THE THEME OF ISOLATION IN THE WORK OF JOSEPH CONRAD

by

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B.A. University of British Columbia, 1954

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
M.A.
in the Department of
ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April, 1958.
ABSTRACT

Central in the work of Joseph Conrad is the theme of isolation, of the loneliness of man, and of alienation from one's own kind, a theme which, in some form, dominates the work of many modern writers and thinkers.

A study of the criticism of Conrad shows that this preoccupation with the isolated man has always been noticed and was early linked to Conrad's own position in the world as an exile. Recent critics have delved more deeply into the subject, and have shown its relationship to the threatened break-up of society seen in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and have declared Conrad a forerunner of such modern authors as Gide, Eliot, Kafka, Malraux, among others, in whose work the "exile" of man is also a central thought. While many critics have touched upon this aspect of Conrad's writings, I have felt that the theme is so central to Conrad's total outlook on life that a fuller analysis of this question was necessary for an adequate appreciation and understanding of his writing. This thesis, then, is an endeavour to explore more fully the theme of isolation in Conrad's books, to try to distinguish the various types of isolation he deals with and their causes, and to link with this central theme the other beliefs—moral, political, and social—disclosed by Conrad in his work.
As Conrad says repeatedly that his writing reflects honestly his view of life, and as most of his stories are at least semi-autobiographical, I have begun with Conrad himself, particularly with his early life. To these early years may be traced many of the ideas and emotions which are reflected in his stories and choice of themes. Also central in Conrad's work and closely related to his theme of isolation is his concern with love and friendship, two important ways in which man's terrible sense of aloneness may be alleviated—though never completely or permanently dispelled. To Conrad man exists not only in relation to other men, but also, in the form of an "idea", to himself, and thus there runs through his work the theme of self-discovery through experience, often the terrifying discovery of one's aloneness or, as all illusions are stripped off, of one's "hollowness". Closely related to this, often acting as a contributory cause, is the isolation of the settings of his stories, an isolation necessary for such self-confrontation.

Conrad himself found his fullest identification with a professional group, and places much stress upon the value of a tradition as a means to keep men together, to combat the fears, doubts, and selfish individualism which may disrupt mankind's "solidarity". The evil man is the individualist who considers fidelity to a code "childish", and puts his faith in himself and follows his own desires. Unlike those separated from others by guilt for breaking a
code—a type found repeatedly in Conrad's books—the truly evil man is self-confident, with both the strength and the weakness of the wilful isolate. When traditional values solidify into mere conventions and are based upon smugness and self-approval, they become separating forces. In many of his books Conrad presents victims of conventional morality. He also realizes that even living traditions may isolate, and that men in a different moral climate, men of different races, even of different temperaments, may find themselves "exiles". Some of the more fortunate ones may overcome in part this kind of isolation through developing what Conrad calls a "job sense", a keeping in touch with reality through work. But even more important is the power of imagination to bridge this gulf, the power that he calls "imaginative sympathy".

Closely allied to Conrad's interest in the imagination as both "the enemy of mankind" and the gift that helps man to transcend his own and another's loneliness, is his interest in the romantic, another self-willed exile. Conrad explores all aspects of idealism as both separating and binding forces in society, examines the strengths and weaknesses of various types of idealists, both selfish and unselfish, and studies the results of their pursuit of illusions and reactions to disillusionment upon the dreamers themselves and upon society. Related to this are Conrad's theories regarding freedom and his fear of all forms of repression, political, social, or domestic, which, he believes, lead to isolation.
Conrad makes a further distinction in his treatment of the isolate. In several stories he analyzes critically but sympathetically the intellectual who accepts isolation as a protective philosophy. Convinced of the barrenness of all man's ideals and struggles, and superior in his "clear-sightedness" and withdrawal, such a person eventually finds his position untenable; life breaks in and, being unattached, he is defenceless. It is with this type of "exile" that Conrad seems to come to his most definite conclusions.

Thus, while isolation is not the only theme with which Conrad deals, yet it seems to be the central one, the theme which most occupies his thoughts, and the one to which may be related his other social, political, and personal beliefs.
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Date April 14, 1958
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Note: The references to Conrad's works are to the Uniform Edition (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London) and the Concord Edition (Doubleday, Page and Co., Garden City, New York) which have identical pagination. Where no author is given in a footnote, the author is Conrad.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of my debt to Dr. M. Steinberg who provided not only the initial inspiration but also much constructive criticism and many suggestions which enlarged my viewpoint.
CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION

It is often the fate of the intelligent, sensitive artist to be aware of forces and trends in his society before they become apparent to the general public. Joseph Conrad, a displaced European in a safe, complacent England, perceived in western society a movement toward chaos, toward renunciation of previously accepted beliefs and standards of behaviour without a general acceptance of any new theory of values to replace the old. Though Conrad did not fully understand the restlessness and the uncertainties of his time, he responded to them emotionally. He sensed the horror of a world with no moral standards, of men no longer held together by a common background of beliefs and becoming terribly aware of their aloneness in a morally anarchistic world. Conrad's early audience did not comprehend this element in his work, and either accepted his books as good romantic sea-tales, or complained that the author was a pessimist. Conrad was puzzled, disheartened, and even embittered by his readers' lack of insight, for, like so many of the characters in his books, he wanted to be "understood". In 1908, he wrote to his friend, John Galsworthy:

I own that I am cast down. I suppose I am a fool to have expected anything else. I suppose there is something in me that is unsympathetic to the general public — because the novels of Hardy, for instance, are generally tragic enough and gloomily written too — and yet they have sold in
their time and are selling to the present day. 
Foreignness, I suppose. 
All this is a matter for anxious thought.¹

Later more discerning critics² accounted for the element of fear in Conrad's work and his frequent themes of betrayal and of separation by relating these to his personal life — which is only part of the truth. A new and disillusioned generation can now more fully understand Conrad's apprehension, his desire for "certitudes", and his frequent cries for "trust and faith", and to-day's critics are re-assessing his books as being the forerunners of those of Gide, Thomas Mann, Eliot, Malraux — indeed, of most great writers of our century. They express, in some form, modern man's awareness of his isolation and of his search for new values — what Conrad would call "anchors" — so that his life may be meaningful to himself and be related to the flow of mankind. There is a revival of interest in Conrad's work. Contemporary readers who have seen the degradation of man in Europe can understand Conrad's journeys into "The Heart of Darkness"; they can comprehend his frequent pictures of despair, of disillusionment, and of the inertia brought about by the feeling of being overwhelmed by forces too strong, too chaotic, for the individual to control. Above all, they can understand one of the themes


running through all Conrad's work, the theme of the essential loneliness of the individual, and of his desire, indeed, his necessity, to transcend this aloneness in some way.

The purpose of this essay is to explore this theme in Conrad's work, to discover the relationships between this theme and the other beliefs held by Conrad, and to come to some conclusions regarding his search for standards upon which "human solidarity" can be built.
CHAPTER II.
CONRAD THE EXILE

"He had no experience of any sort of home life."
- Mrs. Conrad.

Conrad's preoccupation with the isolated man arose partly from his own position in the world as a "displaced person". One of his earliest memories was the sorrow of leaving his home to accompany his parents into exile. His mother's death, hastened by their straitened circumstances, came when the boy was only eight; and for several years the child, without companions, shared the exile of his father, a defeated man, a dreamer who had followed an impossible, hopeless dream faithfully to its inevitable end. Conrad states that his last memory of his father was of watching him burn his manuscripts in the fireplace, "a mortally weary — a vanquished man", and adds, "that act of destruction affected me profoundly by its air of surrender."¹ While the father awaited death calmly, the lonely boy watched its approach with terror. He says later:

I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it sometimes with success, and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe. But when the inevitable entered the sick room and the white door was thrown wide open, I don't think I found a single tear to shed.²

¹ Author's Note to A Personal Record, viii.
One can imagine the solitariness of the twelve year old boy following his father's funeral procession through the streets of Cracow, "the old town of glorious tombs and tragic memories", and also of the profound effect upon him of the consciousness that "rows of bared heads on the pavements with fixed, serious eyes" were also paying tribute, not to the man but "to the Idea" of his fidelity to a cause. A childhood such as Conrad's could not help but mark a person of his sensitive, imaginative temperament. Many characteristics of his novels may be at least partially traced to this period of his life — the misty, ethereal, self-sacrificing and suffering women who are so much like his idealized mother; the father-figure at home either condemning the romantic, wayward son; or quietly giving guidance or sympathy; the interest in the influence of a father's philosophy upon a child, or of a too early mistrust of life; the longing for certitudes and the fear of disorder; the frequent references to man's terror of death; the preoccupation with the power of ideas or ideals to govern man's actions; and the recurring figures in his books of revolutionaries, idealists, and disillusioned dreamers.

Particularly related to Conrad's own loneliness is his interest in tradition as a means to overcome man's sense of isolation, as a thread to link him to the past and to the

3 A Personal Record, viii.

4 Especially evident in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'.
future. Dr. Retinger, who was also a Polish exile in England and, therefore, perhaps more able than English biographers to understand certain aspects of Conrad's character, observes that even Conrad's patriotism had no definite "home".

He could not and did not attach himself to any particular nook or corner of Poland.... His patriotism lacked a physical pivot. He could not enjoy the most intimate kind of patriotism, the love of one's childhood surroundings.... he did not abandon a familiar hearth, or forsake an ancestral playground.5

His patriotism necessarily took the form of fidelity to abstract ideas, to inherited ideals, and his novels repeatedly deal with this theme, the strength of a man who, even in an isolated or alien part of the world, is faithful to a traditional code of behaviour, or the tragedy of a man who breaks the thread which links him to his past. To the accusation that he "deserted" Poland when he went to sea, Conrad answers that "the fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse," a thread of thought which runs through the novel Lord Jim.6 Conrad's "desertion" of his country is quite understandable. The atmosphere of Poland at the time of his early youth was one of


defeat, of bitterness, of worship of the past and of hopelessness regarding the future—a atmosphere that would be suffocating to a boy of his romantic temperament. He fled to the sea, which was always to be for him the symbol of life and freedom. In the active and orderly life of the ship, Conrad found a measure of peace and security. He learned to know men, not the men of sophisticated society, but simple men who battled the elemental forces of wind, sea, and storm, each man living in his own world of dreams and hopes, yet dependent upon the others in the world of the ship. On the frontiers of civilization, where unconventionality is accepted casually, he caught glimpses of the lives of other wanderers, adventurers, and exiles from home—glimpses that stirred his imagination and occupied his thoughts in the long, lonely watches at sea. Isolation, he says, is "not a bad educator," and the experience of isolation gives sailors "an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game." Retinger, on remarking upon Conrad's loneliness—as do all his biographers—notes the effect of Conrad's profession upon his outlook on life, suggesting that:

7 Retinger describes the sadness and dreariness of the Polish cities at this time. According to his book, pp. 15-25, the exodus of young men was a general movement. George Jean-Aubry, The Sea-Dreamer, p. 49, also describes the political atmosphere then, the tendency to give up the fight for Polish freedom and to accept "reality".

8 Chance, p. 32. His tales are often told by such an on-looker.
The sailor's calling which he pursued until he reached middle age made him a solitary figure, more interested in the subtleties of his own mind or in men's psychological reactions than in themselves. His lonely childhood, the lack of congenial companionship during his growing years, his long voyages on tramps or cargo-boats, when he was surrounded by men who must have been his intellectual inferiors, all that accustomed him to live by himself.

Conrad admits that he was soon disillusioned with his concept of the sailor's life as a romantic one, but in his profession, particularly in the British Merchant Marine Service, he found something he needed, a tradition or an ideal not incompatible with his family tradition, and therefore one with which he could identify himself. In a late essay he says of his undoubted over-idealization of the men of his profession:

I have looked upon them with a jealous eye, expecting perhaps even more than it was strictly fair to expect. And no wonder — since I had elected to be one of them very deliberately, very completely, without any looking back or looking elsewhere. The circumstances were such as to give me the feeling of complete identification, a very vivid comprehension that if I wasn't one of them I was nothing at all.

9 Retinger, Conrad and His Contemporaries, p. 82. Hugh Walpole, in Joseph Conrad, New York, Holt, notes the loneliness of Mr. Baker when the Narcissus docks and all the others go to homes or friends, and suggests its connection with Conrad's own loneliness in various ports.

10 Preface to The Mirror of the Sea, vii. The Shadow-Line is a semi-autobiographical account of this period of disillusionment through which he was guided by an older man to identification with a tradition. An Outcast of the Islands, p. 17, also describes the young Willem's "great disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting in closer acquaintance."

In the "brotherhood of the sea" Conrad found his fullest identification. From this comparative security he was suddenly exiled to the alien shore. In England he was a man with few acquaintances, little money, and no nationality. His letters of this early period, written to his one friend and Polish connection Mme. Poradowska,\textsuperscript{12} reveal his hunger for fellowship and understanding; his consciousness of lack of nationality; his urge to "justify" his life yet his tormenting doubts of his own abilities; his frequent physical pain, and his struggles with the habit of introspection and its consequent moods of inertia and almost complete despair. Like many of the alienated characters in his books, Conrad found comfort in the love of a devoted woman, but his integration with the life of England, whose citizenship he finally accepted, was never complete. His wife and his friends noticed that "one always felt that there was a depth in him that even after years of the closest friendship, one had not reached,"\textsuperscript{13} while his biographers remark upon his "assumed English outlook", his delight with being taken for an Englishman in spite of his foreign appearance and accent, and his ambition "to be taken for — to be! — an English


country gentleman of the time of Lord Palmerston."14 His frequent and often flagrant flag-waving and references to the "red spots on the map" also betray the outsider anxious to please.

Conrad's allegiance to the English tradition was not, however, insincere. He considered England the most civilized nation of the world, an orderly country ruled by law, the hope of a decadent and disorderly Europe,15 and with a tradition compatible with his own background and worthy of his "faithfulness". He genuinely admired the non-introspective Englishman of action, the colonizer who could temper the spirit of adventure with the ideals of service, duty and responsibility, and, like Lord Jim, bring order, peace and justice to the turbulent, backward areas of the world.16 England was also the romantic country, linked to the memories of his father and to the dreams and books of his boyhood. As John Galsworthy notes:


15 Repeatedly emphasized in The Secret Agent. Heemskirk of "Freya of the Seven Isles" sneers at Jasper's request to have their dispute settled in court. Kurtz, Decoud, and Heyst are "products of Europe". Ford Madox Ford, p. 56, says that Conrad remembered the English gold coming to aid the Polish revolutionaries against Russia.

16 Decoud sneers at this English trait, Nostromo, pp. 215, 216.
It had been enshrined for him, as a boy in Poland, by Charles Dickens, Captain Marryat, Captain Cook, and Franklin, the Arctic explorer. He always spoke of Dickens with an affection we have for the writers of our youth.17

Conrad's loneliness and alienation were aggravated by his choice of a "land" profession. Few writers have created with such agonies of self-doubt or have been driven by such an uncompromising artistic and moral conscience. In A Personal Record he describes the loneliness of the creator:

the intimacy and the strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle — something for which a material parallel can only be found in the everlasting, somber stress of the westward winter passage around 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 overmatched littleness, for no reward that could be adequate, but for the mere winning of a longitude.18

When speaking of his struggle with a new and difficult language, he compares himself to a "coal miner in

17 John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad", Castles in Spain and Other Screeds, London, Heineman, 1928, p. 79. Retinger, p. 122, says that Conrad detested Dickens, but was afraid to say so lest he be thought un-English. Obviously Conrad would dislike Dickens' optimism and sentimentality, yet the influence of Dickens may be seen in Conrad's work, particularly in his treatment and descriptions of evil characters, whom he caricatures, and in his use of gesture and habits of speech to illuminate character. He also frequently uses names symbolically, as did Dickens. F. R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition, New York, Stewart, 1946, notes the resemblance of Conrad to Dickens, particularly in the characterizations in Chance and Typhoon, and in the descriptions of London in The Secret Agent.

his pit quarrying all my English sentences out of a black night," while he advises a young aspiring author that to write well, "you must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image, — mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse: you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain, — and you must do it sincerely, at any cost ... so that at the end of your day's work, you should feel exhausted ... with the notion that there is nothing — nothing left in you."20

Conrad longed for success and general recognition, but this did not come until late in life. Always he feared that his "foreignness" would come between him and his audience. Nor was he free from attack because of his racial difference. As late as 1908, an article in The Daily News wounded the proud Conrad by describing him as "a man without a country and language." He wrote with bitterness about this attack to his friend, Edward Garnett:

It is like abusing a tongue-tied man, for what can one say. The statement is simple and brutal; and any answer would involve too many feelings of one's inner life, stir too much secret bitterness and complex loyalty to be even attempted with any hope of being understood. I thought that a man who has written the Nigger, Typhoon, The End of the Tether, Youth, was safe from that sort of thing. But apparently not.21


If he received such a public slight, how many small, thoughtless remarks may have injured this sensitive man, who was so proud of his parentage, of his country's hopeless struggles, of his national heritage, and so conscious of the spiritual value of such a heritage? There is a world of proud loneliness revealed in the remark Conrad is said to have made to Dr. Retinger during their visit to Cracow, Poland, the city of his boyhood: "It is a great happiness to me that at last I have come here with my wife and sons and have shown them that il y a quelques chose derrière moi." 

22 Gustaf Morf, *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad*, p.147-8, points out that there are many incidents in Conrad's books which suggest slights he received himself, and notes how often Nostromo's name is mispronounced. Other examples are: Donkin's talk about "putting these furriners in their place," Nielsen being called "Nelson" by the English, the national superiority expressed by the incompetent mate and by Mr. Travers in *The Rescue*, and the discussion regarding foreigners in the very early story, "The Black Mate."

CHAPTER III.

THE ISOLATION OF THE SETTINGS

The conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it stand out with a particular force and colouring.\(^1\)

While there is little doubt that Conrad's view of life was greatly influenced by his own condition of exile, yet his frequent portraits of isolated man are far from being merely extensions of his own position in the world. Nor is his choice of isolated, frequently tropical, settings based solely upon a desire to exploit his own romantic background. Conrad is interested in man's inner life, the elements within a man, his instincts, his fears, his emotions, and what Conrad calls the "ideal world" — his aspirations and ideals — that are the forces behind his actions.\(^2\) These elements are hidden for many reasons, custom, self-evasion, fear, or even ignorance. By isolating his characters in an alien, often primitive, culture, by stripping them of the ordinary social supports and the "external checks" of their own traditions and the censure of their own kind:

\(^1\) Letter to Henry S. Canby, 7 April, 1924, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters, Vol. II., p. 342, regarding The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'.

\(^2\) In 1917 Conrad wrote to Sir Sidney Colvin: "Perhaps you won't find it presumptuous if after twenty-two years of work, I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer, and also a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the ideal value of things, events, and people. That and nothing else." G. Jean-Aubry, Life and Letters vol.2; p. 185.
by way of solitude — utter solitude without a policeman — by way of silence — utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion, 3.

he can probe into the depths of man's nature to "get at the truth of things". Conrad's experience of life allowed him to live with, work with, and observe men of all races, cultures, creeds, and temperaments, and he wants to cut through these barriers and, without losing sight of racial or individual differences, find the basic facts common to all, those that transcend time, geography, and social mores. The artist, says Conrad in the famous Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', speaks to "something permanently enduring in mankind:"

the latent feeling of the 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 joys, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

Conrad's examination of "men's hearts" is, as he repeatedly insists in his prefaces, honest and minute. The sceptical yet sympathetic Marlow probing the why of men's actions is Conrad at work. In the preface to Chance, his first book to receive any amount of popular attention, Conrad explains that this favourable reception by a wide audience is of great value to him, for he has been afraid that he was:

drifting unconsciously into the position of a writer of a limited coterie: a position that would have been odious to me as throwing a doubt on the soundness of my belief in the solidarity of all mankind in simple ideas and sincere emotions.

General acceptance reassures him that apparently he has not "sinned against the basic feelings and elementary convictions which make life possible to the mass of mankind". No one is more conscious than Conrad of the numerous ways in which a man's mind, especially a civilized mind, may evade the truth or may be misled by "preconceived notions". The narrator of "Falk" finds this difficulty, as he tries to enter into Falk's elemental world of hunger and self-preservation. It is, he says; "so difficult... for our minds, remembering so much, instructed so much, informed of so much, to get in touch with the real actuality at our elbow."4 Conrad is continually concerned about the truth of the premises upon which he works; he examines his beliefs from all angles, testing himself to be sure that he is not what he hates so much, a "sham".

The "test" of emotions, ideals, or values is a dominant theme in Conrad's work, and the isolated settings are often what Walter Allen calls "the laboratory conditions in which he makes his investigations into the nature of man and the springs of action."5 By eliminating the outside props, he tests the inner supports, The settings of his stories are seldom just scenery — though he does give his readers some of


5 Walter Allen, The English Novel, New York, Dutton, 1957, p. 362. He continues that thus Conrad is a novelist "of the extreme situation". Thus also his use of extreme types to illuminate truths hidden in the average person. Decoud says in Nostromo, p. 244, "Exceptional individuals always interest me, because they are true to the general formula expressing the moral state of humanity."
the most beautiful descriptive passages written in English prose — but are an integral part of the human drama, even agents affecting the action. Sometimes his descriptions provide atmosphere, working upon the imagination of the actors and the readers, and heightening the emotional value of the scene; often the outward world is a symbol of man's inner world. The scenery is never static; it always gives the impression of life; it is frequently presented as unlimited in time and in power; it is indifferent, alien, sometimes even malevolent, to man. Even when the scene is perfectly quiet, there is an effect of tension, of power that can at any moment be let loose. The reader of Conrad feels the accumulative effect of such typical repeated phrases as: "deep abyss", "impenetrable darkness", "immense indifference", "crushing solitude", "measureless expanse", "profound depths", "immeasurable strength", "brooding stillness", "inconceivable depths", "implacable force", "the empty ocean", and "the soundless life of the jungle".

Very often the setting is that of a decaying yet living jungle of an isolated island. The mystery, the

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6 Typical is Willems' frantic and fruitless paddling up various arms of the river to find a spot where he would not suffer from self-reproach, An Outcast of the Islands, p. 65, or the shoals endangering Lingard of The Rescue. Paul L. Wiley's Conrad's Measure of Man, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954, is an excellent study of Conrad's imagery and of his methods, related to those of Flaubert.

7 Or is repelled by this vocabulary. Those who dislike Conrad's work nearly always refer to his style and diction. Typical of such criticism, and with some truth in it, is Marvin Mudrick's "Conrad and the Terms of Modern Criticism", Hudson Review VII., (1954-55), 419-426.
alienation from one's own experience, arouse the elementary
fear of having one's personality dissolve into the fluid
surroundings. Mrs. Travers, in *The Rescue*, feels this force in
the hidden lagoon:

That erection of enormous solid trunks, dark
ragged columns festooned with writhing creepers and
steeped in gloom, was so close to the bank that by
looking over the side of the ship she could see in-
verted in the glassy belt of water its massive and
black reflection on the reflected sky that gave an
impression of a clear blue abyss seen through a
transparent film. And when she raised her eyes the
same abysmal immobility seemed to reign over the
whole sun-bathed enlargement of that lagoon which
was one of the secret places of the earth. She felt
strongly her isolation. She was so much the only
being of her kind moving within this mystery that
even to herself she felt like an apparition without
rights and without defence and that must end by
surrendering to these forces which seemed to her
but the expression of the unconscious genius of
the place. Hers was the most complete loneliness,
charged with catastrophic tension. It lay about
her as though she had been set apart within a magic
circle. It cut off — but it did not protect.°

It is this "immense indifference" that swallows up Decoud of
*Nostromo* in the Placid Gulf, "whose glittering surface remained
untroubled by the fall of his body."° It is when facing the
immensity of the universe that Flora de Barral attempts
suicide, "one of those dewy, clear starry nights, oppressing
our spirit, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of

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8 *The Rescue*, p. 285. The term "magic circle" suggesting
isolation, immobility and enchantment, is a favourite Conradian
symbol, and is also used to refer to a ship at sea bounded by
the horizon. In *Lord Jim*, p. 31, Jim is described as caught in
"a circle of facts" that "cut him off from the rest of his
kind."

9 The "mere, feeble pop" of the pistol amid Russia's snows
in "The Warrior's Soul," and the "shelling of a continent" in
*Heart of Darkness* are similar in their contrasting of man's
littleness with the universe's immensity.
the awful loneliness, of the hopeless obscure insignificance of our globe lost in the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe."\(^\text{10}\) It is the dark, decadent growth of the jungle which overwhelms and terrifies Willems:

He looked into that great dark place odorous with the breath of life, with the mystery of existence, renewed, fecund, indestructible; and he felt afraid of his solitude, of the solitude of his body, of the loneliness of his soul in the presence of this ardent and unconscious struggle, of this lofty indifference, of this merciless and mysterious purpose, perpetuating strife and death through the march of ages.\(^\text{11}\)

Such jungle and island settings are used in most of Conrad's stories, \textit{Almayer's Folly}, \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, \textit{The Rescue}, most of \textit{Tales of Unrest}, \textit{Lord Jim}, \textit{Heart of Darkness}, \textit{Victory}, and others.

The sea also isolates, and, in its moods of storm, calm and indifference, dwarfs man and his ships, and makes his struggles for existence seem hopelessly unequal. He feels "the crushing, paralyzing sense of human littleness" against its might. Even when quiet, the sea can strike. One of the most beautiful and powerful of Conrad's many incomparable descriptions is the passage in \textit{Lord Jim} which describes the serenity of the night on which Jim meets his test, "a marvellous stillness" which gives Jim the assurance of everlasting security, and contributes to his downfall, making him feel

\(^{10}\) \textit{Chance}, p. 50.

\(^{11}\) \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, p. 337. The kinship of Conrad with other nineteenth century authors affected by the mechanistic interpretation of the universe is here obvious.
betrayed, the victim of a "monstrous joke".\textsuperscript{12}

The political novels of Conrad, though necessarily placed in society, are out of the main stream of normal life, and the action is confined mainly to a room or to obscure places in cities. \textit{Under Western Eyes} begins in Razumov's lonely room, and most of the drama of \textit{The Secret Agent} takes place in the tiny shop in a hidden corner of London. The little town of Sulaco, the scene of \textit{Nostromo}, is carefully described as an isolated spot, cut off by the Golfo Placido on one side, and by the great overshadowing mountain on the other. Within this isolation is another isolation of the Isabel Island, and also of the small boat in the blackness of the gulf — a technique used also in the jungle and island settings, with rivers or estuaries leading ever inwards. A house and rooms within the house isolate the main action of \textit{The Arrow of Gold}, and the scene of \textit{The Rover} is a lonely peninsula, cut off from even the little village by psychological barriers of hate and fear.

Although in many of his tales, nature seems to be evil in itself — certainly alien to man — it can also be used as a symbol of elements within man.\textsuperscript{13} In the preface to "The Nigger of the \textit{Narcissus}", Conrad contends that art is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} The serenity of the scene in "Freya of the Seven Isles" is similar in its contributing to the over self-confidence of Jasper before the disaster.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Douglas Hewitt, in \textit{Conrad: A Reassessment}, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1952, also notes the correspondence between "the inner plight of a character and the setting", the "externalizing of the problem", p. 14.
\end{itemize}
sensuous, that he wants "to reach the secret springs of responsive emotions" of his readers through the senses. His lavish descriptions and concrete details are to immerse his readers in the experience, "to make you hear, to make you feel...to make you see." The evil captain of the Patna reveals himself by the single gesture of scratching himself, giving a glimpse of the jungle world he represents. Sound is used vividly and effectively, as in the scene when the Patna is struck by the unknown welling up from the depths, and the sea hisses, suggesting the treachery of a snake. While Jim struggles with himself in Marlow's room, the rain in the pipes outside gurgle and choke and splash, as if "in odious ridicule of a swimmer fighting for his life," and the rush of water outside suggests the Deluge.

The downpour fell with a heavy uninterrupted rush of a sweeping flood, with a sound of unchecked overwhelming fury that called to one's mind the images of collapsing bridges, of uprooted trees, of undermined mountains. No man could breast the colossal and headlong stream that seemed to break and swirl against the dim stillness in which we were precariously sheltered as if on an island.14

Jim's agony before he turns to meet death is reflected in the sky, "blood-red, immense, streaming, like an open vein."15

14 Lord Jim, p. 180. Imagery suggesting the Deluge is also used in The River to suggest the chaos and sense of sin during the revolution. Paul L. Wiley's Conrad's Measure of Man gives many examples.

15 Ibid., p.413. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 58, notes the relationship of this imagery to the Crucifixion and thus to Jim's assumption of a savior's role in a fallen world." The image is also somewhat like that in the final scene in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, in which Faustus faces the consequences of his action and cries, "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!"
The scene in the hotel dining room is full of sound, the murmur of voices, the tinkling of glasses, the small talk of the other guests; Marlow notes the contrast of Jim's anguish and terrible isolation with the indifference and conviviality of the insensitive tourist crowd. The silent Jim and his glorious dreams of heroism are again contrasted with the noisy, sordid group that shares his trial scene, the friends of a native who has assaulted a moneylender. The shuffling of Stein from light to shadow, from his butterflies to his beetles, and the reflections on the waxed floor of his cavern-like room express concretely his knowledge of and his musings upon the good and evil elements within man's ideals, while Marlow's own awareness of the dangers takes the form of a great plain "full of graves and pitfalls", desolate under a "crepuscular light" and surrounded by "an abyss of flames." 16 Night, darkness, caverns, empty holes, the jungle, the ooze of swamps become symbols of the evil, the mystery, the decadence, the soul-emptiness, or the hidden primitive elements of man. Such symbols of isolation as islands, clouds, mists, fog, forests, darkness, and magic circles occur repeatedly, as well as the man-made barriers of walls, veils, and gates. Chains, nets,

16 Ibid., p. 215. Most of Conrad's stories are woven tightly together by a complex system of cross-references, repeated words, phrases, and situations. This is especially true of Lord Jim, Chance, The Rescue and Heart of Darkness. A. Grove Day in "Pattern in Lord Jim," College English XIII (1952), 396-7, traces the "jump" image in this one novel; a fuller analysis of the imagery is Dorothy Van Ghent's "On Lord Jim", The English Novel, New York, Rinehart, 1953, pp. 229-244.
and cages are Conrad's usual symbols of enforced captivity. Opposed to these are light, whiteness, flames, and man's lamps and beacons, the symbols of human endeavour to pierce the darkness and to find a way.

Even more terrifying than the vastness, the mystery, and the darkness is the lack of order in the universe, the chaos that approaches madness, and is akin to the incomprehensible elements in man, or, to use a Conradian expression, "the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion."^17 The sea is always treacherous; it is primitive, "as if created before light itself"; when stormy it is "as if immemorial ages had been stirred up from the undisturbed bottom of ooze";^18 it is also destructive, with "no compassion, no faith, no law, no memory."^19 Conrad's concept of evil is a force disorderly, lawless, selfish, and primitive, present to a degree within every man and therefore within society, treacherous like the sea, and always ready to seize upon a moment of weakness, of unawareness, of overconfidence, to destroy man-made values of order and solidarity. 20 Man's greatest defence is his will to defy and to live,

17 Lord Jim, p. 121. It is the irrationality of the attack by Fereaud that is so appalling to D'Hubert in "The Devil".

18 The Mirror of the Sea, p. 71.

19 Ibid., p. 135.

20 Looking at Brown, in Lord Jim, p. 344, Marlow reflects "how much certain forms of evil are akin to madness, derived from intense egoism, inflamed by resistance, tearing the soul to pieces, and giving factitious vigour to the body."
but, as Conrad repeatedly shows in his stories, this in itself is not enough. Against the overwhelming force of chaos, a man alone succumbs unless he has some connection with other men. The connection may be in the "real" world, symbolized nearly always in Conrad's work by the human hand, or it may be in the realm of "ideas" or ideals, but the connection is necessary, or evil, in the form of despair, death, negation, or chaotic violence, triumphs.

This is one of the main preoccupations of Conrad, the study of the forces within man and within society that tend to separate man from man, and those that help him to transcend his aloneness and become part of the general flow of mankind.
CHAPTER IV.

THE HUMAN CONNECTION

- There is death in the mockery of love.¹

It is one of the commonplaces of the criticism of Conrad's work that his women are "unreal", "misty", or "ethereal". The reason may be, as some claim, his limited or unsatisfactory experience with women,² but it is also very definitely related to his views on the rôle of women. Conrad is not interested in sexual love in itself;³ it is the "idea", the inspiration woman provides that really interests him. Love is one of the chief ways in which man may alleviate his loneliness. At an elemental level, it is part of the basic urge to live, to join one's life with that of another, and thus with the stream of mankind, and, to Conrad, woman instinctively lives by allowing her life to flow into that of another. Once this sense of communion in love is felt,

¹ The Arrow of Gold, p. 212, (said by a wise old woman to George).

² Vernon Young, in "Joseph Conrad: Outline for Reconsideration," Hudson Review, II (1949), 5-19, makes much of Conrad's "insincerity before the vital possibilities and crises of sex." A recent book, Thomas Moser's Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, Cambridge, Howard University Press, 1957, is a fuller analysis of "the uncongenial subject." He analyzes "The Return" to show "the near paralysis of Conrad's creativity when dealing with a sexual subject", and sees a pattern in his early stories (till 1913) of "timid hero, powerful heroine, and impotent rival" (p. 101), while he notes that Conrad's later stories stress the defenceless woman. Conrad's failure with women in crucial scenes he blames upon "his moral view and his almost irrepressible misogyny," p. 159.

³ Though he is aware of the necessity of it, as discussed in Chance.
loneliness is intolerable. Jim feels this after Jewel shows herself ready to risk her life for him, and, both literally and symbolically, places a weapon in his hands: with which to destroy his enemies. He knew "that for him there was no refuge from that loneliness which centupled all his dangers except — in her." "I thought," he said to Marlow later, "that if I went away from her it would be the end of everything somehow." Falk, the embodiment of the elemental urge to live, must also have love. Conrad says:

We were in his case allowed to contemplate the foundation of all the emotions — that one joy which is to live, and the one sadness at the root of innumerable torments.5

The silent girl has made his loneliness "impossible". She is life, "that life that, in the midst of death, cries aloud to our senses",6 and Conrad repeatedly equates the inability to love another with the inability to trust life itself, with the fear of accepting the joys and the risks of being human.

Many of Conrad's exiles and derelicts are tied to life by the single strand of a woman's loyalty or love. Jorgenson of The Rescue, who mistrusts life because of his own failure and is always described in terms of death, knows

4 Lord Jim, p. 300. The connection with Jewel may be considered the beginning of his regeneration and of the end of his absorption in his self; he learns responsibility. He says to Marlow, p. 304, "You take a different view of your actions when you come to understand... that your existence is necessary — you see, absolutely necessary — to another person."

5 "Falk", Typhoon, p. 224.

6 Ibid., p. 236.
that only a Malayan woman's faithfulness saves him from complete annihilation. He tells Tom:

if it hadn't been for the girl I would have died in a ditch ten years ago. Everything left me — youth, money, strength, hope — the very sleep. But she stuck to the wreck.7

Dr. Monygham is saved from complete isolation by the humanity of Mrs. Gould; Razumov is restored by the love and trust of Natalia; Rita loses her fear of life by "following her heart"8 and accepting George's gift of love; Arlette and Real are brought back to communication with others through their love; Lena wins the illusion of victory and Heyst achieves self-knowledge through the girl's efforts to make their life complete. Symbolically, Jones of Victory, who is the negation of life, is terrified of women, and Allegre of The Arrow of Gold, who has complete contempt for all mankind, cannot "bear women about his person."9

Woman, to Conrad, is also the embodiment of compassion and pity. She possesses "the wisdom of the heart."10 Just as man expresses himself and his ideas in action, so woman expresses herself in tenderness. She both gives and inspires devotion. At the very highest, she is the personification of man's innate yearning for the Ideal, the symbol of man's dreams. Rita, the Enchantress with the arrow of gold, is "as old as the

7 The Rescue, p. 103.
8 The advice given by her maid, Rose.
world"; to George she is a "revelation":

warming like a flame, ... all-revealing like a great light; giving new depths to shades, new brilliance to colours, an amazing vividness to all sensations and vitality to all thoughts: so that all that had been lived before seemed to have been lived in a drab world and with a languid pulse.12

But the revelation does not dispel all the shadow, which is "the inseparable companion of all light."13 Love, like all of man's dreams, is never complete, never infinite, though both woman and man may long and strive for such perfection in their relationship. Even the elemental Falk knows instinctively that, for the complete communion he desires, he must tell his wife his secret, for otherwise "What sort of companionship would that be?"14 Jim, also, must confess his former crime to Jewel, and Nostromo's choice of sisters is Giselle, not the uncompromising Linda, because "his wife would have to know his secret or else life would be impossible."15 Nor can love last forever. Though George does obtain Rita, his dream, he must, symbolically, come down from the heights at the practical call of the world, and Rita, in her wisdom, releases him from the dream before complete disillusionment may

11 The Arrow of Gold, p. 106. The same phrase is used to describe Lena of Victory.

12 Ibid., p. 124.

13 Nostromo, p. 324.


15 Nostromo, p. 524. Jewel also longs for completeness in her love.
overtake him.\(^\text{16}\) Mills, the experienced, explains to the boy:

You know that this world is not a world for lovers, not even for such lovers as you two who have nothing to do with the world as it is. No, a world of lovers would be impossible. It would be a mere ruin of lives which seem to be meant for something else. What this something else is, I don't know.\(^\text{17}\)

George loses his pain in action — Conrad's usual remedy — and finds that the experience has been a gain. He has new strength, and new insight. Just as earlier his love had brought him a realization of his fellowship with even the evil Ortega, and a new pity that comes from understanding, so now every face reminds him of Rita, "either by some profound resemblance or by the startling force of contrast."\(^\text{18}\)

For love is a gift not given to everyone to experience fully either in the giving or in the receiving. Its effect is most complete upon Conrad's "elect", the imaginative.\(^\text{19}\) Love also requires the renunciation of self and a

16 The loss of the boat previously is a foretelling of the impermanence of the dream and of beauty. Cf. Stein's similar knowledge as he blows out the flame of the match, "Friend, wife, child...Phoo!", \textit{Lord Jim}, p. 211. In "Freya of The Seven Isles" Conrad calls it "the secret disenchantment, the unavoidable shadow of all passion."


18 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 275 and p. 288. Similarly the loss of a wife "removed the brilliant bandage of happiness" from the eyes of Prince Roman, and "opened his heart to a greater sorrow, his mind to a vaster thought, his eyes to all the past," and his love expands to a love of his country and to a sense of duty. In the same story Conrad states, "enduring happiness is only found in the conclusion of fairy tales."

19 Compassion requires a certain amount of imagination, Conrad says when remarking upon Amy Foster's love for Yanko and her perception of his strange beauty.
complete surrender to the "dream". As George finds, the "conscious surrender" also means captivity, the end of "the careless freedom" of his life,"20 but the captivity brings spiritual growth.

Hervey, of "The Return", through the pain of losing his wife, discovers what love can be, and sees his wife with opened eyes.

She was the incarnation of all the short moments which every man spares out of his life for dreams, for precious dreams .... She was mysterious, significant, full of obscure meanings — like a symbol.21

He understands that his life has been "a sham" for:

there can be no life without faith and love — faith in a human heart, love of a human being!..... Faith! — Love! — the undoubting, clear faith in the truth of a soul — the great tenderness, deep as an ocean, serene and eternal, like the infinite peace of space above the short tempests of the earth. It was what he had wanted all his life — but he understood it only for the first time .... She had the gift!22

But she does not have the gift. She prefers safety, her own room which is "like a grave," to the danger of following her lover, her own dream, and to Travers' gesture of outstretched arms she responds with only a look "of blank consternation." Travers reflects that probably no one has the complete

20 The Arrow of Gold, p. 124. This is a repeated theme in Conrad. Cf. Jim's captivity to the island where he is tied by every human connection he makes.

21 "The Return", Tales of Unrest, p. 139. Conrad frequently speaks of the love of a woman as a "gift". For example Real is restored to normality when he realizes that Arlette is "a gift", and not "a stumbling block to his pedantic conscience". The Rover, p. 268.

22 "The Return", Tales of Unrest, p. 178.
gift, and with this new knowledge comes the realization of the universality of his experience; he is "saddened by an impersonal sorrow, by a vast melancholy, longing for what cannot be attained"; for the first time he breaks through his shell of selfhood and is a moral creature in the true sense. He feels "his fellowship with every man", even with the "outsider" waiting somewhere for his wife, the woman who has not the courage or ability to love. In the pain of the knowledge that the "certitude of love and faith" can never be found, is born his conscience:

not that fear of remorse which grows slowly, and slowly decays amongst the complicated facts of life, but a Divine wisdom springing full-grown, armed and severe out of a tried heart, to combat the secret baseness of motives.23

His conscience takes the place of his former code of conformity to the social laws of his society.24

Having caught a glimpse of the Ideal, Hervey must choose between his old life and the new, unattainable vision. He sees that the choice is between falsehood and truth; the old pattern would be a succession of "to-morrows",25 with "servile fears and servile hopes ... dreaming of success, behind the

23 "The Return", Tales of Unrest, p. 163. Mrs. Hervey also makes the moral discovery that she has not the selflessness necessary for love.

24 Symbolized by the many mirrors in his room, each containing a reflection of the same man.

25 Probably an echo of Macbeth's "to-morrow". It is a favourite word of Conrad's, used more often to express the human tendency to live in hopes, dreams, and illusions. The story "To-morrow" uses the word in both senses, first of the false hopes and illusions, and then of the hopeless future of the disillusioned girl.
severe discretion of doors as inpenetrable to the truth within as the granite of tombstones", leading only "to the fitting reward of a grave"; to follow the dream is to be "under the subtle despotism of an idea that suffers no rivals, that is lonely, inconsolable and dangerous". It is the choice between death and life, and the price is renunciation and isolation, the stripping off of all his illusions upon which he has based his life and built his personality. Hervey is afraid, for "it is an awful sacrifice to cast all one's life into the flame of a new belief." When he turns to his wife for help "against the cruel decrees of salvation", he sees in her eyes "nothing", only a series of to-morrows without faith or love, and he chooses the lonely way, stepping out into the "revealing night".

Renouard, "The Planter of Malata", also sees his dream in a girl, and submits to being "The Slave of the Lamp", the symbol of man's search for the Ideal. When his Venus proves to be only a cold statue, he becomes one of Conrad's proud swimmers for whom only the Ideal is enough, and swims calmly "beyond the confines of life — with a steady stroke — his eyes fixed on a star." D'Alcacer, who has experienced

27 Ibid., p. 181.
28 Cf. Notes on Life and Letters, p. 16 regarding the force of renunciation.
29 Cf. the moral awakening of Captain Whalley as he becomes blind.
30 Within the Tides, p. 126.
the pain of lost love, and thus can be "an acute and sympathetic observer", is aware that Tom Lingard sees his dream in Mrs. Travers, and tries to explain to her the meaning and value of such a love. He tells her:

"You do not love because of something that is in the other — you love because of something that is in you — something alive — in yourself .... A capacity in you. And not everyone may have it — not everyone deserves to be touched by fire from heaven."

"And die," she said.

He made a slight movement.

"Who can tell? That is as it may be. But it is always a privilege, even if one must live a little after being burnt."31

Conrad's heroines and also his leaders of men are those who possess "the gift" of inspiring in others love, trust, confidence, and the desire to serve faithfully. His heroes are all, in some way, "lovers". Very often in Conrad's work the binding force is affection between two men. Jim is trusted and liked, and, like Lingard of The Rescue, is bound to a friend and a faithful servant with ties of affection that are deeper than ordinary loyalty and transcend all barriers of cultural differences; Razumov has similar qualities which attract and inspire confidence; the relationship between Dominie and young George is more affection than mere loyalty to a common task; while old Peyrol's influence upon the people of the peninsula is the power of a certain type of personality, of an ability to give and accept friendship. The women in Conrad's books, however, are

31 The Rescue, p. 130.
dependent upon men. Flora of Chance turns to Mrs. Fyne, the only woman who might help her, but there is no affection or loyalty in their relationship and the girl is nearly destroyed by her benefactress; when Rita is left alone, she particularly feels her need of another woman to talk to, and she has only her sister to trust, a sister who will betray her for money.

Because of their dependence upon love, upon human trust, Conrad sees women as ready victims of life's cruelties, contradictions, and disillusionments. Women are the adventurers in the realm of love who are willing to take all risks and make all renunciations in order to find perfection, and are thus often doomed to desertion or betrayal. Marlow muses about this as he discusses the fate of Jewel, in Lord Jim. He asks his listeners:

Where is the man — I mean a real sentient man — who does not remember vaguely having been deserted in the fullness of possession by someone or something more precious than life?... our common fate fastens upon the women with a peculiar cruelty. It does not punish like a master, but inflicts lingering torment, as if to gratify a secret, unappeasable spite .... it seeks to revenge itself upon the beings that come nearest to rising above the trammels of earthly caution; for it is only women who manage to put at times into their love an element just palpable enough to give one a fright — an extra-terrestrial touch.

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32 The Arrow of Gold, p. 85. Mrs. Blunt plots against her for her own purposes.

33 Aissa's sacrifice of her father for Willems, Lena's sacrifice for Heyst are examples. Winnie Verloc and her mother's sacrifices for Stevie and Amy Foster's story suggest that maternal love may be even stronger. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Conrad felt that her love was strongly maternal in nature, Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad and His Circle, p. 16.

34 Lord Jim, pp. 276-7.
Woman is often "the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing in the world but love — the everlasting thing."\(^{35}\) Aissa, Jewel, Mrs. Decoud, Immada, Lena, Flora de Barral, and many others find that there are barriers within man and within society\(^{36}\) that can be impenetrable walls. There can also be elements within the woman that become barriers to mar the complete trust that is so necessary to the relationship. Especially evident to the discerning Conrad is the element of vanity in woman's love, the desire for power, and the tendency to dream "of moulding a god from the clay at her feet".\(^{37}\) Marlow is shocked to hear Kurtz's fiancee, whom he expects to listen "without a thought for herself", slip into expressions suggesting egoism, in spite of her idealism and belief, her "saving illusion".\(^{38}\) It is also the touch of vanity in Freya, of the sense of her woman's power, that finally maddens Heemskirk and causes the destruction of Jasper and his boat of dreams. In their demand for completeness in their love, women

\(^{35}\) *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 334.

\(^{36}\) Some of these will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

\(^{37}\) *Almayer's Folly*, p. 172. Her mother's belated warnings as Nina leaves to meet Dain foretell her inevitable disillusionment. Winnie Verloc's trust in her power over Verloc, Jewel's tendency to worship Jim, Mrs. Travers' desire to influence Lingard, all contribute to the tragedies.

\(^{38}\) E.g. "No one knew him as well as I"; "What a loss to me — to us!" - She corrected herself with beautiful generosity": "He needed me! Me!"; and her final "cry of inconceivable triumph." *Arsat of "The Lagoon"* is haunted by the memory of the brother he deserted for "a woman with triumphant eyes."
tend to ignore all other human values, and thus precipitate tragedy or create a wall of non-understanding between themselves and men.

While women may be over-possessive, they are more often, in Conrad's books, victims of possession. To Conrad, the personality is sacred, and he sees women as necessarily passive, unable to escape from oppression as men can.

And that is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom and courage .... But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women.39

This is illustrated vividly in the story "To-morrow" in which both the boy and the girl are victims of a father's tyranny. The boy has escaped into life, but the girl is trapped, in the end without even the saving illusion of a different "to-morrow". Captain Anthony's and Flora de Barral's stories are very similar, while the escape of man into action is contrasted with the passive lonely suffering of woman in the portraits of George and Rita, of the young captain and Alice, the daughter of

39 Chance, p. 281. This novel has many caustic comments upon "the new woman" movement of his age. There is a striking parallel to Conrad's view of the passivity of women in Honore de Balzac's Eugenie Grandet, trans., Ellen Marriage, Westminster, The Folio Society, 1953, pp. 151-2: "In every situation a woman is bound to suffer in many ways that a man does not, and to feel her troubles more acutely than he can; for a man's vigour and energy is constantly brought into play; he acts and thinks, comes and goes, busies himself in the present, and looks to the future for consolation .... But a woman cannot help herself — hers is a passive part; she is left face to face with her trouble, and has nothing to divert her mind from it; she sounds the depths of the abyss of sorrow."
Jacobus, and of Mr. and Mrs. Gould.

The element of egoism, of selfish possessiveness, may enter and mar any human relationship, for love must be like a sailor's love of his ship; "untainted by the pride of possession". Conrad's work has many instances of the ego of the father imposing his philosophy, his dreams, or his tyranny upon the son or daughter and restricting his or her ability to live and love fully. Conrad stresses the Jove-like conceit and selfishness of Allegre in his appropriation of the personality of Rita, "something lofty and sinister like an Olympian's caprice", "as if in defiance of unexpressed things and for an unheard-of satisfaction of an inconceivable pride".

Charity itself, the impulse to stretch out one's hand to another with help and sympathy, to alleviate another's loneliness — and one's own — "the gift straight from the Eternal to the elect", can be tainted with the egoism of those who do not know enough about the evil in themselves to examine

40 The Mirror of the Sea, p. 136.
41 Heyst, Anthony, Alice Jacobus, Flora de Barral, are a few. There is a possibility that the theme of a daughter's loyalty to her father conflicting with her love for another man may be related to the story of Conrad's mother who became ill when torn between her sense of duty to her father and her love for Korzeniowski. The story is told in G. Jean-Aubry's The Sea-Dreamer, p. 20, and in A Personal Record, p. 28.
42 The Arrow of Gold, p. 108.
43 Letter of March 5, 1892, John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, ed., Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska 1890-1920, trans. from the French, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1940, p. 42. The same letter discusses the possible evil in woman's urge to self-sacrifice or self-abnegation taken to the extreme.
carefully their motives. Lingard's "infernal charity" towards Willems contributes to the latter's ultimate downfall by protecting, even indulging, his weakness. The author notes that Lingard "had an inclination to set right the lives of other people, just as he could hardly refrain — in defiance of nautical etiquette — from interfering with his chief officer when the crew was sending up a topmast." His benevolence springs from the vanity and over-confidence of a man who has little understanding of evil or of human weakness, a man without the moral maturity to be wary of evil and to search his conscience for possible selfish motives. True compassion is untainted by contempt.

Nor is the most completely disinterested act of compassion always free of tragic results. Captain Allistoun's pity for the dying Wait nearly causes a mutiny upon his ship; Jasper's generous impulse to Schultz contributes to the loss of his boat; Renouard meets his fate because of his pity for the derelict Walter; the "humane Tomassov's" compassion for de Castels makes him a victim of the crude adjutant; Davidson's kind actions leave him "without a single affection near him";  

44 An Outcast of the Islands, p. 199. Lingard's charity is mirrored by Willems' munificence to Joanna's family, which demoralizes them and flatters him. In the above letter to Mme. Poradowska, Conrad comments: "To return good for evil is not only profoundly immoral but dangerous, in that it sharpens the appetite for evil in the malevolent and develops (perhaps unconsciously) that latent tendency towards hypocrisy in the ... let us say, benevolent." Cf. the disastrous results of Jim's leniency to Cornelius and Brown. Cf. Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," The Liberal Imagination, New York, Doubleday Anchor, p. 214.

45 "Because of the Dollars", Within the Tides.
and Heyst's venture into action in order to help Morrison ends in tragedy. Yet the outstretched hand to another is necessary, or human fellowship is betrayed, and man will succumb to aloneness and despair. "A mere glance is enough," says Marlow in Chance, "to make despair pause."

Man's relationships with others is not free from tragedy at any time. Even love may take the form of betrayal, as man is caught between conflicting loyalties. Jim's dream betrays his friend, his wife, and his faithful servant; Lingard in The Rescue destroys his friends because of another dream; Karain kills his friend because he is "loyal to a vision" of a girl, and young Hollis recognizes the native's pain as something universal. "Everyone of us, you'll admit, has been haunted by some woman... And... as to friends... dropped by the way... Well!... ask yourselves," he comments to the "unbelieving whites". Arsat's story of desertion of his brother is similar. "Tuan, I loved my brother," he explains to the white man, who answers sadly, "We all love our brothers."

To Conrad, life is tragic. The betrayal, the disenchantment, the aloneness, is inherent in the human situation. Yet faithfulness to a person, to a leader, to a task, to an illusionary dream, is the only way in which man may achieve the

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46 An example of the opposite result is the kindness towards "The Secret Sharer" whose hat serves as a guide to the young captain and saves his ship and command. Pity for the warden's wife saves "The Anarchist", Set of Six, p. 154, from an inertia of despair so complete that he is indifferent to even self-preservation.

47 Chance, p. 183.
stature, dignity and value he desires, for he is in communion with others. Conrad's stories are full of faithful workers, the Singletons who stay at the wheel, the MacWhirrs who defy the storms, the Antonias who guard the light; of faithful friends and servants, such as Jaffir, Dain Waris, and Tamb' Itam; of faithful women, such as Mrs. Gould, Tekla, and Flora; of faithful dreamers, such as Jim and Peyrol. To cling to something or somebody other than one's self is necessary for life, and to have the connection broken completely is worse than death. "Hate is better than being alone! Death is better!" cries Willems; and Peyrol, who has learned about Fidelity from "The Brotherhood of the Coast", allows the crippled Michel to die with him rather than doom him to live without any attachment, "Marooned on this earth like a man thrown out to die on a desert island." 48

The impulse of the outstretched hand to another is, to Conrad, the impulse to be obeyed, for it is born of the consciousness of our own loneliness, and thus of the loneliness of others. Conrad's "exiles" all recognize each other; Captain Anthony understands Flora's need at once, for it is also his own; the isolated Mrs. Gould is "always sorry for "homesick people"; Heyst responds at once to the plight of the forlorn Lena,49 the first novel by the lonely Conrad was

48 The Rover, p. 253.

49 She made his "illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of his existence, and leave them both face to face in a moral desert as arid as the sands of Sahara." Victory, p.80. His sense of Lena representing all the cruelty and loneliness of life is like Captain Anthony's poetic expression of Flora as "the little ghost of all the sorrow of the world," in Chance, p. 225.
inspired by the outcast Almayer, whose memory "haunted" him. Paradoxically, from the experience of recognition of one's own condition of aloneness, often forced upon one by the desolation of despair, of disillusionment, of guilt, or of loss, is born that sense of "solidarity with others". "Sympathy," says Conrad, "is a form of fear", a recognition in another of one's own experience of weakness, fear, and isolation. He would have us forget the intellectual problems of right and wrong, for reasoning may betray us, and trust to the world of feelings. "Feelings are, and in submitting to them we can avoid neither death nor suffering, which are our common lot, but we can bear them in peace."

\[50\] Lena of Victory expresses it simply: "It's perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other," p. 352. Cf. Lord Jim, p. 180.

\[51\] The Secret Agent, p. 88.

\[52\] An example is Razumov's decision, arrived at by reasoning, to betray Haldin. The captain in "The Tale" is tortured by doubt because he allowed his reason to persuade him that the word "duty" held "an infinity of absolution", even for possible murder.

CHAPTER V.

TRADITION AS A FORCE THAT HOLDS MEN TOGETHER

Each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life.¹

One of the strongest forces which bind men together and help individuals to give their lives a continuity and their actions meaning is tradition, either family, national, or professional. Conrad sees man as basically weak, prey to impulses which he does not understand, passions that blind him, and a selfishness that leads to lawlessness and disorder. Opposed to these disintegrating agents is mutual trust, guarded by what man calls conscience, "that heirloom of the ages, of the race, of the group, of the family ... 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."²

This feeling of community based upon trust, which serves as a "restraint" to self-seeking, is found in even the most primitive peoples. Marlow marvels at this "human secret" when he finds "something restraining" in the behaviour of his hungry cannibal crew in the Heart of Darkness, who were men that "still

¹ Lord Jim, p. 163.
² A Personal Record, p. 94.
belonged to the beginnings of time — had no inherited experience to teach them as it were.\textsuperscript{3}

Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear — or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze.... It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly .... Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint of a hyena prowling among the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me — the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma.\textsuperscript{4}

Most of Conrad's stories discuss this feeling of trust or the agonies of conscience felt by those who have betrayed that trust. "The real significance of crime" says Conrad, "is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind,"\textsuperscript{5} and the most complete exiles are those who repudiate the laws of trust that hold society together, and are thus outlaws. Such is Chester, of \textit{Lord Jim}, who prides himself upon his ability to "see things as they are" and to "never take anything to heart"; he wishes to recruit Jim and exploit him as he has done with old Captain Robinson, who looks "with sad, dim pupils" and then "drops his gaze on the ground"; such are the captain and officers of the \textit{Patna}, who run away from the trial; such is Cornelius, who is described in imagery suggesting the

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Heart of Darkness}, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Heart of Darkness}, p. 105. A full study of hunger and its relation to "restraints" is the story "Falk".

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Lord Jim}, p. 115.
beetles of Stein's collection, the opposites of his butterflies of beauty; such is Brown, a "man-beast of folk-lore", a Scourge of God" whose character is based upon "a vehement scorn for mankind at large" and a "natural senseless ferocity"; he is a destructive force, unable to keep faith with anyone:

while he planned treacherous alliances, had already settled in his own mind the fate of the white man, and intrigued in an overbearing, offhand manner with Kassim, one could perceive that what he really desired, almost in spite of himself, was to play havoc with that jungle town which had defied him, to see it strewn with corpses and enveloped in flames.

The ultimate of evil is the trio in Victory, representing to Lena "all the evil in the world". Conrad paints a vivid word picture of each; Pedro, the unintelligent animal brute, with enormous brown paws, a face covered with hair and a wide mouth full of fangs; Ricardo, an outcast because of his vices, who moves like a cat; Jones, the intelligent beast of prey, who "looks upon all the tame creatures of the earth as his natural victims". He symbolizes negation and destruction; he is described in the imagery of death with "a spectral face", "skeleton hands", "black eye-caverns", and a "peculiarly lifeless

6 Lord Jim, pp. 208, 209, 285. The girl is described in the imagery of the butterfly, pp. 226, 308. Marlow wishes to see Jim squirm for his crime "like an impaled beetle". The same image is used throughout "Freya and the Seven Isles" to describe the evil Heemskirk, with his "black bullet head", "beady eyes" and his beetle shape, wide at the hips and tapering narrow at the ankles.

7 Ibid., pp. 274 and 259.

8 Ibid., p. 370. Cf. Donkin's desire to "smash", to "wring necks, gouge eyes, spit on faces" in The Nigger of the Narcissus."
voice" that has "sepulchral undertones." All Conrad's evil characters are described in similar terms. Their evil consists of a heightened individualism based upon selfishness, and their isolation is conscious and self-willed, based upon a belief in their own strength and powers, and a contempt for "the weak" of the world who allow consideration for others to interfere with the gratification of their own desires. Typical is the sneer — that of Chester for Jim's "taking it to heart", of Jones for the people who are "born tame", and of Donkin for the naive charity of the forecastle crowd.

Yet even these outlaws cling together, and, though self-interest is paramount, they depend upon a code of loyalty. Ricardo is sincere in his indignation against Heyst who, according to the story told by Schomberg, betrayed his "chum"; the captain and officers of the Patna risk their lives waiting for their companion, George; even Brown of Lord Jim is not without a certain amount of loyalty to his band of men.

An evil trio similar to the one in Victory appears in "Because of the Dollars". Its leader is a Frenchman who, rather grotesquely but symbolically, possesses no hands with which to contribute to the common achievement of man.\footnote{10} Evil

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9 Each evil character has its counterpart in a "good" character; Pedro with the Chinaman Wang, who is "obedient to his instincts", is extremely orderly and creates a garden; Ricardo with Lena, who understands him; and Jones with the intelligent Heyst, who also come to an understanding.

10 Jean-Aubry, The Sea Dreamer, p. 81, says that Conrad met this Frenchman with no hands in Sydney. Conrad would, however, be fully aware of the symbolic meaning of this defect.
is not only disorderly and self-seeking, but also lazy, living not by work but by exploitation of the weaknesses of mankind. Order and tradition, believes Conrad, are maintained not only by renunciation of self-interest, but also by positive action.

The worth of a sentiment lies in the sacrifices men will make for its sake. All ideals are built on the ground of solid achievement, which in a given profession creates in time a certain tradition, or, in other words, a standard of conduct. The existence of a standard of conduct in its turn makes the most improbable achievement possible, by augmenting the power of endurance and of self-sacrifice amongst men who look to the past for their lessons and for their inspiration.11

Such idealism, based on "solid achievement", is order; it is "the enemy of things that 'just happen'";12 it is man's way to progress, even though it may be a way obscured and blocked by man's imperfect nature, his vanity, his selfishness, his self-deceptions and, even more tragically, by his limited knowledge. The price the individual must pay is "in the coin of accepted morality, self-restraint, and toil",13 for "a man is a worker. If he is not that he is nothing. Just nothing — like a mere adventurer."14 Even the greatest of leaders, says Conrad, does not understand fully the nature of his work "because of its magnitude and the remoteness of its end",15

11 "The Dover Patrol", Last Essays, p. 58.
12 Preface to "The Shorter Tales", Last Essays, p. 141.
13 The Secret Agent, p. 53.
14 "Well Done", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 190.
15 Ioc. cit.
but:

from the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practice which makes good craftsmen, the sense of right conduct which we call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born.16

Work undertaken with single-minded devotion makes men, giving to their achievements that vitality and continuity in which their souls are expressed, tempered and matured through the succeeding generations.17

It is noticeable that Conrad's villains are usually slovenly in appearance, and often grossly fat, the signs of their aversion to orderliness and to labor. Donkin of the Narcissus shirks his work and his responsibilities, "a creature who knows about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company, the independent offspring of the ignoble freedom of the slums, full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea".18 Willems, one of Conrad's first 'outlaws' is untidy and lazy; even the blind Lingard soon realizes this his protegé is "hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea", with "an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work," and unfit to be a seaman.19

Brown, the agent of destruction in Lord Jim

17 Ibid., pp. 196-7.
18 The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', p. 11. Dr. Monygham of Nostromo is distinguished from the "shiftless Europeans" only by his "immaculate cleanliness". He wears a white jacket to visit Mrs. Gould.
19 An Outcast of the Islands, p. 17.
instinctively hates Jim on first sight, for:

there was something in the very neatness of Jim's clothes from the white helmet to the canvas leggings and the pipe-clayed boots, which in Brown's sombre irritated eyes seemed to belong to things he had in the very shaping of his life condemned and flouted. Brown knows at once that they are "standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind". Yet even Jim, at the beginning of his career, was not "a good sailor". He never learned "the perfect love of the work" and he was "secretly glad he had not to go on deck" during his first storm; he succumbed easily to the decay of the East and accepted the easy life of the Patna, the service of "short passages, good deck-chairs, large native crews, and the distinction of being white" rather than "the home service with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans." Verloc, of The Secret Agent, is drawn into the revolutionists' circle because he is lazy; indeed, Conrad decides, "the majority of revolutionists are the enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly." Verloc is described in the imagery of a pig, with "the air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed" — and is suitably murdered with a carving knife; the little shop is untidy, with dusty shelves, faded
merchandise, soiled book covers, and a "hopelessly cracked" bell. Verloc is also unattached to any tradition or "standard of conduct":

there was about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised; the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism.25

The same "air of moral nihilism", of disorder, of waste, of disregard for human values, appalls Marlow on his voyage into the "Heart of Darkness". The warship "firing into a continent", the railway truck with its wheels off, the stacks of rusting machinery, the soldier whose jacket lacks a button, the wantonly smashed drain-pipes, the group of dying miners, the missing rivets, the intrigues of the officials, are all outward signs of the moral degradation of the participants in the "mad scramble for loot". In this moral vacuum Marlow feels completely isolated from all those around him, with the exception of the few mechanics "whom the other pilgrims naturally despised".26 He retains his sense of identity by externalizing himself in his work. The only orderly thing at the station is the bookkeeping of the company's chief accountant, who saves himself from the general demoralization by devotion to his work and by keeping some symbols of civilization, his "high-starched collar, white cuffs, snowy trousers, clean necktie, and varnished boots".27

26 Heart of Darkness, p. 85.
27 Ibid., p. 67.
Such outward manifestations of one's own traditions are an important aid to a man lost in an alien culture or in an alien moral climate; they link him to his own past and help him retain what Conrad calls his "moral identity".28 When Marlow comes upon the young Russian's book on seamanship, the pages seem "luminous with another than a professional light," while "to leave off reading it was like tearing away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship."29 Symbolically the book is "lost" during the youth's period of association with Kurtz, and is restored by Marlow who frees him from this discipleship to a man who has repudiated all the values represented by the book. Kurtz too clings to a symbol of his own former tradition, the photograph of his fiancee. Just as the native Karain feels a need for a charm to protect him from "the outer darkness", so the civilized Hollis can see that he too, and the others from "the unbelieving west" have something similar, a collection of "ribbons, letters, pictures, flowers":

"Charms and talismans! Charms that keep them straight, that drive them crooked, that have the power to make a young man sigh, an old man smile. Potent things that procure dreams of joy, thoughts of regret, that soften hard hearts, and can temper a soft one to the hardness of steel. Gifts of heaven — things of earth."30

Conrad suggests that the strength of a sailor's feeling of community arises not from his devotion to an abstract "spirit of the sea", but from his having a concrete object to which he can

28 Lord Jim, p. 136.
29 Heart of Darkness, pp. 99-100.
30 "Karain", Tales of Unrest, p. 48.
be faithful, "something that in his eyes has a body, a character, a fascination, and almost a soul — it is his ship." Conrad repeatedly asserts his dislike of philosophy, of abstract ideals consisting of words only, and his preference for idealism expressed in action, for action is commitment, a test of sincerity. Charles Gould externalizes his ideal of justice in the form of his silver mine; Jim, who cannot be a story book hero in the "outside" world, creates a world in which he might be his ideal self. As the Professor of Under Western Eyes expresses this human need:

> even the most idealistic conception of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable.

The same need to externalize one's self, to justify one's actions to another person and thus relate them to some human continuity is felt by the very isolated, especially those facing the final isolation of death. The sceptic, Decoud, who has been drawn into actions for which he thinks he has only contempt, must write to his sister before he ventures into the obscurity of the Placid Gulf. The author comments:

> In the most sceptical heart there lurks at such moments, when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings, like a light by which the action may be seen when the personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world. Therefore, ... Decoud was filling the pages of a large pocket-book with a letter to his sister.

31 "Well Done", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 191.
32 E.g. Youth, p. 8, and Within the Tides, p. 67.
33 Under Western Eyes, p. 106.
34 Nostromo, p. 230.
Razumov, who is completely isolated in a moral climate which he detests, writes in a journal, "the pitiful resource of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to;" 35 the boy George, in The Arrow of Gold, when he finds himself "a stranger in the moral region" of the Carlist group, 36 records his thoughts in a journal to "keep a better hold of the actualities"; 37 and the young captain of The Shadow-Line, not expecting to live through his ordeal of guilt and inertia, scribbles in a notebook. 38 Leggatt, of The Secret Sharer, who has "a confounded lonely time" on the Sephora, a moral climate in which he was a stranger, tells the young captain that his swim towards the ship's light was instinctive. Although resigned to swimming out into darkness, he wanted "to be seen, to talk with somebody" before going. After being assured that someone of his own tradition, another "Conway boy", understands his actions, he can become "a free man", one of Conrad's "proud swimmers striking out for a new destiny". Razumov's confession and the inarticulate Jim's attempt to write a last letter to Marlow are other examples of

35 Under Western Eyes, p. 309.

36 "as much of a stranger as the most hopeless castaway stumbling in the dark upon a hut of natives and finding them in the grip of some situation appertaining to the mentalities, prejudices, and problems of an undiscovered country." The Arrow of Gold, p. 69.

37 Ibid., p. 88. Conrad said that the only time he kept a journal was during the Congo voyage when he experienced the same moral isolation. The diary is printed in part in Last Essays.

38 The Shadow-Line, p. 106.
the same urge in man to give his actions meaning by relating them to a tradition, to the flow of mankind. "I would like somebody to understand", cries Jim, "— somebody — one person at least!" Complete moral isolation, the feeling that one is not trusted by others, or that one's actions are without moral connections, is unbearable to any man who is not completely evil. This is true loneliness. Man may cover it with some illusion, as Almayer covers Nina's footprints with mounds of sand, like graves, and assures himself that he will forget, and he may thus live on; or he may succumb to the despair of isolation, as does Schultz, "the impossible gentle Schultz", when no one believes his story of selling the guns on Jasper's boat. But no human being can "bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad," says Conrad when discussing Razumov's desperate need for "moral support" in his decision to betray Haldin. To Conrad man exists only in relationship to others, by virtue of their trust, their confidence, their respect, or their love. "Trust" is one of the most frequently used words in Conrad's books and letters. It implies the confidence of others in the moral basis of one's actions. "I must be trusted in what I do," insists Razumov to Mikulin; his betrayal of the revolutionaries must be


40 "Freya of the Seven Isles," Twixt Land and Sea, p. 231. "I am an honest man!" he repeats. "You must believe me when I tell you that I am a thief."

41 Under Western Eyes, p. 39.
recognized as being motivated by a principle held in common with the group he has elected to join, or he is as morally isolated as before.42

Linking his life with those of others who hold similar ideals is, to Conrad, one of the chief ways in which man may alleviate his state of loneliness and insignificance. To the isolated, this sense of belonging can be a safeguard against the approach of evil or the urge to act in self-interest; it acts not only as "moral support" but also as a moral reference point by which man may judge himself and decide upon action. Razumov, who is without a family or a class tradition, is handicapped in making his important moral decision, for he is not sure just what he believes, and has no pattern of behaviour to guide him. He tries to explain this to Haldin, who has the moral support of his family and of a belief. He says:

Did it ever occur to you how a man who has never had a word of warm affection in his life would think on matters which you would think first with or without your class, your domestic tradition, your fireside prejudices? I have no domestic tradition. I have nothing to think against.43

The young, untried captain in The Shadow-Line is helped by this sense of "belonging". When he first sits in the captain's chair and sees himself reflected many times in the mirrors of the room, he realizes that he is taking his place in a fraternity.

42 Under Western Eyes, p. 312.
43 Ibid., p. 61.
It struck me that this quietly staring man whom I was watching, both as if he were myself and somebody else, was not exactly a lonely figure. He had his place in a line of men whom he did not know, of whom he had never heard...but...whose souls in relation to their humble life's work had no secrets for him.44

He is the "latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty; not continuous in blood, indeed, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life."

In his battle against the "enchantment" of inertia and of darkness, the young captain is greatly sustained by this feeling of "a semi-mystical bond with the dead" and by his anger with his predecessor whose behaviour "was a complete act of treason, the betrayal of a tradition which seemed to me as imperative as any guide on earth could be."45 He is also upheld by the example and the very presence of Ransome, the embodiment of the ideals of good seamanship, and by the loyalty of the men such as Gambril who, though ill, steers without complaining, his hollow eyes "illuminated against the blackness which had swallowed up our world", and his arm on the wheel.

44 The Shadow-Line, p. 53. Conrad himself tells many times (e.g. Last Essays, p. 18) how the sense of belonging to a tradition alleviated his loneliness, for he felt his kinship with the sailors and explorers of all time. His nostalgia for the sea is partly nostalgia for the place where he could most fully identify himself with a group, and also for its uncomplicated moral code.

45 The sense of being sustained by the opposition of the enemies of the tradition recurs in Lord Jim. Jim faces the trial because the others run away, and he tells Marlow that the anger of the others in the lifeboat "saved his life".
seeming "to shine with a light of its own". It is Ransome who rouses the captain from the inertia brought by guilt, self-doubt, and the fear of "going on deck to face it", and it is Ransome whose "consistent heroism" saves the ship. When he goes below, the captain is uneasy, "as if some support had been withdrawn".

Jim, as Marlow urges, the Frenchman, was without the moral support of his own kind at the time of his testing. The Frenchman, however, insists that "the honour remains" and is "real", real enough to carry one through a crisis of fear. The reader knows that Jim had already repudiated his membership in the tradition or at least showed that he did not understand his place in it, when he joined the Patna, an easy berth, rather than take a passage home, and so has no adequate sustaining "belief" to carry him through the crisis. The most damning testimony against Jim at his trial is given by the old Malayan helmsman, who declares that he does not believe that the white men left the ship through fear of death, for he has worked with many white captains and knows their tradition. As he names a long series of "dead-and-gone skippers", under whom he served, the audience is hushed, realizing that he is "possessed of some

46 The Shadow-Line, p. 110. Cf. the light that seems to shine from the seaman's book found by Marlow in Heart of Darkness.


48 Ibid., p. 112. Cf. Heat's assurance when confronting Michaelis, The Secret Agent, p. 96; "the consciousness of universal support in his general activity heartened him to grapple with the particular problem."
mysterious theory of defence" which might have saved Jim.\textsuperscript{49}

Though Jim's thinking is distorted by his imaginative romantic egoism, and although he is the only one in the courtroom unaware of the significance of the Malayan's remarks, Jim is aware of having lost something precious, and it is this that makes him worthwhile to Marlow. When wrapped in his dream of "recklessly heroic aspirations", he has "no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain";\textsuperscript{50} but in his less exalted moods, as in the scene on the beach when Marlow leaves for England, he shows that his "faithfulness" is also a way to "keep in touch" with his home traditions and with the parson father whose letter he carries in his pocket.\textsuperscript{51} "He was romantic, but none the less true", decides Marlow. Whatever doubts Marlow has of Jim's motives — and he has many — he does not doubt that Jim is "one of us"; that is, that he is not a Chester who scoffs at the ideals of the profession.

I don't know how much Jim understood; but I know he felt, he felt confusedly, but powerfully, the demand of some such truth or some such illusion... The thing is that in virtue of his feeling he mattered.\textsuperscript{52}

Indeed, says Conrad in a few sentences that show how closely \textit{Lord Jim} was allied to his own story of alienation, probably Jim as an exile from his land and from his father feels the

\begin{itemize}
\item 49 \textit{Lord Jim}, pp. 98-99.
\item 50 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 83.
\item 51 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 334.
\item 52 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 222.
\end{itemize}
bond more strongly than he did when he belonged inside the 'tradition' and a family group.

I think it is the lonely, without a fireside or an affection they may call their own, those who return not to a dwelling but to the land itself, to meet its disembodied, eternal, and unchangeable spirit — it is those who understand best its severity, its saving power, the grace of its secular right to our fidelity, to our obedience.53

Marlow is Jim's connection with his traditions, both professional and national. Without this hand reaching out to him, Jim would be adrift and might become a Chester, a complete exile. Marlow explains his connection with Jim:

I was afraid of, some day, being waylaid by a bleary-eyed, swollen-faced, besmirched loafer, with no soles to his canvas shoes, and with a flutter of rags about the elbows, who, on the strength of old acquaintance, would ask for a loan of five dollars. You know the awful jaunty bearing of these scarecrows coming to you from a decent past, the rasping careless voice, the half-averted impudent glances — those meetings more trying to a man who believes in the solidarity of our lives than the sight of an impenitent deathbed to a priest.54

The hand outstretched gives the "moral support", the courage to go on, to tackle the darkness and evil of the world. Lena when alone cringed before Schomberg, but on the island with Heyst she feels completely competent to deal with Ricardo's attack because she is:

no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her.55

53 Loc. cit. Dr. Morf claims that Jim is Conrad.
54 Ibid., pp. 223-224.
55 Victory, p. 292.
Even the affection of a dog — ironically a spurious affection — is enough to check Flora de Barral's impulse to commit suicide. When Captain Anthony speaks to her of their common loneliness in an unfriendly world, she finds the courage to face life. Conrad adapts his favourite metaphor of the proud swimmer to express her new outlook:

That girl was, one may say, washing about with slack limbs in the ugly surf of life with no opportunity to strike out for herself, when suddenly she has been made to feel that there was somebody beside her in the bitter water.

As Lingard finds when he is confronted with Mr. and Mrs. Travers, a man is not free of the moral claims of his tradition even in an alien culture. The two traders of "An Outpost of Progress" who are alone in the jungle and walk arm in arm "as children do in the dark" are safe until they break the moral code of their own tradition by acquiescing in Makola's slave trade. Suddenly they feel fear.

It was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the past that impressed them so much as an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety, and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts. The images of home; the memory of people like them, of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel, receded into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine. And out of the great silence of surrounding wilderness, its very hopelessness and savagery seemed to approach them nearer, to draw them gently, to look upon them, to envelop them with a solicitude irresistible, familiar, and disgusting. 57

56 Chance, pp. 202-3. Marlow is puzzled about Flora's remorse for trying to commit suicide, for to him "Remorse... is only understandable... when some wrong had been done to a fellow-creature", and apparently Flora is without human ties. Later, however, he discovers that she has one tie, with her father.

When Kayerts commits the final sin of murder, he is exhilarated by a momentary feeling of freedom, of complete freedom from any moral code.

He seemed to have broken loose from himself altogether. His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred appeared in their true light at last! Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous.\(^{58}\)

But the next morning, at the sound of the whistle of civilization's steamer, and at the sight of his own tradition's symbol, the "cross-shaped stain upon the shifting purity of the mist", he learns that the "free" man is alone and lost, and he commits suicide. In *The Heart of Darkness*, Marlow has trouble finding a way in which to reach Kurtz, a more intelligent Kayerts, who also has "kicked himself loose from the earth", and made himself "free" of all the moral restraints of his tradition. Marlow says, "I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low". Searching frantically for a "magic" formula to break the "spell of the wilderness" that was drawing Kurtz along the jungle path, Marlow is inspired to say, "You will be lost — utterly lost" — a truth that has the power to make Kurtz hesitate. To bring him back Marlow has, "even like the niggers, to invoke him — himself — his own exalted and incredible degradations"\(^{59}\) for there was nothing else. His own powerful personality is not, however, enough. When facing death, with "an intense and

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\(^{58}\) "An Outpost of Progress", *Tales of Unrest*, p. 114. Cf. Cornelius's description of Jim's idealism as "childish".

\(^{59}\) *Heart of Darkness*, p. 144.
hopeless despair" he pronounces judgment upon himself. Razumov experiences the same sense of "freedom" when he decides to betray Haldin. "He felt himself invulnerable — raised far above the shallowness of common judgment." He wants to be "free" and in anger denies the bond between him and Haldin, a fellow man, only to find that without that bond he is nothing. "Everything was gone. His existence was a great, cold blank, something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists." As Razumov says later to Haldin's sister, he was a man who understood "only to-day", who had not seen the true picture of himself as a man in relation to other men of the past, the present and the future. He is saved when she forces him into a relationship of trust, a relationship he had refused with her brother. He says:

You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace ... And you have done it in the same way, too, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence.

Like so many of Conrad's characters — Heyst, the young captain of The Shadow-Line, Decoud, Rita — Razumov discovers that the man unencumbered by any attachment, "the free man", is living in a void; the most complete expression of the

60 Under Western Eyes, p.41. Cf. The Secret Agent, p.148, the sense of "loneliness, of evil freedom", of becoming "unplaced", felt by the Assistant Commissioner when he steps out of the conventional path. He finds the feeling "rather pleasant". Massy, when planning his trickery against Captain Whalley feels a similar "pride of superiority to common prejudices".

61 Under Western Eyes, p.303.
62 Ibid., p.358.
individual comes when he renounces self and submits to something greater. Not freedom but servitude, is the way.

At one level, the servitude is to a "job". The simple and elemental, who are not made complicated by the power to reflect, achieve their greatest stature by being faithful to the task at hand. Singleton is "monumental", "like a statue of heroic size" because he knows his duty, and "steers with care"; the men of the ships are at their greatest and strongest when they are working together, defying the world of storms, of fires, of destructive power. When inspired by the kinship of their work, the men of the Narcissus can face the death they formerly feared, and, without a thought for themselves, rescue Wait from his cabin. Marlow notes the "partnership" between himself and his black helmsman in the "Heart of Darkness":

he steered for me — I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken.63

When he dies, his look towards Marlow is a "claim of distant kinship", and Marlow asserts that the like of this savage "who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara" was worth more than that of Kurtz, the product of European civilization.

The training acquired in the tradition gives one values to live by, values that have been tested over a period of

63 "Heart of Darkness", Youth, p. 119. The sense of social responsibility is basic in Conrad and to his belief in "solidarity". As Marlow finds with Jim, to help another is to be responsible. Cf. Belfast's answer to the question "Who will miss him?": "I do — I pulled him out."
time. The unimaginative Captain MacWhirr lacks young Juke's sentiment about his flag, the symbol of his tradition, but he understands the basic behaviour which the flag stands for, what Conrad calls "the sense of the fitness of things". "Belief does not necessarily imply comprehension," says Conrad in the same story, and MacWhirr is armed with the right values that can take him through the cataclysm. He depends on good men who express the acceptance of the same values in their work, the engineer Rout, the stokers, young Jukes, and the builders who made a good ship. The flag "doesn't make any difference as long as we are on board," he tells Jukes. In contrast, the second mate, who is "competent enough" and shows "no evidence of any sort of vice", is exposed by the storm and is cast out, a homeless wanderer.

At a higher level is the French lieutenant of Lord Jim who has enough imagination and has had enough experience with fear to be aware of the inner strengths given by the belonging to a tradition, to know that "courage does not come of itself" but from the example and eyes of those around you, or, if these are not present, from the sense of "honour" within you, the

64 His insistence upon good workmanship and anger about "rubbishy locks" are "his confession of faith, had he only known it", comments Conrad. His attitude towards "books", the accumulated experience of his tradition, is interesting. At first he is contemptuous and relies upon his own experience; when the storm becomes something beyond his experience, he uses some of the knowledge of the books. If he had understood the books, he might have evaded the storm. Nevertheless, his final comment that "you don't find everything in books" is right. The experience is even more necessary — the experience Jukes lacks.
"decent fear of disgrace". 65 Uncomplicated by Jim's romantic individualism, he accepts completely and abides by the code of his tradition and does what Jim failed to do. 66 Captain Allistoun, Conrad's leader of the highest order, is also aware of the secret places of men's hearts; 67 his knowledge comes from not only "the profound depths of a larger experience", but also from the gift of imagination. Repeatedly in his stories and essays Conrad decries the attributes of imagination and intelligence, and often, as in the contrasted portraits of MacWhirr and Jukes, he infers the superiority of the unimag- inative and the stupid, but the preference is more an emotional longing than an intellectual assent. Conrad knows well, from personal experience, the vulnerability of the imaginative, intelligent man; how imagination may immobilize him by arousing

65 "His War Book", Late Essays, p. 123.

66 It may be noted that he is also without the strength, as well as the weakness, of the romantic, a topic that is dis- cussed in a later chapter. The lieutenant, Jim, and Brierly make an interesting trio; the unrecognized hero, the man who wants to be a hero and fails, and the man acknowledged as a hero by others but whose heroism has an unsound basis. Since writing this section, I have found that Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, Harvard University Press, 1957, follows a somewhat similar pattern in his discussion of "the unreflective heroic seaman", "the vulnerable hero", and "the perceptive hero". He contrasts Marlow, "the perceptive hero" who follows the code yet has self-doubt, skepticism, and aware- ness of his human fallibility, with the lieutenant whom he classifies as unimaginative (pp.23-4). The latter point is debatable; whether his austerity arises from a lack of imagin- ation or from conviction because of experience cannot be deci- ded from the limited portrait Conrad gives. He is the positive ideal with which Jim's negativity is contrasted.

67 Yet man is always surprising, and the affair of the mutiny on the Narcissus adds to the captain's knowledge of men.

68 In Lord Jim, p. 11, "the enemy of men, the father of all terrors".
and augmenting fear — a process so well described in *Lord Jim* — and how intelligence may cause paralysis by introspection, analysis, scepticism and despair — resulting in the "Heystian attitude", the Kurtz hollowness, the Razumov self-deception, or the Decoud life-emptiness. The unimaginative and not too intelligent men are safe from these dangers, and therefore trustworthy, and Conrad longs for their simplicity, their ability to follow without doubt the straightforward pattern of conduct supplied by the code of a tradition. In a letter to R. B. Cunninghamé-Graham, Conrad discusses the character of Singleton:

I think Singleton with an education is impossible. But first of all, — what education? If it is in the knowledge of how to live, my man essentially possessed it. He was in perfect accord with his life .... Would you seriously, of malice prepense, cultivate in that unconscious man the power to think? Then he would become conscious, — and much smaller, — and very unhappy. Now he is simple and great like an elementary force. Nothing can touch him but the curse of decay, — ... he does not think.

Would you seriously wish to tell such a man "Know thyself! Understand that thou art nothing; less than a shadow, more insignificant than a drop of water in the ocean, more fleeting than the illusion of a dream? Would you?70

The values held by the French lieutenant and by the simple uncomplicated men such as Singleton and Ransome are the "old iron"

69 Conrad's letters, especially the early ones, are full of his despair, scepticism, doubt, and inability to act because of these results of introspection.

of the Patna that holds against the destructive force of the ocean in spite of Jim's imaginative fears. To Conrad the "old ideas" upon which the community of mankind is based are durable, "as tough... as the spirit of some men we meet now and then, worn to a shadow and breasting the weight of life".\textsuperscript{71}

Without the added dimension of imagination, however, one is cut off from everything except the world of outward appearances; one is denied those illuminating flashes of insight into the hidden reality that enrich and deepen a life. MacWhirr is isolated from his wife and from much of the world around him;\textsuperscript{72} Captain Mitchell of \textit{Nostromo} is, unlike Hirsch or Dr. Monygham, too unimaginative to succumb to terror, but he sits "a little apart" in the Casa Gould, "a little disregarded and unconscious of it; utterly in the dark and imagining himself to be in the thick of things."\textsuperscript{73} Such men are, in Conrad's eyes, fortunate, for their faith is not open to attack from imagination or reasoning; they are "safe". But they are

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{71} \textit{Lord Jim}, p. 98. The lieutenant is described in terms of old metal. The same faith is expressed in \textit{The Secret Agent}; the anarchist Professor doubts his power to destroy only when he thinks of the "invincible multitude" behind Inspector Heat.
    \item \textsuperscript{72} Conrad suggests that even MacWhirr must have had some imagination to have run away to sea, amazing his shopkeeping family by this aberration. His experience with the typhoon adds to his knowledge of himself as a man, as evidenced by his letter to his wife.
    \item \textsuperscript{73} \textit{Nostromo}, p. 112. Captain Mitchell is also sustained in his encounter with Sotillo by his national background; he has its strength behind him, and he has not known torture. Hirsch, the Jewish merchant, the archetypal exile, is without this support and knows what Sotillo represents. As Irving Howe notes in "Joseph Conrad, The Political Novels", \textit{Kenyon Review} XVI. (1954), pp. 1-19, Hirsch "knows what awaits him, he has a sense of history."
\end{itemize}
also limited in their powers of insight; they are permanently isolated from the inner meaning and often from the needs of the lives around them. Of Captain Mitchell the author comments that "characteristic illuminating trifles of expression, action, or movement, escaped him completely. He was too pompously and innocently aware of his own existence to observe that of others." The unimaginative "kind" Fynes of Chance are similar in their self-absorption and inability to understand the needs of the lonely Flora. "Imaginative sympathy" is the term Conrad uses repeatedly for the faculty of understanding others, the faculty needed to lessen man's sense of isolation, for:

> from that same provision of understanding there springs in us compassion, charity, indignation, the sense of solidarity; and in minds of any largeness an inclination to that indulgence which is next to affection.74

Nor will the safe dull men achieve self-discovery. In The Mirror of the Sea Conrad calls them the "Royal Academicians" of the trade, never startling you "by a touch of originality, by a fresh audacity of inspiration", "safe, very safe", but their activities always "unsuggestive, empty of any lesson that one could lay to heart".75

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74 Chance, pp. 117-118.

75 Mirror of the Sea, p. 32. Cf. Typhoon, p. 19, "Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last .... There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate — or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea."
CHAPTER VI.

TRADITION AND CONVENTION AS SEPARATING FORCES

You are strange, you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true .... You do not understand the difference between yourselves and us — who are men.¹

While Conrad so frequently discusses the comfort, the strength and the sense of solidarity given to men working within a tradition, he is fully aware that race, family background, and traditions can be almost insuperable barriers between men. His first story, written while he was still at sea, concerns the tragedy of a man in an alien society, a lonely man who dreams of going "home", and of an equally lonely girl who cannot remain in her isolated position as a half-caste and prefers to step backwards into "the hopeless quagmire of barbarism" and accept the lineage of her mother rather than share the isolation of her "traditionless" father.² While having the same "moral reference points" joins men in common understanding, being amongst those of a different tradition, even those of opposite temperaments, means tragic isolation. George in the Carlist group, Razumov among the revolutionaries, and Marlow with the "philanthropists" in the jungle are typical examples.

One of the most moving of Conrad's stories, and,

¹ An Outcast of the Islands, p. 226 (Babalatchi to Lingard).
² Almayer's Folly, p. 43.
according to J. H. Retinger,\(^3\) one of the most autobiographical, is that of the castaway Yanko and Amy Foster. Yanko is by fate alone in a land where he is so different that he is "like a man transplanted into another planet". He is different not only in language and culture, but also in temperament; he is "innocent of heart and full of goodwill"; he is happy, and is thrown out of the local public house for expressing his joy in life by dancing and singing; above all, he is loving, and beautiful. Conrad describes him in the imagery of a bird, with "a skimming walk", "a carolling voice" "like a lark's", and a "little startled glance", while his child is like him, lying "very still, with his big black eyes, with his fluttered air of a bird in a snare".\(^4\) Yanko is thus not only a foreigner; he is also the vulnerable imaginative man in a hostile society, akin to Jasper and his beautiful boat destroyed by Heemskirk, to George threatened by the carnival crowd, to Rita persecuted by the barbarous Ortega and by her conventional sister, and to Tomassov persecuted by the crude adjutant.\(^5\)

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3 J. H. Retinger, *Conrad and His Contemporaries*, p. 112. Like Conrad is Yanko's muttering in his native tongue while in fever and Yanko's accent. Mrs. Conrad mentions this in her biographies also.

4 Yanko dies "like a wild creature under a net." The captured bird image is a favourite of Conrad's and is one of the dominant images used in *The Rescue*. Jasper and his boat are also described in bird imagery.

5 "The Warrior's Soul", *Tales of Hearsay*. Conrad says "it was his lot to be the predestined victim. You know what the world's justice and mankind's judgment are like. They fell heavily on him with a sort of inverted hypocrisy."
The only one with imagination enough to catch a glimpse of the beauty of the stranger is Amy Foster, and by her love and her "act of impulsive pity" he is "brought back again within the pale of human relations with his new surroundings." Amy's love transcends her fear of the unknown in Yanko, but, with the coming of the child, her possessive maternal love restores her conventionality, and, when Yanko sings strange songs and talks in a foreign tongue to the child, she is "awakened at last from that mysterious forgetfulness of self, from that enchantment, from that transport, by a fear resembling the unaccountable terror of a brute", and leaves him to die of a broken heart "to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair."8

To Yanko the people of the village look sad, "like dead people".9 Similar expressions are used frequently by Conrad to express his criticism of the civilized "land" European of his day. Typical are his tirades against Jim's father, safe in his little study and so sure that he knows all about right and wrong; against the tourists in the hotel who are startled by Jim's outburst in the dining room, and are described caustically as being "as incapable of receiving new impressions as their trunks upstairs";10 and Powell's anger

6 "Amy Foster", Typhoon, p. 125.
7 Ibid., p. 110.
8 Ibid., p. 142.
9 Ibid., p. 129.
10 Lord Jim, pp. 341-2.
regarding the inefficiency of the "shore-gang" because of their security in the knowledge:

that no matter what they do this tight little island won't turn turtle with them or spring a leak and go to the bottom with their wives and children.\footnote{11 Chance, p. 4.}

Conrad's criticism may be partly the resentment of a man who never quite fits into the English society, a society of merchants and commercially-minded imperialists,\footnote{12 Both types are treated in Conrad's books with angry contempt. The letter to Edward Garnett of 21 August, 1908 regarding the attack in The Daily News ends with: "If I had made money by dealing in diamond shares like my neighbour here, Sir Julius Wernher, of Hamburg, I would be a baronet in the UK and provided both with a language and a country." In "The Warrior's Soul", Tales of Hearsay, p. 17, Conrad says, "People without compassion \textit{in war} are the civilians, government officials, merchants and such like."} and a society that seems to have lost, because of its safety, some of the spiritual values his own country found in its hopeless struggles; or it may be the comments of a European who sees the world as a far less stable place than dreamed of by the average, complacent Englishman; but it also derived from Conrad's often expressed belief that an important part of valuable human experience is lost in sophisticated urban society. People who are too safe, whose sensibilities have solidified into a mere set of conventions, can never discover their own natures, can even lose their essential humanity and thus never understand others. Wrapped within their illusions of their own dignity, their own virtue, they are protected from full self-discovery, from the exciting consciousness of their own personalities which is so characteristic of his dreamers,
and from the knowledge of the truth about themselves, which is the beginning of moral growth.

Conrad's most common image to describe city life is that of a brick wall, suggesting separation and dull uniformity. Marlow watches the people in a city street as he talks to Flora, and notes:

they passed us in their shabby garments, with sallow faces, haggard, anxious, or weary, or simply without expression, in an unsmiling sombre stream not made up of lives but of mere unconsidered existences whose joys, struggles, thoughts, sorrows and their very hopes were miserable, glamourless, and of no account in the world.13

The city people at the ticket gate in "The Return" are joyless, separated, and all alike:

almost as if they had been wearing a uniform; their indifferent faces were varied but somehow suggested kinship, like the faces of a band of brothers who through prudence, dignity, disgust, or foresight would resolutely ignore each other; ... their eyes, brown, black, grey, blue had all the same stare, concentrated and empty, satisfied and unthinking.14

The word picture painted of the Herveys of "The Return" is Conrad's fullest portrait of conventional man. Successful, disdainful, confident, with many "friends", they "skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere — like two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the Stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen."15 Hervey had never

13 Chance, p. 208.
15 Cf. note 76, chapter V.
thought of his wife "as simply a woman" until the moral shock of her desertion forces him to look into the stream of dark passions and real emotions. At first there is chaos in his thinking, for:

the sentiments that he knew that in fidelity to his bringing up, to his prejudices and his surroundings, he ought to experience, were so mixed up with the novelty of real feelings, of fundamental feelings, that know nothing of creed, class, or education, that he was unable to distinguish clearly between what is and what ought to be; between the inexcusable truth and the valid excuses.16

When he is completely stripped of all his protective illusions, he feels alone and exiled — that moment of panic and terror and complete isolation that Conrad so often describes when a man confronts himself and finds that all the values upon which he has based his life and built his personality are false, the moment when he feels betrayed and alone in "the utter exile of disbelief".17

For a moment he ceased to be a member of society with a position, a career and a name attached ... He was a simple human being removed from the delightful world of crescents and squares. He stood alone, naked and afraid, like the first man on the first day of evil.18

16 "The Return," Tales of Unrest, p. 131.

17 Experienced also by Nostromo, Lingard of The Rescue, Dr. Monygham, Il Conde, Jasper, Captain Whalley, the girl of "To-morrow", Kurtz, Decoud, Razumov, and Heyst.

Hervey must reassess himself, and he realizes that a wall of convention has existed between him and his wife. With this realization comes a glimpse of truth, of the ideal real love which is "the very secret of existence", and he holds out his hand to her. But she has not the gift of love; she is like the statue on the stairway, "the sightless woman of marble, ... thrusting blindly at them a cluster of lights"; they are completely separated, and he leaves to seek life rather than remain in separation and in spiritual death.19

Mr. and Mrs. Travers of The Rescue are somewhat similar in their condition of isolation from each other and from others because of a hard shell of convention. Mr. Travers and Lingard are completely unable to communicate. Travers' contempt and distrust make Lingard remember "where he began" and, besides raising the barriers of class, also threaten the concept of his "King Tom" personality; Travers' conceit and hard coating of convention make him unable to recognize or understand the real emotions of anyone, especially those of the romantic Lingard.20 As the emotional atmosphere around him becomes more and more complex, Travers becomes increasingly isolated. He is ill with the fear of the unknown which he cannot comprehend, with "the anguish of a slow mind with an

19 The statue image is used also in The Arrow of Gold and "The Partner". Conrad spoils "The Return" by his overuse of the basic imagery; he leaves little to the imagination or intelligence of the reader. He is never as sure a craftsman in stories set in society as in those based upon the sea.

20 The mate, Shaw, with his conceit, racial pride, and fear of "assaults on his respectability", is a minor Travers.
instinctive dread of obscure places wherein new discoveries can be made."^{21} His conventions separate him from the significance of the events around him, and he learns nothing from the experience, although "the polished and solemn crust of hard proprieties had cracked slightly here and there under the strain."

Mrs. Travers is more interesting. She is a romantic, receptive, sympathetic, and capable of inspiring devotion, but she is disenchanted with life and too civilized. As a girl she longed for the "sincerity of a great passion"; she married Travers thinking him an idealist, only to find him "enthusiastically devoted to the nursing of his own career".^{22} Like Hervey, he treats her not as a woman, but as an acquisition, and she is disillusioned with the world he shows her which is "too prudent to be sincere". At the beginning of the story, though endowed with a woman's sympathy, she is indifferent to others, separated by apathy, for her future seems to be:

rapid, brilliant, uniform, without a glimpse of sincerity or true passion, without a single true emotion — not even that of a great sorrow.^{23}

She speaks "from behind a veil of immense indifference stretched between her and all men, between her heart and the meaning of events."^{24} Her first awakening from this indifference is caused

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21 *The Rescue*, p. 272.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 125. She wears the veil literally when she tells Tom the lie. The veil image is repeated throughout the book. "The cage" of muslin walls imprison the Europeans except D'Alcacer who is aware of the meaning of his surroundings. (p.284) Conrad uses the veil image in *Under Western Eyes*, p. 349 when Razumov confesses his lie to Natalia and she drops her veil to the floor, and in *The Secret Agent* in the final scene between Verloc and Winnie.
by the quarrel between her husband and Lingard, her first experience with a genuine emotion. When D'Alcacer is about to intervene, she stops him, crying, "Oh! this is truth — this is anger — something real at last." Her next awakening is the sight of primitive Immada, whom she envies because:

nothing stood between that girl and the truth of her sensations. She could be sincerely courageous, and tender and passionate and — well — ferocious. Why not ferocious? She could know the truth of terror — and of affection, absolutely, without artificial trammels, without the pain of restraint.

Mrs. Travers longs to find "the naked truth of life and passion buried under a growth of centuries", and she realizes that she can perhaps find it with Tom, who is outside social organization, and has the power to strip her "of her position, of her wealth, of her rank, of her past". "Here was a human being and the naked truth of things was not so very far from her notwithstanding the growth of centuries."

But Mrs. Travers is not capable of the complete trust, the complete renunciation of herself. The little confession Lingard makes to her regarding the opera, in which he "forgot himself" in the story of the princess reveals the difference between the two. She was never able to forget herself. "It was not in me," she admits. Nor, symbolically, do Immada's clothes, which she wears and likes for "their freedom of movement", really fit her. At the end she admits to the betrayed Tom, "Now I know that I couldn't change even if I wanted to. I am made of

25 The Rescue, p. 132.
26 Ibid., p. 153.
clay that is too hard."27

The Verlocs, too, are separated from each other and from truth by a protective covering of conventionality. Winnie accepts this covering deliberately, assuming the conventional role of wife because of her maternal passion for Stevie. She intuitively knows that she is safe only if she "puts her trust in face values" and so makes it a policy not "to look under the surface of things". Verloc is conventional by nature. Conceited enough to have the illusion that he is loved for himself alone, he is oblivious of the undercurrents of passions within his home. The tense scene in the parlour just before his murder in which Verloc thinks he is opening his heart to his wife, explaining himself, planning their future together, and, he thinks, for the first time moving a little closer to her, while she sits hearing and understanding nothing he says and seeing only "a blank wall" is one of the most dramatic Conrad has written.28

Felicia Mooresom, of "The Planter of Malata" is another example of a woman made incapable of love and separated from real life by her conventionality. She does not live, but exists in what her father calls "the froth of life", when:

thoughts, sentiments, feelings, actions too, are nothing but agitation in empty space — to amuse life — a sort of superior debauchery, exciting

28 The scene in An Outcast of the Islands between Willems and his native wife (pp. 30-31), and that at the end of "Heart of Darkness" between Marlow and Kurtz' fiancee are similar in their dramatic and ironic qualities.
and fatiguing, meaning nothing, leading nowhere ....
And everything is possible — except sincerity, such
as only stark, struggling humanity can know. 29

The girl's search for her lover is not "a sacred fire", but
is motivated by sentimentality and vanity; 30 her world, called
by the Editor the world of the two big F's, Fashion and
Finance, is seen by Renouard to be a world of Froth and
Fraud. 31 Like Mrs. Travers she is unfit for love; 32 she
cannot even recognize it in Renouard's embrace.

She was so used to the forms of repression
enveloping, softening the crude impulses of old
humanity that she no longer believed in their
existence as if it were an exploded legend. She
did not recognize what had happened to her. She
came safe out of his arms without a struggle, not
even having felt afraid. 33

As in his dream, she is only a cold statue of a goddess, that
crumbles into dust at the touch of reality. 34

Conrad's war upon sentimentality as opposed to
sincere feelings ventures into many fields, particularly into
that of humanitarianism. 35 It is the hidden element of egoism
and feeling of superior virtue which he fears, as well as

29 "The Planter of Malata", Within the Tides, p. 599.

30 The repulsive figure of Willie, the sentimentalist
"facile to tears" is contrasted with the real passion of
Renouard. Willie is described in terms of a bat.

31 Ibid., p. 24 and p. 66.

32 Also like Mrs. Travers she is a woman who wishes to influence the destiny of some man, a desire born of vanity.

33 Ibid., p. 114.

34 She is described in the imagery of Greek statues or of metallic brilliance.

35 Conrad recognizes sentimentality as one of the weaknesses of the English. He calls it "the cynicism of the crocodile" and says that it "commands all sorts of respects from the inhabitants of these Isles", "John Galsworthy", Last Essays, p. 130.
the fact that evil can feed upon this weakness of man. The sentimentality of Belfast and his shipmates encourages the evil of both Donkin and Wait in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and makes possible the lie and the doubt which destroy the solidarity of the crew. Donkin's first act, one of cynicism, is to prey upon "the naive instincts", upon the vanity of benevolence, the "sentimental pity" of the forecastle crowd, who give him clothes and are "touched by their own readiness to alleviate a shipmate's misery". The black, primeval, mysterious Wait, representing Death, then appears arrogantly declaring, "I belong to the ship," looks down upon the crew as if surveying "all the vastness of human folly", and begins to achieve power and ease by exploiting their sympathies and their human fear of death. The men of the ship are, like all men, eager to cover up unpleasant facts and fears with false hopes, with sentimentality, as represented by Belfast, or with illusions based upon conceit, as symbolized by the Cook.

36 The egoism of Lingard's "benevolence" to Willems has been discussed already. He has something of Jim's "contemptuous pity" for "his people" in his minor imperialism.

37 "Nothing lends itself more to lies than death," says Conrad, "The Return", *Tales of Unrest*, p. 129. The fact of mortality is also Singleton's lesson learned during the voyage, the "sinister truth" needed for his "completed wisdom". Cf. Ransome of *The Shadow-Line*.

38 Belfast goes even as far as to steal for his "Jimmy", thus breaking one of the most fundamental principles of a ship's solidarity. An excellent analysis of the story is Vernon Young, "Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*", *Accent XII*(1952), p. 67.

39 The Cook "beams with inward consciousness of his faith, like a conceited saint unable to forget his glorious reward." One of Wait's first actions on board is to frighten the Cook who is so sure that he is "ready for his Maker's call", an example of Conrad's ironic humour.
Their acquiescence in Wait's "untruthful attitude in the face of the inevitable truth", in his "nonrecognition of the only certitude" makes the crew "overcivilized and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life." Only in the discipline and work demanded by the elemental storm does their common danger and their common fidelity to the ship restore their sense of solidarity which is being destroyed by their questionings and doubts. Wait's death is "like the death of an old belief" that shakes "the foundations of our society", for "the common bond was gone; the strong, effective, and respectable bond of a sentimental lie", and the self-doubt and introspection which follow bring quarreling and disintegration, until the call of duty and work restores order.

This story is one of Conrad's strongest statements of his conservatism, of his longing for the old order in which society was stable. The only one of the crew on the ship who is untroubled by the lie is Singleton who has his own belief. But he is a man of the past, "a lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation", a strong generation because they knew "neither doubts nor hopes". The other men are "the grown-up children of a discontented earth", the modern world in which men doubt and fear and talk and deny elementary truths about their nature as men. For the new world with its worship of

40 It may be noted that his belief is a superstition.
science, its love of money, its hopes of various kinds of utopias, its denial of authority, and its questionings of old faiths, Conrad has only fear, fear of the break-up of society no longer held together by commonly held, tested values. The Narcissus is to Conrad the modern world that needs the "discipline of fear" to arouse its men to their duty, a world otherwised governed by Death and threatened by anarchy, and thus a world of separation:

our little world ... carrying a discontented and aspiring population. They found comfort of a gloomy kind in an interminable and conscientious analysis of their unappreciated worth; and inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines they dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers.

41 Vladimir decides that the way to outrage the English is to attack the Observatory, for "the sacrosant fetish of today is science." The Secret Agent, p. 31. He goes on to say that the National Gallery's destruction would not be effective as only "artists — art critics and such like — people of no account" would notice, and "nobody minds what they say."

42 The Mint dominates the scene when the Narcissus docks. It has a "stained front".

43 Jocelyn Baines, in "The Young Conrad in Marseilles", The Times Literary Supplement, Dec. 6, 1957, p. 748, discloses early letters and events which show that Conrad's conservatism was very deeply rooted; even in his youth he disliked Republican France and preferred the old order. Cf. Conrad's letter to Spiridion Klizzczewski, 19 Dec., 1885, Aubry, vol.I, p. 84, expressing his fears of socialism and "doctrines born in continental back-slums" and the abyss awaiting England if she follows "Mr. Chamberlain's herd". Donkin's theories are from the slums. The men are repeatedly described in terms of death; sleeping, they are "shapeless dark mounds", "neglected graves"; the berths of the forecastle "yawn black like graves tenanted by uneasy corpses", legs hang out "white and lifeless" and Singleton stands out "like a statue in a crypt". Conrad's story is partly prophetic, for to-day's world under the "discipline of fear" is busy reassessing its spiritual values and bases of solidarity.
Conrad does not despair of the modern world. The Narcissus makes its way home, but without the leadership of Captain Allistoun, without a nucleus of men who share a common belief, and without the discipline of a common danger to face, Donkin and Wait's tyranny might have brought disaster. Conrad assures himself that in spite of outward changes, man is fundamentally unchanged; in The Secret Agent the crowds of London move on undisturbed by the Nihilist group, and the exploding bomb leaves the Observatory unscathed; the opening and closing thought of the "Heart of Darkness", the journey into the dark part of man's nature, is that the Thames, now filled with light, was once also a dark river to be explored by man; yet he is aware that his world is unsettled and complicated, that the values he cherishes may be as outmoded as the sailing ships he loved. Conrad's nostalgia for the sea is partly a longing for the "blessed simplicity" of its moral demands and he yearns for "certitude" as do the men of the Narcissus.

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44 In contrast with the successful voyage of the Narcissus is the failure of Decoud's and Nostromo's enterprise into the darkness of the Golfo Placido. Here danger does not develop the greatest in man but reveals his weakness when he has no sustaining faith held in common with others. The darkness does not join them but becomes a "smooth darkness, like a solid wall" and "their common danger brought their difference in aim ... into absolute prominence in the private vision of each"; they have "nothing to say to each other" and each succumbs to the evil within himself. Nostromo, p. 295.

45 Like Shaw, Conrad also comforts himself with the thought that anarchism can never conquer, as it is, by its own nature, without the strengths of leadership or organization. "The Informer", A Set of Six, pp. 79-80.
Throughout the story of the *Narcissus* are many comments expressing Conrad's fear of modern man's tendency to be deceived by the flow of words. The men of the ship are misled by Donkin's talking, his "irrefutable" arguments, his "picturesque and filthy loquacity" which "flowed like a troubled stream from a poisoned source". To Conrad, words are suggestive of hypocrisy and self-deception, contrasting with genuine feeling, which, as illustrated by Allistoun or Jim, is usually inarticulate. Conrad is modern in his realization of the great power of words in swaying an unthinking crowd. How easily de Barral seduces a nation, and himself, with the slogan "Thrift", especially when it is linked with the word "righteousness", "the inseparable companion and backer up of all such national catch-words, looking everybody in the eye as it were." Conrad also comments upon the Russians' extraordinary love of words:

...they gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes, that, as in the case of very accomplished parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say.

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46 The Professor of *Under Western Eyes* considers reserve as "a favourable trait of character ... associated with sincerity", p. 173.

47 The opening paragraphs of "A Familiar Preface" to *A Personal Record* expand upon this theme. The expression "the right accent" is also used by Kurtz.

48 *Chance*, p. 74. Cf. Scevola's talk of killing Real "in the name of virtue and justice", and the contrast between Peyrol's refreshing lack of sentimentality and the revolutionaries' hypocrisy as they kill "in the name of sacred principles or the love of humanity", *The Rover*, p. 209.

49 *Under Western Eyes*, p. 4. Cf. note 81 of this chapter.
The *Heart of Darkness* also exposes man's tendency to cloak his greed with words of righteousness and humanitarianism, with a "philanthropic pretence", a pretence kept alive by words of "elevated sentiments", a pretence that is a barrier between a man and knowledge of his own evil and his real motives. Kurtz is "a voice"; he is a gifted man, the product of the culture of Europe, but:

of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words — the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.50

His report, "seventeen pages of close writing", moves Marlow with its eloquence — "of words — of burning noble words" — though he notes that there are "no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases".51 He deceives others and he deceives himself with words. When he does, Marlow knows only that "the voice was gone", and wonders, "What else had been there?" Ivanovitch, Decoud, Heyst's father are all eloquent speakers, like Razumov, arguing themselves into a false position; Conrad's "heroes", his men of feeling, are silent men. Dominant in Conrad's thinking is a horror of a world of lying words and pretences, a society unrestrained by any common bond of belief, a world in which all men are exiled from each other because they are strangers to themselves.

Man needs to reassess constantly the values by which

50 "Heart of Darkness", *Youth*, pp. 113-114.
he lives and upon which he acts; he must not accept a moral code unless it is a belief. "Principles won't do," says Marlow, when he discusses the discovery that he responds to the drums of the jungle, to the "darkness" within himself. Principles are merely "acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags — rags that would fly off at the first good shake." One needs a "deliberate belief", or a testing will show up the sham. Kurtz has the correct words, but they do not come from his heart, and the isolation of the wilderness finds the hollowness. This is Conrad's reiterated criticism of a too safe society in which "tradition" means only "convention", and words take the place of feelings. Fundamental principles are not consciously and fully accepted beliefs nor tested convictions which require the renunciation of self-interest. Conventional people are isolated from the truths of life. It is this which angers Marlow when he reads the facile moralizing of Jim's father, written "in the inviolable shelter of his book-lined, faded, and comfortable study", "as free from danger or strife as a tomb". Jim knows his error cannot be understood by a father who has so little real knowledge of fear and of evil, nor by his brothers with their "clear unconscious eyes". The Secret Sharer similarly knows that it would be impossible for "an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen" to judge adequately the elemental situation that

52 "Heart of Darkness", Youth p. 97.

53 Lord Jim, p. 342. Jim's father's belief in divine benevolence is fully explored and exploded in the story of Captain Whalley, "The End of the Tether".
arose on the Sephora.

In all Conrad's stories, experience with elemental forces brings a man closer to self-knowledge, particularly to knowledge of his own essential weakness or evil. Just as the young captain must test himself and his ship by approaching the danger, the blackness that is "like the very gateway of Erebus" before he is in full command, so man must have insight into his own nature before he can have moral maturity. This is the reason for Marlow's "choice of nightmares" in Heart of Darkness. At least Kurtz knows of the darkness within himself and within all men; his verdict, "The Horror" comes from a moment of complete self-knowledge, and it is therefore a truly moral verdict. Marlow prefers this to the moral ignorance and indifference of the manager and of the people in the "sepulchral city" who know nothing of themselves. He is not sure what his own "summing-up" of life would be, but, he says:

I would like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry — much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last.55

54 "The Secret Sharer." Conrad's stories are frequently tales of "self-discovery" and of the terror of self-doubt (e.g. Brierly's suicide in Lord Jim). The search for one's true personality is the search for wholeness. Jim's search is partly the search for the test to find and confirm the truth about himself and end the self-doubt, symbolized, perhaps, by the two peaks on the island.

55 "Heart of Darkness", Youth, p. 151.
T. S. Eliot, who often quotes Conrad, has much the same opinion of the modern "bored" man who, without a consciousness of sin and without a knowledge of the evil within himself, is also without dignity. In an essay on Baudelaire, he says:

so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not man enough to be damned.56

Marlow is also tied to Kurtz by the knowledge, the self-discovery he has made during the trip, that the evil within Kurtz is also within himself and within all men. At first his new knowledge brings anger and revolt and he feels morally isolated among the city people whom he resents as "intruders", "whose knowledge of life was ... an irritating pretence", whose suppositions of "perfect safety" seem "like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend". His anger continues in the interview with Kurtz's fiancee when he finds that the "perfection" he expected to find in her is marred by a touch of egoism, Kurtz's fault;57 but the anger subsides before her sincerity and true sorrow, and is replaced by a new feeling, "infinite pity". The experience of the jungle has now become an


57 Her repeated I's, my's, and me's are an echo of Kurtz's "my intended, my ivory, my station, my —".
acquisition, for it has enlarged his concept of mankind and deepened his character. He recognizes the universality and the necessity of her cry that she "wants something to live with", and preserves her ideal, though it is an illusion, though it is imperfect in its human form, for she represents the other side of man. She is "the inextinguishable light of belief and love" without which the world would be "too dark — too dark altogether". She is the part of Kurtz that has survived, and, says Conrad in his determination to fight pessimism and to retain his belief in man and in life, she is the part that will survive. Marlow says:

I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together — I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived' while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing up whisper of his eternal condemnation.58

The feeling of isolation felt by Marlow in the city after his experience with Kurtz occurs repeatedly in Conrad's stories, the isolation which accompanies the discovery of evil, of unknown powerful forces within one's self or within others. The isolation may resolve in universal pity, as with Marlow, or may be momentary and quickly covered, but at times it may be so overwhelming as to cause death. Not only is the moral personality destroyed or disintegrated so that there is

58 "Heart of Darkness", Youth, p. 157. Thomas Moser, in Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, p. 81, has a different view of Marlow's lie — that the darkness is the truth, and that the girl either "doesn't deserve the truth" or the lie is a "reaffirmation of fellowship with Kurtz", including "accepting damnation". My view is that Marlow learns from the girl that Kurtz isn't the whole truth of man; she also is a part.
nothing upon which to base life or action, but also one must face the reality of one's aloneness, insignificance, or evil without any flattering illusions. Conrad associates it with the fundamental terror of the void. The story "Il Conde" has as its theme the effects of such a discovery upon a man who has been over-protected by society. The count is a dignified, idealistic European whose whole existence has been "correct, well-ordered, and conventional, undisturbed by startling events", his life "ruled by the prescribed usages of good society protected by the State", and relieved of even the "roughness" of having to make a living. Suddenly he is exposed to evil. By a series of accidents, he becomes the object of contempt, and "his delicate conception of his own dignity" is "defiled by a degrading experience." He is haunted by the face of the young Italian, which has the expression he has already noticed on the busts of the Roman emperors and disliked as being "too vigorous, too pronounced". The newly discovered evil and cruelty he now sees everywhere and the knowledge that they will always be present, threatening his concept of his self, is so unbearable that he prefers death. "He had seen Naples and died", says Conrad.

59 "Il Conde", Set of Six, p. 272.

60 I.e. leaving his money at home, having only a cheap watch, and being found later with gold coins.

61 The story of Flora de Barral is also of a too sudden introduction to evil, which nearly destroys her; she is saved by her youth but is marred forever.
Conventional morality not only over protects; it may also harm individuals by an unconscious or conscious feeling of superiority, or, as Conrad often suggests, by a desire to protect its illusions. Victims of its unimaginative smugness or of its fears are condemned to "moral solitude". Many, such as Nina, Conrad's first heroine, are victims of isolation because of race. Understanding between different cultures is not impossible, says Conrad, but it is difficult to bridge "the gulf of racial difference" or to overcome centuries of change. Marlow feels his isolation when journeying into the "Heart of Darkness"; as the steamer goes by native villages, he cannot tell whether the prehistoric men are "cursing us, praying for us, or welcoming us", because:

we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign — and no memories.  

Yet he realizes that there is "just the faintest trace of a response" to the noise of the drums, and he finds kinship with the helmsman who steers for him, because of their mutual dependence. Conrad writes of many friendships between men of different races; Arsat of "The Lagoon" can suffer the

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62 "Heart of Darkness", *Youth*, p. 92. He is equally isolated from the whites, because of their different outlooks and values.

63 Belfast misses Wait because he saved his life. Cf. Brown's servant who saved Brown's life and the relationship between Dain Waris and Jim. Responsibility and mutual dependence are basic to solidarity.

64 The friendship between Jim and Dain Waris was made stronger by their difference of race; his sympathy with Jim cut through racial barriers to "the very origin of friendship".
same remorse as Tom Lingard and be caught in a similar moral dilemma, and Karain can, like the "unbelieving whites", be haunted by a thought and be understood by young Hollis. But it is only at night that they can be friends. In the daytime, Karain "struts", wrapped in the protective illusion of his own importance.

Day after day he appeared before us, incomparably faithful to the illusions of the stage, and at sunset the night descended upon him quietly, like a falling curtain .... Sounds ceased, men slept, forms vanished — and the reality of the universe alone remained.65

Then he forgets his daytime acting, the outside forms which are not the reality, and he is simply a man, with a man's insignificance, yet pain of existence.

When the white feels superior to the native, communication is impossible.

There are those that say a native will not speak to a white man. Error. No man will speak to his master; but to a wanderer and a friend, to him who does not come to teach or to rule, to him who asks for nothing and accepts all things, words are spoken by the camp-fires, in the shared solitude of the sea, in riverside villages, in resting-places surrounded by forests — words are spoken that take no account of race or colour. One heart speaks — another listens; and the earth, the sea, the sky, the passing wind and the stirring leaf, hear also the futile tale of the burden of life.66

The simple, the completely disinterested, those who have renounced their conventional backgrounds, are accepted without thought of race. The young Russian of "Heart of Darkness" in whom the "clear flame" of adventure has "consumed all thought

65 "Karain", Tales of Unrest, p. 9.
of self" has many friends amongst the savages. "They are simple people — and I want nothing, you know", he explains to Marlow.67

The tragedy of Willems and Aissa is partly caused by the "gulf of racial differences". Lingard, listening to Aissa's plea, is overcome with the universal aversion to what is different from one's self:

that feeling of condemnation, deep-seated, persuasive, and masterful; that illogical impulse of disapproval which is half disgust, half vague fear, and that wakes up in our hearts in the pressure of anything new or unusual, of anything that is not run into the mold of our own conscience; the accursed feeling made up of disdain, of anger, and of the sense of superior virtue that leaves us deaf, blind, contemptuous and stupid before anything which is not like ourselves.68

Aissa's love finds the same barrier in Willems. For a moment, a moment of awareness of his own solitude, Willems pities her, and considers "the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority", but he cannot, and he is thus condemned to complete isolation.69 Lingard tells him, "You are alone.... Nothing can help you .... You are neither white nor brown. You have no colour as you have no heart."70

67 "Heart of Darkness", Youth, p. 139.
68 An Outcast of the Islands, p. 254. Aissa's fear of Willems' background which isolates her from him is like Jewel's fear of the unknown in Jim.
69 The last picture of Willems, in his terror of solitude trying "to hide within himself", with his feet up, his head down and his arms hugging his sides, is interesting psychologically. The same pose is adopted by the "Nigger" in his terror and complete moral isolation during the Cook's exhortation just before his death.
70 Ibid., p. 276.
The young Nina is unfortunate enough to be thrown amongst people of "little heart", and their contempt of her mixed blood together with her mother's story of her white father's falseness cause her decision that "the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen ... /Is/ at least preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come in contact with."71 Alice, of "A Smile of Fortune", is a similar social outcast "condemned to moral solitude by the verdict of a respectable community", and, like Rita, Flora de Barral, and Jewel, taught to mistrust the outside world.

The social isolation of Alice makes the betrayal of her awakened love much more poignant, just as the racial differences of Mrs. Gould in Nostromo and of the Nigger on the Narcissus heighten their tragedies of other types of isolation. Jewel's failure to trust the love of Jim is partly a racial problem, for her mother's experience has taught the girl that white men can betray, and she senses that Jim has another loyalty that belongs to "the mysterious unknown of her fears".72 Flora de Barral is, like her father, a victim of civilization; she is at the mercy of the "respectable" community, of her father's cousin's with his "conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity"73 and of the

71 Almayer's Folly, p. 43.
72 Lord Jim, p. 309.
73 Chance, p. 143.
conventional Fynes who are "kind", but implacable in their traditional morality which preserves their sense of superiority. Kindness, says Conrad, is "not enough".

There is a kind way of assisting our fellow-creatures which is enough to break their hearts while it saves their outer envelopes. How cold, how infernally cold she must have felt — unless when she was made to burn with indignation or shame.74

Mrs. Fyne's kindness is tinged with "the semi-conscious egoism of all safe, established existences", and quickly changes to malice when the girl's attachment to her brother threatens her conventional respectability.75

Rita is another victim of civilization, brought up in an atmosphere so artificial, so far from the truth, that she has learned to mistrust all men, to shrink from any sentiment lest it be false or insincere, and to fear to follow Rose's advice "to follow her heart". She is simple and elemental, as different from her conventional sister as "living tissue of glowing loveliness with a divine breath and a hard hollow figure of baked clay".76 The boy George sees Rita "as young as himself" and therefore able to understand him. Rita recognizes their mutual simplicity, their freedom from the shell of convention and sophistication.

74 Ibid., p. 353. The story is full of the symbols of separation, doors, curtains, walls, and nets.

75 Conrad enjoys the irony of Mrs. Fyne's condemnation of the marriage being based on the insinuation that Flora is taking advantage of Anthony, which is quite compatible with her own feminist doctrines.

76 Arrow of Gold, p. 121.
She cries to George:

What are we doing in this world? ... people like you and me. Simple people, in this world which is eaten up with charlatanism of all sorts so that even we, the simple, don't know any longer how to trust each other.77

She is also able to converse freely with Dominić, because of their common simplicity and "knowledge of things as old as the world".78

The most conventional man in the Carlist group is Blunt, who is torn between his passion for Rita and his contempt of her freedom from his own conventional moral code. While Rita knows that his offer of marriage could bring her "all the glamours of respectability" and respects his passion, which is honest, she is aware that he is incapable of the complete surrender of love; "his conventions will always stand in the way of his nature",79 and he will feel, after kneeling at her feet, "tempted to brush the dust off his moral sleeve."80 His language is not the simple language of the

77 Arrow of Gold, p. 199. George is called "a child of nature", as Rita is essentially the simple girl among the goats, "the agile beasts with cynical heads". The Allègre group is described in terms of goats. Even Rita's hair is unruly "as if abhorring the restraints of civilization".

78 Ibid., p. 106.

79 Ibid., p. 200.

80 Ibid., p. 206.
heart, but "parrot language", "the words of tradition and morality as understood by the members of that exclusive club to which he belongs." 81

Conrad's criticism of European civilization and of the "shore-gang" is far from being an extolment of the "noble savage". The white race is the one that has "emerged from the gloom", gradually, by a system of ethics based upon ideals of responsibility, imposing order upon man's world. It is youthful in its dreams, its vigour, and its tendency towards action, and Conrad consistently correlates the jungle and the eastern nations with the passions, the hidden decadence, the darkness within every man, the selfish and retarding elements that lead to isolation. Nor does Conrad despise what he calls "the spirituality of national existence". 82 What Conrad assails is the unquestioned rigid morality which passes ready judgments, presumes superiority, or becomes unrelated to basic human truths, and thus becomes an instrument of separation. Conrad does not agree with Jim's father that "virtue is one over all the world and there is only one faith, one conceivable

81 Arrow of Gold, p. 208. The parrot symbol is also used to describe the philosophic talking of the Allègre group, and for the language of business in Chance, p. 74. Donkin, who is described in bird imagery, is called by Wait "a screechin' poll-parrot", "The Nigger of the *Narcissus*, p. 110. In Nostromo, p. 82, the parrot screams intermittently "Viva Costaguana" and is called "very human".

82 A phrase he uses in speaking of the beliefs of his father in the Preface to A Personal Record. Cf. Youth, p. 29 regarding British sailors and racial differences, and "Prince Roman", Tales of Hearsay, pp. 29-30, in which he states that patriotism is a sentiment "growing out of the very nature of things and man", but somewhat discredited by the humanitarians of to-day.
conduct of life, one manner of dying". Man is so various that there are as many wisdoms as there are men.

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

Civilizations and their moralities change; they may progress — for Conrad's complete disbelief in utopias does not exclude a belief in gradual progress — but man's nature does not change. He must learn wisdom not only from tradition, which is the experience of those who went before him, but by experience with life, particularly by testing situations in which he confronts his conscience and becomes an experience to himself. When a man knows of his own weakness, potential evil, and dependence upon others, he is in a position to establish a sound relationship with other men, a relationship based not upon a superior pity, but upon compassion, a recognition of mutual imperfection, of a basic morality of responsibility, and a sense of the "solidarity" of man.

The form of isolation which most preoccupies Conrad is that of guilt for breaking this fundamental code. The isolation may be imposed by the social group of the tradition —

83 Lord Jim, p. 341.


85 George, in The Arrow of Gold, p. 8, describes his early life as "other men's adventures".
as Jim is cast out by the court and by his father, as Donkin is dismissed by Captain Allistoun and the second mate is put ashore by Captain MacWhirr — or it may be by the conscience of the man who has erred and in some way exiles himself. The riff raff wanderers of the world are part of this isolated group, sometimes defiant and cherishing illusions of their own value in spite of the world's verdict, sometimes sad-eyed and wistful, but always outcasts. They include the failures, men who cannot measure up to the standards their society demands and conscious of it, men who are "stripped of all prestige by men's queer smiles and the disrespectful chatter of every vagrant trader in the Islands", men who are distrustful of others and of life because of the secret knowledge of their own inadequacies. Many have retreated to the fringes of their civilization or to a world of private illusions. Almayer, Willems, old Captain Robinson, Dr. Monygham, and Bamtz are all variations of this type of isolate. They are not completely evil, for they are conscious of their failure. Bamtz the loafer is different from the evil trio of "Because of the Dollars", for at Anne's death he is "the

86 This is part of the description of Almayer given in A Personal Record, p. 88. He is "real" to Conrad because of his desperate clinging to his "saving illusion" that "nothing was ever quite worthy of him". Conrad's second book, about Willems, was based on the memory of a similar outcast. In the Preface Conrad states, "my interest was aroused by his dependent position, his strange, dubious status of a mistrusted, disliked, worn-out European ...." Conrad says he has always had a half-reluctant love for such outcasts, "Travel", Last Essays, p. 88.
only one who looked down with an air of guilt";\textsuperscript{87} Captain Robinson's air of defeat, his "sad dim pupils" and his tendency to "drop his gaze on the ground" are contrasted with Chester's breezy self-confidence.\textsuperscript{88} They are the weaklings, the cast-offs of a tradition.

Conrad's sympathetic treatment of all his exiles who have broken the code of a tradition, the "stragglers" as he calls them in \textit{Lord Jim}, is based upon more than sympathy or the fellow-feeling of an isolate. He is aware that a belief in a code of conduct is not always strong enough to withstand inherent weaknesses in man. The "code" of a tradition is an ideal, providing a man with a morality to which he tries to be faithful, but certain circumstances can show the disparity between the ideal and the real power of man. As Marlow tries to tell Jewel, "Nobody, nobody is good enough."\textsuperscript{89}

It is this doubt which, in part, binds Marlow to Jim. Although the court and his family exile Jim, Marlow does not. Jim is obviously "one of us", one of the hundreds of boys Marlow has trained in the Merchant Marine tradition of duty and responsibility, values upon which Marlow has built

\textsuperscript{87} "Because of the Dollars", \textit{Within the Tides}, p. 276.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Lord Jim}, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 234. The dislike of the Europeans for the outcast is based partly upon an instinctive desire to defend one's own illusions of one's self. \textit{Nostromo}, p. 311. Jim destroyed Brierly's illusions of invulnerability from failure.
his life. Yet the boy who looks "as genuine as a new sovereign" has "some infernal alloy in his metal", and his aberration shakes Marlow's faith in himself, in man, and perhaps even in the values of his traditions. His interest in Jim is a search, a search for what he knows is:

the impossible — for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death — the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct.

The word "sovereign" has several shades of meaning, the power to dictate conduct and to inflict punishment for failure no matter what the exigencies of the situation, the power to control conduct in spite of natural instincts, or, referring back to the coin image, the genuineness of the values themselves. The doubt is never resolved and gives the book its peculiar tension. Marlow surrounds Jim's death with a rhapsody of praise — but Marlow wants to believe in Jim and in the "sovereign power" of the tradition that provides his own moral personality. The book ends also with the betrayed Jewel, inert and soundless, part of the human wreckage left behind by Jim's career, and with Stein grown old and weary.

90 *Lord Jim.*, p. 234. He says that chance meetings with these men make him feel "less lonely in the world".

91 Ibid., p. 45.

92 Ibid., p. 50. The many ways in which Jim's action radiates out to touch other lives illustrate Conrad's belief in responsibility for others. The word "sovereign" is used in a similar way in *Under Western Eyes*, p. 358, when Razumov writes in his diary of the sovereign power of Natalia over his imagination.
In the story of Falk, Conrad is definitely sympathetic with this simple elementary, and certainly not evil man, who breaks a fundamental law of civilized human society, but does so only when his society reverts to anarchy and the law of the jungle. Conrad treats him, and he feels himself, more as a victim of a faulty society than as an erring man. Falk, nevertheless, is plagued with the consciousness of guilt which, as usual with Conrad, takes the form of separation from others.

In *Nostromo*, when commenting upon the self-exiled Dr. Monygham, Conrad is also sympathetic with the doctor's failure and with his particular reaction to his failures. Dr. Monygham is a type only too familiar in the modern world, a man who has betrayed others under torture "a sort of panic which makes truth, honour, self-respect, and life itself matters of little moment."\(^{93}\) Believing that he has failed his code of "an officer and a gentleman", a "simple" code of conduct "resting mainly on severe rejections",\(^ {94}\) a European code that did not provide for the knowledge of a South American Father Beron, Monygham is overwhelmed with guilt and despises himself for his inadequacy. Without trust in himself, he is without faith in men, in their motives, or in life itself. "Really," he says to Mrs. Gould, "it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better

\(^{93}\) *Nostromo*, p. 373.

\(^{94}\) *Ibid.*, p. 375. In other words a "negative" code, not a positive faith.
than he is able to think of himself.\footnote{Nostromo, p. 45.} Conrad notes that he makes "an ideal conception of his disgrace", consistent with his "eminently loyal nature", but taking "no account of physiological facts or reasonable arguments"; it is "not stupid", but an "imaginative exaggeration of a correct feeling". Like Jim, he is "too fine" to compromise with his ideal self when he finds it is unattainable. The penalty of his self-rejection is isolation from his own tradition and from the flow of life,\footnote{His mistrust of himself extends to mistrust of life, and is felt instinctively by others who wish to keep their "saving illusions".} but, again like Jim, he also attains a certain stature because of his sense of the importance of his failure. Conrad gives a detailed picture of Monygham first leaving the prison, thin, naked, in rags, dirty, and mocked by the lolling soldiers who ram a broken straw hat upon his head;\footnote{He is a Christ-figure. Conrad notes that his immaculate cleanliness, like Jim's, distinguishes him from "the shiftless Europeans that are a moral eyesore to the respectability of a foreign colony in almost every exotic part of the world." He puts on a white jacket to visit Mrs. Gould, p. 45.} it is a picture of a man totally bereft of human dignity; yet his clinging to his ideal retains for him a certain amount of respect and gives him a type of victory over the fates which have overwhelmed him. Dr. Monygham's partial restoration — it is never complete — is achieved when love gives him the positive faith and fortune gives him the opportunity to face again the fear which had before
defeated him. 98

Dr. Monygham's cynical attitude regarding the motives and ideals of all men is an effort to confirm to himself the debased view of his own character which he accepts as the reason for his personal failure. 99 This same need for confirmation, implying self-doubt, is noticeable also in Jim, and in Razumov, Conrad's two other major studies in quiet and separation. Razumov's takes the form of using a student's loyalty and naive hero-worship to make him become a thief and betray his father, because, as he explains later, "it was necessary ... to confirm myself in my contempt and hate for what I betrayed." 100 His planned betrayal of Haldin's sister, a ready victim because of her innocence and "trusting eyes", has the same motivation.

Jim's case follows a different pattern. While accepting his disgrace, and being able to confess to Jewel that he was afraid "once", he refuses to be convinced by the facts of his own inadequacy, and continually tries to recreate the testing situation, one in which he, alone of his race and tradition,

98 He accepts the duty of lying to Sotillo in "a spirit of abasement", believing "he is the only one fit for that dirty work", p. 439.

99 Logically, Monygham's extension of contempt for himself to scorn for all men must be based upon a high opinion of himself, which is, of course, the true assessment of his character. He is a curious mixture of pride and humility, in many ways like Lord Jim. His scepticism is a logical result of romantic disillusionment.

100 Under Western Eyes, p. 359.
is responsible for the lives of others. His native people's faith in him is a confirmation of his ideal self, and a denial of the self-doubt which he hides. "I must go on, go on forever holding up my end, to feel sure that nothing can touch me. I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe," he tells Marlow. Their assent to his will is necessary to him as "testimony to that faithfulness which made him in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of the ranks." His sense of guilt and his efforts to overcome it thus make him a prisoner of the land and of its people, an exile by race, by the necessities of leadership, and by his clinging to his dream.

Jim's other self, the guilty self, contributes to his defeat by Brown. Brown resembles Jim in some ways; he is a leader, like Jim inspiring devotion from a woman and from followers and heroic deeds from a faithful servant; his actions, though at an opposite moral pole to Jim's, are characterized by an "earnestness" arising from "some complex intention", which

101 Lord Jim, p. 334.
102 Ibid., p. 393.
103 Conrad frequently speaks of "the loneliness of command", the isolation of the leader. This aspect of Napoleon fascinates Conrad, Suspense, pp. 181 and 261.
104 Lord Jim, pp. 247, 262, 305, 321 are only a few of the many references to Jim's loneliness and captivity to his land and people. Each new responsibility adds a link to the chain.
suggests a romantic in evil, the converse of Jim;\textsuperscript{105} even his ironic title, "Gentleman Brown", suggests Jim, who is distinguished as a gentleman by the other officers of the \textit{Patna}. Diabolically Brown finds the exact words to identify himself with Jim, and Jim, burdened with guilt, accepts the identification.\textsuperscript{106} Although everyone else in the community recognizes the evil of the intruder, Jim does not condemn him, for to do so would be to condemn himself.\textsuperscript{107} "Are they very bad?" asks Jewel; and Jim answers hesitantly, "Men can act badly sometimes without being much worse than others."\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} \textit{Lord Jim.}, p. 353. His final "awful outbreak", p. 404, is "not a vulgar and treacherous massacre", but is idealized as "a lesson, a retribution". Their similar temperaments make it easy for Brown to see the weakness in Jim, to realize that Jim is there because of some emotional need. A similar pair who are morally opposites yet temperamentally alike is Heyst and Jones of \textit{Victory}; their isolation has an intellectual rather than an emotional basis.
\item \textsuperscript{106} "And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts." Jim looks "on the ground". \textit{Ibid.}, p. 387. Dr. Morf takes this view of Jim's failure, \textit{The Polish Heritage}, p. 158, and identifies Jim's guilt with Conrad's own guilt in deserting Poland.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Jewel, Dain Waris, and even a simple old woman recognize his evil. Kassim sees at once that "they are outcasts, men without a country, and therefore weak as they would have no friends."
\item \textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 394.
\end{itemize}
in a dilemma, Jim is powerless and his kingdom is destroyed. While Jim's refusal to lower his standards of self-hood in spite of the evidence of failure undoubtedly has elements of pride and egoism, nevertheless his striving for perfection is man at his best and greatest. In *The Mirror of the Sea* Conrad compares the struggle of a craftsman to reach "something beyond — a higher point" to men "of scrupulous honour" who "set up a standard of public conscience above the dead — level of an honest community". Such men are necessary lest the tradition, like a craft, "should perish of an insidious and inward decay." Jim and Dr. Monygham, though excessive in their demands upon themselves, would not be completely condemned by Conrad for their "fine conscience".

Conrad often shows that guilt may cause various types of emotional disturbances or crippling, all forms of withdrawal. His books contain many instances of suicides because of the pain of remorse — Ziemianitch, Kayerts, and Schultz are examples. Brierly chooses suicide to the torment of

109 Paul L. Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man*, p. 60, argues that Jim's failure is that of a detached ideal of chivalry that is not relevant "to the immediate needs of a secular community for self-preservation", making Jim's sacrifice "both chivalrous and futile." The same argument is applied to Dr. Monygham. Conrad's attitude to Jim and the almost Shakespearean glow that surrounds him at his death, cast doubt upon this being Conrad's complete view.

110 *The Mirror of the Sea*, p. 2.

111 Jocelyn Baines, "The Young Conrad in Marseilles", *The Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 6, 1957, gives evidence that Conrad, while at Marseilles, attempted suicide and suggests that this may be related to the many suicides in his books, including the "exalted forms" used by Jim, Razumov, and Peyrol.
self-doubt aroused by Jim's failure. The young captain of "The Secret Sharer" is indecisive and alienated from his crew as long as he is possessed with guilt and with the doubt of his ability to measure up to "that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly". The new captain of The Shadow-Line is unable to act because of the "sense of guilt which clung to all his thoughts secretly." Often guilt takes the form of violence, or of withdrawal to another culture, as Dominic turns his back to the sea, his home, or Karain becomes a wanderer, "a lover of turmoil and danger", a perpetual exile with a vague sense of being betrayed, with a fear of being alone, and a consciousness of a terrible loneliness. His face shows his fatigue:

the tormented weariness, the anger and the fear of a struggle against a thought, an idea — against something that cannot be grappled, that never rests — a shadow, a nothing, unconquerable and immortal, that preys upon life .... he had the power of the possessed — the power to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute that surround the loneliness of mankind.

112 "The Secret Sharer", Twixt Land and Sea, p. 94.
113 The Shadow-Line, p. 256. He feels guilty regarding the quinine and the fact that he is not ill like the others. He writes in his diary, "Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good."
114 "Karain: A Memory", Tales of Unrest, pp. 23-4. He has taken his people to where "they had forgotten all the past, and had lost all concern for the future." Assat of "The Lagoon" is a similar exile, while Damon of The Rescue is "a self-made outcast" with "an assumed superior detachment" caused by hate.
Both Jim and Razumov show a similar tendency towards violence when they are hemmed in by guilt feelings. Rita is unable to love because of the haunting consciousness of guilt; she tells George, "like all those in whom there is no peace, I am not One". Her other self, the guilty self, is Therese her sister, who urges her withdrawal from the world for her "sin". George thinks the two sisters are unlike each other, but, warns the author:

our psychological sense is the crudest of all; we don't know, we don't perceive how superficial we are.

Therese's conventional attitude to sin and her belief in the penalty of withdrawal are again portrayed in the aunt of Arlette, of The Rover. This "peasant-priestess", holds the girl in awe as a scapegoat, "the selected object of God's wrath", like herself cast out from the grace of God, and the priest to whom the awakened Arlette goes for help echoes the aunt's beliefs.

Those whom God has visited by a trial such as yours cannot be held guiltless of their enormities. Withdraw from the world. Descend within yourself and abandon the vain thoughts of what people call happiness. Be an example to yourself of the sinfulness of our nature and of the weakness of our humanity .... you must pray to be given strength for a complete renunciation.

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115 Some of Conrad's wanderers, e.g. D'Alcacer and Van Wyck, seek relief from the pain of disillusioned love, in wandering and a form of isolation.

116 The Arrow of Gold, p. 300.

117 Ibid., p. 122.

118 The Rover, p. 156. This very priest and the aunt were once in love, but renounced love for what Conrad calls a "dead" life.
Arlette obediently prays — but for love, and her choice of life and love restores her to normality.

Arlette's initial psychological isolation — in fact, that of all the inhabitants of the peninsula — was caused by political chaos, and Conrad frequently stresses the relationship between a faulty society and the alienation because of guilt feelings. Just as the tragedies of Falk and the Secret Sharer are caused by a breakdown in the social structure because of faulty leadership,¹¹⁹ and the Narcissus is saved from the disintegrating forces of doubt and guilt by good leadership, so many of Conrad's stories reflect his beliefs regarding the crippling effects of tyranny upon the individual personality. His books have many examples of daughters who are victims of domestic tyrants and thus made incapable of the trust necessary for love. Mrs. Fyne's "unprincipled notions" regarding women are explained as a doctrine of revolt against her father, "the domestic autocrat".¹²⁰ The same tyranny has made the son, Captain Anthony, the wanderer and isolate that he is when he meets Flora. The child's governess is also warped by frustration, and her cruelty to the girl is a product of revolt against her life-long repression, her "restraint, the iron,

¹¹⁹ The young untried captain learns from the Secret Sharer's story of tragedy caused by an irresolute captain afraid, as the youth is, of his own mate and steward. Joseph J. Reilly, "The Shorter Stories of Joseph Conrad", Of Books and Men, New York, Messner, 1942, pp. 79-92, takes a different view, as a "conflict between duties defined by law...and the generous instincts of his youth", endangering the ship by yielding "to the claims of compassion rather than to the claims of responsibility".

¹²⁰ Chance, p. 62.
admiringly mannered restraint",¹²¹ her unexpressed "accumulated resentment" of her pupils and employers.

As a Pole, Conrad cherished the ideal of freedom and knew well the excesses aroused by its suppression. Freedom without law, however, he could not condone, for lawlessness is just another form of tyranny. Heat of The Secret Agent and — rather awkwardly — the professor of Under Western Eyes serve to contrast the legality of the west, particularly of England, with the despair, madness, or self-interest underlying the revolutionary movement of Russia. Oppression results in moral corruption and breeds violence, and, to Conrad, utopian revolutions which seek to destroy "in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of heart must follow" is an "imbecile and atrocious answer" to the problem, prostituting man's idealism, his desire for freedom, love of justice, patriotism and fidelity to "the lusts of hate and fear".¹²² When Razumov finds, as many a modern liberal in a revolutionary world has found, that he cannot remain neutral as "an unstained, lofty, and solitary existence", and feels crushed by "the dream-intoxication" of Haldin, reflected in the drunkenness of the peasant Ziemiamitch,¹²³

¹²¹ Chance, pp. 100 and 120.

¹²² Under Western Eyes, x., and p. 7. Cf. note 43 of this chapter. Conrad bases his hatred of, and also his theories of, revolutions upon the French Revolution, the producer of Jacobins, and of Napoleon, the betrayer of Poland's hopes. On p. 135, he says that the idealists are the victims of revolutions, their hopes betrayed and their ideals caricatured. Irving Howe, in Politics and the Novel, p.90 objects to this view of revolutionism. He also, very rightly, objects to Conrad's belittlement of revolutionists, reducing their idealism nearly always to self interest or sadism.

¹²³ A comparison made again in Lord Jim, pp. 20 and 25.
he, ironically, reacts just as Haldin was reacting to oppression, striking out blindly with anger and hate at the forces robbing him of his freedom. "Ah! the stick, the stick, the stern hand," he thinks "longing for power to hurt and destroy" as he beats the insensible driver.\textsuperscript{124} His violence increases as his servitude becomes heavier, and the wise Sophia Antonovna senses it. "You are not an enthusiast," she tells him, "but there is an immense force of revolt in you."\textsuperscript{125} It is only when love releases him from his hate and confession from his lie that he is at peace.

Razumov's early aloofness from others, his inability to make close friends, is in itself a separation, caused partly by his social milieu.\textsuperscript{126} Similarly Lieutenant Real of The Rover, whose parents were executed during the Terror, is called by Conrad a victim of revolution. His too early knowledge of "the precariousness of all things" has made him an isolate, sceptical of all men, with no principles beyond professional ones, unable to form a friendship, and all his faculties of both love and hatred firmly repressed.\textsuperscript{127} Only

\textsuperscript{124} Under Western Eyes, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 260
\textsuperscript{126} Also by his early deprivation of the natural love of a family.
\textsuperscript{127} The Rover, p. 70 and p. 209. Conrad notes that he "enjoyed the sense of remoteness from ordinary mankind", a slight sense of superiority engendered by isolation and seen also in Jim and Razumov. In Peyrol it takes the form of a "pedantic conscience" which hinders his love for Arlette. Later he finds she is "a gift", and is restored to normality.
Peyrol, whose genuineness and sincerity have no connection with the untrustworthy 'land' society, is able to break through his "schooled reserve", and then the personalities of the others on the farm gradually enter through the breach. Eventually the power of Peyrol's personality and his sense of community with others release all the inhabitants from their spell of stagnation and isolation, their deeply-rooted sense of guilt and mistrust caused by an evil and oppressive society.  

Conrad hates and fears all oppression, all attempts to interfere with or coerce the individual's efforts to live as his temperament and conscience demand. He insists upon freedom, including freedom from the consequences of disorder. As he shows in his political novels, Conrad has little faith in politics or related theories of "collective man", economics or science as methods to alleviate the distress of mankind. He puts his faith in the individual. The revolutionary Professor's creed that "what happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence" he condemns as a denial of responsibility, a too-easy submersion of the individual conscience in the authority of some group or some abstraction, a non-demanding freedom from the basic principles that bind

128 Peyrol says, "This place, as lonely as a ship at sea, is like a ship to me, and all in it are like shipmates." p. 44. The peninsula is "cut off from the rest of the land by the dead water of a salt lagoon".

129 The Secret Agent, pp. 72 and 107. Lord Jim in particular illustrates Conrad's belief in the social consequences of our acts; Jim's action radiates out to affect many lives.
Razumov, already morally weakened by his fear-pervaded society and his unusually isolated place in it, too readily dismisses the promptings of his conscience and submits his moral autonomy to the authority of his society. The young captain in "The Secret Sharer" has a somewhat similar choice to make regarding the betrayal of Leggatt who is fundamentally a victim of anarchy on board a ship. His decision, however, is dictated by conscience; by setting Leggatt free — not unpunished for he is "to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth", but not burdened with all the guilt of the murder — he breaks the code of his tradition, but adheres to a higher law. The world of the Sephora was one of separation; the young captain affirms his world of solidarity; unlike Razumov who finds himself enslaved and isolated by his decision, the captain sets himself free of guilt and fear and enlarges his view of his duties as a leader of a small society.

While, therefore, Conrad does show that the code of a tradition holds men together and becomes a binding force, a protection against isolation and anarchy, yet he illustrates also that a moral decision can be complex, that it must have

130 In "John Galsworthy", Late Essays, p. 126, Conrad says, "The seduction of irresponsible freedom is very great," In the Preface to A Personal Record he notes that "the revolutionary spirit is mighty convenient in this, that it frees one from all scruples as regards ideas." In "Gaspar Ruiz", A Set of Six, p. 24, a story of separation by hate, the same thought is rephrased as a removal "of the restraints of honour and humanity".

131 "with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead", p.142.

132 Like the weak captain of the Sephora, he is afraid of his mate and steward.
the assent of conscience, and that a corrupt society or a convention within a tradition may become a separating force, a betrayer of man. It is not surprising that readers in to-day's world with its problems of conflicting loyalties, its fears of disintegration, and its concern with the relationship between the individual and political or social pressures, find new meaning in Conrad's stories and perceive the complexities of the moral dilemmas he presents.
CHAPTER VII.
SEPARATION AND SOLIDARITY IN THE DREAM

We live as we dream — alone.¹

Consistent with Conrad's suspicion and criticism of organized "land life", particularly of its materialistic values, is his love of the romantic adventurer, he who deliberately exiles himself from his home to seek a life of action, to make a glamorous world of his own. This is Conrad's favourite and most frequently analyzed character; each time he appears, there are variations, but there is a common core of characteristics which are recognizably close to those of the young Conrad who left his home to follow "an inexplicable impulse", and those of his friends in the lawless Mediterranean adventures.² Tom Lingard of The Rescue, Jim, George of The Arrow of Gold, the young Russian in Heart of Darkness, Peyrol the rover, Attilio "the wanderer of the seas" in Suspense, and, to a degree, Captain Anthony, Nostromo, Charles Gould, Jasper, and Renouard are all variations of a type. They belong, in Conrad's mind, to the ancient tradition of romantic wanderers, seeking self-expression outside organized society; to the lineage of Ulysses, to whom he often compares them;³ or to that of don Quixote, to whom Conrad himself was compared by his tutor when the boy wished

¹"Heart of Darkness", Youth, p. 82.
² Particularly of Dominic Cervoni.
³ George, of The Arrow of Gold is nicknamed "Young Ulysses".
to escape to his "sea of dreams";\(^4\) to all the adventurers and explorers of Conrad's boyhood book world and dreams, men such as M'Neil and Stein whose tradition was passed on to Jim. They recognize each other, as Rita recognizes her kinship with George, and also with Dominic because of their "common lawlessness",\(^5\) and they have a code of honour amongst themselves, a sense of brotherhood. In the conventional world, however, they are aliens. An "older bohemian" in *The Arrow of Gold* defends George against charges of being "foreign" to a group of Carlists with whom he associates, by explaining George's individualism.

That fellow (*ce garçon*) is a primitive nature, but he may be an artist in a sense. He has broken away from his conventions. He is trying to put a special vibration and his own notion of colour into his life; and perhaps even to give it a modelling according to his own ideas. And for all you know he may be on the track of a masterpiece.

But, he warns George:

> if it happens to be one nobody will see it. It can only be for himself. And even he won't be able to see it in its completeness except in his death-bed. There is something fine in that.\(^6\)

Conrad insists upon the right of each man to follow the path dictated by the needs of his individual temperament.\(^7\)

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4 *A Personal Record*, p. 44. The Assistant Commissioner of *The Secret Agent* is called a *don Quixote*, a frustrated adventurer and an individualist in a government office. Drake and Franklin are called "*knight-errants of the sea*", *Heart of Darkness*, p. 47.

5 *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 106.


7 Thus his distaste for socialism or any similar idea of "*mass man*". In a letter to Cunninghame-Graham, Feb.16,1905(*Jean-Aubry, völ. 2*,p.12), he writes, "The grave of individual temperaments is being dug by G.B.S. and H.G.W. with hopeful industry. *Finita la commedia!* Well, they may do much, but for the saving of the universe I put my faith in the power of folly."
The romantic man is highly imaginative, easily made captive by a dream, a vision, or by a passion; he is chivalrous, readily touched by someone else's distress and eager to redress a wrong. Indeed, the distinguishing trait of nearly all Conrad's romantics is their sensitivity to others, a trait that is felt and trusted by others and gives them an unconscious prestige. When speaking of Stephen Crane, Conrad uses a phrase with which he often describes his romantics, "a man who is safe to trust one's life to", and relates it to "a strain of chivalry" in him that "comports more rigid limitations in personal relations" than usual. And the romantic is lonely, for he is willing to give up his life to the pursuit of the ideal, though it may be an illusion. Conrad admits that perhaps his romantics, like don Quixote, are "not good citizens" and are justly condemned by "the barber and the priest and the whole village." In speaking of the famous knight, and also of his own "escape", he says:

after reading so many romances he desired naively to escape with his very body from the intolerable reality of things .... O blessed simplicity of a gentle heart without guile! Who would not succumb to such a consoling temptation? Nevertheless it was a form of self-indulgence and the ingenuous hidalgo of La Mancha was not a good citizen. The priest and the barber were not unreasonable in their strictures .... He rides forth, his head encircled in a halo — the patron saint of all lives spoiled or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination. But he was not a good citizen.

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8 As Paul L. Wiley's Conrad's Measure of Man develops this theme fully and gives many examples of Conrad's use of the terms of chivalry and of fairy tales, I shall not enlarge upon this aspect of the topic.


10 A Personal Record, p. 38.
In a later essay, however, Conrad takes the opposite and a more characteristic viewpoint; don Quixote is "a convert", like Hervey of "The Return" possessed of the courage to leave the "old beaten track" that is "but the arid way to the grave" and to follow an "imperative faith", perhaps even "to attain the illusion of having turned his back on Death itself." Conrad ends the essay with:

And on you be peace! ... You have chosen your ideal, and it is a good choice. There's nothing like giving up one's life to an unselfish passion. Let the rich and the powerful of this globe preach their sound gospel of palpable progress. The part of the ideal you embrace is the better one, if only in its illusions. No great passion can be barren. May a world of gracious and poignant images attend the lofty solitude of your renunciation.

The Barber and the Priest, says Conrad, who shut up the knight-errant in a cage, are "the fit ministers" of the shocked social order.

Always Conrad has this ambivalent attitude to his romantics. Their self-willed isolation stems, to a degree, from escape — as Conrad escaped from dreary Poland, Lingard from the social conditions in England, Peyrol from a revolution, Renouard from the pain of disappointed love, and Jim from certain facts about himself — but the escape, the action which so often seems to be flight, is also a search, a self-forgetful pursuit of some ideal or some dream. Discriminating between the two — the escape and the search — is difficult, perhaps impossible. Marlow finds this when he tries to decide whether Jim's "retreat" is a running away from the facts or an

endeavour to find an opportunity for rehabilitation, whether it is "shirking his ghost or facing him out", and he decides that:

as with the complexion of all our actions, the shade of difference was so delicate that it was impossible to say. It might have been flight and it might have been a mode of combat.12

The doubt is never fully resolved; Jim, the romantic, is extremely complex.

The romantic is also a mixture of strength and weakness. The words naively, simplicity, and without guile used in describing don Quixote are clues to one aspect of Conrad's views upon his young dreamers. They are naive in their belief in their own powers, in their egotistic self-confident autonomous existence; they are simple, without sophistications that prevent them from acting, or from eventually gaining knowledge of themselves, but they are innocent, without experience of evil within themselves or within others. The young Russian of Heart of Darkness is typical in his wandering, in his simplicity, in his ability to make friends with the savages, and in his inability to recognize the evil of Kurtz or the emptiness of the latter's fine phrases. The romantic is vulnerable to evil; for full self-knowledge he must undergo the discipline of failure or of disillusionment, what Conrad calls the "disenchantment".

Conrad uses his own early life as a model for the various stages through which the romantic may pass. At first he is a "mere adventurer", courageous perhaps to break away, 

12 Lord Jim, p. 197.
sensitive to outward appearances, and free, but not "touched by grace".\(^\text{13}\) This stage, so nostalgically described in *Youth* and *The Mirror of the Sea*, is without great moral profit, for the adventurer is merely an onlooker upon life. As George says in *The Arrow of Gold*, his adventures before meeting Rita were "other men's adventures":

> they had left me untouched .... they had not matured me. I was as young as before. Inconceivably young — still beautifully unthinking — infinitely receptive.\(^\text{14}\)

To remain at this stage is to live a futile life, to end like Chester of *Lord Jim* searching for non-existent gold under ever appearing and disappearing rainbows, or in the desolation of disillusionment. In his essay "Well Done", Conrad says:

> The mere love of adventure is no saving grace. It is no grace at all. It lays a man under no obligation of faithfulness to an idea and even to his own self .... There is nothing in the world to prevent a mere lover or pursuer of adventure from running away at any moment. There is his own self, his mere taste for excitement, the prospect of some sort of gain, but there is no sort of loyalty to bind him in honour to consistent conduct .... There is nothing more futile under the sun than a mere adventurer. He might have loved at one time — which would have been a saving grace. I mean loved adventure. But if so he was bound to lose this grace very soon. Adventure by itself is but a phantom, a dubious shape without a heart.\(^\text{15}\)

It is only when his imagination is captured by something outside himself and self-interest, when his heart becomes involved, that

\(^\text{13}\) Though he is often, like young Hollis, gifted with intuition, he does not fully understand the inner meaning of events, as Powell does not understand the situation in *Chance*, and young Carter in *The Rescue*.

\(^\text{14}\) *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 8.

\(^\text{15}\) "Well Done", *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 189.
he truly begins to live and develop. George finds that his love for Rita and what Conrad calls "the conscious surrender" to the dream or the "renunciation" end the "careless freedom" of his life, but also reveal to him a new beauty and a consciousness of his own personality. Love is like a charm:

warming like a flame ... all-revealing like a great light; giving new depth to shade, new brilliance to colours, an amazing vividness to all sensations and vitality to all thoughts.17

But it also isolates him, giving him "an illusion of lonely greatness".18

His development continues when his youthful world of innocence and self-confidence is destroyed with the loss, through treachery, of Dominic's boat. Stranded in Marseilles, he watches the alien crowd and sees that their "yells of festivity" are really "an intimate expression of the savage instincts hidden in the heart of mankind";19 he realizes that he has "travelled a long way in his mistrust of mankind".20 As he tells Rita later, life then seemed "but a series of betrayals". Yet from his new knowledge of himself and of the world George matures. He is now more capable of understanding and overcoming the fear and guilt that are crippling Rita's

16 "Well Done", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 124.

17 Loc. cit.

18 Ibid., p. 244. Cf. Freya's love which makes Jasper feel over-confident and set above the fates "for what could touch the elect of Freya?"


20 Ibid., p. 275.
capacity to love, of dealing with the evil of Therese and Ortega, and even of feeling pity for his rival.

After obtaining his ideal, George must learn the further lesson of its impermanency. When the bitterness of this loss is gone, he finds what is permanent; Rita, the embodiment of man's desire for beauty, for fellowship in dreams and in love, he now sees everywhere; because of his experience he can recognize not only her, but also her opposite, in all women. He has increased his sense of "solidarity" with all men, who have similar longings, aspirations and losses, and also his ability to discern the evil of the world.

Just as George learns that his and Dominic's "luck" is not invulnerable to evil, and Jasper must lose his ship to understand that he was "a child" in his carelessness regarding the evil Heemskirk, so Lingard of An Outcast of the Islands must learn, through failure, to reassess himself and his "contemptuous tolerance" of evil. Continuous success has made him a man who has achieved "great length without any breadth", a man without any knowledge of the limitations of his humanity.21 Lingard of The Rescue is equally sure of himself and of his luck, in spite of the haunting figure of Jorgenson beside him constantly reminding him, "I was like you once."22 Like the first Lingard, who believed that only he knew what was

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21 An Outcast of the Islands, p. 197. Just as Heemskirk gave Jasper plenty of warning regarding his malevolent intentions, so Lingard refused to learn from past experience. Willems points this out to him, pp. 161-2.

22 Jorgenson is always described in the imagery of death.
good for "his" people, so Tom is convinced that "he alone had the means and the pluck" to make a kingdom for Hassim and Immada. He is set apart by his complete faith in his own powers; "a man like me has no friends ... No, not even Jorgenson. He calls me King Tom, too", he boasts, and he is content with his visions that make for him a world of his own. After causing the death of those who trusted him, Lingard realizes that he and life are not simple, but are as complicated and as full of traps as the shoals which have captured the boat. His new awareness of evil is made apparent in his instructions regarding the grave of his faithful servant:

if they want a board to set up at the grave let them have a piece of an oak plant. It will stay there — till the next monsoon. Perhaps.

To Conrad, evil is a force with which there can be no compromise. The stories of Captain Whalley, Charles Gould, Willems and Nostromo are all illustrations of Conrad's belief that one step from the path dictated by conscience will bring its inevitable result of disaster. A truly moral man is

23 The Rescue p. 106. There is a resemblance here to Jim's assumption of power over "his" land and people.

24 Ibid., p. 307. Cf. the aloneness and aloofness of "Lord" Jim on the cadet ships.

25 Ibid., p. 452.

26 In a letter of Sept. 15, 1891 to Marguerite Poradowska, Gee and Sturm, p. 36, Conrad writes: "there is no expiation. Each act of life is final and inevitably produces its consequences in spite of all the weeping and gnashing of teeth and the sorrow of weak souls who suffer as fright grips them when confronted with the results of their own actions."
like a good sailor, constantly on the watch to combat evil from without; or from within. It is the romantic's vanity which is his weakness. Nostromo builds his life of "audacious action" upon the vanity-fed supposition that he cannot fail; with failure comes the emptiness of disenchantment and he is easily corrupted, to become a slave of the treasure, a secret outcast. Charles Gould's pride, and a sense of guilt about the disregarded wishes of his father, cause him to degrade his youthful ideals by compromising with the evil of Costaguana, and making success more important than his principles. At first he enters the battle for the mine as a knight-errant, and Mrs. Gould can share his dream; but their separation begins when he uses methods of which she cannot approve. He stoops for his weapon and uses wealth, the power of materialism, only to find his sword double-edged, stained with the cupidity and misery of mankind, steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it was drawn." When he sees the human results of his efforts, a woman weeping for her dead husband, he realizes that he is only an adventurer:

for all the uprightness of his character, he had something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraising of his action.

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27 In spite of the warnings of Senora Teresa.

28 *Nostromo*, p. 365.

29 *Loc. cit.*
Decoud sees Gould's compromise clearly:

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption.\(^{30}\)

Unable to renounce his desire for success, Charles Gould finds that the "Idea" of the mine, which at first united him with his wife, becomes a wall of silver bricks between them; the degraded ideal becomes an agent of separation. The concept of following the ideal without hope of success, and without compromising with one's conscience to obtain success, is closely related to Conrad's memory of his father and to his idealization of the Polish struggle. He once wrote to Edward Garnett:

> you seem to forget that I am a Pole. You forget that we have been used to go to battle without illusions. It's you Britishers that "go in to win" only. We have been "going in" these hundred years repeatedly, to be knocked on the head only — as was visible to any calm intellect.\(^{31}\)

It is the element of vanity in the chivalrous idealism of Captain Anthony of Chance which nearly destroys Flora. Anthony's love for the girl is sincere, "rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness ... the tenderness

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 171. Dr. Monygham (p. 511) condemns materialism as "founded on expediency" and being "inhuman ... without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle."

\(^{31}\) Letter to Edward Garnett, Oct., 1907, Jean-Aubry, vol. 2, p. 59. Cf. the story of the captain who allows the word 'duty' to absolve him from guilt, in "The Tale". He says that "Everything should be open in love and war ... since both are the call of an ideal, which it is so easy, so terribly easy, to degrade in the name of Victory." Tales of Hearsay, p. 69. In Nostromo, p. 366, Conrad notes that primitive people are similar, but "more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality."
of silent, solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts
of their kind", but, "at the same time," comments the author,
"I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous."32
Overwhelmed by the sublimity of his "unselfish" renunciation,
Anthony is blind to the human needs of the girl; it is a trans-
gression against the basic truths of life. The girl feels
"bereft of moral support which is wanted in life more than all
the charities of material help", the captain becomes the
"captive of his generosity", and the ship, like the Narcissus,
is uneasy in the atmosphere of doubt, falsehood and "desperate
acting". Anthony is misled not only by his idealism, but also
by his innocence.33 His early flight to sea was an escape from
the tyranny of his father, and based upon a mistrust of life;
lack of experience with life makes him credulous and he too
easily believes Fyne's suggestion that he is taking unfair
advantage of the girl.34

Lord Jim, while too complicated a book to be explained
completely with any one formula, is the story of a young romantic

32 Chance, p. 331.

33 Conrad emphasizes the inheritance of his romantic tempera-
ment from the poet father.

34 One of the characteristics of youth that Conrad stresses.
He notes the trustfulness of young Powell at the docks, the in-
ability of Powell to understand the emotional atmosphere of the
ship, and his later growth in understanding. In Under Western
Eyes pp. 142-143, Conrad notes the vulnerability of the innocent
Natalia: "so true so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced!
Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of man-
kind left her disarmed before her own impulses." After dis-
illusionment "the strength of her nature comes to the surface
because the obscure depths have been stirred." (p. 373.) Carter
of The Rescue also matures after his youthful error.
who remains innocent of evil and thus contributes to his own downfall. Like Lingard and Jasper, he sees himself as self-sufficient, his over-confidence fed by dreams of heroism, by egoism tinged with contempt for others, and by innocence because of his isolation. His first failure to achieve the heroism he dreams of does not teach him his limitations; as he listens to the story of the real hero:

Jim thought it a pitiful display of vanity. The gale had ministered to a heroism as spurious as its own pretence of terror .... he was rather glad he had not gone into the cutter, since a lower achievement had served the turn. He had enlarged his knowledge more than those who had done the work .... and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage.35

Jim's heroism is to be individual, and this dream he pursues and achieves, though he pays the price of almost complete isolation for himself and of destruction for those who love him. Marlow is both fascinated and appalled as he sees how Jim's dream transforms each mistake, probably even the final one, into an opportunity to become what he believes he is. On board the Patna he is blind to the implications of his joining such a crew, and delights in his superiority to the others.36

35 Lord Jim, p. 9. The first view of Jim is aloft, looking down "with contempt" upon the others. Later, he loves his people with "a contemptuous tenderness". Cf. Lingard of The Rescue who is "King Tom", and has no friends, p. 307, and the superiority inherent in Lingard's "benevolence" in An Outcast of the Islands, matched by Willems' to his native wife and her relations.

36 Another example of disaster from a compromise with evil.
While a wiser man knows that "in our own hearts we trust for our salvation in the men that surround us," Jim's romantic dreams have made his soul "drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself."

Ironically, the physically drunk engineer echoes Jim's secret thoughts of superiority and fearlessness, while Jim, "too pleasurably languid in his dream", is deciding that:

the quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they did not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different.

Jim retains this attitude of lofty and distant superiority as he watches the frantic efforts of the officers to launch a lifeboat, and insists to Marlow that he "kept his distance", though the facts show that he was "in the same boat". Marlow cannot decide whether or not Jim accepts his guilt, and, with it, an altered view of himself and his own powers. As he watches Jim's quickly changing moods, his "artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge", "those struggles of an individual trying to save from a fire his idea of what his moral identity should be", Marlow notes that he "would be confident and depressed all in the same breath, as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn." At the slightest suggestion he becomes lost in his "impossible world of romantic achievements"

37 Lord Jim, pp. 20-21.
38 Ibid., pp. 24-25. Captain Whalley has the same illusion as he joins Massy and Sterne.
39 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
from which Marlow "whisks him back" to the reality of his transgression. 40

Jim, says Marlow, seems to be more concerned with his disgrace, "while it is the guilt alone that matters." 41 He accepts the fact that he has jumped, he accepts the court's punishment and his isolation from his tradition, but Marlow is not sure that he adjusts his concept of himself to the facts. He remains young, without the self-knowledge that is the first defence against evil. 42 As Marlow tells Stein, Jim is "the youngest human being now in existence", a man without knowledge of sin. 43 On the island, it is the girl who supplies him with a defence; he allows Cornelius freedom to do harm because of his contempt and his conviction that nothing can touch him; when Brown breaks into his Eden, he does not know enough about evil, not recognizing the destructive force in this man and too readily identifying Brown's type of evil with his own, and is destroyed.

Like Jim, Stein is a romantic, willing to follow the dream to the end; unlike Jim, Stein is a mature romantic who knows that man's nature is dual, partly beautiful like the butterflies of his collection, and partly ugly like his beetles. Stein also in his youth sought the ideal, and he found it

40 Lord Jim, pp. 83-84.
41 Ibid., p. 177.
42 He is always described as being young, fresh, naive.
43 Ibid., p. 219.
"on a mound of earth" after he had killed his enemy. He followed the butterfly ready to capture it with one hand, but keeping a revolver ready in the other. Jim went into the island with an unloaded revolver, with no defence against evil.

The isolation Jim has consistently sought, his running away from the world "slamming gates behind him", each step a retreat from the truth about himself, leads directly to his downfall. It is only in isolation that Jim can be "impeccable". When news of Jim's final mistake reaches Jewel, her first words are, "Shut the gates," and she and Tamb' Itam are prepared to retreat again. Jim, however, after a long communion with himself, goes back into reality. "Open the gates," he orders. Whether he goes out with greater self-knowledge, choosing to face the consequences of his error, or whether his imagination again transforms his acceptance of punishment into an opportunity to be a hero is a question left unanswered.

44 Brown tells Jim the truth — that he is a man, and therefore not without a flaw, in words that refer back to Stein: "I've lived — and so did you though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well — it is dirty. I haven't got any wings." Lord Jim, p. 282. Conrad calls Stein "practical".

45 Or each step may be a move towards the truth and leading towards a greatness he might never have achieved otherwise.

46 Cf. Brierly's suicide. Marlow comments, "Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?" Lord Jim, p. 64.
conflicting ideals, dreams, and loyalties, which lie behind any man's actions?

Paradoxically, Jim's innocence of evil, his clinging to his original dream of himself, also saves him, and his isolation raises him to a stature that, Marlow admits, is "immense". At first Marlow is angry with Jim for he strikes at the "secret of his egoism", his belief in the behavioral code of a tradition as a way of living. Gradually, however, Marlow grows in understanding of Jim, and thereby enlarges his own concepts of "morality". He finds that Jim's running away may be a search, and that his clinging to his youthful dream may be of a higher order than the common adjustment to disillusionment and reality. He realizes that Jim is Youth, his "very young brother", with all the illusions, the moral simplicity, the belief, and the strength — even the arrogance — of that period in life before self-doubt inhibits action. "He believed where I had already ceased to doubt," Marlow tells his listeners.  

To Conrad, youth is the time of action, of idealism, of conquest, and of assertion; with disenchantment comes a knowledge of one's limitations, and thus caution and self-doubt, perhaps a temptation to withdraw. As Marlow watches Jim "hurl defiance at the universe", he decides that:

Youth is insolent; it is its right — its necessity; it has got to assert itself, and all assertion in this world of doubts is a defiance, is an insolence.  

47 Lord Jim, p. 153.

48 Ibid., p. 236. Young Tomassov of "The Warrior's Soul" is typical with his "innocent, believing eyes", "utterly inexperienced, unsuspicious, and unthinking."
Jim is heir to the tradition of the young M'Neil and Stein, one of the dreamers and explorers who push into the jungles and defy the dark places of the earth. To Marlow Jim seems "Symbolic" as he stands all white against the dark forest.

He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom.49

By following his dream of achieving an ideal, Jim attains a certain greatness, and, like Lena, a victory over the powers of darkness, a victory that transcends the ordinary realities. Perhaps, says Conrad, the idealist is in touch with a more true reality; perhaps his dream is a glimpse of "the truth of things", a glimpse denied to those who do not have the faith. Jim dies for an illusion, yet, muses Marlow, "all our illusions ... I suspect only to be visions of remote unattainable truth, seen dimly."50 Perhaps, he writes to the one man who might understand, Jim "has confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress."51 And, paradoxically, the moment of Jim's death, of his most complete isolation, may have been the moment of his most complete feeling of fellowship with his home and family, with Marlow and his tradition, his most complete realization of "solidarity" with all mankind. To die for an

49 Lord Jim, p. 265. On p. 336 Jim is a "tiny speck" that seems "to catch all the light left in a darkened world. Several critics have pointed out that Conrad always associates idealism and vigour with the "misty-eyed" people of the north.


51 Ibid., p. 339.
ideal is to die in communion with others. If Jim had failed to accept this final challenge of the 'darkness' he would be, as he tried to explain to Jewel, nothing, a man completely isolated from his tradition. Similarly Victor Haldin's mother and sister can accept his death if they are sure that he died with faith in the ideal he sacrificed himself for, a faith they shared. What haunts them is the fear that he died in despair "crushed by an intolerable doubt", and thus separated from them.52

Part of the relationship that Marlow feels exists between him and Jim is the "solidarity of the dream", the sense of fellowship that the older, disillusioned, though not cynical, man had for the youth who is aglow with the dreams with which he himself was once possessed. To watch Jim go through the experiences similar to his own adds to Marlow's sense of belonging to a continuity and decreases his human loneliness. Jim, to Marlow is:

of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of these illusions you had thought gone out, extinct, cold, and which, as if rekindled at the approach of another flame, give a flutter deep, deep down somewhere, give a flutter of light ... of heat.53

In no other profession, says Conrad, is the beginning romantic illusion so far from the reality, and "the disenchantment so swift", and therefore the bond between the experienced man and "the youth on the brink" so close:

besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of a wider feeling — the feeling that binds a man to a child.54

52 Under Western Eyes, p. 116.
53 Ibid., p. 128.
54 Ibid., p. 129.
Each of Marlow's friends accepts Jim as a son; with Stein, who was himself "adopted" by M'Neil, Jim finds the spiritual father whom he has been seeking, the tradition to which his temperament is suited, and Stein accepts the bond completely. The disenchanted mood of the youth in *The Shadow-Line* is understood by his captain, who says "in a peculiar, wistful tone" that he hopes the boy will find what he is seeking, and by old Captain Giles who tactfully guides the boy safely from the egocentricity of youth over the dark time of realization that the glamour of the sea has gone to the mature stage of acceptance of responsibility. Similarly Mills is the father-guide of young George through the shadow of disillusionment; the experienced de Castel watches over young Tomassov; Mr. Powell of the Shipping Office helps his youthful namesake to become started in life; the disenchanted Van Wyck can listen to the child-like Captain Whalley; and D'Alcacer can understand and counsel Mrs. Travers and Lingard. All are possessed with sympathetic understanding untainted by superiority; because of their own experience of the sorrow and loneliness of disillusionment, they can give another soul in isolation consolation of "having someone understand"; they have a strong sense of mankind's "solidarity in our dreams". It is also when we try to "grapple with another man's intimate needs" that we realize with renewed force aloneness of the individual soul:

we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, unconsolable, and elusive
spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp.55

Once Marlow has caught this glimpse of Jim's aloneness, he knows that he cannot "let him slip away into the darkness".

Yet Conrad is very much aware that there is no one more lonely, or more dangerous, than the man possessed by an idea, a vision, or a passion. Every man is to a degree isolated and bounded by the magic circle of his dreams. When the vision becomes a "ruling passion", the visionary may sacrifice all human values to the attainment of his dream. Thus Jim is a "selfish idealist" upheld by "an exalted egoism"; his dream is "pitiless", and his victory brings human suffering and isolation. Charles Gould becomes increasingly separated from the world and from his wife by the concentration of his "will haunted by a fixed idea". Conrad comments that:

a man haunted by an idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head?56

Dr. Monygham of the same story is so engrossed in his role of protector of Mrs. Gould that he fails to see Nostromo's need of prestige, which "would have restored to him his personality", and he steels his heart against remorse or pity for Hirsch, as it would clash with the "idea" which dominates him, dwarfing "all merely humane considerations".57 The fanatic who forgets compassion in order to reform or change mankind is a constant target

55 Under Western Eyes, p. 180.
56 Nostromo, p. 379.
57 Ibid., p. 439.
of Conrad's criticism — the religious cook of the Narcissus who deliberately puts aside pity in "the infernal fog of his supreme conceit" and terrifies Wait on his death-bed is typical.\textsuperscript{58} Conrad suggests that such fanaticism is sustained only by solitude, by a retirement from experience with life. Just as Jim's desired perfection is possible only in isolation and fades at the touch of the outside world, and Lingard's dream of an empire is destroyed when his secret country is reached by envoys from his own civilization, so the utopian dreams of Michaelis, the lonely obese anarchist of \textit{The Secret Agent}, are conceived in the isolation of prison\textsuperscript{59} and he must discuss them with his eyes cast down "because the sight of faces troubles his inspiration".\textsuperscript{60} Conrad stresses the child-like innocence of his faith in his vision, a faith that is not a reasoned conviction, but a personal impulse of revenge disguised as a humanitarian-scientific creed.\textsuperscript{61} His "lady-patroness", isolated from the realities of life by her position, is equally innocent,\textsuperscript{62} and is therefore easily deceived by Michaelis' "candid infant eyes and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} He "prayerfully divested himself of the last vestige of his humanity", p. 134.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Conrad is very sarcastic about the waves of sentimentality which brought first his heavy sentence and later his release.
\item \textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Secret Agent}, pp. 44-45.
\item \textsuperscript{61} "The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 81. A rather extreme statement.
\item \textsuperscript{62} She is such a stranger to real suffering that she must translate it into mental suffering to comprehend it. She is also "incapable of admiration".
\end{itemize}
fat angelic smile," while her determination to be "superior" is attracted by his creed which would destroy only those whom she despises. Ironically she declares that Michaelis is:

not dangerous — I should think not indeed. He is a mere believer. It's the temperament of a saint. 63

The Professor, "the perfect anarchist" of the same story, is completely solitary in his dream of unlimited power, exalted in his illusion of being "a moral agent", 64 and superior in his freedom from "all conventions and restraints" and his "grit to work alone, quite alone, absolutely alone." 65 In a crowd, however, he is "lost, miserable and undersized" and haunted by the fear that mankind, which seems to flow on "blind and orderly and absorbed" like a natural force, may not be impressed by his detonator. It is only in isolation from the world that he can keep his illusions and resolve his doubt. The author comments:

Such moments of doubt come to all men whose ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity — to artists, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints. A despicable emotional state this, against which solitude fortifies a superior character; and with supreme exaltation the Professor thought of the refuge of his room, with its padlocked cupboard, lost in a wilderness of poor houses, the hermitage of the perfect anarchist. 66

63 The Secret Agent, p. 108.

64 Conrad notes the inheritance of these tendencies from his father, "a delicate, dark enthusiast", a preacher in a small sect, and "a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness", Ibid., p. 80.

65 Ibid., p. 70

Conrad does not condemn idealism because of its perversion by man's selfishness, egoism, hate, greed and desire for success; yet the violence with which he attacks certain types of idealists sometimes suggests an element in Conrad of distrust and fear, almost of resentment of idealists, an element perhaps related to his early life. He also tends to reject completely, sometimes contemptuously, those idealisms that are not congenial to his own temperament or tradition. Certainly Conrad would have man's idealism, which can so easily become fanaticism and intolerance, restrained by the principles of humanity and responsibility, both based upon a knowledge of life and of man's limitations gained through the intuition of love, and through participation in life. These principles are Conrad's "few very simple ideas ... as old as the hills"; the revolutionary he sees as "free" from "all scruples as regards ideas".

Certainly also Conrad asserts as one of the basic truths of life that mankind is, rightly or wrongly, moved towards action by feelings and by dreams. Man's beliefs and ideals are the truly creative force of the world, not intellect, nor science, nor economics. When an Italian innkeeper is asked why his people

67 A Personal Record, xix.

68 Ibid., xx. In the same essay he denies that his father was a revolutionist, for he had "a strong sense of responsibility in the region of ideas and action and so indifferent to the promptings of personal ambition."

69 In an excellent article, "Nostromo", Sewanee Review LIX (1951), 363-391, Robert Penn Warren expresses much the same opinion, and notes that even the most evil of Conrad's men idealize their existence in some way.
love Napoleon, even though he has stolen from them and betrayed them, he answers, "Signore, it is the idea."\textsuperscript{70} One of the best statements of Conrad's view is its negative form, spoken by Michaelis, the believer in scientific and economic utopias, the disbeliever in the ideals of man:

all idealization makes life poorer. To beautify it is to take away its character of complexity — it is to destroy it. Leave that to the moralists, my boy. History is made by men, but they do not make it in their heads. The ideas that are born in their consciousness play an insignificant part in the march of events. History is dominated and determined by the tool and the production — by the force of economic conditions.\textsuperscript{71}

All Conrad's books are denials of this materialistic viewpoint of man. Of himself, Conrad says that perhaps his romanticism is a "curse", but:

when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind, [Romanticism] becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear endowed with an internal glow. And such romanticism is not a sin. It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70} Suspense, p. 182. Conrad is fascinated with the figure of Napoleon, with his loneliness, his immorality, his relation to the revolution, and his power over the imaginations of man.

\textsuperscript{71} The Secret Agent, p. 41. Recent events in the world, such as the present race to capture men's imaginations and loyalties, would suggest that there is much truth in Conrad's views.

\textsuperscript{72} Within the Tides, vii, viii.
CHAPTER VIII.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ISOLATION

"If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do he drowns — nicht wahr?"\(^1\)

A constantly recurring theme in Conrad's work, and one which seems to be closely related to his own experience, is that of the temptation to withdraw from the flow of life because of disillusionment. Finding the ideal unattainable or finite, man refuses to accept the pursuit of the dream, which is life, and becomes a mere on-looker, watching with pity, perhaps with contempt, the efforts of others, and intellectually convinced of the futility, the "nothingness" of it all. To Conrad this is akin to despair and to death. He associates the philosophy with "intellectual audacity", which, like the romantic's "audacity in action", is tinged with egoism, vanity, and faith in one's own conclusions, and in the superiority of one's own "clear sightedness". Under the testing conditions of isolation or of an encounter with evil, the philosophy proves to be inadequate.

As many critics have noticed, Conrad's preoccupation with the philosophy of negation and with the two opposing aspects of idealism arises from his own personal demons of skepticism, self-doubt and frequent moods of despair. His fully developed portraits of Decoud and Heyst and his denial of the validity of their philosophy of detachment, as well as

\(^1\) Stein in Lord Jim, p. 214.
his frequent statements disparaging intelligence and reflection\(^2\) which analyze and thus inhibit action are all forms of self-assurance, of reinforcement against a part of himself which he must suppress. He associates this extreme reaction to disillusionment with the romantic temperament, his own,\(^3\) for it is essentially a result of the inevitable clash between the ideal and reality. He also associates it with a lack of trust in life and in relationships with others.\(^4\)

In the older, experienced man, Conrad finds a touch of skepticism normal, if not carried to the extreme of cynicism, to a complete lack of faith in mankind or in mankind's ideals — or, as in the cases of Mikulin and Jones, to complete negation and to the evil of using man's idealisms for one's own purposes.\(^5\) As Heyst notes, "There is a touch of my father in every man who lives long enough."\(^6\) Even the savage Babalatchi,

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2 In the Author's Note to *Victory*, Conrad states: The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.

3 The "Korzeniowski strain" which his uncle frequently deplores in him. The theme of a wife sacrificed to an ideal of the husband's may be related to the story of Conrad's parents, for there is evidence that Conrad's uncle resented the suffering and early death of his favourite sister.

4 E.g. the loss of Jasper's boat results in the loss of faith in each other by both Jasper and Freya; Almayer's pathetic mistrust of life and of others; Jewel's mistrust of Jim's love.

5 Conrad goes to the length of calling all Russians cynics, their difference from Western Europeans lying in the fact that "they hate life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is." *Under Western Eyes*, p. 104. Conrad would include all the cynics of the commercial world who prey upon man's fears and weaknesses, Jones is the evil counterpart of Heyst; he has frequent fits of boredom, when "nothing's worth while, nothing's good enough", *Victory*, p. 130.

6 *Victory*, p. 196.
the busy politician of the jungle, has a moment of revolt against man's place in the universe, against "the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life". As he sees Omar die, he feels "the weight of his loneliness", and:

for the space of about thirty seconds, a half-naked, betel-chewing pessimist stood upon the bank of the tropical river ...; a man angry, powerless, empty-handed, with a cry of bitter discontent ready on his lips; a cry that, had it come out, would have rung through the virgin solitudes of the woods, as true, as great, as profound, as any philosophical shriek that ever came from the depths of an easy-chair to disturb the impure wilderness of chimneys and roofs.

Immediately, however, he forgets his pain in action, "the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth." Conrad insists that, in spite of such moments of revolt or of the frequently fatal times of apathy and resignation when man is overwhelmed by the forces against him, the claim of life, expressed by struggle and a reaching out to others, is basic and strong. D'Alcacer, who deliberately detaches himself from life and becomes a wanderer to find forgetfulness from sorrow, is amazed at his own emotion when he faces death. Conrad comments:

He had flattered himself on the possession of more philosophy. He thought that this famous sense of self-preservation was a queer thing, a purely animal feeling. "For, as a thinking man," he reflected, "I really ought not to care."

7 *Victory*, p. 212.
9 *Victory*, p. 174.
10 *The Rescue*, p. 345. D'Alcacer's detachment is unlike Jorgenson's, as he is still "an acute and sympathetic observer", pp. 238 and 309.
Heyst, too, is amazed to find that, in spite of his philosophy of detachment, there remains in him "a lot of the original Adam", which lures him into action and attachment to another person.\(^\text{11}\) Heyst's acceptance of non-involvement as a method of avoiding the sorrows of disillusionment breaks down because it is based, not upon his temperament or feelings, but upon his intelligence only, and also because it is an older man's philosophy, his father's; and alien to his youth with its desire for action and love.\(^\text{12}\) After his failure with Morrison, when he renews his vows of renunciation of the world, he is surprised at his sense of loneliness, for there is a contradiction between his mind and his feelings. When his naturally sympathetic temperament betrays him into making a second human connection, the girl with the symbolic names of Alma Magdalena, his intellect tells him that "he who forms a tie is lost", yet holding her hand gives him "a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in his life."\(^\text{13}\) Because of his early training in mistrust, however, Heyst cannot have a satisfactory relationship with Lena, and he is like "a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he is unable to decipher, but which may be big with some revelation."\(^\text{14}\) His isolation has also made him ignorant, uninstructed regarding life and

\(^{11}\) *Victory*, p. 173. Paul L. Wiley's theory is that all Conrad's romantics discover an element of eroticism in their chivalry.

\(^{12}\) *Ibid.*, p. 66-7. It is also based upon pride, and resentment of the world's treatment of his father. He is flattered to join a philosophy not for "the crowd" but for "the elect".


he had not the gift of intuition which is fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the counter's of the world.  

When evil invades the island, Heyst finds that his isolation from life has made him without weapons, either spiritual or material, with which to defend himself and Lena. On the mountain top, as he surveys his invaded Paradise, he realizes his powerlessness, and its relationship to his inability to accept a human tie. He says:

How helpless a man is against the Shades!
How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities .... Lena, give me your hand!"
She looked at him, surprised, uncomprehending.
"Your hand," he cried.
She obeyed; he seized it with avidity, as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.
"What's the matter, dear?" she whispered timidly.
"Neither force nor conviction," Heyst muttered wearily to himself.  

Lena's search for a weapon for him is also a search for love, the magic formula to break the spell on the "enchanted" immobilized Heyst.  

In spite of her illusion of success, the emotional crippling effects of Heyst's youth cannot be overcome, and he can only bend over her:  
cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life.

15 Loc. cit.
16 Ibid., p. 350. Wang also refuses them admittance to the safety of a community, though he later allows Lena to enter.
17 The island is Samburan "the round island". Cf. Jewel's placing a weapon into the hands of Jim.
As with Flora de Barral in whom "the old doubt of herself, the old scar of the blow received in childhood" lingers on, Heyst is permanently marked, and cries:

    woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love — and to put its trust in life.\(^{19}\)

Jones and his evil friends are "the world", the "retribution" that falls upon the intellectual audacity of denying the claims of life, which may not be done with impunity.\(^{20}\)

Like Rita, Lena is described as being "as old as the world"; Heyst, on the other hand, says that he is "so recent that I call myself a man of the last hour."\(^{21}\) Decoud, Conrad's other philosopher of detachment, and one he admits is part of himself, is also a product of late Europe.\(^{22}\) His detachment takes the form of a determination to "see through" all man's idealism, to see the ugly hidden side of self-interest and vanity, and thus to condemn the whole. He accepts the half-truth; patriotism, he says, like all such convictions and ideals,

\(^{19}\) One may wonder if there is any relationship to Conrad's own early life and sense of insecurity, his living with a defeated man, and his sense of having "some of his simple trust in the universe" stripped off when his father died. Conversely, it could be a tribute to the widom of his uncle who allowed him the freedom to live his dream. The quotation may also answer Vernon Young who, in *Hudson Review II* (1949), p. 17 blames Conrad's "psychological celibacy" for drowning Captain Anthony. Conrad is too realistic to have Flora and Anthony, both scarred in youth, left "living happily ever after". Love to Flora will always be a search.

\(^{20}\) The world that also breaks in upon Jim's island and Razumov's room.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 379.

\(^{22}\) "The adopted child of Western Europe", *Nostromo*, p. 156.
is "hopelessly besmirched" with sins committed in its name, and he refuses to consider that, as Antonia reminds him, the word has "stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering". The artificial society of the Parisian boulevards has made him not what he thinks he is, a clear-eyed philosopher who sees through all men's professed idealism, but an idler and a dilettante, whose attitude is "a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority." Worse, his habit of "universal raillery" has hidden from him the truest and deepest parts of himself, or, as Conrad expresses it, "the genuine impulses of his own nature." His staying at Costaguana, his efforts in journalism and his final bold plan are not as devoid of idealism as he would have himself and others believe; he unconsciously responds to the struggles of his country, his anger against the exploiters is real, and his actions are motivated by more than love for Antonia, an emotion he admits having as it does not conflict with his theory of self-interest. Part of his raillery is self-persuasion, the submergence of a genuine emotion by an intellect trained to abhor "the narrowness of any belief".

23 Ibid., p. 187. The situation is much like that of Razumov who, depending also upon his "clearsightedness", sees only one side of a belief in Haldin, but later sees the other side in Haldin's sister. Cf. note 58, Chapter VI, regarding Marlow and Kurtz's "Intended". Decoud's stripping down of all man's motives to self-interest alone, is also like the cynicism of Allegré. Conrad, who often uses the imagery of the old fairy tales, has Rita say, "If ever anybody saw mankind stripped of its clothes as a child sees the king in the German fairy tale, it's I." She has been taught to see men as like "taking the lids off boxes and seeing ugly toads staring at you," p.96 and p. 101. Thus her mistrust and inability to love.

24 Nostromo, p. 151.
Conrad is ruthless in exposing the self-interest, either emotional or material, underlying the adherence of each of the actors in the drama of the revolution — only with Mrs. Gould is he gentle — and he is caustic in his comments upon the futility of the efforts to find "a permanent solution to the problem" by revolution, but he finds Decoud's opposite viewpoint, the rejection of all idealism, of all effort to reach toward an ideal, even more unacceptable. Decoud is refusing what is essentially human, and is really denying all responsibilities and all ties. When Nostromo puts out the candle on the lighter, Decoud finds that intelligence itself cannot penetrate the darkness of the Gulf; he is without affiliations, and, when left completely alone, is easily swallowed by the darkness. He dies "for want of a faith in himself and in others," in "the exile of utter unbelief," though he first feels "the first moral sentiment of his manhood", "a vague consciousness of a misdirected life."

As in "The Nigger of the Narcissus", Conrad is portraying in Heyst and Decoud the malady of the modern world, the

26 Indeed, the novel is a masterpiece, showing clearly a community of people living and working together, yet separated, each motivated by an individual vision or ideal.

27 All the advanced solutions are imposed by outsiders, Europeans, upon a country not ready for these ideas. Conrad believed in Razumov's "Evolution, not Revolution". The changes now taking place in "the dark places" of the world would surprise Conrad.

28 Nostromo, p. 498. The plan he proposed seems doomed to failure and "Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself."
breakdown of old values upon which mankind has been building an orderly world, and the resulting sense of isolation in a world of nothingness. Conrad asserts that there are fundamental and continuing values underlying those that may change, human ideals which, in spite of man's weakness and his inability to realize them completely, have a valid claim upon his loyalty and efforts. A retreat into the irresponsibility of cynicism, of despair, or of superficial self-deception brings the penalty of isolation. To Conrad cynicism is despair, a complete lack of faith in man and in life; when it is an intellectually accepted philosophy, it is based upon arrogance, a stepping out of the stream of mankind, a denial of human risks and responsibilities, or upon fear, a fear of the pain and toil demanded by life. Conrad would agree with George Orwell that:

in this yogi-ridden age, it is too readily assumed that "non-attachment" is not only better than a full acceptance of earthly life, but that the ordinary man only rejects it because it is too difficult; in other words that the average human being is a jailed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings. If one could follow it to its psychological roots, one would, I believe, find that the main motives for "non-attachment" is a desire to escape from the pain of living, and above all from love, which, sexual or non-sexual, is hard work.29

Van Wyck, the romantic who has retired from the world and its dreams because of the pain of disillusionment, watches the struggles of old Captain Whalley against the darkness which

threatens and finally overwhelms him, and discovers that there is a nobility in man's resistance in the uneven combat, a nobility which makes his own retreat seem childish, and he reenters life with opened eyes and a new humility. Like Jim's, Captain Whalley's defeat increases his stature as a man; when his daughter reads of his sacrifice, the meanness of her own struggles with poverty loses its sting, and she sees her father with "something august" in his aspect. Conrad criticizes his chivalrous dreamers with their over-confident simplicity, but he prefers them to those who never have the courage or the vision to step out of the ranks of the mediocre. Lingard of An Outcast of the Islands decides that he is "an old fool" but it is this "spark of divine folly" in him that makes him stand out from the sordid, unscrupulous crowd of adventurers around him, with their visions limited to materialistic gain and unchecked by principles of social responsibility. And Conrad puts his faith "in the power of folly".

In a late essay, wherein he discusses the moral role of an author, Conrad writes:

> It must not be supposed that I claim for the artist in fiction the freedom of moral Nihilism. I would require from him many acts of faith of which the first would be a cherishing of an undying hope; and hope, it will not be contested, implies all the piety of effort and renunciation. It is the God-sent form of trust in the magic force and inspiration belonging to the life of this earth. We are inclined to forget that the way of excellence is in the intellectual, as distinguished from the emotional, humility. What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance. It seems as if the discovery made by many men at various

30 An Outcast of the Islands, p. 273.

times that there is much evil in the world were a source of proud and unholy joy. That frame of mind ... gives an author ... an elated sense of his own superiority.32

It is in such a spirit of humility and compassion that Conrad wrote his stories, aware of the tragedy and the irony of man's pride, his assurance, his ever-hopeful activity and dreams of success, amid the reality of his weakness, his fears, his compromises, his agonies of conscience, and his ultimate failure, yet finding the spectacle of man's struggles worthy of respect. It is, he says, not only "the almost incredible misfortune of mankind, but also its highest privilege, to aspire towards the impossible."33 Man is alone and lonely, but in "the continuity of effort" towards his ideals he transcends his solitariness and insignificance, and experiences the victory, the sense of community, felt at the end by Jim and Lena.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSIONS

Again and again in his prefaces and essays Conrad assures us that his novels reflect faithfully his view of life. It is not difficult to find, as many critics have found, logical contradictions in Conrad's expressed philosophy, contradictions of which he himself seemed to be aware. In spite of these, however, there is a consistency. Central in his vision of man is the fact of the terrible isolation of the individual soul:

of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelopes, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps beyond,\(^1\)

of the human instinct to break through the "envelope" and to seek fellowship and understanding, of the joy that comes with the partial success in achieving this communion, and of the complete despair that attends failure. Upon this truth human society rests. To Conrad man's hope is not in mass movements, nor in material or scientific progress, but in the individual contacts of man with man, in the enlightenment and humility which comes with the knowledge of a self that is also lonely, also weak, and thus able to break down at least partially the barriers between men. The morally mature man, like the experienced sailor looking at the sea, knows that life is unsafe, needing a moral scrupulousness, a careful examination

\(^1\) An Outcast of the Islands, p. 250.
of all motives, even of the so-called virtues which can so tragically corrupt and betray, and that even then he can err.

To attain self-knowledge, a man must participate in life, and accept his human condition with its load of responsibilities, guilt, fear, defeats and loneliness. Frequently in Conrad's stories, moral decisions are forced upon people who would rather evade the dilemma or ignore the social repercussions of their actions to remain "in peace"; there is, however, as Jim and Razumov find, no retreat from responsibility, "no place to go" to escape from their humanity. Yet, in facing the darkness within himself, man need not lose sight of the light. Man is committed to action, and thus to error, but his will and his faith are indestructible in spite of defeat. His ideals are like the rocks which Lingard watches, always overwhelmed by the victorious waves, yet always emerging again with the sea repulsed. Through his actions, his labours for his dimly understood visions, man attains a sense of belonging, of community with all men of all time. Man progresses as he understands that his actions must be controlled by a knowledge of his potential evil, by his sense of being part of a human community in which an individual's actions have the potential of vast good or great harm. Mrs. Gould, carrying the burden of a full realization of

2 E.g. Peyrol who seeks "peace" when he returns to his land; Razumov who wants to live without involvement, Lingard who wants no interference with his kingdom-making, Verloc who wants only his domestic peace, the captain of "The Tale" who wishes to do his duty.

3 Nostromo ends with Linda tending the light shining into the Gulf.

4 The Rescue, p. 245.
her aloneness, also finds wisdom, and sees that:

for life to be large and full, it must contain the
care of the past and of the future in every passing
moment of the present. Our daily work must be done
to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those
who come after.5

What Conrad says is not new, but he says it with a
rare insight into human psychology, with compassion, and with
poetic beauty as well as with emotional intensity. The society
in which Conrad lived seemed to him to be too confident and too
safe in a false security, and to be drifting towards moral in-
differentism; he saw a society too eagerly pursuing false hopes
of utopian "tomorrows", following visions based upon materialism,
without the discipline of the traditional restraints and blinded
to the basic truths of man's nature — a society doomed to
become a world of exiled souls. In the characters of his books
he shows the anti-social vices, avarice, selfishness, com-
placency, vanity, fear, envy, laziness and the love of power,
all the forces within man that separate him from his own kind
and lead to the supreme tragedy of aloneness; against these he
places fidelity, the sense of responsibility, sympathy, love,
and man's indestructible spirit of hope and defiance.

5 Nostromo, p. 521.
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LETTERS BY CONRAD


BOOKS DEALING WHOLLY WITH CONRAD


**BOOKS WITH SECTIONS ON OR REFERENCES TO CONRAD**


ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS


GENERAL


