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"THE GREAT FOES OF REALITY"

Attitudes to Language in Selected Novels by Joseph Conrad

PETER McDONALD

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"Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality."
(*Under Western Eyes*, 3)

"I spoke the truth. What more can I say?"
"Confound it! You might say something human...."
("The Return", *Tales of Unrest*, 163)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Conrad's ambivalent attitude to the value of words in human affairs. Though his critical attitude is the main focus of the argument, his positive attitude will also be considered in some detail.

In the first chapter, on *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, the critical attitude is primary. In this story language is seen in relation to silence and action, and in both cases the non-linguistic element is celebrated, while words are censured. Yet the values implied by the tale leave the writer of fiction, and the narrator who emerges at the end of the story, in an uncertain position: the world presented in the novel undermines the mode of presentation which is the novel. This paradox is to some extent resolved in the following two chapters which deal with Conrad's complex response to the culture of European imperialism. Chapter 2, on *Heart of Darkness*, examines the ways in which words contribute to the systematic lies that sustain the nineteenth-century civilizing mission. The story is, however, not wholly critical of language, since the value of Marlow's spoken narrative is clearly endorsed. Chapter 3 offers a more detailed account of the relationship between the story-teller and his society, and of the value of Marlow's words. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow's account of Jim is contrasted with the account of him given by the court of inquiry, and with the notion of the hero projected in the

romantic fictions which Jim reads. Once again Marlow's use of language is affirmed, while other uses are shown to be reductive, or simply spurious. The final chapter deals with *Under Western Eyes*. Of the four novels selected for this thesis, Conrad's "Russian novel" offers the most explicit and sustained critique of language. The novel suggests that any simplistic identification of language with "communication" is naive, if not misleading.

In the conclusion I discuss Conrad's understanding of the nature and function of his own words, as set out in the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and *A Personal Record*.

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My greatest debt is, of course, to my supervisor. I wish to express my warmest thanks to Mr Ron Hall whose unfailing and ever-encouraging belief proved that some convictions gain considerably the moment another will believe in them.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

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

In certain instances I have used the following abbreviations to avoid having to repeat the full title of a particular work in parenthetical references:

UWE: *Under Western Eyes*
APR: *A Personal Record*
The Nigger: *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*
Mirror: *The Mirror of the Sea*

In matters of presentation I have in general adopted the conventions prescribed in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1984). In particular, I have adopted the author-date system of parenthetical documentation set out in the handbook.

INTRODUCTION

> *Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.*
>
> Wordsworth[1]

Cicero (106-43 B.C.) begins *De Inventione* by reflecting on the value of what he terms "oratory" and "eloquence":

> I have often seriously debated with myself whether men and communities have received more good or evil from oratory and a consuming devotion to eloquence. For when I ponder the troubles in our commonwealth, and run over in my mind the ancient misfortunes of mighty cities, I see that no little part of the disasters was brought about by men of eloquence. (Hubbel ed. 1949, 3)

Nineteen hundred years later, while pondering the troubles of a very different world, Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) expressed similar doubts about the value of words in human affairs. If the command of language distinguishes man from all other creatures, then, for both Cicero and Conrad, this distinction is not gained without cost. The purpose of this thesis is to examine Conrad's estimate of the price of speech by exploring the ambivalent attitudes to language represented in four key works: *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim,* and *Under Western Eyes.*

As a practitioner of the written word, Conrad was only too conscious of the compelling power that language can have

over the human imagination. In a letter of 9 October 1899 to a fellow writer, Hugh Clifford, he observed that

> words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers. The things "as they are" exist in words; therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts should become distorted--or blurred.
> (Karl and Davies ed. 1986, 200)

While recognizing the power of words, Conrad also indicates in this passage that without due care this power can be mishandled. If words can "present" things, they can also "distort" or "blur" things. On the one hand, Conrad saw that words could be used "to arrest...the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision" (*The Nigger*, xii); that is, words could be used to make the reader attend to the world in a particular way. On the other hand, "the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage" (*The Nigger*, ix) could, in a number of ways, be used to avoid confronting the world. To illustrate this ambivalence it will be worth examining, albeit briefly, two early short stories.

Both "Karain: A Memory" and "The Return" are part of Conrad's first collection of short stories entitled *Tales of Unrest* (1898). Each story draws attention to a different aspect of the complex attitude to language that remained with him for most of his writing career. "Karain: A Memory"

reflects the more positive aspects of his views. Karain, a Malay chief who is tormented by spectres from his past, one night tells the story of an incident in his life to three European traders. Like the commanding presence of the man himself, his story has the power

> to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind. (24)

His account has a profound effect on at least one of his listeners, a man called Jackson. Conrad's tale ends with Jackson and the frame-narrator looking out over a crowded and noisy London scene, which represents for the narrator an incontestable reality in the face of which Karain's story can only be seen as a uncanny fabrication. Jackson does not share the narrator's point of view:

> "Yes; I see it [the narrator's 'reality']," said Jackson, slowly. "It is there; it pants, it runs, it rolls; it is strong and alive; it would smash you if you didn't look out; but I'll be hanged if it is yet as real to me as...as the other thing...say, Karain's story." (55)

In response to this the sceptical narrator declares that Jackson "had been too long away from home" (55). Nonetheless, Karain's story does affect Jackson's previously unexamined assumptions about the nature of the world. The tormented chief's words disclose to him unacknowledged aspects of experience.

As opposed to this positive attitude, Conrad's critical awareness of the ways in which language can be used to

conceal aspects of experience, particularly undesirable ones, is shown in "The Return". The story is an unflattering exposure of the hypocrisies of "civilized" life in London society, which is seen as a perpetual flight "from something compromising...from something suspected and concealed--like truth or pestilence" (119). In the course of the story, words are shown to be an important means by which this undesirable truth is concealed. Alvan Hervey, the central figure, is a man who believes that "deception should begin at home" (170). In fact, he begins even closer to home by deceiving himself: he conceals his lust and his desire for domination "under the cover of that sacred and poetical fiction [the word 'love']" (120). Later, he seeks comfort

> in clinging to the contemplation of the only fact of life that the resolute efforts of mankind had never failed to disguise in the clatter and glamour of phrases. And nothing lends itself more to lies than death.
> (129)

The story is centrally concerned with the way words contribute to the unreality of the Herveys' life. At the climax of the events, when "for a moment he [ceases] to be a member of society with a position, a career, and a name attached to all this, like a descriptive label of some complicated compound" (133-134), Alvan Hervey recognizes that isolation is an inescapable condition of life. For a moment he sees beyond the screen of words to an undeniable and unendurable reality. The fact that this "reality" cannot be outfaced complicates Conrad's attitude to those characters who are unable to live

without deception, fantasy or escapism in some form. Though many of his fictions undermine the rhetoric of evasion, they are not simply critical. In certain cases, the need for "a fresh crop of lies...to sustain life, to make it supportable, to make it fair" ("The Return", 134) is shown to be unavoidable. But in "The Return" the illusions created and sustained by language are exposed with unusual relentlessness.

Though Conrad's critical attitude to language will receive more attention in what follows, both attitudes will be considered in some detail. In the first chapter, on *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, the critical attitude is primary. In this story language is seen in relation to silence and action, and in both cases the non-linguistic element is celebrated, while words are censured. Yet the values implied by the tale leave the writer of fiction, and the narrator who emerges at the end of the story, in an uncertain position: the world presented in the novel undermines the mode of presentation which is the novel. This paradox is to some extent resolved in the following two chapters which deal with Conrad's complex response to the culture of European imperialism. Chapter 2, on *Heart of Darkness*, examines the ways in which words contribute to the systematic lies that sustain the nineteenth-century civilizing mission. The story is, however, not wholly critical of language, since the value of Marlow's spoken narrative is clearly endorsed. Chapter 3 offers a more detailed account of the relationship between the story-teller and his society, and of the value of Marlow's words. In *Lord Jim*,

Marlow's account of Jim is contrasted with the account of him given by the court of inquiry, and with the notion of the hero projected in the romantic fictions which Jim reads. Once again Marlow's use of language is affirmed, while other uses are shown to be reductive, or simply spurious. The final chapter deals with *Under Western Eyes*. Of the four novels selected for this thesis, Conrad's "Russian novel" offers the most explicit and sustained critique of language. The novel suggests that any simplistic identification of language with "communication" is naive, if not misleading.

In conclusion, I shall consider a problem which is raised only indirectly in the previous chapters: given that Conrad's novels, particularly the four selected for detailed examination, are so frequently concerned with words as "the great foes of reality", how does he understand the nature and function of his own words? That this was an important question for Conrad is attested to by his declaration in the Author's Preface to *The Secret Agent*: "I have always had a propensity to justify my action....Not to insist that I was right but simply to explain that there was no perverse intention, no secret scorn for the natural sensibilities of mankind at the bottom of my impulses" (viii).

CHAPTER 1

To praise their silence one must possess a voice.
Virginia Woolf[1]

In the early sea tales Conrad frequently praises men who are by nature taciturn, men, like Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon", who have a "literal mind and...[a] dauntless temperament" ("Typhoon", vi). In *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* he commends "the dumb fear and the dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring" (90). The silence of these men is directly related to their integrity and their reliability as sailors. Praise usually implies its opposite, and so language, the medium of the writer, is often censured. Verbal facility is repeatedly associated with characters who have become self-conscious; who have, as a later story describes it, crossed the shadow-line. The moral effects of this new awareness are not wholly desirable. The self-conscious man is one who is often incapable of swift action when circumstances demand it, and he tends to be overly concerned with his own special interests. To satisfy these interests, he frequently resorts to deceiving both others and himself. Whatever the case, the sailor's ability to act responsibly as part of a collective undertaking, like sailing a ship, is undermined. Yet Conrad praises silence and action, and censures language, with words, and frequently these words are spoken by extremely self-conscious narrators. The nature and

implications of this paradox will be the central concern of this chapter.

I

In the penultimate paragraph of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* the narrator, who has stepped out of the wings for the first time to disclose himself as an individualized first person speaker, meditates on the fate of his fellow crewmen.

> I never saw them again [he says]. The sea took some, the steamers took others, the grave-yards of the earth will account for the rest. Singleton has no doubt taken with him the long record of his faithful work into the peaceful depths of an hospitable sea. And Donkin, who never did a decent day's work in his life, no doubt earns his living by discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live. So be it! Let the earth and the sea each have its own. (172)

Throughout the tale, Conrad employs a series of oppositions to organize and to evaluate his material. In this paragraph the narrator refers in summary to three of these oppositions: sea and land, Singleton and Donkin, faithful work and filthy eloquence. In his discussion of the novel, Berthoud emphasizes the moral aspects of the symbolic opposition between the land and the sea--what he terms the "rival 'ethics' of the sea and of the land" (1978, 28). Of the many dualities used in the story, the oppositions between land and sea, darkness and light are most germane to its central moral preoccupations. For our purposes two secondary, but related, sets of oppositions are more apposite. These are the oppositions between

filth and resplendence, clamour and silence. By examining these oppositions, and the implicit evaluations they reveal, some sense can be made of Conrad's critical attitude towards language.

Both pairs of opposites are introduced early on in the narrative, as the following extract shows:

> Soon after dark the few liberty-men and the new hands began to arrive in shore-boats rowed by white-clad Asiatics, who clamoured fiercely for payment before coming alongside the gangway-ladder. The feverish and shrill babble of Eastern language struggled against the masterful tones of tipsy seamen, who argued against brazen claims and dishonest hopes by profane shouts. The resplendent and bestarred peace of the East was torn into squalid tatters by howls of rage and shrieks of lament raised over sums ranging from five annas to half a rupee.... (4)

From the outset resplendence and silence--in this case the brilliance and peace of the Eastern sky at night--are associated, and opposed to squalor and noise.

Following this general introduction, the pairs of opposites are associated with particular members of the crew. As the men gather in the forecastle, their "growling voices" (5) and fragmentary conversations are described. Then Belfast is reported to have "abused the ship violently, romancing on principle, just to give the new hands something to think over" (5). This empty show of disrespect towards the ship is repeated more forcefully when Belfast finds himself with an audience in the forecastle. He shrieks "like an inspired Dervish" (8) as he recounts an obviously false story of an act of defiance against the authority and order of a ship. The

crew's response is significant. They disbelieve him, and a broad-chested, slow-eyed sailor adds about the officers: "I concloode they ain't that bad now, if you had the taming of them, sonny" (9). Already the crew's ambivalent attitude towards authority is apparent; they both defy and respect their officers. Belfast is the first figure associated with clamour and with the insurrectionary element aboard the *Narcissus*.

Prior to Belfast's bragging speech, the opposite sides of the clamour/silence, filth/resplendence polarities are presented through a carefully wrought description of Singleton. He is set "apart on the deck right under the lamps" (6). The reader is told that his "white skin gleamed like satin" and that "he resembled a learned and savage patriarch, the incarnation of barbarian wisdom serene in the blasphemous turmoil of the world" (6). A further important distinction is introduced in this initial description of the old seaman. Singleton is "lost in an absorption profound enough to resemble a trance" and his "bleared eyes [gaze] fixedly from behind the glitter of black-rimmed glasses" (7). By contrast, young Charley, who is learning how to tie a lanyard knot, is not as attentive and from time to time he glances "out of the corners of his restless eyes" (7). Singleton is the mature man tested by time and the sea; Charley is young, untested and unsure of himself. The opposition between equanimity and restlessness, often signified by the eyes, is used throughout the tale to distinguish between the 'single-minded' and the 'double-

minded'--a distinction that will be important in the discussion of the crew. Singleton, then, is associated with silence, resplendence and equanimity.

Donkin is contrasted with the old seaman in all ways: he is the embodiment of clamour, filth and restlessness. As Belfast concludes his invective against authority, the crew's attention is fixed on the first major threat to the society of the *Narcissus*. Donkin has "shifty eyes" (9), and is at first hidden "in the shadow of the midship locker" (9). As the representative of Berthoud's "'ethic'of the land", he is unmistakably of his element: "He looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth" (9); "all his left side was caked with mud" (10). All the crew know him as the man who testifies "to the eternal fitness of lies and impudence" (10), as the man who "swears" (10) and "curses" (11) while others work. Donkin is the "creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of the *unexpressed* faith, of the *unspoken* loyalty that knits together a ship's company" (11, italics mine). The adjectives "unexpressed" and "unspoken" suggest that what "knits together a ship's company" is not language, but some unarticulated sense of solidarity. In fact, since the crew of the *Narcissus* is cosmopolitan and multi-racial, language is more divisive than binding. Donkin's rhetoric--whether it is racist, nationalist, or political--only serves to exacerbate the situation.[2] He sets race against race,

nation against nation, and men against officers. As the arch exploiter of language and human sympathy, he knows nothing of the bond of the unsaid, and so keeps company with the clamorous Asiatics demanding money and with the voluble Belfast.

In a relatively brief space Conrad has established a series of symbolic oppositions that underscore the values of his tale. This series could be arranged as a twofold scheme: on the one side darkness, the land, clamour, filth and restlessness and, on the other side, light, the sea, silence, resplendence and equanimity.

There are, however, at least two reasons for being cautious at this point. First, the oppositions are neither as simple nor as distinct in the tale as this scheme suggests, even though the narrator would at times like the reader to believe they are. For instance, when the *Narcissus* leaves port she is described as "a high and lonely pyramid, gliding, all shining and white, through the sunlit mist" (27), whereas the "short black tug" is seen to resemble "an enormous and aquatic black beetle, surprised by the light...trying to escape with ineffectual effort into the distant gloom of the land" (27). This description, besides being a lament for the lost age of the sailing ship, seems to support the simple scheme: land is dark and treacherous; sea is bright and good. But the voyage that follows demonstrates that this is far from the truth. Second, the new generation of seamen--that is, the large proportion of the crew of the *Narcissus*--are, as

Berthoud argues, "caught...between the imperatives of the land and of the sea" (1978, 39). Paradoxically, the tale shows that the "'ethic' of the land" is as prevalent at sea as it is anywhere else.

With these qualifications in mind, the twofold scheme can yet be usefully applied to the issue of language in the tale. From the account so far, it appears that language is associated with the negative side of the scheme, that is, with restlessness, clamour, darkness and filth. Donkin is the unappealing prophet of the word. Silence--associated with equanimity, resplendence, and the lofty figure of Singleton--is viewed more positively. Added to this, where language is associated with national, racial and political differences, silence is expressive of solidarity. But once again this simple view is inaccurate. Singleton does after all speak, even if very rarely, and in a particularly terse manner. To clarify this the characters of Singleton and Captain Allistoun need to be examined more closely, as must the relationship between the word and the deed.

II

Batchelor argues that the story is "organized round four major figures: Wait and Donkin, the destructive elements, and Singleton and Allistoun, the sustaining figures..." (1982, 34). As Singleton and Allistoun are the first heroes of the ethic of action, which is to become a central preoc-

cupation in many of the later novels, so Wait and Donkin are its first villains. To these four can be added a fifth 'figure', the collective character of the crew. They represent vacillating humanity, caught as they are between the antagonistic demands of altruistic action and self-interest.

The storm passage in Chapter 3 is the pivotal point in the story and the proving ground for the ethic of action. In this episode the various attitudes held by the five major figures are put to the test. Wait and Donkin are shown to be cowardly and self-regarding, both are incapable of acting for the common good; Singleton and Allistoun remain vigilantly at their posts; and under these extreme conditions the crew members remain faithful to their professional code, despising both Wait and Donkin.

The storm episode immediately precedes the famous paragraph at the beginning of Chapter 4. This paragraph is particularly significant, as it gives some sense of what the ethic of action meant for Conrad at this point in his career, and of how this influenced his understanding of the place of language in human affairs.

> On men reprieved by its disdainful mercy, the immortal sea confers in its justice the full privilege of desired unrest. Through the perfect wisdom of its grace they are not permitted to meditate at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence. They must without pause justify their life to the eternal pity that commands toil to be hard and unceasing, from sunrise to sunset, from sunset to sunrise; till the weary succession of nights and days tainted by the obstinate clamour of sages, demanding bliss and an empty heaven, is redeemed at last by the vast

> silence of pain and labour, by the dumb fear and the dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring. (90)

The paragraph points to one of the tale's central concerns: the concern with various forms of salvation. In the story as a whole three possible forms are suggested: there are Donkin's "hopeful doctrines" that inspire the crew to dream "enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea, manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers" (103); there are Podmore's religious convictions which induce in the votary a state similar to that experienced when one becomes "intoxicated in an East-end music-hall" (115); and finally there is redemption "by the vast silence of pain and labour" (90). In the course of events the first two forms are shown to be illusory or, at least, questionably motivated. As instances of political or religious escapism, they offer only spurious deliverance *from* the world. The third--described in the passage above--offers deliverance (of a sort) *in* the world. This is seen to be the only form of salvation that does not entail deception or self-deception.

Watt paraphrases the passage in the following way:

> ...it asserts that, contrary to the crew's longings and to the more sentimental hopes consciously promoted by those clamorous sages Donkin and Podmore, the destiny of the successive human generations is not to find any adequate reward either in this life or the next, but only to labour in their unending confrontation of the environment. The confrontation is unsought and yet obligatory; it is the basis of human solidarity; and its most dangerous enemies are those who seek to

confuse, defer, or evade its exactions.
(1980, 99)

Watt implies that the passage is intended to function normatively in the tale--the significant placing and elevated style seem to support this claim. The passage gives the reader some sense of the "reality" that the likes of Donkin, Wait and Podmore "seek to confuse, defer, or evade". Two necessary features of this "reality" are the "unending confrontation of the environment" and death. Conrad frequently described these features as "irremediable" (103, passim), and the heroes of many stories are those characters who acknowledge the irremediable stoically. Their stoicism is often negatively defined: they are able to confront the irremediable because they lack imagination; they are undaunted because they do not meditate "upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence" (90). In "Typhoon", "Youth", *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, the saving value of limited awareness is a central concern. For instance, Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon" is "tranquilly sure of himself" because he has "just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day" (4). This quality is frequently coupled with the character's habitual silence. Conversely, to have imagination is to lack self-assurance, and to be incapable of action. This is one of Jim's difficulties in *Lord Jim* and it is Jukes's problem in "Typhoon". By praising those who are unimaginative and capable of action, Conrad shares the common Victorian assumption that the life of action is primary; the assumption underlying Carlyle's

declaration that "Man is sent hither not to question, but to work: 'the end of man,' it was long ago written, 'is an Action, not a Thought'" (1872, 22).

Included in the paragraph is a further reference to the clamour/silence polarity. Silence is praised, and associated with a stoical attitude to existence: man is redeemed by the "vast silence of pain and labour" (90). Language, associated with the "obstinate clamour of sages" (90), is indirectly condemned. By commending action and silence, Conrad expresses a Carlylean distrust of thought and words; the distrust implied in Carlyle's notion that "Deeds are greater than Words" (1919, 145), and in proverbial expressions like "it is easier said than done" or "actions speak louder than words". Most importantly, this praise introduces a distinction, essential to Conrad's overall vision, between the thing said and the thing done.

Berthoud indicates the centrality of this distinction. He makes the following general observation about the idea of the 'test' in Conrad's fiction: "the test of what a man really is cannot be what he thinks he is [or says he is], but what he does--not his individual consciousness but his public role" (1978, 188). About *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* he says: "what matters is not what the crew may desire or think [or say], but what they actually do--whether they succeed or fail to 'drive the ship'" (1978, 188). Actions, things done, are a reliable expression of character: they occur in the public realm and have the actuality of facts. Things said are less

reliable: they originate in the private realm, and the intentions of the speaker are difficult to ascertain. Added to this, where words can be used to fabricate and to communicate deceptions, actions can be a way of overcoming deception and self-deception. This is one reason why Conrad repeatedly depicts characters in extreme conditions where all evasions and self-deceptions, often associated with man's language ability, are broken down and the character is forced to *do* or die. It is under conditions like these that Stein catches his butterfly, that Kurtz becomes a deranged but eloquent demi-god, and that Jim leaps off the Patna. In *The Nigger* a clear distinction is drawn between those who do and those who speak. Singleton and Allistoun are amongst those who act; their lives are justified by unceasing toil rather than by clamour.

The saving values associated with Allistoun and Singleton are seen to be part of the past. Though the narrator says that "a generation of men goes--and is forgotten, and it does not matter" (25), a tone of regret and a sense of things falling apart underlies the tale. Singleton is a "lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation" (24), a generation that "had been strong, as those are strong who know neither doubts nor hopes" (25). Most significantly, "the men who could understand his silence were gone" (25). The new generation seldom, if ever, finds a point of rest between the extremes of doubt and hope, and is rarely silent. Its vacillation is directly contrasted with Singleton's equanimity.

Certain qualities shared by Singleton and his generation are particularly noteworthy. They are "voiceless men" (25), "unthinking" (24), and they "knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity" (25). The narrator twice refers to them as children: they are "the everlasting children of the mysterious sea" (25), and they have the "simple minds of...big children" (6). Berthoud argues that "to men like Singleton...the question of the meaning of their lives is an unreal one" (1978, 28), and to some extent this explains why they are compared to children. To use Conrad's slightly misleading term, they live "unconsciously" (it would be more accurate to say "unself-consciously"). What he means by this is clarified in a letter in which he responds to R.B.Cunninghame Graham's suggestion that Singleton's heroic appeal would be greater if he were educated. To this Conrad replied emphatically:

> ...I think Singleton with an education is impossible. But first of all--what education? If it is the knowledge how to live my man essentially possessed it. He was in perfect accord with his life....Or do you mean the kind of knowledge which would enable him to scheme, and lie, and intrigue his way to the forefront of a crowd no better than himself? Would you seriously, of malice prepense cultivate in that unconscious man the power to think. Then he would become conscious--and much smaller--and very unhappy.
> (Karl and Davies ed. 1983, 423)

Singleton and his generation are great because they are unself-conscious, like children, and they are capable of action without reflection. Houghton's description of an

aspect of the Victorian frame of mind is a useful commentary on this:

> The combined effect of a dissolving tradition of thought and the new scientific conception of man and nature was to drive sensitive minds into the mood of ennui and frustration. So long as one lives within an accepted structure of belief and value, he follows customary lines without raising fundamental questions, and human energy flows unimpeded into activity. (1957, 71)

Singleton's energy flows unimpeded into the activities demanded by his profession because, as his name suggests, he is single-minded; that is, he doubts neither himself nor what he is doing: "The thoughts of all his lifetime could have been expressed in six words, but the stir of those things that were as much a part of his existence as his beating heart called up a gleam of alert understanding upon the sternness of his aged face" (26). He remains silent because he does not require the sanction of words in order to act. His relation to the "accepted structure of belief and value" is suggested by the following simile: Singleton and his generation are "effaced, bowed and enduring, like stone caryatides that hold up in the night the lighted halls of a resplendent and glorious edifice" (25). This distils all the qualities associated with Singleton: resplendence, silence, single-mindedness, and an unquestioning devotion to the professional code.

Captain Allistoun, the second major figure who demonstrates the priority of the deed over the word, shares these qualities with Singleton. He is "one of those commanders who speak little, seem to hear nothing, look at no

one--and know everything..." (125). Like Singleton, he has a capacity for single-minded attention, so that during the storm he "seemed with his eyes to hold the ship up in a superhuman concentration of effort" (65). (One recalls Donkin's "shifty eyes" (9) mentioned earlier.) Like Singleton, he remains vigilantly at his post during the storm, and is unquestioning in his devotion to the professional code: "He loved his ship, and drove her unmercifully; for his secret ambition was to make her accomplish some day a brilliantly quick passage which would be mentioned in nautical papers" (30-31).

The captain's principal virtue is genuine altruism. During the attempted mutiny, which as Watt argues is largely the result of misguided compassion (1980, 111-115), Allistoun stands "composed in the tumult, listening with profound attention" (121) and he watches Wait with "a quiet and penetrating gaze" (119). He is the only man on board who sees the reality of Wait's condition; he does not possess the "latent egoism of tenderness to suffering" (138) which afflicts the crew, and he is not misled as they are by Wait's words. His silence is a crucial part of his ability to perceive the truth of the situation. After explaining to Baker and Creighton his reasons for dealing with the dying Wait as he does, Allistoun leaves them "facing one another, and more impressed than if they had seen a stone image shed a miraculous tear of compassion over the incertitudes of life and death..." (127).

Berthoud argues that the "deeper intention" of *The Nigger* is to "explore the subterfuges...which men resort to

when confronted by an irremediable reality" (1978, 34). In the context of the tale, it is Singleton and Allistoun who confront the actual conditions of existence without evasions. Their moral qualities--principally, their unself-consciousness and single-mindedness--are the main reason for this steady-eyed vigilance. Their silence is also an essential part of this; they shun language which, as will be argued in the next section, is too frequently associated with evasiveness and deception.

Yet they do not reject language entirely. Hawthorn makes a useful connection between the attitude to experience shared by Singleton and Allistoun, and language. He argues that "Conrad consistently associates the language of sailors with a direct and non-problematic relationship with reality..." (1979, 10). He goes on to cite a passage from the essay "The Unlighted Coast", where Conrad distinguishes between the "war talk" of "men (and even great men)" who remain behind the lines and that of sailors actively involved in events. The language of the latter is, he says,

> full of sense, of meaning, and single-minded purpose; inquiries, information, orders, reports. Words, too. But words in direct relation to things and facts, with the feeling at the back of it all of the correct foresight that planned and of the determination which carries on the protective work.
> (*Last Essays*, 50)

What Conrad seems to be suggesting is that the language of the sailors is uncomplicated and unambiguous because they use words with clearly discernible intentions: to inform, to

report, to command, and so on. One of the problematic aspects of language that will be discussed repeatedly in this thesis is that words can be used to conceal intentions, or used without any discernible intention. (This problem is particularly prevalent amongst the Russian speakers in *Under Western Eyes*.) Moreover, the sailor's language has determinate meaning because it is used in clearly discernible contexts; it is used as a tool to assist those acting in the world, those who are carrying on the "protective work". Their words are, therefore, always used in direct relation to things, facts, and deeds. By implication, the language of the men behind the scenes--language divorced from the context of action--can be ambiguous or even meaningless.

Allistoun and Singleton by their silence demonstrate the primacy of the thing done, and the few words they speak only serve to underscore the intimate relationship between their words and actions. To use J.L.Austin's phrase, when they speak they "do things" (Austin, 1975) with words: Allistoun, for instance, is most frequently heard issuing commands. Singleton's command "'You...hold!'" (26), at the end of Chapter 1, epitomizes this attitude to language. When they are not actually doing things with words, their language is always in "direct relation to things and facts". Their perception of the world is not distorted by egoism, fear or impractical aspirations, and their language is similarly uncontaminated. The difference between their silence (or rare

use of language) and the clamour of the rest of the crew is the subject of the next section.

The attitude to life and language shared by Singleton and Allistoun is summarized by Trilling in the following passage from *Sincerity and Authenticity*:

> The sailing officer was admired as the exemplar of a professional code which prescribed an uncompromising commitment to duty, a continuous concentration of the personal energies upon some impersonal end, the subordination of the self to some general good. It was the officer's response to the imperatives of this code that made for the singleness of mind and the openness of soul imputed to him. (1972, 111)

The crew members of the *Narcissus* are neither single-minded nor open-souled; they are not exemplary sailors.

III

Singleton and his lost generation were "strong and mute" (25), "inarticulate and indispensable" (25); the new generation are "less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing; and if they had [sic] learned how to speak they have also learned how to whine" (25). As the silence of Singleton and Allistoun is consistently associated with their capacity for selfless action and with their stoical acknowledgement of things as they are, so the crew's clamour is related to their doubt about themselves and what they are doing, and to their tendency to avoid things as they are. Belfast's boastful speech shows that this tendency to

evade the truth, and to use language to deceive themselves and others, is present in the crew from the start. The arrival of Donkin and Wait, the principal evaders in the tale, only serves to exacerbate this tendency. Influenced by Donkin and Wait, the crew moves from the relatively clear and distinct world of things done to the complex and bewitching world of things said.

From his first utterance on board the *Narcissus*, Wait is associated with what Schwarz has called the "potential immorality of language" (1980, 42)--its powers of concealment and duplicity. When in the first chapter Baker finishes mustering the men, he finds he is missing one member of the crew. As he tells the men to go below a "deep, ringing voice" cries "'Wait!'" (17). Taking this to be an act of insubordination the chief mate is enraged. Wait explains that he meant only to call out his name, but already his intentions are unclear. This linguistic ambiguity is reflected in the ambiguity of Wait himself: he is at once "calm, cool, towering, superb" (18), and subject to severe coughing fits. These ambiguities, as Berthoud argues, "defy steady definition and make it impossible for the men to adopt a consistent attitude to him" (1978, 31). Because the crew's perceptions are often distorted by egoism--their self-pity makes them unwilling to admit that Wait is dying--they find it impossible to tell whether or not Wait is what he says he is. That is, whether he is in fact ill (and therefore worthy of their compassion) or merely shamming (and therefore worthy of their scorn).

This 'double-mindedness' is a central characteristic of the crew, who lack Singleton's unself-consciousness. Unlike the old seaman, who lives "untouched by human emotions" (41), they oscillate "between the desire of virtue and the fear of ridicule" (41), particularly in their response to Wait. Wait's use of language only complicates things further.

Wait's motives are extraordinarily complex: he pretends to be sick in order to avoid the fact that he really is mortally ill. By appearing to be sick he enlists the crew's compassion, and is let off work (if he continued working he would be forced to face the fact that he is dying), but the *appearance* still allows for that element of doubt in their minds which is necessary for him to remain firm in *his* conviction that he is shamming. This complex game of deceit, where the deceiver is self-deceived, bewitches the men and threatens the order of the ship.

Watt sees Wait as a "symbol...of the universal human reluctance to face those most universal agents of anti-climax, the facts..." (1980, 106). The men are as reluctant to face the fact of death as Wait is. Throughout the tale the most reliable sign of Wait's actual condition is his cough. At first it is "metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud" (18); it is almost apocalyptic, and seems to shake the "dome of the sky" (18-19) and the ship. The cough comes to symbolize the facts that the men are unwilling to face. When they are involved in an "obstinate and childish" (32) dispute about the characteristics of a gentleman, where they "repeated in shouts

and with inflamed faces their amazing arguments" (32), Wait's cough--in this instance a "weak rattle...heard through the forecastle door" (34)--brings them back to reality. Their clamour ceases and the group separates. The cough is directly opposed to Wait's statements about himself on the occasion of his first private conversation with Donkin. He has just confessed to Donkin that he is in fact shamming sick: "Then Jimmy coughed violently. 'I am as well as ever,' he said, as soon as he could draw breath" (111). This disparity between what is avowed and what is actually the case is repeated when Wait confronts Allistoun. Wait is helped out of his cabin, he is "leaning with all his weight on Belfast's neck", and in broken speech he says: "I've been better this last week...I am well...I was going back to duty...to-morrow--now if you like--Captain" (119). The men, who share Wait's "steadfastness to his untruthful attitude in the face of the inevitable truth" (138), agree with what he *says*. Wait hides the truth from himself and the crew behind the veil of language. Only the master, who watches fixedly and silently, is able to see beyond the words.

The contrary attitudes to experience represented by Wait and Singleton are clearly shown in their respective attitudes to death. When the old seaman becomes aware of his mortality, we are told that "he brooded alone more than ever, in an impenetrable silence..." (98). Unlike Wait, who is tormented by his intimations of mortality, Singleton has "never given a thought to his mortal self" (99). When he finally

does consider his mortality, he confronts the sea--the single undeniable fact in the tale:

> He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perception of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatient voice calling for him out of a pitiless vastness full of unrest, of turmoil, and of terror. He looked afar upon it.... (99)

Singleton confronts unflinchingly the 'two realities' in the tale--death and the sea; Wait clings to all possible distractions, and remains hidden in his cabin. Left alone at night, Wait sees "the quick, repeated visions of a fabulous world made up of leaping fire and sleeping water" (104); he is consoled by "soft footfalls", the "breathing of some men lounging on the doorstep", and the "calm voice of the watch-officer" (104). Life seems to him "an indestructible thing" (105), and at this point he is transformed into an idol representing the power of human delusion.

Berthoud discusses the implications of this transformation. He distinguishes between two modes of discourse reflected in the novel: the "symbolic mode" and the "technical mode". The latter is akin to the language used by the sailors who are involved in events (see above, section II). As Berthoud suggests, "the technical vocabulary of seafaring...is language stripped of all symbolic ambiguity because it has to serve a specific practical end" (1984, xxiv). This is the language used by Allistoun and Singleton: the intentions are clear, the words are used in direct relation to facts, and the

meaning is determinate. The "symbolic mode" is used "when men decide to turn a reality that contradicts their desires into a symbol or surrogate for a more acceptable imaginary alternative" (Berthoud 1984, xxiii). In their case, language is used to escape actuality, rather than to deal with it. For Donkin, Podmore and the crew, language is used to express their psychic need for deliverance from the facts of death and suffering. The only consequence of this practice is self-deception.

In order to avoid confronting the fact that Wait is dying (and therefore the universal fact of mortality), the crew transform him into an idol. His cabin has the "brilliance of a silver shrine where a black idol, reclining stiffly under a blanket, blinked its weary eyes and received our homage" (105). Donkin officiates at this rite, exclaiming now and then: "Just look at 'im, 'ee knows what's what--never fear!" (105). The "strong, effective and respectable bond of [this] sentimental lie" (155) is broken when Wait dies, and, "like the death of an old belief" (155), this shakes the foundations of the society on board the *Narcissus*.

The demoralizing effect Wait has on the crew makes them "over-civilized, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life" (139). They make a "chorus of affirmation to his wildest assertions, as though he had been a millionaire, a politician, or a reformer..." (139). Donkin is the real reformer, the "votary of change" (14), on board the *Narcissus*. Berthoud argues that "the novel...compels us to

connect [Donkin's] rejection of the demands of maritime service with Wait's refusal to countenance his inevitable end" (1978, 35). Donkin is the antithesis of Allistoun and Singleton: he is deluded about the nature of reality, and he is the embodiment of clamour and restlessness.

Donkin's delusions about the nature of reality are most clearly reflected in his response to the sea. In the novel the sea is frequently described in terms usually attributed to deity. It is the "immortal sea" (90,99,155), it has an "impatient voice calling" (99) Singleton to his death, and "through the perfect wisdom of its grace" (90) the men are redeemed. The style of these descriptions is modelled on Biblical techniques: the repeated phrases used when Singleton gazes upon the immensity (99), and the grand style of the paragraph opening Chapter 4 (90), are instances of this. The purpose of this rhetoric seems to be to suggest that the actual sea, the given, is the final authority over the world of men. The sea has the power in this world traditionally ascribed to a transcendent God. It also suggests that those in touch with the sea are in some sense in touch with "reality". Donkin is a landsman who rejects the actual and undeniable imperatives of the sea, particularly the imperatives of action and vigilance. He is "full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea" (11). His principal illusion is that he believes, and under certain circumstances persuades the crew to believe, that the demands of the professional code are forced on them by those in command and

not by the sea itself. When the men are called to muster, they ask: "What's up?...Is there no rest for us?" (14). Donkin yelps: "If that's the way of this ship, we'll 'ave to change all that....I will soon..." (14). This is followed by the significant observation that "none of the crowd noticed him" (14). After the storm the men repeat the question to Baker, who replies: "No! No rest till the work is done. Work till you drop. That's what you're here for" (93). At this a "bowed seaman" gives a short laugh and then repeats the slogan "do or die" (93). Donkin's aspirations are rendered void by both the men and the sea--in terms of the novel, man is, after all, redeemed "by the vast silence of pain and labour", and not "by the obstinate clamour of sages, demanding bliss and an empty heaven" (90).

Watt suggests that "in general the crew's ambivalence is manifested by the contradiction between their talk and their behaviour" (1980, 104). What they say suggests that they have no respect for the officers, yet what they do during the storm (and finally during the attempted mutiny) is obey the commands given. One of the crew goes so far as to hit Donkin--when he demands that the masts be cut--to keep him quiet (60). The same can be said of their attitude to work. Though a group rescues Wait from his cabin (an *act* of compassion that has significant implications in itself), during the storm they "hardly gave a thought to Jimmy" (53), and in the aftermath "they could not spare a moment or a thought from the great mental occupation of wishing to live" (82). But once

the storm is over they enter the equatorial doldrums, and their sympathy again shifts to Donkin. Their "contempt for him was unbounded--and [they] could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist" (100). Donkin delivers "impassioned orations" (101) to a "discontented and aspiring population" (103), inspiring them to dream of a utopia where the sea is always serene and all mankind is satisfied. Despite themselves, the men are deceived as soon as they begin to believe in clamour rather than in action.

Besides creating fictions about the world through the medium of language, Donkin uses words to conceal the truth about himself. His "picturesque and filthy loquacity" flows "like a troubled stream from a poisoned source" (101). The "poisoned source" is egoism, which is revealed to be the motivating force in Donkin's life. An important distinction can be drawn between Donkin and Podmore, the other "clamorous sage" on board the *Narcissus*. Podmore, like Donkin, can be accused of what Schwarz calls a "narcissistic attitude towards language" (1980, 42). When he takes it upon himself to 'save' Wait's soul he "prayerfully [divests] himself of the last vestige of his humanity" (116). He becomes a "voice--a fleshless and sublime thing" (116), and utters his "impassioned screeching babble" (117) more for his own sake than out of any concern for Wait. But Podmore is capable of altruistic action--he makes coffee for the men during the storm. Though this act is questionably motivated (like "many benefactors of humanity, the cook took himself too seriously..." (84)), and

even though he recalls "the night when he went *walking over the sea* to make coffee for perishing sinners" (116, italics mine), it represents something of which Donkin is incapable. As Allistoun says: "The fellow breaks out like that now and then. Good cook tho'" (127).

Donkin's clamour is never redeemed by action, rather his actions reveal the truth about himself. The crew, when not confronting the reality of the sea, succumb to the surface glitter of Donkin's rhetoric; they fail to see beyond the words to the "poisoned source" (101). But in the two private conversations between Wait and Donkin, the latter's apparent altruism is unmasked. On the first occasion, Donkin accuses Wait of egotistically shirking duty, and goes on to say:

> '...it's a bloomin' shayme. We are put upon...bad food, bad pay...I want us to kick up a bloomin' row; a blamed 'owling row that would make 'em remember....' His altruistic indignation blazed.
>
> (112)

At this point Donkin begins to doubt Wait's pretence; he recognizes that Wait is in fact dying. At their next meeting, after his humiliation by Allistoun, Donkin's "perfidious desire of truthfulness" (150), and his desire to "be even with everybody for everything" (150), drive him to undermine Wait's self-deception. Ironically, the two principal evaders of reality in the tale end up exposing the truth about each other: as Wait is forced to confront the reality of his own death, Donkin is revealed to be the one unmitigated egoist on board the *Narcissus*. The arch exploiter of human sympathy

terrorizes Wait into dying, and even manages to feel self-pity. When he observes Wait's final moments, he feels "the anguishing grasp of a great sorrow on his heart at the thought that he himself, someday, would have to go through it all..." (153-154). Wait dies; Donkin steals his money and leaves. Once again actions prove to be a more reliable expression of character than words.

IV

The view of language presented in the novel is on the whole derogatory. In the oppositions between language and silence, words and actions, the non-linguistic element is valued more highly than the linguistic. Silence and action are praised and associated with Singleton and Allistoun, whereas language is censured and associated with the deceivers and the self-deceived (Wait, Donkin, Podmore and the crew). In the final paragraphs, the narrator sees the crew "swaying irresolute and noisy" (171) on their way to the Black Horse, where men "dispense out of varnished barrels the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness; the illusion of splendour and poetry of life..." (171). "From afar I saw them *discoursing* [he adds]...while the sea of life thundered into their ears ceaseless and *unheeded*" (171, italics mine). The clamorous and forgetful men are contrasted with the "remembering and mute stones" (172) on which they walk. The only form of language that is not seen to be a distracting clamour is the

technical language of the sailors, which is restricted both in terms of intention and context, and which has, as a consequence, determinate meaning. All other forms of language are seen to be potentially misleading, ambiguous, and morally suspect; these are the words that constitute the "poetry of life" which conceals or detracts from the "sea of life".

In conclusion, it is significant that many of the virtues ascribed to Singleton and Allistoun--particularly their sincerity, their single-mindedness, and their vigilance--are also the virtues of the "workman of art" (*The Nigger*, xi), who labours in his own "region of stress and strife" (*The Nigger*, viii). In the preface to *The Nigger*, art is defined as amongst other things a "single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe" (vii), and the task of the artist "approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood" (x). Yet the artist does not possess two essential characteristics of the seamen: their silence and their unself-consciousness (or as Conrad would have it, their unconsciousness), and his language is not strictly limited in terms of intention and context.

The reader is left with an apparent contradiction: the world presented in the novel undermines the mode of presentation which is the novel. The story is concerned to show that deeds have priority over words, that silence is a virtue, that language is morally suspect, and that self-consciousness

has a debilitating effect both on the individual and on the community. But the story itself is clearly a linguistic object, and what is more the form of telling--in particular the device of the first-person narrator--suggests that self-consciousness and imagination are not viewed entirely negatively. In Levenson's words, there is in the story a "tension between thematic representation and narrative form" (1984, 34). Or, as Virginia Woolf put it, to celebrate silence one must possess a voice. Levenson goes on to sum up the problem:

> The thematic sympathies of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* are plainly on the side of duty, obedience, authority and silence, and against individualism, consciousness and loquacity. But through the person of the narrator ...there is an implied commitment to the values of a registering consciousness. Singleton's "unexpressed faith" may be the supreme virtue endorsed in the novel, but it is the narrator who gives expression to that claim.
>
> (1984, 34)

Given this, it seems yet to be true that in the world of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* there is no obvious place for the story-teller[3]. In the final paragraphs he emerges as an anonymous, alienated figure, speaking to no one directly, who tells a story that undermines his own position. Only in *Heart of Darkness* does the teller, who is now given a name, begin to find his place in the world, and to locate his narrative amongst the many other valid and invalid kinds of discourse.

CHAPTER 2

The last distortion of romance
Forsook the insatiable egotist.
Wallace Stevens[1]

Heart of Darkness is one of many literary responses to the age of colonial expansion, or what can be called the nineteenth-century civilizing mission. At a general level the response was twofold: there were the "imperialist romancers", who celebrated the mission in romantic stories, and there were the "critical realists", who condemned its methods and aspirations. The techniques of the romancers are outlined by Frye in *The Secular Scripture*:

> ...the adventure stories of Rider Haggard and John Buchan and Rudyard Kipling...incorporate the dreams of British imperialism. This is the process of what we called "kidnapping" romance, the absorbing of it into the ideology of an ascendant class.
> (1976, 57)

Frye suggests that, in the case of these works, ideology affects and employs romance, and vice versa. In the period of colonial expansion, Britain and certain European powers were an "ascendant class" in the international scene. The romancers "absorbed" its ideology into the conventions of the genre of romance, and, as is made clear in *Heart of Darkness*, the ideologists of the civilizing mission appropriated the conventions of romance.

On the face of it Conrad is on the side of the "critical realists". He was capable of writing stories that were clearly

anti-romantic and anti-imperialist; stories that questioned rather than confirmed the dominant ideology and its attendant rhetoric. The short story entitled "An Outpost of Progress", for example, is a direct and comparatively uncomplicated attack on the hypocrisies of the civilizing mission. But *Heart of Darkness* is neither as simple nor as uncompromising as "An Outpost". The reasons for this will become clear in the account that follows, but to begin with, it can be said that the novella is both more extensive and more discerning of the human predicament than the short story. In *Heart of Darkness* the historic circumstances of the civilizing mission are not the principal object of inquiry; they serve rather as the material used to present a more far-reaching concern that includes both the romantic's and the realist's perspectives.

I

The story begins with a prologue or overture in which these two conflicting perspectives are introduced. An anonymous frame-narrator describes the scene: five men--among them a Director of Companies, a Lawyer and an Accountant--all of whom share the "bond of the sea" (45), are aboard a cruising yawl moored in the Thames estuary waiting for the tide to turn. They are all looking to seaward and to the "luminous estuary" (45) ahead; the "mournful gloom" (45) of London is behind them. The use of the tropes of darkness and light--the symbolic opposition that is to become essential in the story as a whole--tells the

reader less about the external scene than it does about the narrator's emotions and attitudes, or what Parry calls "the manicheanism of the imperialist imagination" (1983, 21). The landscape is invested with meaning, it is not merely described. The frame-narrator is a romantic, who sees the world in the light of his romantic dream. In *The Mirror of the Sea* Conrad describes the Thames in words that clarify the frame-narrator's position. At one point he says: "romance has lived too long upon this river not to have thrown a mantle of glamour upon its banks" (113). This description echoes the narrator's rendering of the mist on the Essex marshes, which is "like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds" (46). The estuary itself has symbolic significance for the romantic: "all the estuaries of great rivers have...the attractiveness of an open portal" (*Mirror*, 101) and "from the offing the open estuary promises every possible fruition to adventurous hopes" (*Mirror*, 101). The frame-narrator sees the estuary as an open portal promising every possible fruition to his romantic expectations. His views, and the rhetoric he uses to express them, exemplify the vision of the world and man characteristic of the imperialist outlook. The tale of disillusionment that is to follow, though it does not deny the validity of these feelings, shows that the frame-narrator's words do not refer to the world. His is the rhetoric of the deceived.

This heroic vision of the future is followed by an equally heroic rendering of the past. The imaginations of those aboard the *Nellie* (excluding Marlow) are contaminated by the

dominant ideology of their time, and the language they use is similarly contaminated. With the exception of Marlow, they all "evoke the great spirit of the past" (47) in a manner characteristic of the language used by the rhetoricians of the civilizing mission, with its blend of chivalric and religious idioms. Drake and Franklin are "the great knights-errant of the sea", the names of their ships are "like jewels flashing in the night of time"; history has the linear and progressive character of a "gigantic tale"; and the conquerors go out on the stream "bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire" (47). The civilizing mission, in this account, is part of a proud and glorious tradition of progress, bringing light to the benighted places of the earth. Marlow's tale takes issue with this unqualified affirmation of European aspirations, particularly with the simple associations of light and virtue, darkness and evil, suggested by the frame-narrator's rhetoric. As he says at the end of "Youth": "I have seen the mysterious shores, the still water, the lands of brown nations, where a stealthy Nemesis lies in wait, pursues, overtakes so many of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength" ("Youth", 41-42).

Marlow's terse retort to the frame-narrator's celebration of the civilizing mission, "And this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth" (48), radically alters the perspective. His manner is unaffected and matter-of-fact. He recalls the time of the Roman invasion of Britain, "nineteen hundred years ago--the other day" (49). On this time scale, which both extends and

reduces that of the frame-narrator, the light from the sacred fire becomes "a running blaze on a plain...a flash of lightning in the clouds" (49). As Watt argues, "we are made to see civilization, not as a stable and normal condition, but as a brief interruption of the customary rule of darkness..." (1980, 154). When considering history and civilized man's place in it, Marlow takes (to use Eliot's words) a

> ...backward look behind the assurance
> Of recorded history, the backward half-look
> Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.[2]

Marlow's view of the conquerors is similarly anti-heroic. The "decent young citizen in a toga", left to his own resources in an unfamiliar world, feels the "fascination of the abomination" as he looks into the "hearts of wild men" (50). The commander of the trireme, though saved by his devotion to his task and his ability to act "without thinking much about it" (49), is no knight-errant of the sea. Marlow's sombre perspective on civilization undermines the idealistic vision of the frame-narrator. He maintains this critical attitude throughout the first section of the story, as he reveals the gulf between what civilized man says and what he does.

At this point Marlow pauses in his narrative, apparently--as Watt suggests--"reflecting that he ought not to upset his listening friends with his gloomy ruminations" (1980, 216). When he resumes, "it is to exclude the present company from his unflattering generalizations about human weakness" (1980, 216). Yet this attempt to exclude his audience, by means of a spurious distinction between colonists and conquerors, makes

Marlow's use of language as questionable as the frame-narrator's. He appeals to the ideal of "efficiency" (50) in order to distinguish the modern day colonists from the Roman conquerors, but this is contradicted by his previous description of the Romans as a "wonderful lot of handy men" (49), and by the inefficiency characteristic of the colonists he witnesses in Africa. The appeal to the "unselfish belief in the idea" (51) is similarly questionable. The idea seems to be more akin to a primitive idol, "something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (51), than a rationally chosen ideal. By making this spurious distinction between conquerors and colonists, Marlow is not simply deceiving his audience, he is (as an accomplished story-teller) trying to prevent his audience from dismissing his tale as absurd. Throughout the account that follows, he is aware of the problem of communicating unflattering truths to his listeners; this is the first instance of it. In this situation we can assume that Marlow has sacrificed absolute veracity in order to preserve the decorum of conversation, and to retain his credibility as a teller. But once again the reader is asked to interrogate words: to ask who is speaking, who is listening and in what circumstances the words are uttered.

II

With the prologue complete, Marlow begins to tell the story of his experience in Africa. He describes his childhood "passion for maps" and for losing himself in "all the glories of

exploration" (52); he wonders at his impulsive desire in later life to travel up the river that resembles "an immense snake" (52); and he explains how, with the help of his aunt, he set about obtaining employment that would allow him to fulfil this desire. Then, in one of the few interruptions of the chronological sequence, he describes his attempt, once in Africa, to recover the remains of his predecessor, Fresleven. In this account we hear Marlow's ironic voice, which is to dominate the first section of the story. This is the sardonic voice of the outraged seaman, who lives by the values--by what Berthoud calls the "ethic of service" (1978, 41)--affirmed in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. The account of Fresleven's ignoble decline and death--his death is caused by (among other things) the failure of communication between two cultures--provides a contrast to the frame-narrator's enthusiastic celebration of the civilizing mission. Added to this, Marlow's insistent ironies undermine the rhetoric of the civilizing mission; phrases like "the noble cause" and "the cause of progress" (54) are made to sound particularly hollow when used in this context. As Marlow soon discovers, European culture has created a complex system of lies to justify its actions and to conceal its own dark heart; hypocrisy, which entails a disparity between what is professed and what is actually done, is its defining characteristic.

The meeting between Marlow and his aunt gives a clear indication of the nature and extent of these systematic misrepresentations. She has secured him a position in the "Company", and so before setting off Marlow visits her to pay his

respects. He finds her "triumphant" (59). In words resembling those of the frame-narrator, she considers Marlow to be "something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (59), and she talks about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (59). Marlow is sceptical, and he "venture[s] to hint that the Company [is] run for profit" (59). He explains his aunt's enthusiastic idealism:

> There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. (59)

In the short story entitled "An Outpost of Progress", the two principal characters, Kayerts and Carlier, are similarly carried off their feet by "print and talk". Left alone at their outpost in the wilderness, their morale slowly breaking down, they discover "some old copies of a home paper" (94).

> That print discussed what it was pleased to call "Our Colonial Expansion" in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. ("An Outpost", 94)

Having read this the two colonists begin "to think better of themselves" (95); they are consoled by the thought that they represent the vanguard of "civilization, my boy, and virtue--and all" (95). The omniscient narrator comments that "they seemed to forget their dead predecessor" (95), making the irony of their words clear to the reader. The remainder of the story describes their gradual moral decline which leads finally to a murder and a

suicide. As an account of the effect that the colonial experience has on the colonists, the story is a bitter indictment of the civilizing mission. Like the first section of *Heart of Darkness*, its mordant comedy and repeated ironies reveal the hollowness of the rhetoric used to promote the mission.

Throughout his preparations for the journey to the Congo, Marlow feels a growing sense of disquiet. "It was," he says, "just as though I had been let into some conspiracy...something not quite right..." (56). The knitters of black wool, the "shabby and careless" (57) clerk, and the doctor who takes a scientific interest in those going "out there" (58), offer no consolation. The journey to the Central Station plots Marlow's gradually developing awareness of what this conspiracy means.

Throughout this journey, Marlow's capacity for astute and unprejudiced observation isolates him from the other colonists. Yet it takes time for him to articulate clearly the meaning of what he sees; he feels that he is being kept "away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion" (61). The energetic black boatmen give him a "momentary contact with reality" and a comforting sense that he still belongs "to a world of straight-forward facts" (61), but this is short-lived. The actions of the colonists, unlike those of the black boatmen, are at first incomprehensible. Marlow witnesses a French man-of-war firing into the continent and is amazed:

> In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one

> of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech--and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. (61-62)

Berthoud argues that this incident demonstrates that "the intelligibility of what men do depends upon the context in which they do it" (1978, 46). This is true, but what is perhaps more important is that the incident shows exactly how Marlow differs from the other colonists.[3] The activities of the colonists are unintelligible only to Marlow; he is not consoled when "somebody on board assure[s] [him] earnestly there was a camp of natives--he called them enemies!--hidden out of sight somewhere" (62). Marlow sees beyond the words used by the colonists to legitimize and to give significance to their actions. He sees the futility of firing into a continent, and he sees that the colonists are deceiving themselves, while they either cannot or will not see beyond their words. What Marlow gradually comes to understand is that the rhetoric of the civilizing mission is used to deceive not only those who remain in Europe, but also the colonists themselves.

The abuse of the word "work" particularly offends Marlow's professionalism. He comments on the petty intrigues of the "pilgrims" at the Central Station, saying that "it was as unreal as everything else--as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work" (78). At the Company Station he observes that the word is used to justify the "objectless blasting" (64) of a cliff, to legitimize the exploitation of the natives (who--in another

instance of misleading categorization--are classified as "criminals", though Marlow sees them as "nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation" (66)), and to conceal the inefficiency of the whole enterprise. In the grove where the "helpers had withdrawn to die", Marlow's ironies become cries of outrage: "The work was going on. The work!" (66). Even the accountant, who appears at first as a "sort of vision" (67) to Marlow, and who seems to have maintained his standards of efficiency "in the great demoralization of the land" (68), cannot be justified by an appeal to the word. His efficiency is inversely proportional to his compassion, both for the natives and for his fellow colonists. On seeing the "decaying machinery" and the chain gang (63-64), Marlow begins to understand the conspiracy he has been let into: "I foresaw", he says, "that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (65).

Marlow arrives at the Central Station, and at a glance sees that "the flabby devil was running that show" (72). Having to some extent come to comprehend the ideological conspiracy behind the civilizing mission and the self-deceptions of the colonists, Marlow now faces deceit in a more personal form. Characteristically, the speech of the "pretending devils" belies their actual feelings and motives. In order to find out what is actually happening around him, Marlow has to rely either on non-linguistic signs (like gestures, actions and general demeanour) or on indirect forms of "conversation", like eavesdropping. The

manager, for instance, assures Marlow that Kurtz is "the best agent he [has], an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company" (75). But his actions--breaking the sealing wax (75) literally breaks the seal on the "door opening into a darkness he [has] in his keeping" (74)--and the distracted manner in which he conducts the conversation, reveal that this unqualified praise is sham. (Marlow only realizes that the manager deliberately inconvenienced his repair work on the steamer, in order to delay the rescue mission and to jeopardize Kurtz's position, when he overhears a conversation between the manager and the manager's uncle, who is the leader of the "Eldorado Exploring Expedition" (89-92)). Marlow soon becomes aware that the "only real feeling" among the colonists "was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages" (78). As the rhetoric of the civilizing mission misrepresents the reality of colonization, so the words of the flabby devils conceal their self-interest and moral cynicism.

III

At the Central Station, Marlow turns his back on the hypocritical colonists and, to keep a "hold on the redeeming facts of life" (75), devotes himself to the practical problem of repairing the damaged steamboat. The implications of this symbolic act will be the central concern of this section, particularly as it has a bearing on the relationship between the self, language, and work. In order to provide a context in which the

significance of Kurtz can be seen more clearly, the discussion re-examines the distinction between language and action referred to in Chapter 1.

Much has already been said about Singleton in Chapter 1; what follows is a brief summary of the ground already covered, and then a look at how this is related to some of the issues raised in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Sincerity and Authenticity* Trilling describes the "trait on which the English most prided themselves, their sincerity, by which they meant their single-minded relation to things, to each other, and to themselves" (1972, 111). As we have seen, Singleton is the paragon of sincerity. He is single-minded in his relation to the world, the other members of the crew, and himself. Certain other characteristics are noteworthy: the sincere man--as represented by Singleton--is silent, unconscious (to use the Carlylean term which Conrad also used) and unquestioningly committed to his public role and the work that it entails. He is Carlyle's "good man" who works "continually in well*doing*", and "to whom well*doing* is as his natural existence...*requiring no commentary*" (1872, 7, italics mine). The "good man" for Carlyle is the silent, unreflecting worker; the "good life" is lived unconsciously, it is active and industrious. In addition to this, work has a significant influence on the self.

> To work: why, it is to try himself against Nature, and her everlasting unerring Laws; these will tell a true verdict as to the man. So much of virtue and of faculty did *we* [Nature and her Laws are speaking in judgement] find in him; so much and no more! He had such capacity of harmonizing himself with *me*

> and my unalterable ever-veracious Laws; of co-operating and working as *I* bade him....
> (1919, 143)

That is, the activity of work tests an individual's mettle, and through his work he "harmonizes" himself with what is unalterable and ever-veracious. Importantly, the worker's self is discovered and expressed through action--actions which are in turn "judged" by objective reality (Carlyle's "Nature") and tested for their worth. Singleton is tested by time and the sea (hence his equanimity) and he faces resolutely the two unalterable and ever-veracious facts in the tale: death and the exactions of the sea. He has, according to Carlyle and Conrad, discovered his "real self" by *acting* in the world and facing its demands.

A further quality possessed by Singleton--and, according to Marlow, all reliable workers--is "restraint". In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow praises his cannibal crew, who are "brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity" (105) by hunger, and who are yet able to restrain themselves from feasting on the "pilgrims". Marlow is baffled: "Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear--or some kind of primitive honour?" (105). No explanation suffices, and he is left facing an enigma. The notion of restraint refers primarily to the individual's capacity to remain true to his public role in the face of outer threats and inner compulsions. Conrad praises men like Singleton and Allistoun, who are able to retain the identity they possess as members of a group (for instance, the crew of a ship); and yet many of the novels deal with men who fail, like Jim, to suppress their individuality and

who are, as a result, cast out of the group. Singleton has been tested, he has no false perceptions of himself, and he can be relied upon to fulfil his function as a member of the crew.

Marlow is committed to many of the values and qualities represented by Singleton. In the first instance, he is committed to the belief in work as a test of individual mettle.

> I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work,--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know. (85)

On the basis of this commitment, Marlow praises the mechanics at the Central Station--particularly the simple and industrious boiler-maker--and criticizes the members of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition (and the colonists in general), who are not aware that "foresight" and "serious intention" are "wanted for the work of the world" (87). Second, Marlow gives priority to deeds over words. When the boat is attacked just before the Inner Station, and the helmsman dies, he makes the following comment:

> No; I can't forget him [Kurtz], though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully....Well, don't you see, he had *done* something, he had steered....It was a kind of partnership. (119, italics mine)

Kurtz has also "done something", but he has *said* more. Though Marlow is exaggerating at this point, he nonetheless asserts that Kurtz's primary commitment to words makes him less worthy than the helmsman. Finally, Marlow is able to restrain himself from going "ashore for a howl and a dance" (97) and, like Singleton,

he is able to retain his public role (in Marlow's case this is his role as captain of the steamboat).

But, unlike Singleton, Marlow is a complex and divided man. The tension between theme and form described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation becomes, in *Heart of Darkness*, a tension within Marlow himself. He is a man of words who celebrates deeds, and who censures many forms of language. As the frame-narrator says, Marlow is a seaman who does not "represent his class" (48). Whereas Allistoun and Singleton have "minds [that] are of the stay-at-home order" (48), Marlow is a "wanderer" (48). His commitment to the work ethic is not as simple as has been made out, and, in this regard, his response to the book entitled *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* is particularly revealing.

> Not a very enthralling book [he says]; but at the first glance you could see there a *singleness of intention*, an *honest* concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages...luminous with another than a professional light.
> (99, italics mine)

In Chapter 1, the only kind of language that was praised was the practical discourse of the sailors. It was valued because it had clearly defined purposes, it was used in the context of action, and it had determinate meaning. Marlow values the seamen's manual for similar reasons. Reading it, he is made to "forget the jungle [the stillness of which conceals "an inscrutable intention" (93)] and the pilgrims [whose intentions are far from clear] in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real" (99). Leaving off reading it is "like tearing

myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship" (100). For someone like Singleton, work or books about work would not be seen as a "shelter"; he would not be conscious of, or at least not feel threatened by, the darkness beyond the light of his profession. For Marlow, however, work and words about work "belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge" (*Lord Jim*, 313). Work, according to Marlow, enables one to find one's own reality and to "harmonize" oneself with a reality beyond the self, but it does this by distracting the worker from another more threatening reality.

What this latter reality means for Marlow is clarified by a distinction he makes while describing the journey to the Inner Station. He distinguishes between the "incidents of the surface" (93) or "surface-truth" (97), and "inner truth" (93) or "reality" (93). He feels himself to be caught between two irreconcilable planes of experience. The imperatives of his profession and of practical necessity demand that he "discern...the signs of hidden banks" (93) and "keep a look-out for the signs of dead wood" (93); yet he is aware of something beyond these immediate concerns which is embodied in the stillness and magnitude of the landscape.

> When you have to attend to things of that sort [practical problems], to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality--the reality, I tell you--fades. The inner truth is hidden--luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same....
>
> (93)

This awareness profoundly affects Marlow's attitude to work and to his public role. He is now aware of his role *as* a role (a

deliberately assumed attitude), and he conceives of work as "monkey tricks" or tight-rope walking (94). In a letter Conrad used a similar image to describe such moments of awareness.

> I am like a tight-rope dancer who in the midst of his performance should suddenly discover that he knows nothing about tight-rope dancing. He may appear ridiculous to the spectators but a broken neck is the result of such untimely wisdom.
> (Karl and Davies ed. 1986, 90)

Singleton does not have moments of debilitating self-consciousness; he is praised principally because he is unselfconsciously committed to working for the common good. For Marlow, work can seem to be just a "shelter", an artificial barrier between the self and the darkness. This is why the seamen's manual gives him a momentary sense of relief: it speaks clearly and unequivocally of the right way of *doing* things, just when Marlow is beginning to feel that action and human endeavour are bereft of any significance.

Guetti explains Marlow's distinction between the two irreconcilable planes of experience, as one between two senses of the word "reality":

> ...the primary reality is the suggested essence of the wilderness, the darkness that must remain hidden if a man is to survive morally, while the secondary reality is a figurative reality like work, an artificial reality by which the truly real is concealed or even replaced.
> (1965, 494)

Berthoud makes a similar point when discussing the "*antithetical* conception of reality...[which] is at the centre of *Heart of Darkness*" (1978, 53). On this account--as on Guetti's--

"civilization is thought of not merely as a given, but as something achieved--something deliberately constructed and upheld in defiance of an elemental nature" (1978, 53). That is, civilization with its moral and social practices is an effort of the human will. Singleton does not question his commitment to these values and practices; he is therefore unshaken in his resolve. Kurtz abandons all but a verbal commitment to these values, while Marlow finds himself caught between the need of real commitment and his recognition that he is committing himself to something that, seen in one way, is merely a sham.

But Marlow differs from Singleton in more ways than one. Not only is work at times merely a shelter from reality, it is also insufficient justification for Marlow--he cannot feel that his life is wholly justified by a good job well done. Whereas Singleton is satisfied with a relatively limited conception of his purpose and object in life, Marlow is not. He is essentially a quester or wanderer; Singleton is a man of action, a worker.

The notion of the "quest" is both structurally and thematically central to the novel. Raval argues that the "modernist quality of *Heart of Darkness* inheres...in its subversion of the paradigm of romance" (1986, 19). The most significant convention taken from the genre of romance, and both used and undermined in the story, is the idea of the quest. When Marlow turns his back on the hypocritical colonists he turns to his work *and* to Kurtz, who represents the end and object of his quest. He is not sure about the object of the pilgrims' journey, but for him the steamboat crawls "towards Kurtz--exclusively" (95). As a

romantic quester, Marlow seeks a figure who will reveal some profound truth about man and the world. He himself compares his quest to the conventional romantic quest: "the approach to...Kurtz [he says]...was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle" (106). As Watt argues, "Marlow is unconsciously impelled to create a fantasy Kurtz" (1980, 240). But in so doing he becomes subject to the unreal expectations typical of the Conradian romantic; he begins to see the world as the frame-narrator sees it and, therefore, to deceive himself.

What does Marlow expect from Kurtz before he sees him? In other words, what fantasy does he create about Kurtz? Marlow's beliefs about Kurtz are based only on what he has heard, and, as is by now only too clear, any description of the world or of a person--any experience mediated through language--is in the Conradian universe potentially unreliable. From the Company's chief accountant, Marlow learns that "[Kurtz] is a very remarkable person" (69) and that "he will go far, very far" (70). From the "papier-maché Mephistopheles" (81) he hears that Kurtz is "a prodigy", "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress", that he has spoken of the need for "wide sympathies" and "singleness of purpose" (79). The Manager reports Kurtz's saying: "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre of trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (91). As a consequence of what he has heard, Marlow looks to Kurtz as a man who, unlike the self-interested pilgrims, has come out to the Congo "equipped with

moral ideas of some sort" (88). That is, Kurtz comes to represent for Marlow the human capacity to distinguish what ought to be the case from what is or tends to be the case. Kurtz is the figure (so Marlow believes) of the moral agent, who will confirm his much shaken belief in the possibility of moral actions. As the tale of disillusionment progresses along its inevitable path, Marlow discovers that he has put too much faith in words. Kurtz is not what he and others say he is; and if "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (117), then by implication Europe is in fact not the civilized and morally impeccable empire the imperialist rhetoricians say it is.

Yet Marlow expects Kurtz to do more than vindicate his belief in the human capacity to act morally or merely to *be* civilized. He sees Kurtz as an oracle ("the man presented himself as a voice" (113)) who will unriddle the world by making some eloquent pronouncement upon it. When the steamboat is attacked, and Marlow senses that Kurtz may have been killed--like Fresleven--"by means of some spear, arrow, or club" (114), he says: "I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,'or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'now I will never hear him'" (113). He continues: "I will never hear that chap speak after all....I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life..." (114). In the conventional romance, the quester, after many trials and disappointments, invariably achieves what he most desires, and the object of his desires usually meets with his expectations. For Marlow (and for Conrad) the world is not so

well fitted to human needs and desires, and those who believe otherwise are simply deceived. Yet, in a complex way, he does achieve what he desires, but only at the cost of discovering that it is not desirable and that his expectations were merely romantic delusions. If the frame-narrator's imagination is contaminated by the ideology of imperialism, Marlow's is contaminated by the conventions of the genre of romance. But his is the quest that ends in darkness and disillusionment, rather than illumination and fulfilment, and, like Jim, Marlow discovers that there is an all too frequent gap between the world and human representations of it.

IV

The second section of the story ends--as the third begins--with Marlow talking to the young Russian sailor. His is the final account of Kurtz given before Marlow actually meets the man himself. The Russian's response to Kurtz is of particular significance, because to some extent his response is Marlow's intended response. That is, as the Russian's response is innocent and myopic, so Marlow's hopes are by implication innocent and myopic. The young Russian is ruled by "the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure" (126). He is saved and urged on by what Marlow calls "glamour" (126). But, as Berthoud argues, "this is not moral strength: it is moral naïveté" (1978, 53). As Marlow says: "I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it"

(127). The Russian embodies the courage and hope of youth, as well as its limitations. The source of the youth's problem is that he has accepted Kurtz's "magnificent eloquence" (131) uncritically. Like the crew of the *Narcissus*, Marlow's aunt and the frame-narrator, he has been blinded by the surface glitter of language, and he has failed to see the "barren darkness" (147) that is its source. Marlow had also been prepared to listen to Kurtz, to have him "enlarge his mind", but on seeing him and what he has in fact done, these illusions are destroyed.

Berthoud makes the following general claim about Conrad's "almost obsessive interest in the phenomenon of self-deception".

> His scepticism of almost all self-descriptions, his doubts as to a man's own view of his relationship to himself, or to society, or to the universe, place him in the forefront of twentieth-century deflators of a naïvely self-confident nineteenth-century individualism. (1978, 188)

The "self-descriptions" of the frame-narrator and of the colonists in general are all examined sceptically in this story, but it is with the figure of Kurtz that the reader confronts most directly the problem of language and its relation to the self. As the rhetorician of civilization, Kurtz is the supreme exponent of "naïvely self-confident nineteenth-century individualism".

As we have seen, the figures of Singleton and Marlow demonstrate that one way of discovering something real about the self and the world is to *act* in the world. By acting in the world, the individual is forced to confront the actuality of things beyond the self; he meets a counter-world of things as

they are, which tests his own conception of the world and of his place in it. In addition, the reliable worker is self-disciplined; he has the restraint necessary to retain his public role in the face of adversity. Kurtz's conceptions of the world and of himself are not tested in this way, and he has no self-restraint. He is committed to words, not to deeds, and as such he is potentially (and as it turns out, actually) blind to things as they are. At one point Marlow says: "I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him [Kurtz] as *doing*, you know, but as *discoursing*" (113, italics mine). Obviously Kurtz does act, but the point that Marlow and Conrad seem to be making is that his primary commitment to words enables him to deceive himself and others, and then to act on the basis of those deceptions. Marlow, when he realizes that what he has been looking forward to is a "talk with Kurtz" (113), says:

> The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preëminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words--the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (113-114)

Unlike the Russian, Marlow is aware of the powers of concealment and deception man possesses through the gift of expression. He is also aware that without proper restraint this gift can become a curse.

In Kurtz, Conrad combines artistic and political aspirations in such a way as to reveal his scepticism about both.

The artist and the politician are able to exploit the compelling power that language can have over the human imagination. Their reasons for doing so are different, but the effects are potentially the same: they deceive themselves and others. That is, without the requisite restraint, verbal facility is a curse rather than a gift. Kurtz is Conrad's vision of the unrestrained and unconstrained speaker who is both the slave and the master of eloquence.

Where Marlow is committed to his single public role as captain of the steamboat, Kurtz is capable of performing many roles. He is a humanitarian who is also a poet (140), a musician (153), a painter (154), a journalist (154), and a politician (154). The final role he takes on, and the one which reveals the extent of his self-deception, is that of a god. Kurtz believes in his imaginative capacity to create, to project (and so inspire others with his vision), and in the end to realize an ideal self--the self that "by the simple exercise of...will...can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (118). The phrase "practically unbounded"--meaning "almost unlimited"--has peculiar force in this instance if misread to mean "unbounded by practical necessities". As it turns out, there are neither external nor internal checks restraining Kurtz's imaginative will. As a consequence, he can make himself believe anything about himself and the world, without necessarily questioning the validity of his beliefs.

Kurtz's verbal facility is both the expression of and in part the cause of his self-deception. His report for the

"International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (117) demonstrates both the powers and the dangers of eloquence. Marlow offers the following criticism of it:

> The peroration was magnificent....It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the *unbounded* power of eloquence--of words--of burning noble words. There were *no practical hints* to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page...may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you...like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes'.
>
> (118, italics mine)

As we shall see later, Kurtz's eloquence is misleading, whereas his simple, whispered statements are sincere. Hawthorn makes a useful connection between the language of Kurtz's report and that of the seamen's manual, relating the problems to those Conrad may have experienced as a writer.

> Kurtz's piece of 'beautiful writing' and the *Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* aptly symbolize two stages of Conrad's 'duplex' life. The transition from the life of a sailor working in situations where words are used in a concrete, direct and immediate way, to sitting in front of a sheet of paper and spending perhaps hours searching for the right word, must have struck Conrad...very forcibly. Deceitful or dishonest usages of words are soon exposed on ship, because of the concrete nature of the tasks that have to be undertaken by collective, physical labour.
>
> (1979, 17)

Kurtz's claims about the world and his place in it have no direct reference to actuality. But without troubling himself about the truth of what he claims, he is able to say anything; so long as

he says it with enough force and conviction he can, like an ideologist, make both himself and others believe that his image of the world is real. The author of the *Inquiry* could not as easily create a false picture of how things are; his words are constantly tested by others and by actuality.

As the story proceeds, the reader is persuaded to see some relationships among three forms of discourse that are presented. These could be described as the practical (the seamen's manual), the ideological (Kurtz's report and eloquent speeches), and the artistic (Marlow's narrative) forms of discourse. Each form is markedly distinct in terms of the intention of the speaker or writer, the subject matter, the style, and the kind of response it expects from its audience. If the seamen's manual has the virtues of honesty, clear intentions and accuracy, it is also limited and not very enthralling. It demonstrates a reliable but restricted use of language. Kurtz's various discourses, which are intended to inspire others and to persuade them to act in certain ways, are morally at the other extreme. His eloquence is used to create fantasies about the world with which he deceives both himself and others. In contrast to these two forms of discourse, Marlow's narrative is neither practically useful, nor is it intended to persuade or to inspire action. His story is told in a specific context to a limited audience, one of whom (the frame-narrator) believes that it is important enough to be recorded and relayed to others. The nature of his narrative, which obviously has some bearing on the nature of Conrad's fic-

tional discourse, will be considered further in the final section of this chapter.

Fogel has a different view of the possible relationships among the kinds of discourse presented in the story. He discusses only Kurtz and Marlow, and their respective uses of language, arguing that, as the story proceeds, the reader "has an increasingly uncanny...feeling that Marlow's long-winded yarn is proportionally and therefore somehow morally linked to the more obviously imperial and abject forms of excessive talk like Kurtz's" (1985, 17-18). But this is surely incorrect. Though Kurtz and Marlow might be identified on the basis of the length of their monologues, there seem to be other aspects of their use of language that show them to be distinctly, and significantly, different. Some of these aspects have been described in the previous paragraph. Moreover, Fogel's inference from proportion to moral worth is surely unacceptable. The length of a speech has little to do with its moral worth, what is *morally* relevant are factors like honesty, openness, sincerity, and so on. It is in terms of such factors as these that Kurtz's monologues can be distinguished from the seamen's manual and, more particularly, from Marlow's narrative. To clarify these differences it is necessary to look at the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz, and at the latter's final moments.

Unlike the young Russian, Kurtz is not a naive idealist, but he is an irresponsible idealist (and an irresponsible communicator). He not only creates a fictive ideal, he creates any

ideal. As Marlow learns from the journalist in Brussels:

> '[Kurtz] could get himself to believe anything--anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party'. 'What party?' I asked. 'Any party,' answered the other. (154)

When Marlow crawls after Kurtz in the long grass and discovers that the only way to persuade him to return to the boat is to invoke him as one would a god, he says that Kurtz "had kicked himself loose of the earth" (144). He has, as Berthoud argues, "lost contact with everything outside himself" (1978, 57). The reliable worker, who is committed to deeds, would not reach this exalted position as easily; he loses contact with what is outside himself at his own peril. But Kurtz believes in what he says, rather than what he does, and language, unlike action, is not necessarily (though it is generally believed that it ought to be) constrained by actuality. As a consequence, he can get himself to believe and to say anything about the world and his place in it. His voice "survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart" (147).

When Kurtz is taken down the river for the last time, he still believes himself to be the humanitarian he intended and professed to be.

> The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now--images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression. (147)

Only in his death-bed vision does he see beyond his words to the reality of his actions for the first time.

When Marlow meets Kurtz, his hopes of finding a man who acts on the basis of moral convictions are dashed. Whereas he had earlier turned from the amoral and hypocritical world of the colonists to Kurtz, whom he believed had moral convictions of some sort, he now finds that he is faced with a dilemma--what he calls a "choice of nightmares" (138). The possibility of simple affirmation is denied, and Marlow is compelled to choose between two figures that offer only different forms of negation. The manager proves to have no moral sense--he judges Kurtz's "method" unsound and inopportune, not immoral (137)--and his only restraint is the "wish to preserve appearances" (106), that is the outward--but misleading--signs of civilized conduct. On the face of it, Kurtz appears to be the more nightmarish figure: he lacks all restraint, and he has been capable of committing atrocities that make the manager into a minor devil.

Yet Marlow chooses Kurtz, and finds himself "a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe" (138). As it turns out, Kurtz redeems himself (and therefore Marlow) in a way that Marlow would not have expected. In this sense Marlow's original desire--to have Kurtz confirm his belief in the human capacity to act morally--is fulfilled, though not without complications. The moral world is redeemed not by an eloquent and oracular pronouncement, but by a whisper. Marlow prepares the reader and his listeners for the death-bed whisper quite early on.

> ...Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts...there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence.

> Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last--only at the very last.
> (131)

For Marlow, Kurtz is a "remarkable man" (151) because in a "supreme moment of complete knowledge" (149) he "had something to say" (151). At the moment of death Kurtz perceives for the first time the gulf between the self that imagines and the imagined self--that is, the gulf between his actual self, realized in his actions, and his idealized conception of himself, projected in his eloquent discourses. His cry--"The horror! The horror!" (149)--rends the veil his words have cast over reality and, for an instant, he sees himself and the world without deceptions or distortion. He steps "over the edge" (151) and glimpses a truth about the human heart that is "wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness" (151). His final vision gives him momentary insight into the life of man in general, and into his own particular life. For Marlow the cry is "an affirmation" and a "moral victory" (151), because it vindicates his belief in the possibility of moral evaluation. Kurtz, who had rejected all the claims of moral restraint, finally evaluates his own past actions on the basis of moral criteria. By implication, if his past acts are "the horror", then his calling them so suggests he believes that man *ought* not to act as he has done.

As Berthoud argues, "two things...can be confidently said" about Kurtz's final cry:

> The first is that it records some sort of 'ultimate truth' about man; the second is

> that it implies that this truth is morally abhorrent. (1978, 60)

According to this view, man has an essentially dark (amoral, unknowable) heart, which he inherited from primitive ancestors. This instinctual essence can be restrained by legal systems and "public opinion" (116). Where responsibility is institutionalized, man can live a civilized life; he can in fact come to believe that he is *essentially* a moral, civilized being. He can express these beliefs in words, so that others come to share his convictions. But these beliefs could (and in fact do) turn out to be false, when an isolated man finds himself in a place "where no warning voice...can be heard whispering of public opinion" (116). In this situation he is compelled to act on the basis of personal responsibility, and--if he is a man like Kurtz--he is inevitably found to be wanting. A single-minded commitment to work and to practical problems might save the man from the darkness, but--as Raval argues--work "does not provide the moral coordinates that give life stability and definition beyond the immediate moment" (1986, 25). Yet Conrad asks: what if this is true? Can we (and should we) act as if man is *in fact* not a moral being, and as if morality is nothing but an illusion? The answer, as the final section of the story shows, is not straightforward.

V

Marlow does not confront the "inner truth" directly, and so he survives to tell his tale, unlike Kurtz. He does yet glimpse the horror reflected in Kurtz's final cry, and this experience leaves him despairing and contemptuous. The people in the "sepulchral city" (152) trespass upon his thoughts.

> They were intruders [he says] whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. (152)

It appears, then, that Marlow has returned from the Congo with a sense that civilized life is a pretence worthy only of his contempt. The irony with which he scorned the empty rhetoric of the civilizing mission, has become disdain for the "civilized". He seems to adhere unambiguously to the realist perspective on civilized man, and to see the romantic perspective as an illusion.

But once Marlow meets Kurtz's relatives, the journalist, and particularly the Intended, his attitude changes once again. He takes on the role of a censor, in order to preserve the false beliefs about human nature professed by the rhetoricians of civilization. First, he gives the journalist Kurtz's "report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs,' with the postscriptum torn off" (153). He is by implication preserving the illusory ideology that encouraged the likes of Kayerts and Carlier, and inspired the frame-narrator's view of the world. Second, he lies to the Intended.

Does this lie mean that Marlow has abandoned the realist position? Or, if he has not abandoned it, does it mean that he regards it as untenable? The change in attitude can best be described as a shift in sensibility. Whereas Marlow was wholly critical and even contemptuous before, he is now to some extent sympathetic. He now recognizes that illusions can be "saving illusion[s]" (159) and that in certain circumstances telling the truth can be "too dark--too dark altogether" (162). Marlow lies to the Intended in order to preserve her romantic belief in the ideal Kurtz, and to veil the "triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her--from which I could not even defend myself" (159). He bows his head "before that great and *saving* illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness" (159, italics mine).

But if this is the case, we now have an entirely different Marlow from the one who scorned the illusions and self-deceptions of the colonists, and who set himself up as what Berthoud calls "the very apostle of veracity" (1978, 62). Berthoud says of the lie that "it serves to keep alive, in the darkness of Marlow's experience of actuality, the light of visionary purpose" (1978, 63). If this is true, then Parry's criticism is valid and Fogel's suggestion--that Kurtz and Marlow can be identified with each other on the basis of their questionable use of language--is not wholly unwarranted. Parry argues that in the story the "political protest is crucially muffled and the grace of visionary aspirations invested in imperialism triumphs over representations of the disgrace attend-

ing its historical practice" (1983, 21), and, more generally, she argues that Conrad's texts "become accomplices in the life-lie" (1983, 11) which sustains the ideology of imperialism. Of Marlow's lie to the Intended, she says: "now because the eulogies to blind devotion are not undercut by the ironies attaching to its enactment by the vile agents worshipping ivory or the adorers crawling before Kurtz, the fiction invites a positive response to Marlow's action [his lie to the Intended] which its cumulative discussion has countermanded" (1983, 37-38).

But on closer examination Parry's view is too restricted. The fiction does not, as she suggests, invite a positive response to Marlow's action, rather it asks the reader to understand it in context. The lie is, after all, not Marlow's final position. In the narrative past he found himself in a situation where he had to conceal the truth, but in the narrative present he tells a story in which he attempts to disclose the truth both about imperialism and the human predicament in general. The story he tells presents a truth about man and the world that undermines the beliefs and attitudes of the frame-narrator, of the Intended, and of the dominant ideology of the time. But through his own experience of disillusionment Marlow has come to understand the function of illusions in human experience: they are a refuge from the "conquering darkness" (156) which is reality. This insight takes him beyond the particular political deceptions of his day. Furthermore, he has realized that in certain contexts the truth ought not to be told.

In other contexts, however, Marlow makes a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to his experience of the world. In *Heart of Darkness*, language is in many instances used not to disclose meaning, but rather to impose meaning or simply to conceal the truth. In reports, newspapers, and romantic stories, the rhetoricians of the civilizing mission present a naive and confident view of European culture, which is accepted by the likes of Marlow's aunt, Kayerts, Carlier and the frame-narrator. The colonists use words in order to deceive themselves and to legitimize their actions. Kurtz, the master rhetorician, exemplifies what is tantamount to schizophrenia: his words and his actions are, till his death-bed vision, radically contradictory. Marlow's narrative is, in terms of its intentions and its effects, clearly opposed to practices such as these. In it he attempts to *bring out* the meaning of an episode in his life "as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (48). His primary intention is not to encourage, to console, or to inspire action, it is rather to make four other men *see*. To achieve this he takes issue with the dominant ideology of his time, which has contaminated the minds of his listeners, and with certain of the assumptions that underlie the genre of romance, particularly the notion of the quest (although it would perhaps be more accurate to say that, through Marlow, Conrad reassesses this notion). Through telling his story, Marlow successfully readjusts the perceptions of at least one of his listeners. The frame-narrator, who at the out-

set described the offing as a "luminous space" (45) in which "the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint" (45), now faces a different scene both literally and metaphorically.

> I raised my head [he says]. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky--seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (162)

The artificial coherence of his world--it was "welded together"--has been irrevocably lost. As one of the men "entranced by the sight of distant goals" (*The Nigger*, xii) , he has been compelled by Marlow to "pause for a look" (*The Nigger*, xii), and has, as a consequence, become one of the less deceived. Such is the power of the spoken word or, in Conrad's case, the written word.

CHAPTER 3

To point out to the crowd beauties not manifest to the common eye, to flash the light of one's sympathetic perception upon great, if not obvious, qualities...this is indeed a toil worthy of a man's pen....

Conrad in a letter to Blackwood, 1899[1]

The argument of the previous two chapters has dealt principally with Conrad's critical awareness of the potential abuses of language. In *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* things done are given priority over things said, silence is praised, and language (with the exception of the technical language of the sailors) is seen to be morally suspect. In *Heart of Darkness* this view is developed: literary and political discourse are both subjected to close critical scrutiny, but (unlike that of *The Nigger*) the world of *Heart of Darkness* contains one speaker whose words are considered worthy. Marlow's spoken narrative makes at least one of his listeners see aspects of the world and of the heart of man that had not been clear to him before. In *Lord Jim* the preoccupation with language and various forms of misrepresentation is continued, but alongside this the value of Marlow's spoken and written narratives is confirmed, and his relation to his society is more clearly defined.

In a letter of 14 July 1923 to Richard Curle, Conrad commented on the critical reception of his works, and on his artistic aims and methods, saying that

> critics...[have had difficulty] in classifying [my art] as romantic or realistic.

> Whereas, as a matter of fact, it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective.[2]

This accurately describes the methods of *Lord Jim*, with its "grouping...which shifts, and [its] changing lights giving varied effects of perspective". Though the points of view presented in the novel are varied and constantly changing, it can be said that, at a very general level, two predominate. These are the points of view represented by what could be termed the realist and romantic "ethics". These two "ethics" can be characterized as follows: according to the "realist ethic" the social group is primary, and service and fidelity to collective projects are central values; according to the "romantic ethic" the individual has priority over the group, and so the individual's faithful pursuit of his own ideals and aspirations has more value attributed to it. In *Lord Jim* there is a constant interplay between these two "ethics": each offsets the other, while neither is granted privileged status. The novel does not offer a reassuring reconciliation of opposites. "The only legitimate basis of creative work", Conrad argues, "lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous--so full of hope" (Najder 1978, 75).

These two "ethics" are related to what Wolfgang Iser has termed (in *The Act of Reading*) the "repertoire" of the text. For Iser the "repertoire"

> consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged--in brief, to what the Prague structuralists have called the "extratextual" reality. (1978, 69)

In *Lord Jim* the "repertoire" includes three main areas of familiar territory--familiar, that is, to the early twentieth-century reader. First, there are the social and historical norms of European imperialist culture, which were also part of the "repertoire" of *Heart of Darkness*. Here two social codes are particularly noteworthy: the code of the colonial services and the maritime code. These social and professional norms form an essential part of the "realist ethic" in the novel. Its principal representatives are the omniscient narrator, Brierly, the French lieutenant, the "privileged man" (337), and Marlow; the court of inquiry is the official embodiment of this "ethic". Second, there are the ideals and aspirations of the romantic tradition. These constitute the "romantic ethic". Its principal representatives are Stein and Jim, with Marlow included as a wary sympathizer. Finally, there is an area of familiar territory that is specifically literary. In the novel Conrad recalls a number of literary kinds[3], including amongst others tragedy and imperialist adventure stories, but the most notable reference is to the genre of romance which *Lord Jim*, like *Heart of Darkness*, both relies on and criticizes. These three areas of familiar territory are aspects of the broader historical context that are

manifested, and examined, by the text.

Before beginning a detailed discussion of selected episodes in the novel, it is necessary to make a distinction between two levels of narrative in *Lord Jim*. There is, on one level, Marlow's non-fictional narrative and, on another, Conrad's fictional narrative. These two narratives are obviously related in a number of important ways, but to begin with, the differences between them need to be noted. Marlow's two narratives--the one spoken, the other written--are acts of personal communication, addressed to a specified audience: they are about Jim, who is a social outcast, and about the various responses to his delinquency. Conrad's novel is an act of public communication, addressed to an unspecified audience: it includes Marlow's narratives and an account given by an omniscient narrator; and it is also about Marlow or, more particularly, Marlow's acts of personal communication. Conrad's novel is not only about Jim, it is also about Marlow, the teller of stories, and his relation to the prevailing beliefs, attitudes and modes of representation of his society.

Though *Lord Jim* cannot be reduced to Marlow's narratives, I shall argue that, in terms of their function, his narratives serve as a model for the larger fiction. Marlow's account of Jim questions the assumptions of those (including Marlow himself) who live simply according to the "realist" conception of the world and man; it also challenges those who live by "romantic" conceptions, and it examines conventional

notions of the romantic hero depicted in the novels Jim reads as a youth. It is here that Iser's notion of the "repertoire" of a text helps to clarify matters. The novel invites the reader to draw parallels between the nature and function of Marlow's story and itself: as Marlow, the story-teller, examines the norms and values of his time, so the novel engages those aspects of the "extratextual reality" that comprise its "repertoire". In other words, just as Marlow's story attempts to make his listeners see beyond their habitual conceptions, so Conrad's novel attempts to make his readers see qualities not manifest to the common eye. The following discussion foregrounds this self-reflexive element in the novel.

I

Seen in terms of the narrative situation, *Lord Jim* has a tripartite structure: the first four chapters, recounted by an omniscient narrator, form the first section; Marlow's spoken narrative comprises the second and longest section (Chapters 5 to 35); while his written account of the events surrounding Jim's death--the letter he sends to the "privileged man" (337)--forms the third section (Chapters 36 to 45).

The first four chapters afford a perspective on the central figure that is unique in the novel. First, it is only in these initial chapters that the narrator is omniscient, and

as such has the conventional privilege of direct access to the attitudes and feelings of the central figure. As readers of Conrad's novel--rather than members of Marlow's audience--we are allowed direct knowledge of Jim's romantic aspirations, his tendency to deceive himself, and his incorrigible sense of his own heroic rectitude. Neither Marlow, who meets Jim as one person meets another in everyday life, nor his respective audiences are afforded knowledge of this kind; for them Jim's inner life can only be seen indirectly and tentatively as if through a "damaged kaleidoscope" (157) of inferences and interpretations.

Second, the omniscient narrator's presentation of Jim in these initial chapters leaves the reader with an unqualified sense of the pejorative connotations of the term "romantic". Though this narrator does not use the term, his perspective on Jim implies a particular understanding of its significance. As Watt suggests, "*Lord Jim* opens with a critical and sardonic view of its hero and his self-indulgent dreams" (1980, 346). For instance, in Chapter 1, after Jim has failed to respond decisively when called upon to rescue the survivors of a collision between a coaster and a schooner, the narrator comments:

> He [Jim] knew what to think of it. *Seen dispassionately*, it seemed contemptible. He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with *fresh certitude* in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage.
> (9, italics mine)

Having just been told that Jim looked up to his captain "with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes" (8), the reader cannot easily view these rationalizations with sympathy. The narrator's ironies ensure that the reader remains critically aware of Jim's romantic delusions. In the first four chapters (and again in parts of Marlow's narrative), Jim is a "romantic", that is, a "self-deluding egotist" (Watt 1980, 322). The possible meanings of this difficult term form part of the complex and ambivalent view of experience that constitutes *Lord Jim*. The omniscient narrator's understanding of it is particularly important as it has a bearing on the relationships between language, action and the self considered in Chapter 2.

The novel begins with a brief account of Jim's nomadic career as a "ship-chandler's water-clerk" (3). As we later discover, this period of his life occurs after the *Patna* episode, but prior to his going to Patusan. By the third paragraph, the chronological ordering of the material shifts, as the reader is informed of Jim's childhood. His early experience was of a society untroubled by moral and ethical uncertainties; his father's parsonage was an abode of "piety and peace" (5). Jim's pious father is described in ironic terms, as a man who

> possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions.
> (5)

His father's naive views on the problem of moral conduct, which are so radically undermined in the course of the novel, are contained in the last letter Jim receives from home. In it he

> hopes his 'dear James' will never forget that 'who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin. Therefore resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, to do anything which you believe to be wrong.' (341-342)

Being "one of five sons" (5), Jim was not expected to inherit his father's assured and pious way of life. When, "after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea...declared itself" (5), he was sent off to a "training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine" (5). The influence of this early reading on Jim's life proves to be more considerable than his father's restricted views of moral existence: from it he derives his romantic view of the world and a conception of the hero he desires to be. In other words, it is from this "course of light holiday literature", that Jim fashions what Stein will call his "dream".

Jim derives his dream of the world from his reading of light literature--books which tend to legitimize, confirm, or merely reflect the ideals and aspirations of his society. Marlow's comment in *Chance*--"we are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected" (288)--is particularly apposite to Jim's case. Jim's desire to emulate the heroes he has read about, to be "as unflinching as a hero

in a book" (6), reveals certain of his assumptions about literature: first, he assumes, like a naive realist, that there is a straightforward relationship between the heroes of light literature and actual people; second, it implies that he has a limited conception of the nature and function of novels. The account of Jim's desire to emulate characters in books, like any statement *about* novels *in* a novel, tends to be self-reflexive. It invites the reader to examine the novel he is reading and to ask questions like: what kind of relationship, if any, is there between the heroes of novels and actual people? Or, what kind of hero is Jim? Or, what is the nature and function of this novel called *Lord Jim*?

The kind of novel Jim reads can be distinguished from the kind in which he appears by means of a distinction Cawelti employs in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*. Cawelti suggests that

> we might loosely distinguish between formula stories and their "serious" counterparts on the ground that the latter tend toward some kind of encounter with our sense of the limitations of reality, while formulas embody moral fantasies of a world more exciting, more fulfilling, or more benevolent than the one we inhabit. In these imaginary worlds we come temporarily nearer to our hearts' desires and escape from the limiting reality around us.... (1976, 38)

On this account, *Lord Jim* is an example of a work of "serious literature": the vision of the world it presents questions--but does not invalidate--the heart's desires and the tendency to find ways of escaping the limitations of reality. In con-

trast, Jim's novels are "formulas" that evade or conceal the undesirable aspects of "reality".

A similar distinction is made by Tanner. He distinguishes between the genre of Romance and what he calls "the genres of Irony", arguing that

> Romance...tends to celebrate certain Ideals--gallantry or chastity for example--and to ensure that the Ideals pass unchallenged and untarnished, Romance tends to exclude what Yeats called 'the brutality, the ill-breeding, the barbarism of truth'....
> (1963, 8)

Lord Jim belongs to the genre of Irony that insists "on putting the heroic, the romantic, the Ideal in a sharply realistic perspective" (1963, 8). Useful though it may be, Tanner's generic classification underplays the complexities of the novel. He conceives of the novel as using one perspective (the realist's or ironist's perspective) to question another (the romantic's perspective), whereas it would be more accurate to say that the novel presents a conflict of perspectives, where neither has final authority over the other, and where each is used to locate the limits of the other.

Jim longs to be as unflinching as the conventional hero in a Romance, but *Lord Jim*, though it relies on certain conventions of the genre, is not a Romance[4]. The kind of world he longs for is suggested in the Patusan chapters, but this is finally not the world projected by the novel.

In *Lord Jim* the critique of language centres on "formula stories" and their social and political implications. In these stories language is used to project alternative worlds

that bear little or no relation to the actual world. They describe the world as man would like it to be, or as he thinks it ought to be, not as it is. But for someone like Jim, who fails to see this, stories of this kind only serve to deceive, delude, or mislead. Like Don Quixote, Jim believes what books say, before he believes what his own eyes see. He derives from his reading a conception of the self and the world that is radically, and as it turns out tragically, at odds with actuality. This raises one of the issues considered in Chapter 2: the relationship between language, action and the self. To see how this preoccupation is developed in *Lord Jim*, we need to examine the initial presentation of Jim in greater detail.

In the first four chapters, a number of the flaws in Jim's character, that pertain to his misguided notions of the self, are revealed. The representative episode on the training ship--the collision between the two ships and Jim's response to it--introduces the reader to a number of Jim's weaknesses. First, Jim is cursed by the gift of "Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors" (11). "He was", says Marlow later, "a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision" (96). In Conrad's world, imagination is an ambivalent resource: it can inspire men to act nobly, and yet at the same time it can paralyse their will. In Jim's case it makes him a dreamer whose dreams render him unfit for action in the world. As Tanner suggests, he is "bravely active in his intentions and disastrously pas-

sive in his deeds" (1963, 7). Like the frame-narrator at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, Jim is inspired by "the hazy splendour of the sea in the distance, and the hope of a stirring life in the world of adventure" (*Lord Jim*, 6).

The omniscient narrator has direct access to Jim's boyish and literary imagination:

> On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men--always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book. (6)

In his dreams Jim is unflinching; on the deck of an actual ship he is paralysed. Like Kurtz, Jim lives in a projected world of things as he would like them to be, rather than in the actual world of things as they are. In the case of Kurtz, the imaginative projection, embodied in his writings and monologues, is of his own making; in Jim's case the projection is derived from the light literature of the nineteenth century. His imagination is imbued with images from books like Marryat's *Mr. Midshipman Easy* that describe the heroic adventures of men at sea, and Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* with its Crusoe-like island and castaways. Yet, unlike the heroes of those books, Jim is incapable of resolute action.

Jim's second major weakness is that, in addition to his being imaginative, he is also seduced by his dream-world. He considers his projected world to be more 'real' than the actual world. His confusion between the world and representations of it is suggested in the following scene. Jim--"in the very excess of well-being" (19)--is watch-officer on the bridge of the *Patna*. From time to time he glances "idly" (20) at the navigation chart beside him.

> The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of a bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters. (20)

Like Narcissus, and like the crew of the *Narcissus*, Jim makes the fatal mistake of allowing himself to be seduced by images and by shiny surfaces. He compares the "straight pencil-line" (20) marking out the projected course of the ship to the actual passage of the ship through the sea: "he saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart" (20). What the chart fails to portray, and what Jim fails to see, is the contingency inherent in actual experience. As Marlow says, "it is always the unexpected that happens" (95), but Jim is disastrously unprepared for the unexpected. His false assurances make him relax his vigilance: he merely keeps his eyes "perfunctorily...ahead" (20).

As Jim confuses the chart with the actual world, so he confuses "imaginary achievements" (20) with actual ones.

> He loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. *They were the best*

> *parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality.* They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an *unbounded confidence* in itself. There was nothing he could not face.
> (20, italics mine)

On a second reading of the novel, when the reader has the benefit of knowing what in fact happens to the *Patna*, the irony of these words is more readily felt. Watt makes the connection between Jim's intoxication with himself and the "drunken engineer's boastful vapourings about his courageous disregard of the dangers of serving on the *Patna*" (1980, 271). Both men overestimate themselves, and underestimate the hazards of life at sea; for different reasons both are out of touch with actuality.

This leads to Jim's third major weakness: his egoism. This flaw is in a sense the consequence of the previous two. As an imaginative man, Jim is incapable of resolute action; as a deluded man, he considers his imaginary view of himself and the world to be "the best part of life...its hidden reality". If these two traits are put together, then it follows that his views of himself and the world are not open to being tested by experience, by *action* in the world. Were he capable of action he would still not necessarily benefit from experience, as he would not accept as 'real' anything from the world outside himself that might invalidate his dream. Of Conrad's many egoists, Jim is the one who is most like the Paterian solipsist whose experience is "ringed round...by that thick wall of

personality through which no real voice has ever pierced" (Pater 1900, 235). Jim is a "solitary prisoner...[in his] own dream of a world" (1900, 235), and at the end of the novel Marlow still finds it necessary to ask whether or not this young romantic is motivated solely by "exalted egoism" (416).

The omniscient narrator's attitudes to Jim's romanticism and egoism recall certain issues (regarding language, action and the self) raised in Chapter 2. When Jim finally goes to sea, he finds the reality of life at sea quite different from his imagined view of it; he finds the "regions so well known to his imagination...strangely barren of adventure" (10). Yet he remains impervious to the experience of things as they are.

> He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water: he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread--but whose only reward is in the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him. (10)

Unlike Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Jim does not seek in work the chance it gives one to find oneself by confronting that which is not the self. On the training ship, but more particularly on the *Patna*, he proves incapable of testing his conception of himself and the world by *acting* in the world. He is not

> tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to others but also to himself. (10)

In the novel, the objective realm--the world that exists outside or beyond a particular individual's conception of it--is designated by the word "fact". Tanner observes that "'fact'is to be a key word in the novel--it represents the challenge Jim can never meet, the threat he seeks to escape: his dreams can never grapple adequately with the factuality of the world" (1963, 18). Those who live according to the "realist ethic" are capable of dealing with the "factuality of the world", since their conception of a man is grounded on the verifiable facts of his past conduct, not on his desires, dreams, and aspirations. Those who live by this "ethic" are first presented by the omniscient narrator in Chapter 4, which deals with the public inquiry into Jim's case.

The kind of discourse that deals only with objectively verifiable facts is most clearly demonstrated at the public inquiry into the *Patna* case. In the court, Jim is faced with "terribly distinct questions" (28) that "were aiming at facts" (28). The lighting in the court-room makes the two nautical assessors and the magistrate "fiercely distinct" (28). Their single-minded pursuit of clear and distinct facts is directly opposed to the vagueness of Jim's romantic dreams, and to the language of his romantic fictions. They represent the world that knows that the *Patna* did not sink, and that Jim failed to act as he ought to have done. Jim's response to the challenge is complex and variable.

> After his first feeling of revolt he had come round to the view that only a meticulous precision of statement would bring out the true horror behind the appalling face of things. The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch.... (30)

Jim wants "to go on talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also" (31), but this attempt to confront the facts is only apparent.

> ...while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot...some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. (31)

This "awful activity" makes him "hesitate at times in his speech" (31). In the end the "sound of his own truthful statements confirm[s] his deliberate opinion that speech [is] of no use to him any longer" (33). Having at first attempted to give a true account of his experience--in the hope of making those present in the court-room see that "this had not been a common affair" (31)--Jim then doubts "whether he would ever again speak out as long as he lived" (33). Jim's abandonment of the language of fact is wholly consistent with his romantic disposition. His decision to remain silent is significant, since later on Marlow takes on the burden of speech when he becomes Jim's spokesman.

For the court, a man *is*, as Berthoud suggests, "nothing more than the sum of his actions--that is [in Jim's case], a cowardly knave indistinguishable from his fellow-officers on the *Patna*" (1978, 80). The criteria used by the court to select the relevant details about a man--the details that will constitute its "story" of him--are simply truth and falsity. In considering Jim's case, the assessors can find indubitable evidence to justify their estimate of his character, and then to exclude him from the maritime service. Jim feels defeated by this reductive view of himself, and yet he cannot find words to defend himself against the court's limiting descriptions. This is where Marlow comes in. In his written and spoken narratives, Marlow attempts, "with all the sympathy of which [he is] capable, to seek fit words for [Jim's] meaning" (*Lord Jim*, ix).

In the court Jim is faced with an audience that seems to be "composed of staring shadows" (29): "many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, out of white faces, out of red faces" (28). Some are "attentive" (28), while others are "spellbound" (28); one assessor looks at him with "thoughtful blue eyes" (29), the other is "scornful" (29). Jim's own "gloomy eyes" (32) finally come to rest upon a white man, who sits "apart from the others" (32), and whose eyes glance "straight, interested and clear" (32). This is the first view the reader has of Marlow. Marlow's glance is not "the fascinated stare of the others" (32), which seems to signify a certain awe-struck detachment from Jim's anguish; it is "an

act of intelligent volition" (32-33). In a sense the complex relationship that develops between them is a consequence of Marlow's many acts of "intelligent volition". With this profound glance the first section of the novel ends and we move on to Marlow's spoken narrative.

II

So far, two kinds of discourse have been brought either directly or by implication into the discourse of the novel: the language of the formulaic literature that has shaped Jim's romantic imagination, and the empirical language of the court. There is some connection between these two kinds of discourse and the two examples of writing in *Heart of Darkness* (Kurtz's report and the seamen's manual). In *Heart of Darkness*, the technical language of the manual is contrasted with the idealistic rhetoric of Kurtz's report; in *Lord Jim* the language of the court offsets the language of the romantic fictions that have influenced Jim. In his tales, Marlow attempts to find a mean between these two extremes. As Tanner puts it: "Marlow must mediate between...society and the outlaw, between the empiricists and the Idealist" (1963, 24). In telling Jim's story, he must avoid the stereotypes of formulaic literature, and yet not rest content with empirical facts alone, or with a "propositional" conception of truth. Marlow is not a detective trying to establish conclusive facts about Jim's case (there is, as he says, "no incertitude as to

facts" (56)); rather he is an interpreter (he sees himself as Jim's "ally", "helper" or "accomplice", not as his "judge" (93)) whose object is to disclose the "true essence of life" (93).

Marlow and Jim are for different reasons both sceptical about the value of "facts". Jim, with his romantic sensibility, is threatened by them; Marlow sees them as necessary--he will not let Jim forget the "one material fact" (56)--but not sufficient. As Marlow somewhat whimsically says of the court inquiry: "the questions put to [Jim] necessarily led him away from what to me...would have been the only truth worth knowing. You can't expect the constituted authorities to inquire into the state of a man's soul--or is it only of his liver?" (56-57). He continues:

> The examination...was beating futilely round the well-known fact, and the play of questions upon it was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what's inside. However, an official inquiry could not be any other thing. Its object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair. (56)

For Marlow, and for those attending the official inquiry ("whether they [know] it or not" (56)), the interest is "purely psychological--the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions" (56). Facts are sufficient for the court of inquiry: they will serve as grounds for the assessors' judgement, and enable the "casual police magistrate" to "come down upon the consequences" (57). But facts alone do not disclose

the texture of life, what is *really* inside the iron box. Where the court is concerned with codes of conduct and manifest behaviour, Marlow is concerned to understand the complex interiority of a man. The expectations of the audience in the court-room are not met; but in his narrative Marlow attempts to disclose to his listeners the "obscure truth" about Jim that could be "momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself" (93).

One of the first aspects of Marlow's style of inquiry worth noting is that, unlike the court of inquiry, he finds what is "visible, tangible [and] open to the senses" (30) to be questionable. The purpose of language, as used by the court, is to pick out the facts about Jim accurately and reliably, but for Marlow language used in this way can be misleading. This problem is confronted on the occasion of the first (chronologically first, that is) encounter between Marlow and Jim. From the outset, Jim is interesting because he is ambiguous, the "facts" about him appear to be contradictory. Marlow first sees him standing with two men from the *Patna*--the chief and second engineers--and comments: "I did not care a rap about the behaviour of the other two. Their persons somehow fitted the tale that was public property, and was going to be the subject of an official inquiry" (41). Jim does not "fit" this tale, and Marlow's response to him is therefore more complicated. He explains why he decided to wait to see what effect the information about the *Patna's*

not sinking has on Jim:

> I waited to see him overwhelmed, confounded, pierced through and through, squirming like an impaled beetle--and I was half afraid to see it too--if you understand what I mean. (42)

Marlow is "half afraid" because outwardly Jim looks like the kind of man who could be relied upon: "I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us" (43). This complexity justifies Marlow's inquiry into interiors, and reveals the limitations of the official inquiry.

In the passage cited above (43), Marlow uses the phrase "one of us" which needs some explication. The meaning of this phrase develops and changes as the story progresses. At this point, we can take Marlow to mean that Jim is one of the group or collective that lives according to the prevailing social and moral norms. Jim is not simply motivated by self-interest, as the German captain, for instance, is. He is "one of us" because he *appears* to have a moral sense. Marlow wants to see Jim "squirm for the honour of the craft" (46), but he is also afraid to see him suffer, because his failure is all too human. Weakness, according to Marlow, is unavoidable; it may be "prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime", but "not one of us is safe" (43). The only counter-force to weakness is the "instinct of courage" (43): the "power of resistance" (43), "an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature,

and the seductive corruption of men" (43). Jim interests and alarms Marlow, not because the younger man is immoral, but because he is an example of moral failure. In this sense Jim is similar to Kurtz. As Berthoud observes, "Jim...recalls Kurtz in at least one essential respect: his failure to live up to the ideal he professes" (1978, 65).

On the basis of outward appearances, Jim is clearly "one of us", but his past actions complicate this categorization. As a consequence of this ambiguity, Marlow remains uncertain about the actual nature of his protagonist. His awareness of the unreliability of appearances, and of the complexity of human beings, is clearly shown in the following passage:

> ...all the time I had before me these blue boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead...this appearance appealing *at sight* to all my sympathies....He was of the right sort; he was one of us.
> (78, italics mine)

On the evidence of these outward impressions, Marlow is assured of Jim's moral worth. But in conversation with him, and in trying to ascertain the inner worth of the man, he finds his mind floating "in a sea of conjectures" (78):

> He talked soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing that *might have been* the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception. Who can tell! (78, italics mine)

This hypothetical language is a characteristic feature of Marlow's style of narration. Where the court is reductionist in

its description of Jim, Marlow, while recognizing that this kind of description is necessary for the efficient governing of civilized society, is constantly aware of complexities. At one point he says: "We are *snared into doing things for which we get called names*, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive--survive the condemnations, survive the halter, by Jove!" (43, italics mine). Marlow's narrative focuses on that element which might not be grasped by the labels of the court, and since that element is elusive--he gestures toward it with the word "spirit"--his style is appropriately tentative and uncommitted.

Marlow's preoccupation with interiority, as opposed to manifest behaviour and social codes, is taken further in his account of Brierly. Outwardly Brierly has the features of the hero Jim desires to be: "he had saved lives at sea, had rescued ships in distress, had a gold chronometer presented to him by the underwriters, and a pair of binoculars with a suitable inscription from some foreign Government, in commemoration of these services" (57). If a man is merely the sum total of his past actions, then Brierly is a man who can be trusted and given public recognition. Before he meets Jim, there is little or no disparity between the terms in which Brierly is perceived by others and the terms in which he sees himself. He is "acutely aware of his merits and of his rewards" (57), and he presents "to the world a surface as hard as granite" (58). But during the course of the inquiry the disparity becomes profound. He appears to be "consumedly

bored" (57), but in conversation with Marlow he reveals himself to be a deeply agitated man. Marlow only begins to understand the implications of this conversation "more than two years" (64) after the inquiry, once he has discovered more information about the circumstances surrounding Brierly's suicide from a man called Jones, who was Brierly's mate. Only then can Marlow say that during the official inquiry Brierly "was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case" (58). Brierly is one of Conrad's tightrope walkers who suddenly realizes that he knows nothing about tightrope walking. Being faced with Jim's failure, the self-confident captain sees for the first time the ineluctable precariousness of moral existence: Jim is the mirror in which he glimpses a previously unrecognized aspect of himself. He cannot endure this disabling moment of self-consciousness, and so he commits "his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea" (68). His suicide reveals aspects of experience not available to official inquiries. Even Marlow is not able to reach any firm conclusions about the man.

A further feature of Marlow's style, which is related to the features described above, is his impressionism. He frequently uses the word "glimpse" to describe the fleeting and uncertain moments of insight he has into the real nature of another man. In conversation with Brierly, he has "apropos of Jim" a "glimpse of the real Brierly" (68). But it is in his dealings with Jim that Marlow's impressionistic understanding of others is most evident. Watt argues that "in

general Conrad's novels suggest that he thought character was impervious to full comprehension" and that

> [his] presentation of Jim is sceptical in the impressionist way, because he is portrayed almost entirely through Marlow, who has no privileged knowledge of the "real" person such as an omniscient author might have claimed. (1980, 340)

In the initial four chapters of the novel, the reader *is* given "privileged knowledge" of Jim's longings and of his weaknesses. To at least some extent, then, the reader already knows what Marlow is trying to discover. Given this, the reader's attention need not be focussed wholly on the object to be discovered (the truth about Jim), rather the process of discovery is itself of interest. The problem of explanation itself, rather than any specific explanation, is foregrounded. At times this process takes the form of an almost scientific inquiry: Marlow formulates a "theory" (69) about Jim, and suggests certain "hypotheses" (69) that need to be tested. Yet Marlow's style and methods are very different from those of the court. Rather than explore the facts about Jim's past actions in order to discover the truth, Marlow relies on subtle psychological observation. He finds he must attend to Jim's "pauses between the words" (105), and to certain of his unintentionally revealing acts.

The clearest instance of such an act, which gives Marlow a glimpse of the "real" Jim, is the yellow cur episode. After a day in court--this is the day before final judgement is passed--Marlow finds himself uncertain about Jim's response

to the ordeal. He has two hypotheses: either Jim is insolent or he is despairing (69). Then, as they are leaving the court-room, someone cries out: "Look at that wretched cur" (70). Jim makes two revealing errors: he thinks that Marlow has said the words, and that the words refer to him. He turns round and confronts Marlow, glaring at him "with an air of stubborn resolution" (70). In doing so he reveals something of his real anguish. Marlow comments:

> A single word had stripped him of his discretion--of that discretion which is more necessary to the decencies of our inner being than clothing is to the decorum of our body. (74)

For Marlow this incident opens "a new view of him to my wonder" (76). He is able to see that Jim is not insolent, that he is in fact tormented by his failure. Yet Marlow remains tentative in his claims to knowledge. At the end of Chapter 6 he declares:

> I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog--bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one's curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. (76)

This perspective on others is markedly different to the court's perspective. Where the court was assured in its judgement, Marlow is sceptical, and yet, as the narrative progresses, his sympathy for the romantic outcast grows. His awareness of the complexity and opacity of others influences

his attitude to Jim.

III

The complex reasons for Marlow's increasingly sympathetic perception of Jim are the main subject of this section, particularly as they have a direct bearing on the nature and function of his narratives. When Jim realizes, during the inquiry, that speech is no longer of any use to him, he senses that Marlow "seemed to be aware of his hopeless difficulty" (33). In the narrative past Marlow acts in order to save the living Jim from an ignominious life; in the narrative present (the time of telling), through his deliberate act of recollection, he attempts to give an adequate account of Jim in order to save him (and what he comes to represent) from the ignominy of silence. Jim is the "rescued fragment" Marlow holds up "before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood" (*The Nigger*, x). By "rescuing" Jim, be it actually or verbally, Marlow complicates his relationship to the society in which he lives (as his sympathy for Kurtz had done), since his sympathy for a man who has been formally spurned casts some doubt on the prevailing social norms. As a story-teller, Marlow endeavours to bring the outcast back into the consciousness of those who excluded him. Where Jim fails to bring out to those attending the inquiry the "true horror behind the appalling face of things" (30), Marlow attempts to make his audience and

the "privileged man" (337) *see* something that they would in the normal course of their lives choose not to see.

After the yellow cur episode, Marlow invites Jim to dinner at Malabar House, the hotel at which he is staying. The opening description of Chapter 7 sets the scene for the prolonged conversation which takes place at dinner and, as Tanner suggests, carefully directs the sympathies of both the reader and Marlow's listeners.

> When Marlow inserts little details about glasses and crockery, the fatuous conversations of the tourists, the vulgar complacent comfort of the hotel, these help to throw up in sharp relief the intense interest of Jim, the tremendous reality of what he has been through. (1963, 28)

During the conversation, Marlow finds himself being "swayed" by Jim.

> I was made [he says] to look at the convention that lurks in all truth [the court's "truth" about Jim] and on the essential sincerity of falsehood [Jim's self-deceptions]. 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. I own to it, I own up.
> (93)

That Marlow feels in some way guilty about being swayed by Jim is implied in the final admission. The last sentence also carries with it certain attitudes on the part of his listeners (or at least certain beliefs Marlow has about their possible attitudes), that they would, for instance, suspect a man who shows signs of sympathy to the likes of Jim. After judgement

has been passed by the court, Jim is excluded from his profession and he is left destitute. At this point Marlow acts: he writes letters in an attempt to secure Jim a job of some kind, and to save him from an ignominious life. This act is the clearest expression of his sympathy for the younger man. The reader's task is to explore the motivations behind this act.

The reasons for this sympathetic response are essential to the understanding of Marlow as a man and as a storyteller; they are also central to the understanding of *Lord Jim*. It is, after all, by his sympathy for Jim that Marlow can be distinguished from many of the figures in the novel--particularly Brierly, the French lieutenant and the "privileged man". The only other figure to show a sympathetic understanding of the outcast is Stein. In at least one respect, Marlow's response is similar to Brierly's: they both see Jim as a potential self. The self-assured Brierly sees his own potential failure in Jim and, because of his extraordinary "belief in his own splendour" (64), cannot survive the vision. Marlow sees in Jim an image of his younger romantic self: "He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been..." (128).

After making this observation, Marlow pauses to reflect on the nature of life at sea:

> In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality--in no other is the beginning *all* illusion--the disenchantment more swift--the subjugation more complete. Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire, ended with

> the same knowledge, carried the memory of the
> same cherished glamour through the sordid
> days of imprecation? (129)

The passage suggests that Marlow is a disillusioned romantic. Assuming that there is some relationship between the Marlow figure in *Heart of Darkness* and the Marlow of *Lord Jim*, then *Heart of Darkness* can be read as an account of his journey from the realm of youthful desire to that of mature knowledge. Like Stevens's Crispin, Marlow emerges at the end of that story a "starker, barer self/In a starker, barer world" (1972, 59). In *Lord Jim* the younger romantic self is given a separate existence and contemplated from the outside.

Though Marlow becomes increasingly more sympathetic towards Jim, his response to his romanticism is not straightforward. At times he is exasperated when Jim projects his "inner being" into the "fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations" (83), or into the "impossible world of romantic achievements" (83). Here Marlow shares the critical views of the omniscient narrator, but at other times his views are significantly different. When Jim believes, for instance, that he can begin life with a "clean slate" (185), Marlow comments: "as if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (186). Yet he adds ruefully that "after all, it was...he of us two, who had the light" (186). At another point Marlow says, referring to Jim, "he believed where I had already ceased to doubt" (153). At times like these Marlow plays the

disillusioned older man who sees his lost youth reflected in the younger man.

Jim is more than an image of Marlow's younger self. He is also a representative self embodying something essentially human, and for this reason he commands Marlow's sympathetic recognition. Through the "rifts of the immaterial veil" (133) that separates him from Jim, Marlow sees a distinct form "pregnant with vague appeal like a symbolic figure in a picture" (133). At another point he is "like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old" (265). Marlow comments: "I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic" (265). What Jim comes to represent is clarified in the Stein episode. But before considering Stein's sympathetic response, some of the unsympathetic attitudes to Jim, particularly those of Brierly, the French lieutenant and the "privileged man", need to be examined.

As characters, Brierly, the anonymous French lieutenant and the "privileged man" are very different from one another, but in one significant respect they are similar: they are all unsympathetic towards Jim. All three men belong to what Marlow calls the "impeccable world" (339); that is, the world of those who have not failed to live up to the norms and standards of the prevailing moral order (be it the particular code of the merchant marine or the more general code of the colonial service). To use another of Marlow's phrases,

they live and work "in the ranks" (225). Iser gives the following account of the nature and functions of "systems" (what I have called the "prevailing moral order") in human existence, which explains some of the attitudes of these men:

> [Systems] provide a framework for social action; they serve as a protection against insecurities arising out of the contingent world; they supply an operational set of norms that claim universal validity and so offer a reliable basis for our expectations; they must also be flexible enough to adapt to changes in their respective environments. In order to fulfill these functions, each system must effect a meaningful reduction of complexity by accentuating some possibilities and neutralizing or negating others.
> (1978, 71)

In another context Marlow describes this kind of system as "the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge" from "a world that [seems] to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder" (313). One of the "possibilities" excluded by the "system" is the possibility of a charitable response to Jim. Since all three men accept the rules and conventions of the established order unquestioningly, they look upon any obvious sign of sympathy for a "straggler" (224) as tantamount to subversion. What distinguishes Marlow is, amongst other things, his ability to entertain possibilities other than those determined by the prevailing order or system. In short, where the others accord the system priority over the individual, Marlow focuses on the individual case; where they might reduce complexity by simply defining Jim as an outcast, Marlow tells Jim's story in a manner that underscores the com-

plexities of human beings and the difficulty of making moral judgements about them.

Brierly grounds his views of Jim on the rules of conduct set down in the maritime code. His response is emphatic:

> This is a disgrace. We've got all kinds amongst us--some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand?--trusted!
> (67-68)

For Brierly "such an affair destroys one's confidence" (68); he would have Jim "creep twenty feet underground and stay there" (66). Jim embodies, for both Brierly and Marlow, that "uneasy doubt uprising like a mist...the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct" (50). The assessor is not the kind of man who can live with doubt and uncertainty.

The French lieutenant, though he recognizes that living according to the dictates of the code is demanding (unlike the self-confident Brierly, he acknowledges that "the fear, the fear--look you--it is always there" (146)) is nevertheless unsympathetic towards Jim. When Marlow infers from his sober attitude that he is "taking a lenient view" (148) of Jim's case, the response is instinctively antagonistic: the lieutenant stands up as "a startled ox might scramble up from the grass" (148). He is in the end uncompromisingly committed to the maritime code and to a rigid code of honour. His eyes reflect the inflexibility of his views: they are "two narrow grey circlets, like two tiny

steel rings around the profound blackness of the pupils" (148). For him the only life worth living is the life of honour.

> But the honour--the honour, monsieur!...The honour...that is real--that is! And what life may be worth when...when the honour is gone--*ah ca! par exemple*--I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion--because--monsieur--I know nothing of it.
> (148)

Jim has strayed from the ranks, and accordingly he cannot be described as "an honourable man". The French lieutenant's view of the world is dominated by this restricted set of labels ("honour" and "dishonour"), and since Jim cannot be designated by the positive term, he is not worthy of consideration.

The reasons for the privileged man's unsympathetic response to Jim are based on the more general code of the colonial services, which is permeated by crude racist assumptions. In his letter to him, Marlow sets out the anonymous reader's position. The man had previously said "that 'giving your life up to them' (*them* meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute'" (339). By going to Patusan alone, Jim would, according to this view, have sacrificed his racial and cultural identity. The civilizing mission is, for the privileged man,

> only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. 'We want its strength at our

> backs,' you had said. 'We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition.' (339)

Jim's going to Patusan is, then, "no better than the way to perdition". Marlow summarizes this outlook: "in other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count" (339).

It would be too simple to argue that Marlow is merely opposed to this view, since he shares some of the privileged man's attitudes to racial and national identity. In an earlier part of the novel, Marlow celebrates the idea of fidelity to what he calls "the spirit of the land" (223):

> The spirit of the land, as becomes the ruler of great enterprises, is careless of innumerable lives. Woe to the stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together. He [Jim] had straggled in a way; he had not hung on; but he was aware of it with an intensity that made him touching.... (223)

But unlike the "privileged man", Marlow does not believe that Jim is not worth considering. Marlow sees Jim as a "straggler yearning inconsolably for his humble place in the ranks" (224-225), and for him Jim's yearning is sufficient reason for compassion. For Marlow it is "those who do not feel" the "saving power" of this spirit who "do not count" (222). For the "privileged man", Jim's being a straggler is evidence enough to justify an unsympathetic response. Marlow is more discriminating, and therefore more sympathetic, since for him it is "in virtue of his feeling" (222) that Jim matters.

At this point the motivations behind Marlow's sympathetic response to Jim can be summarized: he sees Jim as an image of his younger self, he sees him as representative of something essentially human, and he recognizes that Jim feels his outcast state. This complex response motivates Marlow's actions in the narrative past and his words in the narrative present, and it distinguishes him from the three figures discussed above whose responses are less complex, and less tolerant.

A further aspect of Marlow's motivation is suggested by Watt, who argues that

> *Lord Jim*...reflects...a continuous confrontation between the exalted ideal of personal honour [the "romantic ethic"] on the one hand, and the more modern, more widely applicable, but much more prosaic collective values of the code of solidarity on the other [the "realist ethic"].
> (1980, 355)

Brierly, the French lieutenant, the "privileged man" and Marlow represent the more modern and more prosaic collective values of the prevailing moral order. Jim represents a romantic and individualistic ethic that only Marlow and Stein recognize as valid. In telling Jim's story, Marlow attempts to save from the ignominy of silence an alternative world-view, a view that is negated or neutralized by the prevailing system. He puts the following question to the privileged man:

> 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. (339)

The faith to which Jim confesses is clarified by Stein.

As Tanner argues, Stein "turns out to exist at the real middle of the novel in more ways than one" (1963, 40). He is important in terms of the plot--his actions move the story into its second phase--but he is also important in that "it is this world-famous expert on insects who is selected to make a central (though not definitive) assessment of Jim" (1963, 40). Stein also reassesses the significance of the term "romantic". He is the exponent of the romantic world-view, who sees Jim as a representative romantic figure. Marlow considers Stein to be "an eminently suitable person to receive my confidences about Jim's difficulties *as well as my own*" (203, italics mine). Jim's difficulties are those pertaining to his idea of himself; Marlow's are the more general difficulties of comprehension. Stein appears at first to solve the enigma of Jim by giving an adequate and credible account of him. But, as Marlow discovers, the individual cannot be reduced to any categories of apprehension, since something exceeds the explanatory power of all descriptions. This was the case with the official inquiry, and it is the case with Stein.

Stein's delineation of the romantic world-view has provoked much complex and, at times, contradictory critical debate (see Watt 1980, 322-331). For the purposes of this discussion a few important points should suffice. To begin with, it is worth bearing in mind that Stein's sense of the

word "romantic" is distinct from the sense in which Marlow or the omniscient narrator would understand it. Watt clarifies the two meanings:

> whereas Marlow used the label "romantic" to consign Jim to the ranks of self-deluding egotists, Stein gives quite another meaning to the term: and it assigns Jim to the first rank among the specimens of humankind's most distinguishing hunger. (1980, 322)

Jim is for Stein a representative romantic man. According to the romantic world-view, man can be defined as the "dreaming animal" (Berthoud 1978, 88). Man is distinguished from the non-human world by his longings and aspirations.

> 'This magnificent butterfly [says Stein] finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so....' He moved his hand up, then down....'He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil--and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow--so fine as he can never be....In a dream....' (213)

Jim's dreams, seen in this way, are no longer mere delusions, they are an index of his humanity. Being "in a dream" is an inescapable condition of being human: "A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea" (214). Any attempt to escape or transcend this condition--by attempting "to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do" (214)--is to invite disaster. The dream gives man an object for his desires, a shape and an order to his life; it offers what Marlow calls a "shelter" (313). Yet this leads unavoidably to the other significant aspect of Stein's romantic world-view: "man is come where he is not

wanted, where there is no place for him" (208). Berthoud sums up the line of reasoning: "since to dream is to be dissatisfied with life, it follows that to be cast into life is to find oneself in an alien, or unnatural, or even destructive element" (1978, 87-88).

At first Stein is confident about his prescriptions: "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" (214). That is, the individual should accept the irremediable "otherness" of his environment, and, rather than attempt to escape it, he should use it in combination with his will to realize his dreams. Stein is proposing the kind of idealism of which Conrad approved in an essay entitled "Tradition": "idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born" (*Notes on Life and Letters*, 194).

But this confidence is short-lived. When Stein appears to be "inspired by some whisper of knowledge" (214), "the austere exultation of a certitude seen in the dusk vanish[es] from his face" (214). He repeats his profound utterance, but this time in a "subdued tone" (214): "And *yet* it is true--it is true. In the destructive element immerse....That *was* the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream" (214-215, italics mine). The manner of the speech (the repetition of key phrases), if not the con-

tent, reflects Stein's uncertainty. As Marlow suggests, Stein has lived according to his beliefs "without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret" (215). The question implied is: what of someone, like Jim, who *has* faltered? It is this doubt that leads Marlow to say that Stein's directives throw an "impalpable poesy...over pitfalls--over graves" (215). Stein underestimates the effect of failure and the resultant "world pain" (213) experienced by the romantic who is unable to realize his dream. It is for this "great evil" that Stein hopes to find a "practical remedy" (215). His remedy for Jim's painful case is Patusan.

IV

A number of critics have argued that the chapters dealing with Jim's experiences in Patusan are a weak point in the novel's structure. Leavis, for instance, makes the following assessment of the work as a whole:

> The presentment of Lord Jim in the first part of the book, the account of the inquiry and of the desertion of the *Patna*, the talk with the French lieutenant--these are good Conrad. But the romance that follows, though plausibly offered as a continued exhibition of Jim's case, has no inevitability as that; nor does it develop or enrich the central interest, which consequently, eked out to provide the substance of a novel, comes to seem decidedly thin. (1962, 190)

For Leavis, the Patusan chapters are a step backward to the "excessively adjectival studies in the Malayan exotic of Conrad's earliest vein" (1962, 190). Though this criticism is

not wholly unjustified, it does, by seeing the chapters simply as a continued *exhibition* of Jim's case, miss one of the central preoccupations of the novel. This segment of the story is not only a continued exhibition of Jim's case: it is also part of the developing critique of the "romantic" conception of man, and, more particularly, of the conventions of the genre of romance.

Patusan is the theatre in which Jim acts out his dream. As Watt suggests, Jim's play has a particularly contrived set design, plot and cast: "much of the action, the setting, the characters and the symbolism of Patusan suggest fable, fairy tale, and especially medieval romance" (1980, 346). It is, in a sense, the kind of world for which Jim has always longed. By going to Patusan, he expects to transcend the world of his past, to rise above things as they are and were, and to become the unflinching romantic hero he desires to be. In other words, he hopes to transcend the world presented in the first part of *Lord Jim*, and to enter the world projected in the light literature he read as a youth. This is, of course, not the way Stein and Marlow see things. For them, Jim needs to "creep twenty feet underground and stay there" (219), as Brierly had suggested. Marlow compares Patusan to "a heavenly body...that mankind [has] never heard of" (218), indicating that it is ideal for an outcast. Nonetheless, according to Marlow, Jim once at Patusan "left his earthly failings behind him and that sort of reputation he

had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" (218).

On two occasions Jim refers indirectly to the books he has read. The ring (given to him by Stein) and the stories of Stein's past activities are "like something you read of in books" (233-234); Doramin, his wife and son are "like people in a book" (260). As before (see Section I), Jim demonstrates his limited conception of the nature of fictional stories. His comparisons rest on the assumption that to be like something or someone in a book means to be beyond or above the mundane or commonplace. For Jim, novels are about ideal worlds that offer a means of escape from the actual world. In response to this, the reader can say: but these characters or events are not merely *like* those read about in books, they *are* those read about in books--in this book, for example. If this is the case, are we, as readers, to share Jim's attitude to books--that they simply project fantasies? By provoking these kinds of questions, the novel once again invites the reader to reflect on the relationship between books and the world, and to consider the nature of the book he is reading, namely *Lord Jim*. The Patusan chapters, which are on the face of it the most stereotyped chapters in the novel, bring this kind of issue into the foreground. In doing so, they become a way of locating Conrad's fiction.

Marlow agrees with Jim's view that Patusan, and Jim's activities there, are "like something you read of in books", but he adds a series of significant qualifications. He dis-

tinguishes, for example, between conventional tales of heroism and Jim's tale.

> The conquest of love, honour, men's confidence--the pride of it, the power of it, are fit materials for a heroic tale; only our minds are struck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim's successes there were no externals. (226)

That is, in terms of its materials, Jim's story is like the conventional heroic tale, but in terms of the ways in which these traditional materials are treated, it is distinctly different. Marlow's main focus of interest is on the inner life of the romantic hero, not his outward achievements. His tale is not an action adventure; it is a complex psychological inquiry into the "fundamental why" (56) of certain actions. Whereas Jim is deceived by the conventions of romantic fiction, Marlow recalls and questions them. And, of course, by having Marlow tell Jim's tale, Conrad goes way beyond the methods and preoccupations of romantic fictions.

Marlow also compares Patusan to another art form, namely painting. Like the scenes and figures in a painting, the place and its people are static. It exists in a dimension beyond the "sea with its labouring waves for ever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again" (243). On leaving Patusan for the last time, Marlow makes the analogy clear:

> [Patusan is] like a picture created by fancy on a canvas....It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light. (330)

He looks forward to "going back to the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear

stream" (330). If Patusan seems to exist in a dimension beyond time and flux, its people seem to be simply character types that "exist as if under an enchanter's wand" (330). Yet, for all this unreality, one figure cannot be reduced to a static type: "the figure round which all these are grouped--that one lives, and I am not certain of him. No magician's wand can immobilise him under my eyes" (330-331). For Marlow, Jim is an actual figure in an otherwise fanciful world. The court reduced Jim to a type: the delinquent. An "imperialist romancer" might reduce him to the opposite type: the conventional romantic hero. In different ways, both descriptions are misleading. In the face of these two possibilities Marlow avoids both by disclosing the irreducible complexities of Jim's character.

In Chapter 2, it was noted that Marlow approaches Kurtz with a number of preconceptions about the man he is to meet. Some are gleaned from the gossip of the colonists, while others are derived from the conventions of romance: he sees Kurtz as the object of his quest, for instance. In a similar way, Jim has certain preconceptions about life at sea and about how he will conduct himself. Once again the gap between preconception and actuality is profound. Before going to Patusan, Jim characteristically anticipates actual experience, he expects Patusan to be the world of romance fiction and the people to be like characters in a book. In short, he expects it to be the place of his romantic dreams. When Mar-

low unfolds the "precious scheme for his retreat" (230), he notices

> how [Jim's] stubborn but weary resignation was gradually replaced by surprise, interest, wonder, and by boyish eagerness. This was a chance he had been dreaming of. (230)

Most importantly, Jim expects that by going to Patusan he will be able to "slam the door" (235) on his past, to "forget everything, everybody" (236), and to become the hero he believes himself to be. Marlow remains sceptical of this achievement. In a proleptic account of Jim's success, Marlow comments:

> The time was coming when I should see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name *as though* he had been the stuff of a hero. (175, italics mine)

The "as though" suggests that Marlow is still unsure about Jim as a hero. For Marlow, Patusan and Jim are romantic (in Stein's affirmative sense), but not straightforwardly so. Both remain imperfect. The course of Jim's career is suggested in the following semi-allegorical description of the moon:

> For a moment it looked as though the smooth disc, falling from its place in the sky upon the earth, had rolled to the bottom of that precipice: its ascending movement was like a leisurely rebound; it disengaged itself from the tangle of twigs; the bare contorted limb of some tree, growing on the slope, made a black crack right across its face. (322)

Jim leaps from the *Patna* (this is his descent), then leaps once again from Rajah Allang's enclosure, and drags himself out of the muddy creek into the hands of Doramin. From there

his gradual ascent to the status of a hero begins. But like the moon, and like the romantic world-view, his resplendent appearance is tragically marred.

Yet Jim's youthful romanticism is not simply undermined by Marlow's wary maturity. He does succeed in some important respects: he brings order to a 'primitive' and tyrannized society--an ideal achievement for the hero in stories of imperial adventure; he is selfless and energetic, honest and trustworthy; and he is serious about his responsibility to the people he 'rules'. At the same time, however, he remains estranged from the people of Patusan, not simply because he is white, but because his past remains unknown to them. His recollection of his failure to live up to the codes of the "impeccable world" adds bitterness to his otherwise sweet success. At one moment Jim can feel that "if such a thing can be forgotten, then I think I have the right to dismiss it from my mind" (305), but at another he recognizes that such a thing cannot be forgotten.

> If you ask them who is brave--who is true--who is just--who is it they would trust with their lives?--they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth.... (305)

This mood of uncertainty would be unexpected in the conventional romantic hero.

Jim's triumph in love is similarly flawed. He and Jewel come "together under the shadow of a life's disaster, like knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows amongst haunted ruins" (312). For both the shadow of their past expe-

rience makes for a "strange uneasy romance" (283) in the present. Jewel, because she recalls her mother's tragic betrayal by a white man, cannot wholly trust a man who comes from the unknown "world beyond the forests" (318). As Marlow discovers, the fear of betrayal can only be killed by "an enchanted and poisoned shaft dipped in a lie too subtle to be found on earth" (316). When called upon to exorcise "the spirits evoked by [her] fears" (315), he finds himself unequal to the task. Jim's imperfect achievements, in love and adventure, make it possible for him only to say: "I am satisfied... nearly" (306).

The world of Patusan is almost the world of Jim's dreams and, like a dreamer whose dream is subject to his will, Jim directs and manipulates events according to his desires. The tragic gap between intention and action, that resulted in his initial failure, appears to be closed. At one point Marlow comments: "[Jim] had regulated so many things in Patusan--things that would have appeared as much beyond his control as the motions of the moon and the stars" (221). Yet, as the novel makes clear, any human order--be it the social and moral order, the order imposed by a romantic dream, or even a rigid linguistic order--is provisional and prey to contingencies both from within and from without. In the first instance (in the *Patna* episode), Jim's dream is destroyed by his own weaknesses, and by a fateful concatenation of events; in the second instance, it is destroyed by external forces,

represented by chance and the diabolic Gentleman Brown.

Brown's arrival at Patusan shatters the idyll. He "sails into Jim's history, a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers" (354). His only fear is the "fear of imprisonment" (354), and so he is committed to a reckless pursuit of freedom. For Marlow, and for Jim, though Jim is less conscious of it, ideas of order are "sheltering conception[s]" (313), for Brown they are merely lies. He and his gang of desperadoes are men "without country" (366), who owe allegiance to no one and who are human embodiments of the destructive element. Brown's act--killing Dain Waris and others--is carefully defined by Marlow:

> It was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution--a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think. (404)

Forced by circumstances beyond his will, Jim faces a tragic contradiction: he must, in order to realize his dream, sacrifice himself. Only in dying does Jim finally become like the heroes he read about in his youth. As he dies, he sends "right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance" (416). But, for this honour, he has suffered and failed in ways unknown to the conventional romantic hero. In addition, where a romantic hero, of the kind Jim read about, would in all likelihood have killed Brown, a tragic hero, like Jim, faces the irreconcilable antagonisms of existence.

V

Lord Jim presents a view of experience as complex and as ambivalent as that of *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow's narrative in *Lord Jim* does not celebrate the romantic conception of the world and man in a naive, uncritical way: it questions the two romantics in the novel (Jim and Stein), and it challenges Jim's secular scripture, the conventions of the genre of romance. His written narrative ends with a number of questions about Jim's fate. "Is he satisfied--quite, now, I wonder?" (416). Is his uncompromising commitment to a "shadowy ideal of conduct" merely "exalted egoism" (416)? Does he achieve "in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance" (416) the greatness for which he yearned? Marlow's answer is suggested earlier in the narrative. He refers to Jim's pursuit of his dream, and asks:

> And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all? (349-350)

Jim's longings are no longer the idiosyncratic yearnings of a self-deceived romantic, they have come to represent the aspirations of mankind. Has Jim "confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress" (339)? If Marlow's answer to these questions is affirmative, it is not easily so, since Jim's heroism, like man's, is tragic, not romantic.

The realist conception of the world and man is similarly scrutinized. Marlow at times shows up his listeners. At one point, when he is feeling unusually confident, he addresses them directly:

> I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions--and safe--and profitable--and dull. Yet you, too, in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamour created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone--and as short-lived, alas! (225)

If Jim embodies the dangers and the glories of the imaginative life, these men represent the banal but secure world of the unimaginative. Marlow stands between both: his narrative poses questions without offering simple answers.

This distinction between the imaginative and the unimaginative helps to clarify the issues surrounding language presented in *Lord Jim*. The language of those who lack imagination--the discourse of facts--can at best be practical and useful, but at its worst it can be reductive. The language of those who possess excessively powerful imaginations--the discourse of dreams or pure fictions--can be deceptive and deviously persuasive. Marlow's non-fictional narrative is an act of imaginative recollection, that attempts to be neither reductive, nor misleading. Where his society has defined and dismissed Jim, Marlow rescues him and the romantic view of

experience that he comes to represent. His act of narration is itself an act of sympathetic perception, which challenges the beliefs and values of his listeners and his society. Yet Marlow also challenges the discourse of dreams, and the conventions of the genre of romance. His narrative, both in its style and in its subject matter, serves as a model for the kind of discourse to which Conrad devoted the second half of his life. For Conrad, the aim of writing was to overcome various forms of false consciousness. This could simply be the false consciousness of those, like Jim, who cannot live without fantasies, delusions, or escapism of one sort or another. Or it could be the specifically ideological false consciousness of those who accept the prevailing beliefs of the time, who believe, for instance, that "facts" are "reality". If his novels describe the many ways in which language enables, and even produces, false consciousness, they also demonstrate, particularly through the figure of Marlow, certain ways in which words can be used "to make you see". A novel that attempts to make the reader see how words are used to deceive is *Under Western Eyes*, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

> *Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve.*
>
> Wordsworth[1]

Of the four novels selected for this thesis, *Under Western Eyes* offers the most explicit and sustained evaluation of the place of language in human affairs. The novel presupposes a view of communication in some respects similar to that suggested by Steiner in *After Babel*. At one point Steiner argues that

> it is inaccurate and theoretically spurious to schematize language as 'information' or to identify language, be it unspoken or vocalized, with 'communication'. The latter term will serve only if it includes, if it places emphasis on, what is *not* said in the saying, what is said only partially, allusively or with intent to screen. Human speech conceals far more than it confides....The terrain between speaker and hearer--even when the current of discourse is internalized, when 'I' speak to 'myself'...is unstable, full of mirage and pitfalls. (1975, 229)

Frequently in Conrad's novel, language is seen as a means of concealment or deception: words are seldom used to relay 'information', rather they are used, deliberately or unwittingly, to misinform; and the channel of discourse between speakers and hearers is rarely unobstructed. The statement by the teacher of languages in the second paragraph of the novel--"Words, as is well known, are the great foes of

reality" (3)--alerts the reader to these concerns. The preoccupation with language and various forms of concealment and deception, and the related notions of trust and betrayal, will be the main focus of this chapter.

In an ideal society one of the guiding principles of conduct would be a principle of veracity. According to this principle, the members of that society would (at least) be obliged to speak truthfully[2], to do what they say or promise they will do, and to be open in their verbal interaction with others. In any society verbal communication is, as Warnock suggests, "the most important of all...co-operative undertakings" (1971, 84). The importance of reliable communication is simply this: without something like a principle of veracity, society, as a functioning human collective, would collapse. Warnock puts it this way:

> It is, one might say, not the implanting of false beliefs that is damaging, but rather the generation of the suspicion that they may be being implanted. For this undermines trust; and, to the extent that trust is undermined, all co-operative undertakings, in which what one person can do or has reason to do is dependent on what others have done, are doing, or are going to do, must tend to break down. (1971, 84)

Needless to say, societies in practice seldom achieve the theoretical ideal of open and sincere communication. In Russian society, as depicted in *Under Western Eyes*, this ideal is notably absent. It is a society built on secrecies, suspicions, and deceptions; its members are forced to conceal information, and silence and deceit are conditions of their

survival; and, as a consequence, relations between individuals, and between the individual and the autocratic state, operate with assumed mistrust. The failure of genuine communication is partly a cause and partly an effect of the turmoil of pre-revolutionary Russia. It is with the nature and extent of this failure that *Under Western Eyes* is centrally concerned.

Before turning to the novel itself, a number of preliminary distinctions should be made. First, we need to distinguish between what Bok calls 'falsity' and 'falsehood' (what I shall call 'error' and 'deceit'). Bok suggests that "we must single out...from the countless ways in which we blunder misinformed through life, that which is done with the *intention to mislead*" (1978, 8). The key to the distinction is the word *intention*. A person might misinform others by relaying false information without intending to deceive them. This would be an instance of an unwitting transmission of error. If, however, the person deliberately and knowingly gave others false information or a false impression of himself, then he would be deceiving them. Deceit is a moral issue, while error, though it might be the result of a person's moral weaknesses (a tendency to self-deception, or to gullibility, for instance) is not necessarily open to moral evaluation.

Second, we need to distinguish between two kinds of deceit (as defined above). Chisholm and Feehan, using a traditional theological polarity, distinguish between "decep-

tion by commission" and "deception by omission" (1977, 143). They proceed to describe four types of deception in each of these two categories. For our purposes it will be sufficient to say that, in the case of deception by commission, a person "contributes causally" (1977, 144) to another person's acquiring false information, whereas, in the case of deception by omission, he simply "allows" (1977, 144) another to acquire false information or to remain deceived. On the basis of this distinction it can be shown that, in certain circumstances, silence is as much a form of deceit as speech or writing.

Third, this thesis is concerned only with attitudes to language in Conrad's fiction, but there are, of course, many non-linguistic forms of deception--gesture, disguise, and action, to name but a few. In *Under Western Eyes*, Haldin and his accomplice pretend to be "a couple of peasants on the spree" (17) to avoid arousing the suspicion of the police on the night before the assassination, and Mikulin stages an elaborate series of deceptions, including secret meetings at an oculist, to ensure that, in the eyes of the revolutionaries, Razumov leaves Russia as one of them. The main focus of this discussion, however, will be on words as a means of concealment or deception (silence, which is *not saying*, is also taken to be a form of linguistic deception).

The chapter will be divided into four sections. In the first, the speech habits of the Russians in general will be discussed. The discussion will include specific references to Natalia Haldin, Victor Haldin, and Peter Ivanovitch. The

second section will focus on Razumov and the complex problems of self-deception, while the third will deal with two of the many conversations that take place in the novel. The final section will concentrate on the climax and denouement of the novel, and will attempt to show how the issues raised in the preceding sections are to some extent resolved.

I

By using a teacher of languages as the narrator in *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad brings to the reader's attention the preoccupation with language that is to be a central concern of the novel. At the outset, the teacher makes a point of describing the general character of Russian speakers.

> What must remain striking [he says] to a teacher of languages is the Russians' extraordinary love of words. They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with an enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes that, as in the case of very accomplished parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say. (4)

The teacher's civil ironies--irony itself being a form of concealment (but not of deception), of not meaning what one is apparently saying--suggest that he does not approve of the Russians' characteristic loquacity. On a number of occasions, he distinguishes between Western and Eastern values, and though he is often concerned with the political and social

differences, he frequently highlights differences at the level of verbal conduct. Throughout the novel, the opposition between West and East includes oppositions between reticence and eloquence, sincerity and deceit, openness and secrecy.

Two important and related issues arise out of the teacher's description of Russian eloquence. First, the Russians love words for their own sake: words are cherished and displayed like valuable, but useless, ornaments. The Russian speaker is seldom concerned with the referential function of words, with correct use, he appears simply to enjoy the sound of words which inadvertently at times give the impression of referring to experience. Second, the comparison between the Russians and parrots underscores this idea of linguistic irresponsibility. A parrot is capable of repeating sounds that resemble the sounds of human language, but it is incapable of making *meaningful* sounds, which are the essence of human language. Just because a parrot can say a word (that is, repeat the sound), it does not follow that it has necessarily understood the meaning of the word. The same is true of humans, especially of children learning to talk. To use a word meaningfully, a child is required to apply the word in the appropriate context on different occasions, he cannot simply make the right noises at random intervals. In other words, embedded in the notion of meaning is some notion of fittingness or appropriateness. Moreover, when human beings speak they usually intend something by their utterances; there is usually some point to what they say. Like parrots, the

Russians tend, according to the teacher, not to consider the appropriateness of their utterances, and they intend simply to make sounds, not--as is usually the case in human communication--to refer, to persuade, to exclaim, or to describe. This susceptibility is, however, not peculiar to the Russians, since "to a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot" (3). Yet the Russians, as they are presented in the novel, make a habit of disengaging their words from the world.

The differences between Russian and Western attitudes to language are detailed in an exchange between the teacher and Natalia Haldin near the beginning of Part II. Their discussion centres on Russian politics. Natalia, who is "very capable of being roused by an idea" (102), believes that the present conflict in Russia is temporary, and that "concord is not so very far off" (104). She rejects any mundane descriptions of the Russian situation as, for example, "class conflict" or "conflict of interests" (104). In response to her views the teacher distinguishes between Eastern idealism and Western materialism.

> I suppose one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naïve and hopeless cynicism. I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consists in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value.
> (104)

The teacher, commenting on the Russian "propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression" (104), speaks as if he were a positivist attacking metaphysicians. According to him, the mystical rhetoric characteristic of the Russians conceals "cynicism". What he means by this (in part at least) is that the Russian speaker is indifferent to, even contemptuous of, the truth or intelligibility of his utterances[3]. The Russian officials, for instance, have an "ineradicable, almost sublime contempt for truth" (305-306), and in quite a different way Natalia, like her brother, has, as Berthoud suggests, a "lack of concern for intelligibility [which] is not calculated, but instinctive; but it is not the less cynical for that" (1978, 164). Her cynicism is the expression of "simplicity" (104), rather than sophistication. As far as the teacher is concerned, many of the beliefs held, and the statements made, by the Russians are at best dogmatic, and at worst irrational. Their way of speaking only adds to the unreality of their views.

As Berthoud observes, "it becomes clear from the narrator's arguments that what [the teacher] represents in the novel is the power of rationality" (1978, 163). Oakeshott's description of the "general character and disposition of the Rationalist" may be aptly applied to the teacher's cast of mind.

> He [the Rationalist] is the *enemy* of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional,

> customary or habitual. His mental attitude is at once sceptical and optimistic: sceptical, because there is no opinion, no habit, no belief, nothing so firmly rooted or so widely held that he hesitates to question it and to judge it by what he calls his 'reason'; optimistic, because the Rationalist never doubts the power of his 'reason' (when properly applied) to determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action. (1962, 1-2)

Though the teacher is perhaps more a sceptical than an optimistic rationalist (his reason and perspicacity are at times tested, and shown to be inadequate, by the Russian reality), he does stand for "independence of mind on all occasions" (1962, 1). The idea of 'independence', which is particularly important in the resolution of the novel (see Section IV), points to a quality of mind that the Russians profoundly lack. Unlike the rationalist teacher, they tend to be the slaves of one or another dogma and its concomitant rhetoric: Haldin is a captive of revolutionary dogma, and Natalia, according to her mother, is his "slavish echo" (106); General T-- is a fanatical believer in the doctrine of absolutism; and Ivanovitch is both master and slave of his feminist doctrine. They are in one way or another all "slaves of lies" (360).

The rationalist teacher takes issue with Natalia's revolutionary rhetoric. He questions her naive assurances about the future: "Are antagonistic ideas...to be reconciled more easily [than a "conflict of classes" or a "conflict of interests"]--can they be cemented with blood and violence into that concord which you proclaim to be so near?" (105).

Berthoud argues that the teacher "cannot understand how 'antagonistic ideas'--for instance, contradictory moral or political principles--can be 'reconciled', or shown not to be contradictory, by any act of physical violence" (1978, 163). For the teacher violence as a means of achieving concord is "inconceivable" (106). Natalia replies by appealing to "a necessity superior to our conceptions" (106) and, in so doing, abandons all claim to rationality. What this "necessity" is, she cannot in principle say: it is beyond thought and therefore beyond language. But, as is characteristic of parrot-like Russians, she does not believe, as Wittgenstein believed, that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (1922, 149). Natalia's world is permeated by the inexpressible, and her aspirations are justified by appeal to the ineffable.

The teacher cannot accept Natalia's mystical assertions about the inconceivable.

> I suppose [he says to her] that you will be shocked if I tell you that I haven't understood--I won't say a single word; I've understood all the words....But what can be this era of disembodied concord you are looking forward to. Life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable. (106)

What he claims is that the intelligibility of any utterance rests partly on its referring to actual (or at least probable) states of affairs in the world. He makes this point using notions of embodiment derived from Plato's doctrine of Forms.

To be understandable the ideal must be realized in some concrete form; to make sense *of* the world words must refer *to* the world as it is known historically. Natalia's words are comprehensible at the level of semantics (each word can be understood by a person familiar with the language) and syntax (the arrangement of the words follows accepted conventions), but at the level of what linguists call 'pragmatics' (the uses, effects and larger contexts of utterances), that is, in the larger context of political and historical actualities or probabilities, her words make no sense.

Natalia's use of language is a specific instance of a more general issue. One of the aspects of language repeatedly discussed in this thesis is the problematic nature of the relationship between words and the world. Words can and are used to project 'disembodied' worlds that, without in any way relating to the world, have a compelling effect on the imagination. Used in this way, words become what Wordsworth called a "counter-spirit". Conrad frequently describes those who believe in these alternative worlds as "intoxicated": Jim, like the second engineer on the *Patna*, is intoxicated with his dreams of glory and adventure; in *Under Western Eyes*, Razumov--who at one point asks: "What is a sober man to do, I should like to know?" (96)--finds himself caught between "the drunkenness of the peasant [Ziemianitch] incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men" (31). "Intoxication of some sort we must have" (96), says

Razumov of the Russians in general. The particular characteristic of the intoxicated idealist is not that he fails to see things, but that he habitually misconstrues experience, and therefore his descriptions of things, events and other men are invariably inaccurate or misleading. Though one could not say that Haldin *intends to deceive* others, he does tend to deceive himself and to communicate his self-deceptions to others. His description of Ziemianitch as "a bright spirit" (18) and his misunderstanding of Razumov are clear instances of his habitual misreadings. One of the many people to whom he communicates his self-deceptions ("The fellow's casual utterances were caught up and treasured and pondered over by all these imbeciles" (83)) is Natalia, who is taken in by his description of Razumov in a letter. After Haldin is arrested and executed, she is left feeling unsure about the political ideals and aspirations she and her brother shared; she is troubled by the thought that he might have renounced their ideals, and given himself up in despair. Her brother's description persuades her that Razumov is a man who will give her the reassurance she needs. But, as is so often the case in the novel, a naive faith in the words of others has disastrous consequences.

Peter Ivanovitch, though he is more powerful and more calculating, is as questionable a communicator as Natalia or her brother. When the reader is first introduced to him, the revolutionary leader is heard before he is seen. He is the as yet unnamed visitor at the Haldins' home who is "holding forth

steadily in an unctuous deep voice" (118). Ivanovitch is a large, burly, bearded man who conceals his eyes behind "spectacles with smoked glasses" (119). That he conceals his eyes, has important implications for the man as a communicator. Hawthorn has discussed the general significance of the many references to eyes in the novel (1979, 104-105), pointing out that "eyes and their movements are indicative of a character's openness and honesty" (1979, 105). Though this is a useful description of what eyes are used to indicate in the novel, a question remains to be asked: why does the novel focus the reader's attention on the eyes? A possible answer to this question is suggested by Wittgenstein. In note number 222 of the collection called *Zettel*, he makes the following observation about the human eye:

> We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives; the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.) One can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ear or nose. When you see the eye you see something going out from it. You see the look in the eye.
> (1967, 40e)

Part of what Wittgenstein is suggesting is that the eye is directly related to, and expressive of, human intentions. Eyes, as it were, radiate intention. If this is the case, then eyes have a significant role to play in communication. In open, sincere communication what is intended can be inferred fairly directly from what is said. But problems arise when there is a disparity between what is said and what is intended, that is, when words are being used to screen actual

intentions. A hearer who does not wish to be duped must then rely on non-linguistic signs (like the "look in the eye") to grasp the full significance of an utterance. Or put the other way round: if the eye is a clear index of actual intentions, and if a speaker habitually uses words to deceive others, then, in order to succeed at deceiving others, it would be advisable for him to conceal his eyes. This would prevent the hearer from detecting the intention to deceive. This is exactly what Ivanovitch does: he conceals his eyes in order to conceal his intentions. For the same reasons, Razumov wears a green shade over one eye and covers the other with his hand, when lying to one of his fellow students (310). In answer to the question posed above, then, the novel focuses the reader's attention on the eyes as part of the larger concern with language, intentions, and deceit.

Ivanovitch hides his eyes in order to conceal his motives, particularly his desire to dominate others. An unwary listener, like Natalia, might be taken in by his talk of women and revolution, but the attentive listener, like the teacher, will discern the actual motivations. If the man is actually present, the full effect of his words is more readily felt. In his "great effortless voice" (128) he booms out his views on personal grief and public responsibility to Natalia, who is mourning the death of her brother. Her interruptions resemble the "effort of a drowning person to keep above water" (128). In speaking Ivanovitch does not intend to communicate with others, he intends to dominate them, to subject them to

the force of his voice. The manner of his speech, if not the content itself, testifies to his utter, and barely concealed, disregard of others. The teacher recognizes this, and, as far as he can, he tries to keep Natalia from becoming one of Ivanovitch's victims.

In his autobiographical writings, Ivanovitch's egoism is more successfully concealed. The teacher gives an uncompromisingly ironic reading of "the story of his life written by himself and translated into seven or more languages" (120). In this story Ivanovitch describes his escape from prison, his wanderings through the wilds, his degeneration from man to beast, and his eventual redemption through the generous act of a woman. His escape leads to his "great act of...conversion" (122) to the doctrine of mystical feminism. As if to underscore the novel's preoccupation with language, this moment of conversion is also the moment in which the wild, inarticulate beast recovers his powers of speech:

> It seemed as though he had lost the faculty of speech. He had become a dumb and despairing brute, till the woman's sudden, unexpected cry of profound pity, the insight of her feminine compassion discovering the complex misery of the man under the terrifying aspect of the monster, restored him to the ranks of humanity. (124)

The teacher comments: "This point of view is presented in his book, with a very effective eloquence" (124). But two things undermine this eloquent adulation of women: the manner in which the autobiography is written, and Ivanovitch's actual attitude to women. In this excessively romantic account, per-

sonal experience is given a "mystic treatment and symbolic interpretation" (125). One of the characteristic tendencies of the symbolic mode of writing is that, in transforming objects into emblems, the discourse may show little or no regard for the object as it is in itself. Ivanovitch writes with the "declared purpose of elevating humanity" (125), but his undeclared purpose is to subject the world to his own will-to-meaning--the centre and source of significance being himself. In so doing, he effectively deceives himself about the nature of the world, and deceives others about his motives. The kind of behaviour which undermines his eloquence is seen in his treatment of his amanuensis, Tekla, and his exploitation of Madame de S--. This shows, as Berthoud suggests, that "his feminist idealism barely masks a copious virility, and his general worship of women...conceals a ruthlessly uncompromising will to power" (1978, 168). As his speech, writings and actions demonstrate, Ivanovitch's blend of idealism, mysticism and feminism is a front for his aggressive egoism. He is a typical Russian communicator: forceful and unreliable, deceiving and self-deceived.

II

On the face of it Razumov is an atypical Russian: as a student of philosophy he is committed to rational debate and inquiry, he is also unusually silent, undogmatic and considerate towards others. He has in many respects the traits

of a Westerner. Berthoud argues that Razumov is "to all intents and purposes a portrait of the narrator as a young man" (1978, 170). The difference between the two men is more a matter of where they are, not who they are, since "in the context of Russia, even the most soberly rational existence acquires a paradoxical character" (1978, 171). In a sense the novel is about the tragic life of a rationalist who finds himself in two profoundly irrational worlds: the smaller world of Czarist Russia and the larger world of human experience. The nature of this larger world is disclosed in a discussion between Razumov and Haldin. They are describing their different conceptions of eternity. Razumov imagines it to be "something quiet and dull. There would be nothing unexpected--don't you see? The element of time would be wanting" (59). He continues:

> Can you conceive secret places in Eternity? Impossible. Whereas life is full of them. There are secrets of birth, for instance.... And there are secret motives of conduct. A man's most open actions have a secret side to them. That is interesting and so unfathomable! (59)

For Razumov, the two irremediable features of life in time are contingency (the "unexpected") and secrecy. As it turns out, both conspire against him.

In the prologue to the first part of the novel, the reader is introduced to Razumov as a hard-working, self-sufficient and ambitious "third year's student in philosophy" (6). By his comrades he is "looked upon as a strong nature--an altogether trustworthy man" (6). As the teacher points

out, this reading of Razumov's character is not wholly justified--it is, in fact, the first of many misreadings (intended and unintended) that prove to be disastrous. In conversation Razumov takes on the "attitude of an inscrutable listener, a listener of the kind that hears you out intelligently and then--just changes the subject" (5). The teacher offers two possible explanations for "this sort of trick" (5): it "may arise either from intellectual insufficiency or from an imperfect trust in one's own convictions" (5-6). Nonetheless, "amongst a lot of exuberant talkers" (6) Razumov procures "a reputation of profundity" (6) and is "credited with reserve power" (6). Most significantly, at this point he is "always accessible, and there [is] nothing secret or reserved in his life" (7).

In order to understand the profound effect that Haldin has on Razumov, his actions need to be placed in the context of the latter's life and aspirations. Razumov's origins are mysterious: he is "supposed to be the son of an Arch-priest and to be protected by a distinguished nobleman" (6), but his "outward appearance accorded badly with such humble origin" (6). (As it turns out he is the illegitimate son of Prince K--, who, for reasons of social propriety, keeps this fact hidden. This minor, but important, theme of naming and hidden identity forms part of the novel's major theme of concealment.) Apart from a guardian, he is "not known to have any social relations in the town" (6), he is "officially and in fact without a family" (10), and is "as lonely in the world as

a man swimming in the deep sea" (10). Owing to his isolation and lack of identity, Razumov depends on the "free use of his intelligence" (83) to convert the "label Razumov into an honoured name" (14). He is motivated by the desire for recognition and the fear of anonymity.

> The unrelated organism bearing that label, walking, breathing, wearing these clothes, was of no importance to any one, unless maybe to the landlady. The true Razumov had his being in the willed, in the determined future--in that future menaced by the lawlessness of autocracy...and the lawlessness of revolution. (77)

In order to realize his goal, which is symbolized by the silver medal he hopes to win in an essay competition, Razumov remains politically uninvolved and devotes himself to his studies. But, like Jim, he confronts a world in which the unexpected and the irrational drive a wedge between aspiration and achievement. In Razumov's case, the "destructive element" is embodied in Haldin.

In a typically Conradian scene, Razumov, having resolved to write his essay, and feeling "confident of success" (14), enters his room only to be "horribly startled" (14) by the "strange figure" (14) of Haldin. On the misguided assumption that Razumov is a trustworthy man, Haldin asks him to seek out Ziemianitch, the town-peasant who is to drive Haldin to safety. In so doing, he not only makes Razumov an accessory after the fact, but he threatens the grounds of his identity: "The sentiment of his life being utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime expressed itself quaintly by a

sort of half-derisive mental exclamation, 'There goes my silver medal!'" (16). Razumov initially agrees to help Haldin, but at that moment, because he says one thing and thinks another, he cuts himself off from the possibility of open, uncompromised communication--of what Ryle calls "unstudied talk" (1963, 173). This is a turning point in Razumov's life, the consequences of which are overcome only in the final scenes of the novel. His acceptance is a promise, a declaration of trustworthiness, that belies his actual, but unexamined, feelings.

> This evening's doings could turn up against him at any time as long as this man [Haldin] lived and the present institutions endured. They appeared to him rational and indestructible at that moment. They had a force of harmony--in contrast with the horrible discord of this man's presence. He hated the man. He said quietly--
> "Yes, of course, I will go. You must give me precise directions, and for the rest--depend on me."
> "Ah! You are a fellow! Collected--cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman...."
> (21-22)

In speech Razumov appears to be "a regular Englishman", in reality he is a compromised Russian. It would be wrong to say that he deceives Haldin at this point, but his calm, collected words conceal his inner states and, to this extent, he is being insincere. The account of the walk to and from the "low eating-house" (27) where Ziemianitch stays, is a complex study of the process of self-discovery and self-deception, in which Razumov's "Russianness" manifests itself clearly.

In the course of the walk, Razumov's commitment to being reasonable is overridden by a conflicting force: the fear of ignominy and destitution. Though he would like to believe that his acceptance of the ideology of absolutism is the result of independent, rational thought, it is in fact the result of an irrational (or, rather, non-rational) quasi-religious "conversion", similar to Ivanovitch's "conversion" to the doctrine of mystical feminism. Where Haldin uses biblical rhetoric to justify his revolutionary actions[4], Razumov resorts to metaphors derived from the organicist tradition, associated with political thinkers like Burke, to rationalize his act of betrayal.

> "Haldin means disruption," he thought to himself, beginning to walk again. "What is he with his indignation, with his talk of bondage--with his talk of God's justice?...Obscurantism is better than the light of incendiary torches. The seed germinates in the night. Out of the dark soil springs the perfect plant. But a volcanic eruption is sterile, the ruin of the fertile ground...." (34)

Haldin is the "withered member which must be cut off" (36). In the process of this rationalizing, the once silent man is now

> holding a discourse with himself with extraordinary abundance and facility. Generally his phrases came to him slowly, after a conscious and painstaking wooing. Some superior power had inspired him with a flow of masterly argument as certain converted sinners become overwhelmingly loquacious. (35)

Loquacity, as is invariably the case in Conrad's fictions, is an index of delusion, and is therefore not to be trusted.

Indeed, the ironic final words of the novel suggest that any "inspired" Russian is to be regarded sceptically.

In Razumov's discourse with himself "the terrain between speaker and hearer--even when the current of discourse is internalized, when 'I' speak to 'myself'...is unstable, full of mirage and pitfalls" (Steiner 1975, 229): Razumov's eloquence becomes a means of concealing the truth of his guilt, not from others, but from himself. Before Haldin's unexpected arrival in his room, Razumov has a clearly defined life-plan and a coherent personality. Now his personality is divided into a conscious self that speaks out against revolutionary action, and a conscience that remains silent and suppressed. In other words, at one level Razumov intends to get himself to believe that betraying Haldin is, both morally and politically, the right course of action (this is the level of articulated thought); at another (suppressed) level he believes that what he is doing is morally wrong, that he is motivated in part by self-preservation (this is the level that produces visions--he sees and walks across Haldin's phantom--and guilty gestures). Such a division in the self is revealed in the following passage:

> Then for some twenty yards or more all was blank. He wrapped his cloak closer round him. *He pulled his cap well forward over his eyes.*
>
> "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 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."
>
> *Razumov looked round from under his cap.*
>
> (37-38, italics mine)

Concealing the eyes again points to the complexity of his intentions--in this case, it is Razumov's intention not to recognize his intention to deceive himself. In his discussion of this passage, Tanner asks the following question: "Does some part of him recognize that a bond has been made--uninvited but ineradicable, not political but creatural? If so then no matter how justified by exigencies and convictions his intellectual decision is, a part will forever contest it" (1962, 206). For the moment Razumov successfully conceals that part of himself which will contest the morality and sincerity of his actions, and so he betrays Haldin.

From the moment of betrayal, Razumov cuts himself off from direct, uncompromised communication with others, and his life becomes a "comedy of errors, phantoms, and suspicions" (99). He commits himself, in short, to solitary confinement. When he meets General T-- he confronts the "merciless suspicion of despotism" (48), and realizes that he is the General's "helpless prey" (49). For fear of bringing harm to Ziemianitch (48) and of presenting himself in the wrong light, Razumov suppresses the fact that he went to the "big slum house" (48). Returning to his rooms and to Haldin he finds himself compromised once again. He engages in a long conversation with the revolutionary, the primary purpose of which is to ensure that he does not escape. In the conversation, he

reveals his anguish but conceals the one important fact: that he has betrayed Haldin. As is frequently the case in the novel, the reader, who knows what Haldin does not, is able to witness the strategies of the deceiver. Razumov does not intentionally communicate false information to Haldin--he says to himself: "I have said no word to him that was not strictly true. Not one word" (71)--but his conversation is a clear instance of deception by omission. In all his conversations from now until his final confessions, Razumov is forced to be on guard. On the one hand, he is misunderstood by his fellow students, who think of him as Haldin's heroic accomplice, and, on the other, he is both mistrusted and seen to be a useful "tool" (307) by the autocrats.

The complex relationships between concealment, betrayal, self-deception, isolation and a fragmented self are manifested in a significant vision Razumov has during his first interview with Mikulin: he sees "his own brain suffering on the rack--a long, pale figure drawn asunder horizontally with terrific force in the darkness of a vault, whose face he failed to see" (88). He fails to recognize that, by betraying Haldin, he has brought upon himself the "solitude of the racked victim" (88). Only in the climactic final scenes does he see through his self-deceptions when he discovers that the face of the racked victim is his own.

III

Before we turn to the two conversations to be discussed in detail--one between Razumov and the teacher (182-197), the other between Razumov and Sophia Antonovna (237-282)--some remarks about the nature of conversation in general need to be made. In what follows, three views of what is typical of verbal interaction between two or more people will be contrasted. The first view (which could be termed the ideal view) is outlined by Donoghue in *Ferocious Alphabets*.

> What happens in a conversation [he asks]? Each person describes or tries to make manifest his own experience: the other, listening, cannot share the experience, but he can perceive it, as if at a distance. Complete proximity is impossible. What makes a conversation memorable is the desire of each person to share experience with the other, giving and receiving. All that can be shared, strictly speaking, is the desire: it is impossible to reach the experience.
> (1984, 43)

As Donoghue suggests, even in the ideal situation of open, sincere communication, complete proximity between the two speakers is impossible. In Conrad, a conversation that comes closest to this ideal is that between Marlow and the men, particularly the frame-narrator, on board the *Nellie* in *Heart of Darkness*. In that extended talk, Marlow frequently alludes to the difficulty of making manifest his own experience through words (cf. 82-83 and 114-115, for instance), and to the gulf between himself and his listeners.

But, as is more often the case in Conrad's novels, dialogue between two people is seldom simply a matter of unhindered reciprocity. In *Coercion to Speak*, Fogel argues that the Conradian novel has a "very strong will to objectify and contemplate dialogue as constrained form, and the plurality of such dialogue forms in their social distribution" (1985, 17). According to Fogel, Conrad dramatizes conversations in which "giving and receiving"--the ideal of a voluntary and uncompromised exchange between people--is seldom, if ever, operative. Rather, dialogues are more frequently disguised monologues: either a person is forced to listen to another, or he is forced to speak to others. Fogel suggests that the "theme in his work is not 'lack of communication' but the recognition that communication itself is by nature more coercive and disproportionate than we think when we sentimentalize terms like *dialogue* and *communication*" (1985, 35). Of *Under Western Eyes* Fogel says that "Conrad amplifies James's 'question of our speech' into a steady political negation of the ideal of conversation" (1985, 184), and he adds that Razumov is "Conrad's purest image of the forced speaker and listener" (1985, 180).

Fogel's understanding of the nature of dialogue is applicable to many situations in the novel: Ivanovitch, Haldin, Razumov, General T-- and Mikulin all, at one time or another, force others either to speak or to listen. The clearest examples of this kind of dialogue are Razumov's interviews with Mikulin and General T--, which begin in Part I

and are continued in the first section of Part IV. The two functionaries within the autocratic system are "like two Olympians glancing at a worm" (306). The teacher, who has in mind a "Western" model of dialogue similar to Donoghue's, describes the situation in the following terms:

> To the morality of a Western reader an account of these meetings would wear perhaps the sinister character of old legendary tales where the Enemy of Mankind is represented holding subtly mendacious dialogues with some tempted soul. It is not my part to protest. Let me but remark that the Evil One, with his single passion of satanic pride for the only motive, is yet, on a larger, modern view, allowed to be not quite so black as he used to be painted. With what greater latitude, then, should we appraise the exact shade of mere mortal man, with his many passions and his miserable ingenuity in error, always dazzled by the base glitter of mixed motives, everlastingly betrayed by a short-sighted wisdom. (304-305)

Fogel takes power over others to be the central motive behind this kind of dialogue, and this seems to be true: Mikulin deceives Razumov in order to co-opt him into the Russian intelligence. "In a moment of great moral loneliness", Razumov is "allowed to feel that he [is] an object of interest to a small group of people of high position" (307-308). In fact, Mikulin simply sees "great possibilities of special usefulness in that uncommon young man" (307). Power over others is also the concealed motive behind many other dialogues in the novel: for example, in the conversation between Ivanovitch and Natalia described above. Yet there are some that could be more accurately described using Donoghue's model, for example, the exchange between Tekla and Natalia at

the Chateau Borel, and the conversations between the teacher and Natalia. These dialogues do not refute Fogel's thesis, but they do qualify his more general claims about dialogue in Conrad's fiction. For our purposes, though, neither the purely coercive nor the ideal model is sufficient. Rather, as the final sentence in the passage quoted above (304-305) indicates, a model that accounts adequately for "mere mortal man" is required.

As the teacher's comment suggests, the old myths concerning dialogues between supernatural beings and man--one thinks of Eve and Satan, or Faustus and Mephistopheles--no longer apply when the subject is man speaking to man. The intentions are more complex, and error and myopia are unavoidable. In both of the dialogues to be discussed, the "power relations" are not disproportional (as they are in the dialogues between Mikulin and Razumov), and yet both involve misunderstandings and elaborate strategies of deceit. A model that possibly makes more sense of these dialogues is suggested by Laing, Phillipson, and Lee in *Interpersonal Perception*.

They are concerned, as the title of their book indicates, with the interrelations between people in a social context. They describe the situation as follows:

> My field of experience is...filled not only by my direct view of myself...and the other..., but of what we shall call *meta*perspectives--*my view* of the *other's* (your, his, her, their) *view* of *me*. I may not actually be able to see myself as others see me, but I am constantly supposing them to be seeing me in particular ways, and I am constantly acting in the light of the actual

> or supposed attitudes, opinions, needs, and
> so on the other has in respect of me.
> (1966, 4)

In social situations, our knowledge of others (and of their views of us) is gained from a number of sources: their gestures, actions and dress all contribute to the sum of what we know. But it is from their talk that we derive most understanding. In the ideal conversation, my view of the other, and my view of the other's view of me, would be discussed openly. Any disagreements or misunderstandings would be resolved by open, sincere talk. When an element of concealment, deliberate deception or even unwitting error is introduced, the situation becomes extraordinarily complex. An exchange which illustrates some of these complexities is that between Razumov and Mikulin in Part 1 (85-99).

This important instance of a coercive dialogue will not be examined in detail here, but a brief discussion of it will serve to introduce the ideas of "perspective" and "metaperspective" that are essential to an understanding of the two conversations to be discussed in detail. Razumov is summoned to the Secretariat by Mikulin. Thinking that he is to go through the kind of exchange he had experienced previously, he prepares "his will and his intelligence to encounter General T--" (86). He is seriously troubled when he discovers he is to go before Mikulin, who is a very different man from the fanatical General. Mikulin is refined, intellectual, and he has the kind of self-possession that makes him inscrutable to others: "The mild gaze rested on

[Razumov], not curious, not inquisitive--certainly not suspicious--almost without expression" (86). He is, in short, an accomplished and sophisticated deceiver.

In confronting Mikulin, Razumov has two principal, and related, difficulties: first, he must conceal the fact of his having gone to seek out Ziemianitch, since this might link him to the revolutionaries; second, he is compelled to discover what Mikulin knows about him without incurring suspicion. The first difficulty occurs at the level of "perspective". He must ensure that Mikulin has no reason to doubt his view of him (that Razumov decries revolution and revolutionaries): "the main point was, not to be drawn into saying too much" (87). This is made more difficult, for Razumov, by his growing psychological distress. His actions (at one point he gets up to leave the room without knowing why) and his utterances become "involuntary" (87, 95, 96). Mikulin's style of interrogation, particularly his protracted silences, compound this problem. Throughout the exchange, Razumov struggles both to keep certain facts concealed and to hide his distress.

The second difficulty occurs at the level of "metaperspective". At the outset Razumov asks himself: "He had been called there for some reason. What reason?" (87). He never quite knows how much Mikulin knows about him, or quite what the purpose of the interview is. Being told that Haldin had remained silent during his interrogation does not solve the problem. He still needs to "make [Mikulin] show his hand" (95). But, for the moment, this proves to be impossible.

Mikulin remains impenetrable: where Razumov's voice dries out "very much against his will" (96), Mikulin does "not allow himself the slightest movement" (96). As Razumov soon discovers, deception and concealment are an achievement of the will. Mikulin is a master at the art of deceit, whereas Razumov is throughout the novel a relatively unsuccessful deceiver. His ineptitude, and the problems at the levels of "perspective" and "metaperspective", are clearly revealed in the two conversations to be discussed in detail.

Before we turn to the details of the conversation between the teacher and Razumov, a number of distinctions need to be made. These will clarify some of the complexities of the exchange. First, we need to distinguish between the teacher-as-character and the teacher-as-narrator, not simply in terms of temporal differences, but in terms of knowledge. The teacher himself alludes to this distinction. He comments on the strange impression he has of Razumov during their conversation, and then adds:

> Now, when I know how true it [his own impression] was, I can honestly affirm that this *was* the effect produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way--for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance. (183)

In the narrative past he was ignorant; in the narrative present he writes in the "fullness of [his] knowledge". In a sense this is true, though it would be more accurate to say that, in the narrative past, the teacher was not simply

ignorant of the truth about Razumov, he was deluded about him. As opposed to knowing nothing about Razumov, the teacher knew the wrong things about him. The source of his misconceptions, which he shares with Natalia, is Haldin. Haldin had sent a letter to his sister praising Razumov as one of those "unstained, lofty, and solitary existences" (169). By doing this he communicates his delusions to his sister, who unwittingly misinforms the teacher. In this way false descriptions are communicated from one person to another, thus contributing to the gradual accumulation of error. For both the teacher and Natalia this description has important implications: Haldin obviously respected Razumov, Razumov is a revolutionary, and he might be able to solve the mystery of his friend's arrest. As the teacher says in the narrative past: "I ventured to speak to you on that assumption [that Razumov was Haldin's comrade]. And I cannot be mistaken" (189). The irony of these words is evident to the teacher-as-narrator, and to the reader who knows the circumstances of Haldin's arrest.

Second, we need to distinguish between at least two readers of the novel--once again in terms of what they do and do not know. Those reading the novel for the first time know, as the teacher-as-character does not, that Razumov betrayed Haldin to the authorities. For them Razumov's "unrefreshed, motionless stare" (183)--the strange impression he has on the teacher--could be explained in terms of the guilt he feels at having betrayed Haldin and at having to face Natalia. For

those reading the novel for the second time this explanation no longer satisfies. These readers know the answer to Mikulin's question "Where to?" (99); they know, that is, that Razumov is a spy, and they know what he is thinking at the time of the conversation (he is intending to steal Natalia's soul; and he thinks of the teacher as the "devil himself" (360), egging him on to commit this "unpardonable sin" (360)). His barely concealed distress can, therefore, be explained more precisely.

By limiting the first reader's knowledge and by concealing important facts, the novel enacts one of its major preoccupations: it is *about* concealment and secrecy, and it itself contains secrets and strategies of concealment. The long gap between the end of Part I (Mikulin's unanswered question) and the beginning of Part IV is a calculated strategy of concealment, which creates suspense and which involves the reader in the kind of world he is reading about. Concealing the fact that Razumov is a spy is also a way of controlling the reader's response. The teacher alludes to this at the beginning of Part IV. It is out of sympathy for Razumov that he feels

> a strange reluctance to state baldly here what every reader has most likely already discovered himself. Such reluctance may appear absurd if it were not for the thought that because of the imperfection of language there is always something ungracious (and even disgraceful) in the exhibition of naked truth. (293)

This is an artistic justification for employing language in such a way as to avoid the ungracious exhibition of naked truth. To state baldly the fact that Razumov is a spy, would invite a simplistic, if not unsympathetic, response to his actions. The delay creates a tension which ensures a fuller imaginative response to the complexities of those actions than would otherwise be the case. In this case, then, concealment has positive consequences.

With these distinctions in mind we can turn to the conversation itself. Natalia prompts the teacher to engage Razumov in conversation for two reasons: she wants the teacher to inform Razumov of her need to find out about the circumstances surrounding her brother's arrest, and of her need to conceal from her mother the fact that he is in Geneva. Once Natalia has left them alone, the teacher, with this "mission" (183) in mind, says: "No...you cannot be expected to understand" (183). Razumov replies, "as if wickedly amused" (183): "But haven't you heard just now? I was thanked by that young lady for understanding so well" (183). The teacher finds himself unable to comprehend the full force of this response. He cannot define the exact tone of Razumov's retort, and therefore the precise intention behind the words. He asks himself: "Was there a hidden and inexplicable sneer in this retort? No. It was not that. It might have been resentment. Yes. But what had he to resent?" (183). Given the limitations of the teacher-as-character's knowledge, the full significance of Razumov's words eludes him: he is a vic-

tim of false information, and he thinks of Razumov in the terms outlined above. He is troubled by what Razumov says, by his manner, and by his appearance. His state of mind could be summed up as follows: if Razumov is a revolutionary and a friend of Haldin, why does he speak and act in this way? At times the younger man seems to insult him, and yet "the rustling effort of his speech [is] too painful to give real offence" (184). In the course of the dialogue, the teacher's confusion mounts progressively, and at the end Razumov remains an "enigmatical young man" (194). Yet the game of concealment is played not only by Razumov. In order to conceal his perplexity, the teacher assumes "a conversational, easy familiarity" (183) or a "light manner" (196). Though this might serve to ease the awkwardness of the exchange, it only increases the ever-widening gap between the two speakers.

Throughout the conversation, the teacher's beliefs about Razumov (that he is a revolutionary and a friend of Haldin) are put to the test. In other words, his difficulties occur, following Laing et al., at the level of perspective--his view of Razumov is undermined. Razumov's difficulties, however, occur at the level of metaperspective--he is uncertain about the teacher's view of him. On the whole he believes that the teacher thinks of him as a revolutionary, and to a large extent the teacher's conversation confirms this. Yet in some instances he doubts this metaperspective. At first Razumov thinks that the teacher intends to speak to him about women. He casts him in the role of a go-between in

a romantic novel, and assumes that the teacher sees him as a potential suitor for Natalia. He objects to this by saying "I am not a young man in a novel" (185-186), by which he means "I am not a conventional young man in romantic stories who is always in search of the ideal woman". The teacher manages to correct this misunderstanding. But later, when he mentions the report of Haldin's arrest in a newspaper (191) and the letter (190) from Haldin describing his lofty, unstained friend, Razumov becomes increasingly anxious. He has to find out, without disclosing his intent to do so, how much the teacher knows about the arrest and what Haldin has said about him. After a considerable silence he asks "abruptly" (196): "Could I see that precious article anywhere?" (196). For a moment the teacher is bewildered by this apparently random question, but he eventually answers--his answer is, not unexpectedly, unhelpful. At the end of the exchange, the teacher thinks that "there [is] something else under [Razumov's] scorn and impatience" (197), but, apart from the consideration that "it was the same thing which had kept him over a week...from coming near Miss Haldin" (197), he is unable to say what it is. Razumov is similarly unenlightened.

The transition from Part II to Part III involves a change from the teacher's perspective to Razumov's perspective. The reader discovers that Razumov does not know what the teacher's view of him is, and that he sees the teacher as a threat: "There is nothing, no one [he says to himself], too insignificant, too absurd to be disregarded....I must be

cautious" (200). For all the ostensible "communication" in this conversation, it ends with neither speaker having resolved any of his perplexities. Both are in fact more confused and wary at the end than they were at the outset.

The conversation between Razumov and the teacher is recorded from the perspective of the deceived; that between Razumov and Antonovna is seen from the deceiver's point of view. Sophia Antonovna is a very different person from the teacher of languages, and she poses a greater threat to Razumov. She is a passionate, trusted member of the revolutionary movement who possesses a natural authority and a formidably strong character. Razumov had met her in Zurich on his way to Geneva, where he had "judged her from his own private point of view, as being a distinct danger in his path" (242), and discovered that "he could not despise her as he despised all the others" (242). During the account of the conversation she is described as

> the old revolutionary hand, the respected, trusted, and influential Sophia Antonovna, *whose word had such a weight in the "active" section of every party.* 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 [Razumov] had to meet.
> (261, my italics)

This passage underscores the novel's concern with communication and trust: Antonovna is Razumov's "personal adversary", not simply because she is a *bona fide* revolutionary, but

because her word is trusted by some people, whereas his word is mistrusted by most.

In the dialogue, Antonovna, as her eyebrows indicate (cf.245, 247, 253), takes on the role of a Mephistophelean inquisitor or tester, one who is both subtle and perceptive. Most importantly, she mistrusts Razumov's words: "She had been looking at him all the time, not as a listener looks at one, but as if the words he chose to say were only of secondary interest" (242). Razumov is not only compelled to deceive her about his political allegiances, he must also conceal his growing psychological distress. She is aware that his bitterness towards revolutionaries and his sarcastic manner are part of a pose he assumes in order to conceal his anguish: "He was conscious of an immense lassitude under his effort to be sarcastic. And he could see that she had detected it with those steady, brilliant black eyes" (240). Ryle makes a general point about the nature of pretence, which clarifies Razumov's case. He argues that

> to describe someone as pretending is to say that he is playing a part, and to play a part is to play the part, normally, of someone who is not playing a part, but doing or being something ingenuously or naturally.
> (1963, 245)

This is an accurate description of what it is to play a part successfully: you play a part as if you are *not* playing a part. Seen in this way, Razumov is not a successful deceiver: he plays a part as if he *is* playing a part. This makes him suspect, particularly to Antonovna. She is constantly aware

of the gap between his words and his intentions, and of his efforts to conceal his distress, but she is not able to know with any certainty the reasons for this behaviour and so, to some extent, she is still in the dark.

Like the teacher of languages, Antonovna believes that Razumov is a revolutionary, the friend and accomplice of Haldin. This is her "perspective" on Razumov. She is the victim of both intentional deceit and the unwitting transmission of error. Mikulin stages an elaborate series of deceptions, the "ultimate success [of which depends] solely on the revolutionary self-delusion which credited Razumov with a mysterious complicity in the Haldin affair" (309). His strategies are successful, and the revolutionaries outside Russia are misinformed by their own agents in the country. Even so, Razumov is never quite able to believe that Antonovna believes him to be a revolutionary. As is the case in his conversation with the teacher, his perplexities occur at the level of metaperspective: "It was [he thinks] impossible to guess what she had in her mind" (244). His predicament is extremely hazardous: he must convince her that he is not "playing a part" (251), that of a revolutionary, but, in order to do so, he must speak to her without knowing what she knows about him. With every word uttered, then, he puts himself at risk. At times the strain of this constant uncertainty, of having to play verbal chess without being able to see his opponent's moves, becomes unbearable:

> 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. "It has taken me unawares." It seemed to him that if he only could allow himself to pant openly like a dog for a time this oppression would pass away. "I shall never be found prepared," he thought, with despair. (252)

In longing for the opportunity to express himself openly, Razumov is longing, as the comparison with the panting dog indicates, for a form of expression which is less than human. In this novel such direct expression is almost impossible for a man; where it is achieved the consequences are invariably tragic.

The climax of the conversation occurs when Antonovna questions Razumov about his activities on the day of the assassination. The import of this question reaches Razumov "like a bullet which strikes some time after the flash of the fired shot" (254). He feels that "his presence of mind [is] gone" (254) and all he can do by way of response is make "a sort of gurgling, grumpy sound" (254). Realizing that the shot "had been fired at random" (255), he regains a measure of self-possession, but from now on the conversation takes on the character of a "battle", in which he is required to deceive her in order to sustain a deception: "It was to be a plain struggle for self-preservation. And she was a dangerous adversary too" (255).

One of the consequences of Antonovna's question is that she discloses to Razumov the source of her information about his activities on the day of the assassination. It is a letter from one of the revolutionary agents in St. Petersburg.

Razumov now finds himself in a situation similar to, but more hazardous than, the one experienced in the conversation with the teacher. He must find out the contents of the letter in order to ascertain what she knows about him (her view of him), so that he can act and speak accordingly. Moreover, all this must be done without her being able to discern his intention. Needless to say, the information contained in the letter is false, and Razumov realizes that it could be used to his advantage: it is "a piece of sinister luck which had only to be accepted with proper caution" (258). At the risk of self-betrayal he manages to find out that the letter blames Ziemianitch for Haldin's arrest. The peasant driver, it is alleged, betrayed Haldin and then committed suicide out of remorse. Razumov meditates "in silent astonishment upon the queer verisimilitude of these inferences" (276). It gives him "the notion of the invincible nature of human error, a glimpse into the utmost depths of self-deception" (282). With this perfectly coherent but false account of the mysterious arrest, Razumov ought to feel perfectly safe: the principal fact about his past has been concealed. But he does not yet feel assured: "Has she told me everything that correspondent of hers has found out?" he asks (277). He has a "nervous longing in his fingers to tear some sort of confession out of her throat" (280). When Antonovna mentions, just before they part, that Ziemianitch believed he had been beaten by the devil, he thinks: "It was obvious that she did not make much of the story [about the devil]--unless, indeed, this was the

perfection of duplicity" (281). Even now, he cannot feel safe, the possibility of counter-deception can never be dismissed.

At times during the conversation, Razumov takes malicious delight in deceiving Antonovna:

> It gave him a feeling of triumphant pleasure to deceive her out of her own mouth. The epigrammatic saying that speech has been given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts came into his mind. (261)

But this enjoyment is contradicted by his "newborn desire of safety with its independence from that degrading method of direct lying which at times he [finds] it almost impossible to practice" (279-280). His longing for air manifests itself in the course of the conversation:

> The choking fumes of falsehood had taken him by the throat--the thought of being condemned to struggle on and on in that tainted atmosphere without the hope of ever renewing his strength by a breath of fresh air. (269)

This longing finally leads to action in the climax of the novel, when Razumov attempts to liberate himself from the necessity of compromised and guarded talk by confessing to Natalia and to the revolutionaries.

IV

Razumov's yearning for safety is satisfied for a moment immediately after he leaves Antonovna. He finds "precisely what he needed" (290) on an island, an "unfrequented tiny crumb of earth named after Jean Jacques

Rousseau" (290). For Razumov the island is simply a place to which he can retire to write his first spy report; for the reader it is a symbolic set piece. The statue of Rousseau is specifically described as the "effigy of the author of the *Social Contract*" (291) in order to highlight two central themes of the novel: the concern with the relationship between the individual and society, and the preoccupation with words. A brief passage from Grimsley's article on Rousseau in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* points to the significance of the scene. According to Grimsley, Rousseau argued that

> Man's participation in society must be consistent with his existence as a free and rational being....The institution of any genuine political society must be the result of a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who deliberately choose to form the type of society to which they will owe allegiance.... (1967, 222)

By placing Razumov--the individual who once hoped to shape his future in society by the "free use of his intelligence" (83)--on the island, Conrad clearly intends to undermine this idealistic conception of man's social existence. The novel presents a society in which individual choice is consistently denied, either by subtle forms of deception and persuasion, or by undisguised forms of coercion. Though it does not finally deny the importance of the individual's independence from the social forces that influence him, it does suggest that Rousseau's views are naive. Independence for the individual is, as we shall see, achieved only at great cost in the political world of *Under Western Eyes*. Moreover, in order to enable

free and undeceived choice, Rousseau's ideal society would require either that language never be used to mislead others or that the individual be incapable of being deceived, or both. For Rousseau, language would be the ideal form of the "social contract" entered into by the members of a particular society. Betrayal, in the form of lies or concealments, would be unknown. But, as the novel demonstrates, this expectation is (to say the least) unrealistic. What is more--and this is surely part of Conrad's intention in this scene--Rousseau's writings themselves, as represented by the *Social Contract*, are an instance of man's ability to project compelling but false views of the world. That is, the reference to Rousseau's words on the individual and society, in this context, is part of the novel's general critique of language.

On the island, Razumov's desire to escape the conditions of his life manifests itself more clearly. Fogel argues that as the novel unfolds "Razumov has a growing figurative or symbolic wish to be deaf--figurative, not physical" (1985, 189). In other words, Razumov wishes to escape the complex, and for him hazardous, business of human communication. This wish is fulfilled ephemerally on the island. He listens "with interest" to the "faintly accentuated murmurs of the current breaking against the point of the island" (291), and it occurs to him that

> this was about the only sound he could listen to innocently, and for his own pleasure, as it were. Yes, the sound of water, the voice of the wind--completely foreign to human passions. All the other sounds of this earth

> brought contamination to the solitude of a soul. (291)

The teacher adds fastidiously: "This was Mr. Razumov's feeling, the soul, of course, being his own, and the word being used not in the theological sense, but standing, as far as I can understand it, for that part of Mr. Razumov which was not his body, and more specially in danger from the fires of this earth" (291-292). Razumov's anguish is, as the teacher implies, wholly secular. His desire to escape the contaminating influence of compromised speech and writing is directly related to his desire to escape the historical and political circumstances of *this* world. The island scene is a turning point for Razumov, as it is there that his vague longings are defined and recognized. This recognition leads to the confessions which constitute the climax of the novel.

At the beginning of the second section of Part IV, the concern with trust and betrayal, and the related preoccupation with forms of concealment (till now manifested in the public and political world of the novel), are brought to bear in the sphere of personal relations. In order to ease her mother's "unhappy state" (322) after the news of her son's death, Natalia has decided not to tell her that Razumov is in Geneva. But far from easing the situation, this merely serves to aggravate it. Mrs. Haldin suspects her daughter of concealing something from her, and the bond of trust between them is broken. Natalia explains to the teacher:

> She is in a terrible state of agitation.... It's all my fault; I suppose *I cannot play a*

> *part*; I've never before hidden anything from mother.... But you know yourself the reason why I refrained from telling her at once of Mr. Razumov's arrival here.... *I am no actress. My own feelings being strongly engaged, I somehow...I don't know.* She noticed something in my manner. She thought I was concealing something from her.... Goodness knows what suspicions arose in her mind.
> (321-322, italics mine)

Most importantly, Natalia cannot play a part, she cannot deceive her mother even by omission, and the reason for this is that her "feelings" are "strongly engaged". In the final scenes of the novel "feelings"--particularly the love that binds personal relations--are a force that overrides the deceptions and concealments unavoidable in the public sphere. The possibility of a felt bond between two people, which is neither politically nor ideologically motivated, invites open and uncompromised communication.

In an attempt to resolve the conflict between mother and daughter, the teacher and Natalia try to find Razumov. They are unsuccessful, but in the process of trying to find him, Natalia is given an important piece of information by Antonovna. In one of the novel's last instances of the unwitting transmission of error, Antonovna tells her that Haldin was betrayed by Ziemianitch. She and the teacher return to the Haldins' home, only to discover that Razumov has arrived of his own accord, and that he is talking to Mrs. Haldin. They wait in the ante-room for him to finish.

What Razumov says to Mrs. Haldin while he is alone with her is not immediately clear, and the teacher is unreli-

able on this point. He says towards the end of the novel: "What tale, precisely, he told [Mrs. Haldin] cannot be known--at any rate, I do not know it..." (372). This is untrue. The teacher-as-character would not have known, but the teacher-as-narrator could discover what was said, since the reader is able to. First, the reader knows that Razumov goes to the Haldins' home intending to tell them the tale about Ziemianitch; and, second, when he comes out of the room in which he was speaking to Mrs. Haldin, he sees Natalia and asks himself: "Must I repeat that silly story now?" (341). The reader can assume, on this evidence, that he lied to Mrs. Haldin: he told her that her son was betrayed by Ziemianitch. But, as the teacher makes clear, he "failed to gain the confidence of Victor Haldin's mother" (372). He adds: "She had not believed him. Perhaps she could no longer believe any one, and consequently had nothing to say to any one--not even her daughter" (372). Mrs. Haldin's death is the result, at least in part, of the failure of trust and, consequently, of the failure of genuine communication. Significantly, she dies in isolation and silence.

For Razumov the "fifteen minutes with Mrs. Haldin [are] like the revenge of the unknown" (340). After he has told her the false story about her son's betrayal, he thinks triumphantly that "nothing could touch him now; in the eyes of the revolutionists there was now no shadow on his past" (340). He feels that the "phantom of Haldin [has] been indeed walked over" (340). But he underestimates the effect of the mother's

silence. It is the silence of maternal *feeling*, and he finds it alarming and incomprehensible.

> The silence which had fallen on his last words had lasted for five minutes or more. What did it mean? Before its incomprehensible character he became conscious of anger in his stern mood, the old anger against Haldin reawakened by the contemplation of Haldin's mother. And was it not something like enviousness which gripped his heart, as if of a privilege denied to him alone of all the men that had ever passed through this world? (340-341)

For Razumov, who has both abused and been abused by words, the truth about himself, particularly about his alienation from the heart's affections, is disclosed in a moment of silence. In this instance, silence is not the absence of communication, but rather communication unmediated, and in this case undistorted, by words. He recognizes that "it's myself whom I have given up to destruction" (341), and that the person on the rack, whose face he could not see, is himself. "Alarmed by [this] discovery" (341), he strides out of the room only to be confronted by Natalia.

The answer to the question "Must I repeat that silly story now?" (341), which Razumov asks himself when he sees Natalia, can only be given in the negative. As he discovers, she has already been misinformed by Antonovna--he need not deceive her by speaking, by causing her to believe something false, he can simply remain silent, thereby allowing her to continue believing what is false. But, as it turns out, he cannot bring himself to deceive her at all. The ensuing conversation between them is a study of delayed revelation, where

Razumov for the first time in the novel attempts to speak the whole truth to another. Natalia, who has been "utterly misled by her own enthusiastic interpretation of two lines in the letter of a visionary" (354), is "unable to see the truth struggling on his lips" (354). But she is not the only person who is "unable to see". The teacher-as-character believes that he is witnessing a moment of understanding between two lovers.

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

As we shall see, the teacher's interpretation of the scene is not entirely false: he is wrong about the nature of Razumov's confession, but right about what motivates it. As a man who has never experienced personal relationships of any kind--relations between people that are motivated by nothing other than mutual affection (like family relations, or love relations) and which depend on open, uncompromised communication--Razumov is at first unable to comprehend the feelings that motivate his confession. At this point he knows only that these feelings make it impossible for him to deceive Natalia. This leads to a typical Conradian paradox. As Berthoud puts it: "as her love for him makes his possession of her a possibility, so his love for her places her finally out of his reach" (1978, 182).

Till the moment of his confession, the only discourse that Razumov has--unblighted by deceptions, concealments, and compromise--is his written discourse with himself. This takes the form of a written journal, which contains his "mental and psychological self-confession [and] self-analysis" (308), and which is, according to the teacher, "the pitiful resource of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to" (308-309). But the journal is a self-enclosed form of discourse: it is an expression of Razumov's isolation, rather than a way out of it. At one point the teacher describes the document that forms the basis of his narrative:

> The very words I use in my narrative are written where their sincerity cannot be suspected. The record, which could not have been meant for any one's eyes but his own, was not, I think, the outcome of that strange impulse of indiscretion common to men who lead secret lives....Mr. Razumov looked at it, I suppose, as a man looks at himself in a mirror, with wonder, perhaps with anguish, with anger or despair. (214)

The mirror comparison is apt: like a man who looks at himself in a mirror, Razumov is estranged from genuine relations which demand that the other be *other*, not simply an image of the self. In other words, his talking to himself is sincere but futile. Only when he finally addresses Natalia in his journal, and sends it to her, does it become a way out of his solitary confinement.

Having told Natalia the truth about himself, and her brother's arrest, Razumov returns to his rooms in order to

write the final entry in his journal. At first "his expression is baffled by the novelty and the mysteriousness of that side of our emotional life to which his solitary existence had been a stranger" (357-358). Then he addresses her directly, saying: "You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace" (358). The recognition about himself that began while he was speaking to Antonovna, and that was clarified on the island, is completed by Natalia: "the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me" he writes (361). In all respects she is his opposite: he says of her during their final conversation:

> Of you he [Haldin] said that you had trustful eyes....It meant that there is in you no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion--nothing in your heart that could give you a conception of a living, acting, speaking lie, if ever it came in your way. (349)

As this suggests, her innocence is also a kind of blindness, but she is freed from this limitation at the end of the novel. The truth she draws out of him is clear: "In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely....It is through you that I came to feel this so deeply" (361). By betraying Haldin, Razumov betrays himself out of open and trusting relations with others, and out of direct, uncompromised communication. Though living *in* the world, he is cut off *from* it by the constraints placed upon his speech and actions. His confessions--the first is personal, the second (to the revolutionaries) is public and

political--are an attempt to "escape from the prison of lies" (363) that his life has become.

Both Natalia and Razumov achieve, in different ways, a form of personal independence in the world in which they find themselves. For Natalia this is achieved through suffering, but the effect it has on her life is positive. At their final meeting, the teacher observes:

> She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled at that something grave and measured in her voice, in her movements, in her manner. It was the perfection of collected independence. The strength of her nature had come to surface because the obscure depths had been stirred. (373)

She no longer requires the sanction of others in order to act, as she had needed her brother's assurances. Though she does not abandon her Utopian vision of the future, the reader feels that her idealism is now comparatively clear-eyed. She says of herself at the end: "My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now" (376).

Razumov's independence is not as positive as this. He says himself in the last sentence of his journal: "I am independent--and therefore perdition is my lot" (362). Natalia's independence can be positively defined as the freedom *to* act; the independence Razumov achieves can be defined only negatively as freedom *from* coercion, deception, and self-deception. His decision to confess to the revolutionaries, when he has for the first time been made safe by the false story about Haldin's betrayal, is a deliberate act of the will. He need not have confessed (in fact it was in his own

best interests not to), but in doing so he makes an independent moral stand which liberates him from external constraint. His final words to the revolutionaries are memorable:

> I beg you to observe...that I had only to hold my tongue. To-day, of all days since I came amongst you, I was made safe, and to-day I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse--independent of every single human being on this earth. (368)

When silence is a form of deception by omission, Razumov discovers that he must speak, and, as Antonovna says, "There's character in such a discovery" (380). But to make a moral declaration in an immoral society is to invite disaster. As punishment for speaking the truth, Razumov is physically cut off from the world--the revolutionist Nikita bursts his eardrums. The point of his deafness at the end of the novel is to underscore the difference between physical and moral isolation. In the past Razumov could hear what others said, but he could not communicate with them. If "a man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love" (14), then, because others never knew the truth about him, Razumov had no "real life". Now he is physically isolated from others, but he is able to communicate without concealment, deception or compromise. As a man who "has ideas" (379) he is respected by the revolutionaries, and as a cripple he has the natural love of Tekla. Antonovna declares that, though he is deaf and crippled, "he talks well" (379). In a novel which presents so many characters who talk

"badly", and who do not lead "real lives", that is an achievement.

CONCLUSION

The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.
Oscar Wilde[1]

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore Conrad's attitudes to language as reflected in four novels. More often than not, these novels present language in a critical light: words are shown to foster and even to produce the pervasive unrealities in human existence. They are in many instances "the great foes of reality". Yet certain uses of language are sanctioned by the novels. For example, the technical language of the seamen, because it is used for specific and determinate purposes in particular contexts, is considered reliable. The value of Marlow's narratives is also endorsed. Marlow is presented as a responsible speaker who is conscious of the limits and the dangers of the word. While Conrad's novels cannot be reduced to Marlow's narratives, the argument has been that in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* Marlow's non-fictional narratives serve as a model for the larger fictions. That is, Conrad's fictions, since they are in part *about* the story-teller and his relation to his society, contain a metafictional element. By way of conclusion, then, I shall examine Conrad's understanding of the nature and function of his own words, as reflected, in the first instance, in the metafictional element of the novels, but, more particu-

larly, as set out in the preface to *A Personal Record*, *A Personal Record* itself, and the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*.

Conrad begins the preface to *A Personal Record* by discussing the power of words:

> you cannot fail to see the power of mere words; such words as Glory, for instance, or Pity....Shouted with perseverance, with ardour, with conviction, these two by their sound alone have set whole nations in motion and upheaved the dry, hard ground on which rests our whole social fabric....Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world. (xi-xii)

He adds: "What a dream for a writer!" (xii). Yet he goes on to acknowledge that, in the case of the writer of fiction, this is a dream that ought not to become a reality. These are "words of extraordinary potency" uttered with the "accents of irresistible heroism" (xii), which are "more fit for a moralist than for an artist" (xiii). The kind of language referred to is akin to that of the parrot-like Russians (*UWE*, 4), which is appreciated simply as sound without sense, or to that of a convinced and self-deceived demagogue like Kurtz. Used in this way, by someone like Kurtz, words might inspire action and "set whole nations in motion", but they can potentially also be used to deceive both the speaker (or writer) and his audience. For an artist like Conrad, words ought to be used to overcome deception in all its forms, and to achieve this they must be constrained in a number of ways.

To be worth anything the words of the artist must conform to the demands of truth and sincerity.

> Truth of a modest sort I can promise you, and also sincerity. That complete, praiseworthy sincerity which, while it delivers one into the hands of one's enemies, is as likely as not to embroil one with one's friends.
> (*APR*, xiii)

Truth, or the avoidance of misrepresentation, demands that the artist be faithful to his subject; sincerity, or the avoidance of concealment, demands that he be faithful to his audience. The writer must commit himself absolutely to these principles, but he must also ensure that his commitment to these principles leaves his words free from compromise, whether it is the compromise of fear (in the case of his enemies) or of love (in the case of his friends). He cannot succeed as an artist if his utterance becomes like that of Razumov, Conrad's most compromised communicator.

But it is not simply the absence of compromise that ensures the reliability of the writer's words, since the power inherent in words needs to be constrained: first, by the reality of the writer's time; second, by the writer's self-restraint; and third, by the writer's values and motives.

In the first instance, the writer's words must be constrained by the reality of his time. For Conrad, the writer of fiction is no mere fabulist. At one point he claims that "imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life" (*APR*, 25). In this context, the word "imagination" describes a creative energy which, unlike the faculty of "invention", is engaged in the factuality of the world. The stories Jim reads, and the stories of the imperialist roman-

cers, are merely acts of *invention* that employ words to project fantasies. They embody human desires, wishes and longings but fail to set them in the context of the actual world. Conrad's fictions are also centrally concerned with human desire, but, as acts of *imagination*, they never fail to present the tragic disparity between the world as man desires it to be and the world as it is. Later, Conrad describes (somewhat inconsistently) the "first virtue" of the novelist as the "exact understanding of the limits traced by the reality of his time to the play of his invention" (*APR*, 95). Where the fabulist's words might evade the "reality of his time", the novelist's are constrained by it.

In the second instance, to control the inherent power of words the artist requires self-restraint. "The danger lies," he says, "in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose--as, in fact, not good enough for his insistent emotion" (*APR*, xviii). The clearest example of such a writer in Conrad's fiction is Kurtz. As a writer and as a speaker, Kurtz exploits the "unbounded power of eloquence--of words--of burning noble words" (*Heart of Darkness*, 118), and succeeds only in deceiving himself and others. He becomes the "victim of his own exaggeration" (*APR*, xviii). Most importantly, he lacks a moral quality that is essential for the writer of fiction, namely integrity. For Conrad, "taking care of his own integrity" is the artist's "clear duty" (*APR*,

xviii). What he means by this is clarified in the following description, which is particularly applicable to Kurtz, of the interior world of the writer's imagination:

> In that interior world where his thought and his emotions go seeking for the experience of imagined adventures, there are no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstance or dread of opinion to keep him within bounds. Who then is going to say Nay to his temptations if not his conscience?
>
> (xviii)

Integrity implies "self-imposed restraint", without which the artist, and any unwary reader, can become the victim of words.

The self-restraint of the individual writer, whose own integrity is the only guard against the many forms of deception and self-deception, is considered again later. Conrad refers to the words "strictly sober" (*APR*, 111) which appeared on his mariner's certificates, and applies them to his career as a writer:

> I will make bold to say that neither at sea nor ashore have I ever lost the sense of responsibility. There is more than one sort of intoxication. Even before the most seductive reveries I have remained mindful of that sobriety of interior life, that asceticism of sentiment, in which alone the naked form of truth, such as one conceives it, such as one feels it, can be rendered without shame....I have tried to be a sober worker all my life--all my two lives.
>
> (111-112)

This distinguishes the writer of fiction from the many intoxicated dreamers, like Jim and Haldin, who people Conrad's novels. Conrad goes on to say that his sobriety is motivated partly by "an instinctive horror of losing my sense of full self-possession", but also by his "artistic conviction" (112).

In other words, self-imposed sobriety is a necessary, though perhaps not sufficient, condition for excellence in both art and life. The intoxicated writer, like any intoxicated man, is invariably deceived or self-deceived, or both.

In the third instance, to ensure that his words are reliable the artist must take care of his motives. In a sense, if the motives are what they should be, then the writer will be in touch with the reality of his time and he will have the self-restraint required of him. The key word in Conrad's account of the writer's motives is *piety*: it describes a core value that enables and sanctions the artist's activities. Reflecting on his motivation to write, Conrad observes that "it is a sentiment akin to piety which prompted me to render in words assembled with conscientious care the memory of things far distant and of men who had lived" (*APR*, 10). He uses the term later in a way that underscores the relationship between the writer of fiction and a yarn-spinner like Marlow: "An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety towards all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experience" (*APR*, 25). Where Conrad is the writer of tales, Marlow is the man reviewing his own experience. Both undertake their tasks in the "spirit of piety". This similarity confirms those already suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, where it was argued that, in terms of their function, Marlow's narratives resemble Conrad's

novels. Now it is possible to add that both tellers are similarly motivated.

What Conrad means by "piety" has some bearing on his notion of the novelist as the responsible speaker or writer. The word carries with it the notion of responsibility or duty (to the subject, the "men who had lived" (*APR*, 10)), and a sense of secular devotion. It suggests that the novelist's attitude to experience is both willed and disinterested.

His attitude is *willed* in the sense that he deliberately focuses on selected aspects of his material. If he is motivated by piety, his selection of detail will not be simply arbitrary or whimsical; it will be constrained by the world as it exists independently of his particular purposes. This act of selection, far from distorting or blurring the subject, can potentially (if the motive is right) create "a form of imagined life clearer than reality" (*APR*, 15). For this reason Conrad believed that a novel's "accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history" (15).

As one whose response to life is *disinterested*, the artist can be distinguished from three other kinds of men, all of whom fail, for one reason or another, to apprehend the "real". First, there are the "megalomaniacs who rest uneasy under the crown of their unbounded conceit" (*APR*, 91), those who are too concerned with power to perceive the truth; second, there are the "ambitious minds who, always looking forward to some aim of aggrandisement, can spare no time for a

detached, impersonal glance upon themselves" (*APR*, 92); finally, there is the "much larger band of the totally unimaginative,...those unfortunate beings in whose empty and unseeing gaze (as a great French writer has put it) 'the whole universe vanishes into blank nothingness'" (*APR*, 92). All three kinds of men, according to Conrad, fail to comprehend the "true task of us men whose day is short on this earth, the abode of conflicting opinions"--the task of "unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of the living universe reflected in our consciousness..." (*APR*, 92). In one way or another, their accounts of human experience would be unreliable: they are either too concerned with power and their own special interests, or too inattentive. Things are different with the artist, whose task is sanctioned by the "spirit of piety" (*APR*, 25) in which it is undertaken. It is the artist's piety that makes possible an "undesigning response to life as it is" (Berthoud 1984, 178), and that lends credibility to his words.

What has been said so far shows sufficiently clearly that Conrad's understanding of the nature and function of art is radically at odds with Wilde's. Conrad did not believe, as Wilde at times tended to believe, that the artist is an "unconditional dreamer" (*APR*, 111). For Conrad, the artist has responsibilities to himself, to others and to his project. But there is one final difference between Wilde and Conrad which is perhaps the most significant. In the epigraph to this chapter, Wilde argues that *lying* is the proper aim of

art. His use of the word is admittedly idiosyncratic and provocative (Wilde means something like "fabrication"), but if it is taken in the usual sense ("speaking or writing with the intention to deceive"), then his views are a direct contradiction of those held by Conrad. In Conrad's view, a work of fiction cannot be justified without recourse to some adequate, non-propositional conception of truth, and, for this reason, the intentions of the worthy artist are directly opposed to those of the deceiver.

As many of Conrad's novels show, words can indeed be the "great foes of reality". In various ways, man's command of language is shown to be used for the purposes of misrepresentation, deception, and concealment. Words are used to evade, to obscure, or to defer the truth. The artist's words, however, are an attempt to bring the truth out of hiding. For Conrad, the "prose artist of fiction...has his place amongst kings, demagogues, priests, charlatans...ants, scientists ...dandies, microbes and constellations...", because his fictions are "after all...but truth...dragged out of a well and clothed in the painted robe of imaged phrases" (*APR*, 93). Since it is "only in men's imagination [that] every truth [can] find an effective and undeniable existence" (*APR*, 25), the artist is required to "bear true testimony" (*APR*, 92).

So conceived, the novelist can be distinguished, in terms of his intentions, from the many abusers of language who appear in Conrad's novels. The only figure who approximates to this idea of the novelist is Marlow, who attempts, through

words, to disclose unacknowledged, and frequently undesirable, aspects of experience to his listeners. Like Marlow, the novelist does not set out "to write only in order to reprove mankind for what it is [as a satirist might], or praise it for what it is not [as a panegyrist], or--generally--to teach it how to behave [as a moralist]" (*APR*, xv); being "neither quarrelsome, nor a flatterer, nor a sage" (*APR*, xv) he does none of these things. In answer to those who "demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed" (*The Nigger*, x), Conrad makes his famous declaration:

> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you *see*. (*The Nigger*, x)

If his intentions are realized, the reader might find "that glimpse of truth for which [he had] forgotten to ask" (*The Nigger*, x). Seen in this way, the novelist's words are agents of discernment, not of delusion. Like the words Stevens's Large Red Man reads aloud to the "ghosts that returned to earth to hear his phrases" (1972, 320), his words present

> The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law:
> *Poesis, poesis*, the literal characters, the vatic lines,
>
> Which in those ears and in those thin, those spended hearts,
> Took on color, took on shape and the size of things as they are
> And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked.
> (1972, 321)

ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1](p.1) William Wordsworth, "Essays upon Epitaphs, III", *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols., ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 2:84.

Chapter 1

[1](p.7) Virginia Woolf, "Joseph Conrad", *Collected Essays*, 4 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 1:304

[2](p.11) In his introduction to the World's Classics edition, Berthoud gives a more detailed account of the significance of Donkin's nationalist rhetoric and its relation to the ideas of solidarity presented in the story (1984, xii-xiv).

[3](p.36) A question I have not raised in the discussion concerns Conrad's complex and experimental use of narrators in the story. Levenson has one of the most interesting accounts of the issues involved: he sees the first-person narrator, who is a spokesman for the crew in all but the final paragraphs of the story, as a representative of an emergent modernist stance which is contrasted with the more traditional, detached third-person narrative stance used in most of the tale (1984, 1-36). The ambivalence, as Levenson argues, has to do with the general problem of authority, and with the specifically artistic problem of presenting the inner life of characters. For our purposes, the inconsistency of the narrative situation further underscores the idea that there is no clear or obvious place for the teller in the world presented by the novel. His position is questioned by another, at times more authoritative, perspective on the events (see for instance the opening paragraph of Chapter 4).

Chapter 2

[1](p.37) Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holly Stevens (1967; New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 60.

[2](p.41) T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 209.

[3](p.46) Berthoud does go on to make this point about the difference between Marlow and the other colonists, but not in the same context. He argues that "one of the essential differences between Marlow and his fellow-Europeans in Africa is that he can recognize the unreality of the notions that have been arbitrarily imported into the country, whereas they cannot or will not" (1978, 46-47).

Chapter 3

[1](p.74) Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, 3 vols. so far, ed. F.R. Karl and L. Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-), 2:215.

[2](p.75) The relevant extracts form the letter are quoted in: Robert Kimbrough, ed., *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 233-234.

[3](p.76) In his critical book on *Lord Jim*, Batchelor gives a fuller account of the literary influences on the novel. In addition to the contemporary influences, like Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, he compares *Lord Jim* with *Hamlet* and Calderon's *La Vida es Sueño* (1988, 36-40 and 160-185).

[4](p.83) In fact, Conrad had great difficulty deciding how to present his novel to the public. Batchelor observes that "Conrad's great novel does not know where it belongs generically" (1988, 121). He goes on to describe Conrad's vacillation: "The serial publication was called *Lord Jim: A Sketch*, the first British edition was called *Lord Jim: A Tale*, the first American edition was called *Lord Jim: A Romance*, and the first Canadian edition was called *Lord Jim: A Tale of the Sea*" (1988, 121). That Conrad thought of calling it *Lord Jim: A Romance*, indicates that the genre of romance influenced his conception of the story. That he dropped this classification, suggests that he felt it to be misleading. *Lord Jim* is not a pure or unself-conscious romance. As I argue in the chapter, it both uses and questions the conventions of the genre.

Chapter 4

[1](p.126) William Wordsworth, "Essays upon Epitaphs, III", *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols., ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 2:85.

[2](p.127) This is not to say that the truth ought necessarily to be told on all occasions. For instance, Marlow reexamines his unusually categorical interpretation of the principle of veracity at the end of *Heart of Darkness*, when he discovers that in certain contexts the truth *ought not* to be told. The issues associated with the question of the "justifiable lie" are discussed in some detail by Bok in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (1978).

[3](p.133) The complex notion of "cynicism", which is important for the novel as a whole, is discussed more fully by Berthoud (1978, 164-165).

[4](p.146) Purdy mistakenly attributes the religious language used by both Haldin and Razumov to the teacher. He argues as follows: "...the source of the fantasy is our narrator, the elderly professor. After all, these are his metaphors, not Haldin's or Razumov's. He insists that he has only translated Razumov's record (pp.24,86,192), but he translates it into the phrases, rhythms, and values of the English Bible" (1984, 76). There is no reasonable evidence for this claim. Purdy underplays the complexity of the novel's narrative situation. For instance, in Haldin's case, the teacher is translating Razumov's account of what Haldin said. There is no way of telling at what level the "filtering" occurs. Does Razumov insert the biblical metaphors or does the teacher? Since there is no possible evidence to support either view, the reader must assume that both Razumov and the teacher are giving reasonably faithful accounts of what was actually said. Therefore, in Haldin's case the religious rhetoric is his own.

Conclusion

[1](p.180) Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", *Intentions* (1891; London: Methuen, 1909), 54.

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