to occur in Conrad's world. The inhabitants of Costaguana revolt in the desire to possess silver, the trusted Capataz becomes a thief, and Gould's idealism changes into an obsession with the economic success of the mine. Silver, like the egoistic dream, has no inherent value and protects neither individuals nor communities from the destructive tendencies of human nature.

Through the use of concrete situations, Conrad enables the reader to recognize the fact that scientific advances and civilization do not alter the need for a "saving illusion" that commits man to the community. Ironically, it is the accomplices of the "destructive element", not Gould, who possess the advantage of technology in the most crucial situation of the novel. Nostromo and Decoud rely upon wind to escape with the lighter and its cargo of silver. Sotillo, who has come to steal the silver, is able to enter Sulaco on a steamship. Unable to escape from the Golfo Placido because there is no wind, the lighter is struck by Sotillo's ship. The accident initiates a chain of
events that culminate in Decoud's suicide and Nostromo's corruption. Possessing none of the "inborn strength" which man acquires when he has a sense of obligation to the community, Decoud and Nostromo are dragged into the "destructive element" by the silver. The novel completes its full circle, beginning where it ended, with legendary seekers of "forbidden wealth" guarding the treasure which they cannot use to achieve the peace and felicity which they, like all mankind, seek.

Decoud's body lies at the bottom of the gulf weighted with bars of silver; and, "from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love" (Nos, 566).

The reader has recrossed the "imaginary line" (Nos, 5) that first marked his entry into the Golfo Placido and the imaginary country of Costaguana. Nostromo becomes part of the legend of unfortunate treasure seekers to which Conrad introduced the reader in the opening pages of the novel. However, because the concrete events of the novel enable the reader to see, hear, and feel, the legend is changed from a superstition into a truth.
Conrad's art also enables the reader to apprehend the subjective feelings of the characters involved in the struggle with the "destructive element." Because he senses the placidity of the bay, and the hostility of nature, particularly Azuera, where, it is rumored, not even a blade of grass draws nourishment, the reader understands the mental anguish of solitude that causes Decoud to despair and finally commit suicide. The fog, and awesome stillness enveloping the lighter which carries Nostromo's and Decoud's hopes, accentuates the sense of futility and helplessness of imprisonment within the Golfo Placido. The brutal physical tortures inflicted upon Hirsch externalize the inner spiritual suffering of Dr. Monygham, Gould, Decoud, Nostromo, Giorgio Violo, and Gould's wife. Similarly, the natural forces which make "forbidden wealth" inviolable externalize the internal qualities in man that keep him from achieving the good which he seeks when he clings to an ego-centric dream. Like Giselle, the reader admits when the raging conflict is over: "I cannot understand. I cannot understand. But I shall never forget thee. Never! . . . Never! Gian' Battista!" (Nos, 566)

Although Conrad stresses the fact of human corruptibility, Nostromo is not a cynical novel. Scenes like the one in which Giselle weeps over Nostromo and the one
where Mrs. Gould protects Nostromo's reputation by not revealing the import of his final confession to Dr. Monygham suggest the redeeming power of human solidarity. In the "Author's Note," Conrad invokes this sense of solidarity: "In his mingled love and scorn of life and in the bewildered conviction of having been betrayed, of dying betrayed he hardly knows by what or by whom, he is still of the People, their undoubted Great Man—with a private history of his own" (Nos, xiii).

The presentation of human corruptibility in Conrad's works has a similar effect upon the reader as the awakening and discovery of personal insufficiency has on characters like the crew of the 'Narcissus', Jim, and the captain in "The Secret Sharer". Like the characters, the reader faces the choice of trying to escape, or submitting. If he submits, and accepts the fact that "they are one of us" he awakens to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity", the "wider feeling" to which Marlow refers in a comment on his attitude towards Jim: "Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation? What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be
close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is... the strength of a wider feeling—the feeling that binds a man to a child. He was there before me, believing that age and wisdom can find a remedy against the pain of truth" (LJ, 129). Having himself felt the anguish of alienation, loss of identity and condemnation, the attempt to understand Jim awakens in Marlow the feeling of solidarity. Therefore, Marlow stands between Jim and the darkness of oblivion: "He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you" (LJ, 224).

The capacity of art to "snatch ... a passing phase of life ... [and] hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment ... [to] reveal the substance of its truth" (NN, x) caused Conrad to compare the creative art of fiction to rescue work: "The creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values—the permanence of memory. And the multitude
feels it obscurely too; since the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry 'Take me out of myself!' meaning really, out of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness." The artist's response is an affirmation of solidarity, as Conrad indicates when reminiscing on his work: "It seems now to have had a moral character, for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers on this earth?" (PR, 9)

Therefore in an imaginary argument with Almayer, Conrad writes: "I wrapped round [your name's] unhonoured form the royal mantle of the tropics and have essayed to put into the hollow sound the very anguish of paternity—feats which you did not demand from me—but remember that all the toil and all the pain were mine. . . . Since you were always complaining of being lost to the world, you should remember that if I had not believed in your existence . . . you would have been much more lost" (PR, 88). The "mantle" is enough to assure Almayer, and Conrad's other characters a place in the community of fiction and in the tradition of art.

10 Ibid., p. 13.
And, like the characters in his novels who acquire a sense of their own reality when they affirm solidarity with their fellow-men, Conrad's artistic loyalty to mankind gives him the sense of his own reality. "There is that handful of 'characters' from various ships to prove that all these years have not been altogether a dream" (PR, 110).

The quest for identity in Conrad's fiction thus involves the author as well as his characters. Its aim "is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of these heartless secrets which are called Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult" (NN, xi-xii). Man must immerse himself in the "destructive element", or plunge into life, while exerting himself to give a personal meaning and value to life. The involvement in life gives life its meaning. Then the individual awakens to a sense of solidarity of belonging to the community of mankind and of being an integral part of the visible world. This feeling of oneness with the world in which he lives gives the individual the sense of personal identity which is so essential for peace and happiness.

Conrad's manner of self-expression was to create a fictional world. The human failure and success which he depicts become part of the tradition which is mankind's
legacy and guide, the source of "inborn strength". Like the beauty, cracks, and discolorations of stone on Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli", Conrad's "presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth" (NN, x), achieves the beauty and triumph of art. For "when it is accomplished—behold!— all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh—and the return to an eternal rest" (NN, xii).

Thus, as he traced his heroes' quest for identity in a fictional world and communicated to his readers those moments of vision which disclose the meaning of human existence, Conrad found his own identity as an artist.
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