HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF

JOSEPH CONRAD, 1900 - 1911.

A study of four novels: Lord Jim (1900), Nostromo (1904), The Secret Agent (1907), and Under Western Eyes (1911).

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**Bibliography**
A study of human relationships must seem a trifle odd, pedestrian, or even irrelevant to those who still search diligently through Conrad in order to be stimulated by his "atmospheric" passages, who still demand salty yarns from the "Prose Laureate of the Merchant Service", or who require from Conrad a "romantic" tale calling for no cerebral activity whatever on the part of the reader. However, these are not the only approaches to Conrad. My concern is with Conrad as novelist, as explorer of moral themes, and above all, as pessimistic writer. Joseph Conrad wrote best when depicting human beings, human beings in relation to each other, in relation to the society in which they lived, in relation to the world. These aspects of his work well warrant examination in terms of his themes and dominant philosophical attitude.

Human relationships form as important an aspect of Conrad's great works as almost any of the numerous other aspects that have received the attention of literary critics over the last half-century. Conrad's interest in the relationships of others and his acute awareness of his own relationship with human beings provided him with material which he used again and again to advantage. However, the human relationships portrayed by Conrad bear no resemblance to those which form the subject
of novels of certain other writers, Samuel Butler and Ivy Compton Burnett, for instance. These latter are more concerned with the intimate relationship between members of one family. In Conrad the tension which gives the relationships their dramatic interest is not so much one of temperament, but rather a tension of conflicting morality and conflicting views of life. Through human relationships Conrad develops his moral themes and reveals his own attitude to life and humanity. I intend in this thesis to examine certain types of human relationships in the works which I consider to be Conrad's greatest, in order to provide evidence with which to reassess some current attitudes on his life and work.

The human relationships in Conrad have received little beyond passing attention from his many critics. Their neglect in favour of other aspects of his art has led to the obscuring or misinterpreting of certain fundamental elements of his work. Much of the more scholarly Conrad criticism tends to place too heavy an emphasis on biographical details of his life or odd utterances in his speeches and letters in assessing his work and his attitude to life. It is from the novels themselves that we may obtain the most reliable evidence for the discovery of the attitude to life upheld in them and Conrad's general attitude to life behind them. At least this evidence is more reliable than the perambulatory speculations of certain littérateurs on choice Conradian phrases expressing the invincibility of the British Merchant Service and the indomitability of the English spirit.
Both good and bad critics tend to place too much emphasis on important characters in the novels and their psychological affiliations with their creator. This approach has often led a critic to identify a particular character’s philosophical attitude with Conrad’s. Such a critical method is useless unless the relationships of the characters with each other and the world of the novel are taken into careful account. These characters exist dramatically chiefly in relation to each other. In Lord Jim, for instance, without Marlow there could be no Jim, or if there were, he would be uninteresting. In Under Western Eyes without the Russian reactionaries and revolutionaries there could be no Razumov. While the approach to the characters as individuals is admissible in studying Heart of Darkness, and The Shadow Line, it becomes intolerable when Lord Jim is discussed as though he were the special case of a psychoanalyst. The characters exist as fictional characters in a fictional world, created in relation to each other for a serious moral purpose.

Yet Conrad scholarship has not been valueless. Certain remarks have been made by recent writers of particular importance to the subject of human relationships, and we shall first turn our attention to these. Critical writings have also been of particular value in the assessing of other subjects of direct concern to this thesis, to discussion of which the remainder of this introduction is devoted: the establishment of the "canon" of greater Conrad works from which the novels of this study were chosen, the ascertaining of the philosophical attitude behind his
works, and the discovery of certain moral themes which, especially in the greater works, provide a central interest and connecting thread.

a) Human Relationships as Subject.

Very few critical writings on Conrad are concerned with a particular aspect of his art. Even the greatest critical works are general studies which nevertheless single out certain works for close study and certain topics for detailed discussion. However, several statements have been made recently reminding the reader of the relative importance of the aspect of the human relationships in the novels, and of the contribution made by all the characters in relation to each other in the development of theme.

A. J. Guerard remarks, speaking of "The Secret Sharer":

It would be improper to forget, while preoccupied with the psychological symbolism, that Leggatt is substantial flesh and blood. The story dramatizes a human relationship and individual moral bond at variance with the moral bond to the community implicit in laws and maritime tradition. ¹

In much recent criticism of Conrad's work the moral bonds are fully recognized, but the human relationship which affects the nature of the moral bond is inclined to be forgotten. Critics tend to be preoccupied with the themes and their development in terms of a single character. In Lord Jim Gentleman Brown may be Jim's "second self" as Leggatt is

to the captain, but Brown does not exist merely as a shadowy moral entity in Jim's mind. He is a flesh and blood character, whom Jim meets and who fights with Jim using real words, displaying real passions. The psychological element is there, and is meant to be taken into account, but Lord Jim is a novel, not a "case-history", and it is worked out through a series of encounters of different men with each other. Jim's existence is limited to a work of art, not to human life. After warning the reader not to identify himself with Marlow and Stein, Guerard remarks:

Then to whom and to what should the reader attend, if not to his professed guides? The answer of course is that he should attend, eagerly yet skeptically, to everything: to the moralizing of the guides, yes, but even more to every scrap of evidence they offer by way of anecdote, digression, example. The reading of this novel is a combat: within the reader, between reader and narrators, between reader and that watching and controlling mind ultimately responsible for the distortions.¹

These conflicts are generated in the first instance by conflicts existing in the novel, between narrator and character, character and character. In this novel, and more especially in Nostromo, it is often the little detail of personality, the little fragment of conversation that adds to the development of the moral theme.

R. P. Warren, speaking of Nostromo, says:

But we cannot speak of the characters as such, for Conrad, in one sense, had little concern for character independently considered. He is no Dickens or Shakespeare, with relish for the mere variety and richness of personality. Rather, for him a character lives in terms of its typical involvement with situation and theme, the fable, the fable as symbol for exfoliating

theme, is the central fact.\(^1\)

Warren is right to turn attention away from consideration of the character as individual. Yet Conrad is also concerned with a series of human relationships between different characters in terms of their involvement with situation and theme. Warren himself implies that he has noted this when he refers to *Nostromo* as "a complex of personal stories, intimately interfused, a chromatic scale of attitudes".\(^2\)

Conrad's interest in the border-line nature of certain crimes is noted by Guerard, and also the conflict existing in Conrad himself.\(^3\) This conflict is projected into the novels by means of personal relationships, by the juxtaposition of the different points of view of certain characters, by characters who find themselves unable to pass judgment on other characters, especially in *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*. In *Under Western Eyes* Razumov himself is divided, and is wearied by demands made on him through his relationship with reactionary and revolutionary. His confession results from a longing to have done with the conflicting moralities of both sides, with the world at large for ever, not from a desire to submit to justice. In *The Secret Agent* the anarchists are firmly established as villains, but when Winnie's relationship with


\(^3\) *Conrad the Novelist*, pp.21-3.
others and with the world is taken into account, the reader begins to question whether or not she was really guilty of a moral offence.

In the four novels appraised as Conrad's best by certain academic critics I found that the treatment of human relationships reaches its greatest intensity and subtlety, and decided to try to discover why this was so. In these works a relationship is very seldom exploited to develop the narrative alone. Conrad frames even the shortest meetings of his characters in such a way that they give a new slant, a new direction, to a moral theme. Thus this study of Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes was undertaken. A close analysis was made of encounters between characters in the four novels and of personal relationships developed, and an attempt was made to discover the significance of these relationships. A less intensive study was made of relationships established in all other works of Conrad.

b) The Conrad "Canon" and the Selection of the Period.

Of greatest assistance in selecting an area suitable for this study was Thomas Moser's book, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline.¹ His work follows the remarkably small line of literary critics who make any attempt to discriminate between the good and bad Conrad. John Galsworthy's warning "It does disservice to Conrad's memory to be indiscrimi-

inade in praise of his work" has not been heeded until quite recently.\footnote{John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad", pp.195-212 of Gondolebra. New York, Scribner, 1933. P.181.}


This judgment was altered when Guerard wrote his second book, \textit{Conrad the Novelist}. Jocelyn Baines takes a similar position to Guerard's in 1947, considering \textit{The Secret Agent} inferior to \textit{Victory}.

Douglas Hewitt in his \textit{Conrad; A Reassessment} names a particular period as Conrad's best, and is forced to consider tales such as "\textit{Falk}" and "\textit{The End of the Tether}" with the major novels.\footnote{J. Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960, pp.329-330.} Less valuable attempts have been made at discrimination. There is Oliver Warner's longer book in which Warner ignores completely the remarks of Leavis and Guerard, so that while \textit{Lord Jim} enters his classification of greater novels by a bare margin, \textit{Victory} and \textit{The Rover} stand alongside \textit{Nostromo}, \textit{The Secret
M. C. Bradbrook, writing before Leavis and Guerard, notes Conrad's decline, but classes *Chance, Victory* and *The Rover* among the great novels, and considers the construction of *Under Western Eyes* awkward. Edward Crankshaw, interested primarily in technique, places *Chance* before *Under Western Eyes* without regard for their subject matter. Hugh Walpole was one of the first to note the inferiority of Conrad's early work—the clumsy development and the overcharging with "atmosphere".

Moser's analysis overshadows any of the foregoing in the attempt to find Conrad's best work and to analyse his failure. He shows that Conrad just could not deal with themes of romantic love or with sexual themes, that works in which these themes were dominant inevitably failed, and that his continuous use of these in his latter period was in part responsible for artistic failure. Moser notes as well the failure of the early works, *Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands,* and *Tales of Unrest,* which also contained romantic love themes, but which failed primarily because of immature craftsmanship. He notes the failure of

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5 *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*, see especially p.102.
certain works even in Conrad's successful period because of indulgence in sentimentality or because the tales were written quickly to bring in ready money. For whatever reason Conrad turned away from his explorations of moral failure to the more "normal" subject of novelists, and there are a number of possible reasons, his work fell from first to second rate.

In his recent book Guerard confirms Moser's view:

But I could not agree more warmly that the best work of Conrad is the work of a tragic pessimist, concerned with other kinds of masculine failure than sexual, and that his turn to "normality" was stultifying.  

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When the works of Conrad's apprenticeship and declining periods are excluded, (along with poorer works of his major period), we are left with five novels, The Nigger of the "Narcissus", Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, and Under Western Eyes, and five minor novels or tales, Youth, Heart of Darkness, Typhoon, "The Secret Sharer", and The Shadow Line.

All these works explore serious moral themes. None fails artistically because of large areas of poor writing, sentimentality, or lack of dramatic movement. Yet while human relationships in the minor works and The Nigger of the "Narcissus" are by no means unimportant, because of their length, the complexity of human relationships in them, and their formal artistic merits, the four novels of this study must be considered the greatest.

In these novels the individual spiritual problems that dominate the shorter works are still there, yet the characters are expected to grapple

1 Conrad the Novelist, p. 55.
with them, not alone, but in the presence of others who create, help create, or who modify the problems. But if human life receives its greatest complexity of treatment within these novels, so does Conrad's attitude to the meaning of life receive its fullest expression.

c) Conrad's Philosophical Attitude.

As many critics and biographers who write about Conrad make an attempt to define his attitude to life or assume that Conrad took a certain attitude, there are almost as many opinions on the subject as there are literary critics and biographers of Conrad. However, there has been an increasing tendency to consider Conrad a highly sceptical writer. Nearly all Conrad's early critics were misled by the figure of the toiling seaman with his Merchant Service morality, and the over-worked writer, also by certain utterances in his letters and in the two semi-autobiographical works, especially the famous statement in A Personal Record:

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity. 1

The early critics took such statements as these at their face value, and were either too careless, too unwilling or incapable of searching deeper into Conrad. It has taken the force of two world wars to enable men

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to see the other Conrad, the Conrad with his faith in the world torn
to shreds by sorrow, exile, hardship and attacks of illness.

It is not very strange that it was not an Englishman, but an
American, H. L. Mencken, who first noticed seriously the disturbing
nature of Conrad's works. Mencken's approach in an essay in A Book
of Prefaces \(^1\) follows a remark by Wilson Follett noting "a sense of
seeking and not finding" \(^2\) under Conrad's stories. Follett's book,
published in 1915, was already out of print when Menoken wrote. Men-
oken's remarks, published in his book in 1917 while Conrad was still
alive, were completely ignored by critics until very recently:

Conrad is forever fascinated by the "immense indifference of
things," the tragic vanity of the blind groping that we call
aspiration, the profound meaninglessness of life—fascinated,
and left wondering. \(^3\)

Another prophet in the wilderness, Stefan Napieriski, a Pole this time,
made these important observations in 1926:

It would seem that if ever anybody's work contained the maximum
of unpopular elements, it would be Conrad's. How cultivated
and sensitive—or how superficial—must his Anglo-Saxon readers
be, to have accepted this fascinating and destructive artist!
Do they not feel the despair lurking behind these truly nihil-
ostic books? . . . There are moments when one begins to doubt
whether the man who wrote these terribly logical and implacable
books was really a strong, unbroken man, whether his pathos was

\(^1\) H. L. Mencken, "Joseph Conrad", in A Book of Prefaces. New

\(^2\) Wilson Follett, Joseph Conrad, Garden City, New York, Doubleday,
Page, 1915. (Unobtainable in New Zealand.)

\(^3\) H. L. Mencken, op. cit., p.11.
not a mask, whether his heroic, tragical face did not hide some unknown, invisible misery, a misery which his whole life and his whole work were not sufficient to efface.¹

The English critics were not troubled for many years by such disturbing thoughts. One has only to look for instance at the self-assured utterances of Lord David Cecil, to realise the truth of Napierski's remarks on Conrad's "Anglo-Saxon readers".²

Of recent critics who take more than a superficial view Leavis denies Conrad a "philosophy", presumably meaning a consistent worldview, but suggests that while he believed in the morality surrounding the Merchant Service, he displayed an underlying scepticism.³ Hewitt, Moser and Guerard explore Conrad's view of life, and they reach the conclusion that he was a sceptical writer. Jocelyn Baines's book also reveals the pessimism and scepticism in Conrad's life and work. Guerard's view was not shaken appreciably between the writing of his two books, yet he does note the possibility of the spirit of the time influencing his view. Hewitt thinks that Conrad was pessimistic, but never cynical. Vernon Young considers Conrad incapable of real scepticism or real


³ The Great Tradition, p.200.
commitment. Less pessimistic views have been adopted by some recent writers. For instance R. P. Warren thinks that *Nostromo* puts forward a more optimistic view, while he admits the pessimism of Conrad himself. M. D. Zabel gives attention to the fact that Conrad's insight went much deeper into things than was revealed in his essays and personal writings, but does not explore him as sceptic. Oliver Warner has no conception of Conrad as pessimist.

It is difficult because of Conrad's reserved nature to attain a deep insight into the man, although this does not necessarily mean that E. M. Forster's suggestion is valid, "that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges", or that the self-effacing nature of the artist in attempting to conceal his personal attitude is responsible for the failure of the work of art produced. In the Author's Note to

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Notes on Life and Letters Conrad himself remarks that we never catch him en pantoufles. In essays such as these and in the autobiographical works Conrad reveals far less of his personality than he does in his novels. In the former he turns a face of courage to his audience, perhaps for a moral purpose. Yet even in the novels the use of the narrator or of a detached ironical point of view tends to make it difficult to reach any final decision on Conrad's attitude. Was it identical with Marlow's? with that of the teacher of languages? with any of the Nostromo characters? Was it consistent? Is there any attitude of any kind behind the novels?

From the works, letters, and autobiographical material it appears that Joseph Conrad's view of the world was generally pessimistic, although he may have displayed optimism intentionally when in good health, when entertaining visitors, or when writing his essays, especially those of a patriotic nature. His intimate letters reveal almost monotonously the everlasting difficulties he encountered in producing his work. Perhaps in this letter to Marguerite Poradowska he gives us the closest glimpse of the world's impression on him:

Life rolls on in bitter floods, like the grim and brutal ocean under a sky covered with dark clouds, and there are days when the poor souls who have embarked on the disheartening voyage imagine that never has a ray of sun been able to break through that dreary veil; that never will the sun shine again; that it has never even existed! Eyes that the sharp wind of grief has filled with tears must be pardoned if they refuse to see the

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1 Notes on Life and Letters, p.vi.
blue; lips that have tasted the bitterness of life must be pardoned if they refuse to utter words of hope.  

Conrad's attitude does not obtrude itself insistently in the narrative as does Hardy's, nor does Conrad himself interpose between the narrative to present his views as Butler does. Conrad's narratives are so finely worked out that the nihilistic closes of, especially, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes are inevitable.

Problems set by Conrad are very often left to the reader to solve, even the problem of defining good and evil, hence a further difficulty in discovering his attitude. If we take seriously Conrad's remarks on fidelity in A Personal Record Jim and Nostromo are guilty of a serious moral failure, and the problem ends there. If we are to take into consideration the evidence presented through the whole novel in each case, we are forced to see the multiplicity of arguments for and against, and that no final judgment is made on the situation; so that the author's attitude is almost totally eclipsed. Only very recently have critics paid much attention to this aspect, although Morf did point it out in his book, in referring to the Biblical influences in Conrad's writing:

For Joseph Conrad's style betrays truly a prophetic inspiration and if he has not become a prophet, it is because he avoids all

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solution, all definite judgment, and contents himself to lead
the reader, by the scruff of his neck, right into the centre of
a burning problem and to abandon him there.¹

This tendency may well have its origin in Conrad's personality, as
Guerard suggests:

the best work was built, nearly as much as Gide's best, out of
conflict, anxiety, fear. Conrad too was a much divided man.²

This attitude of uncertainty is not contradictory to, but in keeping
with, and contributory to Conrad's dominant attitude of pessimism and
scepticism. The affirmative person will seldom miss an opportunity
to pronounce or suggest a final judgment. The sceptic flees from
judgment, the pessimist spurns it.

Little need be said about Conrad's political and religious affiliations.
He had no religious affiliations after childhood, and his letters, works
and essays reveal little interest in contemporary politics.³ Neither
his works nor his life reveal him as a consistent aristocrat, liberal,

¹ Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, p.217. See
also Arnold Kettle, "The Greatness of Joseph Conrad", in Modern
Quarterly, New Series 3, 3:63-81, Summer, 1948, pp.76-7; and A.
J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, p.23.

² Conrad the Novelist, p.2. See also op. cit., p.57; and a
similar statement by Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph
Conrad, p.91.

³ His letters reveal the feelings of a Conservative of his time,
but do not reveal deep thought on political matters. For
instance see letter to Spiridon Kliszczewski, 19 December 1885,
letter to Hugh Clifford, 25 January 1919, op. cit., Vol. II,
pp.216-8; and letter to Elbridge L. Adams, 20 November 1922,
reactionary or revolutionary. His works reveal a scepticism towards political systems and institutions. In spite of anti-revolutionary feeling, Conrad succeeded in his work in effacing much of this.

If literary criticism were confined to England it seems quite possible that the real Conrad would still remain conveniently concealed behind the mask of patriotism and the Nineteenth Century English version of the stoic virtues. Fortunately critics in other countries have taken him more seriously, especially American critics, and have fearlessly examined the less pleasant, but greater side of his work. However, H. L. Mencken's criticism proceeds too far. In acclaiming Conrad as sceptic, Menken denies that Conrad was a moralist. While Conrad does not descend to "moralising" in the narrow sense of the term, Mencken's claim is unjustified. Because Conrad's works suggest that, in the final issue, there is no hope for mankind, this does not mean that Conrad abandoned making suggestions for man's improvement, for the easing of his burden of life. This is amply demonstrated by certain themes that recur throughout his work.

d) Conrad's Moral Themes.

As has been amply demonstrated by recent critics, especially Moser and Guerard, a number of important moral themes appear throughout Conrad's work, but with a particular intensity in his great work. These themes

\footnote{A Book of Prefaces, p. 34.}
are concerned with man's human limitation, at personal and public levels, with his moral decadence, with the question of moral standards, or the lack of them, and with man's plight within existing moral systems.

In Conrad moral themes and human relationships are closely linked together. This is so in spite of the fact that Conrad's most important theme is that of human moral isolation. This theme is worked out chiefly at the personal level, through human relationships. For instance Razumov's moral isolation is intensified immeasurably by the fact that he is obliged to associate with both reactionary and revolutionary. He hates both because he cannot consent to either creed. The themes of betrayal, guilt and atonement are also worked out at the personal level. Jim's official trial is of little importance. Marlow's trial, conducted over a number of years with many witnesses, is of great importance. The evidence and opinions of these witnesses is validated or negated through the relationship they establish with Marlow. The relationship established between Marlow and Jim makes it possible for Marlow to pursue Jim's soul, to discover his motives.

In Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes the political themes, also concerned with morality, are worked out once again through a series of human contacts. The people of Sulaco cannot avoid contamination by its politics because they are so entangled with each other—
nobody, not even Mrs. Gould, can avoid a certain amount of responsibility for events. In The Secret Agent it is not anarchism that the police officials have to fight, but a motley collection of individual human beings each of whom has a different philosophy of anarchism based on his own personal background. In Under Western Eyes the Russian world hurls itself at Razumov not chiefly in the form of rival principles, but in the form of people, of Haldin and Mikulin, both of whom he hates.

The theme of egoism concerns individuals in so far as it springs from individual psychological qualities. However, in Lord Jim, Nostromo and Heart of Darkness it is never taken up as a matter between Conrad and the character concerned alone, but is developed through a relationship established between characters. For instance it is Marlow who truly perceives Jim's egoism. Self-knowledge, another theme apparently concerning individuals, is also explored through relationships. In Heart of Darkness Marlow achieves a further degree of self-knowledge through his relationship with Kurtz. The same applies to Marlow's relationship with Jim; in fact the border-line nature of Jim's crime is established chiefly because Marlow is almost forced to admit that he would have acted as Jim did. The Captain's attainment of self-knowledge through his relationship with Leggatt is the central theme of "The Secret Sharer". The theme of the human being's longing for peace, even at the price of self-destruction is one of the few examined in terms of individuals. Decoud's and Winnie Verloc's suicides have no onlookers. It is from himself and no other that Jim appears to want to escape in
the end—Marlow is no longer there. However the destruction of two characters is brought about partly through a relationship. Brierly's suicide is shown to be partly the result of some obscure act, but more especially the result of his encounter with Jim. Razumov's confession is the result of a psychological desire, but this desire is brought about by his relationship with Haldin, the Russian police, the revolutionaries, Mrs. Haldin and Nathalie Haldin.

In a Conrad novel the characters are not left on desert islands to discover their moral isolation, their guilt, their egoism, their lack of self-knowledge. They do not necessarily make the discovery themselves at all. Some, like Jim, are incapable of doing so. In the great novels there is always someone else who shares, or tries to share, or who hinders. Conrad implies through these moral themes that we must try to help, to understand our fellows in their predicament, but he shows how hard, how almost impossible it is to do this.

Thus we see that human relationships do have an important part in the greater Conrad novels. While they are not central subjects of Conrad's novels as they are to novelists concerned specifically with family relationships, they do develop into themes themselves, or have a most important functional value in the working out of moral themes and in the unobtrusive implanting of Conrad's pessimism and scepticism. We must now look more closely at the human relationships themselves, as the critics have approached them and as they appear in
different forms through Conrad's work.
CHAPTER TWO

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN CONRAD — THE BACKGROUND

a) The Critical Background.

Through early Conrad criticism the human element in his work was seldom considered important, and his critics did not come to grips seriously with the attitude to life revealed in it. Indeed a considerable stretch of imagination would be necessary to call some of the early writings on Conrad "literary criticism" at all. While the works of Conrad did attract the notice of leading authors and literary men of his day, it appears that their writings, which seldom went beyond appreciation, misinformed destructive criticism or biographical anecdote, were uniformly superficial; they paid little or no heed to those aspects of Conrad's work now considered worthy of critical attention. It is a pity that Conrad criticism began so badly, since much space has been wasted since by critics refuting or qualifying statements made by these early writers, especially Richard Curle and F. M. Ford. H. L. Mencken's¹ and Stefan Napier's² essays are the only notable exceptions to the general dullness.

Mencken's pungent writing is strongly personal and undisciplined, con-

¹ "Joseph Conrad", in A Book of Prefaces. Pp. 41-64.
taining within itself a philosophy of pessimism and an attack on English
superficiality, yet he is the first to acclaim Conrad as one of the
world's great pessimistic writers. The extract which Morf publishes
of Napier'ski's essay endorses Mencken's remarks, as we have seen. G.
J. Aubry's official biography, published in 1927, is reasonably
scholarly, but contains inaccuracies. Henry James makes one or two
perceptive remarks, but much of his study is unimportant.

Since Conrad's time a large number of general studies of varying
standards have been produced by essayists, compilers of books on literary
criticism, writers of prefaces to anthologies, and others. Most of
these are too short and too generalised to be of significant value.
Certain more specific studies, for instance those of J. W. Beach and
Dorothy Van Ghent are excellent within their own sphere. Other short
studies, for instance those of Forster and Galsworthy, are important

1 See above, pp. 15-16.
3 Henry James, "The New Novel, 1914", in Notes on Novelists: With
4 J. W. Beach, "Impressionism: Conrad", in The Twentieth Century
Pp. 357-365. Beach's analysis of the technique employed
in Lord Jim is excellent.
5 Dorothy B. Van Ghent, "On Lord Jim", in The English Novel. New
6 E. M. Forster, "Joseph Conrad: A Note", in Abinger Harvest.
seminal works which have been overshadowed since they were written. A number of essays have a particular relevance to the subject of human relationships. Arnold Kettle's study, "The Greatness of Joseph Conrad", draws attention to a theme of Conrad's work often forgotten, the social nature of man, a theme of major importance to my study of the relationship between the individual and human society. Some of R. P. Warren's remarks on Nostromo are relevant to other novels studied. The "complex of personal stories" to which he refers is also present in a lesser degree in Lord Jim, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes. M. D. Zabel, Vernon Young and Irving Howe are deeply concerned with Conrad's attitude revealed in Under Western Eyes. R. W. Stallman's criticism of "The Secret Sharer" is important indirectly since he notes both the internal and external conflicts in that work, and points to the relationship between it and other works.

Since 1930, when Gustav Morf published his study, a number of more detailed studies, some good, some mediocre, have been produced. Morf's

book was the first really to explore Conrad's philosophical attitude, and, in spite of his over-straining of biographical influences in Conrad's work, and his far-fetched psychological interpretations especially of *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, he displays a keen perception of Conrad's sense of isolation, and opens the way to many developments in later criticism. Crankshaw's book is unfortunately rather undisciplined, so that at times poor Conrad is lost sight of while a lengthy dissertation on the art of the novel is interposed, often with a musical comparison.¹ Gordon's study is very scholarly, but concerned only with Conrad's early work.² F. R. Leavis's great work, in spite of certain misjudgments, was to draw public and critical attention to some of Conrad's best work, especially *Nostromo*. M. C. Bradbrook's book made a quieter impact on the critical world, but is none the less scholarly.³ M. D. Zabel's article in the *Sewanee Review* and his introduction to *The Portable Conrad* both warrant particular attention as two of the most perceptive pieces of criticism ever produced on Conrad.⁴ Since Zabel wrote, almost every aspect touched on by him has been expanded by later writers. Although much

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¹ *Joseph Conrad; Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel.*


³ *Joseph Conrad; Poland's English Genius.*

of the work of these critics has been overshadowed since they provide a useful background to the study of some of the more important issues of Conradian criticism, especially the establishment of the Conrad "canon" and the determination of Conrad's philosophical attitude. The poorer studies fail most often because they are not sufficiently selective in their treatment. For instance Paul Wiley¹ and Oliver Warner² devote so much space to discussion of works of inferior quality that the great works receive nothing beyond the most superficial treatment.

The work of Guerard, Hewitt, Moser and Baines is particularly valuable. In submitting Conrad's work to close, careful analysis they give due emphasis to its human elements and moral interest, and show deep concern for the discovery of the secrets of its artistic greatness. Guerard is a self-confessed intentionalist, and although his analysis does go far beyond the mere seeking of Conrad's aim his chief concern is the search for the author in the background. Luckily Baines detaches his "criticism" and "biography" so well that the "critical biography" does not become "biographical criticism". However, the result does tend to string things out to enormous length, and, as all writings have to be accounted for as part of the biographical scheme,

space is wasted in giving a critical account of many works unworthy of it.

While a few critics are willing to draw attention in general terms to the "complex of personal stories, intimately interfused", as R. P. Warren does¹, or to make reference to the fact that Marlow's and the reader's task is "to achieve a right human relationship" with Jim as Guerard does², even the greatest of the critics are inclined to disregard the complex and examine the personal story individually, in the hope that the particular character's attitude is sufficiently representative of Conrad's, or to forget about the "right human relationship" in their preoccupation with moral problems. Warren himself is caught out when, in his criticism of Nostromo, he gives Captain Mitchell's view too prominent a place on its own as the "official view"³, without regard for Mitchell's relationship with such people as Monygham, who considers Mitchell's view useless, or Nostromo, whom Mitchell idolises, or with the Sulaco population in general, who consider Mitchell a pompous eccentric. Were the critics to turn "eagerly yet skeptically, to everything", to "every scrap of evidence", as Guerard recommends⁴, they would not lose themselves in lengthy dissertations on the "destructive element" or in

² Conrad the Novelist, p.152.
attacks on Conrad for displaying a hatred of Russia. Stein's opinion might be given its proper place in terms of his relationship with Marlow, and in terms of Marlow's relationship with the other commentators on Jim's situation, and the full extent of Conrad's personal withdrawal behind the complexity of Under Western Eyes could be assessed. General vague appreciation, undiscriminating biographical criticism, and loose character studies have given way to closer analysis based on the text. Such steps have been advantageous to the examination of Conrad's particular form of art. We may still look even closer, and pay attention not so much to the significant situation, the significant character, but to the relationship between the characters in terms of the situation. By this we may discover further the significance of the situation, and further establish Conrad's position behind it.

To carry out this closer study, it is best to divide the human relationships in Conrad's work up into four divisions which are fairly clear-cut and have very different shades of emphasis. Conrad's treatment of human relationships of an official nature is distinct from his treatment of those employed chiefly to develop the moral themes. Relationships between men and between men and women form a second and third category. The fourth, the relationship between the individual and human society, is a theme on its own and will be examined last.


Through his earliest days in exile in Russia, through his youthful
Mediterranean adventures of gun-running and supporting the Spanish Carlist faction, and through his mature life as a seaman, Conrad was confronted by a whole host of officials of various kinds—police officers, customs officers, port officials, court officials, trading officials, clerks, official examiners—not to mention the Censor of Plays during his literary career! Many of these inevitably appear as a class dotted here and there through his writings. Conrad's attitude, no doubt sprung from the fact that many of his encounters with officials had a hampering effect on his activities for what seemed to be no useful purpose, and partly inherited from that of the mentor of his early years, Dominic Cervoni¹, was one of uniform contempt towards officialdom, usually amused, but occasionally bitter. The amusement is reflected in the fact that nearly all of the officials portrayed, in spite of their exalted positions, are simple, imperceptive men, of Moser's "simple hero" classification², and their behaviour and utterances are invariably limited to their mentality. The Conradian official lacks the imagination which will enable him to identify himself or sympathise to any great extent with those with whom he comes into contact. An egoist, he is unable to perceive complexity in others, is always eager to simplify, to pigeon-hole people into "good" and "bad" categories, to take a "black and white" view of history. Sometimes innate simplicity is considered a pre-requisite of their calling, as is Chief Inspector Heat's in the


² Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, p.15.
He had gone even so far as to utter words which true wisdom would have kept back. But Chief Inspector Heat was not very wise—at least not truly so. True wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions, would have prevented him from attaining his present position. It would have alarmed his superiors, and done away with his chances of promotion. His promotion had been very rapid. ¹

The officials are extraverts who seldom have any conception of the meaning of scepticism or pessimism, or if they have they display it only to themselves. Their belief in the particular system or institution they stand for is absolute, as is their adherence to the code of morality attached to it, be it Mitchell's Ocean Steam Navigation Company or General T—'s Russia. Thus contempt came naturally to Conrad, himself pessimistic of most human institutions.

Because of his very nature the Conradian official cannot give an account of himself or perceive his failings, therefore a relationship is needed to throw his behaviour into relief. This is most often portrayed between an official and an outsider, except in The Secret Agent where there is a chain of relationships between subordinates—Home Secretary, Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector. The outsider is usually more perceptive than the official. He tries to see through to the mind of the man saying his set piece to find the key to the stratagem, if there is a stratagem. In his interview with Councillor Mikulin, Razumov considers the attempt to force Mikulin to show his

¹ The Secret Agent, p.84.
hand a kind of macabre game.

Through the four novels in this study there is a fair sprinkling of official relationships. In *Lord Jim* there is the official court of inquiry which receives its due amount of satire, but no official relationship. In *Nostromo* there is Captain Mitchell who never appears before anybody in "private" capacity, even when imprisoned, and Charles Gould, who, on Holroyd's insistence, maintains an official coldness towards the Costaguana inhabitants. In *The Secret Agent* there are the relationships between Verloc and the embassy officials and between the police officials. In *Under Western Eyes* there are the relationships between Razumov and the Russian officials.

In these Conrad gives leash to the tremendous store of humour which rose above the toils of his existence, except for the interviews in *Under Western Eyes* in which Razumov's bitterness and fear smothers the humour. These official relationships do not stand apart from, but in fact are invaluable to the structure of the respective novels. Captain Mitchell's harangues to important visitors provide the reader with the superficial guide-book view of Sulaco, the only view to reach the outside world, which by examination of the facts he is able to contrast to the truer reality. Those in *The Secret Agent* provide links in the chain of the strata of society chosen by Conrad.¹ The

¹ See below, p.116.
two in *Under Western Eyes* are of tremendous dramatic importance. The scene leading to Councillor Mikulin's "Where to?" has to carry the reader through the whole of the following two parts until the return at the beginning of Part Four. The atmosphere of tension created in these two scenes make them most uncomfortable for the reader to witness, especially the latter in which Razumov is driven to abnormal behaviour.

Outside the four novels there are also many encounters of an official nature, some of which must be mentioned to show the general pattern of official relationships.

Conrad's encounters with Board of Trade examiners, of which an account is given in *A Personal Record* must have had a profound impression on him. Besides a reference to one of these sessions in *Chance* certain official encounters, especially those in *Under Western Eyes*, have an examination aura about them. The personal nature of the examination, resulting not in a battle of knowledge but of personality, is mirrored by Razumov's battles with General T— and Mikulin, and Razumov's overwrought mind resulting in confused statements and even abnormal behaviour may well have had its origin in Conrad's fears during his periodic visits to examiners. The isolation Conrad experienced during

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1 *Under Western Eyes*, p. 99.
2 *A Personal Record*, pp. 112-120.
3 *Chance*, p. 5.
examinations, the test and fear of failure, which for Conrad would be moral failure as well, are themes appearing in official encounters through his works.

Here and there throughout the works is a striking relationship of an official nature. Perhaps the best of all is the encounter between the young officer and Captain Ellis, the "deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas" in The Shadow Line. In Chance another young officer faces a milder official, who nevertheless confronts him with a formidable Act of Parliament. Here follows a comment on official morality which reminds the reader of the state of affairs in Sulaco:

"I was confounded at the idea, but Mr. Powell made me soon see that an Act of Parliament hasn't any sense of its own. It has only the sense that's put into it; and that's precious little sometimes."  

In The Rescue Conrad tries to break the egoism of Mr. Travers, one of his officially-minded extraverts. The Lingard-Travers relationship could have proved interesting had Conrad not allowed Travers to degenerate into a stereotype or Lingard to pursue Mrs. Travers. Similar rough handling to that received by Travers is given to Mitchell by Sotillo in Nostromo, but Mitchell's spirit is far stronger than Travers's and both it and his principles survive. Heart of Darkness contains Conrad's most scathing attack on a race of officials, the Belgian administrators

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1 The Shadow Line, p. 30.
of the Congo. Every one of these "imperialists" whom Marlow encounters has the same callous, blind, apathetic nature, whose ideals are nevertheless made a mockery of by the heat, death and disease in the land.

The Conradian officials seldom approach the nature of stereotypes. Although many of them have similar qualities, they are all individually drawn, some, for instance Councillor Mikulin, to quite a high degree of complexity. However, Conrad's portrayal of human relationships reaches its greatest complexity where there is a moral barrier, not where there is an official barrier. Although the moral themes are definitely developed through the portrayal of official relationships, they receive their most intensive development in the portrayal of relationships between men of a more friendly nature than those maintained at a purely official level.

c) Human Relationships between Men.

In early life Conrad was forced, as seaman, to associate with men far more than with women. Except for one or two romantic contacts, he had few intimate dealings with women, and until his marriage, by which time his attitude was fixed, he had little opportunity to have more than superficial dealings. His dealings with men, however, were numerous and diverse, and his acute interest in moral problems facing the masculine world provided him with an enormous bulk of material which he used to advantage in his great works.
It is through this moral interest that the dramatic tension of the human relationships is sustained. In *Lord Jim* the relationship between Marlow and Jim is most important, but almost equally important are Marlow's encounters with the host of minor commentators on Jim's situation, and Jim's encounter with Gentleman Brown. In *Nostromo* the relationship between the individual and the state of Sulaco is a major theme, but this relationship is determined by the individual's reaction to other people, so that all the many personal encounters are worth consideration. *The Secret Agent* may be considered as a series of encounters through a miniature strata of society, mostly masculine. *Under Western Eyes* is concerned with Razumov's relationship with a world which is masculine except for some of the revolutionaries, who are devoid of most feminine attributes anyway, and Nathalie Haldin, whose relationship with Razumov is rigidly controlled to confine it to the moral sphere.

Throughout these works the relationships between men seldom fail in artistic portrayal, whether their treatment is lengthy, like the Marlow-Jim relationship, or brief, like the account of Marlow's meeting with Chester. Marlow's complexity is fully developed because of Jim. Razumov's is developed because of the various Russians who assail him. None of Conrad's men in these four books stand alone; the reader's perception of their character, their inner moral being, grows in proportion as he sees them in relation to other men.

While Conrad's women have the habit of reacting in stereotyped fashion
to other people, the reactions of his men cannot be so predetermined. He permits them to encounter a much greater diversity of situation, and a much greater variety of people than his women. While psychological parallels may be found between Razumov's and Jim's characters, the people they encounter are of a vastly different order, and their reactions to these separate them immensely.

Very close attention is given to these relationships in the analysis of the four novels. In some of the successful shorter works and in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" relationships between men are portrayed directly related in type to some in the four novels. The whole of "The Secret Sharer" is in itself the portrayal of a relationship, between Leggatt and the Captain, and it constitutes what through Conrad and perhaps through literature may be considered the archetype of the relationship of self-identification, which has its parallels in the Marlow-Jim and the Jim-Gentleman Brown relationship. Although in Heart of Darkness Marlow's attitude to Kurtz is one of curiosity and repulsion, not self-identification, Marlow gains a measure of self-knowledge through his relationship with Kurtz, as he does through Jim. Moral and physical isolation are combined in Typhoon so that although at the height of the storm Jukes and MacWhirr stumble on each other, they are worlds apart. The young officer's relationships with his sceptical or ailing associates in The Shadow Line serve to illustrate the themes and give a tone to the novel, which for all the former's elation, is predominantly sceptical. The crew on board the "Narcissus", the
"small planet" of the ship\(^1\) constitutes a microcosmic society with a series of human relationships mirrored in the somewhat larger but equally enclosed societies of the four novels.

Outside Conrad's best works the romantic love theme is inclined to dominate. However, better areas of writing most often coincide with a successful and subtle portrayal of a relationship between two or more men, as in the first chapter of *Chance*, and the lengthy Ricardo-Schoomberg conversation in *Victory*. Two tales of *A Set of Six* succeed artistically because of a successful portrayal of relationships. In "The Duel", concerned with a relationship between antagonists, not "accomplices", the moral theme develops as d'Hubert progresses over the years to a greater degree of perception, until he repudiates "honour" altogether, and supports his opponent secretly, while Feraud remains unaltered. The impact of the Caviliere from Bari on the Count in "Il Conde" is the most startling in all Conrad, as after their meeting the delicate man's fear of another encounter causes him to leave Naples which, in his case, is nothing short of suicide. Only in *The Rover*, *The Arrow of Gold*, and *Suspense* does portrayal of these relationships become uniformly tedious and stilted, where Conrad brings his people together not so much to explore each other's motives, to sound each other's depths of integrity, as to develop the narrative.

\(^1\) *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, p.29.
Conrad's treatment of these relationships between men is of great importance to the success of his best works. Had they failed artistically these works would be lowered to the inferior level of those in which love is a major theme. Their brilliant success is Conrad's triumph. It is through them that Conrad's pessimistic attitude towards humanity is chiefly asserted. In his portrayal of human relationships between men and women Conrad was not so fortunate, as we may now see.

d) Human Relationships between Men and Women.

"About his attitude towards women there is perceptible, all the way through his literary career, something of the gallant simple sailor."¹ This statement of Leavis's is very often true, and as a large area of Conrad's writings was concerned with relationships between men and women, much of it is consistently patterned, and of a uniform second or third rate standard. Moser suggests that Conrad included romantic elements in his early and later novels because it was the thing to do, not because they were an integral part of his original conception. Financial failure of his great works followed by the popular success of Chance and the laudatory comments of appreciators on this and his later efforts did not assist him in finding his blind spots.

Fortunately for the artistic success of the four novels, even when women are portrayed, romantic love elements are for the most part

¹ The Great Tradition, p.183.
excluded. However, where they do enter, the advancement of the moral theme, the dramatic movement, stops temporarily. The account of Jim's and Jewel's partnership in Lord Jim is unconvincingly sentimental, and Jewel herself scarcely exists as a character. In Nostromo the relationships between Giselle and Linda and Nostromo are treated so badly as to almost ruin the close of the novel, yet romantic love themes do not obtrude in Conrad's portrayal of Mrs. Gould, Antonia Avellanos and old Mrs. Viola. In The Secret Agent Winnie Verloc's relationship with Verloc is portrayed successfully, because of the marriage-of-convenience nature of their attachment. In Under Western Eyes the original plan, to have Razumov and Nathalie marry, was luckily abandoned, so that the moral theme remains unchallenged, and the relationship between Razumov and Nathalie limited because of the difficulties of their situation.

In the later works the romantic love theme and its allied theme of sexual repression are inclined to dominate. However brilliant the technique of narration and use of time in Chance, its subject, the elopement of a girl of marriageable age to the brother of her guardian's wife, does not shock the reader's moral sense however outrageous Conrad has Mrs. Fyne consider it, so that the novel has no movement, and fails artistically. Outside Chance Vernon Young's accusation on Conrad's

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women applies almost without exception. "They are merely victims, merely madonnas, or merely mates". The entry of the "wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" temporarily wrecks the moral theme of Heart of Darkness. The best passages in Victory are those in which Lena has no part. The significance Conrad tries to give Mrs. Travers's relationship with Lingard also falls flat. Relationships between men and women in the very early works, shorter tales, and last works are very dull.

If we disregard Antonia Avellanos and Mrs. Viola as minor characters, we find that in all Conrad three women are portrayed successfully as major characters, Mrs. Gould, Mrs. Verloc and Miss Haldin. They are not by any means the greatest women of literature, but they have at least survived their generation, and fit into their place in the novels without embarrassment. This is always because of the artistic restraint Conrad exercises in adhering rigidly to his moral themes without allowing sex and romance to obtrude at all. We do not see the Goulds together except when they are troubled about the mine. We do not see the Verloos together except when one of them is isolated from the other by a profound anxiety or distress. Razumov can never become intimate with Nathalie Haldin because of his secret. Moser's statement "In Nostromo . . . Conrad created his only truly successful characterisation of a woman,

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1 "Joseph Conrad: Outline for a Reconsideration", in Hudson Review, 2:5-19, Spring, 1949, p.16.
2 Youth—A Narrative; and Two Other Stories, p.135.
Mrs. Gould is not quite true. Mrs. Gould is certainly Conrad's most rounded feminine character, but the portrayal of the other two succeeds artistically also.

As Leavis implies Conrad displays a "shore-leave" attitude to most of his women, which absolves them from moral responsibility, over-emphasises but does not individualize their "romantic" qualities, and leaves them poorly drawn stereotypes with few personal attributes or accomplishments. Portrayal of relationships between men and women is one-sided in Conrad. The point of view is nearly always the man's. The woman is allowed few words to express herself, often because of her frigidity towards the man. If one of Conrad's "romances" is read the reaction and behaviour of his women to a given situation in any other may be guessed. They are seldom permitted to meet many people. As Conrad develops his characters most successfully by bringing them into contact with a diversity of people, the confinement of his women to the entreaties of their harrassed spouses and the oppressive persecutions of their abnormally protective guardians does not assist this development.

As we have seen Conrad's portrayal of relationships between individuals is highly varied within the different types, while each type has many elements in common. However, Conrad did not confine his interests to the association of individuals. He was concerned deeply with a wider relationship, the relationship between the individual and the group, the society, of the world of his novels. Through this
relationship the moral themes are given a stronger, a cosmic power, as the failure of the individual may jeopardise the safety of the whole group. We must now turn our attention to this wider interest which appears again and again especially in his great work.

e) The Relationship between the Individual and Society.

This theme has not received the critical attention it deserves. While from their various critical positions of optimism or pessimism, writers have expressed their views on the "one of us" morality to which Jim is obliged by birth and upbringing to adhere, the problems of Razumov's loyalty, even of Nostromo's, have been passed over by most critics in silence. The theme is most important from the point of view of the establishment of Conrad's philosophical position. It is impossible to look at the hopelessness of the close of The Secret Agent, and its picture of the little Professor alone in the indefinable multitude, or at Razumov and his despair at the impact of the individual on the Immensity of Russia and insist that Conrad maintains a philosophically optimistic point of view in these novels. Conrad's statement would seem to be that a man's impact on the world, however great he may seem to those around him, whatever his reputation, is in reality negligible, and never worthwhile. Conrad's scepticism is also displayed in the way in which he leaves the "cases" of Jim's and Nostromo's true relationship with society open. Jim's behaviour implies a sense of guilt, Nostromo is defiant, but were they guilty? Of what?
To discuss the problems connected with this theme we must focus attention on certain characters, and consider their relationship with the human society in which Conrad places them, in terms of the moral themes. Arnold Kettle is the only critic who draws special attention to the link between Conrad's moral interest and his interest in the social structure. Among what Kettle considers the four greatest achievements of Conrad as novelist is one, Conrad's understanding of the social nature of man. Kettle insists that this is "The most important fact of all to Conrad". Conrad develops his tension by giving significance to the isolation of his men from the moral systems of the various societies he portrays. Moral as opposed to physical isolation implies some form of moral system, which must be imposed by a society, be it the Merchant Service or the republic of Costaguana.

Kettle and R. P. Warren are the only critics to draw special attention to this theme. Kettle lists these among Conrad's problems in employing his method in Nostromo:

To suggest the almost infinite inter-relatedness of character and background; to give each character a real individuality and yet see each as part of a concrete whole; in short, to show men in society.

R. P. Warren mentions the theme in outlining various types of Conradian

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The characteristic story for Conrad becomes, then, the relation of man to the human communion.  

The Conradian character has received much attention from Moser and others especially in terms of Conrad's attitude to him, but not so much from this point of view. While Conrad felt his own share of isolation, as exile in Russia, France, and England, as sea captain among writers, this did not only lead him to withdraw from society; it led to a strong desire for friends, a longing to be with others. Kettle is right to say "That is Conrad's nightmare: man divorced from society", and to point out that this divorce is not considered in terms of denial of social obligation, romantic individualism or psychological neurosis.

Conrad envisages even his smallest group of men, the ship's crew, as a society, united yet disunited, battling its way against the external plight of the elements and the internal plight of threatened disruption. The Nigger of the "Narcissus", especially, but also Typhoon and The Shadow Line are concerned with this theme. It occurs also in the larger units of society presented in the four novels under discussion. In Lord Jim Conrad considers Marlow's and Jim's relationship with society, and the tension Marlow experiences in trying to reconcile the English "one of us" morality and Jim's case. In Nostromo Conrad

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2 Arnold Kettle, op. cit., p.81.
looks closely at the relationship between the state of Costaguana and certain individuals. He poses the reader with the problem of Nostromo's responsibility. In *The Secret Agent* Conrad presents us with an intense picture of one of the most startling incidents that ever occurred in the London of his day, yet he shows how negligible its effect was against the immensity of humanity. In *Under Western Eyes* Razumov's situation is treated with similar intensity, yet Razumov himself is a pawn easily discarded by the two immense conflicting societies of Russia.

The individual is confronted with the morality of society. But it is not only the individual who is challenged by the society; to an extent the society is challenged by the individual's case. The "one of us" morality does not appear to have much to do with Jim's case. The Ten Commandments appear to be suspended in Sulaco during revolutions, so why should Nostromo's case be an exception? How can Winnie Verloc be expected to follow society's morality when by her nature she can know nothing whatever of society? Can Razumov be blamed, really, for not committing himself irrevocably to either the reactionary or revolutionary side of Russian politics? Hence, on the cosmic level, what is man's responsibility in the world? Is there an adequate moral system, somewhere, to cover every situation? Through these novels Conrad implies that there is not, that there is a point where every moral system will break down, and that man's groping towards judgment
The world of the Conrad novel is not a phantasy world, nor is it a world of interior monologue, a man's mind shut off from the external world. Over the past fifty years, with the development of psychoanalytic study, critics have seized on Conrad's insistence, in his famous Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" on the artist's descent into the "lonely region of stress and strife" to find the terms of his appeal. But Conrad insists that they must do this confronted by the spectacle of the "visible universe". Conrad's visible universe is primarily a world of human beings and their conflicts. "Ship! . . . Ships are all right. It is the men in them!" insists old Singleton of the "Narcissus". We may turn now to look more closely at the human situations in Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes and see how clearly they reveal Conrad's vision of life and humanity.

1 The Nigger of the "Narcissus", pp. vii-viii.
The chief human problem with which Conrad confronts the reader dramatically in Lord Jim is the question of Jim's guilt. This question provides the dramatic interest behind the central human relationships between Jim and Marlow and between Jim and Gentleman Brown, and behind the minor relationships between Marlow and the chorus of commentators on Jim's situation. Nostromo is more complex as the guilt of the state is in question as well as that of the hero, but in Lord Jim, through various relationships and in Marlow's mind the question of Jim's guilt is intensely debated. Marlow reveals that the morality of officialdom has no place in Jim's case. The court of inquiry is of no use whatever; it is concerned with how the Patna came to be deserted by her officers, not why Jim jumped from her, which is the real yet unasked question in the minds of those present. Therefore apart from the official court scene Conrad gives us none of his typical "official relationships" as he does in the other works we shall consider. To counterbalance this the most complex human relationship in all Conrad appears in Lord Jim, the one which must remain in the memory of all serious readers of Conrad, the relationship between Marlow and Jim.

However, the dramatic interest of the central question is not
sustained throughout Lord Jim. The novel contains structural weaknesses which may be more certainly determined than those in the three other novels. The critics have taken pains to justify the two parts with much success; in fact criticism asserting that the novel's parts are irreconcilable is no longer to be taken seriously. If it is to have its intended impact the division must be allowed as a convention suitable to it. Yet there are weaknesses, especially in the second part. Guerard is right in suggesting that with the novel's transition from moral to physical peril, and with the attempt to write affirmatively, Conrad's imaginative faculty was impaired, so that much of Jim's "success" story is exceedingly dull.\(^1\) The portrayal of Jim's and Jewel's attachment contributes to this failure. As there are no significant official relationships we shall first examine the relationships in the second of my four divisions.

a) Human Relationships between Men.

The relationship between Marlow and Jim has received a number of critical comments. Some of Guerard's are especially relevant. Critics have noted that Marlow has an important place in this novel besides that of narrator. Leavis remarks that he "is the means of presenting Jim with the appropriate externality, seen always through the question, the doubt, that is the central theme of the book."\(^2\) Marlow is deeply

\(^1\) Conrad the Novelist, pp.167-71.

\(^2\) The Great Tradition, p.189.
involved in Jim's situation, so involved that every progressive event in the story, every encounter with Jim himself and with the large number of other characters has a profound effect on him, provoking thought and moralising. In his analysis of the three types of Conradian hero, Moser ascribes the important role of perceptive hero to Marlow, as opposed to the simple hero (e.g. Captain MacWhirr) and the vulnerable hero (e.g. Jim). The perceptive hero can perceive his own fallibility, but he commits no act of "failure". In spite of a certain detachment, Marlow enters the novel's action to the extent that dramatically the reader is interested in Marlow's progress in the situation as well as Jim's.

Through Marlow the "question", the "doubt", the borderline nature of Jim's case is established. Guerard points out that Marlow is divided in himself. In noting the importance of their relationship he later searches Marlow's motives in pursuing Jim's case, and discovers them to be revealed at times as selfish. Jim becomes Marlow's potential criminal self, and Marlow, in being Jim's "ally", "helper", and "accomplice", pleads for himself as well. Yet Marlow's interest is not only an objective one in Jim's case, in the series of tests over a number of

1 Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, pp. 16, 28.
2 Conrad the Novelist, p. 17.
3 Lord Jim, p. 93.
4 Conrad the Novelist, p. 147.
years and in Jim's final disaster, but is also a much more involved interest in Jim as a man, originating from first observations of Jim among the Patna crew and later. Let us look closer at the movement of these two strands through the novel, at the themes developed through them, and the part the reader must play as he stands beside Marlow.

The Jim-Marlow relationship begins in public. In the court-room Jim singles out Marlow and notices the difference between his glance of "intelligent volition" and the "fascinated stare" of those present. Marlow's is the only face which shows any sympathy. Yet Marlow has already singled out Jim from the Patna crew as one who does not fit into place in his imagination with the others. Their manner and appearance are what Marlow expects. Jim's apparently careless manner is oddly deceptive, as in reality he is far more concerned with the affair than the others. It is deceptive in another way too, for the bearing of Jim is such that Marlow would have automatically trusted him. This makes Marlow apprehensive, involves him morally. It is perhaps this that leads Marlow to seek a shadow of an excuse for him.

Jim's apology startles Marlow too, so that he sums up the riddle with which he has been confronted:

1 Lord Jim, p.32.
"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."¹

Marlow's incomprehension remains throughout. His conversations with Jim or about Jim reveal no more than a series of glimpses. When the reader is left to patch them all together he still has a very imperfect view.

Through the conversation which follows in the hotel dining-room, with its background of mail-boat passengers, the themes of isolation and self-knowledge are developed side by side. The isolation is two-fold, between the intensely serious moral world with which Marlow and Jim are concerned and the casual world of the mail-boat passengers, and between Marlow and Jim themselves, who cannot successfully bridge each other's levels of perception. Marlow cannot bring Jim to self-knowledge, or force him to face practically his troubles and the future. Jim says "—I would like somebody to understand—somebody—one person at least! You! Why not you?"² Marlow can only listen without understanding, as he has already observed: "I wanted to know—and to this day I don't know, I can only guess."³

As he gives his account, Jim makes every possible effort to justify

his jump and flight from the sinking Patna, on which he was an officer. He mentions the crumbling bulk-head, the confusion that would arise if he were to give the alarm, and other excuses, but in all he over-pleads his case to the extent of betraying himself in an effort to bolster himself up to Marlow. To the official court of inquiry such details are, naturally, irrelevant, yet these and the way Jim presents them may be vital evidence to the court the reader is expected to hold. In his attempt to provide further evidence Conrad lets us see the preparations for departure through Jim's eyes. To the other scoundrels of officers, who have their own situation well in hand, the procedure is obvious, and it is with a completely different world that Jim comes into contact on deck, so different that he does not grasp the fact that they intend to abandon the ship.

The narrator pauses amid Jim's pleading, moralises concerning their relationship, and gives an account of Jim's impact on him. Marlow is conscious of attending, watching something like a ritual, between Jim and Jim's inner soul, with its aim to win over Marlow. The reader must be willing to share, too, in the "subtle and momentous quarrel", to "see . . . merely the human being", before he can reach

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the inner depths of Jim's situation:

"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 . . . He appealed to all sides at once—to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge. He swayed me."¹

Jim's isolation from Marlow because of their different levels of perception is particularly acute here, even when Marlow feels most strongly his self-identification. To Marlow Jim is both too subtle and too simple; too subtle in his motivation, but too simple to account for it to the world.²

After his reflections Marlow lets Jim continue his self-justification, how he considers himself wronged by circumstance; the event did not overtake him "on the square". Marlow fights this one back, "It is always the unexpected that happens."³ Jim does not fight back, nor does he admit defeat, he only curses. When Jim tells of the approaching cloud, and of the psychological effect on him of the first swell,

Marlow again feels the power of Jim's argument:

"I was being bullied now, and it behoved me to make no sign lest by gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself which would have had some bearing on the case."¹

Marlow recoils on consideration of Jim's exaggeration. When Jim is brought to semi-admission of what happened, Marlow realises his helplessness before Jim's problem:

"'I had jumped . . .' He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . .'It seems,' he added.

"His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumbfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster."²

At the beginning of Chapter Eleven Marlow's short glimpse behind the mists surrounding Jim's existence is curtailed by Jim's reference to Marlow's age, a further barrier to mutual understanding. Jim attempts to comment on the morality of his situation, but he does not follow Marlow's irony and does not retaliate. Marlow again tries to bring Jim to self-knowledge, to realisation of his limitations. This is impossible. Jim and Marlow are isolated in mentality as well, so that Marlow can make no inroad into Jim's soul. Jim still pleads so desperately for himself:

"And so you cleared out—at once."

"Jumped," he corrected me incisively.¹

Marlow, too, is unwilling or too tired to come to the point of any affirmation on the problem. Jim's "What do you believe?" receives no reply.²

When the novel returns later to the conversation in the Malabar House, we are given perhaps our deepest insight into Jim's morality. Jim's reaction to the suggestion that he clear out is so heartrending to Marlow that he becomes brutal in a verbal attack. It is quite clear however that over this Marlow, the practical man, and Jim, the idealist do not speak the same language. Jim's "I may have jumped, but I don't run away" is stupid to Marlow.³ Their vision of the morality surrounding human institutions is totally different. Although Jim recognises that the court's proceedings are so much nonsense, he will not run away. He insists on trying to fight it down. He does not realise that he is trying to fight down his own vision of himself. The leave-taking of Marlow shows Jim's terrific preoccupation with himself, his egotistical self-abasement, his fear that other people might look at him as he looks at himself. It also shows the full depth of Marlow's self-identification:

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"God forgive him—me! He had taken it into his fanciful head that I was likely to make some difficulty as to shaking hands."

"God forgive him—me!" Marlow's self-identification is almost unconscious, perhaps merely a slip of the tongue or a reflection. Through their conversation Jim tries, in his halting way, to make Marlow identify himself with him, to admit that given the circumstances he would have done the same. Against this Marlow fights, but here he gives in. It is very reluctant and only momentary, for a large part of Marlow despises Jim.

After the trial while, with Jim present, Marlow tries to write in his room, the problem of his isolation from Jim in spite of his nearness is paramount. Because of Jim's situation, Marlow does not speak, yet his thoughts are on what is to be the eternal problem, what to do with Jim. When Jim does speak, his stammerings and confusion are worse than ever. Again Marlow comments on the great difficulties involved in helping another human being. Where a moral problem such as Jim's is involved, no help can be given, at least not to Jim. Marlow also realises how tenuous an aid human speech really is in forming such a contact:

"I at least had no illusions; but it was I, too, who a moment ago had been so sure of the power of words, and now was afraid to speak, in the same way one dares not move for fear of losing a slippery hold. 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

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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. It was the fear of losing him that kept me silent, for it was borne upon me suddenly and with unaccountable force that should I let him slip away into the darkness I would never forgive myself."

Behind Marlow's problem lies Conrad's interest in the difficulty involved in forming any kind of human contact, in the fluctuations and nebulousness of the impact of other men's existence on the lives of individuals. This concern is in keeping with his scepticism of human ability, and his vision of the ephemeral nature of things.

Jim begins his drifting existence, moving further and further away, yet the dilemma is no nearer to solution: "What difference would it make?" By this Marlow is brought to think that perhaps Brierly's answer was best: "Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there." Instead, Jim goes to Patusan. After that Marlow becomes more the passive observer and commentator on the action and plays no direct part in influencing Jim's existence. Yet the inner, second-self relationship, which has sprung up in Marlow's mind does not end there, and thus Marlow retains his intense interest in the working out of Jim's life, and still feels within himself the same attraction and repulsion to Jim, and the desire to moralise on his situation.

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After Jim's death his impact on Marlow's existence is still there, in approaching and receding waves, as it was while he was alive:

"Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments, too, when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades."1

Marlow attempts to gain a moral point of view from the whole pattern. The novel ends with a question mark, "Who knows?" and the reader is left to provide the answer—if he can. Guerard notes:

The related central preoccupation of Conrad's technique, the heart of the impressionist aim, is to invite and control the reader's identifications and so subject him to an intense rather than passive experience. Marlow's human task is also the reader's: to achieve a right human relationship with this questionable younger brother.2

This is true in so far as the reader is expected to accompany Marlow through the witnessing, the pleading, but where final judgment is involved the reader must part company with Marlow, for this Marlow does not give. Hewitt's accusation that Marlow is "muddled" is not necessarily important if the novel's purpose is to establish the divided nature of the case.3 "I had jumped... It seems"4 may constitute Jim's vindication. Marlow is uncertain. The sceptical


2 Conrad the Novelist, p. 152.

3 Conrad; A Reassessment, p. 37.

4 Lord Jim, p. 111.
Conrad behind him was perhaps no more certain, but the uncertainty presented in the novel is consistent, not muddled.

Not so complex or involved as the relationship we have been considering yet equally important from the point of view of the novel's dramatic structure is the relationship between Brown and Jim, developed in an encounter towards the end of the novel.

This relationship has received some attention from critics. Gustav Morf notes how, by his self-identification with Brown, Jim was robbed of all free-will to decide what to do with Brown.1 Dorothy Van Ghent notes that Jim identified himself with Brown in two ways, through sense of honour as well as guilt.2 In his first book Guerard attacks Morf's assertion that Jim's self-identification with Brown reduced him to immobility3, but in his later book he recants, and, while still qualifying Morf's analysis, regards it more accurate than his own first explanation "that Jim's hard-won assurance was destroyed by the fact that the first visitor from the outside world brought a reminder of the Patna, and that Jim was unwilling to shed white men's blood."4 It seems obvious to me that Morf's argument is valid here.

2 The English Novel, p.243.
3 Joseph Conrad, p.32.
4 Conrad the Novelist, p.150.
and that this is a type of relationship of self-identification, in which, as we have observed, Conrad reveals an acute interest.¹

Conrad attached great importance to Jim's encounter with Brown; to him their conflict had a kind of heroic significance, as one fought in the light of the entire background of two lives to decide an issue of fate beyond their immediate concern:

"To me the conversation of these two across the creek appears now as the deadliest kind of duel on which Fate looked on with her cold-eyed knowledge of the end."²

It is a verbal fight for moral superiority, more desperate than that between Verloc and Vladimir in The Secret Agent, and made more intense through Brown's astonishing ability to argue, to find a man's weak spot:

"What made you come here?" 'You want to know,' said Brown, bitterly. 'It's easy to tell. Hunger. And what made you?"³

On reflection Jim thinks that, perhaps, Brown's pretext for his presence might be more laudable than his. Brown's severely practical and totally unscrupulous approach has considerable advantage when opposed to Jim's reflective nature, and his conception of honour. Brown has the luck too, to have Jim covered, which does in fact reduce them to equality. The reader can imagine the impact of Brown's subtle truths

¹ See above, p. 40.
² Lord Jim, p. 385.
on Jim's mind:

"'Have we met to tell each other the story of our lives?' I asked him. 'Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine.'"

Brown flatly admits his guilt and accepts it as his whole existence:

"I haven't got any wings." He admits his weakness. He is afraid of a prison. Jim has never admitted guilt or weakness. Even when brought to the point of admission by Marlow he has evaded it. "I had jumped ... It seems." Yet Brown, by bringing Jim to the point of equality with him, physical equality, before death, and moral equality, by his subtle hints, forces Jim to admit to his own guilt if he admits to Brown's, in which case his whole world will collapse. Is it Jim's realisation of himself brought to him by Brown that makes him let Brown slip through his fingers or is it that he is still unwilling to come to self-knowledge and make an admission of guilt? Once again Conrad leaves the answer ambiguous. The reader is only given the account:

"'He just stood there with nothing to say, and looking as black as thunder—not at me—on the ground.' He asked Jim whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man trying to get out of a deadly hole by the first means that came to hand—and so on, and so on. And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their


hearts."

We can imagine Jim's mind, the effect of the echo of the Patna, the "deadly hole" image (cf. "It was as if I had jumped into a well—into an everlasting deep hole. . . . "2), but we can only imagine, for the picture we have is one of Jim standing silently before Brown.

Again there are problems set for the reader in this relationship. To what point was Jim identified morally with Brown? to what point should the intention be considered and to what the fact itself? is moral rehabilitation possible, or must the man who has failed and tried to recover himself be considered alongside and equal before death to the man who has failed, accepted it, and made no effort at rehabilitation? As a sceptic Conrad once again leaves the problems unanswered. Jim's efforts have a certain futility about them in the end, when all his strivings are upset by a lying ruffian.

Through his portrayal of the two principal human relationships Conrad does not reveal an optimistic view of life. Yet there are other characters in Lord Jim. Where does Stein fit into this picture of scepticism, the little Teuton who so self-assuredly gives the "answer" to Jim's problem? We must turn to consider Marlow's relationship with Stein and some of the other important commentators on Jim's situation.


Many critics consider Stein's famous statement, his remedy for Jim's case, to be of great importance:

"The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me—how to be?"¹

Yet whatever interpretation is placed on the meaning of the words "destructive element" it is largely irrelevant unless considered in the context of the novel. Zabel and Dorothy Van Ghent, among recent critics, both fall into the trap of taking up seriously Stein's remarks and elaborating on them as though they were Conrad's.² Dorothy Van Ghent forgets that Conrad may have considered the remarks "sheer twaddle" as she insists the French lieutenant would have. Except Guerard they all ignore Marlow's comments here, although many seem quite happy to accept them as representing Conrad's views elsewhere. Guerard is the only critic to notice a) the ambiguity of meaning that may be attached to the remarks and the possibility that Conrad himself may have been uncertain as to his precise meaning, or may have had an ambivalent attitude, and b) that in the context of the novel, even if a meaning can be attached to them, they are not necessarily of any great value in helping Marlow to help Jim.³

In my opinion if Stein's true importance is to be established,


³ Conrad the Novelist, pp. 164-6.
it is necessary to look not only at his "significant" cryptic sayings, but at the man behind those sayings and his impact on Marlow, an impact made over a number of years. It is not for nothing that accounts of Stein's history and of his hobby of nature study are given. Nor is it for nothing that the novel concludes with a reference to Stein.

When Marlow visits Stein, he is engrossed completely in his butterflies. Marlow's existence makes very little impression on him. When Marlow can at last make an impact on him, it is by allusion to his "hobby." But Marlow has come to discuss Jim. Stein's remarks on Jim's case are not particularly helpful. Being a German, he can speak of abstractions as if he understands them. To Marlow's English mind they are not of much use. "He is romantic" is all very well, but does it mean anything? Marlow is surprised at Stein's simplification, but he goes on to ask what is good for it, and how to live. The further abstraction on the destructive element follows, with the advice "To follow the dream." Except for Guerard, critics do not trouble about the immediate context of Stein's cryptic remarks and the somewhat despairing effect they produce on Marlow:

"The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn—or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night?"

1 Lord Jim, p.212.
One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls—over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames. When at last I broke the silence it was to express the opinion that no one could be more romantic than himself."¹

Of this passage, Guerard remarks:

It associates Stein and his "conviction" with the half-lights of deception and menacing illusion; it brings Stein down to Jim's level rather than raises Jim to his.²

Despair, pessimism, are the notes of the passage. Stein's "cure" is for a special case. It has worked for himself; he cannot perceive it not working for anyone else. It does not work for Jim, who has a further test to come which will provoke the final failure. To Stein "He is romantic" produces its answer. To Marlow the seeming unreality yet the reality of Jim's existence makes him very sceptical.³

It is at Stein's next appearance that we see the result of his "case". This time we are presented with a figure of ageing impotence, both in his physical appearance and in his conversation:

"A drab saok-coat of alpaca hung, unbuttoned, down to his

² Conrad the Novelist, p. 164.
³ Lord Jim, p. 216.
Later, when Marlow is going he catches sight again of Stein's "drab coat". He cannot help Jewel even if he did suggest an answer to Jim. At the very end Marlow reflects on Stein, and the picture he gives us is one of tragedy, despair, complete impotence in age before death, from which not even his butterflies can save him:

"Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave ...' while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies."2

The enigmatic sayings of Stein have for years served as a critical tilt-yard, partly because almost any interpretation can be placed on them, partly because Stein appears first at the cross-roads of the novel. That Conrad meant this character to have considerable importance in working out the themes is highly probable. That Conrad intended Stein's remarks to be regarded as the "answer" to Jim's spiritual problem and the key to his rehabilitation is highly doubtful. It is also doubtful that Conrad intended Stein's "diagnosis" of the case to shed much light on the problem, because of its very vagueness.

Other characters by their remarks made in terms of their own environment attempt to throw some light on Jim's moral situation.

Accounts of his conversation with these people are included at random by Marlow, along with remarks which indicate their impact on Marlow as individuals, with general moralisings, but never a dogmatic acceptance or rejection of their comments on Jim.

Of these Marlow's conversation with the French lieutenant must be considered. The lieutenant appears in Moser's classification of types as the simple hero, the man who blunders his way through and by ignorance and imperception succeeds blindly in life. He has the typically Conradian "official" attitude to everything, rather like Captain Mitchell's in *Nostromo*, yet his relationship with Marlow is not of an official kind. Marlow's interpolation of sharp French phrases illustrates the peremptory, matter of fact nature of his mind.

His innate simplicity is compared with that of a "snuffy, quiet" village priest, "on whose faces the placid and simple expression is like a veil thrown over the mystery of pain and distress." Jim's pain and distress is scarcely likely to have any profound effect on the fixed and closed morality of his soul. He has followed his pattern of morality, of duty, to the utmost himself, as Stein followed his. Marlow's relationship with this man reveals to him the limitations of an "official" view of life, but does not give any assistance towards the solution of Jim's case:

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1 Joseph Conrad: *Achievement and Decline*, p.17.
2 *Lord Jim*, p.139.
"... when the honour is gone—ah ça! par exemple—I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion—because—monsieur—I know nothing of it."¹

So the question of Jim's guilt is only further confused, not solved, by this man's appearance.

Chester is a character who, unlike Stein, has escaped the notice of many of the critics, yet he is the most typical representative of those who comment on Jim's situation, not because they wish to help Jim, but because they have a personal end in view and are therefore willing to disregard Jim's "record". By his standard of "every man for himself" morality, anyone who falls short of this is "no good". Hence a peremptory judgment to Marlow on Jim:

"'Taking it to heart?' he asked, scornfully. 'Very much,' I said. 'Then he's no good,' he opined."²

Chester himself falls short of his practical maxim that people should see things "as they are". Conrad shows that he does not see things as they are, but in terms of his material interests. His description of his partner, "Holy-Terror Robinson" bears no resemblance to Marlow's more perceptive description of the "emaciated patriarch" who eventually arrives. Chester's real interest is to make up a case for obtaining Jim's services.

"'If you only could see a thing as it is, you would see it's

the very thing for him.\footnote{Op. cit., p.167.}

Marlow sees things as they are and he knows that Jim will come to no
good by going with Chester. Yet Chester's parting shot "See what you
will do with him\footnote{Op. cit., p.168.} reminds the reader that after all the fate devised
for Jim by Marlow and Stein succeeded no more than that devised by
Chester. Again the relationship is of negative value and the problem
of Jim's guilt is further confused.

Marlow's relationship with Captain Brierly is used by Conrad to
give the true significance of another relationship, the relationship
between Brierly and Jim. Neither Brierly nor Jim is fully capable
of perceiving what lies behind the drama of their own lives. Brierly
is concerned with Jim not because of any material interest in Jim's
welfare, but because of a moral, perhaps a spiritual, interest, akin
to the relationship of self-identification. Brierly's true relation­
ship with Jim is unknown, because of the former's suicide, yet Conrad
obviously means the reader to assume that there was some relationship,
that Jim's trial forced Brierly to recognise some failing, something
he did not want to recognise. Thus their relationship is of direct
concern to the guilt and self-knowledge themes. Brierly has to get
rid of Jim at any price or else force himself to recognise his failing,
and suffer the collapse of his world. Yet he prefers voluntarily to
terminate his existence rather than admit this failure. In wanting
to get Jim out of the rest of the trial, he has an ulterior motive
as Chester has for taking any interest at all. Brierly's remarks
to Marlow on Jim's case have a reflection on his own case, of which
the reader is already aware: "let him creep twenty feet underground
and stay there! By heavens! I would." So obviously "one of us",
he realises his affiliation with Jim, who is also "one of us"—he has
met Jim's clergyman father. Marlow's and Captain Jones's comments
on Brierly are worth noting, especially Jones's on Brierly's egoism,
which reflects Jim's: "Ay, ay: neither you nor I, sir, had ever
thought so much of ourselves." Although short, the Brierly episode
has a wide significance in the novel's context, as Guerard remarks:

... the episode's chief function is to prepare us to understand
(or at least accept) Jim's paralysed identification with Gentleman
Brown and suicidal refusal to fight him; and to prepare us,
also, for the deliberateness of Jim's march up to Doralin.

All the relationships we have been considering succeed artistically,
and play their part in the development of the moral themes, especially
those of moral isolation and betrayal, and the central question of Jim's
guilt. When they are all summed up we are left with a dilemma, an
issue clouded by innumerable self-interests, stemming from Conrad's
scepticism over human affairs. The one relationship between a man

3 Conrad the Novelist, p.149.
and a woman in the novel which we must consider briefly does not succeed artistically, nor do the moral themes receive significant development through it.

b) Human Relationships between Men and Women.

Romantic elements in the four novels do not concern a large enough area to affect the impact of the whole. Only one relationship between a man and a woman is portrayed in *Lord Jim*, but it unfortunately contains many of the Conradian love-story features of his poorer works. When Conrad begins a romantic theme the dramatic movement, usually springing from the development of a moral theme, ceases immediately. The passages concerning Jewel degenerate into poor prose with inexcusably poor romantic imagery:

"Her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings."¹

The Malay girl—like the earlier ones, Nina and Aissa—exists merely as a name and a shadow. The reader has no interest in her moral being, nor is any action of hers allowed to influence the novel's movement. Their relationship is a static one, with nothing of the tension generated between Jim and Marlow and Jim and Brown. It appears in the middle of the account of Jim's more successful period at Patuan, which is in itself a poor piece of writing.

¹ *Lord Jim*, p. 283.
o) The Relationship between the Individual and Society.

The successful portrayal of human relationships at the individual level is confined to personal relationships between men as we have seen; there are no official relationships to compete, and the one relationship between a man and a woman fails. Let us examine finally the wider relationship between certain individuals and the human society in Lord Jim.

The relationship between Marlow and Jim and the English society to which they belong is of considerable importance. Marlow's insistence that Jim was "one of us" and therefore subject to the morality of the British Merchant Service, unrelated to the free-and-easy conduct of the other members of the Patna crew is emphasised when Conrad allows Marlow to see the complete difference in bearing on their arrival in port:

"He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself—well, if this sort can go wrong like that... and I felt as though I could fling down my hat and dance on it from sheer mortification..."

This is Marlow's first feeling of self-identification as a man of the same stock, the same society, a feeling developed throughout. If Jim were not a part of this society, his "case" would hold no interest for anybody, nor would the question of moral self-justification or rehabilitation have entered. The question considered is whether or not Jim

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{1} Op. cit., p.40.}\]
indeed divorced himself irrevocably from his society by his jump, or whether circumstances outside the range of its official code, beyond the court of inquiry, must be taken into account, whether his self-imposed physical isolation had any real moral justification.

Although he pleads his "case" again and again, Jim, in his egoism, does not admit overtly any relationship to society, and Marlow questions whether or not he was concerned with some private ideal of his own:

"The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress." ¹

This private morality is referred to again at the end:

"He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. Is he satisfied—quite, now, I wonder?" ²

But through the novel Marlow is not concerned with Jim's shadowy egoistic ideal. He is concerned with the ideals of conduct imposed by the world with which he is familiar, both the official ideals of the service, and the less definable but none the less real ideals of "one of us":

"He is one of us—and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy?" ³

Marlow's final attitude is one of doubt: "Who knows?" The reader

is left to provide the answer. These are poor grounds for anyone who considers Jim rehabilitated at the end, either in his own eyes or in those of the world.

Jim's social responsibility, for all his egoism, and regardless of any justification, is clear, both on the *Patna* and at Patusan. His action may not have been of particular importance to the pilgrims on the *Patna*, but his surrender to Gentleman Brown's demands, shown to have stemmed from his original failure, is responsible for the disruption of Patusan. To know all may be to forgive all in Jim's special case, but the responsibility is still there.

By way of contrast we shall examine briefly the relationship with the world of the New South Wales German captain of the *Patna*. His morality, representative of the free-lance standards of this part of the East, has no affiliation with the "one of us" morality of Jim and Marlow, yet his actions provide a kind of subtle ironic comment on Jim's and Marlow's efforts to come to terms with their own morality. The captain's first words show clearly his attitude to human beings: "Look at dese cattle."¹ The pilgrims are a cargo, for whose well-being he has no concern. Marlow's account of the impact of this "trained baby elephant walking on hind-legs" is in terms of broad

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farce, yet plausible. ¹ For all Jim's attempt to avoid involvement with mankind, he does not display the injured contempt of this man:

"Bah! the Pacific is big, my friend. You damned Englishmen can do your worst; I know where there's plenty room for a man like me: I am well agaïnad in Apia, in Honolulu, in ..." ²

The captain's solution to his problem is simple: "I vill an Amerigan citizen become."³ We remember however that Jim's solution is not so different—he becomes a citizen of Patusan—and that in the final issue, with the exception of Jim's attendance at the inquiry, their situations are much the same. What is to be the reader's attitude to these two, so alike yet so different? If we vindicate Jim must we also vindicate this fellow? Is Jim brought down into partnership with the German in guilt to some extent in spite of the evidence Marlow finds in Jim's favour?

No answer is given by Conrad. We are merely left with the hint of a link between their two situations and we note the sense of injustice and futility behind the fact that the captain, living by his own standards of not recognising any moral responsibility, is absolved from taking any. He escapes free and with a free conscience, while Jim has to bear the responsibility of the "one of us" morality he imposes on himself, and can never free himself from the guilt with which it afflicts him.

The Marlow-Jim relationship somewhat overshadows the others in this novel. It is one of the most fascinating relationships in literature. The interest Marlow and Conrad have in exploring every facet of a man's character to arrive at the very depth of his moral being reaches its culmination in this novel. At the end Marlow is forced to give up, and Conrad leaves the reader with the question mark and the suggestion that a final answer would be futile. Although Jim's social responsibility is clear, what right have men to judge others by their own erring standards of morality, which differ so widely from one man to the next? How impossible it is for anyone, even of Marlow's perception, to discover all the relevant evidence. How hopeless, once all this evidence has been amassed, to give a pronouncement.

Marlow's deep interest in the problem of Jim's guilt sustains their relationship throughout. In Nostromo, to which we now turn, no similar human relationship is sustained, yet there is a greater complexity of human relationships through all my categories.
Guilt is the central problem of *Nostromo*, as in *Lord Jim*, but this time it is the guilt of corruption, of political and moral corruption, a guilt which directly affects not one person only but a whole state. The reader is posed with the more delicate problem of assessing the guilt of an individual, not against a "one of us" English morality, but against the morality (or perhaps the amorality) of Costaguana. Therefore in this novel, which is longer and more complex than *Lord Jim*, the relationship between individual and state is an important subject, around which a whole host of human relationships must be considered. Yet before we make a detailed examination there are certain relevant general critical problems to which we must give attention.

In spite of the willingness of the academic critic (after Leavis) to praise *Nostromo* as Conrad's greatest novel, few of them have the courage to submit it to close analysis or to try to discover the limits of its success as a work of art. Galsworthy's warning "It does disservice to Conrad's memory to be indiscriminate in praise of his work" must be applied to the particular work as well as to the whole of Conrad's work. Only Baines, Guerard and R. P. Warren give this novel anything like

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1 "Reminiscences of Conrad" in *Candelebra*. P. 181.
the attention it deserves. Guerard alone makes any real attempt to point to the greater and lesser passages of its 566 pages. His insistence that the novel is too long is valid. The thread of the meaning is not lost at any stage, but the development, especially in the third part, seems to stagnate at times, and subject matter and themes undergo repetition.\(^1\) Yet on the other hand it is certain that Conrad intended to give the reader the impression of the existence of Costaguana over a period of time, where a revolution or outbreak of civil strife does not exist on its own, but is the seed that generates a later outbreak. Nostromo's act must be weighed against consideration of the whole background.

In spite of the novel's weaknesses a full tribute should be paid to the outstanding brilliance of the creation of a Latin American Republic, with a singularly convincing atmosphere appropriate to it. At no time does the reader feel that Costaguana has ceased to exist, become a fairy-tale land. Conrad's Costaguana and its people are no more transplanted from Poland as Morf suggests than is his London in \textit{The Secret Agent}.\(^2\) This is particularly significant since Conrad visited Central America only once, twenty-five years before the date

\(^1\) Conrad the Novelist, p. 203.

\(^2\) The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, p. 127.
of writing.¹ For the greater part a firm grasp is maintained on the complexity, so that the reader can see the landscape, the people, follow the events and immerse himself in the passions and problems. Conrad's theme of human isolation reaches its greatest complexity of development. Not only are the individuals isolated morally from each other, but the whole state is cut off, physically and morally, from the rest of the world. For the first time a political theme enters a Conrad novel with his other major themes, to be developed further in The Secret Agent and to reach its greatest intensity in Under Western Eyes.

In Nostromo there is no dominant human relationship or group of relationships. While Nostromo's exploits and behaviour may be central subjects, they are by no means the only subject. Nostromo is a colourful individual character; he is also a figure whose moral problems and whose life are used to objectify the problems of a nation. In a letter to Ernst Bendz in 1923, Conrad wrote:

I will take the liberty to point out that Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the Tale of the Seaboard. Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale.²

The relationships in the novel are all dictated, influenced by the presence of the silver. It is the silver that produces the "complex of personal stories, intimately interfused", the "chromatic scale of

attitudes" in which, R. P. Warren asserts, Nostromo consists. The silver is the third party in every relationship, the power which unites the characters within its net of moral corruption, and thereby, paradoxically, isolates them from each other.

The silver is, nevertheless, inanimate and the novel must exist around its characters. Without a narrator they each have considerable importance, and the reader has a heavier task in weighing the views of one against those of another, or against the impersonal view which Conrad himself presents at times. Baines makes this very important observation:

Although they can often be taken as reflecting the author's view Dr. Monygham and Decoud are characters in their own right; they reveal themselves as well as others by their comments and it is always necessary to take the commentator's own character into account when assessing the comment.2

But where does Conrad exist behind the characters? To what extent is he Decoud? Monygham? Gould? Mitchell? or does he efface himself altogether? Guerard, although made uncertain by R. P. Warren's introduction to Nostromo, asserts that the novel is deeply sceptical.3

He points out that not only Decoud, who perhaps is the character through the whole of the works whose attitude approached closest to Conrad's, but also the omniscient narrator, Dr. Monygham, Father Roman and Mrs. Gould all reveal different attitudes of scepticism. Baines's view is perhaps even stronger:

Nostromo is an intensely pessimistic book; it is perhaps the most impressive monument to futility ever created.

Yet does the novel reveal approval of Decoud's suicide or Monygham's ill-nature? Although no censure is given directly Conrad's whole-hearted approval seems unlikely in these particular instances.

In Costaguana there is no dominant standard or symbol of morality, no symbol to which the individual can ally himself and which can serve as a supreme guide to conduct. Corruption overtakes both its people and its institutions in some way: political parties, leaders, the mine with its foundation on material interests, the Europeans from Gould down, even Nostromo. The silver alone is incorruptible in itself yet it corrupts all it touches. There is no British Flag or Merchant Service morality here, just an entanglement of personal interest, group interest and party interest, so that from the politics of the nation to the private dealings of individuals there are a vast number of influences which appear behind every type of human relationship. In my opinion there is a strong air of pessimism, despair at the motives

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1 Conrad the Novelist, pp. 189-90.
and ways of humanity, which reduces the hope of a nation to the screech of a parrot: "Vive Costaguana!"1

Bearing this general tone of the book in mind, we shall now examine certain specific human relationships. In *Nostromo* important relationships are portrayed within each of my four divisions. Conrad brings people of different backgrounds, traditions, standards of morality, ways of living, together at different times and in different situations and allows them to discuss themselves and their problems in such a way that they show up weak points in themselves and in their arguments. By contrasting what they say and do against what other people say and do the reader may work towards the discovery of Conrad's attitude behind the whole pattern. Let us look first at the official relationships of Captain Mitchell and Charles Gould.


Captain Mitchell is an important figure, not for the reason that he would consider himself to be important, as a distinguished onlooker and participant in the "historical events", but in so far as he has a fixed view of life, which Conrad shows to be highly fallible, an "official" view, of the type that would only be likely to appear in Government magazines and tourist pamphlets. In his relationship with everyone Mitchell is very self-conscious of his "official" capacity as

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1 *Nostromo*, pp.69, 82.
superintendent of the Ocean Steam Navigation Company. R. P. Warren's optimism leads him to place the wrong emphasis on Mitchell's view:

Captain Mitchell's view is, we may say, the 'official view': 'Progress' has triumphed, the world has achieved itself, there is nothing left but to enjoy the fruits of the famous victory.\(^1\)

This does not take into account attitudes expressed by people towards Mitchell in various conversations, and Mitchell's own behaviour in his dealings with others, especially in Part III Chapter 10. It is revealed that he is incapable of anything but optimism, and that his views are never likely to be more than superficial.

Throughout the novel Conrad gives Mitchell a colourful if somewhat stereotyped official form of speaking which reads like a combination of a legal document and an oration of Cicero. He always addresses people as "sir" or by their official titles:

To the very last he had been careful to address the ex-Dictator as "Your Excellency."\(^2\)

Mitchell's relationships do not descend below the official level partly because of his profound belief in his status and standing, and in those of the people with whom he comes into contact. He believes firmly in the inevitable advancement and prosperity of his company and of mankind. He has no comprehension whatever of scepticism. The outstanding events of Costaguana fall into two categories, they are

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either "history" or "mistakes" in the line of inevitable progress. 1 (Nost- 
romo's supposed loss of the silver represents "a fatality." 2) Conrad 
portrays Mitchell most often in conversation with some unidentified tourist 
to whom he deferentially refers as "sir." Mitchell has no insight into 
morality beyond his official guide-book mentality. All the time he is 
"utterly in the dark, and imagining himself to be in the thick of things." 3

His relationship with Nostromo is one of those master-and-servant 
relationships where the work of the servant is responsible for the 
reputation of the master. Mitchell has the idea that he is on very good 
terms with his Capataz, far better than he is really, and considers 
him to be completely faithful and absolutely incorruptible. Mitchell 
has his motives for liking Nostromo. His "death" is a blow "because 
he had become attached to his Capataz as people get attached to their 
infectors from love of ease and almost unconscious gratitude." 4 Nost-
romo can see through Mitchell, as appears later, when he returns to 
Sulaco:

As to Captain Mitchell, Nostromo, after the manner of trusted 
subordinates, considered him as a person fitted by education 
perhaps to sign papers in an office and to give orders, but 
otherwise of no use whatever, and something of a fool. 5

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This falls into an odd contrast beside Mitchell’s blind trust:

"The fellow is devoted to me, body and soul!"¹

Yet on the other hand we must take into account the fact that Nostromo did save the state although he stole the silver, and that he saved it alone, by his ride, only to be poorly treated after. Mitchell is one of the few really concerned about the public ingratitude to Nostromo:

"There are people on this Alameda that ride in their carriages, or even are alive at all to-day, because years ago I engaged a runaway Italian sailor for a foreman of our wharf simply on the strength of his looks. And that’s a fact. You can’t get over it, sir."²

For all his imperception old Mitchell can see some of the extent of the ingratitude of the state towards Nostromo’s services, and he does, unbeknown to himself, plead further evidence for Nostromo’s case.

Mitchell’s interview with Sotillo has its serious side from the moral point of view, as the juxtaposition of these two outlines sharply some of the limitations of both men. Mitchell’s chief concern is for the immediate, the material, in deep contrast to the other Sulaco personality whom Sotillo is privileged to interview, Dr. Monygham. Mitchell’s chief concern throughout the interview, the one which causes him to be bound up, is not for Costaguana, Sulaco, the Europeans, or himself, but his gold watch. Mitchell’s outburst reveals Sotillo’s cowardliness and his imperception of character. Their thoughts proceed

¹ Op. cit., p.44.

on different lines, until Sotillo mentions the silver, which sets a
train of thought going in Mitchell's mind. He strains himself to the
utmost of his mental capacity to reply to Sotillo in such a way as to
deceive him and keep him at bay. Fortunately for Mitchell Sotillo
can perceive his uselessness, so he dismisses him before he has a
further chance to make a fool of himself.

Following this is Mitchell's interview with Monygham in the strong
room. The two men are of such varying disposition that only the
prison in which Conrad has them locked up would make the length or
intimacy of their conversation at all plausible, a conversation which
reveals again the tremendous moral isolation from each other possible
between two human beings in spite of physical closeness. Mitchell's
basic concerns are for his watch and his aching legs. He is also
inquisitive as to how Sotillo came to know of the silver. He is
therefore impatient, as the reader is not, with Monygham's narrative
of Viola's wife's death. The shock of the news of Nostromo's death
further isolates him within the limits of his own meditations. Mitchell
is shocked when Monygham mentions his agreement with Sotillo's suggestion
that Gould may have hid the silver for his own use. His disapproval
of Monygham's use of a little strategy for the ultimate benefit of the

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community and Gould himself reveals a further limitation in perception. 

Monygham's remark to Mitchell towards the end of their conversation is devastating, yet true:

"It wouldn't help a single human being in the world if you thought ever so hard upon any subject whatever."¹

This irony has no effect whatever on Mitchell, who interprets the statement as referring to his immediate condition:

"No, ... A man locked up in a confounded dark hole is not much use to anybody."

Another comment on his uselessness glances off Mitchell as he returns his attention to his chronometer. Through this scene, more than any other, the reader should be able to perceive Mitchell's limitations.

In Chapter Ten of Part Third Mitchell really comes into his own as Guide Book to Sulaco.² Conrad gives a typical visit (presumably they are all much the same) of a distinguished visitor to the place who is conducted personally by Mitchell around the new independent State. This is an ironic denouement of the later history of Sulaco. The day-long visitor-and-official relationship is very important as at this stage of the novel the reader already expects to find a heavy touch of irony beneath any of Mitchell's utterances. The Triumph of Progress which Mitchell heralds is not the end of Costaguana, nor is it the end of the novel, where we see a different picture. Mitchell's

guide-book style is an excellent vehicle for including the high-sounding titles of the inhabitants of this new republic—"Consolidated San Tomé mines", "Hernandez, Minister of War", and so on—titles which have an ironic reflection on the past of the country. Mitchell's manner of speaking further reveals his imperception. He assumes that his guest has a knowledge of the history of the place before he begins, and his disjointed narrative, while intelligible to the reader, presents many difficulties for the visitor, who takes in very little anyway. Mitchell's visitor is one of the few contacts Costaguana has with the outside world. Anything like a true impact of its history never reaches the world. The manner and substance of Mitchell's narration throw into ironic perspective much that has gone before. The long struggle of Don José Avellanos for Right and Justice has resulted in a bust in the Cathedral: not even his book has survived. Decoud, the sceptic who planned the new state and committed suicide has earned himself a medallion on the wall of the Cathedral. Don Juste Lopez, who has changed his politics all along to suit the occasion, is now Chief of the State. Nostromo, who saved the state, has been quickly forgotten by the world. This chapter is an important part of Conrad's comment on the amorality surrounding human politics.

From the evidence Conrad gives us it seems that he intends us to consider Captain Mitchell's approach the obverse to a realistic approach. His "official" mind, in common with other Conradian official minds, limits severely his philosophy to nothing much beyond material and
immediate considerations. It is important to realise that the dominant sceptical tone of the novel is in no way lightened by Mitchell's appearance. His attitude reveals rather the unwillingness of certain people to perceive the world's evil.

A totally different man who maintains an official attitude in his relationships with other men is Charles Gould. This time it is the cold, "stiff upper lip" officialdom of silence, withdrawal and disdain, by which Gould attempts to remain aloof from Costaguana's politics and morality, but cannot entirely succeed in doing so.

Gould and Holroyd, his United States financier, have a curious relationship, in purely business terms which Holroyd defines:

"We will go with you as long as the thing runs straight. But we won't be drawn into any large trouble . . . if you can't keep up your end, we will stand our loss, of course, and then—we'll let the thing go."¹

Gould and Costaguana are Holroyd's hobby to which he gives his personal attention. Gould knows his part well, and he knows the right thing to say:

"You may begin sending out the machinery as soon as you like."²

Once established this position does not change at all in Gould's mind, even in the middle of the political unrest. Yet Holroyd's millions and his advice are not of much assistance to Gould in his isolation.

² Op. cit., p.82.
at Sulaco, as Gould suggests later to the chief engineer:

"He"—Charles Gould spoke after a slight pause—"he said something about holding on like grim death and putting our trust in God. I should imagine he must have been rather startled. But then"—pursued the Administrador of the San Tomé mine—"but then, he is very far away, you know, and, as they say in this country, God is very high above." ¹

Gould somehow keeps his "stiff upper lip" in his dealings with the Costaguana politicians and populace. In his first interview with the Sulaco political chief he maintains an official coldness and reserve which the man cannot break down for all his free-and-easy manner. Although Gould has already paved his way to this man's favour with Holroyd's gold, the official is puzzled, as are many after him.² Gould's coldness, and the subsequent importance of the few words he utters, are emphasised in Conrad's account of his treatment of Señor Hirsch:

His silences, backed by the power of speech, had as many shades of significance as uttered words in the way of assent, of doubt, of negation—even of simple comment.³

For Señor Hirsch, Gould's silence means irrevocably that no deal will be made.

However even Gould cannot remain entirely aloof from the Costaguana society. During the revolution he is forced to commit himself, to take sides with a party, to enter negotiations with a bandit. His official reserve towards Costaguana does not preserve him from being

tainted by its morality.

b) **Human Relationships between Men.**

In his portrayal of other kinds of relationships between men in *Nostromo*, Conrad further displays his sceptical attitude and develops his themes. Gould's and Mitchell's attitudes contrast strongly with that of another of the novel's commentators, Dr. Monygham, whose views and relationships with men are anything but "official" and who shows a far deeper understanding of affairs and human nature. Although his comments are fewer in number than Mitchell's, from the point of view of what he says Monygham's views are perhaps of first importance. Monygham is a sceptic, and has a rather acute perception of the situation, both of which attributes Conrad would seem likely to approve. Whether Conrad approves or not of his employment of political strategy, or his invariable harshness of manner is another matter.

Monygham is one of those who throughout maintains a very sceptical attitude towards Nostromo and his exploits. It appears that the majority of the Sulaco residents trust Nostromo and subscribe to the myth of his "incorruptibility", but not Monygham. When Mrs. Viola is dying and wants to see Nostromo, he remarks: "And why she wants to see you I cannot imagine." Later we have Monygham's ironic remark on Nostromo's hesitancy to go off with the silver: "Why, Capataz! I

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thought you could never fail in anything."\(^1\) It appears however that Monygham himself would have failed in the silver exploit. He states his price to Nostromo, which no doubt the latter would call to mind later:

"Illustrious Capataz, for taking the curse of death upon my back, as you call it, nothing else but the whole treasure would do."\(^2\)

By the standard he sets Monygham can scarcely place any moral blame on the one "failure" Nostromo makes, except perhaps for not striking any definite bargain, which Nostromo had scarcely time or opportunity to do anyway.

Nostromo and Monygham meet again after the former's return from Great Isabel. Nostromo is in a very antagonistic state of mind at the ingratitude displayed by mankind in general, and Monygham in particular:

To Nostromo the doctor represented all these people. . . . And he had never even asked after it. Not a word of inquiry about the most desperate undertaking of his life.\(^3\)

The Doctor, singularly uninterested in Nostromo's exploit, is concerned chiefly with his plans for Sulaco's salvation, destined to further involve Nostromo. Monygham's suggestion that it would have been better had Sotillo taken the silver gives further cause of affront

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to Nostromo, yet he does not show this.

The betrayal theme enters when Monygham fears that Nostromo has heard of his own past failure, that he has thus lost his moral ascendancy over Nostromo, his power to use the man. The reader realises the full import of this on second reading, when he sees that both men have a common guilt. Although neither character realises it, their relationship at this point is of much the same kind as the relationship of self-identification. Nostromo feels, moreover, that he and his Cargadores are "betrayed" by the rich.\(^1\) This is fed by Monygham's cynicism towards his interests, his unconcern, except for exploiting his usefulness. Through this conversation is revealed as much as we see of Nostromo's approach to stealing the silver. Monygham's callousness and the general unconcern of the rich for Nostromo may be considered strong evidence in favour of his vindication.

Monygham's encounter with the chief engineer of the railway is used by Conrad to reveal some further elements of the former's scepticism, as well as to throw light from two different points on various people and the political situation, on the general entanglement of morality, on the common guilt. The chief engineer has a slightly sceptical approach, although it is from a neutral position, and has nothing of Monygham's cold cynicism.

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Their comments on Gould are most important:

"That man is calmness personified," he said... "He must be extremely sure of himself."

"If that's all he is sure of, then he is sure of nothing," said the doctor.

This is true, yet the Doctor's following remark "It is the last thing a man ought to be sure of", reminds the reader again of the doctor's own story, his failing and guilt, that has rendered him psychologically incapable of any certainty in his own life, and therefore unable to appreciate that felt by any one else in theirs. ¹ The engineer later passes remarks as devastating as Monygham's on Decoud and Barrios, and Decoud's plan:

"He [Decoud] had arguments which should have appeared solid enough if we, members of old, stable political and national organizations, were not startled by the mere idea of a new State evolved like this out of the head of a scoffing young man fleeing for his life, with a proclamation in his pocket, to a rough, jeering, half-bred swashbuckler, who in this part of the world is called a general."²

Yet the engineer displays a certain amount of optimism; it may come off, the plan is workable. Monygham displays no optimism:

"A new State, with that plump dandy, Decoud, for the first President".³

The engineer's optimism grows, until it is cut short abruptly by Monygham.

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² Op. cit., p.315. This sceptical attitude to Barrios exists in the novel, therefore there is some doubt as to whether Barrios is really "one of the saved" as Guerard suggests. (Conrad the Novelist, p.189.)

with one of the most sceptical statements in all Conrad:

"Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity—"

"Bah!" interrupted the doctor . . . "Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round."¹

If Conrad held Monygham's point of view here it would seem that he denied all spiritual values as the inventions of mankind. The engineer's optimism is similarly counterbalanced with Monygham's pessimism when they comment on Nostromo.²

The juxtaposition of the standards of morality of Sotillo and Dr. Monygham is rather odd. Sotillo thinks he has the moral superiority, and that he therefore has Monygham in the palm of his hand.

Sotillo thought that Dr. Monygham, so different from all Europeans, was ready to sell his countrymen and Charles Gould, his employer, for some share of the San Tomé silver. Sotillo did not despise him for that. The colonel's want of moral sense was of a profound and innocent character. It bordered upon stupidity, moral stupidity. Nothing that served his ends could appear to him really reprehensible. Nevertheless, he despised Dr. Monygham.³

Actually Monygham is in control, and he has the moral superiority. He knows Sotillo's weak spot, greed, and therefore plays his hand accordingly in such a way as to convince Sotillo, and keep him occupied diving for the silver.

Like Mitchell and Monygham, Don Martin Decoud is also one of the novel's commentators, and as with Monygham, critics have identified his attitude with what they suppose Conrad's to be. Unlike the other two Decoud plays a crucial part in the action, and his suicide is used to objectify a theme at a symbolic level. He is both detached from the situation by his background, and involved in it by his affection for Antonia and the plan of action which he initiates. His scepticism carries with it the heavy penalty of moral isolation.

Conrad introduces him to the novel as the cynical opponent of the patriotic optimism of Don José Avellanos. The mentality of Avellanos is limited, so he does not take up Decoud's argument on the mock-heroic nature of Costaguana politics and the morality of the whole affair, but tries merely to defend Barrios.¹ Decoud is concerned with a historical view of the political situation, with the morality, the general principle behind the events. Avellanos is concerned only with the situation in hand, its material aspects and the hopes of the immediate future. They are isolated by their approach and Avellanos cannot understand Decoud's obverted view of what to Captain Mitchell is "history". Decoud's scepticism towards his own journalism reveals his unbelief in the words which he alone can pour forth in his newspaper. Avellanos remarks:

"The Porvenir must have a long and confident article upon

Barrios and the irresistibleness of his army of Cayta! The moral effect should be kept up in the country. We must cable encouraging extracts to Europe and the United States to maintain a favourable impression abroad."

Decoud replies:

"Oh, yes, we must comfort our friends, the speculators."¹

Decoud's relationship with Nostromo is one between men whose attitude to the situation is alike. They have a common affiliation: they have both come from outside the country, and thus they are both sceptical. However Decoud recognises that Nostromo cannot have the same motive for action as he, thus he explores the latter's morality:

"The only thing he seems to care for, as far as I have been able to discover, is to be well spoken of. An ambition fit for noble souls, but also a profitable one for an exceptionally intelligent scoundrel."²

Decoud also notices:

"That man seems to have a particular talent for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done."³

When on the lighter with Nostromo, Decoud learns more about the former's inner motive, of his concern for his reputation rather than humanity:

"I am so desperate that if I didn't know your worship

to be a man of courage, capable of standing stock still
whatever happens, I would drive my knife into your heart." 1

Conrad stresses the complete isolation of these two men, despite
their nearness to each other and common isolation from the whole
world:

Each of them was as if utterly alone with his task. It did
not occur to them to speak. There was nothing in common
between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must
be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge, which was
like the crucial test of their desires, they seemed to have
become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in
the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter
would not mean the same thing to them both. This common
danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character,
and in position, into absolute prominence in the private
vision of each. There was no bond of conviction, of common
idea . . . 2

However, when Nostromo is leaving him, Decoud begins to feel the
impact of absolute solitude, and he desires to hear Nostromo's
voice again, as it happens, the last human voice he hears in his
life.

The account of Decoud's death has considerable thematic importance,
but this time it is the complete lack of any relationship that drives
him to suicide.

He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible
images. Nostromo was dead. Everything had failed ignominiously. 3

Conrad portrays old Giorgio Viola, the confirmed disciple of Garibaldi, as a very simple soul of a fixed standard of morality. To him Nostromo replaces the son he lost, and that is all there is to the matter.¹ Personal vanity, the longing to be well spoken of, does not enter the field of the old man's comprehension, hence he disregards his wife's accusations of Nostromo with the maxim "A man ought not to be tame."² Yet Nostromo is conscious of the old man's limitations when he returns to the Albergo after his trip to Great Isabel. There is no-one in Sulaco, not even his old patron, who can understand his motives or share in his action.³

We see that the more important relationships between men in Nostromo strongly influence the development of the sceptical tone and the moral themes. Monygham's relationships with others are particularly important, as Conrad provides no definite contradiction of his point of view. There are also significant relationships between men and women which play a part in the tonal and thematic development of this novel.

c) Human Relationships between Men and Women.

In Nostromo Conrad does use his portrayal of relationships between men and women to develop moral themes, as far as Mrs. Gould, Antonia, and

Mrs. Viola are concerned. Only the relationships between Giselle, Linda and Nostromo are used to display a romantic love theme. Mrs. Gould's relationships show greater complexity than any other relationships between men and women in Conrad. They are particularly important from the point of view of the development of the moral isolation and political themes, and because they introduce a new theme, that of human kindness. Mrs. Gould prefers, in contrast with Decoud and Monygham, to think well rather than ill of people. When Decoud discusses Nostromo with her she does not acquiesce to his sceptical point of view: "I prefer to think him disinterested, and therefore trustworthy." Mrs. Gould uses her kindness to assuage the loneliness, the grief caused by the political situation, and Conrad obviously approves of this, although he seems highly sceptical of the ultimate benefit actually obtained by people through Mrs. Gould's kindness.

Charles Gould's relationship with his wife is important. Conrad does mention the Goulds' courtship, but most sexual elements are excluded, so that here he is not trapped into the absurdities of his earliest or last novels. Most of their conversation is concerned with the political situation and the mine. In fact they seldom appear together, and when they do it is not for long; Gould is always on his way somewhere, usually to the mine, in pursuit of the material interests on which he pins his faith. When the political situation grows more intense, Mrs.

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Gould is put well into the background, almost forgotten, in Gould's preoccupation. Mrs. Gould feels deeply this preoccupation of her husband:

The fate of the San Tomé mine was lying heavy upon her heart ... He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. "Those poor people!" she murmured to herself.¹

Conrad develops this sense of isolation further when Monygham arrives with news of Decoud's and Nostromo's "death." Gould's mind immediately turns to abstract planning, which isolates him from everything, including his wife, and disturbs Mrs. Gould:

Her heart turned to ice, while her cheeks flamed up as if scorched by the blaze of a funeral pyre consuming all her earthly affections. The tears burst out of her eyes.

"Antonia will kill herself!" she cried out.²

With characteristic kindness and unwillingness to cause any commotion on behalf of herself, Mrs. Gould sublimates her feelings by diverting them on to Antonia, whom she feels will face a situation similar to hers.

It is Mrs. Gould who protects and patronises, yet not in a "patronising" way, anyone who happens to require help—whether Giorgio Viola wishing to retain his hotel or Dr. Monygham requiring a little affection in his old age. Thus at the end Nostromo wishes to confess

to her, a European, yet kind and approachable. The theme of political corruption enters again when Mrs. Gould remembers that the silver corrupted her, too, once, when she concealed the truth about it to her husband. The reader is reminded that not only Nostromo was corrupted by the silver, but a large number of people, to a certain extent the whole state. When Monygham mentions that Nostromo wants to see her in connection with the silver, she exclaims:

"Oh, no! No! . . . Isn't it lost and done with? Isn't there enough treasure without it to make everybody in the world miserable?"

In view of all this, R. P. Warren's assertion seems irrelevant:

Symbolically, this is her moment of vision, her repudiation of the logic of material interests. Mrs. Gould does not "repudiate" as an act of faith, she wants to forget. Nor is her moment one of "vision", it is one of horror.

Nostromo's confession does not proceed as far as Razumov's in Under Western Eyes. He does not go beyond allusion, so that the bulk of the treasure is still left at the end and, as in The Secret Agent, the instrument of evil remains unchained, incorruptible, giving a nihilistic conclusion to the novel. However Nostromo does remind Mrs. Gould—and the reader—of the way he was treated by the Europeans during the revolution, as a servant, the common property of the ruling class, providing more evidence in favour of his case.

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Conrad's handling of the relationship between Decoud and Antonia is also convincing to the reader because of the isolation of their points of view, their outlook on life, the one of profound belief, the other of profound scepticism. Thus they are not permitted close intimacy, and Conrad is not forced to embarrass the reader. Decoud's conversation with Antonia reveals his true motive for action, desire to win her affection. The picture Conrad presents of them on the balcony is one of intense isolation, not intimacy. Decoud can see through the morality of the land, and he naturally longs to snatch Antonia out of its futility.¹ Antonia's unwillingness to flee alone makes him stay and work out his plan.

Yet in his portrayal of Decoud on the island of Great Isabel, Conrad causes his relationship with Antonia to become as unreal and intangible as his contacts with any other people.² Conrad reminds us of their relationship in his account of Decoud's end:

The stiffness of the fingers relaxed, and the lover of Antonia Avellanos rolled overboard without having heard the cord of silence snap in the solitude of the Placid Gulf, whose glittering surface remained untroubled by the fall of his body.³

The theme of betrayal is strongly emphasised in Conrad's portrayal of the relationship between Mrs. Viola and Nostromo. Mrs. Viola's

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¹ Nostromo, p.186.
curious affection for Nostromo seems of itself to provoke her tirades against his infidelity. Nostromo is divided in loyalty when confronted with the dying woman's demands for a priest. When he chooses the silver exploit instead she is not deceived into thinking that he has any altruistic motive for helping the state, but accuses him of vanity and self-interest. These accusations, it appears later, are perfectly justified.

The relationships between Giselle and Linda and Nostromo are handled very poorly. The fatigue experienced by Conrad, perhaps the desire to have done with the novel quickly, resulted in this unfortunate piece of writing. As with Jewel, neither of these girls has any life, and Nostromo degenerates into a stock-romantic figure. The portrayal of Nostromo's frigidity to Linda is unconvincing. His love-making to Giselle is stereotyped and pathetic.

d) The Relationship between the Individual and Society.

Having considered the different categories of individual human relationships we now turn to examine the theme of the relationship between certain people and the human society in Nostromo. An important thing to be considered about the relationship between the principal characters and Sulacoan society is that none of them, except Gould, were born in Costaguana, and none grew up there. Mitchell, Monygham, Mrs. Gould and the chief engineer of the railway are English. Gould's outlook is decidedly English, as he was educated there. Decoud is
French. Nostromo himself and the Violas are Italian. Holroyd comes from the United States. Sotillo, Pedrito Montero, Barrios and Don José Avellanos, perhaps the most important of the indigenous Costaguaneros, are all minor characters. Thus while each of the principal characters is involved morally and materially in the society of Costaguana, each is enabled to preserve a detached view of the society because of the morality of his own background. They each maintain a distinct, separate relationship. We shall consider the relationship of Nostromo and three other major characters, Gould, Decoud, and Captain Mitchell, with the society of Costaguana, to examine their influence on this society, and the society's influence on them.

Nostromo desires one thing from human society, for which he is prepared to undertake almost any danger. It is, Decoud reports, "To be well spoken of." Nostromo does not account himself a responsible citizen of Sulaco, he has rather the trade-unionist attitude of an employee. He has rendered greater service to the community than anybody else, yet the more he does, the more he is taken for granted, nor is he rewarded in accordance with the magnitude of his actions. The question is, therefore, did Nostromo, by taking the silver, commit a moral offence, or was he, given the particular circumstances of corruption in Sulaco, merely taking his due reward? Monygham's statement is strong evidence in favour of Nostromo's vindication:

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"Illustrious Capataz, for taking the curse of death upon my back, as you call it, nothing else but the whole treasure would do."

The silver would be of little material benefit to anyone except Gould and Holroyd, who have quite enough money anyway, and the theft does not necessitate the killing or injuring of anybody. To counterbalance this Nostromo's method of gaining the silver must be taken to account. Nostromo made no bargain with the Sulaco leaders of the silver as his price, therefore he was not entitled to it. On the other hand again we remember that he had scarcely time or opportunity to make such a bargain; it was too late once the situation was saved.

Nostromo's responsibility to the state is far less clearly defined than Jim's. *Lord Jim* is concerned largely with the working out of Jim's personal justification through his relationship with Marlow. If we are to justify Nostromo's actions we must survey them against the general social corruption. Technically, Nostromo's obligations end within the limits of his role of *Capataz de Cargadores*; any services rendered outside these limits are really gratuitous. Although his exploits are crucial to the salvation of the state, he is not obliged either to salvage the silver or ride to Cayta. So as in *Lord Jim* there is the same question at the end of the novel, "Who knows?" Did Nostromo offend? If so whom? Did his services to the state justify his theft?

The central problem of Nostromo's guilt is left unsolved by Conrad. However he does, it seems, provide as much evidence as he can for Nostromo. We shall contrast the relationship between the other three men and the state, to see if they escape more worthily.

Like Nostromo Charles Gould came to Sulaco with the intention of making his name, but as a responsible citizen, not an employee. His attempts to remain aloof from local politics are made, he believes, in the interests of the community. Yet for all his reserve, the society in Sulaco has its effect on him in the same way as he makes his impact on it. He cannot remain untouched. He has to bribe his way into favour in order to open up the mine, and in the crisis has to throw in his lot irrevocably with the Ribierists. He does not realise how entangled he is until the emissary of the bandit, Hernandez, brings it home to him:

"Has not the master of the mine any message to send to Hernandez, the master of the Campo?"

The truth of the comparison struck Charles Gould heavily. In his determined purpose he held the mine, and the indomitable bandit held the Campo by the same precarious tenure. They were equals before the lawlessness of the land. It was impossible to disentangle one's activity from its debasing contacts. A close-meshed net of crime and corruption lay upon the whole country.¹

This is perhaps one of Conrad's most pessimistic illustrations of his theme of the social nature of man. None of Conrad's many isolated human beings can "disentangle" themselves, finally, from the society

in which they find themselves. Like a fatality it overtakes them sooner or later.

Decoud's relationship to the Sulaco society is scarcely laudable, the result of self-interest, as is shown by his conversation with Mrs. Gould on his secession policy:

"Separation, of course," declared Martin. "Yes; separation of the whole Occidental Province from the rest of the unquiet body. But my true idea, the only one I care for, is not to be separated from Antonia."

"And that is all?" asked Mrs. Gould, without severity.

"Absolutely. I am not deceiving myself about my motives. She won't leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate."

Thus one member of the state alone provokes Decoud's exertions on behalf of its welfare. Both the state and these exertions are completely meaningless to him in themselves. Decoud's plan is put into action; the state is saved because Decoud happened to fall in love with Antonia! Decoud's journalism, all important to the Ribierists, and causing the Monterists to put a price on his head, is undertaken in an attitude of complete irresponsibility, and is of no import whatsoever to its writer.

Captain Mitchell's relationship with society is limited by his personal egoism and constant optimism:

Unfortunately, Captain Mitchell had not much penetration of

\[1\text{ Op. cit., p.215.}\]
any kind; characteristic, illuminating trifles of expression, action, or movement, escaped him completely. He was too pompously and innocently aware of his own existence to observe that of others.  

As Mitchell is the most garrulous commentator in the novel, the reader must be careful to weigh anything he says against this direct comment on him. He has no faculty of perceptive imagination, therefore his profound belief in the integrity of the state’s morality reduces him to the level of a blind tool of those who happen to have the upper hand.

If we were to look at the minor characters we would see how they, also, are unable to escape the clutches of the state’s corrupt morality. If all are so involved why should we not absolve Nostromo altogether because of the influence of general corruption on him? Conrad develops his theme so well that, as the novel progresses, we can see the tentacles of moral corruption, represented by the incorruptible silver, slowly forcing all the characters into their grasp, even those who are unconcerned and those who consciously try to remain aloof. However Conrad does not himself dare to proclaim Nostromo vindicated, but maintains his typically sceptical attitude. The accidental shooting of Nostromo by the senile Italian at the end can scarcely be accounted, even by the most optimistic, as “poetic justice”.

The people in *Nostromo* are not slow to pass their comments and judgments on the situation and on other people. Conrad brings his characters into a position where, from the point of view of their individual backgrounds and traditions, they are forced to comment. The reader must consider the remarks made on a situation or character against those made by others, as well as the factual account given of what actually happened and what a character actually did. Out of all this complexity he is invited to make a judgment on *Nostromo*, *Costaguana*, and perhaps the world at large, (since many of the comments on politics and other themes have universal relevance,) or to decide with Conrad that there is no final judgment.

In *Costaguana* there is no moral standard, only a complexity, from which, at the end, we see there will be no hope of escaping. There have been disorders in the past; there will be more in the future. The entanglement of human relationships will become further involved and continue to spread the political and moral corruption. So *Nostromo* concludes with its pessimistic vision of the human dilemma. However, a more terrible pessimism appears in *The Secret Agent* and almost haunts *Under Western Eyes*. 

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECRET AGENT

The tiny police and political criminal society of The Secret Agent is linked, like the society in Nostromo, by a common guilt, but this time it is less obtrusive. A strong atmosphere of despair dominates throughout. Responsible people are unable to control the unruly; nor can they avoid being drawn into the mesh of moral guilt woven by the unruly. A nihilistic tone becomes more and more dominant through The Secret Agent, to develop almost into an obsession in Under Western Eyes. These are accompanied by a growing atmosphere of fear and terror, in which the human relationships develop abnormal elements, inspired no doubt by the abnormality of certain human relationships in Dostoevski's works.

As with Nostromo, there are again critical problems which must be discussed before we look at the human relationships or even admit the novel to be worthy of close study. Critics have expressed many opinions on its merits and faults. Even the more reputable of them show considerable divergence of view. Guerard selects it for close study in his recent book, whereas in his earlier one he classified it as of inferior quality to Victory.\(^1\) Leavis considers it greater than

\(^1\) Joseph Conrad, 1947, and Conrad the Novelist, 1959.
Under Western Eyes, probably because of its closely-knit structure. On the other hand Baines attacks it for admitting scenes "which contribute little to the central interest", and suggests that while ironic treatment provides a unity of mood, there is no unifying theme, the "crystallisation" referred to in the Author's Note does not appear. ¹

Admittedly it is very easy to divide this novel up into scenes, and the Verloc-Mrs. Verloc scenes do not appear to have much in common with the Home Secretary-Assistant Commissioner scenes. Yet besides the link of guilt and the unity of tone I have mentioned, the themes of intellectual and moral isolation do recur throughout, and the scenes are linked in a kind of chain process by the relationships of the different characters with each other. The Home Secretary may not have much to do with Winnie Verloc, yet he is linked to her through the Assistant Commissioner, Chief Inspector Heat, and Verloc, and so the chain goes down to Osipon and the anarchist Professor. The chain doubles back on itself as both Heat and the Professor and the Assistant Commissioner and Vladimir are permitted to meet each other. Conrad is concerned with a certain strata of society—the police-criminal society—not a whole society, as in Nostromo. By the different relationships the stratification is linked, the code of morality of one character has its effect on that of another. Winnie Verloc's existence is the centre of this chain, therefore Conrad's claim that

the novel was "in intention, the history of Winnie Verloc" is
substantiated within these limits.¹

One of the major objections to The Secret Agent and Under
Western Eyes is that Conrad's revolutionaries, anarchists and the
like are portrayed unsympathetically by Conrad, that he had no real
understanding of such people, and that he reveals a strong conservative
taste and a political bias against Russia. A common fault is to
consider the two novels together from this point of view, whereas
in fact there is a completely different emphasis in each. Arnold
Kettle and Jocelyn Baines are both guilty of this.² In The Secret
Agent the "revolutionaries" are not satirised as part of a national
movement, but as an isolated set of shams. This statement of Kettle's
may be relevant to Under Western Eyes but it is not to The Secret
Agent:

What he lacks is any sense of organised, disciplined,
scientific revolutionary party or—more important still—
of any mass democratic movement among the people themselves;
and there is no doubt that this deficiency ultimately limits
the value of his novels.³

While The Secret Agent may lose something from the point of view of

¹ See letter to Ambrose J. Barker, 1 September 1923, in G. J.

² Arnold Kettle, Modern Quarterly, New Series 3, 3:63-81,
Summer, 1948, p. 78; and J. Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical
Biography, pp. 334-5.

³ Kettle, op. cit., p. 78.
universal relevance because of this, it gains very much by the limitation. Only a limited strata of society is portrayed, but through its whole scale. The concern is for the tiny faction, not a large network of underground organisation required for a major political upheaval, with a group of antisocial, big-talking but really indolent men, with no potency to act, no answer but to destroy.

Baines rightly draws attention to the comic passages in the novel, of which there are many. It is perhaps the only work from which Conrad displays considerable detachment. However Guerard sums up best the attitude presented by the book as a whole:

The Secret Agent is macabre comedy, and it would be possible to present it as the very darkest of Conrad's books: a version of modern life and modern man untouched by grace in any form except that of British legality; a vision (in his own words) "of a monstrous town . . . a cruel devourer of the world's light"; a book about mankind's petty weakness and infirmity of spirit.

The nihilistic tone is enhanced by the close. The situations are not cleared up, the characters are not tied into bundles and punished or rewarded according to their merits like the novel's many crime-and-punishment successors. The officials are forgotten. The Professor still roams the world, symbol of evil and despair. The other anarchists are likewise free. Vladimir himself, perhaps,

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2 *Conrad the Novelist*, p.219.
remains unscathed. Conrad rightly refers to "its anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness and despair". ¹

The dark, macabre tone of *The Secret Agent* may be attributed chiefly to the small number of personal encounters within a circumscribed, claustrophobic atmosphere. While the novel is set in the immensity of London and the physical isolation that appears in *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* does not exist, the people, by virtue of their lives, are as isolated from the rest of humanity as if an iron ring had been placed around them. Beyond them there is the indefinable "multitude", which by its very immensity and vastness isolates the few pitted against it.

Because Conrad selects the police and political criminal society, the official relationships are naturally more complex, and, at the lower level, show a more sinister aspect than those in *Nostromo*. The personal relationships between men and between men and women are strained by fear as well as by moral and intellectual isolation. The theme of the relationship between the individual and society is further developed. While there are problems similar to those we have encountered in connection with the theme in *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, we are confronted with the further problems of the overt anti-social nature of the anarchist group and the violent purpose of the little "Professor".

¹ "Author's Note" to *The Secret Agent*, p.xv.

Through the scale of the police hierarchy down through the anarchists to the Professor there is a large proportionate number of relationships of an official kind. The novel's action begins with Verloc's visit to the foreign embassy, therefore we shall first examine his relationship with the officials he encounters there.

As he walks into the embassy from the street Verloc undergoes a subtle psychological metamorphosis. He passes from porter to footman, footman to lackey, along the passage and up the staircase. His stature slowly decreases as he is ushered along the official chain to Wurmt, then to Vladimir. Verloc's approach to Wurmt is one of "unobtrusive deference" and at this level they make their conversation.\(^1\) Wurmt has to attack, Verloc to reply. The moral battle does not last long, for Wurmt, in spite of his victory "You are very corpulent", leaves himself open to accusation of impertinence which he is unwilling to receive. He takes advantage of what moral superiority he has by interrupting the conversation and pushing Verloc on to Vladimir, for whom Verloc is really no match. Once again Verloc has to wait, is ushered along another passage and up a further flight of stairs, along a further passage, then to Vladimir, before his vast mahogany table.

Vladimir's superiority is emphasised. He speaks in French and

\(^1\) *The Secret Agent*, pp. 16-18.
is endowed with a much sharper gift of biting irony than Wurmt. He has the luck to sort out Verloo's weakness very quickly: "Aha! Cherchez la femme", and the ability to take advantage of it. He also takes advantage of Verloo's "professional" status:

"You—a desperate socialist or anarchist—which is it?"

"Anarchist," stated Mr. Verloo in a deadened tone.

Vladimir turns to Verloo's "career", to the "job" of anarchism: "The proper business of an 'agent provocateur' is to provoke." He gains ascendancy over Verloo through his hard-hitting manner: "The good old Stott-Wartenheim times are over. No work, no pay." From his state of moral superiority, won after considerable heckling, Vladimir is free to state his own anarchist theory concerning the Milan Conference, and state at length what he wants done. Difficulties, costs are irrelevant to Vladimir. Verloo's shop and wife expose him to scathing remarks. Finally Vladimir is short and sharp, and knows he will meet no opposition. "A dynamite outrage must be provoked. I give you a month."  

Verloo withdraws and the whole thing is "an angry dream", a macabre vision that recurs later when he is in his bedroom, leaning against the window-pane. Vladimir's impact on Verloo is startling.

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Conrad illustrates how the abnormal fear which Vladimir has provoked isolates him from the world and from his wife.

This luminous and mutilated vision was so ghastly physically that Mr. Verloo started away from the window, letting down the venetian blind with a great rattle. Discomposed and speechless with the apprehension of more such visions, he beheld his wife re-enter the room and get into bed in a calm, businesslike manner which made him feel hopelessly lonely in the world.

This sinister psychological trait of their relationship sounds a new note in Conrad's portrayal of relationships, which is developed later through Razumov's relationships in Under Western Eyes. While Conrad displays his sense of humour in this portrayal it is a sinister sense of humour. The more pleasant farcical elements that typify the dealings of Captain Mitchell and other more jovial Conradian officials are given a macabre twist.

The effect of Vladimir on the whole being and outlook of Verloo as well as his issued order is what sets the subsequent action of the novel in process. Vladimir, from his moral position of authority established through the conversation by the clash of personalities, makes retreat impossible for Verloo, hence the vision of horror, and the isolation. The irony lies in the fact that Vladimir's impressiveness is only a sham. His stature is reduced to insignificance when he visits the drawing-room of Michaelis's patroness and is confronted by the Assistant Commissioner. Human beings, to Conrad, are of no importance by themselves. "Importance" is established only by external

environment, by their relationship with others. As an invention of men it is easily removed by a change of circumstances.

Conrad's treatment of the police hierarchy is also worth examination. These relationships contain few sinister overtones and conform rather to the pattern of those in *Nostromo*, where the whole society becomes morally entangled. They form an interesting study of departmental morality and of the haphazard way in which private interest can affect even the course of justice.

The type of relationship between Chief Inspector Heat and his superior, the Assistant Commissioner, must have held considerable interest to Conrad, as he very carefully defines its terms. The inspector is the "great expert" of his department, but Conrad reveals that this is because he knows his correct relationship within the structure of that department, not because of any outstanding personal qualities.¹ In fact he blunders by informing a high official that no anarchist activity is expected because the official is anxious to hear this. Not only the anarchists come under the ironic fire of *The Secret Agent*. While they may receive the greatest scorn of Conrad's pen, the whole society of the novel receives its share of irony. Heat knows his place and his relationship. By his peculiar code of departmental morality he knows precisely what to let out and what to keep

¹ *Op. cit.*, p.84.
A department is to those it employs a complex personality with ideas and even fads of its own. It depends on the loyal devotion of its servants, and the devoted loyalty of trusted servants is associated with a certain amount of affectionate contempt, which keeps it sweet, as it were. By a benevolent provision of Nature no man is a hero to his valet, or else the heroes would have to brush their own clothes. Likewise no department appears perfectly wise to the intimacy of its workers. A department does not know so much as some of its servants. Being a dispassionate organism, it can never be perfectly informed.  

This is perhaps one of Conrad's most perceptive statements on the limitations of official morality. Because of this tight official framework, Heat is annoyed when the Assistant Commissioner presses inquiries into his activities further than the unwritten code allows.

The Assistant Commissioner is a misfit to the system, whose career began in a tropical colony and who gained his position through the influence of his wife. In it he is dependent on too many subordinates and tied to a desk. Yet Conrad leads us to see that it is not only because he wants to perform some action on his own behalf that he goes beyond normal departmental procedure, but also because Heat in his simple professional way wants to indict Michaelis, whose patroness is also his wife's influential friend. Heat has a dual motive too, a public and private reason for convicting Michaelis. Publicly it is for the welfare of the department, privately the reason is more involved:


Moreover, besides being legal and expedient, the arrest of Michaelis solved a little personal difficulty which worried Chief Inspector Heat somewhat. This difficulty had its bearing upon his reputation, upon his comfort, and even upon the efficient performance of his duties.¹

Conrad's search for motives goes deeper into this man's personality, so that the reader is left with the suspicion that Heat wants Michaelis because he considers him easier game than the other anarchists. The reader is led to believe that Heat's encounter with the Professor has brought him to fear the power of a type of criminal more dangerous to his person than the honest-to-goodness thieves:

And deep down in his blameless bosom of an average married citizen, almost unconscious but potent nevertheless, the dislike of being compelled by events to meddle with the desperate ferocity of the Professor had its say.²

Both Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, through their relationship, have revealed about them certain secrets which show the possibility of corruption within the most straightforward of moral systems.

The Assistant Commissioner senses that Heat is concealing something for some reason, hence the question which affronts Heat's morality considerably. This is not in the departmental copy-book of questions that may be put to subordinates with decorum: "Now what is it you've got up your sleeve?"³ This interrogation of Heat leads the inspector to imagine an image which shows up the true delicacy of his situation:

He felt at the moment like a tight-rope artist might feel if suddenly, in the middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope.  

As the Assistant Commissioner proceeds with his interrogation Heat’s thoughts take a more aggressive turn: "you, my boy, you don't know your place, and your place won't know you very long either, I bet." Heat is wrong in his first assumption. The Assistant Commissioner knows his place only too well, as he shows later in his conversation with Sir Ethelred:

"Why not leave it to Heat?"

"Because he is an old departmental hand. They have their own morality. My line of inquiry would appear to him an awful perversion of duty."

The Assistant Commissioner unearths the curious situation of the commerce between Verloc and Heat. The department has no record of Verloc's address or doings, hence the Assistant Commissioner brings up the question of private and official knowledge: "And do you think that sort of private knowledge consistent with the official position you occupy?" Heat thinks this is certainly working within his official-private code of morality. He has gained the information about Verloc privately from a friend of his so he reserves the right to use it privately: "Private friendship, private information, private use of

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it—that's how I look upon it." Heat has a little bargain of his own with Verloc, to leave him alone in return for information. A further line of the spider-web of inter-relationship is uncovered and the morality of the affair is further tangled: "the Assistant Commissioner repressed a smile at the fleeting thought that the reputation of Chief Inspector Heat might possibly have been made in a great part by the Secret Agent Verloc." When the Assistant Commissioner points out that Verloc has failed Heat in this instance, Heat's reply puts a new slant on the matter:

"I asked him nothing so he could tell me nothing. He isn't one of our men. It isn't as if he were in our pay."

Heat shows up his fallibility when he makes a statement about Verloc prompted not by what he knows, but by his own personal feelings which derive from consideration for his home, reputation etc: "My opinion is that he knows nothing of this affair."¹

Throughout this interview Conrad scarcely disguises his contempt for the petty machinery devised by men to redress the world's wrong. The "justice" meted out by human beings on one another appears to him the result of haphazard chance or positive self-interest. The more orderly an official system is, the more it is hampered by its very efficiency in the performance of its function.

The Assistant Commissioner's interview with the Home Secretary

carries a similar sceptical undertone. The two audiences with Sir Ethelred are on a higher level of official relationship. Sir Ethelred's insistence on "no details" while the Assistant Commissioner fits in all the details imperceptibly by using a parenthetical manner reveals a limitation in the mentality of the lofty personage. His attitude to mankind, as though he could control people like a series of puppets, reveals in him a certain simplicity and naivety, even stupidity, in his approach to problems of men, an approach which probably helped him into his position, like Heat's lack of "true wisdom". "We can't put up with the innocence of nasty little children" appears ridiculous when considered beside the deep-rooted perversity of the anarchist Professor. Sir Ethelred is too far removed from details to be concerned to any extent with the Assistant Commissioner's true motive in taking Heat's place in the investigation. When he asks for the Assistant Commissioner's "immediate motive" the latter is very careful to leave out Michaelis's patroness. The Assistant Commissioner's rationalisation, that he desires a change to personal action, is true, but his private motive is equally true. It is highly probable that had the Assistant Commissioner not been acquainted with Michaelis's patroness he would not have taken a special interest in this particular affair.¹

The encounters of the Assistant Commissioner and Toodles, the unpaid hanger-on Under-Secretary of Sir Ethelred, have importance for

two things. First, they give the "valet" approach to the Secretary of State, de-romanticising him and his affairs, adding to the satire.  
Second, they give that glimpse outside the intensity of the world into which we have entered, the unconcerned world outside, like the appearance of the couple in the Genevese garden in *Under Western Eyes*. The "revolutionary" Toodles, with his troubles over the Nationalisation of the Fisheries assumes a mock-heroic nature beside the depth of human problems revealed elsewhere in *The Secret Agent*.

The links of officialdom are used by Conrad to join the society and themes of *The Secret Agent*. The use of such a large proportion of official encounters no doubt facilitated Conrad's development of the ironic tone which is a major factor contributing to the novel's artistic success. The official relationships help develop the themes of guilt, moral isolation and corruption, and comprise as well Conrad's most complex portrayal of his attitudes to official morality. In the private relationships between men the theme of corruption, especially, is developed.

b) **Human Relationships between Men.**

The relationships of the anarchists, who are a curious body of men, not at all united, and two encounters between members of both police

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1 Cf. the relationship between Heat and his department: "no man is a hero to his valet", op. cit., p.91.

and anarchist groups are the only relationships of a personal nature worth consideration from the point of view of the development of the moral themes. Let us first look at the anarchists.

We are introduced in Chapter Three to Verloc's little inner circle—to Michaelis, Yundt, and Ossipon. They each pour out their theories, but the reader, like Verloc, is quite convinced at the end that they are "A lazy lot", indolent, morally depraved and incapable of any action collectively or as individuals. After they have left his shop Verloc considers their bodily security, behind which they can talk as much anarchist nonsense as they wish without being driven to act in any way, and his own dilemma, either to instigate a bomb outrage or have his pay stopped. Besides, they have no wives to provide for!

Outside the ring of talkative anarchists there is the little Professor, the bomb expert, who keeps a bomb in his pocket to preserve him from capture. Comrade Ossipon has two conversations with him. Because perhaps, of the intensity of the Professor's purpose and his great confidence in himself, Ossipon "suffered from a sense of moral and even physical insignificance." The Professor contrasts his own standard of morality:

"I shall never be arrested. The game isn't good enough

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for any policeman of them all. To deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism."

Conrad perhaps implies that this does not exist in the official ranks of the police force. Artistically Ossipon's second interview with the Professor adds to the sceptical tone and the nihilistic conclusion.

"Exterminate, exterminate!" Against the Professor's warped vision of existence we are confronted with another warped vision, that of Michaelis: "And so Michaelis dreams of a world like a beautiful and cheery hospital." Then the Professor comments on Ossipon's vision:

"Your notion of a humanity universally putting out the tongue and taking the pill from pole to pole at the bidding of a few solemn jokers is worthy of the prophet. Prophecy! What's the good of thinking of what will be!"

Above all there is in their minds the thought of death which will annihilate everything for them anyway, so that they realise the meaninglessness of their words.

The two encounters between members of both police and anarchist groups, between Chief Inspector Heat and the Professor, and between the Assistant Commissioner and Vladimir display a certain abnormality and strongly develop the nihilistic theme. When the reader considers how plausible Conrad's portrayal of these meetings is, he may be led to question the structure of a society which renders them possible. Perhaps it is best for such meetings to be possible, since if Heat were

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to shoot the Professor at sight the Professor would have won the moral victory. While it is manifest that Conrad does not approve of the morality of the Professor and Vladimir, he does not entirely approve of that of the Assistant Commissioner or Chief Inspector Heat, or the general structure of society that surrounds them. However police and anarchists are not reduced to equality as this statement of Edward Garnett’s implies:

Chief-Inspector Heat, the thief-taker and the guardian of social order, is no better than the inflexible avenger of social injustice, the Professor. The Assistant Commissioner of Police, though a fearless and fine individual moves our admiration no more than does the child-like idealist, Michaelis, who has been kept in prison for fifteen years for a disinterested act of courage.¹

In Conrad’s estimation, the Professor and Michaelis both fall far below Heat and the Assistant Commissioner. His vision of the Professor is one of a dangerous maniac, not of an "inflexible avenger of social injustice", and to Conrad Michaelis’s "child-like" idealism is mere idiocy tinged with flabby indolence. The relationship between their standards of morality is not so simple as Garnett asserts.

As far as the Professor is concerned Heat does represent the whole of mankind, the opposing multitude.² Yet this representative of the opposing multitude is impotent before the moral superiority of the Professor, whose determined will and whose bomb makes him untouchable.

² The Secret Agent, pp.83,84.
The Professor, as a symbol of evil, is still rampant in the world at the end of the book, while Heat and his superiors have disappeared before the wind. In a way their encounter echoes the encounter between Jim and Brown in *Lord Jim* in so far as both Heat's and Jim's morality are questioned, but Heat is less wise than Jim, and has sufficient faith in his departmental morality not to be shaken to the point of failure. Yet he is shaken, he is human after all, as is the Professor; he does not go away with a sense of moral superiority. When he leaves with the feeling that mankind supports him in grappling with his problems the first he encounters is the problem of managing his Assistant Commissioner, put there by mankind for him to grapple with.

The fact that the arch-criminal in the affair and the chief investigator can be formally introduced at a sort of salon makes the reader feel somewhat uneasy about the morality of society. The nearest the Assistant Commissioner can give Vladimir by way of reproach is a dark hint: "I've no doubt that Mr. Vladimir has a very precise notion of the true importance of this affair." In their subsequent conversation outside Vladimir is further frightened, partly because he knows Verloc is to stand trial and does not know how much the man has or will let out. The police do not fare so badly, but the fact that they are able to investigate at all is largely a matter of luck,

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and the results are certainly lucky. Verloc is never brought to trial, so presumably Vladimir roams free at the end of the novel, like the Professor.

Through these relationships at the personal level, all of which concern at least one of the anarchists, we see how the thread of moral corruption moves through Conrad's little society, although there is no focal point of corruption, like the silver in Nostromo. All these isolated links are drawn together by the central relationship of the novel, which, curiously for a successful Conrad novel, concerns a woman.

c) Human Relationships between Men and Women.

In The Secret Agent the moral themes receive their most intensive development through Conrad's portrayal of Winnie Verloc's relationships, especially the themes of isolation, both intellectual and moral, and guilt. We shall pay close attention to her relationship with her husband, as it is the most important human relationship in the novel, but passing consideration must be given as well to her encounter with Ossipon at the end.

Conrad's portrayal of the relationship between Winnie and her husband is the best of his many attempts at portraying relationships between men and women. It carries its achievement because of the strict economy of sentiment allowed by the detached ironic point of
view, with almost the exclusion of any sexual element and a very circumscribed passion. The psychological abnormality of the relationship increases the immensity of isolation between Verloo and his wife. It seems certain, from Conrad's lesser works, that had he attempted to show the Verloos in their more intimate moments or portrayed them as a more loving couple, he would have failed artistically. Whenever Conrad places them together the one is intensely preoccupied with something the other cannot share. Ironically, when Verloo calls Winnie to him in his nearest approach to passionate affection, he unconsciously sounds his death-knell. She comes—with the carving knife.¹

The most remarkable thing about the relationship is the fact that Winnie does not question her husband's affairs. Mrs. Verloo merely accepts her husband. Her worldly concern is for one object at the beginning of the book: the well-being of Stevie, her mother, and perhaps herself. It is because of this concern that she marries Verloo. Her conception of morality does not go beyond her world, hence Verloo's shady dealings are not in her province, though she might have evidence of them. Verloo's extra-mural activities are no affair of hers either, his trips to the continent, or his walks. Baines suggests that this is the result of their indolence, which Conrad stresses again and again:

Without this indolence the Verloos could hardly have remained together, but with it they are able to live insulated from each other, like two wires in an electric flex; the breaking of the insulation brings immediate disaster. ¹

From Winnie's point of view the relationship has the air of a contract, like an international pact of mutual assistance. Verloc will take over Winnie, mother, Stevie, furniture. Winnie will house-keep for Verloc and act when required as his wife, but no questioning or interference must be offered concerning his outside affairs. To Verloc the relationship is free from the contract element, as no such idea enters his head. It seems perfectly natural for him to take over mother-in-law, furniture etc. We are told that the mere suspicion of a bargain would have been infinitely shocking to Mr. Verloc's idea of love, which he keeps completely separate in his life and mind from his work. ² Mrs. Verloc's philosophy which "consisted in not taking notice of the inside of facts" is a part of her whole being. ³ When Verloc gives Winnie the first inkling of something amiss, only a very slight inkling, by saying "Perhaps it's just as well" to the mother's departure, Winnie's curiosity is in fact roused, but only for a few seconds. Her "philosophy" overtakes her in her next thought and she lapses back to think of Stevie. ⁴

At the crisis when Winnie realises what has happened to Stevie, her

² The Secret Agent, p. 259.
habitual unconcern makes it extremely difficult to approach her:

Mrs. Verloc's philosophical, almost disdainful inquisitiveness, the foundation of their accord in domestic life made it extremely difficult to get into contact with her, now this tragic necessity had arisen.¹

He tries at this point to communicate with her, but can only utter a string of allusions to Vladimir which even a person in his right mind would find hard to follow. For Mrs. Verloc with her tremendous preoccupation it is impossible. All he can produce from her is "No . . . What are you talking about?"²

The relationship is made vivid and convincing partly by the extraordinary reticence these two characters display in their conversation with each other. Conrad shows us sufficient to see that most of it must have been limited to the immediate, the physical. In speaking they seldom use sentences of more than one clause, usually just one or two words. The nearest approach to a domestic argument occurs when Mrs. Verloc is concerned because Stevie is upset by the talk of the anarchists. Her comments, which never proceed to open attack, are sandwiched by "Mr. Verloc made no comment."³ Such is the state of Verloc's preoccupation with his job and Winnie's preoccupation with domestic affairs that even in conversation their words do not always convey the intention of the speaker. We are led to imagine that this

state of affairs existed from the date of their marriage and perhaps before. When Verloc returns after seeing Vladimir, his preoccupation is considerably increased, partly because of the anxiety of planning the bomb outrage, partly because of the psychological effect of Vladimir on him.¹

The divergent interests of these two, their isolated concerns for their peculiar worlds, produces the effect whereby when forced through circumstances following Stevie's death to communicate with each other they sometimes only understand each other in part and sometimes completely misunderstand each other. They proceed on different planes of thought and speech until the words of one happen to attract the thought of the other. At times they become so preoccupied with a turn of events in their own situation that they make no attempt whatever to gear their minds to the other's line of thought. When Mrs. Verloc realises Stevie's fate she never really appreciates the significance of what her husband says, such is her passion of consuming hatred. Her violent change of mood is plausible to the reader because Conrad makes her previous lack of moral involvement in her husband's activities and guilt so convincing. When suddenly the whole burden of it descends on her in so realistic a manner it is not surprising that her limited mentality cannot bear the strain. While Verloc catches at the least word of Winnie's to try and start up a conversation, her

inward thoughts impress on her in a kind of poetical refrain: "This man took the boy away to murder him." ¹

Their isolation from each other, their inability to share moral responsibility, is due partly to their limited mentality and lack of imaginative faculty. Verloc cannot conjure up Winnie's world in his mind. He cannot comprehend Winnie's grief; having no sense of guilt himself he cannot imagine why she should feel any:

Mr. Verloc was a humane man; he had come home prepared to allow every latitude to his wife's affection for her brother. Only he did not understand either the nature or the whole extent of that sentiment. And in this he was excusable, since it was impossible for him to understand it without ceasing to be himself. ²

Likewise Winnie at first has no concern for Verloc's world, and after her awakening her mind is so controlled by passion that she can have no comprehension of it. Her unconcern, her later passion with its dominating pictorial visions, are all part of this mentality.

The Verloc-Mrs. Verloc relationship dominates and is crucial to this novel, in which Winnie is brought to some comprehension of her moral involvement in the world by its encroachment on and shattering of her own world. Winnie never realises the magnitude of her act of killing Verloc, since the extreme horror which isolates her from him before she kills him is replaced afterwards by extreme fear, isolating

her further within herself. The pictorial image of the gallows takes absolute possession of her mind, and the accompanying refrain which she has read somewhere: "The drop given was fourteen feet." It is the successful portrayal of this relationship, a very difficult task for Conrad, that contributes most to the success of this novel, as the structure of the other human relationships are all linked to this central point and the dramatic structure has its climax in the slaying of Verloc by his wife. It seems that in portraying relationships between men and women Conrad could only succeed artistically with an abnormal relationship of this kind.

The relationship between Ossipon and Winnie which does contain a sexual element, fails to convince artistically. However we must examine briefly its contribution to the development of the nihilistic tone. The idea of Ossipon blindly wooing the distraught Winnie on the recommendation of the Professor is incredible, as is the manner of their lovemaking. Yet if we accept this, the encounter does add considerably to the general horror of the last parts of the book, the conception of isolation, the nihilism. For the very last thing Ossipon is likely to imagine when he meets Winnie is that she is on the verge of suicide having slain her husband. Yet with his profound shock at the sight of Verloc he is further isolated from her. From when they first meet they scarcely understand each other's words. Their attitude to each other

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is totally divergent, Ossipon, casual, after what he can get out of it; Winnie, clutching at a last straw to save her life. In the end Winnie is abandoned even by Ossipon to the complete isolation in which she destroys herself.

Except for the relationship between Verloo and his wife, the different types of individual relationships have almost equal importance in the development of the themes of this novel. Through his portrayal of the theme of the relationship between individual and society, to which we now turn, Conrad develops most fully its nihilistic tone.

d) The Relationship between the Individual and Society.

We remember that in Lord Jim this theme appears in connection with Jim's and Marlow's affiliations to the "one of us" morality of England, while the morality of England is not seriously called into question. Nostromo is concerned with a corrupt state and Nostromo's relationship with it. In the smaller society of The Secret Agent the state of England is called into question and the relationship between it and the individual is considered. There is the question of Winnie's guilt, and the curious links between police and criminal. However there is a deeper interest, in the anti-social nature of the anarchist group, especially of the little Professor. We shall examine these problems briefly as they concern the Verloos and the Professor.
Mr. Verloc's anti-social nature and activities divorce him from human society so that he has no desire to associate with any beyond his own circle, nor has society any desire to associate with him. In his interview with Vladimir he shows his reluctance to make war on any account with society, but it is unavoidable. He has no conception of what constitutes a social evil. His concept of social responsibility is limited to protection of his family. He displays little sympathy even for his brother anarchists. Conrad shows that all this is the result of Verloc's desire for an easy life, his indolence, and displays a strong disapproval. The reader is allowed no sympathy for him.

For Mrs. Verloc in her situation Conrad has a much greater sympathy. As with Jim he seems unwilling to lay any direct accusation at her and leaves the case open to the reader. Winnie considers the protection of her mother and Stevie her only social obligations. Outside that nothing touches her until the impact of Stevie's death causes her to recognise a social evil and "execute" her husband. There is no evidence to suggest any recognition of social responsibility on Winnie's behalf outside her own little world. No matter who else Verloc had killed she would not have expressed anything beyond annoyance, or fear at the thought of risk for Stevie. Conrad faces us with this problem of Winnie's lack of moral concern. Should a moral evil be neglected because it is considered beyond the bounds of a particular sphere of responsibility? Winnie's world is clearly defined and it takes the tremendous shock of the destruction of one third of it to bring her
to any realisation of moral responsibility:

... this creature, whose moral nature had been subjected to a shock of which, in the physical order, the most violent earthquake of history could only be a faint and languid rendering... 1

While he does not condone her indolence Conrad presents her as totally unacquainted with society. He does not blame her, finally, for not exhibiting more suspicion towards Verloc's activities.

The anti-social nature of the anarchist group reaches its intensity in Conrad's portrayal of the Professor. This man's attitude to mankind is not one of conscious non-involvement where possible but of absolute opposition, so much that whenever he moves among a crowd he feels an untrammeled hatred and fear, and beneath it all, despair, since he is so out-numbered. Chief Inspector Heat remarks "Give it up. You'll find we are too many for you." 2 This removes the Professor's grin and the recurring thought anulls any alacrity in his heart. 3 The novel closes with an account of his opposition, a picture of nihilism, pessimism, with the suggestion of the insignificance of the individual against the mass:

And the incorruptible Professor walked, too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant,

shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea
calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world.
Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly,
like a pest in the street full of men.¹

Conrad displays almost a loathing at the attitude of the anarchist
Professor, yet he uses him as a mouth-piece to convey further his own
nihilistic attitude, to indict not only his fellow-anarchists but the
police society as well. The Professor accuses the anarchists as shams.
They do not rely on death as he does. From his position of complete
independence he accuses them of tying themselves to society:

"You revolutionists . . . are the slaves of the social
convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as
the very police that stand up in the defence of that conven-
tion. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionize it
. . . . The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same
basket . . . He plays his little game—so do you propagandists."

When we think of the commerce between Heat and Verloo and the two
encounters between police and anarchists we realise the truth behind
these statements. The reduction of the whole thing to a "game" reveals
his nihilistic approach to the world, which was perhaps in part Conrad's
approach. His own position is truly "incorruptible", whether the
police descend to savagery and shoot him at sight or whether he is
allowed to continue making his bombs. He always succeeds. He rightly
regards himself the "true propagandist".²

Conrad shows definite disapproval of the attitude to society of Verloc and his fellow anarchists, so that the reader is only called in to consider the question of Winnie's guilt. Conrad is concerned more with an argument than with a question. He takes sides against his anarchists and tries to show how any good intentions of theirs are misplaced, and stem anyway from personal indolence. In The Secret Agent the social theme is very strong, as, in other instances besides those I have mentioned, we are confronted with different attitudes to human society, mostly perverted attitudes. By juxtaposing one against the other from his position as sceptic Conrad shows the fallibility of them all and at the same time shows his mistrust of the whole society he presents us with.

The Secret Agent, Conrad's most sustained humorous work, nevertheless has its humour warped by unpleasantness and grimness. As it progresses the increasing distress and tragedy overwhelms and almost mocks its humorous side with a hollow echo. The human relationships bind the little society together morally as they do in Nostromo. The corruption of the anarchists engenders a wider corruption which reaches even the ranks of the police force. There is no escape. The portrayal of Verloc's relationship with his wife, although often very funny, is Conrad's most despairing picture of the difficulties of human communication and of the general limitations of certain human beings, wallowing in ignorance and indolence. In spite of the intensity he gives to his portrayal of this tiny part of London society, Conrad emphasises the
fact that even such a bomb-incident as this soon disappears into oblivion against the immensity of London, and of time:

The sound of exploding bombs was lost in their immensity of passive grains without an echo. For instance, this Verloc affair. Who thought of it now?¹

In *Under Western Eyes*, the last novel we are to consider, the immensity against which Conrad measures the hopelessness and smallness of human activity is enlarged to the immensity of the state of Russia.

In Under Western Eyes, as in the other three novels we have been considering, moral guilt is again the theme that unifies the various elements including the human relationships, but it is a very different kind of guilt from that which concerns Nostromo and The Secret Agent. It is most akin to Jim's guilt in Lord Jim, or rather to Marlow's conception of Jim's guilt since Jim is not perceptive enough to comprehend or analyse his own feelings. In Under Western Eyes there is no Marlow. The teacher of languages who acts as narrator serves a very useful purpose but he does not, like Marlow, go beyond this capacity and enter the dramatic action. Razumov has no accomplice. He is more than capable of perceiving the nature of his own guilt; the conflicting problems it arouses dominate his consciousness. Through the greater part of the novel he carries the secret of his betrayal of Victor Haldin in his breast and dares not confess it for fear of being assassinated by the Russian revolutionaries. He wrestles with it alone in the face of his harrassing relationships with the world around him until, haunted by fear and in thorough exhaustion, he voluntarily turns the tables on his own success and confesses. The reader emerges from his more passive role as observer of the argument of moral corruption presented in The Secret Agent to become once more sole judge of the issues, to be Razumov's only companion through his bitter experiences. The reader is given a
hopeless task. Perhaps Conrad himself abandoned as too involved the question of whether or not Razumov was really guilty. Perhaps Razumov's herculean efforts symbolise Conrad's efforts to come to grips with these moral problems and his final admission of failure. At least after Under Western Eyes Conrad never again portrayed a series of moral themes with so great an intensity and complexity.

It is impossible to criticize or evaluate this novel without adopting some attitude towards Conrad's treatment of Russians and revolutionaries, an attitude which must affect any consideration of character, human relationships or ideas presented. A large number of critics assume that, because of his Polish upbringing and exile in Russia, a novel of this nature would provide him with a vehicle for an outburst of anti-Russian feeling. In spite of Conrad's claims of impartiality in the Author's Note, this has led to attacks on or criticism of the novel as though it were a political pamphlet. However, Conrad claims to "render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself", which tries to point the way in which the emphasis is taken off politics and placed on people. Yet Gordan, Warner, Hewitt,

1 Under Western Eyes, p. vii.
2 Joseph Conrad; the Making of a Novelist, p. 9.
3 Joseph Conrad, 1951, p. 113.
4 Conrad; A Reassessment, pp. 80-84.
and more recently, Baines¹, among the better critics, have noted the
presence of strong anti-Russian feeling, or Russian hatred. Conrad
himself insists to Garnett "There's just about as much or as little
hatred in this book as in the Outcast of the Islands for instance".²
While Conrad's attitude to the Russian situation was scarcely one of
approval, this is true in the main. Guerard remarks:

The novel's enormous personal achievement is to have done so
much justice to Russia and things Russian. It reminds us,
as we recall Conrad's hatreds and disgusts, how great must have
been the share of conscious imaginative integrity as well as
how great the devil's share of unconscious sympathy.³

Conrad's attitude to Russian politics may have been one of disgust as his
Author's Note reveals⁴, but the novel's main emphasis is not on the
Russian political situation. Attention is drawn rather to a tiny section
of the Russian people, and to that section is given a tremendous sympathy
and understanding in their plight.

Conrad's employment of the old teacher of languages as narrator
masks successfully his own attitude. While the shift Zabel mentions
"to a critical attitude alien and largely hostile or incomprehensible
to the Russian"⁵, is made with the employment of the narrator, the

² See letter to Edward Garnett, 20 October 1911, in Letters from
³ Conrad the Novelist, p. 221.
⁴ Under Western Eyes, p. x.
⁵ "Conrad: The Secret Sharer", in New Republic, 104: 567-74, 21
April 1941, p. 567.
narrator himself has to be taken into account. He is an elderly man, sympathetic to people but, unlike his counterpart, Marlow, without any deep understanding of ways foreign to his tradition or desire to identify himself with those who interest him. The reader often knows more about the situation than the narrator at a given point, so that when the old man tells of his affronted feelings at the time, the reader, familiar with the background, is hostile to him and to his lack of comprehension. Conrad gives no indication whatever that the reader should automatically assume the narrator's views to be correct. He does not claim them as his own views. The narrator's relationship with the Russians is one of detachment, not close involvement, identification, as between Jim and Marlow. He comes into little contact with Razumov and has little influence on the action.

Criticism of Conrad's attitude to revolution and revolutionaries has been applied to this novel as to The Secret Agent especially by Arnold Kettle and Irving Howe, this time with more justification.\(^1\) Conrad does allege these revolutionaries to be part of a national movement, responsible for considerable organisation, for example the projected Balkan intrigue, yet not one of the people he presents us with has the slightest ability to organise anything except petty outrages more likely to strengthen rather than weaken a national administration. Ivan-

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ovitch, Nikita, Laspara, Mme de S— are weak characters tending to become caricatures at times. On the other hand Guerard is right to point to the sympathy of portrayal given to Tekla and Sophia Antonovna. Putting these arguments aside however, this novel is concerned basically with the situation of one Russian, the student Razumov, rather than with the revolutionaries, and his situation does show the plight of a Russian of the time.

The problems of this novel must be considered also at a universal level, problems surrounding a man's relationship to the state and to private individuals, with the clash of public duties and private interests. Marlow cannot make up his mind on Jim's case; the reader cannot on Nostromo's, or perhaps on Winnie Verloo's; Razumov himself cannot discover his own loyalty. Guerard alone gives any real attention to the moral progress of this novel:

Once again we have the story of a not uncommon man whom chance and suffering render extraordinary; who suddenly has to face a boundary-situation and most difficult choice; whose crime both makes and breaks him. The act of betrayal, carrying him out of one solitude and into another, lends him a somber magnitude and new moral awareness, and compels him to destroy himself at last.1

Irving Howe points out the divided claim Russia makes on Razumov, in the form of various people, as a man having no personal ties to anyone and allowing his allegiance only to the whole state.2 Thus it is not wise

1 Conrad the Novelist, p.231.
to rely on Razumov's reactionary "History not Theory" formula which he compiles after he betrays Haldin as a summary of his confession of faith.¹

In Under Western Eyes we are faced with an isolated man in a world of two opposing forces. Because of the peculiar position into which he is thrust by fate, Razumov is forced to have dealings with the Russian reactionary officials and the community of Russian revolutionaries. The revolutionary community is itself isolated in Russia because of its very nature and more so at Geneva where Conrad gives the impression of a closed "pocket" as it were of Russia, transplanted, incomprehensible to the outside world and having no concern for the outside world. Perhaps more than anything the intensity of this isolation diminishes the novel's political element so that the struggle becomes a moral battle between certain human beings. We become interested in the personality of Razumov, Mikulin, General T—, the Haldins, Sophia Antonovna, and so on, and their relationships with each other. What they represent is of secondary importance.

Razumov's relationship with the world, which to him consists in relationships with certain reactionaries and revolutionaries, is the central subject of Under Western Eyes. Because of the importance of these relationships, and the way in which, once begun, the various interviews follow one another, the divisions used for my analyses in

¹ Under Western Eyes, p.66.
the previous chapters require modification. Razu'mov's confession to Nathalie Haldin constitutes the climax, brought about by the series of interviews. Because of this the psychological element of a desire to confess permeates Razu'mov's dealings at all levels of my classifications. Therefore it is best to examine the approach to this climax first in terms of the whole series of relationships, in order to discuss its thematic relevance, then to sub-divide different classifications of relationships. Because of the masculine nature of Conrad's revolutionary women, Razu'mov's relationships with all the revolutionaries may best be considered as a group.

a) Human Relationships and Razu'mov's Confession.

Because of the harassing nature of the various interviews he is forced to submit to, Razu'mov develops a strong psychological desire to confess his betrayal of Haldin, a desire which is largely responsible for the deep pessimism that lies at the heart of the novel. Through every interview he has forced on him, Razu'mov becomes more and more convinced of the uselessness of his supreme concentration in maintaining his pose, in parrying the thrusts of those committed irrevocably to one of the two creeds on which his Russia exists. He prefers to give in rather than remain forever in fear. His reckless ambiguous allusions to matters it is wiser to keep secret in these various relationships help produce this irresponsible tone.

The self-identification element is again prominent. To Razu'mov
confession is a means of bridging his isolation, even at the grave risk of losing his life. The desire may be explained in terms of a subconscious wish to identify himself with someone, even with a revolutionary or a reactionary, as he is not permitted to come into contact with anyone whom he knows has affiliations with both sides. He truly has "no one—to—go—to", no one with whom he can share his thoughts, his feelings concerning his betrayal of Haldin. Instead he has the phantom of Haldin alone to accompany him, a phantom which continues to force itself on him at his various times of crisis. He is forced to identify his predicament with Haldin's, yet this identification is hateful to him. The abnormal type of relationship which we observed in The Secret Agent is really developed here. Razumov's relationship with Haldin assumes a supernatural tone.

The isolation theme is linked closely with the themes of corruption and guilt. Razumov does not wish to be corrupted in any way; he wishes to remain aloof, politically and morally. His betrayal of Haldin to the rulers of a corrupt state leads him eventually to feel a strong measure of moral guilt, of self-corruption. Forced to join the reactionaries as a spy to save himself, he feels that the only way to free himself from further corruption and guilt is to confess to the revolutionaries. His relationship with Haldin's sister brings back recollections of Haldin with terrific force, phantoms which he cannot

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tread down. The guilt complex produces the desire to have done forever with Haladin, but the revolutionaries, Haladin's mother, and especially Nathalie force Haladin before him. The ever-present intellectual problem of his moral responsibility adds to his fatigue and helps break down his resistance. His second confession, in the "lions' den" of revolutionaries, in which he finally spurns the world brings in more prominently the theme dominant throughout the relationships, the longing for peace, culminating in a semi- or sub-conscious death wish. His longing for detachment, for peace, is never fulfilled from the time Haladin appears in his rooms until his confession. Artistically Conrad emphasises this by showing Razumov in one interview after another, especially on the day of his confession, so that the impression is given of a man continually on the rack, having to undergo a perpetual interrogation.

Thus it is that all the major themes and the human relationships through the novel evolve around the central climax of Razumov's confession to Nathalie Haladin. We must now follow more closely the elements leading to this climax through Razumov's series of relationships with Prince K— and the Russian officials, the revolutionaries, and the ladies Haladin. Then at the end we shall again examine the wider theme of the relationship between the individual and the society of the novel.


Conrad's portrayal of Razumov's relationship with Prince K— and the Russian officials constitutes his darkest picture of officialdom. There
is little humour in these official interviews, and what there is is of the bitterest kind.

Razumov's relationship with his "patron", Prince K—, is treated with considerable restraint at a more than semi-official level. Prince K— is the most shadowy of all the Conradian officials. It is important that he should be so as his withdrawal brings into great prominence the relationship between Razumov and the Russian state. Prince K—'s personal contacts with Razumov are slight, yet these have a marked emotional effect on the latter. His relationship with Prince K— does not give him any tangible heritage to a family, but to his mind it gives him a heritage to Russia, to the destiny of Russia. Hence his problem is how to be loyal to Russia in his difficult situation. As he has no real family ties he is forced to meet this problem entirely on his own, and to bear all consequences on his own. The moral isolation theme is firmly established through this skilful and perfectly credible working out of this relationship. Razumov has sufficient affiliation to ally himself to Russia, but not sufficient to claim the personal aid of anyone in his need.

If Razumov's and the Prince's relationship is the most shadowy official relationship in Conrad, his relationship with General T— is the coldest. General T— is the most officious of Conrad's officials, and the one whom Conrad seems to detest most. He has not Vladimir's power of perception and argument, nor does Conrad adopt the same playful
attitude in which he deals with Captain Ellis and Captain Mitchell. We see General T— from the point of view of his impression on Razumov, and this impression, which Conrad seems to endorse, is one of bitter and cold contempt.

Lack of humanity and human feeling and a frowning reserve give the general his moral superiority over his fellow-beings, including Razumov. Razumov finds it very difficult to conceal the fact that he loathes the man. This is the first of a long succession of instances where Razumov finds he has something to conceal. His whole nature rebels against the idea of this hence the mental effort necessary adds to his fatigue through the conversations. He is also forced to conceal the Ziemianitch affair, prompted not by fear of being accused of complicity with Haldin but by humanitarian feeling for Ziemianitch. He succeeds in keeping this affair secret, but at considerable psychological cost. In this conversation Razumov first has to frame his words carefully, to play a part consciously, in an effort to avoid suspicion. Conrad emphasises the strain of this effort by having it produce an abnormal effect on Razumov's mind:

It seemed to Razumov that the floor was moving slightly. This grotesque man in a tight uniform was terrible.1

The general does not follow up any suspicions he may have; he only shows by his coldness of attitude that he thinks there is something extraordinary about Razumov. General T—, with his typically official

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attitude towards mankind, has severe limitations in his idea of revolutionaries:

"One comfort there is. That brood leaves no posterity. I've always said it; one effort, pitiless, persistent, steady—and we are done with them for ever."1

This does not happen. Haldin's execution provokes more unrest.

The "scrupulous courtesy" of the general to his visitors on departure is an important part of his official coldness, his superiority, and perhaps his cruelty. When Razumov leaves him the image of him and what he represents still remains fixed on his mind, and recurs, as Vladimir's does to Verloc in The Secret Agent. The letter from the General Secretariat provokes this abnormal vision:

Razumov had a vision of General T—'s goggle eyes waiting for him—the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible.2

Councillor Mikulin has a completely different and far more subtle and penetrating personality than General T—, so Razumov, prepared to meet the latter, is put off balance completely from the opening of the interview. Mikulin is distinguished from other Comradian officials in so far as he is not an extravert, and has far more perception of human nature. However, the coldness of his official reserve is more intense, and the impression is given that he uses his perception not in order to display human sympathy, but for much more sinister purposes. Conrad

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2 Op. cit., p.84.
shows Razumov's shock at confronting this man:

All the moral bracing up against the possible excesses of power and passion went for nothing before this sallow man, who wore a full unclipped beard. ¹

The uncertainty of things affects Razumov's mind. He never knows exactly how much any of his interrogators know, nor does he know how much he can safely give away, and how much he must retain. He does not know, in the General T— interview or in this one, whether he will ever see the light of day again.

This interview provides a very important link in the novel's dramatic movement. It is an intense duel of words, seen from the point of view of Razumov's conscience. Razumov is unsure of his part because of his divided loyalty. He is again forced to conceal:

Reserve! Reserve! All he had to do was to keep the Ziemianitch episode secret with absolute determination, when the questions came. Keep Ziemianitch strictly out of all the answers.²

This turmoil increases through the interview so that Razumov loses self-control, makes irrelevant statements, even walks out once, pours forth tirade after tirade, and completely mismanages the conversation. He is forced by some psychological necessity to allude to the Ziemianitch affair, although Mikulin obviously has no idea of what is behind that allusion.

The sceptical tone reasserts itself at the end, also the theme of the longing for peace and irresponsibility when Razumov alludes to the peculiar position in Russian society in which he finds himself, hating yet supporting the regime, the position of a detached thinker, he insists. Really his position is that of one who wants to be a detached thinker, but who is drawn by both sides at various times to commit himself. Finally he objects to it all, and expresses a wish to retire, to extricate himself from the situation altogether.

"But I protest against this comedy of persecution. The whole affair is becoming too comical altogether for my taste. A comedy of errors, phantoms, and suspicions. It's positively indecent . . ."

Yet Mikulin wins this battle, which also provides the brilliant dramatic close to the first part, by the simple question quietly put, "Where to?" To the reader it is quite obvious that Razumov cannot retire. He is irretrievably ensnared between a divided loyalty and obligation from which there is no escape.¹ Once again Conrad leaves the case open, this time by imposing an equal moral responsibility on Razumov from either side. Again the reader is left to decide the moral issue. Mikulin is quite right when he insists that Razumov's position is impossible. He is right when he points out:

"You are a young man of great independence. Yes. You are going away free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us."

Perhaps Mikulin is aware that the intense isolation enforced on him by

his position will bring him back easily. At least that is what happens, not because Razumov approves of the regime in any way or disapproves of the revolutionaries, but because he is isolated from mankind and Mikulin is the only person in the whole world to whom he can talk at all openly. In the isolation between the two interviews Razumov's world is a nightmare.

Moral isolation and official coldness are common to these three relationships, especially the latter two. General T—'s relationship with Razumov especially sets this novel's sombre, deadly serious tone. However, in his more personal dealings with the revolutionaries Razumov is scarcely better off. Because of his moral isolation from them the comparative friendliness of the revolutionaries does little for Razumov but put him on his guard.

c) Razumov's Relationships with the Revolutionaries.

Officialdom does not enter Razumov's relationships with the revolutionaries. He still feels that he is scrutinised carefully, and is still isolated tremendously as a spy in their midst, yet they are ostensibly friendly, in an austere way. The isolation theme obtrudes as at each interview Razumov's loneliness drives him towards confession, while his fear of the consequences forces him to conceal. At Geneva incertitude is added as he is not sure how much the revolutionaries know of him. A kind of vicious circle evolves as Razumov's fear drives him to irresponsibility in speech which produces more fear and loneliness. The theme of the
longing for peace enters especially towards the end of the account of
the day of his confession when Razumov becomes more and more willing to
pay even the penalty of death for a time of peace.

Victor Haldin's intrusion into Razumov's rooms which is also his
intrusion into Razumov's existence sets the situation of the novel, the
paradox on which its subsequent action rests dramatically, namely the
encroachment of the world on to Razumov's existence and the fearful
isolation forced on him because of the nature of that encroachment.
Razumov fully realises the significance of the intrusion. His cry
"There goes my silver medal!" means far more than the loss of a distinction,
it means the loss of the right to establish himself as a Russian citizen
alongside other Russian citizens, to remove the blot of his past that
has so far kept him alone in the world. Razumov's imaginative mind sets
off a volley of fears that lead up to thoughts of exile and ruin. In
their conversation the two souls are a great distance apart, Haldin calling
Razumov "brother" and imagining Razumov to be in deep, silent sympathy
with him, Razumov being isolated more and more by images of fear. Haldin
provokes the fear, and, after the Ziemianitch affair, the vision:

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. He was lying out of the way a little, as though
he had selected that place on purpose. The snow round him
was untrodden.

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This vision is the immediate cause of Razumov's betrayal of Haldin, a vision which reveals something pathological in Razumov's nature. This same vision recurs through the book, reminding Razumov that his relationship with Haldin has not ended with betrayal. Their relationship continues in a more frightening, abnormal manner.

Razumov again has a psychological desire to confess on his return to his rooms. His "diabolical impulse" is satisfied by the ambiguous statement "It's done." The desire to confess overcomes his fear of the consequences, which are nevertheless acutely present. His mind leads him to deliver an intermittent, frenzied harangue similar to the display he later gives to Mikulin, with the same elements of allusion, to phantoms, even to Prince K— and General T—. Strongly allied to Razumov's desire to confess is the desire to justify himself to the world, and it is this that leads him on to give what he considers to be his position in the world to Haldin, which ends in a note of what he considers his true relationship with Haldin to be, and, with a further note of deep despair, what he considers their relationship with the world to be:

"You come from your province, but all this land is mine—or I have nothing. No doubt you shall be looked upon as a martyr some day—a sort of hero—a political saint. But I beg to be excused. I am content in fitting myself to be a worker. And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity! I tell you," he cried, in a vibrating, subdued voice, and advancing one step nearer the bed, "that what it needs is not a lot of

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haunting phantoms that I could walk through—but a man!"4

These allusions lead Haldin to realise that he is betrayed, to realise the truth of his moral isolation from the one friend he thought he had in the world of Russia. So we have the picture of Haldin walking wearily yet voluntarily out of Razumov's rooms—to his death. It is one of Conrad's most poignant pictures of the tragedy and futility of human life.

From Russia we turn to Geneva and Conrad's account of Razumov's series of encounters with revolutionaries there. Compelled in order to avoid suspicion to visit the Château Borel where the revolutionary Madame de S— keeps her salon, Razumov is first confronted with the figure of Peter Ivanovitch. Razumov's policy at first is to try to control, to manipulate his conversation in such a way that the subject will not put him in deep water. However he cannot help being drawn into a discussion of his affiliations, or to sarcasm at Ivanovitch's insistence that Razumov is "one of us." He has a weapon, the fact that the revolutionaries have done nothing but talk, while he is supposed to have assisted in a definite action with Haldin. He does not have to enter into agreement or disagreement with Ivanovitch's high-blown theories, but can dismiss them with sarcasm or such statements as this:

"Don't you think that I have already gone beyond meditation on that subject?"2

Conrad gives Ivanovitch and Mme de S—extravert mentalities similar to those of his official characters, therefore it is not hard for Razumov, a perceptive man, to forestall them. Unsuspicious by nature, they are not perturbed by the adequate grounds Razumov gives them for suspicion. It appears that the dramatic power as well as the universal interest would have increased if some of Conrad's revolutionaries had been portrayed as more perceptive beings and more of a match for Razumov. However, it is here that Conrad's sceptical attitude again obtrudes. His attack is launched at the blind affirmations of both reactionary and revolutionary alike, both of which doctrines, he shows, are causing misery to the Russian people, typified by Razumov.

Mme de S— is the weaker of the pair. Conrad shows that her money, not revolutionism, is her chief interest, although she does not recognize this herself, and that she has no real perception of Razumov in spite of her assertion, "I can see your very soul."1 This latter produces in Razumov's mind a kind of travesty of the relationship of self-identification—with Haldin's phantom. Razumov imagines she is looking beyond him. The notion of the phantom springs to his mind so vividly that he is forced to allude to it unmistakably in the ensuing conversation. The abnormal element produces a strange change in the tone of the self-identification relationship which removes it far from those, for instance, in Lord Jim.

After the interview with Mme de S—, when he and Ivanovitch talk outside, Razumov considers he has the upper hand morally so he launches an attack on Ivanovitch:

"I really have no mind to turn into a dilettante spiritualist."

Razumov's demand for "action" is ironical, in terms of his past and present situation. He points to Ivanovitch himself as the acknowledged centre of action. As with Mikulin before, Ivanovitch's silence unnerves him. Again Conrad presents us with the conception of a verbal duel similar to the Jim-Brown conversation, a battle between opposing minds to search each other's souls, motives and so on. Razumov tries to discover his true position among the revolutionaries, and Ivanovitch tries to discover Razumov. Because of Razumov's self-applied reserve and their complete moral isolation neither discovers anything. However this round exhausts Razumov. He reflects at the end of it:

"How am I to go on day after day if I have no more power of resistance—moral resistance?"

In his exchange with Tekla which follows Razumov does not have to undergo any strong verbal battle since Tekla is a disillusioned revolutionary anyway. Her chief part in the novel is that of commentator, in her conversations with Razumov and Nathalie Haldin, on the true natures of the "feminist" revolutionists, Ivanovitch and Mme de S—. Her remarks

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pay an important contribution to the general atmosphere of scepticism. While Razumov does, at one stage, make another subliminal confession, he can see that there is little risk of Tekla passing this on.

It is with the arrival of Sophia Antonovna that Razumov's most difficult conversational battle begins, the longest of the whole novel. Sophia Antonovna has a far more perceptive mind than that of either Ivanovitch or Mme de S—. She has the special care of discovering Razumov, and her whole conversation is directed towards that, while Razumov has to give all his energies to covering himself up, to suppressing the innate desire to reveal himself:

She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution. And she was the personal adversary he had to meet.

The conflict of the two-fold desire to confess yet conceal which is the major conflict of this conversation especially, is summed up best in this sentence:

The epigrammatic saying that speech has been given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts came into his mind.¹

The sarcasm Razumov employs when he asks if, in contrast to Yakov-litch, he is not "the right sort" would be sufficient to show a woman of Sophia Antonovna's perception that there was something odd about him.²

Had Razumov behaved quite calmly as Yakovlitch apparently did his assumed part in the assassination of de P— would have been sufficient to place him in equality with Yakovlitch. Razumov tries to keep Sophia Antonowna at bay by using cold sarcasm. Yet he wants to test her, too, to find out what she knows and what she thinks. When she mentions Haldin, the image conjured up does not take over his whole being immediately as it did formerly, so he has sufficient presence of mind to turn the conversation to sarcastic comments on Mme de S—. Yet the suspense of the unknown wears him down bit by bit. His game is a difficult one to play, requiring his whole being and consciousness, and it has turned out to be a lengthy one, especially on this day.

His sarcasm does lead Sophia Antonowna to suspicion, in fact at one place she even hints on the truth. Again, with the increased intensity of their battle, the abnormal self-identification relationship enters:

"It is not the time to be frivolous. What are you flinging your very heart against? Or, perhaps, you are only playing a part."

Razumov had felt that woman's observation of him like a physical contact, like a hand resting lightly on his shoulder. At that moment he received the mysterious impression of her having made up her mind for a closer grip. He stiffened himself inwardly to bear it without betraying himself.

Her attention is deflected, yet it unnerves Razumov to think that he has given her grounds for suspicion to such an extent:

Razumov noted the slightest shades in this conversation, which he had not expected, for which he was not prepared. That
was it. "I was not prepared," he said to himself.¹

In his isolation, surrounded by this group of demanding revolutionaries with the constant pressure of their demanding round of conversations, Razumov longs for an escape from his situation, from himself, from this enclosed world to the world outside of the Genevan tramcar. She strikes another blow: did Razumov coldly attend lectures on the morning of the assassination? The effect of this almost collapses him. The news of the letter from Petersburg gives him further cause for apprehension, but he still keeps his head. The abnormal allusions made on psychological impulse are so obscure that Sophia Antonovna cannot possibly guess at their true meaning. Razumov's moral attack on the revolutionaries is again his weapon for gaining control of the conversation. He points to the emptiness of Sophia's watchwords "Crush the Infamy", which she wishes to placard everywhere:

"You are eloquent, Sophia Antonovna," Razumov interrupted suddenly. "Only, so far you seem to have been writing it in water..."²

He is almost overcome towards the end of this conversation, when he finds unbearable Sophia's guarded mention of the letter giving an account of Ziemianitch's fate. The thought follows that another letter might well arrive giving a full account of his betrayal which would mark his doom. By luck alone he is saved, but only to endure further trials.

Conrad's detailed rendering of this conversation is too lengthy, and results in an artistic defect. However it seems clear that Conrad intended to give the reader as full an account as possible of the wearing-down process Razumov is forced to undergo, in order to reveal the depths and terror of his isolation and feelings of moral guilt.

The series of conversations with revolutionists is not over. There is one more—with Julius Laspara, the drab revolutionary journalist, an anarchist of sinister, retiring habits. He, too, has his demand to make of Razumov, to bring the latter from his detachment. He wants him to write something for the "cause". Laspara is another imperceptive revolutionary. Although Razumov wards off each of them, they all increase his mounting feeling of disgust and nausea in his situation.

To find Razumov's true relationship with Nikita, the really degraded Conradian villain who punctures Razumov's eardrum after his confession, we must look to the end of the novel, where we find that they have a lot in common. Nikita is a police spy like Razumov in the midst of the revolutionaries, engaged apparently in a double game, but, unlike Razumov, a practised hand, ready to kill on both sides. It appears that had this macabre echo of himself not been present when he confessed to the revolutionaries, Razumov might have been sent off unsoathed. Thus the sense of nihilism and futility descends once more at the end of a Conrad novel. Razumov, pressed into service unwillingly as a police spy, forced to undergo the most rigorous psychological tortures,
is finally made impotent not by revolutionaries, but by another police spy. Their interchange reminds us, when we find out Nikita’s true occupation, of the Jim-Brown interchange, but with a curious reversal:

A squeaky voice screamed, "Confession or no confession, you are a police spy!"

Razumov replies:

"And what are you?"¹

Nikita is not reflective like Jim; the question makes no impression on him.

The revolutionists in Geneva prove powerless of themselves to break Razumov. It is his isolation, coupled with his abnormal fear of Haldin’s presence, that forces him to give up. Nathalie Haldin brings these two elements together for Razumov, and it is to the tensions of their relationship that we must now turn.

d) Human Relationships between Men and Women.

As with the Verloos, Conrad’s portrayal of Razumov’s relationship with Nathalie Haldin succeeds because sex and romantic love are excluded by the pervasive moral tension. We shall examine this relationship in detail, but before discussing the final confession scene brief reference must be made to Razumov’s encounter with the dying Mrs. Haldin which directly influences his conduct. Nathalie’s relationship with the old

teacher is of importance also from the point of view of the moral isolation theme.

Luckily for this novel's artistic merits Conrad did not pursue the original plan of this work outlined to Galsworthy in 1908, in which Razumov and Nathalie were to marry and have a child resembling Haldin. Had this been the case it is highly possible that Conrad's decline would have set in earlier, and that Under Western Eyes, drawn out into interminable length, would have contained serious artistic flaws in the latter part. Conrad recognised his difficulty in maintaining a moral and a love theme at the same time, as he intimates in this letter to Miss Garnett:

You are a good critic. That girl does not move. No excuse can be offered for such a defect but there is an explanation. I wanted a pivot for the action to turn on. And I had to be very careful because if I had allowed myself to make more of her she would have killed the artistic purpose of the book: the development of a single mood.

While Nathalie Haldin's portrayal is not particularly full or colourful, in spite of Conrad's reply to the accusation the girl does move within the artistic limits he applies. As a foil for Razumov which indeed all the other characters are, she is developed to a sufficient degree, no more, so that the moral theme is allowed to triumph. Guerard points to this:

As for Razumov . . . his nominal interest in Nathalie, as soul

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to be damaged or woman to be loved, cannot be taken very seriously. The matter is above sex. She is instead another major witness in his interior drama of self-scrutiny and self-destruction.¹

Had Conrad pursued with his original plan it seems almost certain that the tremendous concentration centred on the problems of Razumov himself could not have been sustained, and it is possible that this novel would have fallen back into line with Chance and Victory.

There is an air of detachment, a feeling of bewilderment expressed over the contacts of these two. Whenever Nathalie and Razumov meet we are more acutely aware than elsewhere of the presence of the old teacher of languages, the narrator, who can listen to their words and observe their manner, but who cannot fathom their hearts, so that much of what they say is meaningless to him. He is aware of their isolation from him as we are acutely aware of their isolation from each other. We gather from the guardedness of Nathalie's expressions that her first meeting with Razumov must have been rather strained, and that she did not receive the comfort she desired from him, from her only tangible link in the world with her dead brother. This coolness the reader attributes on first reading to Razumov's betrayal of Haldin alone, but on a second reading we are aware of the added complication that Razumov is a police spy. When Nathalie mentions her brother's name she imagines Razumov's subsequent emotion stems from his deep attachment to Haldin:

"You should have seen his face. He positively reeled. He

¹ Conrad the Novelist, p.220.
leaned against the wall of the terrace. Their friendship must have been the very brotherhood of souls!"  

In fact this was anything but the case: Razumov betrayed Haldin. Nathalie, like Haldin himself earlier, is deceived by Razumov's reticence and places the wrong interpretation on his behaviour. This adds considerably to Razumov's feeling of moral isolation, which is linked to his abnormal fear of Haldin's phantom. He realises he cannot gain an "accomplice" in Haldin's sister but must walk on the phantom alone. In spite of his daily walks on the Bastions with Nathalie, Razumov apparently gives her no further enlightenment on his relationship with Haldin. This leads to the inevitable myth, a repetition of Haldin's attitude:

"I am convinced," she declared, "that this extraordinary man is meditating some vast plan, some great undertaking; he is possessed by it—he suffers from it—and from being alone in the world."  

The last clause only happens to be correct. Because everyone he meets takes up these misconceptions about him so that he is forced to act up to them, Razumov's intense loneliness becomes more difficult to bear.

The curious interview with Mrs. Haldin before Razumov's confession to her daughter has a tremendous impact on Razumov. The old lady is almost completely insane and takes very little interest in life. The

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1 Under Western Eyes, p.172.
sight of her is like "the revenge of the unknown" to Razumov. Her impotence at first symbolises to him the end of the Haldin myth which he thinks will no longer affect him, but when he contemplates this ghost, "the phantom's mother", his anger against Haldin is transferred to her. This turns to jealousy towards Haldin because he has attained the peace that he can never attain. Conrad brings the phantom back again to Razumov's mind:

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."

Once more, through the dying Mrs. Haldin, the abnormal self-identification relationship appears. Haldin's and his is a common destruction. He cannot throw off the phantom except by destroying himself. The effigy of Mrs. Haldin is worse to Razumov than the spectre of Haldin.

Thinking to flee from her, and therefore Haldin, physically, he runs out, but Nathalie is waiting for him, after his long day of harassing experiences in which his mind is torn to breaking strain. He brings himself at last to give up and confess. The isolation in this scene is threefold as the conversation is observed by the teacher, who is nowhere else more greatly aware of his helplessness, and of the difficulty of comprehending, through his "Western eyes" the Russian mind. Once again Razumov is taunted by the abnormal. "It was she who had been haunting him now." 1 Their minds are isolated from each

other. Razumov is so torn by the desire for peace, to confess and have done, that he gives hints all the time of his true nature. Nathalie does not follow the hints at all, cannot grasp Razumov's self-indictment. He has the forlorn hope that she might understand him, that he might be able to break the barrier of his isolation. By these words she speaks in innocence his hopes are roused:

"Listen, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I believe that the future will be merciful to us all. Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love." ¹

These are easy words, till Nathalie discovers just how much she has to forgive Razumov, if indeed she is to forgive him at all. The confession, a fitting climax, is the end of their relationship, for Nathalie faints and they never meet again.

Later Razumov comments, in his frenzied writing in his diary, on his version of their relationship, a strange mixture of hate and love, repulsion and attraction, a desire to destroy Nathalie as he did her brother, yet a respect for her as representing truth. ² Through it he reveals the torments he has suffered all along of isolation, and especially guilt. His conclusion, containing a further allusion to his identification with Haldin, reads strangely beside his little table


² Razumov's "diabolism" to which Guérard refers does not appear to me an illogical psychological sequence, put in as an afterthought by Conrad. (See Conrad the Novelist, p. 241.)
of reactionary values at the beginning of the book:

"In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely."\(^1\)

The old Englishman's incomprehension of these two he observes gives a further international element to the isolation theme. The teacher's relationship with Nathalie is calm and friendly but Conrad, in a further negative outburst, seems to maintain that a true understanding between nations is as impossible to achieve as a true understanding between individuals. The Western world is impotent to face the problems of the Eastern world. This is most poignantly felt at their last meeting:

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. I remained silent as though it were hopeless to raise my voice.\(^2\)

Fortunately the teacher's age and nationality preclude any hint of romantic attachment, therefore once more the novel's dominant themes and mood are not interrupted.

As from Winnie Verloc in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad maintains sufficient detachment from the Ladies Haldin to portray them adequately within the novel's artistic context. Whenever they appear the dramatic tension increases rather than lapses because of their own anxiety or because the reader knows of the mental torture Razumov is forced to undergo when

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\(^1\) *Under Western Eyes*, p. 361.

he encounters them. Yet this was Conrad's last success at portraying
relationships between men and women. Those in Chance are much inferior.

e) The Relationship between the Individual and Society.

The individual relationships in this novel are all concerned with
Razumov's relationship with the world, therefore we have already examined
in part the theme of the relationship between individual and society,
and have only to consider it from the point of view of the whole novel.

The various characters visit Razumov's consciousness as representa-
tives of the world. His obscure parentage allows him a detachment
from any connection except the state of Russia itself:

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.

His basic concern in life, nevertheless, is not with the Russian state,
but his work:

He was aware of the emotional tension of his time; he even
responded to it in an indefinite way. But his main concern
was with his work, his studies, and with his own future.¹

In a way this novel is the drama of Razumov's moral resistance
to the forces of the outside world that encroach on his private world,
try to control it for him, so that the more he resists the more it
encroaches. The vice-like grip this world has on him strikes him

especially when returning after beating Ziemianitch:

Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men. 1

This vice loosens its grip but is replaced quickly by another, the reactionary-revolutionary vice from which there is no freedom for Razumov but disaster. Finally he breaks under the strain, confesses, and is then spurned and abandoned by the world. Conrad changed the plan of the novel, so that from beginning to end is sustained the theme of Razumov's moral 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? 2

At the end Razumov is physically isolated as well, by his deafness and impending death.

Razumov's position in Russia presents him with the great dilemma of whether or not to give Haldin up. In spite of his quick solution and in spite of his justification afterwards in his "History not Theory" formula 3, the question remains with him throughout:

"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. And how is my conscience engaged here; by

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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."  

The guilt and agony Razumov suffers later, especially in his dealings
with Natalia Haldin, show just how divided his conscience really is,
and how difficult it is to decide on which side the true betrayal lies.
While the reader and Marlow are faced with Jim's problem, while the
reader and perhaps the commentators are faced with Nostromo's problem,
the reader and Razumov himself face Razumov's problems. Razumov has
a perception, an ability to search his soul ranging far beyond Jim's or
Nostromo's, yet in the end he surrenders in despair.

Razumov's final renunciation of the world, of its values and of his
own security in it may well mirror Conrad's final attitude. Razumov's
departure into obscurity contrasts strongly with the flight of the
romantic to his fantasy-world. Whatever romantic flights Conrad allows
himself elsewhere he preserves the cold realism here, as he leaves Raz-
umov crippled, deaf, declining towards death, a picture of abandoned
hopes, misery, helplessness, despair, a man forgotten by the world he
tried in vain to serve.

The ending of this book shows perhaps more than anywhere in his
works Conrad's despair at the ways of mankind. The people who have
impressed us by their opposition through the novel, revolutionary or

reactionary, seem to be reduced at the end to impotence. Nikita's true position is discovered and he has been disposed of. Ivanovitch "unites himself" to a peasant girl. Mme de S— has died without making a will so that the revolutionaries do not benefit at all. Finally, Mikulin and Ivanovitch have met and exchanged notes. This reminds us of the meetings of Heat and the Professor and Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner in The Secret Agent, and adds to the theme of nihilism:

Being alone in the compartment, these two talked together half the night, and it was then that Mikulin the Police Chief gave a hint to the Arch-Revolutionist as to the true character of the arch-slayer of gendarmes. It looks as though Mikulin had wanted to get rid of that particular agent of his own! He might have grown tired of him, or frightened of him. It must also be said that Mikulin had inherited the sinister Nikita from his predecessor in office.¹

For all Razumov's struggle against the world Conrad reminds us, as he does in The Secret Agent, of the futility of human effort. Razumov himself chides Haldin:

And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity!²

In Under Western Eyes more than in any other work this sense of futility dominates. All Razumov's efforts are wasted. All the revolutionaries' plans and talk produce little result. Mikulin himself is disposed of when he has outlived his usefulness. Amid all the useless idealism

Razumov is left coldly alone without anyone with whom he may form a friendly relationship and share the burden of his predicament. He never solves the problem of his guilt. In the end it is no longer of any importance to him.
CONCLUSION

Conrad is forever fascinated by the "immense indifference of things," the tragic vanity of the blind groping that we call aspiration, the profound meaninglessness of life—fascinated, and left wondering.¹

I have already quoted this remark of H. L. Mencken's in the introduction to this thesis. It is one which best sums up the total impression of Conrad's great work. In Conrad's time the full impact of man's insignificance in time and space was beginning to eradicate the traces of the Victorian ideals of Progress and the Advancement of Mankind. Through Conrad's writings the ideals and abilities of human beings are severely questioned, so that very often man's ideals are found to be a mass of idle words and his abilities of no great consequence.

In spite of the subtle treatment he gives to human relationships, in spite of his deep interest in the moral codes and behaviour of men, he tries, time and again, to leave the reader with an impression of the insignificance of the human community and human relationships against the vastness of the sea, the world, the universe, or what, to him, is the "unhappy Immensity". Although the human relationships


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are clothed sometimes in epic significance, where the outcome has an immediate effect on the life of a people, Conrad invariably turns the tables to show the unimportance, in the final issue, of the puny strivings of man to order his way of life and to understand his fellow-beings.

Through the various types of relationships Conrad stresses these things. In portraying relationships of an official nature, he shows how ludicrous it is for men to attempt to assert their self-importance, their sense of authority over other men. Such assertion, Conrad considers, is only attempted by the simple and imperceptive. An easily acquired habit, it reduces men to a more degraded state of simplicity and imperception. In his portrayal of other kinds of relationships between men Conrad shows how, because of man's isolation within himself, or because of his moral isolation, a man's perception does not extend very far, nor do his ideals and ability equip him adequately to sit in judgment over his fellows in all but the most obvious of cases. In his successful portrayal of relationships between men and women Conrad shows the immense isolation possible between two persons affiliated to each other by love or marriage, and the helplessness of the individual to combat that isolation, even through the expression of love. In his portrayal of the relationship between man and human society, Conrad shows that although an individual's actions may seem important to a group or society, this impact is seldom the intended impact, and, when considered against the immensity of the
world, time and space, both hero and the society itself are dwarfed to insignificance.

For what is the total impression of the novels of this study? What is the reader left with at the end? Certainly not the noble feeling at the end of a Shakespearian tragedy, where the hero's death is the culminating epitome of his life. Conrad's tragedy is more disturbing. The reader is not allowed the comfortable feeling at the end that, regardless of the terror and dread of the spectacle he has witnessed, the world is put right in the end, justice is done. Lord Jim is shot in the end at the whim of an old savage. Nostromo is shot also on a whim, not of a savage, but of a man of similarly limited mentality. Winnie Verloc jumps overboard, seen by nobody. Nobody knows why. She was not forced to, as she was well on the way to safety. Razumov, poor man, is not even allowed the honour of dying. Conrad has him deafened and run over by a tramcar, thoroughly crippled, abandoned in his helplessness. Conrad's conclusions leave the reader troubled at the thought of the futility of things, with the sense of the Dark Powers still looming, a further and perhaps more terrible storm about to break.

The portrayal of human relationships contributes throughout to this impression, to this tragedy of futility. In Lord Jim Marlow is concerned at Jim's inscrutability; try as he may he cannot penetrate this sufficiently to be of much use. It is impossible to over-estimate
the character of the heroes in \textit{Lord Jim} and \textit{Nostromo} if we bear in mind their relationship with their perceptive commentators. Through the mixture of human relationships in \textit{Nostromo} runs the tainting element of the silver, so that all are corrupted by it, and true integrity is impossible within the bounds of Costaguana. In \textit{Nostromo} and the other political novels the principles of "order" take no firm embodiment in any character to combat the principles of "anarchy" as all the characters are bound by their relationship to each other in what almost amounts to a common corruption. The smaller society in \textit{The Secret Agent} is linked together, so that morally depraved anarchists like Vladimir and the Professor are permitted free association with an Assistant Commissioner and a Chief Inspector of police. In \textit{Under Western Eyes} although Razumov has brilliant success in manouevring his way through his various harrassing relationships so as to place himself almost beyond suspicion, he confesses deliberately in the final interview, thus rendering profitless all his previous herculean efforts to control himself and say the right thing.

In individual character studies of Conrad's extraverts a critic may be able to discuss Conrad plausibly as one who nourished an optimistic view of the world, who played the prophet of the stoic virtues. By taking into account the relationship of these characters with other men, by careful consideration of what the more perceptive commentators say about these extraverts, it is impossible to make such an assertion. Similarly anyone who thinks Conrad has Jim achieve
"rehabilitation" at the end does not take into account Marlow's doubt, his unwillingness to pass a final judgment on Jim's case. Anyone who can look at the cold isolation of the Verloos, the macabre dealings of the anarchists in *The Secret Agent*, at Razumov's fear and horror of the world's encroachment on him, at the desperate helplessness of Russian society in its predicament in *Under Western Eyes* and consider the tone of these books optimistic is taking his own world-view into account, not Conrad's.

Through each of the great works we have been considering, through the lesser novels, tales and other writings of Conrad the fascination at the "immense indifference of things" appears again and again. Often it is not a mere passive "fascination" as Mencken describes it, but a more positive despair. Even a cursory glance at the numerous settings of Conrad's work and the diversity of their characters and situations reveals his interest in many facets of human life. Yet this vast range is linked by a few themes which sound a further note of pessimism each time they appear. Conrad's vision is one of the first comprehensive artistic visions we have of the displacement of man among his fellows in the universe. The efficacy of the "official" order of human relationships is disrupted. Man's moral order is so incoherent and nebulous that it is impossible for him to achieve a right relationship, morally, with his fellow creatures. The natural relationship of love and marriage between the sexes presents so many problems that it produces lasting pain to nullify a fleeting happiness.
Man's predicament as an individual in human society is that of an insignificant unit in a vast drifting mass. No moral system yet devised by man is at all adequate to regulate this mass, nor could such a system be enforced by human power if it were devised. In his great novels Conrad presents the reader with his artistic vision of humanity undiluted. It is not surprising that a large part of humanity, unwilling to face this vision, has not found Conrad to its taste, or, in studying his works and extolling their virtues, has by-passed it altogether.
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