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PERSPECTIVES ON ISOLATION:
THE RELATION OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE TO THEME
IN SELECTED WORKS
BY
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To My Parents

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Page references to Conrad's works refer to the Dent Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, London, 1946-1954.

To avoid possible confusion I have used the following abbreviations in parenthetical references where the work referred to is not the subject of that particular chapter:

- 'AF': "Amy Foster"
- 'HD': "Heart of Darkness"
- LJ : Lord Jim
- N : Nostromo
- PR : A Personal Record
- 'SS': "The Secret Sharer"
- UWE: Under Western Eyes

In matters of presentation I have in general adopted the conventions prescribed in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (New York: Modern Language Association, 1977).

In quoting from "Amy Foster," "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim I have, when necessary, simplified the punctuation to avoid the awkwardness of double and triple sets of quotation marks.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An enormous volume of criticism on the fiction of Joseph Conrad has been published in the last thirty years. Between 1958 and 1968 alone over twenty full-length critical studies appeared in book form. Some of these critics have set out to demonstrate the development and continuity of Conrad's fiction, others have related Conrad's art to his life. Some studies have concentrated on Conrad's imagery or his use of symbolism; some have set out to identify recurring motifs or archetypal patterns. Several critics have examined Conrad's "political novels." Extensive research has been undertaken into Conrad's source material, and new light has been shed on his life and his Polish background. Important editions of Conrad's letters have been published. There has been a continuing flow of articles, and a journal devoted entirely to Conrad studies, Conradiana, is published thrice-yearly by the Texas Tech University.

Some of this criticism reflects a tendency to apply to the study of fiction methods which are now well-established in the criticism of poetry and poetic drama. This can be fruitful, but some caution seems justified. Philip Rahv has argued that the influence of these methods on the criticism of prose has been "far from salutary."¹ His attack is directed, in the first place, at

¹ "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction," Kenyon Review, 18 (1956), 279.

"the current obsession with the search for symbols, allegories and mythic patterns in the novel,"² and he selects as one of his examples an article by R.W. Stallman on "The Secret Sharer." Stallman regards this story as a "double allegory" and finds a special significance in the L-shape of the captain's cabin.³ Rahv's argument has been echoed by Jocelyn Baines who refers disparagingly to the "alchemical critics" for whom "literary texts are arcana offering knowledge to those who can find the key."⁴ Douglas Hewitt, in his preface to the second edition of Conrad: A Reassessment, expresses similar reservations about a large part of of the Conrad criticism since 1952, when his book was first published.⁵

One would clearly not want to reject out of hand all readings which find "deeper," sub-surface meanings in Conrad's texts. Albert J. Guerard in his book Conrad the Novelist brings to bear insights derived from Jungian psychology.⁶ In particular, he argues that certain texts (notably "Heart of Darkness") are versions of the archetypal myth of the night journey. This sometimes leads him to find analogies (between, for example, "Heart of Darkness" and "The Secret Sharer") which do not, to my mind, exist. Nevertheless, his book is written with such energy and insight that it is, for me,

² Rahv, p. 280.

³ Robert W. Stallman, "Conrad and 'The Secret Sharer,'" Accent, 9 (1949), 142.

⁴ Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (1960; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 428 n., p. 409 n.

⁵ Conrad: A Reassessment, 2nd ed. (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1969), pp. x-xiii.

⁶ Conrad the Novelist, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958).

the most valuable single critical study on Conrad. When Guerard says that his aim (in the long chapters on Lord Jim and Nostromo) is "to talk as rigorously and critically about these novels as certain critics talk about poems," one cannot but approve.⁷ This aim inevitably leads him into matters of technique. More than most critics, he attempts to answer the question, "What kind of novel are we dealing with here?"

It seems important not to lose sight of the fact that Conrad's works are works of prose fiction and that they must first of all convince and succeed as such. I have chosen to examine an aspect of Conrad's narrative technique which is both distinctive and important--namely, his use of a dramatized narrator in certain works. This is, I feel, an area where clarity is still needed.

Studies in point of view have become a prominent feature of modern criticism of the novel and the short story. This is a natural consequence of the development of the novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries--a period which saw the growth of a new artistic seriousness and self-consciousness on the part of the novelist. In "The Art of Fiction" (first published in 1884), Henry James comments as follows:

Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call discutable. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it--of being the expression of artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison.⁸

In fact, it was, according to James, naïve. James's Prefaces point

⁷ Guerard, p. xiii. It is of course impossible to give a whole novel the detailed attention one would give a poem.

⁸ "The Art of Fiction" in Partial Portraits, Ann Arbor Paperbacks (1888; rpt. n.p.: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1970), pp. 375-76.

towards the emergence of a new aesthetics of the novel. In this respect Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction (1921) was a pioneering study. Drawing upon James's insights, Lubbock argued the case for a mode of narration which was impersonal and dramatic. Thus he states that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself."⁹ For Lubbock, the question of point of view is central: "The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view--the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story."¹⁰ Subsequent critics have modified or extended these insights. Of particular significance is Mark Shorer's essay, "Technique as Discovery," (1948) in which he claims for the novel the unity of form and content, or technique and subject-matter, that has long been accepted for poetry. According to Shorer, "Technique is the only means the writer has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it." Point of view is thus "a means toward the positive definition of theme."¹¹

These preliminary comments help to explain the central concern of this thesis, which is to investigate the ways in which Conrad uses a particular technique (that of the first-person narrator) to focus our attention, to secure our involvement, and to direct our sympathies. At the same time I wish to examine the extent to which

⁹ The Craft of Fiction (1921; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 62.

¹⁰ Lubbock, p. 251.

¹¹ "Technique as Discovery," Hudson Review, 1 (1948); rpt. in The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 66.

the central themes or concerns of each work derive from the interaction between the narrator and the man whose experience he confronts, from "the challenging interplay of two frames of reference, two schemes of values, two sets of attitudes" that the use of a dramatized narrator makes possible.¹²

I do not think that one can determine with any finality the reasons for Conrad's use of a first-person narrator in many of his works. This is partly because of the difficulty of separating personal or temperamental and artistic factors. It may be that this method suited Conrad in that it allowed him to employ the relaxed, conversational style of a raconteur and to exploit the narrative transitions made possible by the free play of memory and reflection. Conrad was himself a spinner of yarns. Galsworthy, who first met him on the Torrens in 1893, described him at the time as having "a fund of yarns on which I draw freely."¹³ Personal familiarity and preference may help to account for the way in which Conrad deliberately creates a realistic context for Marlow in each of his stories. Typically, Marlow tells his tale to a circle of auditors in a particular place at a particular time.

However, it is also possible to regard Conrad's discovery of Marlow as a logical step in the development of his art. According to W.Y. Tindall, "the idea of Marlow can be traced back to the inner demands of Conrad's work, immediately to The Nigger of the "Narcissus""; he suggests that "the nameless and apparently disembodied" narrator of that work marks "a transition between

¹² Tony Tanner, Conrad: Lord Jim, Studies in English Literature, No. 12 (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), p. 14.

¹³ Letter of 23 April 1893, in H.V. Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (London, 1935), as quoted in Baines, p. 165.

omniscience and a personified observer."¹⁴ In "Karain," written immediately after The Nigger, this transition has definitely been made. The story shows Conrad moving towards the technique employed so successfully in "Youth," "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim. There can be little doubt that, with Marlow, Conrad found a way of handling and shaping his material.

One often comes across echoes of the view stated by Edward Crankshaw in his study of Conrad published in 1936. According to Crankshaw, Conrad "hit on Marlow as a technical device to enable him, the author, to introduce his own observations, to moralize freely without breaking into the frame of the story."¹⁵ The problem with this view is that it assumes a simple identification between the views of Marlow and those of his creator. Crankshaw was not unaware of this problem; his willingness to make this identification is perhaps a consequence of his belief that Conrad was "a man with a simple philosophy and a straightforward moral vision."¹⁶ W.Y Tindall supplies a necessary corrective to this view when he argues that Marlow is "a creature distinct from his creator. . . . Marlow may owe something to Conrad's desire for a mask in Yeats's sense of the word, but a mask is a device for achieving impersonality, drama, and distance."¹⁷ It is significant that, in the Marlow stories, Conrad enables us to view Marlow objectively by presenting him initially through the eyes of an

¹⁴ "Apology for Marlow," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinman, Jr. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 276.

¹⁵ Joseph Conrad (London, 1936; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963) pp. 71-2.

¹⁶ Crankshaw, p. 27.

¹⁷ Tindall, p. 275.

anonymous "frame-narrator." Thus in "Heart of Darkness" we are given a vivid picture of Marlow as he sits leaning against the mizzen-mast of the Nellie, a cruising yawl on the Thames: "He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol" (HD 46). This helps to prevent too ready an identification between Marlow and Conrad, and lends support to the view that "Marlow has been distanced to the point where Conrad can regard him as another and use him not with the warm concern we devote to ourselves but with aesthetic detachment as an artist should."¹⁸

The question of the reliability of Conrad's narrators is of course a crucial one, and it is raised in each of the chapters on individual works. In the penultimate chapter I consider some of the statements Conrad makes in his essays, prefaces, and autobiographical writings, and suggest a modified version of Crankshaw's view.

I have selected five works for detailed study. These are (in the order of completion) "Heart of Darkness," Lord Jim, "Amy Foster," "The Secret Sharer" and Under Western Eyes. The chapter on "Heart of Darkness" opens with some preliminary remarks on "Kerain" and "Youth," Conrad's first experiments with first-person narration. I have not attempted to cover all the works in which Conrad employs a first-person narrator. I share Moser's conviction that "the essence of Conrad is his complexity and that this complexity can

¹⁸ Tindall, p. 275.

best be conveyed by a detailed examination of his work."¹⁹ It follows that in a thesis of this nature one can only examine a limited number of works. Even here, my treatment of the works--and particularly of the two full-length novels--is by no means exhaustive. Thus in the chapter on Under Western Eyes, for example, I make no attempt to examine the presentation of the exiled revolutionaries in Geneva.

However, my selection of texts is by no means arbitrary. The works I have chosen to examine are among Conrad's finest, and "Heart of Darkness," Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes are essential in any serious consideration of Conrad's achievement.²⁰ Moreover, I believe that it is particularly rewarding to consider the works I have selected in relation to each other. Wellek and Warren suggest that a work of fiction offers not so much a case-history as a world: "The great novelists all have such a world--recognizable as overlapping the empirical world but distinct in its self-coherent intelligibility."²¹ This is certainly true of Conrad. As Moser puts it, "Conrad vibrates with correspondences."²² "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim were closely associated in Conrad's mind,

¹⁹ T.C. Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 8.

²⁰ The exclusion of Chance could be justified on the grounds that it is not "essential Conrad." Moreover, it is common cause that the Marlow of Chance bears little relation to the earlier Marlow. In Chance he is relatively detached from his material, and he has "the habit of pursuing general ideas in a peculiar manner, between jest and earnest" (Chance, 25). The novel does occasionally come to life, but these moments are all too few, and they tend to be smothered by the ponderous narrative method with its weight of analysis and reflection and its series of removes. In fact, in the novel technique seems to become almost an end in itself.

²¹ René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 214.

²² Moser, p. 8.

and he originally intended that they should be published in one volume, together with "Youth." The relationship between "The Secret Sharer" and Under Western Eyes is perhaps even closer: Conrad broke away from the novel as it was nearing completion to write the short story in a matter of a few weeks. I hope that comparisons between the different works will emerge naturally in the course of the following chapters. In Chapter VII I attempt to draw some of the threads together.

It remains for me to explain the emphasis given to isolation in the title. I do not of course intend to limit myself to this theme, but it is such a deep-seated and recurring element in Conrad's fiction that almost any study must take cognizance of it. It is almost a critical commonplace that Conrad's essential subject is man in isolation. He repeatedly dramatizes the situation of a man exposed to some crisis in which he is deprived of all the external supports which we normally take for granted. The individual's predicament is made more acute by the fact that in Conrad's world purpose and meaning depend, in the last analysis, on the individual, on the choices he makes, on the values he accepts or creates for himself. In the following chapters one of my aims will be to examine the way in which isolation is shown to be an unavoidable condition of human existence, and to relate this to Conrad's use of the first-person narrator.

Finally, I should explain my use of critical terminology. The term "first-person narrator" is not a very useful one, although it is widely used. Wayne Booth points out that when we consider the many narrative devices in fiction, "we soon come to a sense of the embarrassing inadequacy of our traditional classification of 'point of view' into three or four kinds, variables only of the 'person'

and the degree of omniscience."²³ In my use of critical terms I have been influenced by Booth's book and by Norman Friedman's article on point of view.²⁴ I prefer to be reasonably flexible in my use of terminology and to allow the particular context to determine the choice of words. The terms "witness-narrator" and "first-person peripheral narrator" are roughly synonymous, as are "protagonist-narrator" and "first-person central narrator."

A minor difficulty is that I have selected for study two full-length novels, a novelette, and two short stories. If I occasionally refer to them collectively as "novels" it is to avoid the awkwardness of constantly referring to them as "works."

²³ The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 214.

²⁴ "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," PMLA, 70 (1955), 1160-84.

CHAPTER II

"HEART OF DARKNESS"

"Karain," written early in 1897, is Conrad's first experiment with the first-person point of view. In various ways it anticipates his subsequent use of a first-person narrator. The opening paragraph immediately establishes the narrative distance: the narrator's memories of the Eastern Archipelago have been aroused by newspaper reports of various native risings, and he looks back nostalgically to "those unprotected days when we were content to hold in our hands our lives and our property" (3). In the first three sections of the story (3-27), the narrator rather elaborately sets the scene and introduces us to Karain and his people. Karain is presented as he appeared to his followers and to the crew of the schooner, an imposing and commanding figure. At the same time he is repeatedly compared to an actor playing a part: "He was ornate and disturbing, for one could not imagine what depth of horrible void such an elaborate front could be worthy to hide" (6). The sense that there is some mystery about the man is confirmed when Karain himself tells his story late one night to the narrator and his companions on the schooner. His first-person account constitutes the core of the story, a narrative within a narrative. Even so, Karain remains something of a mystery, for his story centres on an act of betrayal which defies rational explanation. In this respect his story bears comparison to Jim's, which also centres on a betrayal.

There are also suggestive parallels between "Karain" and the Patusan section of Lord Jim. Both Jim and Karain rule over their domains, and both appear completely convincing--yet both conceal a guilty secret. Both are essential for the stability and safety of the societies they rule over, yet both carry "the seed of peril within" ("Karain," 7). The following description of Karain is equally applicable to Jim in Patusan:

As to Karain, nothing could happen to him unless what happens to all--failure and death; but his quality was to appear clothed in the illusion of unavoidable success. He seemed too effective, too necessary there, too much of an essential condition for the existence of his land and his people, to be destroyed by anything short of an earthquake. (7)

Moreover, in both "Karain" and Lord Jim the protagonist's story is mediated to us by a witness-narrator.

"Karain" also resembles "Youth" in that its opening and closing sections exploit the contrast between past and present, between the remote and exceptional on the one hand, and the familiar and mundane on the other. The first paragraphs evoke with sensuous immediacy the scents and sounds of the East--the same East to which young Marlow responds at the end of "Youth." In the final section the narrator encounters Jackson, one of the crew of the schooner, in a London street. To Jackson "the sombre and ceaseless stir" of London does not seem as real as "the other thing . . . say, Karain's story" (54, 55). The narrator concludes, ironically, that Jackson must have been "too long away from home" (55). The implied contrast between the romanticism of youth and the sedateness of middle age is taken up and developed in "Youth," where it becomes the central theme.

"Youth" was completed by June, 1898, by which time "Jim, a Sketch" had been started. In his perceptive article on "Youth," Murray Krieger points out that, while it may seem "thin and thematically limited" in relation to the work that was to follow, it "has its special value in its capacity to initiate the reader into that absorbing world Conrad everywhere creates."¹ In it Conrad introduces a narrator called Marlow, and he creates for the first time the narrative frame that he is to use in "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim. Marlow tells his story to a representative circle of auditors who all started life in the merchant service. Krieger points out that this narrative frame creates a dramatic situation in which Marlow can unfold his tale: "The rhetorical tone of the tale . . . arises in large part from Marlow's easy confidence of group understanding, from an exclusive, fraternal sense of belonging."²

Most important of all, however, is the clear distinction between the narrating self and the experiencing self. The story itself is comparatively slight, but it derives its value from the fact that it is told by an older, somewhat disenchanted Marlow who looks back with a mixture of irony and regret on what was for him an epoch-making event--his first voyage as an officer on the Judea. As a result a kind of double perspective is created, whereby Marlow is able to re-evaluate his youthful responses in the light of his subsequent experience. The following extract is a representative example:

¹ "Conrad's 'Youth': A Naive Opening to Art and Life," College English, 20 (1959), 276.

² Krieger, p. 276.

O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it! To me she was not an old rattletrap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight--to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret --as you would think of someone dead you have loved. I shall never forget her Pass the bottle. (12)

As Krieger points out, the romanticism of the young Marlow is undercut by the scepticism of the older Marlow.³ It is also undercut by the contrast between the objective facts and young Marlow's romantic transformation of these facts--as in the passage just quoted. In these respects, "Youth" clearly anticipates Lord Jim. In attitude and temperament young Marlow and Jim have much in common. In fact, Marlow (who mediates Jim's story to us) encounters in Jim a version of his own youthful self--a self he had believed almost extinct. In both works there is an unresolved tension as Marlow seeks to weigh what has been lost--the vigour and optimism of youth--against what has been gained--a more mature sense of reality.

While the thematic links are not so direct, in form "Youth" anticipates "Heart of Darkness," where the narrative situation is the same. "Heart of Darkness" is narrated by Marlow to the identical group of auditors, one of whom is the frame-narrator. It also describes a voyage which is an initiation--but of a very different sort. While the material of "Youth" is essentially comic, that of "Heart of Darkness" is tragic. In both stories Marlow is a protagonist-narrator, reporting on his own experience.

While "Youth" possesses its own charm and value, it has a particular interest in that it introduces Marlow. "Youth" was first published in Blackwood's Magazine in September 1898, and its

³ Krieger, p. 277.

favourable reception no doubt encouraged Conrad to employ Marlow again--but in the very different contexts of "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim. Baines suggests that Conrad "must have felt at ease with the style which the use of Marlow allowed him and must have realized the advantage of having a character who could both tell and comment upon the story because he again used Marlow in his next two stories, and gave him an increasingly complex rôle."⁴

"Heart of Darkness" has attracted a volume of critical attention and commentary which may at first sight seem out of all proportion to its length. Many critics differ sharply on matters of interpretation, but almost all accept that "Heart of Darkness" represents the essential Conrad.

One important area of critical debate relates to the overall structure of the work. "Heart of Darkness" has been variously interpreted as a grail quest,⁵ as a night journey into the unconscious,⁶ and as a version of the classical voyage into Hades⁷ or of Dante's descent into the Inferno.⁸ However, while it is clear that "Heart of Darkness" is more than just a travelogue, and more than an attack on colonial exploitation, it is doubtful that

⁴ Baines, p. 259.

⁵ Jerome Thale, "Marlow's Quest," Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, 24 (1955), 351-58; rpt. in Heart of Darkness, ed. R. Kimbrough, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 180-86.

⁶ Guerard, pp. 33-48.

⁷ Lilian Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 9 (1955), 280-92; rpt. in Heart of Darkness, ed. R. Kimbrough, pp. 186-89.

⁸ Robert O. Evans, "Conrad's Underworld," Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (1956), 56-62; rpt. in Heart of Darkness, ed. R. Kimbrough, pp. 189-95.

Conrad intended to compose an explicit allegory. The journey which takes Marlow up the Congo river is clearly symbolic. Marlow's outer journey, while convincing on a literal, realistic level, is co-extensive with an inner journey towards self-discovery. Both journeys terminate in Kurtz, who is located at the Inner Station, or at the "heart of darkness." "It was," says Marlow, "the culminating point of my experience" (51). There is quite obviously at every point an interplay or interpenetration between the outer and the inner journeys, so that the smallest details of action and setting have their part to play in the total economy of the work. What Conrad has created is a mode of fiction where it is impossible to define precisely the suggestiveness of the various details which constitute the created "world" of the story. For Mudrick, it is this which makes "Heart of Darkness" one of "the great originals of literature."⁹

"Heart of Darkness" is clearly the record of Marlow's experience rather than Kurtz's, and in my analysis I follow the stages of his journey into the interior. In the process I hope to present a coherent interpretation of this complex story, and to demonstrate the importance of Marlow's rôle as protagonist and narrator.

"Heart of Darkness" opens with Marlow and four companions on a cruising yawl on the Thames, waiting for the tide to turn. Marlow's story is itself mediated to us by a narrator (one of his companions) who remains anonymous and undramatized. He does,

⁹ Marvin Mudrick, "The Originality of Conrad," The Hudson Review, 11 (1958-59), 545-53; rpt. in Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. M. Mudrick, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 44.

however, have a distinct point of view. For him the Thames is a stream of light, and after his rather elaborate tribute to the "old river" for services rendered (46-7), Marlow's opening words come as something of a surprise: "'And this also,' said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth'" (48). The past achievements which the frame-narrator has referred to are for Marlow no more than a "flicker" in a prevailing darkness (49). The effect is to undercut the affirmative comments of the frame-narrator. The account of the Roman commander making his way into the English wilderness ironically reverses the equation made by the frame-narrator between England and civilization. The Roman commanders were "men enough to face the darkness" (49), in contrast to the young man who has come out to mend his fortunes. The stages of the latter's moral collapse prefigure precisely (as far as we can tell) the stages by which the wilderness takes hold of Kurtz: "Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate" (50). Marlow's comments on the shortcomings of the Romans as colonists, and his remarks on the redeeming power of the idea, anticipate his indictment of colonial incompetence and exploitation in the Congo.

After these significant preliminary reflections, the narrative gets under way. What sort of a man is Marlow? The use of a frame-narrator enables Conrad to present him to us objectively and dramatically:

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. (46)

One effect of Marlow's pose is to distinguish him from the others

on the yacht. He seems to be lost in his own meditations. His Buddha-like posture arouses the expectation that he will be a teacher, imparting wisdom. However, when he does speak it is in a forthright, colloquial idiom:

Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine--what d'ye call 'em?--trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries--a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been, too--used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here--the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina--and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. (49)

He establishes an immediate rapport with his listeners, who prepare to hear another of his "inconclusive experiences" (51). He is characteristically self-deprecating: he apologizes at the start for bothering his auditors with what happened to him personally, and his references to himself are frequently tinged with irony at his own expense. When he learns that his aunt has been representing him as an "exceptional and gifted creature," he exclaims, "Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-half-penny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached!" (59). This modesty is one indication of his reliability.

After describing his childhood interest in exploration, Marlow admits to using his aunt's influence to get him the command of one of the steamers of a Belgian trading company operating in Africa. Then, in one of the few interruptions of chronological sequence, Marlow describes his subsequent attempt to recover the remains of his predecessor, Fresleven. The description of the sordid and petty quarrel which ended in Fresleven's death and the abandonment of the village serves to heighten the misgivings that have already been aroused in the reader by the image of the Congo

river as "resembling an immense snake uncoiled" (52). This episode presents in miniature a foretaste of the dilemmas and the ordeal which await Marlow. We are troubled by the discrepancy between Fresleven's character (he was "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs" (54)) and his irrational behavior. In Marlow's references to "the noble cause" and "the cause of progress" (54) we have the first instances of an irony which becomes habitual.

The sinister overtones deepen when Marlow arrives in Brussels, "a city that always makes [him] think of a whited sepulchre" (55). This significant image recalls the terms of Christ's indictment of the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii. 27-8), and implies that the Company's official morality is so much pious hypocrisy.

By the time Marlow has met "the great man" and been ushered in and out by one of the knitters of black wool, he has begun to feel distinctly uneasy: "It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy--I don't know--something not quite right; and I was glad to get out" (56). The doctor's cryptic comments help to deepen the atmosphere of foreboding, and so in their way do the naïve comments of his aunt. What she says about the Workers and about Marlow--who is an "emissary of light" (59)--serves only to accentuate the sense that Marlow has let himself in for more than he bargained for. After leaving his aunt a queer feeling comes over him that he is an "impostor," and he has "a moment of startled pause" (60).

As we follow Marlow's account of his journey down the African coast, the nature of what he has let himself in for becomes clearer. The voice which reports on this experience is, of course, Marlow's own voice, and his account carries the stamp of authenticity:

The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there grayish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin-shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers--to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out, and on we went. (60-61)

Perhaps no other method could convey as effectively this verisimilitude. Moreover, we are simultaneously made aware of the subjective effect of what is observed on Marlow, who is the perceiver. This is something which follows easily and inevitably, as a result of the narrative method. As we enter into Marlow's experience and share his point of view, our sympathetic involvement deepens.

What Marlow comes to feel as he journeys down the coast is a sense of isolation and alienation. The coast slips by, mute and almost featureless, the settlements seem quite insignificant against the "untouched expanse of their background," and the activity of landing clerks and soldiers is made to seem futile. This feeling is epitomized by the description of the French gunboat: "In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent" (61-2). The voyage becomes "a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (62) and the only relief is provided by the occasional voice of the surf (which was "a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother" (61)) and the boat paddled by blacks: "They had faces like grotesque masks--these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a

wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast" (61).

Marlow himself analyses very clearly the origins of his ennui:

The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. (61)

These ingredients are precisely calculated to produce in Marlow a feeling of uncertainty and doubt. His enforced idleness is particularly significant when one remembers that it is largely the fact that he is able to get to work on his steamboat which preserves his sanity during those months at the Central Station. Marlow's isolation is significant because he is about to be tested, and in Conrad isolation is a necessary condition of the moral test.

When Marlow finally lands at the Company's station near the mouth of the river, everything he experiences from the moment he steps ashore serves to heighten his sense of being cut off from what is real to him. He registers a succession of moral shocks. He comes upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, a railway truck lying upside down, pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty nails, a heap of smashed up drainage pipes. In each case, some item of equipment or piece of machinery has been deprived of its proper function, and is simply abandoned. The whole point of a piece of machinery is that it should function properly, hence the "pieces of decaying machinery" (63-4) suggest a fundamental lack of purpose. In particular, this want of respect for the proper use of things runs contrary to every seaman-like instinct in Marlow. One remembers his approval of the Roman legionaries as

"a wonderful lot of handy men" (49) and his delight, later, at coming across Towson's manual, An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship. The smashed up pipes and heaps of rivets which are left lying about constitute a damning comment on the operations of the Company. Part of Marlow's ordeal consists in a test of his ability to withstand the demoralizing effects of his enforced proximity with these things and the people responsible for them.

When Marlow encounters the chain-gang his moral dilemma becomes somewhat clearer. The precision of his description of the six men who pass him without a glance indicates the strength of his emotional response. The six men are in the charge of "one of the reclaimed" who "with a large, white, rascally grin . . . seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust" (65).

"After all," Marlow reflects, "I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings." For the first time he begins to understand what he is implicated in:

But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. . . . For a moment I stood apalled, as though by a warning. (65)

Clearly, Marlow's response here anticipates his final "choice of nightmares" (138). However, his initiation is not yet over. Instead of following the chain-gang, he descends and enters the shade of a grove of trees by the river's edge. It seems to him as though he has entered "the gloomy circle of some Inferno" (66), for this is a place where some of the "helpers" have withdrawn to die:

They were dying slowly--it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,--nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. (66)

By this time it has become clear that what Marlow has to contend with is a systematic distortion of reality. Are the natives being shelled by the gunboat really "enemies"? Are the contract workers "helpers," or the men in the chain-gang "criminals"? Is the Company's operation in the Congo really a philanthropic and civilizing effort, or is it (as Conrad elsewhere described it) "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration"?¹⁰ The names that do not fit are clearly symptomatic of the morally confused world of "Heart of Darkness," where appearances belie reality.

There is one action in particular which defines for the reader Marlow's own moral response. As he stands in the grove of death, he notices a figure reclining at his feet:

The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against a tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young--almost a boy--but you know with them it's hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held.
(66-7)

This may seem a small and ineffectual gesture, but it is an act of practical compassion, and it carries a more than literal significance and value. It is an affirmation of a shared humanity, and hence a complete contradiction of everything the Company and its officials stand for.

On leaving this place of death Marlow comes face to face with a vision of light--the Company's Chief Accountant. He presents an

¹⁰ "Geography and Some Explorers," in Last Essays, p. 17.

immaculate appearance: "I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots" (67). With his starched collars and his devotion to his books he has managed to achieve something, to preserve some order, amidst "the great demoralization of the land" (68). He is, however, a parody of the values which Marlow seems to espouse ("What saves us is efficiency . . ." (50)); his devotion to order is little more than a concern to keep up appearances, and is completely divorced from any moral or human commitment. His ability to make "correct entries of perfectly correct transactions" (70) when fifty feet below his doorstep Marlow can see the tree-tops of the grove of death, is nothing less than horrifying. His bookkeeping simply gives an appearance of respectability to brutal and cynical transactions.

By the time Marlow leaves for the Central Station, then, the basic lines of development have been laid down. The moral world of "Heart of Darkness" has taken clearer shape, and Marlow has grown considerably in moral stature. By this point in the narrative the reader is likely to agree with the view that Marlow functions as "an instrument for perceiving and conveying truth amid the hypocrisy, confusion, and foreboding evil which fill the story."¹¹

During Marlow's stay at the Central Station the narrative develops thematically in various ways. A glance at the place is sufficient to tell him that it is run by the "flabby devil." His description of the white men strolling about "with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims

¹¹ George E. Montag, "Marlow Tells the Truth: The Nature of Evil in 'Heart of Darkness,'" Conradiana, 3 (1971-72), 93.

bewitched inside a rotten fence" (76) suggests that he has entered another circle of some Inferno. "I've never seen anything so unreal in my life," he exclaims (76). His response is to turn his back on them and go to work on his steamer. "In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life" (75).

For the first time the wilderness is explicitly opposed to the unreality of the "pilgrims": "And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion" (76).

Just before the steamer sets off upriver, Marlow overhears a conversation between the Manager and his uncle, where death and evil are equated with a darkness at the heart of the wilderness. The Manager's uncle gestures towards the wilderness in what seems to be an appeal to "the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart" (92).

Marlow's rejection of the pilgrims and all they represent is accompanied by a growing interest in Kurtz. He has heard from the Chief Accountant that Kurtz is "a remarkable man" (69), that he has the backing of the Council in Europe, and that a great future lies ahead of him. Now, at the Central Station, Marlow discovers that Kurtz arouses feelings of resentment, envy, fear, and hostility. He is despised by the "brickmaker" for having moral ideas of some sort: "'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else'" (79). Moreover, Marlow discovers (to his surprise) that he has been classed together with Kurtz as one of "the new gang--the gang of virtue" (79). It is believed that the same

powerful interests in Europe which are backing Kurtz are also responsible for Marlow's appointment. Thus Marlow's "choice of nightmares" is to some extent being made for him. Although he says that a lie is something he hates and detests, he allows the "brickmaker" to believe that he does indeed have influence in Europe--simply because he believes that this might somehow help Kurtz (82).

Our curiosity about Kurtz is aroused by the piecemeal way in which scraps of information are offered us. At this stage Kurtz was, according to Marlow, "just a word" for him (82). Nevertheless, his interest has been aroused, and has expressed itself in the shape of a particular question: "I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there" (88).

Late one evening, while lying half-asleep on the deck of the steamer, Marlow overhears part of a conversation between the Manager and his uncle, the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. It seems that after coming three hundred miles downstream with a fleet of canoes laden with ivory, Kurtz had for no obvious reason changed his mind and turned about, "setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station" (90). Although Marlow does not understand his motive, for the first time Kurtz comes alive for him: "As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse" (90). This anticipates Marlow's "glimpses" of Jim in Lord Jim. In both cases the implication is that human beings are difficult to understand or pin down--one has moments of insight, but one is never sure. It follows that one's own attempts to

communicate are uncertain of success. Hence Marlow wonders whether he is managing to convey anything of his own experience to his listeners:

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

He was silent for a while.

". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream--alone. . . ." (82)

These comments underline the personal, subjective nature of the experience which Marlow strives to communicate, and reflect Conrad's perception of isolation as an unavoidable condition of human existence.

The description of Marlow's journey upriver to meet Kurtz is a further illustration of the effectiveness of Conrad's narrative method. It combines the economy and compression of report-like narration with the immediacy and conviction of a first-hand account of personal experience:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once--somewhere--far away--in another existence perhaps. (92-3)

The wilderness seems to belong to a primitive world which defies any attempt to define its quality, to make it familiar and comprehensible: "We were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet" (95). The river, with its shoals and sandbanks and hidden snags, seems to deliberately frustrate Marlow's progress. The men who inhabit this wilderness are possessed of a primitive energy:

Suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. (96)

Yet this swaying, dancing, animated humanity which Marlow glimpses is not completely alien and incomprehensible. Marlow can in fact perceive "the faintest trace of a response" in himself to "the terrible frankness of that noise" (96): "What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar." It seems to Marlow that "the mind of man is capable of anything," and that in the frenzy of the "savages" one can see "truth stripped of its cloak of time" (97). This leads to his assertion that a man "must meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn strength." Thus the wilderness and its inhabitants pose a moral challenge even before Marlow has met Kurtz. The reader is prepared for the discovery that, in the face of this challenge, Kurtz was found wanting. Moreover, Marlow's intuitive understanding of Kurtz is anticipated by his prior acknowledgement of his own "remote kinship" with the frenzied natives.

The account of the journey upriver leads naturally into an account of Marlow's personal response, and it is here that we find his first extended moral disquisitions. After stating that one must rely on one's own "inborn strength," he adds: "Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags--rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief" (97). Marlow's "work ethic" is one aspect of this "deliberate belief." Part of the value of work consists in simply keeping oneself occupied. On his journey upriver, the practical necessities of navigation limit Marlow's susceptibility to his surroundings: "I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man" (97). When one has to attend to "mere incidents of the surface, the reality . . . fades" (93).

Viewed in this light, Marlow's activity may seem little more than "monkey tricks" (94). However, for Marlow work is not valuable simply as a distraction. At the Central Station it is a "great comfort" for him to be able to turn away from the "brick-maker" (who doesn't make bricks) to his steamboat:

I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit--to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know. (85)

Marlow respects the boiler-maker because he is "a good worker" (85) and is dismayed by all the evidence of neglect and waste at the Company's stations. At one point a fire consumes a grass shed

full of trading goods. Marlow, who can see that the fire can't be contained, watches as an agent runs down to the river to fetch water--in a bucket which has a hole in the bottom. This detail sums up the futility of the Company's operations. Marlow knows intuitively that these people can never accomplish anything of value. He says of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition: "There was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware that these things are wanted for the work of the world" (87).

Marlow's belief in the value of work can be attributed in part to the fact that he is a seaman by profession. His attitude is shown by his delight at his discovery of Towson's textbook on seamanship:

I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. . . . Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. (99)

The ability to devote oneself to a job of work is valuable in itself, because it requires faith and commitment, and fosters an appreciation of the task, and of that which is the object of one's efforts. Although Marlow recognizes that, objectively, his steamboat is less solid and less pretty than "an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin," he says that he has "expended enough hard work on her to make [him] love her" (85). More than anything else, it is his devotion to his steamboat and to the task of navigating her which preserves Marlow's hold on himself in the face of the

wilderness and the terrible example of Kurtz.¹²

There is a further aspect to the value of work, for the completion of a given task often depends upon co-operation and a common commitment. A ship and its crew provide Conrad with a model of what can be achieved, and in The Nigger of the Narcissus he illustrates the way in which this commitment produces order and meaning. This idea is an important element in "Heart of Darkness." The native crew on the steamer may be cannibals, but they are "men one could work with" (94), and Marlow is grateful to them. After a few months' training, one of them has learned to fire up a vertical boiler: "He was useful because he had been instructed" (97-8). Another black man has been trained by Marlow's predecessor to act as helmsman, and although he is "the most unstable kind of fool" (109), when he is killed Marlow can still say, "I missed my late helmsman awfully" (119). He goes on to explain:

Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back--a help--an instrument. 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. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory--like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment. (119)

This leads to the use of what is the key moral term in "Heart of Darkness": restraint. "Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint--just like Kurtz --a tree swayed by the wind." Marlow realizes with something of a shock that his crew of cannibals are capable of restraint. In their

¹² Marlow's attitude to work may usefully be compared with Conrad's views on "the honour of labour" in The Mirror of the Sea, p. 24.

case this has consisted in not regarding Marlow and his fellow whites as material for a cannibal feast. To Marlow this evidence of restraint--where he would least expect to find it--is something wonderful and inexplicable:

It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. . . . I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst 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.
 . . . (105)

One can cast about for explanations, or partial explanations, but it would seem that ultimately the presence or absence of restraint is a mystery. In fact, if grace is to be found anywhere in the Conradian universe, it is surely to be found here, in the operations of what Marlow refers to in Lord Jim as "a power of resistance, . . . an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and the inward terrors" (LJ 32).

As Marlow proceeds upstream it becomes more and more evident that his journey into the interior, his journey into the heart of darkness, is a journey to meet Kurtz: "Where the pilgrims imagined the steamboat crawled to I don't know. . . . For me it crawled towards Kurtz--exclusively. . . . We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (95). Clearly, Kurtz is located at the heart of darkness--or, conversely, the darkness lies in the heart of Kurtz.

The attack which materializes some miles below Kurtz's station (the "Inner Station") convinces Marlow that they are too late to rescue Kurtz. This produces in him "a sense of extreme disappointment"--as though he had "travelled all this way for the sole

purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz" (113). It is as though he had "missed [his] destiny in life" (114).

Marlow is interrupted by an interjection ("Absurd") and when he resumes he deliberately disrupts the narrative sequence to give us our first real information about Kurtz: "I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me" (114-5). After another pause for reflection he recalls "the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz" talking about his Intended, and goes on to describe Kurtz's surrender to the wilderness. In this way Marlow takes the reader into his confidence, thereby anticipating the narrative climax of his tale. Guerard points out that this tactic is "dramatically effective, though possibly carried to excess: we are told on the authority of completed knowledge certain things we would have found hard to believe had they been presented through a slow consecutive realistic discovery."¹³ As a result, the reader's first direct glimpse of Kurtz (133-4) is charged with meaning.

What is remarkable about Marlow's attitude to Kurtz here is that he is able (in retrospect) to "place" Kurtz quite confidently and give a cool, rational assessment of the man. "Whatever he was, he was not common" (119). Although he can't forget him, he is "not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life [they] lost in getting to him." He explains: "I missed my late helmsman awfully." This is a rather surprising view and (as I will suggest) does not adequately convey Marlow's total response to Kurtz. It is as though Kurtz is being judged here by a man whose point of view

¹³ Guerard, p. 41.

is for the moment secure and who wishes to distance himself from "the shade of Mr. Kurtz" (117).

The reader's initial sympathy for Kurtz will, of course, have been radically altered by Marlow's revelations. At the same time, however, Marlow goes out of his way to contrast Kurtz's situation with that of his auditors, who have "solid pavement" under their feet, are "surrounded by kind neighbours," and are "in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums" (116):

How can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the 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? These little things make all the great difference. (116)

This passage raises questions which recur in Conrad's works. It contrasts security and complacency on the one hand with vulnerability and extremity on the other, and suggests the difficulty of judging the man who has been tested and found wanting.

When the steamboat finally reaches Kurtz's station, it is to find the Russian "harlequin" waiting for them on the bank. Apart from his interest as a character, the Russian's function as sub-narrator is to inform Marlow of Kurtz and his activities. For the first time in "Heart of Darkness" the reader has another point of view to take into account, and it is significant that this information is relayed by a narrator who is sympathetic to Kurtz. The Russian is ruled by "the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure," and Marlow is "seduced into something like admiration--like envy" for his youth and his "unreflecting audacity" (126). He is free from any taint of greed or meanness, and is an attractive contrast to the "faithless

pilgrims" (76). As a result we are likely to be receptive to anything he may have to say about Mr. Kurtz. His eagerness to present Kurtz in the most favourable light is obvious. "You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man," he claims (128). Our view of Kurtz is enlarged by the suggestion of a man struggling morally with himself: "This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away" (129).

During their conversation Marlow is horrified when he picks up the binoculars and sees that what he had taken to be ornamental knobs are in fact human heads which have been impaled on fence-posts around Kurtz's house. The moral shock which Marlow receives so discomposes him that when the Russian volunteers details of the ceremonies to which Kurtz has become accustomed, Marlow actually shouts at him. The Russian looks at him, surprised, and Marlow comments, "I suppose it did not occur to him that Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine" (132). Marlow's attitude to Kurtz is thus distinguished sharply from the Russian's uncritical, or at best ambivalent, attitude. It seems to Marlow that his "devotion to Kurtz" is "about the most dangerous thing in every way" that has yet happened to the young Russian (127).

Finally, Marlow gets his first view of Kurtz--again through the binoculars--as he is carried from his house on a stretcher:

I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks . . . His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arms waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide--it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. (133-4)

Kurtz has been addressing the "savages," who melt away back into the forest.

Here Conrad's presentation of Kurtz is completely successful. The accumulated suggestions of image and symbol find their embodiment in this "atrocious phantom" (133). Death and corruption (in a metaphysical sense) are implicit in the depiction of Kurtz as an exhumed corpse. This "animated figure of death" recalls Marlow's earlier description of Kurtz's "disinterred body" with its "lofty frontal bone" (115). One feels that it would have been more decent to leave him buried. His wide open mouth lends him a "voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him." This suggests an unlimited egotism, a desire for power and possession which can never be satisfied. His conviction that everything belongs to him ("My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--'" (116)) indicates that he is hardly sane.

Who is Kurtz, and what is his significance? When Marlow returns to the "sepulchral city" (152) he receives various bits of information. Marlow had taken Kurtz "for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint" (154), but a man who calls himself Kurtz's cousin suggests that he was "essentially a great musician" (153). They agree, eventually, that Kurtz was "a universal genius" (154). An ex-colleague of Kurtz's, a journalist, informs Marlow that "Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have been politics 'on the popular side. . . . He electrified large meetings. He had faith--don't you see?--he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything--anything. . . . He was an--an--extremist'" (154). This kind of unattached, rootless faith is clearly dangerous,

and is far removed from the "deliberate belief" which Marlow exemplifies. Unlike Marlow, Kurtz seems to have no particular vocation, no "power of devotion . . . to an obscure, back-breaking business" (117). His idealism seems to be a disguise for his egotism. Consequently it is not surprising that, left to himself in the wilderness, he should be found wanting: "They [the impaled heads] only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (131). He can only surrender to the temptations of the wilderness:

The wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude --and the whisper had proved irresistably fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core (131)

This seems clear: "Heart of Darkness" is a study of moral failure, and Kurtz fails because he lacks the necessary "inborn strength." What is the nature of the force that subverts him? The implication is that there is in each one of us a hidden potential for evil which may overwhelm us--given the necessary circumstances. Douglas Hewitt points to the recurrence in Conrad's work of a situation where a man who relies on simple virtues is "confronted by a partially apprehended sense of evil against which they seem powerless."¹⁴ He concludes: "The most cursory glance at Conrad's work is enough to convince us that he has a conception of a transcendental evil, embodying itself in individuals--a sense of

¹⁴ Hewitt, p. 17.

evil just as great as that of any avowedly Catholic or Calvinist writer."¹⁵ As a definition this is a little vague, and some readers may balk at the phrase, "transcendental evil." I think that Guerard puts his finger on the problem: "Perhaps the chief contradiction of 'Heart of Darkness' is that it suggests and dramatizes evil as an active energy (Kurtz and his unspeakable lusts) but defines evil as vacancy."¹⁶ He refers subsequently to "the darkness of passivity, paralysis, immobilization."¹⁷ Clearly, evil is defined as "vacancy" in the sense that Kurtz is found to be "hollow at the core" (131). He is passive in that he is unable to resist the temptations of the wilderness. Yet evil is dramatized as "active energy" in that Kurtz is consumed by uncontrollable lusts and passions. A subsequent critic refers to Guerard's point, but argues that "when Marlow drags him back to the river boat, it is from orgy not from apathy that Kurtz is saved."¹⁸ The truth is surely that Kurtz's surrender to the wilderness is a consequence of the hollowness within. If this is true, then the contradiction disappears.

In writing about "Heart of Darkness" one tends to refer to the wilderness as though it were synonymous with evil. Throughout the story the wilderness has been described as ominous, brooding, silent, vast, and indefinable. These references gather significance and gain precision until the wilderness is explicitly equated with evil. Thus when Marlow arrives at the Central Station, "the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck of earth" strikes him "as something great and invincible, like evil or truth" (76). However,

¹⁵ Hewitt, p. 23. ¹⁶ Guerard, p. 37. ¹⁷ Guerard, p. 47.

¹⁸ Florence H. Ridley, "The Ultimate Meaning of 'Heart of Darkness,'" Nineteenth Century Fiction, 1 (1963), 46.

this equation is not simply a matter of clinical statement. The wilderness takes on significance primarily through Marlow's evolving response to it. In this way the wilderness becomes an "objective correlative" for the sense of evil which Conrad wishes to communicate. The passage which describes Kurtz's surrender to the wilderness is therefore the culmination of a process which began with Marlow's voyage as a passenger down the African coast:

The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball--an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and--lo!--he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. (115)

The ironical resemblance of his head to an ivory ball is, of course, appropriate: Kurtz has become one with that which he desired so much. The sexual metaphors ("taken him, loved him, embraced him") invite one to think in orgiastic terms. On the other hand, there is a literal sense in which the wilderness has "got into his veins" and "consumed his flesh"; he is the victim of disease and fever--which (as Marlow is to discover) is both physically and morally debilitating. Finally, "the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation" has the traditional associations of a pact with the devil; it also has less definable African associations.

This passage may seem to attribute an active power to the wilderness, but this should not obscure the fact that the wilderness simply creates the conditions for moral collapse. It operates by way of silence and solitude, and through the negation of the familiar. It tests one's capacity for "restraint" by hinting at the existence of repressed and unacknowledged forces in the psyche. It is antithetical to the constraints of society and work, and to

Kurtz's idealism. In fact, the central issue posed by "Heart of Darkness" is whether there is anything as real to oppose to the darkness--any countervailing force which is equally rooted in the heart of man. The answer (if there is one) is likely to be found in Marlow's response to and evaluation of Kurtz.

After Kurtz has been brought on board the steamer, the Manager takes Marlow aside and, with apparent regret, talks of Kurtz's "unsound method" (137). Marlow already has reason to believe that the three-month delay in reaching Kurtz was the result of deliberate calculation on his part. The manager's hypocritical talk so revolts Marlow that he turns "mentally to Kurtz for relief--positively for relief" (138). As a result Marlow's hour of favour is over: "I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares." The modification in his attitude is further indicated when, shortly after his altercation with the manager, he turns to the Russian and says, "Speak out. As it happens I am Mr. Kurtz's friend--in a way" (138).

Marlow's "choice of nightmares" may seem remarkable, but, as I have suggested, we have been prepared for it by his response to the Company and the "pilgrims." Moreover, there is a real moral distinction to be made between Kurtz and the manager. Jerome Thale suggests that he and the other officials "do not have the stuff to commit themselves to evil, because they are incapable of moral action."¹⁹ In other words, like Eliot's "hollow men," they exist in a kind of moral limbo. In an essay on Baudelaire, Eliot makes

¹⁹ "The Narrator as Hero," Twentieth Century Literature, 3 (1957), 71-2.

the following observation: "So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; 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."²⁰ One could say of Kurtz, as Eliot says of Baudelaire, that at least he was "man enough for damnation."

The "foundations of [Marlow's] intimacy" with Kurtz are laid during their midnight encounter (143). When he wakes up to find that Kurtz is no longer in his cabin, he receives a profound moral shock--"as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon [him] unexpectedly" (141). What discomposes him is the thought that Kurtz should have deliberately chosen to return to the darkness where his "adorers" are keeping their "uneasy vigil" (140). He decides that he must "deal with this shadow by [himself] alone" (141), and without raising the alarm goes in pursuit of Kurtz. Marlow's nervous state is suggested by the "imbecile thoughts" which come to him as he follows Kurtz's trail, and by the pleasure he takes in circumventing him--"as though it had been a boyish game" (142). He succeeds in cutting him off, and confronts him:

We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns--antelope horns, I think--on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. "Do you know what you are doing?" I whispered. "Perfectly," he answered (143)

Marlow discovers that he has to deal with "a being to whom [he] could not appeal in the name of anything high or low":

²⁰ T.S. Eliot, "Baudelaire," in Selected Essays, 3rd. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 429.

I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him--himself--his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above him or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. (144)

This, it would seem, is Kurtz's achievement. He has asserted his freedom to act independently of all moral considerations, of all traditional ethical codes. Thus Marlow can only appeal to his egotism, to his conception of his own greatness: "'You will be lost,' I said--'utterly lost'" (143).

However, if his achievement is to cut himself off from all restraint and from all morality, and to behave as though he were autonomous, then it is essentially a negative achievement. Marlow perceives this: "I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid" (143). This is why Marlow can describe him in Faustian terms. Referring to "the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness," he says: "This alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" (144). His attempt to defy morality and act autonomously must necessarily fail, and it is his own final recognition of this fact that constitutes his real achievement.

During their midnight encounter, Marlow has to go through the ordeal of looking into Kurtz's soul: "Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity" (145). Yet, on the other hand, Marlow reports: "He struggled with himself, too I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself."

As he navigates the steamboat downstream, he has ample opportunity to listen to Kurtz:

Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! . . . The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham, whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mould of primeval earth. (147)

Marlow is present to observe Kurtz's final moments:

I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror--of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision--he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath--
"The horror! The horror!" (149)

One's interpretation of "Heart of Darkness" hinges upon one's response to these crucial words.²¹ There is little doubt that we are intended to regard them as a cry of moral self-recognition, as Kurtz's moment of self-awareness. It is horrifying, in view of what he has become, but it is also, as Marlow puts it, "an affirmation, a moral victory" (151). He has "pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth" (150). In this moment he understands what he has done, and he acknowledges evil as evil. His final cry is an affirmation of the fact that he is, inescapably, a moral being.

After Kurtz is buried, Marlow himself comes close to death:

²¹ In "'Heart of Darkness': The Grounds of Civilization in an Alien Universe" (Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 7 (1966)), Donald R. Benson suggests that "whether we think of the story as a journey within or as a search for the essence of civilization and humanity, Kurtz's victory is its crux" (345).

I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism I was within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. (150-1)

The terrible, Kurtzian way to the truth is through self-destruction, but it is the truth that he pronounces. This is why, in Lionel Trilling's words, "Marlow does not find it possible to suppose that Kurtz is anything but a hero of the spirit."²²

What, then, is the nature of the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz? "Heart of Darkness" can be regarded as a symbolic voyage of self-discovery, and Kurtz as the agent in Marlow's self-discovery. The Inner Station is "the furthest point of navigation and the culminating point of [Marlow's] experience" (51). The dramatic highlight of their relationship is their midnight encounter on the banks of the river, where Marlow has to attempt to come to grips with "that Shadow--this wandering and tormented thing" (143). However, it is Kurtz's spiritual struggle, and in particular his final whisper, which binds Marlow to him and inspires the loyalty which, paradoxically, expresses itself in his lie to Kurtz's fiancée: "I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more" (150).

Clearly, Kurtz can act as the agent in Marlow's self-discovery only in so far as Marlow sees in him "a potential and fallen self."²³ Marlow is remarkable in that he has the capacity to do this. Instead

²² Beyond Culture (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 33.

²³ Guerard, p. 38.

of rejecting or disowning Kurtz, he acknowledges the existence of a bond between them: "It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares" (147). Kurtz has to some extent become a "secret sharer," an alter-ego. The extent of Marlow's identification with Kurtz is shown by his description of his own struggle with death:

And it is not my own extremity I remember best--a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things--even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity I seem to have lived through. (151)

It would, however, be misleading to refer to Kurtz as a "double," if by this one means the kind of complete identification which Conrad dramatizes in "The Secret Sharer." While Kurtz is a potential self, he is also an opposite.²⁴ Marlow's values and attitudes are distinct from Kurtz's, and while he is aware of the demoralizing effect of the wilderness, he resists it.

The extent of Marlow's commitment to Kurtz is indicated by the fact that, although he hates and detests a lie (82), he chooses to lie to Kurtz's fiancée, thereby preserving her illusion about Kurtz. There is an ambiguity in Conrad's presentation of Marlow's lie. Marlow refers to it several times as an act of loyalty to Kurtz (141, 150, 151), yet at the end, after describing his scene with the Intended, he says: "The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due?" (142). Clearly, his action can be regarded either as his final act of loyalty to Kurtz, or as

²⁴ This view is stated by Florence H. Ridley, who prefers to regard Kurtz as "an example from which Marlow learns" (p. 45).

a betrayal of Kurtz (and of himself).²⁵ The obvious justification for his lie is given by Marlow himself: "I could not tell her. It would have been too dark--too dark altogether . . ." (162). In other words, his lie is prompted by compassion, and by his desire to protect the fiancée and preserve her illusion. One's response to Marlow's lie will therefore depend to some extent on one's evaluation of the fiancée. Is her illusion worth preserving?

Kurtz's fiancée is described in glowing terms. She has "a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering," and her glance is "guileless, profound, confident, and trustful" (157). With her "fair hair," her "pale visage," her "pure brow . . . surrounded by an ashy halo," she is a vision of light. As she speaks the room grows darker: "Only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love" (158). Objectively, her faith in Kurtz is misplaced, yet the capacity for fidelity and belief is valuable, and must be protected. Thus Marlow "bows [his] head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness" (159).

This, at least, is the usual interpretation, and this may well have been Conrad's intention. Is this the actual effect? Throughout this final scene the fiancée's faith in Kurtz as she knew him is juxtaposed with Marlow's vivid recollections of Kurtz as he had become:

²⁵ According to Benson, "Marlow's faithfulness to Kurtz, even to the point of the lie, can be mainly explained by his feeling that . . . Kurtz, at the last, had not failed him, had vindicated his faith in an essential human quality" (p. 346). Perhaps, by lying to the Intended, Marlow has in a sense "rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due."

I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived--a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me (155)

This creates an irony which operates at the fiancée's expense and makes her idealism seem unreal, almost absurd. Her faith shines with an "unearthly glow" before a darkness which is presented as an overwhelming reality (159). Is she not perhaps one of those "exalted creatures" who are "altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds" (117)?

There are in addition various details which seem to establish a link between the fiancée and the "sepulchral city" in which her house is located. The street outside is "as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery" (155). Her marble fireplace has "a cold and monumental whiteness" and the piano "gleams like a marble and polished sarcophagus" (156). Even the girl's halo is "ashy" (157). These details are perhaps designed to emphasize by way of contrast the "unextinguishable light" of the fiancée's belief and love. On the other hand they could be taken as implying that by her insistent idealizing she shares a complicity in the whole colonial enterprise. How dissimilar is she from Marlow's aunt who regards him as "something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (59)?

However, despite these doubts I feel that we are intended to admire the fiancée, and to sympathize with Marlow when by his lie he protects her from disillusionment. Her "mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering" is valuable, and her disinterested idealism is to be contrasted with Kurtz's idealism,

which seems radically unsound. On the other hand we are clearly intended to see her as related to Kurtz and as embodying what was best in Kurtz--his noble ideals. In the final scene she is deliberately counterpointed with the savage woman who is the rival claimant for Kurtz's soul. She could be regarded as the epitome of the redeeming power of the idea, which Marlow insists on at the outset:

The conquest of the earth ... is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea; something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to (50-51)

At the end Marlow "[bows his] head before the faith that was in her" and sacrifices his integrity in order to preserve her "great and saving illusion" (159). This may help to explain what Conrad meant when, in a letter to William Blackwood, he claimed that "in the light of the final incident, the whole story in all its descriptive detail shall fall into its place--acquire its value and significance."²⁶

There is one final problem: the ending presents a simple opposition between Kurtz and the Intended. In this final scene Kurtz appears as the embodiment of a horrifying reality which threatens to swamp Marlow and the girl. This is not entirely consistent with Marlow's interpretation of Kurtz's last words as constituting a "moral victory" (151). Nor does the idealism of the Intended represent Marlow's own more practical, down-to-earth attitude. He stands for "a power of devotion, not to yourself, but

²⁶ [Conrad to William Blackwood], 31 May 1902, Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum, ed. W. Blackburn (Durham, N. Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), p. 154.

to an obscure, back-breaking business" (177). To what extent can their attitudes be reconciled? It seems to me that by insisting on a simple opposition between the Intended's light and Kurtz's darkness, the conclusion fails to reflect the actual complexities of the tale.

The final paragraph returns the reader to the narrative present, and to the boat on the Thames: "Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha" (162). He has attempted to share a profoundly disturbing experience, and the final sentence suggests a new and deeper awareness on the part of the frame-narrator: "I raised my head. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky--seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness."

In the course of this chapter I have pointed to the importance of isolation. Isolation is a necessary condition for the moral test, and it is Kurtz's isolation which precipitates his surrender to the wilderness: "I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating" (131). The man whom Marlow encounters seems utterly depraved; moreover, he seems to mistake his own delusions of grandeur for reality. At times these delusions are "contemptibly childish": "He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere" (148). In human or moral terms, Kurtz's isolation seems complete--Marlow cannot appeal to him "in the name of anything high or low" (144). The distance which separates him from Kurtz is conveyed in a striking

image: "His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines" (149). His final cry is an heroic effort, a "moral victory" which re-establishes his claim as a human being who is entitled to our respect, and even to our admiration.

I have also suggested that Marlow's isolation is an essential part of the experience which he undergoes. His moral isolation--from the manager and the "pilgrims"--is profound, and helps to determine his final "choice of nightmares." His narrative also communicates in a more subtle way a sense of his own isolation. He refers at one point to "the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time" (105). I would suggest that this "dream-sensation" is directly related to his isolation, and helps to explain his conviction that he is attempting to communicate the incommunicable:

I've been telling you what we said--repeating the phrases we pronounced--but what's the good? They were common, everyday words--the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares.
(144)

This echoes the earlier passage where Marlow reflects on the impossibility of conveying "the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence," and concludes: "We live, as we dream--alone . . ." (82). The implication is that one's own, subjective experience is essentially private, that words can convey at best a rough approximation, that communication is necessarily uncertain. It is significant that throughout his ordeal, and afterwards in the "sepulchral city," Marlow can find no one with whom he can share his experience. The people he meets in the streets are "intruders

whose knowledge of life was to [him] an irritating pretence"; he feels that "they could not possibly know the things [he] knew" (152). His aunt's endeavours to "nurse up [his] strength" seem quite misguided: "It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing" (152). The climax is his lie to the Intended, which seems to demonstrate the impossibility of open and honest communication.

In "Heart of Darkness" Marlow is both subject and object, and the impression one is left with is that of a mind attempting to come to terms with, evaluate, and communicate an experience which is both deeply disturbing and almost indefinable:

He was very little more than a voice. And I hear--him--it--this voice--other voices-- all of them were so little more than voices--and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices--even the girl herself--now--. (115)

It is largely for this reason that, as Ian Watt puts it, "we can recognize 'Heart of Darkness' as a landmark in the literature of modern solipsism."²⁷

²⁷ "Impressionism and Symbolism in 'Heart of Darkness,'" The Southern Review, 13 (1977), 112.

CHAPTER III

LORD JIM

The opening section of Lord Jim is mediated by an authorial narrator who introduces us to Jim as a water-clerk before outlining his background. The training ship episode which follows provides a brief, dramatized incident which reveals the discrepancy between Jim's ideal picture of himself ("as unflinching as a hero in a book" (5)) and his actual behaviour in a crisis. It also demonstrates his ability to rationalize his failure. The second chapter describes Jim's response to the prosaic realities of life at sea, and details the events which lead Jim to accept a berth as first mate of the Patna. The third chapter shows us Jim on the bridge of the Patna, half-asleep on his feet, absorbed in dreams of heroic adventure: "They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality" (15). The chapter concludes with the mysterious jolt felt on board the Patna, and the next chapter opens with Jim in court, "a month or so afterwards" (21).

These opening chapters have, through the dramatic incident on board the training ship, brought Jim to life and raised the question of how he will react when confronted with a real crisis which he cannot avoid. Jim is depicted as a romantic and a dreamer, and as possessing an imagination which tends to immobilize him in moments of crisis. The authorial narrator proceeds in a clear and logical manner, and the careful, objective presentation of Jim helps to establish a critical balance in the reader and to stimulate the right

kind of attention. The time-shift at the end of Chapter III is, of course, crucial: in the fourth chapter we receive a vivid impression of Jim in the witness-box in the courtroom of an Eastern port, answering questions which seem to be shaped from within, "like the terrible questioning of one's conscience" (21). Because the key piece of information is missing--we do not know why he is there--we have to suspend our judgement. As a result, sympathy is elicited for this acutely sensitive man who has to endure the ordeal of a public investigation.

At one point Jim's eyes meet those of a white man who sits apart and whose glance is not "the fascinated stare of the others" but "an act of intelligent volition" (24). This man is Marlow. We are told that "later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail, and audibly." This introduces the novel's major narrative shift, from the authorial narrative of the first four chapters, to Marlow's first-person narrative. Marlow's narrative continues, with some modification, to the end of the novel.

What this narrative shift means, in the simplest terms, is that we move from the public, official inquiry to Marlow's personal, private inquiry. In Marlow's words, the object of the official inquiry is "not the fundamental why, but the superficial how" of the Patna affair, and the questions directed at Jim are "as instructive as the tapping of a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what's inside" (42). Marlow's inquiry is an attempt to "find out what's inside," and it is this which helps to explain his departures from chronological sequence, his soliciting of various opinions and his introduction of anecdotes or episodes

which have some bearing on Jim's case.¹ The result is that the novel presents us with a variety of perspectives on Jim, and the reader has to make his way as best he can through this maze of evidence. An important consequence of this complex narrative structure is that it helps to prevent too uncritical an application of one's own preconceptions and instinctive responses. The novel challenges us to take all the evidence into account so that, as Guerard suggests, the reading of the novel becomes a combat "within the reader, between reader and narrators, between reader and that watching and controlling mind ultimately responsible for the distortions."² Another, related consequence is that while Marlow is our principal guide, and while he is "reliable" in the sense of being trustworthy, he can pronounce no final verdict on Jim: "The reader must go through this labyrinth of evidence without the usual guide of an omniscient author or trustworthy author-surrogate."³

One purpose of this chapter will be to investigate the question of Marlow's reliability. In the course of the chapter I will explore his attitude to Jim, and attempt to show how the central concerns of the novel spring from the relationship between them. I will focus on the question of isolation in particular, and show how this is related to the fact that we view Jim for the most part through Marlow's eyes. In a novel of this length and complexity it is, of course, impossible to deal adequately with all the issues

¹ I should acknowledge an indebtedness to the following critics, who all comment helpfully on the novel's structure and on Marlow's function as narrator: J.W. Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1932), pp.352-356; Guerard, pp.141-161; Tanner, pp.11-14; H.M. Daleski, *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p.78; Norman Sherry, *Introd., Lord Jim*, Collected Edition (1946; rpt. J.M. Dent and Sons, 1974), pp.vii-xi.

² Guerard, p.153.

³ Guerard, p.152.

raised, or to do much more than glance at some of the figures who by their comments or by their example throw some light on Jim's case.

The style and tone of Marlow's oral narrative differs sharply from that of the preceding authorial narrative. It is, of course, conditioned by the context in which it is delivered: Marlow is speaking to a small circle of companions who are relaxing "after a good spread" somewhere in the East. The circumstances are such as to encourage confidences, and his tone is suitably informal:

"Oh, yes. I attended the inquiry," he would say, "and to this day I haven't left off wondering why I went. I am willing to believe each of us has a guardian angel, if you fellows will concede to me that each of us has a familiar devil as well. I want you to own up, because I don't like to feel exceptional in any way, and I know I have him--the devil, I mean. I haven't seen him of course, but I go on circumstantial evidence." (26)

The wry, self-deprecating manner and the willingness to address his listeners as equals help to establish Marlow's credentials. We feel instinctively that here is a man we can trust. This impression is strengthened by his reference to himself as the confidant of men "with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots" (26). He protests that this is a rôle he is not particularly qualified to fill--"as though . . . I didn't have enough confidential information about myself to harrow my own soul till the end of my appointed time." These disclaimers are clearly intended to convince us that there is nothing peculiar or extraordinary about Marlow--that he is in fact "one of us."

When, after these introductory remarks, Marlow says, "My eyes met his for the first time at that inquiry" (27), the reader is conscious of standing in a new relationship to Jim. Marlow has

intervened, and we no longer observe him, as it were, at first hand. Marlow makes this point himself, much later: "He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you" (164). Then, after a brief digression, Marlow relates how, one morning, he saw four men walking towards him along the quay and suddenly realized who they must be. After describing the German skipper's entry into the harbour office and summary treatment at the hands of Captain Elliot, he returns to the little group waiting on the quay, and we share his first view of Jim:

He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; and, looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound. (30)

It is immediately evident that we are in the hands of a narrator whose knowledge of others is necessarily limited to what he can see or infer. In other words, we are seeing Jim much as we see people in real life. Of course, Marlow does have an advantage over him here: he knows "a little more" than Jim does; he knows that the Patna stayed afloat. (The reader, however, is still ignorant of this essential fact.) It is Marlow's interest in "the effect of a full information upon that young fellow" which holds him there: "I waited to see him overwhelmed, confounded, pierced through and through, squirming like an impaled beetle--and I was half-afraid to see it too--if you understand what I mean" (32). Already we have a sense of the way in which Jim disturbs and provokes Marlow, and this is confirmed by the long and crucially important meditation which follows:

Nothing more awful than to watch a man who has been found

out, not in a crime but in a more than criminal weakness. The commonest sort of fortitude prevents us from becoming criminals in a legal sense; it is from weakness unknown, but perhaps suspected, as in some parts of the world you suspect a deadly snake in every bush--from weakness that may lie hidden, watched or unwatched, prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime, not one of us is safe. . . . I watched the youngster there. I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us. He stood for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. I don't mean military courage or civil courage, or any special kind of courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face--a readiness unintellectual enough, don't you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless--an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature, and the seductive corruption of man--backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. (32-3)

This is, in effect, Marlow's "credo." It takes us straight to those concerns which lie at the heart of the novel and which provide the impetus for Marlow's inquiry. In particular, it contains Marlow's first statement of a fact which is clearly central, and which he reasserts at intervals throughout the novel: "He was one of us." The importance of this is simply that Jim cannot be ignored--as his fellow officers on the Patna can. He matters because he shares Marlow's background and because he has embraced the tradition and code of conduct of the Merchant Service. Marlow feels that "[he] would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance . . . and, by Jove, it wouldn't have been safe" (34).

After a long digression in which he speaks with professional pride of the youngsters he has "turned out for the service of the Red Rag" (33), Marlow reverts to the subject of Jim, who looked "as genuine as a new sovereign" (34), and confesses that "[he] wanted to see him squirm for the honour of the craft." He then

describes the dramatic departure of the Patna's captain and the attempts of Archie Ruthvel's half-caste clerk to apprehend the remaining crew-members, and concludes: "I went away without waiting to see the end" (36). In this way we are denied the dramatic climax which we have been anticipating--the effect upon Jim of "a full information."

Marlow then relates his visit to the hospital some days later, and his encounter with the chief engineer. This provides the occasion for some retrospective self-analysis:

Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can't explain. You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like, but I have a distinct notion I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible--for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt, uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death --the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. (38)

Clearly Marlow is as much the subject of this opening chapter of his narrative as Jim is. By the end of his encounter in the hospital we feel we know the kind of man he is and where his allegiance lies. We have seen the immediate impact of his first view of Jim, and we have followed sympathetically his attempts to understand and articulate just why Jim should have mattered so much to him. Jim cannot be dismissed like the others, hence his conduct raises deeply disturbing questions for a man who takes most seriously his membership of "an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct" (37).

In the next chapter we move back to the official inquiry and on to the subject of Brierly and his suicide. When we return to the courtroom, Marlow refers again to that significant exchange of glances which initiated his relationship with Jim. Then, as everyone is trooping out of the courtroom, we get our first real insight into Jim's state of mind. He takes a reference to a dog ("Look at that wretched cur" (52)) to refer to himself, and rounds on Marlow. It is a moment of unconscious self-revelation, dramatically and vividly captured, and it brings Jim to life for us: "It was a hideous mistake; he had given himself away utterly" (54). Caught up in the tension of this chance encounter, sharing Marlow's sense of confusion, and suspecting with him some awful blunder, the reader shares also his feeling that there is something almost improper about this view of Jim, "stripped . . . of that discretion which is more necessary to the decencies of our inner being than clothing is to the decorum of our body" (54). After this disclosure we, like Marlow, feel a new and heightened interest in our subject. When Marlow goes in pursuit of Jim, he receives an explanation which further complicates his view of him. "'You may well forgive me. . . . All these staring people in court seemed such fools that--that it might have been as I supposed'" (56). The chapter concludes with an important comment on the nature of these glimpses of Jim:

I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog--bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one's curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation.

(56)

The next few chapters constitute perhaps the finest section of the novel. In them we see Jim and Marlow face to face as Jim struggles to unburden himself and as Marlow tries to preserve his critical detachment. Although extremely important, Marlow's attitude is not the only factor influencing the reader's response to Jim. The setting, for example, is significant. The Malabar House where Jim dines with Marlow is crowded with passengers from a mail-boat that has docked that afternoon. The trivial chatter of these globe-trotters contrasts with Jim's anguished utterances as he struggles to communicate his sense of what happened on board the Patna to Marlow. At one point he clutches Marlow's hand, and Marlow tells us that his movement and sudden exclamation ("It is--hell") "caused two well-groomed male globe-trotters at a neighbouring table to look up in alarm from their ice-pudding" (58). The effect of such juxtapositions is to predispose us in Jim's favour.

Jim himself is clearly just the sort of young man of whom Marlow would naturally approve:

He seemed to have buried somewhere the opening episode of our acquaintance. It was like a thing of which there would be no more question in this world. And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies. . . . He was of the right sort; he was one of us. (57)

Yet Marlow does not allow his instinctive sympathy for Jim to sway his judgement. When Jim begins by trying to draw a distinction between himself and those others on the bridge of the Patna, Marlow listens "with concentrated attention, not daring to stir in [his] chair" (58). After referring to the impossibility of

ever going home to face his father, Jim reverts again to this subject: "He discovered at once a desire that I should not confound him with his partners in--in crime, let us call it. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort" (59). The attentive reader of the opening chapters will be unlikely to accept this at face value. Marlow's scepticism--as well as his compassion--is apparent in the next few lines:

I gave no sign of dissent. I had no intention, for the sake of barren truth, to rob him of the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way. I didn't know how much of it he believed himself. I didn't know what he was playing up to--if he was playing up to anything at all--and I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge. (59)

Throughout this prolonged encounter, Marlow's reservations about Jim's disclosures are often a matter of tone and attitude, but his scepticism is also revealed by questions or interjections which are designed to puncture Jim's illusion of himself. After Jim has exclaimed, "'My God! what a chance missed!'" (61), Marlow snaps him out of his romantic trance with a brutal reminder: "'If you had stuck to the ship, you mean!'" (62). Or again, when Jim suggests that there was "'not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and the wrong of this affair,'" Marlow interjects: "'How much more did you want?'" (95)

Marlow is fully aware of the need to preserve a critical distance from Jim:

He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence --another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life and did

not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession. (68-9)

On the other hand, as we have seen, Marlow has no intention of robbing Jim of "the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way" (59). He is clearly treading a very fine tightrope, and on one or two occasions he does state a willingness to believe Jim. At one point, when directly challenged by Jim, he is moved to make "a solemn declaration of [his] readiness to believe implicitly anything [Jim] thought fit to tell him " (93).

Marlow's reluctance to accept Jim's claims at face value is, as I have suggested, modified by his compassion for Jim. His attitude to Jim is also modified by a strong pull towards identification with him. Marlow is, in fact, uniquely qualified to act as narrator because he is capable of both the sympathy needed to understand Jim and the objectivity needed to judge him. Throughout the novel we see him striving to balance or to reconcile these two impulses, and the novel's ambivalence derives from the fact that he is unable to come down finally either on one side or the other. The truth is that while Marlow is committed to the "Merchant Navy" values of duty and fidelity and service, he is also attracted by the more personal or romantic values which find their expression in Jim and in Stein. Thus Marlow sees in Jim a lost (or dormant) self:

He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been; of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of those 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.

(94)

Marlow is critical of Jim's "romantic readiness,"⁴ for he senses that his failure on the Patna is in part at least a result of his substitution of a dream world of heroic adventure for the real world of routine duty and sudden, unexpected danger. Yet he is also envious of his ability to penetrate imaginatively into "the impossible world of romantic achievements" (61). This tension between what one may term the romantic and the classical attitudes is a most important element in Lord Jim.⁵ It helps to account for the intimacy of the Marlow-Jim relationship, for the strong affection which Marlow feels for Jim, as well as for the exasperation and anger which shows itself at times: "I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me--me!--of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour" (96).

In the course of the novel Marlow becomes committed, almost in spite of himself, to Jim, who becomes (rather like Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness") a kind of alter ego. Guerard goes so far as to claim that Lord Jim is "perhaps the first major novel solidly built on a true intuitive understanding of sympathetic identification as a

⁴ The phrase is used by F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby (New York, 1926; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p.8. The resemblance between Jim and Gatsby is, I feel, close enough to suggest that Jim was a prototype for Gatsby.

⁵ I have in mind T.S. Eliot's discussion of this question in "The Function of Criticism," where he is reacting to the views of Middleton Murry: "Those of us who find ourselves supporting what Mr. Murry calls Classicism, believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves" (Selected Essays, p.26). Marlow's respect for tradition and for "the sovereign power enthroned in a code of conduct" (38) places him on one side of this divide; Jim, with his obedience to the dictates of his "inner voice," is clearly on the other.

psychic process."⁶ It is certainly true that in the Marlow-Jim relationship, in Brierly's identification with Jim and Jim's with Brown, Conrad dramatizes the human capacity to find an alter ego, even in one's apparent opposite.

The effect of all this is, of course, to engage the reader in a very immediate way in the issues which are raised by Jim's conduct. Lord Jim is something of a virtuoso display on Conrad's part. It is one of the most sustained and concentrated analyses of moral failure in English literature. At the same time it is a penetrating and rigorous investigation into the strengths and limitations of the romantic temperament. Yet the reader's willing involvement and cooperation are readily secured by the novel's narrative method, and primarily by Conrad's use of Marlow as his instrument for probing and assaying his material. The reader finds himself implicated with Marlow in his attempt to find "some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom he had never seen before" (38). This willing participation is largely due to the fact that Marlow's values and attitudes are sufficiently broad and humane to command the assent of most readers. His honesty and clear-sightedness and compassion guarantee that we are in the hands of a guide whom we can trust, and whose judgements we can respect. To this extent Marlow is a reliable narrator. Yet his reliability is qualified by his own uncertainty and by the fact that, although he is our principal guide, our assessment of Jim has to take into account the points of view of a number of other interlocutors or sub-narrators. Marlow himself goes to Stein for help and advice, and many readers

⁶ Guerard, p.147.

are tempted to find in Stein's cryptic advice a key to the problems raised by Jim's conduct. Certainly Marlow seems to accept his diagnosis of Jim's condition--"'He is romantic'" (155). He feels less certain about the prescription which Stein offers ("' To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream'" (157)), and remarks that "no one could be more romantic than [Stein] himself" (157). However, in the absence of any alternative he relays Stein's offer to Jim, and so opens the door to Patusan.

Stein's rather Delphic utterances have proved a source of unending fascination to critics. Although the metaphor he uses, with its apparent equation of the "destructive element" with the "dream" (rather than "life" or "reality") is rather puzzling, his meaning is surely reasonably clear, and is supported by the facts of his own life: "His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he had followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt" (157).

For many readers the more austere view of the French lieutenant deserves to be given equal weight, although it is much less hopeful in its bearing on Jim's case. In his own way he is just as impressive as Stein, this man who bears the scars of wounds received in combat, and who stayed on board the Patna for thirty hours because it was "judged proper" (103). His matter-of-fact performance of his duty contrasts starkly with Jim's dereliction of his. As Marlow puts it, he is "one of those steady, reliable men who are the raw material of great reputations" (105). Speaking to him, Marlow feels as though he were "taking professional opinion on the case" (107). At first

it seems that his evidence may help to exonerate Jim, for he freely admits that, "given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come" (107), and that "the young man in question might have had the best dispositions" (108). However, when Marlow compliments him on taking a lenient view, he draws himself up and corrects him sharply:

Allow me . . . I contended that one may get on knowing very well that one's courage does not come of itself. . . . There's nothing much in that to get upset about. One truth the more ought not to make life impossible But the honour--the honour, monsieur! . . . The honour . . . that is real--that is! And what life may be worth . . . when the honour is gone . . . I can offer no opinion--because--monsieur--I know nothing of it. (108-9)

What the lieutenant offers is, on the one hand, a technique for containing fear, and, on the other hand, an absolute commitment to the notion of honour. Cowardice may be understandable, even in the best of us, but circumstances do not extenuate. Thus he ends up by simply dismissing Jim's case from his consideration. For Marlow, such a stark and uncompromising attitude is simply not possible. Chester's attitude, which is one of cynical indifference to conventional moral judgements, is at the other extreme: "'What's all the to-do about? A bit of ass's skin. That never yet made a man. You must see things exactly as they are--if you don't, you may just as well give in at once'" (119). Marlow indignantly rejects his offer of "employment" for Jim (on a guano island in the Pacific). However later, in his hotel room, Marlow finds himself wondering whether, after all, Chester might not be the man "to deal effectively with such a disaster" (126). Considerable weight is also given to the view of the anonymous recipient of Marlow's written narrative, who "maintained we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't

count" (249). Clearly, then, what we have in the novel is a number of witnesses or reflectors, each of whom offers a different perspective on the central question of Jim's conduct. Marlow's function is to assemble or marshal these various points of view, so that the reader is obliged to take them into account before attempting to pass judgement for himself.

There are in addition a number of incidents or episodes which explicitly or implicitly comment on Jim's conduct. At Jim's trial the Malay helmsman who stuck to the wheel when Jim and the other officers deserted is described as an "extraordinary and damning witness" (73). Sometimes the connection with Jim is less obvious, and the inference to be drawn less clear. It is characteristic of Marlow that the episode involving "little Bob Stanton" is introduced quite casually, as an apparent digression, and that Marlow makes no comment on its possible application to Jim's case. Rather than leave a maidservant to drown, Stanton climbs back on board a sinking ship. (Jim asserts that, had the Patna's lights been visible from the boat, he would have swum back and "begged them to take [him] on board" (99).) When he cannot prize her loose from the rail, he chooses to go down with the ship rather than abandon her. He gives his life in the attempt to save one passenger; Jim saves his own life, leaving three hundred passengers to drown. The contrast could hardly be starker--or more damning for Jim. Yet, on reflection, it is possible to interpret this bit of evidence in another way. Is Stanton's behaviour an example of heroism--or of folly? Surely this is a case where the sensible action would have been to jump and save one's own life. If so, then perhaps it would have been unreasonable for Jim not to have jumped--for he had good reason to believe that his ship was about to sink, and that any

action he might take to try and save the lives of the passengers would be futile.

The case of "Big Brierly," the captain of "the crack ship of the Blue Star line" (42), is much more complex, and raises questions which are central to Marlow's inquiry. "He had never in his life made a mistake, never had a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust" (42-3). When he is made an assessor at Jim's trial, he seems "consumedly bored by the honour thrust upon him" (42). He returns a verdict of guilty--and less than a week later he commits suicide by jumping overboard. What light does his case throw on Jim's--and vice versa?

Jim's weakness seems to be proved by the inescapable fact of his jump. Brierly's record, on the other hand, seems to assert that here is a man "invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas" (33). Yet Jim's case forces Brierly to consider--apparently for the first time--the possibility that he, too, might be fallible. If Jim, who is manifestly "one of us," can go wrong, what guarantee can there be against failure? For Brierly, this is a possibility which is too ghastly to contemplate. He prefers to commit "his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea" (50).

The questions that we ask about Jim are equally applicable to Brierly, and equally difficult to resolve. Is his suicide an act of courage or an act of cowardice? In committing suicide, is he facing up to his guilt or running away from it? "Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?" asks Marlow (48). One recalls that Jim, in the boat with the others, had apparently considered suicide, but had rejected it: "I knew

the truth, and I would live it down--alone, with myself" (97). Is Brierly's inability to live with the knowledge of his potential weakness an indication of unsparing self-appraisal, or is it merely evidence of his exalted opinion of himself? The same question could be asked of Jim at the end--with the difference that his weakness is actual, not potential.

It is natural to compare Brierly not only with Jim, but also with the French lieutenant, who is able to live with the knowledge that his courage does not come "of itself": "One truth the more ought not to make life impossible," he tells Marlow (108). Clearly, Brierly has more in common with Jim than with the man who took Jim's place on the Patna. However all three, in their attitudes and in their actions, testify to the terrible power exerted over men's hearts and minds by "a fixed standard of conduct." Marlow explains that such a code may be no more than a convention, "only one of the rules of the game, nothing more, but all the same so terribly effective by its assumption of unlimited power over natural instincts, by the awful penalties of its failure" (60). Jim's case exposes the essentially artificial or "conventional" nature of a code of conduct: men are, in fact, cowards at heart, yet they must behave as though they are not. The instinct for self-preservation is wholly natural and understandable, yet it conflicts with society's expectations--expectations which, when internalized, become part of the individual's conscience. Must Jim therefore be condemned? Do his honourable intentions count for nothing? The French lieutenant would presumably say, Yes. Marlow is unable to return such a stark and uncompromising verdict. For him, the intensity of Jim's suffering is a mark of his distinction: "Woe to the stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together. He

had straggled in a way; he had not hung on; but he was aware of it with an intensity that made him touching" (164). Even here there is an important ambiguity, for "the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters" (130). Jim may not be clear to Marlow, but there is always a suspicion that he was not clear to himself either: "There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings--a sort of sublimated, idealized selfishness" (130). Nevertheless Marlow is unable to wash his hands of him. At one point he asks, unanswerably, "And in what was I better than the rest of us to refuse him my pity?" (95). Because he is unable to simply accept the official verdict, because he feels he has so much in common with Jim, and because he is so aware of his isolation, he cannot dismiss him or turn his back on him. For this reason he goes to Stein for advice, and gives Jim the opportunity to prove himself in Patusan.

A very powerful sense of Jim's isolation is communicated by the novel. This isolation is, most obviously, a moral isolation, brought about by his jump: "There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well--into an everlasting deep hole . . ." (82). Our sense of Jim's isolation is established very clearly in Chapter IV, where we see Jim alone in the witness box, exposed to the hard, critical scrutiny of the court of inquiry:

While his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it might squeeze itself and escape. (23)

The chapters in which Jim faces Marlow at the Malabar Hotel

are both a kind of confession and an attempt at self-justification. The only evidence which Jim has in his favour is private and subjective: it consists of his conviction of his own inner worth. He believes that he has been cheated, that the verdict of the facts is not fair, that he was "not ready," that given the same circumstances anyone would have acted as he did--yet he cannot disclaim responsibility for his action. It is entirely natural that he should look to Marlow for some confirmation that his "conviction of innate blamelessness" (58) is not merely evasion or self-deception. Hence the epigraph from Novalis: "It is certain any conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it." Marlow knows, however, that Jim's hope of finding salvation through confession is futile:

Didn't I tell you he confessed himself before me as though I had the power to bind and to loose? He burrowed deep, deep, in the hope of my absolution, which would have been of no good to him. This was one of those cases which no solemn deception can palliate, which no man can help; where his very Maker seems to abandon a sinner to his own devices. (71)

In the last analysis, each individual is alone, with only his own resources to fall back on.

There is a further reason for Marlow's feeling of helplessness in respect of Jim. He cannot deny Jim's human claim, yet he finds him difficult or impossible to evaluate. The phrase "under a cloud" occurs like a refrain throughout the novel; together with references to mist and fog, it conveys a sense of Jim's elusiveness. The views which Marlow has of him are like "glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog"; they are "no good for purposes of orientation" (56). The reader's sense of Jim as an elusive or puzzling figure is a direct consequence of Conrad's narrative method, for we necessarily share Marlow's perspective,

and in Marlow we have a narrator who is limited to realistic inference and vision. As Dorothy van Ghent puts it, "we see [Jim] only as people can see each other, ambivalently and speculatively."⁷

Certain knowledge is therefore impossible. There is one point in particular when Marlow is forced to acknowledge the limits of his understanding of Jim. After the verdict has been delivered, Jim takes refuge in Marlow's hotel room, "the only place in the world . . . where he could have it out with himself without being bothered by the rest of the universe" (126). It seems to Marlow that only he stands between Jim and an ignominious destiny, but he does not know what to say or how to proceed--or what to make of the apparently successful outcome of Jim's long, silent struggle with himself:

It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that 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. (132)

In this sense Jim's isolation is not unique, nor is it simply a consequence of his jump from the Patna; it is an inescapable part of the human condition. The complex structure of the novel with its shifting perspectives and its achronological progression represents an attempt to pin down the elusive truth about Jim, to get him clearly in focus. Despite his efforts, Marlow never succeeds in reaching certainty, but this in no way detracts from his

⁷ The English Novel: Form and Function (1953; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp.229-30. I found Mrs van Ghent's chapter helpful and stimulating.

(or Conrad's) achievement. J.I.M. Stewart comments on this aspect of the novel: "In imaginative fiction of any depth there has always to be a delicate balance between the writer's intuitive penetration into his characters and the nescience which he must confess to sharing before the frontiers of their final mystery. On this tight-rope Lord Jim is a performance by one of the great virtuosos of modern English literature."⁸

In the second part of the novel we are aware that Marlow stands in a slightly different relation to his material. This can in part be attributed to the fact that in the first half Marlow is concerned to maintain a critical distance from Jim as he pursues his private inquiry into Jim's case, whereas in the second he is, as it were, anxious on Jim's behalf. As Jacques Berthoud suggests, the principal question becomes not "Is he self-deceived?" but "Can he survive?"⁹ And this shift can perhaps be traced to the moment when Marlow commits himself to Jim with what Berthoud describes as "an unsolicited declaration of faith."¹⁰ In the hotel room after the court case, when Jim's future seems to be hanging in the balance, Marlow urges him to accept his offer of practical assistance. Afraid that Jim will refuse, he says, "'I make myself unreservedly responsible for you,'" and urges him to "'reflect a little what that means . . .'" (135). This shift in their relationship does not, however, mean

⁸ Joseph Conrad (London: Longmans, 1968), p.120.

⁹ Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.86.

¹⁰ Berthoud, p.85.

that Marlow becomes uncritical, or that the questions he has raised about Jim's conduct in the first part become irrelevant in the second part. It should in fact be pointed out that the novel is a unified, integrated work, and does not fall apart into two unrelated halves. Far from being an afterthought, the Patusan section is an essential counterpart to the Patna inquiry.

Many critics do, however, complain of a marked falling off in quality in the second half, although they concede that there is a fine recovery of "authenticity in depth"¹¹ towards the end. This falling off occurs in those chapters where Marlow is describing for us Jim's entry into Patusan and his subsequent conquest of fame and love. The story which Marlow has to tell somewhat resembles a boys' adventure story in which Jim acts out with apparent success the kind of heroic rôle he has always imagined for himself. At one point he actually exclaims to Marlow, apropos of Doramin and his entourage, "'They are like people in a book, aren't they?'" (191). The dramatic highlight is the story of Jim's successful attack on Sherif Ali's camp (pp.192-99). What we miss is the sustained moral and psychological interest of the first part of the novel. At times Jim's heroic status is inflated, as when he bursts into "an Homeric peal of laughter" (195). When Marlow comes to the subject of Jim's romance, we are reminded twice in the space of a page that we are listening to a love story. Their meeting is invested with the qualities of chivalric romance: "They came together under the shadow of life's disaster, like knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows among haunted ruins" (229).

¹¹ Guerard, p.168.

All this rings rather hollow.¹² It is, however, arguable that the hollowness reflects a real doubt on Marlow's part, and raises an important question: How real is Jim's achievement in Patusan? Has he managed to come to terms with himself?

One cannot answer these questions without taking into account the Patusan-world which is the context of Jim's actions. The advantage of Patusan is that it is completely cut off from the outside world, so that Jim's reputation cannot follow him. Marlow speculates that it had been used in the past "as a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune" (161), and this is its function now. Moreover, it provides Jim with "a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" (160). Patusan is "one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth" (237), and it possesses its own charm and fascination, but for Marlow it is the charm of a picture, or a dream. He compares it to "a picture created by fancy on a canvas. . . . It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light" (243). In contrast, the outside world is a place of movement, life, action, reality, and it is with a sense of release that Marlow reaches the sea again on his return journey: "I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened

¹² My comments on this section (Chapters XXI-XXXV) do not do justice to the way in which interest is sustained by structural devices and verbal echoes. In particular, there is a patterning in the action which is clearly deliberate. To take one obvious example: when Jim arrives in Patusan he is imprisoned by the Rajah in a stockade, and he escapes by leaping over what is literally "an enclosure of high stakes" (23). The reference to the earlier simile is unmistakable, and suggests that by means of this jump he escapes from the moral isolation to which his previous jump had consigned him. Subsequently he makes three would-be murderers jump into the river--as though to assert his newly-won mastery of himself.

horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world" (244). Jim, however, shrinks from this larger world. He hesitates to raise his eyes "as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offering the reproach of his romantic conscience." He is, in effect, a captive within the world he has helped to create. Yet, as far as Marlow is concerned, although Jim is part of this world, he is not essentially of it. The other figures--Doramin, Jewel, Tamb' Itam--exist "as if under an enchanter's wand. But the figure round which all these are grouped--that one lives, and I am not certain of him. No magician's wand can immobilize him under my eyes. He is one of us" (243).

Its association with moonlight also distinguishes Patusan from the world outside. As Marlow says, "There is something haunting in the light of the moon. . . . It is to our sunshine . . . what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad. It robs all forms of matter . . . and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone" (180-1). Because Marlow has by now something of a vested interest in Jim, he asserts that he "looked very stalwart, as though nothing--not even the occult power of moonlight--could rob him of his reality in my eyes." However, before Marlow leaves Patusan his view of Jim is modified by premonitions of impending disaster. As it rises behind the cleft hill, the moon casts its light over ground which has been prepared for a coffee plantation. "He was going to try so many experiments; I had admired his energy, his enterprise, and his shrewdness. Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans, his energy, and his enthusiasm" (236).

These references to moonlight, and to the striking visual image of the moon rising above the conical hill, have given rise to considerable critical debate. Guerard suggests that "the moonlight in Patusan comments on the unreality of Jim's aspirations."¹³ For Dorothy van Ghent, the cleft hill reflects Jim's own divided personality, and the rising moon suggests his attempt to assert his "ego-ideal."¹⁴ However, to associate moonlight with illusion, and then to regard this as a negative comment on Jim's achievement in Patusan, may well be to beg the question: might not Jim's subjective view of himself (his "ego-ideal") be as real as the apparently damning verdict of the facts? This view has been stated by Donald C. Yelton, who is able to point to more than one passage where Marlow himself seems to question the distinction between "illusion" and "truth."¹⁵ Perhaps all we can say for certain is that Patusan provides Jim with a context in which he can follow Stein's prescription and attempt to realize his "dream."

It would be unfair to simply dismiss Jim's achievement in Patusan. He has shown that he can act fearlessly, and that he can gain the trust and confidence of an entire community. He has, in fact, made himself indispensable. Marlow is impressed by his self-possession and his determination to "hold on." Yet a nagging doubt remains. Has he really changed? Has he really come to terms with himself? Does his devotion to the community in

¹³ Guerard, p.165.

¹⁴ Dorothy van Ghent, pp.236-37.

¹⁵ Donald C. Yelton, Mimesis and Metaphor: An Inquiry into the Genesis and Scope of Conrad's Symbolic Imagery (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp.236-37.

Patusan spring from a sense of duty that is free from any form of self-aggrandizement? It seems to Marlow that his work has "given him the certitude of rehabilitation" (182), but, as Stewart points out, "Rehabilitation will be meaningful to him only if it is concomitant with a radically changed relationship to other people."¹⁶ The evidence suggests that, deep down, Jim remains unaltered.

Jim's final actions are as open to interpretation as any of his previous actions, and one's view of them will depend on one's response to Jim up to this point. The questions raised by his conduct throughout the novel are brought to a focus in the final pages. There can be little doubt that he fails; the question is, how and why? It had seemed to Marlow that "nothing could touch [Jim] since he had survived the assault of the dark powers" (181). Brown, "a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers" (260), irrupts into the world of Patusan, shattering its apparent peace and security. Jim fails because Brown brings with him reminders of the past that Jim had thought finally buried. He sizes him up intuitively and presents his own case in precisely those terms that are most calculated to impress Jim: "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" (285). The result is that, in Brown's words, "'He very soon left off coming the righteous over me.'" Jim is unable to act against Brown because he identifies with Brown. He is unaware of the fact that he is being manipulated by Brown, and he makes a tragic error of judgement: he trusts Brown. This

¹⁶ Stewart, p.182.

is the cause of his undoing. To what extent can Jim be blamed for his decision to give Brown "a clear road" (286)? Certainly, this is not an error which anyone would have made. To everyone else it is obvious that Brown and his men are "cruel, bloodthirsty robbers bent on killing" (288). Jim, on the other hand, explains to Jewel that "men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others" (291). He is ostensibly referring to Brown, but clearly he is also thinking of himself. Jim judges Brown leniently, and gives him a second chance, because that is how he wants to be judged himself. His second failure is different in kind from his first failure, but it is intimately related to it.

The ambiguity which has surrounded Jim is sustained in the final pages, which describe his decision to submit himself to Deramin's judgement--and to certain death. He had earlier promised to "answer with his life for any harm that might come" (289) if Brown and his men were allowed to retire. His ability to make good this promise and accept responsibility for his error of judgement can be seen as a final vindication of his view of himself:

He was inflexible, and with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence. She cried "fight" into his ear. She could not understand. There was nothing left to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way, and conquer the fatal destiny itself. (302)

He says to Doramin, "'I come ready and unarmed,'" and before he falls forward, dead, he sends "right and left at all those faces a proud, unflinching glance" (306). As Marlow says, "it may very well be that in [this] moment . . . he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side" (306).

Has he finally redeemed himself? The novel, I think, leaves us with an open question. Marlow points out that "he who had been once unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men's confidence" (301). This second failure raises again the original question: to what extent does Jim accept his culpability? Again, the evidence is ambiguous. He says to Jewel, "'There is nothing to fight for'" (304), indicating, perhaps, his acceptance of his failure. But he follows this up with, "'nothing is lost.'" When Jewel reminds him of his promise to her, Jim answers, "'Enough, poor girl. . . . I should not be worth having.'" Yet when she asks, "'For the last time, . . . will you defend yourself?'" he answers, "'Nothing can touch me,' . . . in a last flicker of superb egoism." Marlow refers to him as "tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism" (306). Is it not perhaps true that to the last, and in spite of the evidence to the contrary, he clings to his conviction of his own, innate superiority?¹⁷ Does his submission to Doramin's judgement imply acceptance of guilt and responsibility--or by this very act does he defy the verdict of the facts, and finally vindicate his ideal conception of himself?

These questions are, perhaps, unanswerable. Certainly the novel ends by simply posing alternative ways of looking at Jim. The enigma is never finally resolved. Each reader must make up his or her mind, taking as much of the evidence into account as possible, and bearing in mind the way in which one's responses to Jim are inevitably conditioned by the kind of person one is. The only safe

¹⁷ Marlow's comment on Brierly's suicide is relevant here: "Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?" (48)

observation is that Jim's final act, which to Stein proves his fidelity, wears also the aspect of a betrayal: "He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (306-7).

Throughout the Patusan chapters, Jim is isolated in the sense that he is cut off from the outside world; this isolation is, however, a condition of his success in Patusan, for it enables him to make a fresh start. He is also isolated (even from Jewel) in the sense that, because no one knows what has brought him to Patusan, no one there can appreciate the motive for his actions. Jim is very aware of this:

"Is it not strange," he went on in a gentle, almost yearning tone, "that all these people . . . who would do anything for me, can never be made to understand? . . . If you ask them who is brave--who is true--who is just? --they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth. . . ."

(223-4)

Most of all, perhaps, Jim is isolated by his "dream." The very fact that he is committed to a private vision of himself, to a personal ideal which by definition no one else can share, separates him from others, including Marlow. Jim's isolation in this sense is prefigured by the first glimpse we have of him, as a young lad on a training ship: "His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream" (5). Marlow or Stein can provide him with opportunities--but he makes of his opportunity something uniquely his own. One has a strong sense that nothing can alter the pattern of Jim's life. Marlow smiles sadly at the elation with which Jim responds to the first offer of employment

he put in his way: "A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (136). At the end, as Dorothy van Ghent says, "Jim is only what he has been. To be only what one has been is the sentence of solitary confinement that is passed on everyman. It is in this sense, finally, that Jim is 'one of us.'" ¹⁸

In the final chapters our sense of Jim's isolation is emphasized by the fact that he is at yet a further remove from us. We hear of Brown's meeting with Jim through a written narrative sent by Marlow to the only one of his auditors "to show an interest in [Jim] that survived the telling" (254). Marlow is not a witness to any of the events he describes. His account is a reconstruction based upon his meeting with the dying Brown and what he has been told by Stein, Jewel and Tamb' Itamb. This means that Jim has receded from us, and we can be less certain than ever of the significance of his actions. Marlow is unwilling to commit himself to any judgement: "I affirm nothing," he says. ¹⁹ He continues (in his covering letter):

Perhaps you may pronounce--after you've read. There is much truth, after all, in the common expression "under a cloud." It is impossible to see him clearly--especially since it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him. . . . There shall be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words. (250).

Jim does make one final attempt to communicate. It consists of ten

¹⁸ Dorothy van Ghent, p.237.

¹⁹ Contrast his earlier statement, made before the events described in Chapters XXXVII-XLV: "I affirm he had achieved greatness" (165).

words on a sheet of paper headed "The Fort, Patusan," and addressed to no one in particular: "'An awful thing has happened. . . . I must now at once . . .'" (250). At the end, as he is "overwhelmed by the inexplicable," his isolation is complete. He goes to meet his death with accusations of betrayal ringing in his ears--yet faithful to his own inner vision. For Marlow, "he passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic" (306).

Lord Jim is, like "Heart of Darkness," a story about one of Marlow's "inconclusive experiences" ('HD' 51). Marlow's sense of his own isolation is perhaps not as obvious or compelling as it is in the shorter work, but it is implied by his comments on the human condition (see p. 72). However, Marlow in Lord Jim is as uncertain of the reception of his story as he is in "Heart of Darkness," and occasionally he pauses to remonstrate with his listeners:

Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions--and safe--and profitable--and dull. (165)

At the end of his oral narrative his audience breaks up and each man goes his own way:

Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret. (248)

Why does Marlow strive to communicate a story which is so puzzling and ambiguous? The reason is partly that, although he is

never certain of Jim, Jim is very real to him. He writes in his covering letter:

It's difficult to believe he will never come. I shall never hear his voice again, nor shall I see his smooth tan-and-pink face with a white line on the forehead, and the youthful eyes darkened by excitement to a profound, unfathomable blue. (252)

He has been "touched" by Jim (164), and in communicating his sense of Jim's reality, he is also attempting to share his own experience, and by sharing it, to confirm it. The attempt to communicate is uncertain of success, and Marlow is aware that he is missing "innumerable shades" (70), but it is a necessary attempt. As he stands by the moonlit grave of Jewel's mother (on his last evening in Patusan), Marlow confesses that "the sense of utter solitude" had got hold of him so completely that he feels "as though he had been the last of mankind." He continues:

This was, indeed, one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth; I had looked under its obscure surface; and I felt that tomorrow when I left it for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which had incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality--the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion. (237)

Marlow's isolation derives from the sense that his experience is, inalienably, his experience. His struggle to convey Jim's story is an attempt to escape the prison of his own subjectivity.²⁰ In this respect, his predicament surely mirrors that of his creator.

²⁰ One is reminded of T.S. Eliot's lines from The Waste Land: "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" (Collected Poems, London: Faber and Faber, 1963; V. 413-14, p.79).

CHAPTER IV

"AMY FOSTER"

"Amy Foster" has perhaps received less than its critical due. Often it is either ignored altogether, or simply glanced at in passing. J. I. M. Stewart refers to it dismissively as "not a very good story; indeed, it is little more than a morbid anecdote, variously padded out."¹ Guerard seems to undervalue it because, he says, it appears to be "a much less subjective work than 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Secret Sharer.'" Its symbolism is moral and 'cosmic,' not psychological; its statement definitive, not inconclusive. It is, simply, a generalized comment on the lonely, uncomprehended, absurd human destiny."² This comment in fact provides the basis for a positive re-evaluation of the story. I hope to demonstrate, by examining the story in some detail and on its own terms, that it merits a place in any critical estimation of Conrad's work. Baines's treatment of "Amy Foster" is more equitable than Guerard's or Stewart's. He acknowledges its "considerable merit as a story," and adds that it is important in that "it vividly and simply illustrates one of the main themes of Conrad's work, the essential isolation and loneliness of the individual."³ This, together with the fact that it is relayed by a

¹ Stewart, p. 19.

² Guerard, p. 50.

³ Baines, p. 323.

witness-narrator, makes "Amy Foster" an important story for the purposes of this thesis. In particular, I hope to demonstrate how, within the first-person narrative framework, subtle transitions in the point of view affect the reader's response to the narrated material. I should acknowledge a general indebtedness to the chapter on "Amy Foster" in a doctoral dissertation by J. B. Thompson. In his examination of the story Professor Thompson comments on these transitions in narrative viewpoint and examines in considerable detail the "richness and force of suggestion with which every physical detail is invested."⁴

In its stark outlines "Amy Foster" is perhaps Conrad's most sombre story, yet it combines simplicity and directness with subtlety and suggestiveness. This is evident even in the first paragraph, which does more than simply create a realistic setting for the action. The sea-wall "defends" the town of Colebrook from the sea (105)--the same sea-wall which the half-drowned Yanko has to crawl over in the dark. The Martello tower which squats at the water's edge was originally built for defence against a hostile landing from the sea. These details seem to anticipate the hostility and rejection with which Yanko is met--as though he were indeed an enemy. And the "spire in a clump of trees" which marks the village of Brenzett anticipates the irony that this is, ostensibly, a Christian community which shuts its doors to Yanko.

The reader soon discovers that the story is mediated through a first-person narrator who is a kind of frame-narrator. The real

⁴ "The Language of the Body and Related Visual Effects in the Works of Joseph Conrad," Diss. Univ. of Stellenbosch 1973, p. 222.

narrator is a country doctor, Kennedy, whose intelligence is of "a scientific order, of an investigating habit, and of that unappeasable curiosity which believes that there is a particle of a general truth in every mystery" (106). Clearly, these comments help to establish Kennedy as a reliable narrator, and help to account for his interest in Amy and Yanko.

The frame-narrator, who is staying with Kennedy, accompanies him on his rounds, and it is their meeting with Amy which prompts Kennedy to relate her story. Amy, with her "dull face," her "squat figure" and her "scanty, dusty brown hair" (107) seems plain and uninteresting. The frame-narrator remarks, listlessly: "'She seems a dull creature.'" Here we have a familiar Conradian situation. Kennedy, who knows something of her history, points out that, unlikely as it may seem, she was not safe from "the surprises of imagination":

It's enough to look at the red hands hanging at the end of those short arms, at those slow, prominent brown eyes, to know the inertness of her mind--an inertness that one would think made it everlastingly safe from all the surprises of imagination. And yet which of us is safe? At any rate, such as you see her, she had enough imagination to fall in love. (107)

As in Lord Jim, the discovery that one cannot judge others by appearances implies that people are mysterious and elusive, and that certain knowledge is impossible. It seems extraordinary to Kennedy that Amy, outwardly so dull and stolid, and leading the most circumscribed of lives, should be capable of responding to Yanko as she did. This question, which arises from Conrad's use of a witness-narrator, is necessarily left unresolved at the end of the story. Although Yanko's experience is the substance of the story, it also focuses on the enigma of Amy's behaviour. This helps to account for Conrad's choice of "Amy Foster" as the

title of the story. According to Baines, he had originally thought of calling it "A Husband" or "A Castaway."⁵

We also learn from Kennedy that Amy's heart was "of the kindest" (109). He tells us that "she had never been heard to express a dislike for a single human being; and she was tender to every living creature." She has even been seen helping a toad in difficulties. It is this instinctive pity for anything helpless or in distress which helps to explain her initial conviction that Yanko is harmless.

The focus of the story then switches from Amy to Yanko, with a brief but evocative description of the "blind struggle" which "threw him out into the field" (112). When Kennedy resumes his narrative, his remarks about castaways establish the sombre mood and anticipate the theme of the story he is about to tell:

It is indeed hard upon a man to find himself a lost stranger, helpless, incomprehensible, and of a mysterious origin, in some obscure corner of the earth. Yet amongst all the adventurers shipwrecked in all the wild parts of the world, there is not one, it seems to me, that ever had to suffer a fate so simply tragic as the man I am speaking of, the most innocent of adventurers cast out by the sea in the bight of this bay, almost within sight from this very window. (113)

The manner of Kennedy's relation of Yanko's journey from Poland is crucial, in that it establishes an immediate sympathy for Yanko. We are not simply given a prosaic report of the stages of his journey. What happens is that Kennedy relays to us Yanko's own account, so that Yanko becomes in effect a disguised first-person narrator. As we share his experiences and his naïve point of view, we discover what kind of person he is:

He did not know the name of his ship. Indeed, in the course of time we discovered he did not even know that

⁵ Baines, p. 321.

ships had names--'like Christian people'. . . . They were driven below into the 'tween deck and battened down from the very start. It was a low timber dwelling--he would say--with wooden beams overhead, like the houses in his country, but you went into it down a ladder. It was very large, very cold, damp and sombre, with places in the manner of wooden boxes where people had to sleep one above another, and it kept on rocking all ways at once all the time. He crept into one of these boxes and lay down there in the clothes in which he had left his home many days before, keeping his bundle and his stick by his side. People groaned, children cried, water dripped, the lights went out, the walls of the place creaked, and everything was being shaken so that in one's little box one dared not lift one's head. He had lost touch with his only companion (a young man from the same valley, he said), and all the time a great noise of wind went on outside and heavy blows fell--boom! boom! An awful sickness overcame him, even to the point of making him neglect his prayers. (113-4)

This passage is doubly effective, in that its scenic presentation enables the reader to place himself imaginatively in Yanko's situation. In this way his bewilderment and isolation are rendered vividly and dramatically. Yanko's words convey the utter unfamiliarity of everything to one whose knowledge of the world has been limited to his corner of one of the "more remote provinces of Austria" (121). The strength of his simple piety is suggested by the references to his unavoidable neglect of his prayers, and to the masts as "bare trees in the shape of crosses, extremely high" (115). Throughout the story various details emphasize Yanko's simple religious faith, and this becomes an important element in the overall thematic structure. I should add that for the reader the references to the bunks as "wooden boxes" and the masts as "bare trees in the shape of crosses" have a somewhat premonitory effect, in view of the watery death that awaits these emigrants.

Kennedy then describes Yanko's various attempts to make contact, once he has been washed ashore. These are "experiences

of which he was unwilling to speak: they seemed to have seared into his soul a sombre sort of wonder and indignation" (118). He is harangued by an indignant schoolmistress, whipped in the face by the driver of a milk-cart, stoned by three boys who take him for a drunken tramp, and attacked by Mrs. Finn with her umbrella. Finally, he is locked up in a wood-shed. This catalogue looks like a telling indictment of man's inhumanity to man. Yet these people, for all their apparent inhumanity, are not exhibited as monsters. Yanko's sudden arrival among them is quite inexplicable (they do not connect him with the sunken ship), and his bizarre appearance naturally excites fear and suspicion in those who encounter him. The children who run away from him really are frightened, and the children who throw stones are simply reacting in a different way to something which they fear. When we are told that Mrs. Finn "hit him courageously with her umbrella over the head" (119), the description is ironical, for the reader knows that Yanko is quite harmless. Yet Mrs. Finn does not know this, and in acting to protect her baby (who is with her in a perambulator) she could be said to show courage. In fact, during this sequence we intermittently view Yanko through the eyes of the villagers. To the children who run away he is "'a horrid-looking man'" (118), to the driver of the milk-cart he is "a hairy sort of gipsy fellow" (118), and to the boys who throw stones, he is "a funny tramp" (119). As for Mrs. Finn, we have her "unimpeachable testimony that she saw him get over the low wall of Hammond's pig-pound and lurch straight at her, babbling aloud in a voice that was enough to make one die of fright" (119). These transitions in viewpoint undercut the indignation which one would normally feel at this treatment of a

human being in need. Indeed at times (as when Yanko is attacked by Mrs. Finn) the tone is almost comic. The essential point is that these incidents arise out of mutual incomprehension. The situation is of course exacerbated by Yanko's inability to address the local people in any intelligible language. This reinforces the initial impression created by his outlandish appearance, and converts him into an alien and threatening figure.

This failure to communicate is perfectly illustrated by the encounter between Yanko and Smith. Smith sees "some nondescript and miry creature sitting cross-legged amongst a lot of loose straw, and swinging itself to and fro like a bear in a cage" (120). It is understandable that, "alone amongst the stacks," he should feel "the dread of an inexplicable strangeness." When Yanko directs "a sudden burst of rapid, senseless speech" at him, he becomes convinced that he is dealing with an escaped lunatic.

As the creature approached him, jabbering in a most discomposing manner, Smith (unaware that he was being addressed as "gracious lord," and adjured in God's name to afford food and shelter) kept on speaking firmly but gently to it, and retreating all the time into the other yard. At last, watching his chance, by a sudden charge he bundled him headlong into the wood-lodge, and instantly shot the bolt. Thereupon he wiped his brow, though the day was cold. He had done his duty to the community by shutting up a wandering and probably dangerous maniac. (120-1)

The irony is obvious. Nevertheless, one can accept Kennedy's statement that "Smith isn't a hard man at all. . . . He was not imaginative enough to ask himself whether the man might not be perishing with cold and hunger" (121). His inference that Yanko is an escaped lunatic is not entirely unreasonable, and this precludes any response other than the one he makes. Thus the views that the two men have of each other do not coincide at any point. There seems no way that Yanko can break through the

barriers of ignorance and fear and establish his common humanity. Deprived of language, he is little better than a dumb beast-- "a bear in a cage."

Yanko's incarceration in the wood-lodge is his nadir: "Before his excitement collapsed and he became unconscious he was throwing himself violently about in the dark, rolling on some dirty sacks, and biting his fists with rage, cold, hunger, amazement and despair" (121). We are told that the wood-lodge "presented the horrible aspect of a dungeon" (124), and his imprisonment in it must have evoked memories of his earlier incarceration in the ship's 'tween deck. In fact, Kennedy suggests that Yanko must have been "very near to insanity" (121).

Yanko is rescued by Amy, who, unlike Smith, does have sufficient imagination to perceive the human being beneath the "nondescript and miry creature." She had from the first been convinced that he meant no harm. She slips out early in the morning and, opening the door of the wood-lodge, holds out half a loaf of white bread.

At this he got up slowly from amongst all sorts of rubbish, stiff, hungry, trembling, miserable, and doubtful. "Can you eat this?" she asked in her soft and timid voice. He must have taken her for a "gracious lady." He devoured ferociously, and tears were falling on the crust. Suddenly he dropped the bread, seized her wrist, and imprinted a kiss on her hand. She was not frightened. Through his forlorn condition she had observed that he was good-looking. (124)

It is not difficult to see why Amy should have "appeared to [Yanko's] eyes with the aureole of an angel of light" (124). By her act Amy rescues him from the isolation to which he has been condemned, and restores his humanity to him: "Through this act of impulsive pity he was brought back again within the pale of human relations with his new surroundings. He never forgot it--

never" (125). The religious references are not just incidental, or simply a reflection of Yanko's piety. Amy's act is analogous to an act of grace and brings about a kind of resurrection, signified by the way in which Yanko rises to his feet and accepts her gift. She allows him to reclaim his human status.

Even after Amy's intervention, Yanko has to contend with a continuing sense of his isolation in a country where everything is alien: "An overwhelming loneliness seemed to fall from the leaden sky of that winter without sunshine. All the faces were sad. He could talk to no one, and had no hope of ever understanding anybody" (129). What sustains him is his conviction that in Amy he has found "his bit of true gold" (133). He was convinced that her heart was "'a golden heart, and soft to people's misery.'" This conviction is the basis of his attraction to Amy, and explains his determination to marry her. Kennedy is struck by their incongruity as they walk together: "They could be seen on the roads, she tramping stolidly in her finery . . . and he, his coat slung picturesquely over one shoulder, pacing by her side, gallant of bearing and casting tender glances upon the girl with the golden heart" (135). Kennedy wonders whether he saw how plain she was, and suggests that he was "seduced by the divine quality of her pity."

The readiness with which Amy responds to Yanko is less easy to explain. How is it that she, outwardly so dull and stolid, should respond so positively to a being so strange and different? In contrast to the local countrymen who are "uncouth in body and leaden of gait as if their very hearts were loaded with chains" (111), Yanko is "a being lithe, supple, long-limbed" (111) and his voice is "light and soaring, like a lark's" (132). Even when he

takes to wearing corduroys and a pepper-and-salt suit on Sundays, and cuts his hair, people still turn and stare at him: "His foreignness had a peculiar and indelible stamp" (131-2), and his various peculiarities remained "so many causes of scorn and offence to the village" (132). Yet Amy is prepared to defy her parents, the Smiths, and the community as a whole, and marry him. Her feeling for Yanko has its origins in her instinctive pity for him, and in her perception that he is handsome, but, as Kennedy implies, these factors are not sufficient by themselves to account for her attraction to him:

She had even more [imagination] than is necessary to understand suffering and be moved by pity. She fell in love in circumstances that leave no room for doubt in the matter; for you need imagination to form a notion of beauty at all, and still more to discover your ideal in an unfamiliar shape. (109)

Kennedy admits that this explanation does not take us very far: "How this aptitude came to her, what it did feed upon, is an inscrutable mystery" (109). The inexplicable nature of Amy's impulse is emphasized by the repeated suggestions that she has become possessed, or is under a spell of some sort (110). It would seem that her encounter with Yanko has woken her sympathetic imagination, so that she is able to identify with him. His very peculiarities--those things which are to others "so many causes of scorn and offence" (132)--exercise a fascination over her. It would also seem that this is a precarious and insecure state, that sooner or later she will be woken "from that mysterious forgetfulness of self, from that enchantment, from that transport . . ." (110).

The event which awakens her is the arrival of their baby. When Kennedy meets Yanko after the birth of the child, he is struck by the difference in him. He seems to have grown "less springy of

step, heavier in body, less keen of eye" (137). Yanko tells him that his wife had

snatched the child out of his arms one day as he sat on the doorstep crooning to it a song such as the mothers sing to babies in his mountains. She seemed to think he was doing it some harm. Women are funny. And she had objected to him praying aloud in the evening. Why? He expected the boy to repeat the prayer aloud after him by-and-by, as he used to do after his old father when he was a child--in his own country. And I discovered he longed for their boy to grow up so that he could have a man to talk with in that language that to our ears sounded so disturbing, so passionate, and so bizarre. (137)

The shift in point of view ensures that the reader shares Yanko's surprise and indignation as his natural impulses are thwarted by Amy. It would seem that the child has become the focus of Amy's maternal feeling, and that, as a consequence, Yanko has been excluded. The spell has been broken, and she now sees him through new eyes, as it were. Amy becomes aware, perhaps for the first time, of Yanko's otherness, his Polishness.⁶ When Yanko speaks to the boy in Polish, she instinctively intervenes to protect him--just as Mrs. Finn had acted to protect her child from Yanko. Kennedy wonders whether Yanko's "difference, his strangeness, were not penetrating with repulsion that dull nature they had begun by irresistibly attracting" (137-8). Clearly, this reversal of feeling in Amy has produced a situation in which communication has broken down and Yanko is once again isolated.

When Kennedy calls on the sick Yanko at his home, it is evident that, despite the familiar domestic scene, something is radically wrong. Amy refuses to have him upstairs in bed, and she

⁶ I am accepting Baines's view that Yanko comes from Austrian Poland (Baines, p. 321). In the story he is identified only as "a mountaineer of the eastern range of the Carpathians" and as coming from one of "the more remote provinces of Austria" (121).

sits "with the table between her and the couch" (139), as though behind a barrier. She is clearly terrified: "'And there's the baby. I am so frightened. He wanted me just now to give him the baby. I can't understand what he says to it'" (139). Language, which ought to facilitate communication, is what separates Amy and Yanko. More than anything else, it is his reversion to Polish, especially when speaking to the child, which is responsible for Amy's "unreasonable terror" (139).

Inevitably, as the story approaches its climax, the reader's attention and interest are centred upon Yanko. Yet even here one's sympathy is not necessarily alienated from Amy. In her simple, unreasoning terror she is as pitiable as Yanko. In response to Kennedy's suggestion that she should get a neighbour in to sit with her, she replies, "'Please, sir, nobody seems to care to come'" (139). This gives the reader a momentary insight into her own isolation, which is almost as extreme as Yanko's. There is no one she can turn to for support. Kennedy sums up her psychological state: "There was nothing in her now but the maternal instinct and that unaccountable fear" (139).

The final crisis is precipitated by Yanko's request--in Polish--for water. In his fevered condition he cannot understand why his request is incomprehensible to her.

He sat up and called out terribly one word--some word. Then he got up as though he hadn't been ill at all, she says. And as in fevered dismay, indignation and wonder he tried to get to her round the table, she simply opened the door and ran out with the child in her arms.

(140)

There is in this scene a clear structural contrast with the earlier scene in the wood-lodge. There Amy, certain that Yanko "meant no harm," and touched by his plight, offered a piece of bread, thereby initiating their relationship. Here her conviction

of Yanko's harmlessness is replaced by an irrational terror, so that she denies him a drink of water.

Amy's rejection of Yanko is also prefigured by the anecdote concerning Smith's parrot. According to Kennedy, Amy was devoted to the Smiths and their pets--including a grey parrot: "Its peculiarities exercised upon her a positive fascination. Nevertheless, when that outlandish bird, attacked by the cat, shrieked for help in human accents, she ran out into the yard stopping her ears, and did not prevent the crime" (109). In both cases she fails to respond appropriately to the situation. The parallel is strengthened if one remembers that Yanko was also regarded (by Swaffer) as "outlandish" (127).

At the end Kennedy returns to the same question which he posed at the outset: how to account for Amy's seemingly inexplicable behaviour. We have no way of really knowing what went on in her mind, and Kennedy's account is necessarily speculative. He wonders whether she even remembers Yanko:

And she says nothing at all now. Not a word of him. Never. Is his image as utterly gone from her mind as his lithe and striding figure, his carolling voice are gone from our fields? He is no longer before her eyes to excite her imagination into a passion of love and fear; and his memory seems to have vanished from her dull brain as a shadow passes away on a white screen.
(141-2)

The community as well as Amy seem to have erased all memory of him, for she is known to everyone as Amy Foster, and the child is "'Amy Foster's boy.'" The final irony is that she calls him Johnny which, as Kennedy points out, means "Little John."⁷ He concludes that "it is impossible to say whether this name recalls

⁷ Kennedy has previously told us that "Yanko" means "Little John" (133).

anything to her" (142).

Our final image of Amy is, in its implications, almost terrifying: "I have seen her hanging over the boy's cot in a very passion of maternal tenderness" (142). This cannot but recall Amy's passion and tenderness for Yanko. Indeed, what we are presented with here is a mirror-image of her former feeling. It is somewhat alarming that a feeling as powerful as Amy's for Yanko should be so little subject to conscious control and direction. There would seem to be something inherently treacherous in the human heart.

The only person to retain a clear image of Yanko is Kennedy, who perceives the ironical resemblance between the child and the father:

The little fellow was lying on his back, a little frightened at me, but very still, with his big black eyes, with his fluttered air of a bird in a snare. And looking at him I seemed to see again the other one-- the father, cast out mysteriously by the sea to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair. (142)

This final sentence invites us to contemplate once again Yanko's tragic experience. He is perhaps the most isolated of all Conrad's isolates, and he is unique in that he has done nothing to deserve his fate. His story is a frightening revelation of our dependence on language: shut up in the wood-lodge and unable to make himself understood, he has no way of claiming his humanity. His moral isolation is akin to that of Jim or Razumov, but is if anything more intolerable. Again one is led to conclude that for Conrad the failure to accept a common humanity and respond to another man's human need is the unforgivable transgression.

The story's effect is enhanced by a series of images which relate Yanko to a "woodland creature" or a bird whose fate it is to be trapped or ensnared (111, 126, 134, 141). When he is cast

ashore we are told that "he struggled instinctively like an animal under a net" (112). He survives this initial ordeal, but from the moment he is seen running towards New Barns Farm "he is plainly in the toils of his obscure and touching destiny" (119). When Kennedy meets him after the birth of his son, it seems "as if the net of fate had been drawn closer round him already" (137). At the end, when Kennedy discovers him lying in a puddle, he is reminded again of "a wild creature under a net; of a bird caught in a snare" (141). One function of these images is to heighten the pathos: they suggest the crushing of a free and innocent spirit by an inexorable fate.

There is also running through the story a series of almost hidden religious references or biblical echoes. Nothing could be less Christian than the way in which Yanko is received by this community, and the point is subtly underlined by the biblical analogues which are hinted at in those pages which recount his initial experiences. An example is the man who passes by, leaving Yanko lying asleep by the roadside--suggesting perhaps the parable of the Good Samaritan. The action of the boys who stone Yanko has various biblical precedents, such as the stoning of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. One of the central ironies is the lack of charity and compassion on the part of those who call themselves Christian. Here Conrad's use of Yanko's naïve point of view is effective: "If it hadn't been for the steel cross at Miss Swaffer's belt he would not, he confessed, have known whether he was in a Christian country at all" (129). He is bewildered by these people who keep their churches locked up during the week ("Was it to keep people from praying too often?" (131)) and who apparently teach their children to throw stones at those who ask

for compassion (124). The attempts to convert him (by the young ladies of the Rectory) are simply another variation of the prejudice with which he has to contend.

The story itself centres on two crucial acts: the giving of bread and the refusal of water. The bread and water acquire a symbolic value which inevitably reminds one of the bread and wine of the Sacrament, and this association may be strengthened by the explicit religious references. Amy appears to Yanko with "the aureole of an angel of light" (124), and he takes her for a "'gracious lady.'" It would almost be possible to regard Yanko as a Christ-figure. His final words recall Christ's cry of desolation on the cross: "'Why?' he cried, in the penetrating and indignant voice of a man calling to a responsible Maker" (141). Yanko's tragedy is in part the tragedy of a man whose faith and belief are contradicted by the injustices which are heaped upon him. In this respect his story can be seen as a variant of the story of Job. However, Yanko's only answer is "a gust of wind and a swish of rain." He dies pronouncing the word "'Merciful!'"--a last, desperate appeal? The final sentence of the story is unambiguously bleak: it is Yanko's fate "to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair" (142). Clearly, Yanko's suffering is to be seen as cruel, arbitrary and pointless rather than as providential. One can therefore accept Guerard's description of the story as "a generalized comment on the lonely, uncomprehended, absurd human destiny."⁸

The various biblical references help to establish moral criteria in terms of which the action can be interpreted. We are

⁸ Guerard, p. 50.

likely to find those who reject Yanko wanting in charity and compassion. This point is emphasized by the contrast between their professed Christianity and their actual intolerance. In this respect it is tempting to view "Amy Foster" as a sort of extended parable on the theme of man's inhumanity to man. At the same time, however, one must remember that the inhumanity of those who reject Yanko is unintentional, in that they act out of ignorance and fear. In fact, they "know not what they do."

It is difficult to know how far to pursue the religious and biblical associations. Guerard points out that "Yanko's brief passage through England is a whole life, as his arrival is a painful birth."⁹ Clearly, the stark outlines of Yanko's story make some sort of symbolic or allegorical interpretation possible. Yanko could be seen as a Christ-figure, whose life in England is like a brief but painful incarnation. However, I feel that to give primacy to this kind of interpretation is to distort the story. Guerard suggests that Yanko "is more nearly an Everyman than any character in the rest of the work,"¹⁰ and the story does reflect our general human predicament. Its central theme is the need to accept each other and to respond to each other's human needs. To do this one must see the other as human, and identify with him as a human being. As human beings we communicate by means of language, and through these acts of communication we affirm our common humanity. This moral perception relates "Amy Foster" to the other works which are examined in this thesis, and to "The Secret Sharer" in particular.

⁹ Guerard, p. 50.

¹⁰ Guerard, p. 50.

CHAPTER V

"THE SECRET SHARER"

From the opening lines it is clear that in "The Secret Sharer" the story is being relayed to us with a directness and immediacy which comes as something of a surprise after Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness," with their frame-narrators and their circles of auditors. Here there is no attempt to locate the narration in place and time, and no self-consciousness on the part of the narrator. Without preamble, we are plunged straight into the middle of things. The gain in immediacy is appropriate, for "The Secret Sharer" is a shorter, more intense work which holds and carries the reader's attention in one sustained effort from beginning to end. Guerard describes it as "Conrad's most successful experiment by far with the method of non-retrospective first-person narration." And he adds: "The nominal narrative past is, actually, a harrowing present which the reader too must explore and survive."¹

The significance of Conrad's choice of point of view will become clear: viewing the action through the narrator's eyes, the reader comes to share his point of view. In particular, he is led into an involvement with and understanding of the narrator's relationship with Leggatt, which is the central substance of the

¹ Guerard, p. 27. There is a momentary lapse into the manner of the earlier narratives when the narrator tells us, in parenthesis, that the name of the Sephora's captain was "something like Archbold --but at this distance of years I hardly am sure" (116).

story. It will, I hope, also become clear that it is impossible to regard the narrator as unreliable.²

The long opening paragraph with its apparent profusion of detail does more than simply establish a necessary physical setting. The balancing of the opening sentences ("On my right hand To the left"), the insistence on an equal division into land and sea ("I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, . . . in one levelled floor half brown, half blue"), the twin clumps of trees "corresponding in their insignificance to the islets of the sea" (91)--all these details seem to anticipate the theme of duality. In the last line our attention is focused on the narrator, who is "alone with his ship" (92). This theme is taken up and developed in the following paragraph:

At that moment I was alone on her decks. . . . In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges. (92)

This strategically-placed statement centres our attention on the narrator, who seems destined to be the protagonist in a story of initiation. We infer that the captain's ability to measure up to the responsibilities of command will be tested in some way. The final phrases suggest the isolated conditions in which the test will take place. We also infer that the captain is preoccupied with the question of his relationship with his ship. In the next paragraph he enjoys a moment of "quiet communion" with her,

² One or two critics have tried to do this: J.D. O'Hara, "Unlearned Lessons in 'The Secret Sharer,'" College English, 26 (1965), 444-50; Robert D. Wyatt, "Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer': Point of View and Mistaken Identities," Conradiana, 5 (1973), 12-26.

his hand resting on her rail "as on the shoulder of a trusted friend" (92). This feeling of togetherness with his ship is not yet an accomplished fact; it is something which must still be earned. The narrator goes on to confess that his position on board ship is somewhat invidious:

It must be said, too, that I knew very little of my officers. In consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to myself, I had been appointed to the command only a fortnight before. Neither did I know much of the hands forward. All these people had been together for eighteen months or so, and my position was that of the only stranger on board. I mention this because it has some bearing on what is to follow. But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and, if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly. (93-4)

This crucial passage discloses the central interest of the story which is to follow. This interest is primarily in the captain's subjective state, and one anticipates that his test will involve a confronting and coming to terms with himself. It is necessary to stress that even before the advent of Leggatt, the young captain is unsure of himself, and this uncertainty falls like a shadow between himself and his first command.

The young captain clearly resembles Jim in that both are young and both have set up for themselves an ideal conception of their own personalities. Both are untried, and, like Jim, the narrator has a rather over-simple view of the demands that are likely to be made on him:

And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose. (96)

In context, and in view of Leggatt's imminent arrival, these lines are clearly ironic. The security and confidence of the narrator and the peace and quiet of the surroundings remind one very much of Jim on the bridge of the Patna before the collision. And the appearance of Leggatt is as unexpected and mysterious as the Patna's impact with some submerged object.

However, if in years and situation the captain reminds one of Jim, in his capacity for introspective awareness he is more like Marlow. He shows an ability to face up to his inexperience, and a willingness to acknowledge his own insecurity which is absent in Jim. It is this ability which will help him to meet and survive his ordeal.

The way in which the narrator and Leggatt meet is crucial: one is given a sense of an actual encounter between the two people, a sense of the way in which communication is established from the start. The captain's first shock gives way to astonishment that the swimmer should make no attempt to climb on board. Immediately we see the captain seeking to penetrate to the meaning of Leggatt's inaction: "It was inconceivable that he should not attempt to come on board, and strangely troubling to suspect that perhaps he did not want to" (98). Already there is an incipient willingness on the captain's part to project himself into Leggatt's situation. The captain's first words are prompted by "a troubled incertitude" as to Leggatt's intentions, and their matter-of-fact tone indicates an acceptance of the extraordinary situation: "'What's the matter?' I asked in my ordinary tone, speaking down to the face exactly under mine." Here the last phrase anticipates the captain's sense of Leggatt as a mirror-image

of himself.

When, after a further exchange, the swimmer identifies himself, the captain comments: "The voice was calm and resolute. A good voice. The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself" (99). This marks the beginning of a relationship in which, entering into each other's situation, each assimilates certain qualities from the other. One of the things which characterize Leggatt throughout is his remarkable self-possession, and this quality is insisted upon right at the start. And it is important to note that, from the start, the captain's response to Leggatt is one of approval.

When Leggatt calmly outlines his predicament (to go on swimming until he sinks or to come on board), the captain feels that "this was no formula of desperate speech, but a real alternative in view of a strong soul." He continues:

I should have gathered from this that he was young; indeed, it is only the young who are ever confronted by such clear issues. But at the time it was pure intuition on my part. A mysterious communication was established already between us two--in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. The man in the water began suddenly to climb up the ladder, and I hastened away from the rail to fetch some clothes. (99)

Already the narrator's impulse to identify with Leggatt is apparent; an important part of this impulse is his feeling that they both have their youth in common. The reader finds no difficulty accepting the narrator's comment that "a mysterious communication was established already between us two."

It should be clear that we are being presented here with a relationship between two flesh-and-blood human beings. It should also be clear that the story does not have two "levels": the narrator's own recognition of Leggatt as a "double" fuses the

literal and the symbolic.³ In view of the critical controversy as to what Leggatt represents, it seems important to look closely at the moment at which the narrator first consciously identifies himself with Leggatt. This moment comes immediately after Leggatt's admission that he has killed a man. (He has clothed himself in a sleeping suit identical to that worn by the captain, and the two are talking together in low tones on the poop.) The narrator's response to this admission is to offer an unsolicited and sympathetic explanation: "'Fit of temper,' I suggested, confidently" (101). When Leggatt nods in confirmation, the narrator comments: "It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror." Here the depiction of Leggatt as a mirror-image clearly establishes the narrator's sense of identity with him. The fact that it is at this point that the captain explicitly identifies with Leggatt has led some critics to regard him as a representative of a darker, more primitive part of the captain's personality. I hope to demonstrate that this kind of interpretation is not justified. It is necessary to bear in mind that the narrator would not have responded as he does here, had he not approved of Leggatt from the first. His identification with Leggatt here is the culmination of an interchange which was initiated by the captain's question, "'What's the matter?'" (98).

The process of identification is described in the most explicit terms after Leggatt actually appeals to the narrator's own experience:

³ This point is made by J.L. Simmons in "The Dual Morality in Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 2 (1965), 218.

"You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur--"

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping suit. (101-2)

The narrator's willingness to see himself reflected in the other is the central theme of the story. What Conrad explores and dramatizes in "The Secret Sharer" is a mutual understanding so complete that it becomes natural (and in fact habitual) for the narrator to refer to Leggatt as his "second self," his "other self," or as "the secret sharer of [his] life."

It is a little misleading to speak of the narrator's "willingness" to identify with Leggatt, for his identification is almost involuntary; it seems to be a natural response. Up to a point it can be explained by looking (as I have done) at the way in which communication is established, and by taking into account the similarities between the two men. These common factors extend beyond superficial resemblance in appearance to include such matters as their youth and background. Both are gentlemen, both are Conway boys; although the narrator never uses the phrase, he obviously regards Leggatt as "one of us." In addition, the narrator emphasizes at one point that they are both strangers to the ship:

For the rest, I was almost as much a stranger on board as himself, I said. And at the moment I felt it most acutely. . . .

He had turned about meantime; and we, the two strangers in the ship, faced each other in identical attitudes. (110)

This insecurity could easily have led the narrator to conform to the law and to maritime convention and surrender Leggatt. However,

it could also help to explain why he is able to respond to Leggatt: his identity is not yet bound up with his ship and crew; unlike Archbold, he has no reputation to uphold. What happens is that in the course of the story his allegiance to Leggatt comes to predominate over all other considerations.

It is important to examine Leggatt's account of his crime since one's view of him will be influenced by one's interpretation of this event. Is Leggatt "criminally impulsive," to use Guerard's phrase,⁴ or is he, as Daniel Curley suggests, merely a victim of bad luck?⁵ A comparison of Leggatt's actions with the historical crime which was a source for the story (the killing of a seaman by the mate of the Cutty Sark in 1880) shows that Conrad has deliberately introduced various mitigating circumstances. The ship is in an extreme position: its safety depends on the setting of a reefed foresail--"the only sail we had left to keep the ship running" (102). Leggatt is in effective command of the ship, the captain's nerve having gone to pieces. At this critical point, a seaman gives him "some of his cursed insolence at the sheet," and Leggatt turns and fells him.

"He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, 'Look out! look out!' Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. . . . It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits. It's clear that I

⁴ Introd., "Heart of Darkness" and "The Secret Sharer." Signet Classic (New York: New American Library, 1950), p.8.

⁵ "Legate of the Ideal," in Conrad's "Secret Sharer" and the Critics, ed. Bruce Harkness (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 75-82; rpt. in Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marvin Mudrick (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 75-82.

meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face." (102)

According to C.B. Cox, Leggatt behaves here "like a man possessed.

. . . It is as if at this moment of heroic trial and endeavour his will had been abandoned to primitive, destructive urges."⁶

On the other hand, Curley finds Leggatt's felling of the sailor quite understandable, and explains his subsequent actions as follows: "When the sailor came at him again, Leggatt was forced to adopt stronger measures and began to throttle him into submission. When the wave broke over the ship, Leggatt's reflex led him to hold fast to anything. Unfortunately he happened to have hold of a man's throat. Here, then, is the murder in form that is not a murder in fact."⁷

A correct response would surely fall somewhere between these two extremes. Whereas Cox perhaps exaggerates the significance of Leggatt's loss of self-control, Curley certainly understates it. Clearly, what we have here is another marginal crime. As with Jim or Falk, one is forced to consider to what extent circumstances can extenuate a crime. Legally, Leggatt is guilty, and this is enough for Captain Archbold. Morally, one feels that Leggatt could be exculpated on the grounds that his action is not dictated primarily by self-interest (as Jim's is, when he jumps) but by the communal interest. His act is essentially protective. It is on these grounds that the narrator exonerates Leggatt: "It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy, mutinous existence" (124-5).

⁶ Cox, p. 147. ⁷ Curley, p. 80.

There seems no reason to suppose that Conrad does not intend this to be taken at face value. Most readers would agree with Donald C. Yelton when he says, "I do not find that Conrad, by any device of irony or multiple perspective, implies any moral judgment beyond the judgment (or suspension of judgment) of the narrator."⁸ If it is admissable to use extra-literary evidence, then the following statement by Conrad (in a letter written in 1917) would seem to remove any doubt as to his personal attitude: "The Swimmer himself was suggested to me by a young fellow who was 2d mate (in the '60) of the Cutty Sark clipper and had the misfortune to kill a man on deck. But his skipper had the decency to let him swim ashore on the Java coast as the ship was passing through Anjer Straits."⁹

Some critics have nevertheless been disturbed by the implications of the narrator's conduct. By giving refuge to Leggatt, the narrator is after all acting in defiance of the law. Various explanations for this have been offered. Simmons suggests that the story implies two different moralities, a morality proper to the land and a morality proper to the more rigorous conditions of life at sea.¹⁰ On the other hand, Gloria M. Dussinger suggests that Conrad's interest in this story is purely psychological, and that he wishes to exclude moral considerations altogether.¹¹ Neither view seems justified. Clearly, the narrator does make an

⁸ Yelton, p.281.

⁹ Appendix A, An Unpublished Conrad Letter [Conrad to Saunders, 14 June 1917], in Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 295.

¹⁰ Simmons, pp. 209-220.

¹¹ "'The Secret Sharer': Conrad's Psychological Study," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 10 (1968-69), 599-608.

ethical judgement, and, clearly, it is not a judgement which is limited in application to life at sea. Razumov, in almost parallel circumstances, makes the wrong decision when he betrays Haldin to the authorities.

"The Secret Sharer" presents a conflict between two different attitudes to the law--the narrator's and Captain Archbold's. Traditional respect for the law is embodied in the figure of Archbold, with his "seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command" (118). His words to Leggatt after the killing cannot be easily dismissed: "'Mr. Leggatt, you have killed a man. You can no longer act as chief mate of this ship'" (103). However, from the start this other captain is viewed in a rather prejudicial manner by the narrator:

He was not exactly a showy figure; his shoulders were high, his stature but middling--one leg slightly more bandy than the other. He shook hands, looking vaguely around. A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged. (116)

If Leggatt's account is accepted, he is afraid of his crew, dominated by his second mate and his steward--and his nerve had gone to pieces during their sustained spell of bad weather (107). Furthermore, his apparent moral shock at Leggatt's action seems to be occasioned as much by the fact that it took place on his ship, as it is by the act itself: "'What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the Sephora for these fifteen years. I am a well-known shipmaster'" (117). Clearly, his concern is partly for his own reputation.

It seems to the narrator, however, that his attitude to the law goes beyond traditional respect. He is struck by his inflexible determination to hand Leggatt over to the legal authorities: "His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible

and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected of 'countenancing any doings of that sort'" (118). He observes that his thirty-seven virtuous years at sea "seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation" (118-19). The law has become, for Archbold, a kind of fetish--something which (to adapt Marlow's words in "Heart of Darkness") one can "set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" ('HD' 51). By regarding the law as an absolute arbiter, and failing to remember that it is, after all, something devised by man, Archbold attempts to escape all personal responsibility. In particular, he fails to take into account the fact that the setting of the reefed foresail saved the ship. When challenged by the narrator, he refers to this as something providential ("'God's own hand in it'" (118)) and implies that he gave the order himself ("'I hardly dared give the order'"). Thus by denying this indebtedness, and by looking no further than the letter of the law, he seeks to bolster his own insecurely based self-image and to avoid any taint of contamination. His attitude is thus to be contrasted with Marlow's explicit attitude and Brierly's implicit attitude in Lord Jim--and, of course, with the narrator's attitude here. The implication of both "The Secret Sharer" and Under Western Eyes is that there is an inner moral law which must, if necessary, take priority over any purely legal obligations. The voice of one's conscience is stifled or denied at one's peril.

To sum up: there is something inadequate and less than humane in Archbold's conception of the law, and he is deliberately presented in such a way as to alienate the reader's sympathy from him. In Leggatt's case the demands of justice do not accord with

a strict observance of the letter of the law. In answer to the question, "Do circumstances exonerate?" the answer must, however, be "not entirely." Leggatt was still wrong to kill the man. It is important to note that Leggatt does not entirely exonerate himself. His position is not that he is innocent, or that he wants to escape punishment, but that he alone is in a position to know of what he is guilty. What he disputes is the right of a judge and jury to pronounce a verdict:

"You don't suppose I am afraid of what can be done to me? Prison or gallows or whatever else they may please. But you don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I am guilty or not--or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair. What does the Bible say? 'Driven off the face of the earth.' Very well. I am off the face of the earth now. As I came at night so I shall go." (131-32)

The narrator accepts this view without question, and co-operates by giving Leggatt the opportunity that he needs to make good his escape and strike out, "a free man" (143)--yet one who is destined to be "a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand . . ." (142).

The narrator's interview with Captain Archbold is his first real test, and the foregoing analysis of the moral issues involved should not obscure the fact that his response to Archbold is remarkable. For the second time in the story an appeal is made to the narrator's sympathies: "'What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship?'" (117). This time the narrator's prior commitment to Leggatt leads him to withhold his sympathy: "He was densely distressed--and perhaps I should have sympathized with him if I had been able to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second

self" (117). Metaphorically speaking, the narrator is deaf to the other captain's entreaties; hence it is rather appropriate that he should feign deafness so that Leggatt can overhear the conversation. In order to appreciate just what is involved here, it is necessary to remember that the narrator is a young man, very much aware of "the novel responsibility of command" (96), and somewhat uncertain of himself. Here he is faced by a figure of authority, a man much older than himself, and moreover one with twenty years of "immaculate command" behind him. It would clearly have been possible and, surely, much easier, for him simply to wash his hands of Leggatt and hand him over. That he is never tempted to do so indicates the strength of his allegiance to Leggatt.

In my view the narrator and Leggatt have entered into a relationship which is reciprocal in nature. It is a relationship in which "neither self is overcome or subverted."¹² It is not a relationship which can be reduced to the categories of allegory. The fact that critics who attach labels to Leggatt are able to argue equally plausibly in favour of opposite interpretations is an indication that they are misdirecting themselves.¹³ While his relationship with Leggatt obviously raises disturbing and complex questions for the young captain, the example of Leggatt's resolution and self-possession also helps him to survive his ordeal with the Sephora's captain, and his subsequent ordeal with his own

¹² Yelton, p. 283. My interpretation of the relationship is basically in accordance with Yelton's.

¹³ Guerard's and Curley's contributions should be noted. For Guerard, Leggatt is a "darker, more interior and outlaw self" (Conrad the Novelist, p.24); for Curley, Leggatt is an embodiment of that ideal conception which the young captain has to live up to (pp.81-2).

crew. When they first meet, Leggatt's self-possession induces a "corresponding state" in the young captain, and this quality is insisted upon at several points in the narrative. After one of the "scares," the narrator comments that Leggatt "looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm--almost invulnerable" (127). After the worst of these "scares," the narrator marvels at "that something unyielding in his character which was carrying him through so finely" (131). It is in keeping with Leggatt's ability to face up to the realities of his situation that he should originate the plan to maroon him. The captain at first objects, but is afterwards ashamed of his hesitation, describing it as "a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice" (132). Of the two, Leggatt seems consistently the stronger and firmer of purpose. Of course, he does not have to take command of a ship with the "mental feeling of being in two places at once" (125). Much of the interest of the middle part of the narrative derives from the way in which the captain reacts to the stress of the peculiar situation:

. . . all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed, behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of the table. It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it. (113-4)

The captain feels that "all unconscious alertness" has abandoned him, and fears that he is appearing "an irresolute commander to those people who were watching [him] more or less critically" (126). The ordeal which he has to survive is very different from any that he could possibly have anticipated.

If theirs is a reciprocal relationship, what does this mean for Leggatt? Clearly, he receives something which is invaluable:

"As long as I know that you understand," he whispered. "But of course you do. It's a great satisfaction to have got someone to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose. . . . It's very wonderful." (132)

What Leggatt gains through his communion with the narrator is, quite simply, relief from the limbo of isolation to which his action on the Sephora had consigned him. In the extremity of his isolation, and in the urgency of his need to communicate and be understood, he reminds one of Jim and of Razumov. He explains his feelings as he held onto the ladder:

"After I gripped it I said to myself, 'What's the good?' When I saw a man's head looking over I thought I would swim away presently and leave him shouting--in whatever language it was. I didn't mind being looked at. I--I liked it. And then you speaking to me so quietly--as if you had expected me--made me hold on a little longer. It had been a confoundedly lonely time--I don't mean while swimming. I was glad to talk a little to somebody that didn't belong to the Sephora. As to asking for the captain, that was a mere impulse. It could have been no use. . . . I don't know--I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody, before I went on. I don't know what I would have said. . . . 'Fine night, isn't it?' or something of the sort." (110-11)

Leggatt is, at this point, the very embodiment of isolation and despair, a man determined to go on swimming without hope, until he sinks. It is as though Conrad has translated the image used to depict Razumov's isolation--"He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea" (UWE 17)--into literal terms. What the narrator offers Leggatt is (literally, in the form of his ladder) a life-line, a chance to re-enter the human community. When the time comes for Leggatt to put his plan of escape into effect, for the first time he hesitates and falters, as he confronts the necessity to sever his bond with the captain. Their final moments together are movingly described: "Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out" (138). The culminating moment of

the relationship is in the sail locker, before they separate:

A sudden thought struck me. I saw myself wandering barefooted, bareheaded, the sun beating on my dark poll. I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wondered what he thought had come to me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second. . . . No word was breathed by either of us when they separated. (138)

The climax of the narrative itself comes in the final pages, when the captain takes his ship so far inshore that it seems "already swallowed up as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether" (140). This is a crisis in the captain's relationship with his crew, his ship--and himself. The mate has all along represented the biggest threat to the captain's authority. Now his outspoken alarm at the ship's situation brings matters to a head:

"She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this. She will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She'll drift ashore before she's round. O my God!"

I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently.

"She's ashore already," he wailed, trying to tear himself away.

"Is she? . . . Keep good full there!"

"Good full, sir," cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, child-like voice.

I hadn't let go the mate's arm, and went on shaking it. "Ready about, do you hear? You go forward"--shake--"and stop there"--shake--"and hold your noise"--shake--"and see these headsheets properly overhauled"--shake, shake--shake.

And all the time I dared not look towards the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.

(140-41)

More than one critic has observed that this scene involves a re-enactment by the captain of the scene on the Sephora¹⁴--the

¹⁴ The point was first emphasized by Louis H. Leiter, "Echo-Structures: Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer,'" Twentieth Century Literature, 5 (1960), 159-75.

difference being that here the captain acts firmly to assert his authority, and, despite the stress of the situation, avoids any loss of self-control. What is remarkable about this situation (in contrast to the crisis on the Sephora) is that it has been deliberately engineered by the captain: the safety of his ship and her crew has been imperilled--for the sake of one man. In these climactic moments the final test of the young captain's commitment to Leggatt becomes the degree to which he is prepared to risk the ship and his own career in order to give Leggatt the best possible chance of swimming to the land. At the height of the crisis the captain wonders what his double in the sail-locker thought of the commotion: "He was able to hear everything--and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close--no less" (141). The test is, simultaneously, a test of his seamanship, of his authority as captain, and of his commitment to Leggatt.

It is by a remarkable stroke of artistic ingenuity that Conrad finds a further use for the floppy hat which the captain had transferred to Leggatt in the sail locker. At the climax of his delicate manoeuvre off Koh-ring, when the captain needs to know whether his ship has gathered sternway, the sight of the hat floating in the water warns him to give the command to shift the helm:

And I watched the hat--the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh. It had been meant to save his homeless head from the dangers of the sun. And now--behold--it was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness. (142)

Some critics invoke Freudian or Jungian psychology at this point, claiming that the hat represents the personality, which can

be transferred symbolically to another.¹⁵ However, there seems no reason why one should not accept the significance assigned to the hat in terms of the story. The hat is transferred to Leggatt as a result of the narrator's "sudden pity for his mere flesh." As such it becomes a token of their shared life, of the reciprocity of feeling which has characterized their relationship. It is dramatically and thematically appropriate that, having been intended to protect Leggatt's head, it should unexpectedly serve as a mark for the young captain.

Very few of Conrad's novels end in the unambiguously positive and affirmative way that "The Secret Sharer" does. The young captain comes through with flying colours. This effect is partly the result of the reader's sense of relief at the successful outcome, after the mounting strain and tension of the preceding pages. Moreover, the two final paragraphs are carefully balanced and weighted: both convey with equal emphasis a sense of successful outcome. The first refers to the narrator, and focuses on his new-found security and confidence:

The foreyards ran round with a great noise, amidst cheery cries. And now the frightful whisks made themselves heard giving various orders. Already the ship was drawing ahead. And I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command. (143)

These lines reflect back to the captain's initial doubts and fears. Clearly he has survived his test, and he has survived it through his acceptance of his relationship with Leggatt. As Guerard points out, "Whatever test occurs, or whatever change in the narrator's personality, must be due to his relationship with

¹⁵ Guerard, p. 25; Simmons, p. 220.

Leggatt. For that relationship is the whole story."¹⁶ As a result of his willingness to discharge his responsibilities to Leggatt, he emerges with a firmer, more adequate sense of his identity. Or, as Douglas Brown puts it: "To be ready to explore and acknowledge all that binds us to one another--this is a part of what Conrad's tale proposes as the very nature of responsibility, of being fitted for command."¹⁷ The narrator has earned his "perfect communion" with his first command. By implication, he has also earned the trust of the crew, whose demeanour at the close contrasts with their earlier doubts and suspicions.

The final paragraph, however, belongs to Leggatt:

Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus--yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent flimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny. (143)

This suggests that the captain's relationship with Leggatt has not been severed by his physical departure. He continues to project himself into the other man's situation as he vicariously participates in Leggatt's acceptance of his future. This future, and the hope and confidence with which Leggatt meets it, would not have been possible without the narrator's support and understanding. The two final paragraphs, standing together and complementing each other, suggest the reciprocal nature of the relationship between Leggatt and the narrator.

¹⁶ Guerard, p. 22.

¹⁷ Introductory Essay, Three Tales from Conrad (London: Hutchinson, 1960), pp. 24-5.

As a whole, the story is an elaboration of the possibilities of human communion, and an assertion of the primacy of the moral bond contracted between two individuals. In its handling of the central relationship, in its presentation of particular scenes, and in its management of narrative suspense and development, it is an artistic tour de force. Its success depends on the extent to which the reader enters into the narrator's predicament, shares his point of view, and approves his actions. It is significant that in "The Secret Sharer" it is impossible to distinguish between the narrating self and the experiencing self. The reader's centre of orientation is with the experiencing self, and no further perspective is brought to bear on the actions and judgements of this experiencing self. The story effectively challenges conventional moral attitudes, and raises questions to which there are perhaps no simple answers. What does one do when one's sense of justice prompts one to act in defiance of the law? Can a man be allowed to determine his own guilt and punishment? Who (if anyone) is in a position to do this for him? "An old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen" (131)?

There is, finally, one problem which I wish to raise. In the story the narrator identifies with Leggatt so completely that he accepts his view of his crime without reservation. If one examines Leggatt's account, one finds that he seeks to justify his action on two different grounds. In the first place he points out that the setting of the foresail was vital to the ship's survival, and implies that in the stress and tension of the moment any man would have reacted as he did. This is the view which is articulated by the narrator, and it commands our respect. However, Leggatt also

seems to feel that the sailor in question got what he deserved:

"He was one of those silly creatures that are just simmering all the time with a silly sort of wickedness. Miserable devils that have no business to live at all. He wouldn't do his duty and wouldn't let anyone else do theirs. But what's the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur--" (101)

Leggatt's contempt for this particular human type may well have been shared by Conrad, for this sailor has his antecedents in Donkin in The Nigger of the Narcissus and the second mate in "Typhoon." Leggatt's attitude is certainly shared by the narrator, for he responds positively to this appeal to his sympathies: "He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression" (102). Most readers are, however, likely to balk at a view which seems to condone the taking of human life on the grounds that the person concerned is unworthy! One questions Leggatt's right to make such categorical judgements, and one certainly questions his assumption that he is free to act accordingly. On both practical and moral grounds it is a dangerous and untenable attitude--yet the narrator never questions it. In a recent article which analyses the ethical paradoxes of the tale, Cedric Watts points out that "for our hero, a fraternal ethic of loyalty to one who resembles himself entails endorsement of Leggatt's élitist ethic." The reader is thus placed in a rather uncomfortable position: "The reader's sympathies, if liberal, are forced into alliance with illiberal prejudices. . . ." ¹⁸ Although there are good reasons for sympathizing with Leggatt, in this particular respect

¹⁸ Cedric Watts, "The Mirror-Tale: an Ethico-Structural Analysis of Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer,'" Critical Quarterly, 19, No. 3 (1977), pp. 28, 30.

the reader's moral norms are not likely to coincide with those of the narrator--or, perhaps, those of the author.

CHAPTER VI

UNDER WESTERN EYES

From a position of comparative neglect, Under Western Eyes has become a focus of critical interest. One indication of this is the amount of space given to discussion of the novel in Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration, which publishes papers delivered at the 1974 International Conference on Conrad.¹ As one of these critics observes, "Under Western Eyes is one of Conrad's most carefully written and elaborately structured texts."² Much of this critical interest has centred on the rôle of the narrator, and it is clear that an understanding of the language teacher's function is a prerequisite for a proper understanding of the novel. Terry Eagleton points out that "the relation between the narrator and his subject-matter provides, in a sense, the total structure of the novel."³

The narrator is an elderly English teacher of languages who has lived in Geneva for many years. At one time he had "an extensive connection" in the Russian quarter of the town (4), and his narrative is supposedly based on the written record of a young Russian, Razumov. The teacher edits and relays this record to us,

¹ Norman Sherry (ed.), Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration (London: The MacMillan Press, 1976).

² Andrei Busza, "Rhetoric and Ideology in Conrad's Under Western Eyes," in Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration, p. 115.

³ Exiles and Emigrés: Studies in Modern Literature (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 21.

and acts as eye-witness narrator for part of the action which takes place in Geneva. Why does Conrad go to such trouble to create the illusion of a narrative based on an actual document? In his rather pedantic manner the narrator defines this document as "something in the nature of a journal, a diary, yet not exactly that in its actual form" (4). At the outset he "disclaim[s]" the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled [him] to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself . . . Razumov" (3). From time to time he reaffirms his intention not to deviate from Razumov's journal, and he continues to insist that he is no artist. One aim of these references is no doubt to impart to the narrated material a certain documentary respectability. However, Conrad seems at times to be playing a rather elaborate game with his readers. Part II opens with the following declaration:

In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect. . . . But this is not a work of imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its artlessness. Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. (100)

The reader of course knows that the real writer of the narrative is Conrad himself, that his narrative is in fact a work of the imagination, and that as a novelist he has all the resources of art at his disposal.

There can be no doubt, however, that the underlying reason for the references to Razumov's journal is Conrad's need to provide the narrator (and consequently the reader) with direct access to Razumov's thoughts and feelings. During Part I, the reader enjoys unrestricted access to Razumov's consciousness, and

he is thereby drawn into a sympathetic involvement with him. For most of this section the narrative is in effect a blend of figural and omniscient narration.⁴ Comments by the language teacher in his own person are largely confined to the opening paragraphs of each chapter, so that the reader tends to forget that what he is reading is ostensibly an edited version of Razumov's diary. The result is that Razumov's predicament is rendered vividly and dramatically. In fact, these first one hundred pages are among the most compelling in Conrad's fiction.

In Part II of the novel, the scene shifts to Geneva and to the relationship between the narrator and Miss Haldin. Here the narrator comes into his own as eye-witness and participant. This section includes his accounts of Peter Ivanovitch's escape from captivity and journey across Russia, and of Miss Haldin's first encounter with Razumov at the Château Borel. It concludes with the narrator's description of his first (and only) conversation with Razumov in the Bastions. In contrast to Part I, Razumov is here viewed from the outside, through the eyes of the narrator. Conrad's decision to withhold the explanation for Razumov's presence in Geneva until Part IV is, of course, crucial. The narrator deliberately restricts himself to reporting the effect on him at the time of his conversation with Razumov. Although he sits writing "in the fullness of [his] knowledge," he was then in "absolute ignorance" (183). The reader receives an impression of Razumov's exhaustion and lack of inner peace without understanding its cause.

⁴ The term "figural narration" is used by Franz Stanzel in his book, Narrative Situations in the Novel, trans. James P. Puskas (London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971). "If the reader has the illusion of being present on the scene in one of the figures, then figural narration is taking place" (Stanzel, p. 23).

Part III consists almost entirely of a detailed reconstruction of Razumov's meetings with various revolutionaries on a particular visit to the Château Borel. Much of this consists of dialogue, so that the point of view tends towards neutral or dramatic narration. Our access to Razumov's consciousness is limited, in that we are never allowed to discover what has brought him to Geneva. However, at several points in his conversation with one or other of the revolutionaries he almost gives himself away, so that by the end of this section the reader will have guessed that he is there as a police agent.

The question posed with such sinister effect by Mikulin at the end of Part I ("Where to?" (99)) is finally answered in the opening section of Part IV, which takes us back to St. Petersburg. The reader again shares Razumov's viewpoint, and his plight is presented so skilfully that his decision to become a police agent is made to seem almost inevitable. Thus the narrator avoids confronting the reader with the bald fact of Razumov's decision to become a spy. As in the case of his decision to betray Haldin, we are presented with a vivid account of his inner conflict. To the extent that we are able to enter into his predicament and understand his anguish, we are able to sympathize.

In the remaining chapters of the novel the point of view is usually that of the teacher of languages, as he describes the events leading up to Razumov's confessions to Miss Haldin and the revolutionaries. The climax comes when Miss Haldin, accompanied by the narrator, finds herself face to face with Razumov in the ante-room. Here the reader's attention is centred almost exclusively on Razumov as he struggles towards his self-denunciation. By this stage the reader is able to infer what is going on in

Razumov's mind, and his involvement is so intense that he almost wills Razumov to make his confession. After this Razumov's written confession is something of an anti-climax.

Much of the critical debate on Under Western Eyes relates to the teacher of languages and his function as narrator. Douglas Hewitt states that "whatever irony is directed against [the narrator] is very mild," and he concludes: "There can be no doubt that Conrad is in general agreement with his judgements."⁵ For other critics, however, he is an obtuse or impercipient narrator whose judgements are shown to be inadequate.⁶ Clearly, one's view of the narrator will in large measure determine one's response to the novel as a whole. In this chapter I shall attempt to define his rôle, before going on to examine the Russian experience which is the subject of the novel.

The language teacher seems to differ from the Marlow of Lord Jim or "Heart of Darkness" in that he appears to be incapable of "the journey within." He is not altered by the events he relates and whatever impulses he does have towards personal involvement (his feelings for Miss Haldin) are kept carefully in check. He is an elderly and ineffectual figure who feels himself to be on the outside of the events he describes. His characteristic stance is one of incomprehension and bewilderment. He confesses at the start that he has "no comprehension of the Russian character," and claims that there is something about the Russians which is

⁵ Hewitt, p. 81.

⁶ Recent critics have taken their cue from Guerard's remark that "the narrator's own obtuseness is one of the great sources for this created sympathy for the damned" (Guerard, p. 245).

"beyond the ken of mere professors" (4). Ironically, he attributes his lack of understanding to his occupation as a teacher of languages:

It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot. (3)

This is no doubt intended to support the illusion that the teacher is simply relaying to us Razumov's record of his experience. It may also be a device to emphasize the "otherness" of the Russians: a knowledge of their language is not enough to make their point of view accessible. In fact, the novel sets up a dichotomy between East and West, and the implication is that it is the teacher's "Westernness" which renders the Russians incomprehensible to him. This is not only implied; it is insisted on by the language teacher himself, and dramatized in his relationship with Miss Haldin. At the end of one of their conversations he admits his inability to understand her point of view:

I do not know why she should have felt so friendly to me. It may be that she thought I understood her much better than I was able to do. The most precise of her sayings seemed always to me to have enigmatical prolongations vanishing somewhere beyond my reach. (118)

He acknowledges his inability to influence her: "I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not, listen to my wisdom" (141). He tells us that, standing by her side in the Bastions, he could not forget that he was "like a traveller in a strange country" (169). When he reads the report that identifies Haldin as the assassin, he does not know how to respond, or what to say to the bereaved mother and sister:

I confess that my very real sympathy had no standpoint. . . . The anguish of irreparable loss is familiar to us all. There is no life so lonely as to be safe against that experience. But the grief I had brought to these two ladies had gruesome associations. It had the associations of bombs and gallows--a lurid, Russian colouring which made the complexion of my sympathy uncertain. (112)

Despite his concern for Miss Haldin's threatened youth and innocence, he is unable to intervene to protect her. As the action approaches its climax, the narrator's chance glimpse of Razumov's face (he is on his way to post his first police report) so discomposes him that he decides to call on Miss Haldin that evening. However, when the time comes, he is almost overcome by doubt: "One felt so helpless, and even worse--so unrelated in a way. At the last moment I hesitated as to going there at all. What was the good?" (319).

The moment when the narrator and Miss Haldin come face to face with Razumov in the ante-room of the Haldins' apartment is the climactic moment of the novel. As Razumov emerges from the drawing-room, his glance falls on the narrator "without any sort of recognition or even comprehension" (337). As he speaks to Nathalie, the narrator is completely disregarded by both parties. It is almost as though he were not there.

Had either of them cast a glance then in my direction, I would have opened the door quietly and gone out. But neither did; and I remained, every fear of indiscretion lost in the sense of my enormous remoteness from their captivity within the sombre horizon of Russian problems, the boundary of their eyes, of their feelings--the prison of their souls. (345)

This scene--the two Russians facing each other sharing a common predicament, the teacher a silent, peripheral observer--defines and encapsulates the narrator in his rôle of a "mute witness of

things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under [his] Western eyes" (381).

The situation is compounded here by the narrator's misapprehension as to what is actually happening. He believes that he is witnessing the final scene in a drama of love:

The period of reserve was over; he was coming forward in his own way. I could not mistake the significance of this late visit, for in what he had to say there was nothing urgent. The true cause dawned upon me: he had discovered that he needed her--and she was moved by the same feeling. (347)

The irony at the narrator's expense is, however, modified by the reader's subsequent discovery that there is after all an element of truth in his interpretation. Razumov explains in his journal: "I felt that I must tell you that I had ended by loving you. And to tell you that I must first confess" (361).

It would seem, then, that by employing a limited "Western" narrator Conrad seeks to build into the structure of the novel a dichotomy between East and West. By calling the novel Under Western Eyes he deliberately draws our attention to this division. Stewart alleges that he "has invented an Iron Curtain of his own, and thinks to cage 'ferocity and imbecility' behind it."⁷ This is, I think, to miss the point. By insisting on the narrator's relative helplessness and limited comprehension as a Westerner, Conrad wishes to draw our attention to the political realities which threaten the lives of the Russian characters. It becomes apparent that what distinguishes the Russians and isolates the narrator from them is not some mysterious element in the Russian soul, but simply the fact that their political inheritance is so

⁷ Stewart, p. 193.

starkly different from that of Western Europe. Conrad comments as follows in his Author's Note: "The most terrifying reflection (I am speaking now for myself) is that all these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general--of the normality of their place, time, and race" (ix-x). The narrator's repeated references to "the shadow of autocracy" which he sees "lying upon Russian lives in their submission or revolt" (109) are intended to remind the reader of this fact. Early in Part II of the novel, the narrator defines Miss Haldin's predicament: "She was dealing with life as it was made for her by the political conditions of her country. She faced cruel realities, not morbid imaginings of her own making" (117). Late in the novel he describes her mother as "keeping a dreadful, tormenting vigil under the evil spell of an arbitrary rule: a victim of tyranny and revolution, a sight at once cruel and absurd" (335). A few pages later his glimpse of her sitting in her chair by the window prompts him to observe that "the real drama of autocracy is not played on the great stage of politics" (338). As the narrator remarks to Razumov, the Russians are "under a curse. . . . And the important, the great problem, is to find the means to break it" (194). Mrs. Haldin is destroyed but, despite the narrator's premonitions, her daughter survives. At the end of the novel she has been "matured by her open and secret experiences" (373). To the narrator's relief, she has decided to return to Russia. In their last interview, she seems to be already slipping away from him: "To my Western eyes she seemed to be getting farther and farther from me, quite beyond my reach now, but undiminished in the increasing distance" (374).

It would seem, then, that Conrad's primary purpose in using

the language teacher as narrator is to insist on the difference between East and West, and to relate this difference to the contrasting political circumstances of Russia and Western Europe. On the evidence so far, one could conclude that the language teacher is an impercipient narrator in that his insight into the Russian experience is limited. On the other hand, he is perceptive in that he is very aware of his limitations as a Westerner. Moreover as D.R. Schwarz points out, he is "capable of perspicacious observation and [is] sensitive to the needs of others."⁸ His qualities as perspicacious observer are demonstrated in his only extended conversation with Razumov, and his sensitivity to the needs of others permeates his relationship with Miss Haldin. As a person, he is modest and self-effacing, and this enhances the value of his personal judgements.

When one turns to examine the narrator's attitude to Razumov, whose experience he relays, the contradiction between his proclaimed incomprehension and his actual perceptiveness becomes obvious. As a Westerner, it is in character for him to be fascinated but appalled by the facts of Razumov's story. Thus he seems to recoil from his duty of relaying his story to us: "Approaching this part of Mr. Razumov's story, my mind, the decent mind of an old teacher of languages, feels more and more the difficulty of the task" (66). However, it soon becomes apparent that one of his functions is to assist the reader to come to terms with and accept Razumov's story. He takes pains to explain Razumov's predicament after his discovery of Haldin in his rooms:

⁸ Daniel R. Schwarz, "The Significance of the Language Teacher in Conrad's Under Western Eyes," The Journal of Narrative Technique, 6 (1976), 101.

It is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. He would not have an hereditary and personal knowledge of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence. (25)

Clearly, we are invited to place ourselves in Razumov's situation, and to respond sympathetically. From time to time he suggests that we must judge the Russian characters by different criteria. Thus he apologizes in advance for the turn of Razumov's thoughts on the long walk which culminates in his decision to betray Haldin:

If to the Western reader [Razumov's thoughts] appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that as to the first this may be the effect of my crude statement. For the rest I will only remark here that this is not a story of the West of Europe. (25)

I have suggested that the novel's complex narrative method is dictated in part by the need to avoid confronting the reader too soon with the fact that Razumov has allowed himself to be used as a police agent. At the beginning of Part IV the narrator admits his "reluctance to state baldly here what every reader has most likely already discovered himself" (293). While he claims to be "unidentified with any one in this narrative where the aspects of honour and shame are remote from the ideas of the Western world," at the same time he "takes his stand on the ground of common humanity" (293). "Common humanity" would obviously justify a sympathetic response to Razumov.

At times the narrator's stance as uncomprehending Westerner seems little more than a pose. An example is his description of

the public outings of Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S-:

Russian simplicity often marches innocently on the edge of cynicism for some lofty purpose. But it is a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe to try and understand these doings. Considering the air of gravity extending even to the physiognomy of the coachman and the action of the showy horses, this quaint display might have possessed a mystic significance, but to the corrupt frivolity of a Western mind, like my own, it seemed hardly decent. (125-6)

Clearly the narrator here has his tongue in his cheek, and the irony exposes, not the teacher's limitations, but the pretensions of Peter Ivanovitch and his consort. The narrator's much-quoted statement on the folly of revolutionary action is often taken to represent Conrad's own viewpoint:

The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement--but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment--often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured--that is the definition of revolutionary success. (134-5)

It is clear, then, that the narrator has a rather chameleon-like quality. On the one hand he is presented as an avowedly obtuse narrator who is unable to comprehend the Russian character or experience. On the other hand he often functions perceptively, acting as mediator and assisting his readers to understand the story which he relays to them. At times he seems to be acting as a spokesman for the norms and values of the implied author. The fact that the narrator speaks with two voices is no doubt responsible for some of the critical uncertainty over his function in Under Western Eyes. The reason for this inconsistency must be that while Conrad needed (for reasons I have indicated) a limited "Western" narrator, he was unwilling to forgo the obvious

advantages of a narrator who could comment perceptively. Some readers may find it possible to accept this inconsistency as simply another narrative convention. (We have already accepted the discrepancy between the narrator's renunciation of all the resources of art and his actual deployment of these resources.) On the other hand, C.B. Cox states that "the novel partially fails because it is difficult to sort out the several attitudes of the narrator, Conrad and Razumov."⁹ This difficulty does become acute in those scenes where Russia and Geneva are deliberately counterpointed. On several occasions the narrator is allowed to comment astringently on the banality and complacency which seems to pervade Geneva and its citizens. For him, Geneva is "the sleeping town of prosaic virtues and universal hospitality" (336). As he walks with Miss Haldin through the streets late one evening (they are looking for Razumov), it seems to him as though "the emptiness of the quays, the desert aspect of the streets, had an air of hypocritical respectability and of inexpressible dreariness" (332). When he meets Miss Haldin in the Bastions in Part II, he attributes her enthusiasm for the spring morning to her awareness of her own youth--"for there was but little of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees, framed visibly by the orderly roof-slopes of that town, comely without grace, and hospitable without sympathy" (141). The impression created is of confinement and drabness, of a rather sterile imposed order. Such comments sound very odd coming from the mouth of the staid and respectable teacher of languages who has, after all, been domiciled in Geneva for many years. On

⁹ Cox, p. 105.

these and other occasions, the point of view is clearly that of the implied author (or, conceivably, Razumov). This particular inconsistency is difficult to accept because the teacher as character seems to have contradictory attitudes.

The narrator's rôle in the novel raises a further important question. When the teacher with his "want of experience" (11) is juxtaposed with Razumov and the Haldins, does this not create a reaction in favour of the Russians? The Russians may be labouring under a curse, but as they struggle and suffer they are intensely and vividly alive. The narrator, on the other hand, is profoundly isolated from the material which he relates, and he does not seem to grow as a result of his association with Razumov and the Haldins. In other words, it is not possible to make any distinction between the teacher's experiencing self and his narrating self. On this basis Robert E. Kelley claims that the last three parts of the novel are pervaded by an irony which operates against the narrator, so that his inability to understand or communicate with the Russian characters is shown to be a weakness rather than a strength.¹⁰ Similarly, Tony Tanner suggests that a kind of double irony operates in the novel, whereby the teacher's apparent imperviousness to the illogical, the arbitrary, and the exceptional (4) is shown to be an inadequacy:

To make such a reasonable man recount to us some deeply irrational occurrence, to make the nightmarish material pass through the complacent filter, to make the western eye strive to get into focus some seemingly unwestern form of experience--this is to achieve a double irony. . . . The narrator may convince us of the undesirability and remoteness of his material--but his material may

¹⁰ "'This Chance Glimpse': The Narrator in Under Western Eyes," University Review--Kansas City, 27 (1971), 288-89.

convince us of the inadequacy of the narrator's complacent virtues.¹¹

As a theory this is very attractive, but I am not sure that it actually works in practice. Firstly, I have suggested that the presentation of the language teacher as limited by his "Western" perspective has a positive function in that it draws our attention to the contrasting political circumstances of Western Europe and Russia. At one point, for example, Razumov exclaims bitterly to the language teacher: "'Don't you think a Russian may have sane ambitions?'" (191). In any ordinary (i.e. Western) society there would have been no obstacle to the realization of these ambitions. Part of the novel's fascination lies in its depiction of individual lives in relation to the arbitrary and ruthless forces of autocracy and revolution.

Secondly, I have pointed out that although the narrator may present himself as a "dense Occidental" (112), he often functions perceptively and acts as a sympathetic mediator of Razumov's story. This is something which Tanner does not take into account: "He is scrupulously fair in his handling of evidence, but he never achieves any sympathetic insight into Razumov's inner predicament."¹²

Finally, it is surely an exaggeration to say that the last three parts of the novel are pervaded by an "ever-deepening irony" which is chiefly at the narrator's expense.¹³ There is, as Kelley points out, a clear distinction between the teacher as narrator, who writes "in the fullness of [his] knowledge" (183) and the

¹¹ "Nightmare and Complacency: Razumov and the Western Eye," Critical Quarterly, 4 (1962), 198.

¹² Tanner, p. 199.

¹³ Kelley, p. 288.

teacher as character who is unaware of Razumov's mission. This does not mean, however, that his ignorance is "a weakness, . . . a serious flaw in his character."¹⁴ His ignorance is shared by (for example) Miss Haldin and Sophia Antonovna. Neither is a fool, and the latter is a dedicated revolutionary, yet both fail to penetrate Razumov's disguise. Moreover, the teacher's ignorance is shared by the reader who, on a first reading, cannot be expected to intuit immediately the reason for Razumov's presence in Geneva. (By the end of Part III the reader has presumably inferred that Razumov is a police agent.) The teacher is certainly the victim of irony at times (see above, p. 132), but this is intermittent, and his misapprehensions are usually quite understandable.

There is, however, a clear contrast between what Tanner calls "nightmare and complacency" in those scenes which project Razumov against the Genevan background. Razumov feels utterly out of place in Geneva, and regards the town and its citizens with contempt. From outside the gates of the Château Borel, the lake has

the uninspiring, glittering quality of a very fresh oleograph. Razumov turned his back on it with contempt. He thought it odious--oppressively odious--in its unsuggestive finish: the very perfection of mediocrity attained at last after centuries of toil and culture Before advancing into the grounds he looked back sourly at an idle working man lounging on a bench in the clean, broad avenue. The fellow had thrown his feet up; one of his arms hung over the low back of the public seat; he was taking a day off in lordly repose, as if everything in sight belonged to him.

"Elector! Eligible! Enlightened!" Razumov muttered to himself. "A brute all the same." (203-4)

This stark contrast between the complacent and the damned

¹⁴ Kelley, p. 289.

recalls the contrast between Jim and the tourists from the outward-bound mailship at the Marabar House. At one point the same comparison is made in Under Western Eyes: a steam-launch lands a group of passengers at the jetty opposite the gate of the Château Borel. Inside the gate Razumov is talking to a group of revolutionaries. The passengers disperse:

Only a specimen of early tourist in knickerbockers, conspicuous by a brand-new yellow leather glass-case, hung about for a moment, scenting something unusual about these four people within the rusty iron gates Ah! If he had only known what the chance of commonplace travelling had suddenly put in his way! But he was a well-bred person; he averted his gaze and moved off with short steps along the avenue, on the watch for a tramcar. (268)

Perhaps the most poignant contrast comes earlier in the novel. As the narrator strolls with Miss Haldin in the garden of the Bastions, he observes a solitary Swiss couple sitting in the middle of "a whole raft of painted deals" under the trees:

[Their] fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of one's hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the woman, rustic and placid, leaning back in the rough chair, gazed idly around. (175)

Later, left alone with Razumov, the narrator leads him to this very table amongst all the others, the Swiss couple having left. Razumov appears parched and feverish, and is suffering from lack of sleep. With his "unrefreshed, motionless stare," he seems to the teacher to be caught "in the toils of disastrous thoughts" (183).

This contrast between the suffering and the aware on the one hand, and the complacent and the secure on the other, is clearly an important element in the novel, and it predisposes us in favour

of Razumov and the Haldins. However, this is not simply a consequence of the contrast between the language teacher and Razumov. Up to a point, the teacher is exposed to irony, but its effects are mitigated by the factors I have outlined. Moreover, the fact that the teacher often seems to view Geneva and its inhabitants through Russian eyes inevitably blunts the edge of any irony that may be directed against him.

There is general critical consensus on the interpretation of Razumov's story.¹⁵ Razumov is, at the outset, an ordinary, hard-working student whose main concern is with his studies and his own future. He is exceptional in one respect: he is the illegitimate son of a distinguished nobleman, Prince K-. In effect, he is without a family:

No home influences had shaped his opinions or his feelings. He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality. There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian. (10-11)

This lack of any family connection accounts for his solitary, self-contained existence and for his determination to succeed through his own efforts: "Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name" (13-14). These facts help to explain his avoidance of any political involvement and his tendency to forget "the dangers menacing the stability of the institutions

¹⁵ An exception is John Hagan, "Conrad's Under Western Eyes: The Question of Razumov's 'Guilt' and 'Remorse,'" Studies in the Novel, 1 (1969), 310-22. Hagan argues that Razumov is not prompted to confess by remorse for the betrayal of Haldin; he confesses because Nathalie's trust and purity have "suddenly made him aware of the horror of what he had been plotting all along against her" (Hagan, 313).

which give rewards and appointments" (11). He lives a careful, well-regulated life and tries to plan for his future in a rational way. The discovery of Haldin in his rooms shatters his illusion of safety and security:

Razumov kept down a cry of dismay. The sentiment of his life being utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime expressed itself quaintly by a sort of half-derisive mental exclamation, "There goes my silver medal!" (16)

Razumov's immediate, intuitive response is entirely accurate; from this time on it will seem to him as though his life has been fatally blighted. However, upon reflection Razumov feels that his decision to allow Haldin to go on talking was "sound instinct": if Haldin were to be arrested, the police would set about finding a conspiracy, and no one who had ever known Haldin would be safe. Razumov feels that his best hope lies in sheltering Haldin until his escape can be arranged. Thus he agrees to see Ziemianitch on Haldin's behalf. When he discovers that the sledge-driver is drunk, "a terrible fury--the blind rage of self-preservation--" possesses Razumov, and he beats Ziemianitch with "insatiable fury" (30).

It is now, as he retraces his steps back to his rooms, that Razumov undergoes the experience that is compared to a religious conversion. The power that seems to take control of his mind and sweep him along is, of course, the power of rationalization:

Razumov stood on the point of conversion. He was fascinated by its approach, by its overpowering logic. For a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep in the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-formed ambitions, in the secret confidence combined with a secret mistrust of ourselves, in the love of hope and the dread of uncertain days. (33-4)

He is prompted by the instinct for self-preservation which is at the bottom of all he says and does. His decision to betray Haldin is anticipated by his act of walking over the breast of his illusory figure as it lies in his path. He is undeterred by the cry of the driver whose sledge has just collided with another: "'Oh, thou vile wretch!'" (36). (Compare Jim's reaction to the similar exclamation--also not meant for him--outside the courtroom.)

After walking over the phantom's breast, Razumov mutters to himself, "'I shall give him up'" (37). For twenty yards or more all is blank. Then:

"Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience." (37)

The irony is clear: Razumov's own guilty conscience has suggested the word "betray," and he tries to argue himself into a belief that his decision to give Haldin up is not a betrayal:

"And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary--every obligation of true courage is the other way." (38)

On the face of it this is a good argument. There is no moral bond between himself and Haldin, in the sense that he has never identified himself politically with Haldin (and Haldin's action is a political action). In fact, this crisis in his life brings to the surface Razumov's latent sympathy for the established order: "His conservative convictions, diluted in a vague liberalism natural to the ardour of his age, had become crystallized by the shock of his contact with Haldin" (67). Clearly, Razumov cannot be blamed for his failure to sympathize with Haldin's action.

This does not mean, however, that Razumov is exculpated. The fact is that he goes out agreeing to arrange for Haldin's escape, and comes back having arranged for his arrest. Razumov attempts to reason his way out of this, too. After Haldin's passage through his rooms, he attempts to resume work, and attends some lectures:

His new tranquillity was like a flimsy garment, and seemed to float at the mercy of a casual word. Betrayal! Why! the fellow had done all that was necessary to betray himself. Precious little had been needed to deceive him.

"I have said no word to him that was not strictly true. Not one word," Razumov argued with himself. (71)

Razumov carefully overlooks the fact that he had explicitly agreed to find Ziemianitch and make the necessary arrangements: "'Yes, of course, I will go. You must give me precise directions, and for the rest--depend on me" (21). After this assurance, Razumov's subsequent actions are indefensible.

In attempting to evaluate Razumov's actions, one must accept that at no point does he act in terms of a moral principle. His agreement to help Haldin and his decision to inform on him are both dictated by expediency. For Razumov, the question is simply, "How best to get rid of him?" When he attempts to justify his decision as an act of conscience, he is simply being dishonest. To what extent can he be blamed for placing self-preservation above all other criteria? Alternatively, to what extent can he be blamed for wanting to avoid commitment to the political struggle when there seems to be nothing to choose between the two sides? Razumov's aspirations are, after all, fairly ordinary human aspirations. His misfortune is that he lives in a society which suffers from "the throes of internal dissensions" (11),

and sooner or later he is bound to be drawn into the conflict.

These almost unanswerable questions point to the complexity of Razumov's predicament. In this respect his situation invites comparison with Jim's on the Patna. Jim is wrong to jump, just as Razumov is wrong to betray Haldin--yet in neither case is it easy to condemn the decision (or the man) unequivocally. This helps to explain why neither Jim nor Razumov ever completely forfeits the reader's sympathy.

There can be no doubt that Under Western Eyes centres on an inner struggle in which Razumov's need to rationalize his actions and preserve his security is balanced against his need to acknowledge his guilt and confess. In the following pages I hope to show the skill with which Conrad dramatizes this process. I will examine in some detail the relationship between Razumov and the man whom he betrays, and comment in particular on the phantom figure which haunts Razumov until he confesses. I take as my point of departure Guerard's comments on the significance of this illusory figure.¹⁶

If one examines the encounter between Haldin and Razumov, one notes that Haldin has arrived in Razumov's rooms secretly and unobserved:

"I met no one on the stairs, not a soul. As I came up to your floor I caught sight of your landlady coming out of your rooms. But she did not see me. She crossed the landing to her own side, and then I slipped in."
(15-16)

This resembles the situation in "The Secret Sharer," where Leggatt

¹⁶ Guerard, pp. 236-37.

slips undetected into the captain's cabin. Except for the captain, no one suspects that he is on board, and he is as dependent on the captain's goodwill as Haldin is on Razumov's. In "The Secret Sharer" a complicity or understanding is immediately established between the captain and Leggatt, and it is the captain who conceals Leggatt in his cabin. In Under Western Eyes, Razumov simply discovers Haldin in his rooms. Haldin assumes (just as Leggatt does) that once he has received an explanation Razumov will understand and sympathize. Although he recognizes that they are "'not perhaps in exactly the same camp,'" he says, "'I haven't met anybody who dared to doubt the generosity of your sentiments'" (15). The crucial difference is that, whereas in "The Secret Sharer" the captain responds to Leggatt's appeal, Razumov is appalled and horrified. Although his personal circumstances and the political complexion of Haldin's action make Razumov's response understandable, it is conceivable that he should be judged for this failure to respond. Whatever one may feel about political assassination, Haldin's youth and his idealism are in his favour. The most appropriate response may have been for Razumov simply to allow him to leave without offering further assistance, but without informing on him either. Significantly, this possibility never enters Razumov's head.

It is ironical that Haldin refers to Razumov throughout as "brother." At one point, as he is considering how to turn Haldin over to the authorities, Razumov permits himself a glimpse of the possibilities which he has denied himself:

To escape from [his moral isolation] he embraced for a whole minute the delirious purpose of rushing to his lodgings and flinging himself on his knees by the side of the bed with the dark figure stretched on it; to pour out a full confession in passionate words that

would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths; that would end in embraces and tears; in an incredible fellowship of souls--such as the world had never seen. (39-40)

In General T-'s study, he notices a statue which the Prince tells him is Spontini's "Flight of Youth." It is "a quarter-life-size smooth-limbed bronze of an adolescent figure, running" (43). As he stares at it, Razumov is "worried by a sensation resembling the gnawing of hunger." Later, as Haldin stands at the door about to depart--or flee from--Razumov's rooms, we are told that he "might have posed for a statue of a daring youth listening to an inner voice" (63). The implication seems to be that Haldin is, like Razumov, a young man (and a fellow student), that while he may be misguided he is not base or ignoble, and that Razumov was perhaps wrong to repudiate him.

Scattered throughout Part I there are hints that Razumov has deliberately set himself on a course which is contrary to the deepest dictates of his being. After Haldin has left his rooms, Razumov's sleep is interrupted by a recurring dream which refers back to his vision of Russia spread out under its carpet of snow (33), and prefigures his isolation and self-betrayal:

Several times that night he woke up shivering from a dream of walking through drifts of snow in a Russia where he was as completely alone as any betrayed autocrat could be; an immense, wintry Russia which, somehow, his view could embrace in all its enormous expanse as if it were a map. (66)

After his interview with Mikulin, Razumov's position suddenly seems to him so "ugly, dangerous, and absurd" that "the idea of going back and, as he termed it to himself, confessing to Councillor Mikulin flashed through his mind" (297). However, the thought is immediately stifled: "'Go back! What for? Confess! To what?'"

Most important of all is Razumov's obsession with Haldin's phantom, which comes to assume a reality greater than that possessed by the dead man in the flesh. This haunting figure derives its power from the feelings of guilt which Razumov has attempted to suppress by rationalizing his actions. Razumov's decision to betray Haldin is anticipated by and symbolized by his act of walking over the illusory figure of Haldin as it lies in his path.

Suddenly on the snow, stretched on his back right across his path, he saw Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes, clad in a brown close-fitting coat and long boots. . . . Razumov tackled the phenomenon calmly. With a stern face, without a check and gazing far beyond the vision, he walked on, experiencing nothing but a slight tightening of the chest. After passing he turned his head for a glance, and saw only the unbroken track of his footsteps over the place where the breast of the phantom had been lying.
(36-37)

Every detail here is significant and contributes to the symbolic weight of this episode. The figure lies "right across his path": it is an obstacle which cannot be avoided. His response is to gaze ahead and deliberately walk over the figure's breast--suggesting a denial of any human claims Haldin may have on him. It is an action which must be undone and atoned for before he can enjoy any peace of mind. Thus it is appropriate that his tranquillity and resolution should be disrupted by recurring visions of this phantom figure.

On his return to his rooms the body of Haldin lying flat on his back on Razumov's bed "seemed to have less substance than its own phantom" (55). When Razumov finally receives his summons to see Mikulin, he has a vision, first of General T-'s goggle eyes, and then of Haldin standing before him in his room "with extraordinary completeness of detail" (85). When Razumov steps

forward menacingly, the vision vanishes--and Razumov walks out with "infinite disdain." This is, however, a short-lived victory. Later, in Mikulin's office, he has another vision:

At that moment Razumov beheld his own brain suffering on the rack--a long, pale figure drawn asunder horizontally with terrific force in the darkness of a vault, whose face he failed to see. It was as though he had dreamed for an infinitesimal fraction of time of some dark print of the Inquisition. (88)

This recalls the moment when, after Haldin's flight from his rooms, Razumov waits for the town clock to strike: "His mind hovered on the borders of delirium. He heard himself suddenly saying, 'I confess,' as a person might do on the rack. 'I am on the rack,' he thought" (65). Who is the racked victim whose face is not visible--Razumov or Haldin? Razumov, his imagination working beyond the control of his conscious mind, seems unable to distinguish: "The solitude of the racked victim was particularly horrible to behold. The mysterious impossibility to see the face, he also notes, inspired a sort of terror" (88). His terror here is lest the victim should turn out to be himself. Razumov's claim to Mikulin later in this same interview demonstrates that his conscious mind is working in direct opposition to the promptings of his repressed moral nature: "'What is his death to me? If he were lying here on the floor I could walk over his breast. . . . The fellow is a mere phantom'" (96). A little later he asserts that he could walk over dozens of phantoms.

However, Razumov discovers that Haldin--or his phantom--cannot be dismissed so easily. Other students regard him as a confidant or accomplice of Haldin's, so that he is unable to free himself of the man he has tried to repudiate. "All this was Haldin, always

Haldin--nothing but Haldin--everywhere Haldin: a moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead" (299-300). It is only in his own rooms that Haldin is "a vanquished phantom, nothing more" (300). In fact, "there it was Razumov who had the upper hand, in a composed sense of his own superiority." Yet even here his control is not absolute. As he considers his future and tries to reassure himself ("But why not simply keep on as before?" (301)), he happens to glance towards the bed: "He rushed at it, enraged, with a mental scream: 'It's you, crazy fanatic, who stands in the way!'" (302). Thus although he has betrayed Haldin and trampled over his breast, he has not got rid of him or overcome him. He is still an obstacle in his path. In this way he finds himself impelled by the logic of his position to side with the forces of autocracy and repression: "It was what that miserable phantom stood for which had to be got out of the way" (302). His conversations with Mikulin bring a temporary respite, for only with him is he able to take Haldin for granted--"And Haldin, when once taken for granted, was no longer a haunting, falsehood-breeding spectre" (304). Thus it is that Razumov, like a man in the grip of a dream, finds himself among the revolutionaries in Geneva.

For the remainder of the novel, until he confesses, we view a Razumov who is animated largely by a scorn for and hatred of the revolutionaries. He takes a positive delight in the way they deceive themselves, compounding their original errors, and looks forward to a time when he will be able to move among them, free from the necessity of direct lying, "silent, unquestioning, listening, impenetrable, like the very fate of their crimes and their folly" (278). Much of his apparent revulsion at the part he

has to play derives from the need to lie and dissemble, to be always on his guard. Thus at one point he is driven to make a mock-confession to Peter Ivanovitch:

"Ah, Peter Ivanovitch, if you only knew the force which drew--no, which drove me towards you! The irresistible force. . . . I have been impelled, compelled, or rather sent--let us say sent--towards you for a work which no one but myself can do. . . . It is absurd of me to talk like this, but some day you will remember these words, I hope. Enough of this. Here I stand before you--confessed!" (228-9)

This and other instances indicate Razumov's hatred for a life of lies and deception, in which he is a helpless pawn of forces beyond his control. At times he can hardly go on:

He made a gesture of despair. It was not his courage that failed him. The choking fumes of falsehood had taken him by the throat--the thought of being condemned to struggle on and on in that tainted atmosphere without the hope of ever renewing his strength by a breath of fresh air. (269)

Thus in part the relief which his confession brings is relief at being released from his "prison of lies" (363).

There are occasions when Razumov's reactions in Geneva reveal for a moment the power of the latent forces which will compel his confession. The most striking instance is when, speaking to Sophia Antonovna, he accounts for his movements on the day of the assassination. At first he seems to speak with detachment: "Then he remembered another detail and dropped it before her, like a disdainful dole to her curiosity" (256). But as he goes on, he begins to relive the events he describes as though he were himself Victor Haldin. Thus he recalls--or imagines--Haldin's secret entrance into his rooms that morning: "Dvornik, landlady, girl, all out of the way. I went up like a shadow. It was a murky

morning. The stairs were dark. I glided up like a phantom" (257). As he describes his subsequent departure (to go to lectures) his awakened imagination fixes on the details of Haldin's midnight flight from his rooms:

"I took that notebook, and ran down the stairs on tiptoe. Have you ever listened to the pit-pat of a man running round and round the shaft of a deep staircase? They have a gaslight at the bottom burning night and day. I suppose it's gleaming down there now. . . . The sound dies out--the flame winks. . . ." (257)

He checks himself and passes his hand over his forehead, "confused, like a man who has been dreaming aloud." Tanner comments that in this amazing passage, Razumov "literally takes on Haldin's personality and relives the events through remembered hints of what Haldin had said. He identifies with the murdered 'brother,' he becomes the very ghost that is haunting him."¹⁷ This also anticipates Razumov's actions later that night when he re-enacts this scene from his past.

Razumov's confession to Nathalie is torn out of him by an inner moral necessity which he can no longer deny. It is as though his newly-won safety among the revolutionaries, by removing the factor of fear and the need to be always on guard, has cleared the way for the operation of these inner forces. Thus, after leaving the Château Borel, Razumov is shocked by his failure to remember his firm intention to send off his first police report on that day: "'Is it that I am shrinking? . . . Is it possible that I have a conventional conscience?'" (288).

Having posted his report, Razumov realizes that he must give

¹⁷ Tanner, p. 211.

Miss Haldin and her mother the "explanation" for Haldin's arrest. His fifteen minutes alone with Mrs. Haldin are "like the revenge of the unknown" (340). At first he feels that her silence does not matter, since he is now finally safe: "Nothing could touch him now; in the eyes of the revolutionists there was now no shadow on his past. The phantom of Haldin had indeed been walked over, was left behind lying powerless and passive on the pavement covered with snow" (340). This seems to be Razumov's moment of triumph--but it is as illusory and short-lived as the phantom is real and enduring--for it represents a moral force which cannot be denied. He tells himself, "Mothers did not matter," but the continuing silence finally unnerves him and makes him aware of "something like enviousness which gripped his heart":

It was the other who had attained to repose and yet continued to exist in the affection of that mourning old woman, in the thoughts of all these people posing for lovers of humanity. It was impossible to get rid of him. 'It's myself whom I have given up to destruction,' thought Razumov. 'He has induced me to do it. I can't shake him off.' (341)

Thus Haldin's own prophecy ("Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost" (22)) has been ironically fulfilled, and Razumov's departure from the sitting-room is "frankly a flight." However, his retreat is cut off, for he finds himself face to face with Nathalie. Confronted by her innocent trust and her capacity for love, as well as by her beauty, he feels his hatred and scorn and his desire for revenge giving way, and he repudiates the "atrocious temptation" (354) which he says she unwittingly put in his way the day she appeared before him at the

Château Borel.¹⁸

Perhaps the cruellest irony of Razumov's life is that, having turned to Mikulin and having consented to go to Geneva as a spy, he should then find himself confronted by Haldin's sister. Not surprisingly, it seems to him that Haldin has found a new way to haunt him. Her presence in Geneva ensures that he will not be able to live easily with his decision to give Haldin up. He is forced to confront the fact that the dead man lives in the memory of his sister and mother, that to them he is "our dear one," a "moral victim of autocracy" (347). The teacher's presumption that he and Nathalie must be "drawn together fatally" by "the ideas, the aspirations, the cause of Freedom, expressed in their common affection for Victor Haldin" (347) serves by its very wrong-headedness to indicate the kind of torment to which Razumov must be exposed. Nathalie says to him during their final conversation, "but you must understand that it is in you that we can find all that is left of his generous soul" (346)--another ironical echo of Haldin's prophetic words. Clearly Razumov is in an intolerable situation; it can only be a matter of time before his self-control gives way.

His inner turmoil is compounded by the fact that Nathalie, apart from being beautiful, is innocent and completely trusting--

¹⁸ This "atrocious temptation" is the subject of Razumov's second, written confession--a statement which many critics have found to be an unnecessary and complicating factor in his story. It is perhaps a survival from Conrad's original scheme for the novel which required Razumov to marry Nathalie and father a child whose resemblance to Haldin would finally prompt his confession. Razumov's psychology as revealed in his written confession is not as implausible as some critics suggest. However, the fact that this plan to "steal a soul" only exists in the retrospective account is a serious structural weakness. It is a rather awkward and unconvincing intrusion at a point where Razumov's confession is already adequately motivated.

"a predestined victim" (349). However, he is unable to follow through his plan to betray her into marriage because he finds that, despite himself, he has ended by loving her. He feels a growing revulsion for what he is doing, and for himself: "You fascinated me--you have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate--the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me" (361). Now, in retrospect, he writes: "You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace" (358). As he writes, he is "in the depths of anguish, but there is air to breathe at last--air!" He has finally understood what he has done: "In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely" (361).

It is significant that even now Razumov does not embrace the revolutionary ideology: "Only don't be deceived, Natalia Victorovna, I am not converted I am independent--and therefore perdition is my lot" (361-2). He has acknowledged the human bond between himself and Haldin--but this does not mean that he must necessarily identify himself politically with Haldin. At enormous personal cost, Razumov has finally regained the independence which he had valued so highly, and which he had thought he had lost forever when Haldin entered his rooms. In this sense, his victory can be described as "a personal triumph over politics."¹⁹

Razumov's actions after completing his written confession constitute the final evidence for the significance of his relation to Haldin. He sits with his watch in front of him, waiting for midnight:

¹⁹ George Goodin, "The Personal and the Political in *Under Western Eyes*," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 25 (1970-71), 339.

There was no reason for that choice except that the facts and the words of a certain evening in his past were timing his conduct in the present. The sudden power Natalia Haldin had gained over him he ascribed to the same cause. 'You don't walk with impunity over a phantom's breast,' he heard himself mutter. 'Thus he saves me,' he thought suddenly. 'He himself, the betrayed man.' . . .

He was the puppet of his past, because at the very stroke of midnight he jumped up and ran swiftly downstairs as if confident that, by the power of destiny, the house door would fly open before the absolute necessity of his errand. (362)

In this ritual re-enactment of Haldin's actions, Razumov finally identifies himself with the dead man and atones for his betrayal. Haldin's phantom can only be laid once Razumov has acknowledged his guilt and confesses; it is thus an essential agent in his moral and psychological recovery.

Razumov's confession to the revolutionaries is not a confession of political error; it is a necessary corollary, a public affirmation, of the truth which he has confessed to Nathalie: "'Today, of all days since I came among you, I was made safe, and today I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse--independent of every single human being on this earth'" (368).

Despite its affirmative tone, the above statement also carries with it the implication of isolation--"independent of every single human being on this earth." Razumov's isolation at the outset is rather unusual in that it is thrust upon him by the facts of his birth. His condition is described in that suggestive image--"he was as lonely as a man swimming in the deep sea" (10). His isolation is a determining factor in each of the crises of his life. During the long walk in which he decides to give Haldin up, his actions are dictated by two fundamental urges--the need to

survive, and the need to be understood. After reaching his decision, he feels the overwhelming need of "some other mind's sanction." With something resembling anguish, he says to himself-- "'I want to be understood'" (39). At this point the narrator intervenes with a typically Conradian comment:

Razumov longed desperately for a word of advice, for moral support. Who knows what true loneliness is--not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion. Now and then a fatal conjunction of events may lift the veil for an instant. For an instant only. No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad. (39)

Razumov is, in this state, extremely vulnerable and open to suggestion. He says later that night to Haldin: "'The most unlikely things have a secret power over one's thoughts--the grey whiskers of a particular person--the goggle eyes of another'" (59). In this way Razumov goes--or is led--first to Prince K-, and then to General T-.

The next critical moment for Razumov is his decision to surrender to the pressures which bear down on him by agreeing to go to Geneva as a police spy. Again, his complete moral isolation is a determining factor: Mikulin is the only man in the world able to understand his predicament--and "to be understood appeared extremely fascinating" (297). The narrator is at pains to explain Razumov's position: "The obscure, unrelated young student Razumov, in the moment of great moral loneliness, was allowed to feel that he was an object of interest to a small group of people of high position" (307-8).

Finally, we watch Razumov's painful progress through the Genevan sections of the novel to the point where he finds himself

sitting alone on the little island in Lake Geneva under the statue of another exile, Rousseau. It is here that he writes his first police report. "He had found precisely what he needed. If solitude could ever be secured in the open air in the middle of a town, he would have it there on this absurd island . . ." (290). This symbolic scene defines the isolation to which his own decisions have brought him; he has cut himself off from the possibility of free and honest communication with other human beings. As he listens to the "murmurs of the current breaking against the point of the island," he says to himself, "'There can be no doubt that now I am safe'" (291). Yet one cannot help but recall his earlier statement to Councillor Mikulin: "'To cut oneself off entirely from one's own kind is impossible'" (96). No person could tolerate for long the isolated and false existence into which Razumov has been betrayed, and the murmurs of the current around the island suggest the stirring of the latent forces which will bring him to confess. In the final crisis of his life, he explains to Nathalie:

"Do you know why I came to you? It is simply because there is no one anywhere in the whole great world I could go to. Do you understand what I say? No one to go to. Do you conceive the desolation of the thought--no one--to--go--to?" (354-5)

At the end Razumov's ambitions have shrunk to the hope that he may be permitted to "go away and bury [himself] in obscure misery" (361). At least he can live with himself, and his confession to the revolutionaries has put his relationship with them on an honest footing. In fact, Sophia Antonovna tells the narrator that Razumov is visited from time to time by the revolutionaries in his retreat in the suburb of "some very small

town" in the South: "'Some of us always go to see him when passing through. He is intelligent. He has ideas. . . . He talks well, too'" (379). Thus, through his confession, he has even won a measure of acceptance from the revolutionaries. He would not himself wish to be defined by the revolutionaries as "one of us," but at the same time he is not totally divorced from the human community. In addition, of course, he is tended by Tekla "the Samaritan," who has found a task in which there is "nothing . . . to become disillusioned about" (379).

Finally, one other factor must be taken into account in any consideration of Razumov's isolation. In Conrad the sense of isolation is usually related to the need to communicate, and Razumov's impulse to keep a diary and to write a full confession is a function of his isolation. The teacher of languages refers to Razumov's diary as "the pitiful resource of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to" (308-9). Clearly, the diary fulfils a private, interior need. Elsewhere the teacher speculates that Razumov looked at it "as a man looks at himself in a mirror, with wonder, perhaps with anguish, with anger or despair" (214). Unable to communicate with or relate to any other person, Razumov can only commune with himself. His predicament arises, of course, from his initial repudiation of any relationship with Haldin; his deepening isolation and alienation (from others and from himself) is therefore self-imposed; his journal is his only relief.

CHAPTER VII

COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

Recurring Themes and Situations

It is instructive to place Lord Jim alongside Under Western Eyes, written approximately ten years later. Lord Jim is perhaps, with the exception of Nostromo, Conrad's most complex and challenging novel. It is certainly the first novel to demonstrate his powers at their full development. Under Western Eyes, on the other hand, is often regarded as the last novel to show these powers at or near their height. Both novels centre on the predicament of a man who is guilty of an act of betrayal - an act which leads to his moral isolation. Both novels chart this character's agonized attempts to rationalize his action and to rehabilitate himself. Both culminate in an act of expiation which leads to self-destruction. Both Jim and Razumov are divided men: Razumov strives to exorcise the phantom of Haldin, while Jim is engaged in "a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence . . ." (LJ 68). It would almost be possible to regard Under Western Eyes as, in its essentials, a re-run of Lord Jim. At the deepest level, both novels demonstrate our inescapable moral responsibility for our actions. M.D. Zabel has put this very well: "The man who is alone in the world can never escape, for he . . . lives in the company of a ruthless inquisitor, a watcher who never sleeps, an eternally vigilant judge. The alter-ego of the conscience demands

its justice. . . ." ¹

The correspondences between these two novels, written ten years apart, support the view that Conrad's work exhibits a recurring pattern, and suggest an almost obsessive fascination with certain themes and situations. These parallels should not, however, obscure the fact that in terms of narrative method and impact on the reader, the two novels are rather different. Marlow and the teacher of languages are both, technically, witness-narrators, but they function very differently. Lord Jim would be unthinkable without Marlow, whereas (as Conrad acknowledges in his author's note), some readers have questioned the need for the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes. Marlow's probing intelligence dissolves categories, sees beneath surface distinctions, and exposes the underlying moral issues in a manner which combines personal involvement with a disinterested regard for the truth. The teacher of languages, on the other hand, often seems to be emphasizing differences and making distinctions. If Marlow's rôle is to understand Jim, the teacher's rôle is apparently not to understand Razumov. His "Westernness" denies him any effective part in the unfolding drama. The most satisfying sections of the novel are probably the St. Petersburg sections, where the reader forgets all about the narrator, who has supposedly reconstructed these events from Razumov's diary. I suspect that for most readers Lord Jim is a richer, more complex, more original work.

I have begun by comparing Under Western Eyes with Lord Jim, but there is little doubt that the first part of the novel is more

¹ Introd., The Portable Conrad, ed. M.D. Zabel (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 28.

intimately related to "The Secret Sharer." The short story was written in a few weeks shortly before the completion of the novel, and it provides us with a mirror-image (in the sense that it is reversed) of the act which sets Razumov on the path to self-destruction. It also provides us with an arresting instance of the way in which the hero, whose initial self-doubt marks him as being vulnerable, can survive his test and emerge in command both of his ship and of himself. It is (like "The Shadow Line") a story of initiation, but what is distinctive is the form the initiation takes. His test, when it comes, is a test of his ability to respond to a problem of a complex and unexpected kind. The narrator enters so completely into Leggatt's predicament that he defies conventional morality (in the shape of Captain Archbold) and risks the safety of his ship to give Leggatt his freedom. In his willingness to identify with Leggatt and accept the consequent risks, the young captain is clearly contrasted with Razumov, whose first concern is for his own safety.

"The Secret Sharer" should also be read in relation to Lord Jim. Like Jim, the young captain has set up for himself an ideal conception of his own personality; unlike Jim, however, he is capable of self-awareness. He knows that his fitness will be tested by the "long and arduous enterprise" that lies ahead ('SS' 92) and is in some measure prepared--although he does not anticipate the form his test will take. His saving identification with Leggatt is contrasted with Jim's crippling identification with Brown, and Brierly's with Jim. I would argue that it is largely because he does not see Leggatt simply as a "darker" self that he is able to survive his ordeal. Nevertheless this does not invalidate Guerard's comment that "Lord Jim and 'The Secret

Sharer'--in their marginal crimes, sympathetic identifications, and introspective concerns--belong to the same fictional and moral worlds."²

Norman Sherry has demonstrated the extent to which the short story depends on personal experience (Conrad's first voyage as Captain of the Otago in 1888) and on Conrad's knowledge of certain events which took place in the summer of 1880, when Conrad was sailing in eastern waters (the Jeddah disaster and the crime on the Cutty Sark).³ Leggatt's crime is a version of that committed by the mate of the Cutty Sark, one Sydney Smith. Smith's captain agreed to do what Archbold refuses to do--he connived at the escape of his officer. His subsequent suicide (he jumped overboard) undoubtedly lies behind the Brierly suicide in Lord Jim.

Sherry makes an interesting suggestion.⁴ At one point in Lord Jim (after the incident at Shomberg's hotel) Jim turns up in the middle of the night seeking refuge on Marlow's ship, which is moored in Bangkok harbour. Marlow takes him on board as a passenger. The situation which develops seems to anticipate the central situation in "The Secret Sharer." We are told that, during the voyage, Jim "skulked down below as though he had been a stowaway. . . . Often, when alone with him on deck or in the cabin, we didn't know what to do with our eyes" (LJ 146-7). It is also suggestive that Jim and Leggatt share similar backgrounds: both have been to a training-ship for officers, both have fathers

² Guerard, p. 27.

³ Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 253-69.

⁴ Sherry, p. 257.

who are Anglican parsons--and both are reluctant to return to England.

Lord Jim was, like Under Western Eyes, initially conceived as a short story. "Tuan Jim: A Sketch" (which became the first two chapters of the novel) was probably written in the first half of 1898, during which time "Youth" was completed. For the rest of the year Conrad struggled with The Rescue, before abandoning it in favour of "Heart of Darkness," written between December 1898 and February 1899. Conrad then resumed Lord Jim, and completed it in July 1900. This chronology helps to suggest why Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" can be seen as complementary studies. In addition they were, like "Youth," written for serial publication in Blackwood's and both were narrated by Marlow, who had made his first appearance in "Youth." They were intended to be published by Blackwood in one volume, together with "Youth." When it became clear that "Jim: A Sketch" would outstrip all Conrad's estimates, this project had to be dropped, and Conrad wrote "The End of the Tether" as a substitute. In a letter to David S. Meldrum, Blackwood's literary adviser, Conrad expressed his disappointment at having to abandon the original scheme: "[Lord Jim] has not been planned to stand alone. H of D was meant in my mind as a foil, and Youth was supposed to give the note."⁵

Both Jim and Kurtz are test cases. Jim stands for "all the parentage of his kind" (LJ 32) and all his life has been "expecting the worst, rehearsing his best" (LJ 70). Yet, when the

⁵ [Conrad to Meldrum], 19 May 1900, Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum, ed. W. Blackburn (Durham, N. Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), p. 94.

moment comes, he is not ready. As for Kurtz, "all Europe" has contributed to his making ('HD' 117). According to one informant, he was "a universal genius" ('HD' 154). He interests Marlow because he has come out to Africa "equipped with moral ideas of some sort" ('HD' 88). Yet he, too, fails.

Their failures are described in similar terms. Kurtz lacks the "inborn strength" necessary to meet the temptations and terrors to which he is exposed. In particular, what he lacks is a "deliberate belief" ('HD' 97). Jim, like Kurtz, lacks "the inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face . . ." (LJ 32). It is difficult to determine whether this "inborn ability" or "inborn strength" is something unconditional, a gift analogous to grace, or whether it is contingent upon the individual's commitment to a "deliberate belief." In Lord Jim Marlow suggests that this "power of resistance" needs to be backed by "a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas" (LJ 32-33). Whatever view one takes, Jim could certainly be said to lack the kind of "deliberate belief" that Marlow upholds in Lord Jim and exemplifies in "Heart of Darkness." It is made clear at the start that Jim has made many voyages and has "endured the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread--but whose only reward is the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him" (LJ 8). Jim is, in fact, an incorrigible romantic who regards his "imaginary achievements" as "the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality" (LJ 15). He is not even committed to the seaman's code in quite the way Marlow is. For Marlow, the code arises from the demands and necessities of seagoing life. His commitment to it is in a sense disinterested--there is nothing glamorous about it. For Jim, however, seagoing life offers the possibility of self-

fulfilment in heroic endeavour, and the seaman's code provides a pretext for heroism. It is something to be lived up to in extreme circumstances. (One remembers that Jim's vocation for the sea declared itself "after a course of light holiday literature" (LJ 4).) Although he is painfully aware that his desertion of his ship is the most flagrant violation of the seaman's code, one can never be certain of the extent to which he accepts his guilt. Thus Marlow is worried by the fact that "he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters" (LJ 130). Part of Jim's remorse is on account of the opportunity missed. Despite his guilt, he clings tenaciously to an ideal conception of himself. Despite his commitment to the community in Patusan and to Jewel, he is, in the last analysis, self-consecrated.

However, although Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" have important elements in common, there are also obvious differences. Lord Jim contains a critique of the romantic temperament, whereas "Heart of Darkness" could be described as an exposé of a certain kind of idealism. While Jim remains an engaging figure, it is an open question whether he ever finally achieves self-knowledge. On the other hand, Kurtz, who inspires horror and disgust, does achieve self-recognition, and his final words are claimed by Marlow as a "moral victory" ('HD' 151).

It should also be pointed out that while Marlow is indispensable in both works, he is indispensable in different ways. "Heart of Darkness" presents us with Marlow's experience, while in the novel it is Jim's experience which is central. This fact helps to determine the form and structure of the two works. "Heart of Darkness" is, literally and metaphorically, a voyage of discovery in which we seem to penetrate to the heart of a mystery; Lord Jim is an ever-widening inquiry which circles

around and examines a central mystery from every side--but nevertheless leaves us with an enigma.

Isolation

I wish now to turn to the subject of isolation, which is such an obvious and persistent feature of Conrad's fiction. In the preceding chapters I have examined the ways in which Conrad's protagonists or narrators are isolated, and I have drawn attention to the function of isolation in relation to the moral test. Thus Jim and Razumov are alone and without external supports as they grapple with the crises which will shape their lives. In "Heart of Darkness," Kurtz's test is "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" ('HD' 116).

It is in such moments of crisis that the individual recognizes his essential isolation--a stark fact of existence which, Conrad implies, no man can afford to contemplate for long. Thus Razumov, as he walks the streets of St. Petersburg, becomes acutely aware of his isolation:

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

(UWE 39)

We need other people--and it is at this point that Razumov embraces "for a whole minute the delirious purpose of rushing to his lodgings, flinging himself on his knees," and pouring out "a full confession in passionate words" that would end in "embraces

and tears," in "an incredible fellowship of souls . . ." (UWE 39-40).

Yanko's predicament in "Amy Foster" is perhaps the most terrifying of all. His isolation is a function of his inability to make himself understood. Shut up in the woodlodge, he experiences the agony of his frustrated humanity. Deprived of language, man is reduced to the status of a dumb beast. His simple terror is a profound comment on the human condition.

There is a further sense in which the individual is isolated, for each person is the centre of his own subjective world, and our knowledge of others is necessarily uncertain and limited. I have suggested that this can be regarded as the underlying implication of Lord Jim in particular. We view each other (to borrow Marlow's terms) through a "fog" or a "mist," and the most we can hope for are "occasional glimpses" which are "no good for purposes of orientation" (LJ 56).

The case of Brierly provides a dramatic illustration of this general point. Marlow introduces him at the beginning of Chapter VI--"the captain of the crack ship of the Blue Star line" (LJ 42). He is a man who seems invulnerable to accident or error, and Marlow admits that there are moments when he envies him:

The sting of life could do no more to his complacent soul than the scratch of a pin on the smooth face of a rock. This was enviable. As I looked at him flanking on one side the unassuming pale-faced magistrate who presided at the enquiry, his self-satisfaction presented to me and to the world a face as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after. (LJ 43)

The last sentence throws into startling relief the disparity between appearance and reality. Were it not for "the glimpse of the real Brierly" afforded by their conversation apropos Jim (LJ 50), his suicide would have been incomprehensible to Marlow. This sense of the mystery of others is a concomitant of Conrad's

use of a narrator who is limited to realistic inferences about others--in the way that people in everyday life are. In the Lord Jim chapter I quote in full Marlow's definitive statement on isolation: "It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that 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 . . ." (LJ 132). The novel is the record of Marlow's long and, in the end, inconclusive attempt to grapple with Jim's "elusive spirit." In the letter that accompanies his written account of Jim's last days, Marlow says simply, "I affirm nothing" (LJ 249).

"Heart of Darkness" is the record of Marlow's encounter with Kurtz. The various reports that he hears of Kurtz stir his curiosity. Then one evening (at the Central Station) he overhears a conversation which affords him his first "distinct glimpse" of the man ('HD' 90). When he finally meets Kurtz in person, a horrible reversal of expectations takes place. Kurtz sheds "a kind of light" ('HD' 51), but it is a light that throws into doubt all the positive values and assurances that underpin one's confidence in civilization and progress--and in man himself. Kurtz, however, remains unfathomable. Reporting his midnight encounter with Kurtz on the banks of the river and within earshot of "the throb of drums" and the "drone of weird incantations," Marlow says: "I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself" ('HD' 144, 145). It is this encounter which lays "the foundations of [their] intimacy" ('HD' 143). At the moment of Kurtz's death it seems to Marlow as though "a veil had been rent,"

as he is allowed a privileged glimpse of Kurtz in his moment of moral recognition.

Kurtz's final words have been variously interpreted. Marlow, however, is quite explicit: for him this is a "supreme moment of complete knowledge" ('HD' 149) and constitutes a "moral victory" ('HD' 151). This, he says, is why he has "remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond . . ." ('HD' 151). Marlow has known him as well as it is possible to know anyone; he is even prepared to lie on his behalf. Yet how well has he known him? When, back in Brussels, he visits Kurtz's fiancée, he is confronted by her passionate claim: "'I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best'" ('HD' 158). Marlow's response is simply to repeat her words: "'You knew him best.'" And he adds, retrospectively, "And perhaps she did." This passage recalls, briefly, the dilemmas of Lord Jim. Kurtz's fiancée had at least known him as he aspired to be--and she remains faithful to her conception of him. Although in this scene the girl's faith and trust are undercut by Marlow's nightmarish recollection of Kurtz as he knew him, the question still remains. In sharing Kurtz's noble ideals with him, has she in fact known the best part of him? Perhaps Marlow has known only "a shadow" ('HD' 155).

Ultimate truth or certain knowledge may be unattainable; what is certain is that, for Marlow, something real has happened. In coming to know Jim or Kurtz, he has himself been altered. He cannot turn his back on either, for to do so would be an evasion of self-knowledge, a betrayal of himself. Having entered into an "unforeseen partnership" ('HD' 147) there is no going back. He must remain loyal to Jim or Kurtz, whatever the consequences. This brings us full circle, back to Under Western Eyes and "The

Secret Sharer." Exactly the same thing could be said of the young captain in "The Secret Sharer." In this story, and in "Amy Foster," Conrad explores most directly the mysterious ebb and flow of our reciprocal feeling. Leggatt describes his understanding with the young captain as "very wonderful" ('SS' 132), and this story seems to demonstrate the possibility of establishing the "fellowship of souls" which Razumov contemplated briefly, only to reject it. However, "The Secret Sharer" also needs to be seen in relation to "Amy Foster." Yanko moves from complete isolation, to communion with Amy, only to return to isolation and despair as communication breaks down and she abandons him. More than almost anything else Conrad wrote, "Amy Foster" implies that loneliness is "a hard and absolute condition of existence" (LJ 132). In any event we can, I think, conclude with Guerard that "the success or failure of such attempted communications between individuals (and the ensuing acts of loyalty or betrayal) is the subject and central preoccupation of Conrad's greatest books, most obviously of Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes."⁶

Conrad's sense of human isolation is so profound as to verge on solipsism, and this is reflected in the uncertainty of his dramatized narrators. In Lord Jim Marlow pauses to ask how much he is actually managing to communicate. He admits that in his account he is "missing innumerable shades--they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words" (LJ 70). In "Heart of Darkness" he asks his listeners, "Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?" ('HD' 82). These doubts remind one

⁶ Guerard, p. 48.

of the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes, who refers to words as "the great foes of reality," and looks on man as "a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot" (UWE 3). One is reminded, too, of the frequent expressions of scepticism and doubt (bordering at times on despair) in Conrad's letters, of which the following is a sample:

Life knows us not and we do not know life--we don't even know our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of to-morrow--only the string of my platitudes seems to have no end.⁷

This uncertainty as to the efficacy of language seems to be directly related to Conrad's sense of the way in which each individual is, as it were, enclosed in his own subjective world. We use words as an accepted common currency--but communication remains uncertain.

I do not intend to examine Conrad's life in an attempt to explain the recurrence of certain themes and situations in his fiction. It is, however, interesting to note his preoccupation with the saying, "Life is a dream." According to M.D. Zabel, "Three proverbs seem to have haunted Conrad all his life; his wife and his friends have told how he murmured them habitually. One was 'Life is a dream' (Calderon's La Vida es sueno was a favourite motto)."⁸ The reader of Conrad's fiction will know that at times

⁷ 14 January 1898, Letter 7, Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunningham Graham, ed. C.T. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), p. 65; hereafter cited as Letters to CG.

⁸ M.D. Zabel, Craft and Character in Modern Fiction (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 215. According to Zabel the other proverbs were "All things belong to the young," and "Tout passe, tout lasse."

the sense of isolation lends a dream-like quality to existence.

This is expressed most clearly by Marlow in "Heart of Darkness":

It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation. . . .

No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream, alone. . . . (HD 82)

Marlow is expressing here something that must have been, for Conrad, very deeply felt.

Decoud in Nostromo provides a further illustration. His first-person narrative springs from the need which even he feels to communicate something of his thoughts and feelings to another human being--in this case his sister in Paris. He is writing in Viola's posada, surrounded by silence and darkness, after two days without rest or food. Decoud has the feeling of a "great solitude" around him (N 230). He concludes his narrative in this way:

And I, the only other with them, don't really know whether to count myself with the living or with the dead. 'Quien sabe?' as the people here are prone to say in answer to every question. But no! feeling for you is certainly not dead, and the whole thing, the house, the dark night, the silent children in this dim room, my very presence here--all this is life, must be life, since it is so much like a dream. (N 249)

The sense of life as a dream seems to be related to the sense of one's isolation, and it brings as a corollary the need to get in touch with another human being. This sense may derive in part from the lack of any confirmation from others of the reality of one's own feelings and sensations. In fact, prolonged isolation induces the doubt that leads to Decoud's suicide: "Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. . . . After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own

individuality" (N 497). The authorial narrator pronounces an unequivocal verdict: "But the truth was that he died from solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand" (N 496).⁹

To conclude: the sense of the dream-like quality of existence is closely related to the sense of isolation. It cannot be doubted that Conrad suffered acutely from a sense of his own isolation. This helps to account for the tone of his first letter to Cunninghame Graham, where he explains: "Most of my life has been spent between sky and water and now I live so alone that often I find myself clinging stupidly to a derelict planet abandoned by its precious crew."¹⁰ It is not unreasonable to suggest that for Conrad the very act of writing was an act of faith. Language may be inadequate, and communication uncertain; but words are all we have. In fact, writing was, for Conrad, more than an attempt to communicate; it was at the same time an affirmation of solidarity with others. Thus in his preface to The Nigger, he writes that the artist "speaks to . . . the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts . . ." (viii).

⁹ Isolation is "known but to few" in the sense, presumably, that most people never become fully aware of their own isolation.

¹⁰ 5 August 1897, Letter 1, Letters to CG, p. 46.

CHAPTER VIII

CONRAD'S "FEW SIMPLE IDEAS"

The question of fidelity is not only a central issue in Conrad's fiction; it is, together with "solidarity," the value which he invokes most frequently in his essays and prefaces. The following statement (from "A Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record) has become almost notorious, in view of the actual complexity of much of Conrad's work: "Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas. . . . It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity" (xix). The attempt to defend himself against the charges of desertion and betrayal (provoked by his departure from Poland) is part of the burden of A Personal Record:

No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered. . . . The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. 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. (PR 35-6)

In the previous chapter I have shown how Conrad's novels often have at their centre acts of fidelity or betrayal. Fidelity in this sense means fidelity to a bond which has been discovered or created, a bond which unites individuals. Thus fidelity cannot be separated from the idea of solidarity. In this chapter I wish first of all to investigate more thoroughly the question of fidelity, with particular reference to the texts I have selected. As an important preliminary, I examine what may be called Conrad's "dual vision".

For Conrad, human existence--if it is to be fully human--requires an initial act of faith or commitment. It may at first sight seem strange to say this of a man who believed that "the ethical view of the universe" involves us in "so many cruel and absurd contradictions" as to be quite untenable (PR 92). The depth of his scepticism and his pessimism emerges very clearly in some of the letters. Thus he points out to Cunningham Graham that self-knowledge would destroy Singleton, for it would reveal to him that he was "less than a shadow, more insignificant than a drop of water in the ocean, more fleeting than the illusion of a dream."¹ The fact that human life has evolved at all is a "tragic accident," and the universe itself is no more than a kind of infamous machine that "goes on knitting."² In view of this, "The attitude of cold unconcern is the only reasonable one."³ Writing seems to have been a joyless and exacting task--and Conrad often compares his fate to that of Sisyphus.⁴

Yet Conrad also wrote: "What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance."⁵ In the same essay he declares that he would require from an artist "many acts of faith, of which the first would be the cherishing of an undying hope. . . ."⁶ The universe may be empty or indifferent, yet through the exercise of faith and hope and charity human life may

¹ 14 December 1897, Letter 4, Letters to CG, p. 54.

² 20 December 1897, Letter 5, Letters to CG, p. 56.

³ 14 January 1898, Letter 7, Letters to CG, p. 65.

⁴ 21 December 1898, Letter 29, Letters to CG, p. 113

⁵ "Books," in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 8.

⁶ "Books," p. 8.

assume significance and meaning and acquire dignity. The attitude of "cold unconcern" may be the only "reasonable" one, but Conrad also states that "The sight of human affairs deserves admiration and pity."⁷ And he adds: "Resignation, not mystic, not detached, but resignation open-eyed, conscious, and informed by love, is the only one of our feelings for which it is impossible to become a sham."⁸

In a letter to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad attempts to reconcile their respective positions:

I think that we do agree. If I've read you aright . . . You are a most hopeless idealist--your aspirations are irrealisable. You want from men faith, honour, fidelity to truth in themselves and others. . . . What makes you dangerous is your unwarrantable belief that your desire may be realized. This is the only point of difference between us. I do not believe. And if I desire the very same things no one cares.⁹

Their correspondence is so full of interest because, as Watts suggests, there was a sense in which Graham was Conrad's "secret sharer": "In Conrad, he heard the monitory echo of his own pessimism; and in Graham, Conrad saw the melodramatic extension of his own Quixotism."¹⁰

To sum up: Conrad's almost nihilistic vision needs to be balanced against his statements of belief and affirmations of solidarity. This paradox--the need to believe and hope and act in a universe where "the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish" (PR 92)--is central to an understanding of Conrad.

⁷ "A Familiar Preface," A Personal Record, p. xix.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Letter 5, Letters to CG, p. 56.

¹⁰ Introd., Letters to CG, p. 7.

No reader of Conrad can be unaware of the formative influence on his character and outlook of his years in the Merchant Service. This helps to explain why fidelity in the sense of faithful service was for him a since qua non. "I do not know whether I have been a good seaman," he tells us, "but I know I have been a very faithful one" (PR 110). The Merchant Service with its traditions represented for Conrad a remarkable creation of the human spirit--a creation which was solid and real because it derived from the necessities of life at sea, from the necessary commitment of ordinary men to the task at hand. Thus in attempting to account for the existence of such a tradition, Conrad turns to what he calls "the nature of life itself": "It may be that the noblest tradition is but the offspring of material conditions, of the hard necessities besetting men's lives. But once it has been born it becomes a spirit."¹¹ In fact, it becomes "an immortal ruler invested with the power of honour and shame."

This has a very direct bearing on Lord Jim, for Jim's case demonstrates the power of this "immortal ruler." Marlow is interested in Jim because his conduct calls into question the assumptions upon which a tradition of faithful service is built. He hopes to find "some convincing shadow of an excuse" for Jim's act of betrayal (LJ 37). At the same time he hopes to reaffirm his belief in "the sovereign power enthroned in a code of conduct" (LJ 38). This is, of course, impossible. He is forced to admit, in retrospect, that the code itself is simply "a convention, only one of the rules of the game, nothing more . . ." (LJ 60). Yet at the same time it is "terribly effective by its assumption of unlimited power over natural instincts, by the awful penalties of its failure." In other words, belief in a code of conduct is not, objectively, justified, for any code is limited in its efficacy. Such a belief is, in fact, an illusion. Yet it

¹¹ "Well Done," in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 183.

is a necessary illusion, for one must continue to put one's faith in a code, and to regard the individual who transgresses as culpable. This accounts for Marlow's complex attitude towards Jim. While he regards Jim as guilty, at the same time he cannot reject or disown him. Jim is, as he puts it, "one of us," and not one of us really has the right to point a finger at him.

This issue is re-examined in "The Secret Sharer." In this case it is not merely the code of conduct of the merchant service which has been infringed, for we are invited to compare Leggatt's crime with Cain's fratricide. In Captain Archbold we have a man who sees the issue in very simple terms: Leggatt is a transgressor who must be brought to account in a court of law. He is in no doubt as to where his duty lies, and he leaves no stone unturned in his efforts to carry it out. The law is for him an absolute authority and a judge is competent to determine a man's guilt or innocence. It seems to the young captain as though Archbold's twenty years of "immaculate command" "have laid him under some pitiless obligation" ('SS' 118-9). The reader's sympathy is inevitably alienated from this man, who is unable to acknowledge his own indebtedness to Leggatt and who seeks to wash his hands of him. In contrast to the young captain and to Marlow in Lord Jim, he is an example of how not to respond. The implication of this story (and of Under Western Eyes) is that where there is a conflict one's human obligations take precedence over one's legal obligations. Any society must make laws and appoint judges, but the final court of appeal is the individual's conscience.

The complexity of Conrad's attitude is indicated by the value which he places (by implication) on those men who are flawed or vulnerable. Conrad's attitude to his simple, unreflective heroes

is ambiguous. The MacWhirrs and Singletons are admirable in that they do exhibit a capacity for fidelity--but they are of limited interest. Conrad regards them almost as a breed set apart from ordinary men. In his essay on the merchant service he writes: "Thus their simple minds had a sort of sweetness. They were in a way preserved."¹² Their strength is directly related to their lack of self-awareness. Thus Conrad castigates Cunningham Graham for his suggestion that Singleton would be "improved" by education: "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 elemental force."¹³ Conrad's real admiration for such men is qualified by his awareness of their limitations. This is indicated by the authorial narrator's verdict on Captain MacWhirr: "There are on land and sea men thus fortunate--or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea" ("Typhoon," 19). It is the aware, the imaginative, and the flawed who engage Conrad's deepest sympathies, and it is their predicament which is dramatized in his greatest fiction. The exemplar of these men--who are, almost without exception, doomed--is Jim.

Fidelity in Conrad is not restricted in its meaning to fidelity to a code or tradition. I have pointed out that in Lord Jim two concepts of fidelity--Marlow's and Jim's--are juxtaposed. Jim could be said to be faithful in that he never relinquishes his "dream" (see above, pp.63,79). Jim is a romantic, and therefore

¹² "Well Done," p. 184.

¹³ Letter 4, Letters to CG, p. 53.

something of a special case, but in Conrad's works the capacity for fidelity is very often linked to the readiness with which the idealist responds to the challenges and promises of life. Clearly it is natural for the young to trust their own generous and ardent impulses. It is even necessary, as Heyst discovers at the end of Victory: "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!!'" (Victory, 410). A recurring centre of interest in Conrad's work is the way such a person meets the crisis of disillusionment, when innocence has to come to terms with the existence of evil. This could be regarded as the central subject of Chance, the scene with the governess where Flora receives her "mystic wound" being crucial. Kurtz's fiancée in "Heart of Darkness" is another case in point. She has, according to Marlow, "a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering" ('HD' 157). In her case, however, Marlow intervenes to shield her from the truth, thereby preventing the collapse of her faith. Miss Haldin in Under Western Eyes is yet another example. She is also young and generous and idealistic. She also pins her faith on others--and, in the case of Razumov at least, this faith is misplaced. So also, perhaps, is her belief in a future time of concord and reconciliation. Yet she is sustained in her moral crisis by the knowledge that she is not unique, and by her acknowledgement of a shared humanity which unites her with others. At the end of the novel she has been "matured by her open and secret experiences" (UWE 373). She says to the narrator, "'My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now'" (UWE 376). She returns to Russia to do what she can to alleviate the plight of the suffering and the oppressed, and she preserves her belief in

"'the day when all discord shall be silenced.'" Tekla's story is another variation on this theme. She survives her experience as Peter Ivanovitch's secretary, and finds in Razumov a proper object for her compassionate care. She is, as Miss Haldin observes, "'a good Samaritan by an irresistible vocation'" (UWE 374).

These case histories help to explain the significance which Conrad attaches to the idea of solidarity. Together with fidelity, this is the moral precept which is emphasized most frequently in the essays and prefaces. At its simplest, solidarity means the solidarity of a ship's crew, and it derives from the willing commitment of its members to a common task. This is a recurring theme in Conrad's fiction, from The Nigger of the "Narcissus" to "The Shadow Line," and it is an important element in "Heart of Darkness." In its wider sense, solidarity refers to the acceptance of one's shared humanity, with all that this implies. It is this recognition which enables the idealist or the romantic to survive the crisis of disillusionment and to avoid the pitfalls of cynicism or despair. It is a stance which W.R. Martin in his article on Under Western Eyes defines as "compassionate realism."¹⁴

The importance which Conrad consciously attached to this central value is indicated by his references to it in his preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" and elsewhere. In this preface, which is also an artistic manifesto, Conrad states his belief that the artist may, by the clarity and sincerity of his presented vision, "awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity . . . which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world" (x). Indeed, in A Personal Record

¹⁴ "Compassionate Realism in Conrad and 'Under Western Eyes,'" English Studies in Africa, 17 (1974), 93.

Conrad goes so far as to claim that the impulse which led him to write had "a moral character." Why, he asks, should the memory of certain Malays, Arabs and half-castes have demanded artistic expression "except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers on this earth?" (PR 9). One must be cautious about accepting at face value Conrad's retrospective account of his decisions to leave Poland or to start writing. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of his commitment to a humanist ethic and to the idea that art has an underlying moral purpose and justification.

With a writer like Conrad it is difficult, even for critical purposes, to separate completely the man and his work. As Conrad himself admitted, "A writer of imaginative prose . . . stands confessed in his works. His conscience, his deeper sense of things lawful and unlawful, gives him his attitude before the world" (PR 95). There can be little doubt that his novels derive their vitality and strength from his compulsion to objectify--and thereby perhaps come to terms with--his own inner conflicts. In his work opposites are constantly juxtaposed, and the dramatic and thematic interest is generated by the attempt to relate and reconcile these polarities. What are the implications as far as Conrad's narrators--and in particular Marlow--are concerned?

There is, I think, a sense in which Marlow can be regarded as a surrogate for Conrad--provided that certain important qualifications are made. It would be a gross error to simply equate him with his creator; a part of Conrad also found expression in such figures as Jim, Kurtz, Decoud, Razumov, Leggatt and Heyst. It is, however, possible to regard Marlow as a bearer

of those values which are emphasized in the affirmative statements of the prefaces and essays. In the stories which he narrates, these values are challenged and threatened. The moral failure of a Jim or a Kurtz undermines Marlow's self-assurance, for neither individual can be ignored or dismissed. Marlow is forced to question radically those values or assumptions which he had to some extent taken for granted. Thus the relationship between the observer and the man with whose experience he is confronted becomes the subject of these stories. The process is one of self-discovery, and is seen at its clearest in "Heart of Darkness," where it provides the principle on which the whole work is structured and unified.

Marlow is, to use Moser's terminology, the prime example in Conrad's fiction of the "perceptive hero" (in contrast to the simple, unreflecting heroes).¹⁵ He has the capacity for self-awareness, the ability to see in a Jim or a Kurtz a potential self--yet he retains the ability to function and act responsibly. He is not incapacitated (as Brierly is) by his knowledge. He is also, as Martin points out, perhaps the clearest example in Conrad's fiction of the compassionate realist.¹⁶ His compassion is indicated when, at the end of "Heart of Darkness," he lies to protect the idealism of the fiancée. It is also indicated by his response to the whole colonial enterprise in the Congo. His revulsion against the greed, brutality and incompetence of the "pilgrims" is such that he would rather be counted along with Kurtz. A small but defining gesture is the moment when he holds out a ship's biscuit to one of the dying natives. In so doing he affirms a common humanity. If Decoud is the voice of Conrad's

¹⁵ Moser, p. 23.

¹⁶ Martin, p. 93.

scepticism, Marlow asserts and demonstrates the efficacy of commitment and action. He shares his creator's respect for what Robert Penn Warren has called "the discipline of occupation which becomes a moral discipline with its own objective laws."¹⁷ It is by going to work on the steamer that he is able to "keep [his] hold on the redeeming facts of life" ('HD' 75). In short, he is ideally qualified for his task as narrator, which is to probe into the causes of moral failure, and to expose the implications. His significance as a figure in his own right can hardly be underestimated.

¹⁷ "Nostromo," The Sewanee Review, 59 (1951), 371.

CHAPTER IX

CONRAD'S NARRATORS: SOME FINAL OBSERVATIONS

In the previous two chapters I have examined the relationships between different works, and considered the theme of isolation. I have also emphasized the importance of Marlow as a bearer of certain ideas and values. In this chapter I wish to draw attention to what one might call the rhetorical function of Conrad's narrators. At the same time I will bring together points which have been made in the chapters on individual works.

Verisimilitude is often regarded as a natural advantage of eye-witness narration. In his preface to Under Western Eyes, Conrad cites this as a justification for his use of the language teacher as narrator in that novel: "In my desire to produce the effect of actuality it seemed to me indispensable to have an eye-witness of the transactions in Geneva" (ix). This "effect of actuality" is no doubt important in explaining why, until the eighteenth century, so many fictional narratives were written from the eye-witness point of view. This is, however, not the most important or interesting aspect of Conrad's use of a personified narrator. I have suggested that one of Marlow's most important functions is to involve and implicate the reader. In "Heart of Darkness" Conrad enables us to understand the challenge of the wilderness by, as it were, taking us up the river with Marlow. As we see and feel with Marlow, as we register for ourselves the impact of the strange world into which he penetrates, so we come to share (or at least understand) his conceptual framework and to

align ourselves with his values. It is interesting to compare "Heart of Darkness" with "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad's preliminary attempt to transmute his Congo experience into fiction. The earlier story is relayed by an omniscient narrator who is detached from the events and persons described. The central theme is outlined for us in bold and summary fashion, almost in the manner of a discursive essay:

They had been in this vast and dark country only a very short time, and as yet always in the midst of other white men, under the eye and guidance of their superiors. And now, dull as they were to the subtle influences of surroundings, they felt themselves very much alone, when suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness; a wilderness rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained. They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds. Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion.¹

There is nothing here to quicken to the reader's interest.

The prose is ponderous and unleavened by any modulations of tone. Information is being relayed directly in a rather indigestible lump by the omniscient narrator, and we simply have to take what we are told on trust. The difference between this and "Heart of Darkness" is the difference between telling and showing, between exposition and presentation. Marlow's reflections emerge directly from his own experience and as part of his response to the "pilgrims," to the wilderness, and to Kurtz.

¹ Tales of Unrest, p.88-9.

In both "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim Conrad's strategy is to involve the reader, and Marlow is a means to this end, but (as I point out in Chapter VII (pp.170-71)) Marlow functions rather differently in these two works. If one traces Conrad's development from "Youth" through "Heart of Darkness" to Lord Jim, one observes that his method becomes progressively more complex. Part of my purpose in the Lord Jim chapter was to describe and account for this complexity. I pointed to the way in which we share Marlow's difficulty in evaluating Jim, and to the way in which we are exposed to a variety of possible points of view, so that the novel tests the reader's ability to respond to and retain in his mind all the aspects of the case. The reader cannot remain aloof from Marlow's investigation. As Guerard point out, "Marlow's task is also the reader's: to achieve a right human relationship with this questionable younger brother."² He suggests that Conrad's technique in this novel is designed "to invite and control the reader's identifications and so submit him to an intense rather than a passive experience."³ The success of the novel depends very much on this willing involvement on the part of the reader.

In both Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" Marlow combines sympathy and judgement in a manner which is likely to command the reader's admiration. He is both courageous and perceptive, in that he is able to admit to a kinship between himself and the sinner against human solidarity, the man who has violated the ethical norms which he himself upholds. He is unable to deny Kurtz, or to cast Jim out. His "confounded democratic quality of vision" (LJ 69)

² Guerard, p.152.

³ Ibid.

enables him to see beneath appearances or "incidentals" to the essential human being, and he shares this vision with us.

In my chapter on Under Western Eyes I suggest that the narrative situation in this novel is not entirely clear. The teacher of languages is a most un-Marlovian narrator. He professes to a limited insight into the events which he relates, and his rôle in Geneva is that of an ineffectual and largely uncomprehending eye-witness. There is, I suggest, a sense in which the Russian characters have to contend with realities which are foreign to the experience of the average Westerner. By using the teacher as narrator, Conrad presumably sought to incorporate this difference into the structure of the novel. In my chapter I examine some of the questions which relate to the teacher's function in the novel. For example, his insistence on the "otherness" of Russian experience is at variance with the reader's actual response to Razumov. (This leads to the suggestion that a kind of double irony operates in the novel.) The situation is complicated by the way in which the teacher sometimes acts as a perceptive and reliable narrator whose comments help us to understand Razumov's predicament. In fact, his whole narrative strategy seems designed to preserve the reader's sympathy for Razumov, since he delays telling us exactly what Razumov is doing in Geneva. These inconsistencies are rather awkward, especially where the teacher's astringent comments on Geneva reflect a perspective that seems identical to Razumov's! One must conclude that Conrad's handling of point of view in this novel is rather uncertain.

The narrative situation in "The Secret Sharer" is different from that in any of the first-person narratives which I have

examined. Here the narrative process is not presented, so that there is no sense of a narrator looking back to some past experience in his life. It is, in fact, impossible to distinguish the narrating self from the experiencing self. A consequence of this lack of narrative distance is that there is no scope for the processes of retrospective reflection and evaluation. We do not know what difference the perspective of time might make to the young captain's view of his actions. No further judgement is implied beyond that made by the narrator in the course of his involvement with Leggatt. An obvious contrast is with "Youth," where the mature Marlow presents with considerable irony the attitudes and experiences of his younger self. This feature makes "The Secret Sharer" almost unique among Conrad's first-person narratives. On the other hand, this helps to account for the story's success, for the reader is carried along by the uninterrupted flow of the narrative and immersed in the reality of a vividly presented fictional world. The reader almost inevitably enters into the narrator's predicament, shares his point of view, and approves his actions. This is, I would suggest, a condition of the story's success.

There can be no doubt of the quality of Conrad's achievement in "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim, and there is also little doubt that his success is related to his increasingly sophisticated use of the first-person narrator. In a valuable and well-argued article, Wallace Watson suggests that Conrad's discovery of Marlow enabled him to resolve the difficulties that beset him in his early work by allowing him to engage in analysis and reflection (via

Marlow) while at the same time preserving authorial distance.⁴ He suggests that the advent of Marlow enabled Conrad to return to the "Tuan Jim" manuscript and transform it into "a major epic of the romantic consciousness."⁵ In my introductory chapter I point out that Marlow is on the one hand distant from his creator, a part of a fictional world. Yet he owes allegiance to many of the values that we associate with Conrad himself. It is this which makes him an ideal instrument for Conrad's primary purpose, which is the probing of moral failure. We can conclude that his use of Marlow facilitated the prolonged and intensive investigation of a single case history that his temperament and artistic bent seem to have demanded. In his introduction to The Portable Conrad, M.D. Zabel offers a view of Conrad's work which has a very direct bearing on Lord Jim in particular:

His tales, with their repeated patterns of conduct, ordeal and conscience, their tenacious fixity of purpose, their deviously incremental sincerity and exhaustive analysis of static or trance-bound situations, their centripetal mode of moral and dramatic analysis, had their source in a creative necessity of a peculiar kind.⁶

An inherent limitation of the first-person point of view is that the narrator cannot see and hear everything for himself, and the only person he can really know is himself. Where the personified narrator confines himself entirely to his own experience (as in "Youth"), there is of course no problem. There are other ways of overcoming the problem. The author can arrange encounters between

⁴ "'The Shade of Old Flaubert' and Maupassant's 'Art Impeccable (Presque)': French Influences on the Development of Conrad's Marlow," The Journal of Narrative Technique, 7 (1977), 37-56.

⁵ Watson, p.53.

⁶ Introd., The Portable Conrad (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), p.11.

the narrator and other witnesses or participants who are able to fill in an essential part of the story. In "Heart of Darkness" this is achieved by Marlow's meeting with the young Russian, and in Lord Jim by his chance encounters with the French lieutenant and Brown. In addition there are times when Jim virtually takes over as narrator as he recounts for Marlow (and at the same time relives) his responses during those crucial twenty-seven minutes on board the Patna. However, Conrad's fundamental method of overcoming this limitation is much more ingenious: he has in Marlow a narrator who is able to see in Jim or in Kurtz aspects of himself.⁷ Because Marlow is in some measure able to identify with Jim or Kurtz, distinctions begin to dissolve, until we realize that the "real" Jim or Kurtz is irrecoverable. We only know what Marlow makes of him.⁸ Marlow says of Jim: "He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you" (LJ 164). In this sense Kurtz or Jim is assimilated to Marlow's consciousness. It is, however, important to recognize that this assimilation is not total, and does not mean that we lose our sense of Kurtz or Jim as another, separate from Marlow. This applies more particularly to Jim, who remains an enigma. In "Heart of Darkness," where Marlow is the protagonist, it is possible to regard Kurtz as essentially an agent in his self-discovery.

It should be clear that narrative method is not something

⁷ This point is made by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.261. They refer to "the typical Conradian compromise, in which the eye-witness . . . attempts to understand the protagonist through an imaginative sharing of his experience."

⁸ I am indebted here to Tindall, p.282.

arbitrary or extraneous to theme. I have stressed that inherent in Conrad's use of Marlow as narrator in Lord Jim is the implication that objective certainty about others is impossible.⁹ The novel offers a series of sharply contrasted subjective views of Jim, and the reader must weigh the evidence and decide where he stands in relation to Jim. Human beings are essentially elusive; readers (and critics) will continue to differ on the implications of Jim's final actions. As Dorothy van Ghent says, "In this particular book, Marlow has to exist. For Jim's 'case' is not an absolute but a relative; it has a being only in what men's minds can make of it."¹⁰ In this novel the omniscient point of view, with its implication of a single, authoritative vision, would have been impossible.

Scholes and Kellogg point out in The Nature of Narrative that the novel has "always been influenced by cultural conditions intruding into the area of esthetic choices."¹¹ Thus the tendency of modern novelists to avoid the omniscient mode "is tied to certain changes in the entire cultural climate which have made some facets of this nineteenth-century device untenable in the twentieth century."¹² In my introduction I make the point that major shifts in taste and attitude took place during the period that Conrad was writing, and Conrad was both influenced by and part of this shift. Scholes and

⁹ I also make this point in relation to "Amy Foster." (See above, pp.87-8.) Kennedy, who is also a witness-narrator, can only speculate about what might be going on in Amy's mind.

¹⁰ Dorothy van Ghent, p.237.

¹¹ Scholes and Kellogg, p.274.

¹² Ibid.

Kellogg describe this shift in the most general terms as part of a continuing movement "away from dogma, certainty, fixity, and all absolutes in metaphysics, in ethics, and in epistemology."¹³

Conrad's work, with its paradoxes, its underlying scepticism, its penetrating investigation of moral and psychological questions, and its innovations in matters of technique, is clearly a part of this general movement. This makes him an important modern writer, and helps to explain his extensive influence on subsequent novelists.

¹³ Scholes and Kellogg, p.276

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Each item is numbered to facilitate cross-reference.

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