THE MOTIF OF INITIATION IN SELECTED WORKS BY JOSEPH CONRAD

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the archetypal theme of initiation in selected texts by Joseph Conrad. The Introduction first surveys critical attention to initiatory motifs in Conrad with the objective of demonstrating the need for an approach to the topic informed by a more formal and theorized understanding of initiation. It then offers a prima facie case for the centrality of the idea of initiation in Conrad's oeuvre, based on references culled from a range of the author's writings.

Chapter One seeks to contextualise initiation by providing a history of anthropological research into and theorisations of the rite, proceeding to a description of its typical structure and functions. A detailed account is given of the most widely accepted model of initiation, Arnold van Gennep's tripartite schema. Moving on to Conrad's writing, Chapter Two draws on both his fiction and more personal writings in order to provide a provisional account of the writer's own understanding of initiation and its importance, and to offer some explanation of why Conrad should have been prompted to accord the motif such prominence in his work.

Conrad's presentation and (impliedly) his understanding of initiation was never entirely consistent and underwent some change in the course of his writing career. The critical assessment of "Typhoon" in Chapter Three depicts Conrad's more optimistic conception of initiation as a rite benefitting both society, by promoting solidarity, and the individual, by advancing self-knowledge. Chapter Four introduces, via analyses of the novellas "Youth" and "The Shadow Line", that variation on the motif of initiation which is

more typical of its manifestation in Conrad: the failure of individuals to complete their cycles of initiation.

Chapter Five identifies those characteristics of initiation which appear to be determinative in the representations of incomplete initiation in Conrad's work. Initiation seems to play out approximately seven paradoxes; the impact of some of these is examined through analysis of the initiatory ordeals of the main protagonists in The Secret Agent. Integral to this discussion is an attempt to demonstrate the vital role which initiation plays in the healthy maintenance not only of social order but also of faith and life itself.

The Conclusion summarises the more important findings of the study and indicates some directions for further, related research.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in parenthical reference:

AF	Almayer's Folly
OI	An Outcast of the Islands
HD	Heart of Darkness
NN	The Nigger of the Narcissus
Y	"Youth"
"Freya"	"Freya of the Seven Isles"
OP	"An Outpost of Progress"
SL	"The Shadow Line"
LJ	Lord Jim
UWE	Under Western Eyes
SA	The Secret Agent
N	Nostromo
V	Victory
R	The Rescue
MS	The Mirror of the Sea

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, critical assessments of initiation in Conrad's texts understand the term to denote an awakening ordeal with the potential to promote maturation.[1] For example, discussing the issues of betrayal and identity in Conrad's fiction, Robert Hampson interprets George's initiation in The Arrow of Gold as "an educative process presented in terms of a young man's expectations and the subsequent undermining of these expectations by his experience" (1992:263); and C.B. Cox describes "The Shadow Line" as a study of "moral initiation", in which the journey from Bangkok to Singapore symbolises the captain-initiate's passage to maturity (1974:150). I would suggest that accounts of this sort, while not necessarily inaccurate, might acquire greater rigour through the incorporation into the interpretative process of a more formal, more sophisticated and more systematic understanding of initiation. By ignoring certain basic concepts of the initiatory rite as postulated by anthropologists -- for instance, that the ability to tell one's own story is a sign of maturation (Hovet 1990:23), or that metamorphosis is characterised by death and rebirth symbolism (Loganbill 1972:19) -- critics have tended to produce partial or superficial and sometimes misleading analyses.[2] My purpose in this thesis is therefore to essay a thorough-going analysis of the theme of initiation in selected texts by Conrad, employing concepts of initiation informed by almost a century of anthropological research. Although qualified and modified by more recent findings, the paradigm formulated by the Belgian ethnographer Arnold van Gennep remains the dominant descriptive model for the rite of initiation, and will constitute the basic point of reference for the analyses which follow. Yet since the initiatory ordeals of most of Conrad's characters depart in various ways from van Gennep's model, a major objective of the thesis is to establish the significance of these differences.

In his "Initiation" essay, Conrad reveals a basic understanding of initiation as a disillusioning experience effecting a radical change of perspective, augmenting self-knowledge and bestowing a public identity or status. This autobiographical piece traces the joint initiations of an "untried" ship, the Hyperion, and an untested sailor, ostensibly Conrad himself. In his description of the ship as "very far yet from having a name" because she is "untried, ignorant of the ways of the sea" and "has nothing to vouch for her soundness", Conrad establishes a critical equation between successful initiation and the assumption of an identity (MS:132). The logic of the rite is that by overcoming initiatory trials (of endurance, commitment, etc.), one exhibits one's fitness to enter a community and to assume a public status. Just as important, however, is Conrad's recollection of his own "initiation into the sea's implacable hate" and subsequent change in outlook: "Already I looked with other eyes upon the sea. . . . My conception of its magnanimous greatness was gone" (MS:145;148). Conrad's comments on his ordeal -- the captain's smile "completed the cycle of my initiation" (147); "it was not for [the captain] to discern upon me the marks of my recent initiation. And yet I was not exactly the same youngster" (148) -- indicate that he recognised, albeit informally and intuitively, the cyclical structure of initiation as well as the subtlety of the change it effects. Conrad himself thus provides a cue for the concerns of this study -- the patterns assumed by initiatory ordeals in his fiction and the nature of the changes they generate -- and his "Initiation" essay may be regarded as his summary account of a concept which he intermittently expanded upon throughout his writing career.[3]

I must stress that my purpose is not to prove that Conrad deploys an anthropological model of initiation with deliberate intent. On the contrary, it seems that the motif arises

"unconsciously" out of one of his predominant concerns: the process of human change or development.[4] Several prominent anthropologists and psychologists maintain that the advent of any sort of change (in an individual's environment, routine, circumstances, etc.) activates the initiatory paradigm.[5] In this light, the idea of initiation is inherent in Conrad's concern with the ways in which individuals change and mature (or fail to do so) in response to the new or unfamiliar. The proposition finds support in the fact that Conrad tends to focus on events preceding and following the moment of transition, decentering what is conventionally recognised as the climax.[6] As Leo Gurko remarks, "It is less what happens during a crisis than what happens between them that occupies Conrad" (1965:56). Significantly, Conrad's treatment of initiation accords with van Gennep's model, visualizing change taking place through a process consisting of three stages which are of equal importance.

The idea for this thesis originated in my recognition of Conrad's consistent (if sometimes ambivalent) intolerance for the state of innocence and ignorance. In his writings he repeatedly dramatises the destruction of "illusion" by subjecting his protagonists to initiatory ordeals.[7] Why? What function does initiation perform that Conrad seems to have considered so vital? Other questions follow: Do the initiatory ordeals of his characters exhibit a pattern, and if so, what is its significance? Does it change over time and are there significant variations within it? Many of Conrad's protagonists fail to complete their initiations because they are not reincorporated into the community: what are their (or the author's) motives for this resistance, and what are its repercussions?

A decisive factor in my choice of subject was my discovery that the theme of initiation has received very little critical attention, and that much of that little seems

inadequate. Critics have tended to rely upon a popular and imprecise sense of initiation without pausing to probe the anthropological roots and logic of the process. They have also tended to limit their analyses to obvious cases of initiation (such as in The Arrow of Gold, which Conrad describes in his Author's Note (ix) as an account of an initiation into "the life of passion"), neglecting more subtle or anomalous instances, such as the failure to complete the initiatory cycle in social incorporation (e.g. Under Western Eyes) or the dangers of deferment of initiation (e.g."Tomorrow"). Since "perfect" examples of initiation are few and far between in Conrad's texts, there seems all the more reason for critical attention to be focused on representations of aberrational cases.

A focus on initiation may also shed some light on certain aspects of Conrad's narrative technique and thematic concerns. Conrad's use of obliquities in narration, such as "delayed decoding" (Watts 1994:10-11), analepsis and unreliable narrators, has been ascribed variously to his intention to subvert "easy recourse to the idea" (Winner 1988:1), to alert us to the subjectivity of reality (Bohlman 1991:xv), and to involve the reader more intimately in the moral situation (Moser 1966:42). I believe a case can be made for relating these methods of "indirection" to Conrad's interest in the initiatory motif. Initiation is an ordeal which cannot be presented explicitly or directly: it is mysterious and paradoxical and actually occurs in the unconscious; its "total extent can never be made visible, [its] image is present but [its] actual experience is withheld" (Henderson 1990:5). Modern anthropologists like Geertz and Henderson point out that extensive research has failed to demystify the rite (1968:108; 1990:59). Conrad's whole narrative style similarly seems to express an attempt to speak the unspeakable, to suggest that the mysteries of the human heart remain beyond the capture of language and representation: a project of "saying the

unsayable" (Vorse 1903:280), of evincing "a thoughtful mastery of things beyond the grasp of thought" (Fernandez 1929:534).

Again, if looked at from the perspective of initiation, Conrad's obsessive fascination with outcasts or characters living on the periphery of society may be more than just a "writing out" of his personal experience of alienation. It seems also to indicate his understanding of the dynamics and origin of moral discoveries and creative capacities, which in the paradigm of initiation are situated in the pre-liminal and liminal zones of utter isolation.

A second theme which initiation can illuminate is the paradox of the successful failure: as the narrator comments in Victory, "it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources" (68). In an early review of Conrad, Grace Willard observed that at the crux of Conrad's texts is the contradiction that failure to live up to the world's standards is not tantamount to failure as such (1924:162). (The case of Lord Jim is perhaps the prototype here.) More recently, in a discussion of the influence of existential ideas on Conrad, Adam Gillon has maintained that for Conrad the failure and seeming futility of one's efforts are not necessarily synonymous with defeat. On the contrary, defeat may be an affirmation of the ideal value of things (1960:242). One way of understanding this apparent contradiction lies through the recognition that two fundamentally dissimilar paradigms are often conflated in the interpretation of Conrad's fiction: the heroic and the initiatory.

In his classic work Man and His Symbols (1964), Carl Jung maintains that "one striking difference" separates the "hero myth" from the initiation rite: their respective goals are entirely different from one another (1983:124). The hero is a representative of society

who is prepared to risk death to fulfil a publicly visible aspiration. His or her reputation takes priority over his/her welfare or the morality of the deed.[8] An initiand, in contrast, is required to give up "wilful ambition" (Jung 1983:124) and embark on a voyage based on "temporary withdrawal from outer actions, especially heroic adventures" (Campbell 1993:42). His or her final objective is an increase in self-knowledge.[9] Although the initiand may obtain public acclaim, and invariably receives a new position in society, these are more in the nature of side effects than the products of conscious striving.[10]

Although it is argued, rightly, that Conrad rejects the heroic paradigm as presented by Carlyle (Hunter 1985:96), some critics still evaluate his characters according to its values, and few attempts have been made to formulate a frame of reference in terms of which the actions of Conradian characters may be construed as "successful" (compare Moser 1966:16-20).[11] By re-assessing Conrad's characters in terms of the initiatory and not the heroic paradigm, their motives and their creator's view of them may acquire a new significance and integrity.

The first chapter of this study comprises, necessarily, an exposition of the concept and characteristics of initiation as these are understood within the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and psychology. Van Gennep's tripartite paradigm of initiation is described in detail. Chapter Two brings the ritual of initiation into relation with Conrad's work, citing instances from both his correspondence and his published work in which he makes explicit reference to the subject. It also offers a speculative summary of the factors which possibly influenced Conrad's interest in it. Chapter Three provides a template for the application of theories about initiation canvassed in the first chapter by analysing the trials of Jukes and Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon". Although both protagonists complete the

cycle of initiation successfully, the nature of their ordeals is different: Jukes's experience exemplifies the traditional paradigm of initiation whereas Captain MacWhirr's conforms to the "modern" pattern.

The critical assessments of "Youth" and "The Shadow Line" which comprise Chapter Four pursue an enquiry into the typical departures from van Gennep's initiatory model to be found in Conrad. Neither Marlow nor the young captain manages in their different ways to complete their initiation through reincorporation into the social group. That they and the majority of Conrad's characters fail to complete their initiation cycles, remaining on the threshold of society after their ordeals, raises a number of related issues. To what extent can this be attributed to problems involved in the process of reintegration? Did Conrad doubt the necessity or viability of complete reintegration after initiation? Did he perceive reincorporation as difficult for, or unfavourable to, the newly-initiated, and therefore seek to dramatise their failure or unwillingness to reintegrate?

Chapter Five analyses the paradoxes inherent in initiation and considers their explanatory value in relation to cases of incomplete or anomalous initiation. It goes on to offer a reading of The Secret Agent in terms of the novel's representation of a society in which initiation seems radically devalued and inevitably abortive, as evidenced in the incomplete initiations of Verloc, Stevie and Winnie.

The theme of initiation is hardly a new one: it has informed literature, art and, for that matter, life, from the very beginning. But while the common assumption that "all novels are essentially about the passage from innocence to experience, about discovering the reality that underlies experience" may be true (Lodge 1992:179), this by no means renders the motif of initiation too obvious to merit further scrutiny. Dean Loganbill in his

paper, "Literature as Initiation", is quite right to say: "Once the initiatory pattern of literature has been established one may still ask, `What difference does it make?' The answer to this lies in the implications of initiation itself" (1972:21). My intention in this thesis, then, is to demonstrate to its reader the difference(s) which initiation makes by exploring its manifestations and effects in a selection of writings by Joseph Conrad.

NOTES

1. A few critics have investigated the possibility of Conrad's art being influenced by his personal experience of initiation. Paul Bruss discusses at length the hypothesis that Conrad's initiations into the traditions of the sea influenced the content and form of his fiction (1979:19-22). In his article entitled "Acts of Initiation in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Island", Daniel Schwarz argues persuasively that Conrad's first novels were initiatory pilgrimages, in which he, feeling "like an adolescent in relation to his peers", sought an "approving authority figure" (1977:77). Schwarz concludes his analysis by making an equation between the process of creation and initiation: "The early novels are acts of initiation for the artistic self Conrad was trying to create and the casting off of the seaman identity with which he had achieved success" (1977:96).

2. A common error, for instance, pertains to the criteria which indicate the protagonist's metamorphosis through initiation: if no obvious "marks of initiation" are apparent directly after the event, it is deemed that he or she is unchanged. But since initiation is first and foremost a transition of the unconscious, the initiand rarely exhibits signs of metamorphosis immediately after the ordeal. Jocelyn Baines, for instance, concludes that Captain MacWhirr emerges from his ordeal in "Typhoon" unchanged because "at the end of the story there is no suggestion that he has learnt anything from his experience or been deeply affected by it" (1960:258).

3. In Heart of Darkness, Conrad presents initiation as an instrument of orientation which can save an individual who has moved to a new environment from being demoralised by his or her alien surroundings. The first explorer, Conrad explains, who is not "initiated into the mysteries" of his or her alien environment ends up living "in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is detestable. And it has a fascination too. The fascination of the abominable" (HD:50).

4. Allan Hunter, for instance, declares that Conrad's characters "undergo re-incarnations bringing them to a new evolutionary level on eahc occasion" (1985:139).

5. The Belgian ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, who first attempted a formal definition of initiation, maintains that this rite is activated by virtually any situation of change: passages from one status or age-group to another, and physical journeys (1969:3).
According to Jung, the change from one psychic state to another, which always entails conflict between the ego and the self, activates the archetypal pattern of initiation (1983:120).

6. One needs only to consider texts such as The Secret Agent and Heart of Darkness, in which the central event -- Stevie's death and Marlow's meeting with Kurtz -- is never fully or directly described, for confirmation of this view.

7. "A Pathetic Tale", which recounts the mugging of an old count by an Italian nobleman, springs to mind immediately. This "abominable adventure" (281) upsets the count, whose "whole existence" had been "undisturbed by startling events" (270), and consequently he loses all trust in life and resigns himself to death (288). Again, in "Typhoon", Captain MacWhirr, who is introduced as a man who has "wandered innocently over the waters" his entire life (20), and seems destined to remain "ignorant of life to the last" (ibid.), is rescued from this fate by the catastrophic advent of the typhoon.

8. Nostromo, who cares "only to be well spoken of" (N:208), and who aims to "make the silver issue the most famous . . . affair of [his] life" (N:222), is a typical hero.

9. Axel Heyst, who withdraws from society to his island in the hope that there he will not be subjected to heroic trials, is a liminar as he achieves self-knowledge through his confrontation with Morrison, Lena and Jones. Heyst's final remark to Davidson evinces this development: "`Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learnt while young to hope, to love -- and to put its trust in life!'" (V:326).

10. The tendency to conflate heroic and initiatory ordeals, Joseph Henderson remarks, arises from the characteristic of submissionm, which the initiand is required to display, as this characteristic contains a strong element of the archetypal "trial and strength" carried over from the heroic paradigm (1990:43).

11. Gary Geddes, for instance, describes Heyst as an "odd hero", who, far from fulfilling the archetypal tasks of the hero, effectively inverts them by aligning himself with the villain, Jones, and deserting the distressed damsel, Lena (1980:71).

CHAPTER ONE

The Concept of Initiation: History and Theory

> The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another. This progression is accompanied by special acts. Semi-civilised people envelop these moves in ceremony, since for them no act is free of the sacred.
> -- Arnold van Gennep (1969:3)

I

It is widely agreed that the modern study of the phenomenon of initiation has its origins in Arnold van Gennep's seminal Rites of Passage (1909). Yet van Gennep's method of exposition -- empirical and encyclopedic rather than conceptual -- prevents his findings from serving as the basis for a definitive description of initiation. As Paul Roscoe has recently observed, van Gennep only "characterised the ritual loosely in terms of its goal, function and structure" (1995:226), and nowhere attempted a formal definition. This definitional gap is filled neither by Joseph Henderson's impressively concise formulation -- "the archetypal pattern by which the psyche, whether in individuals or in groups of people, is enabled to make a transition from one stage of development to another" (1990:4) -- nor by Mircea Eliade's influential identification of the essentially religious function of initiation. The fact is that the content and meaning of initiation are not fixed, but vary widely according to the context in which the phenomenon occurs.[1] Initiation simply cannot be reduced to a single set of circumstances (cf. Norbeck et al. 1962:482).

Nancy Lutkehaus notes that the capacity of the ritual to "do" several things at once may have inhibited a categorical description of it (1995:3). For instance, when the initiand is subjected to severe physical and mental torture the resultant pain serves a variety of purposes simultaneously: it subjugates the profane and liberates the spiritual, it activates the

unconscious and represses the conscious mind, and it terminates the natural, acultural condition of the initiand in preparation for his or her adoption of a cultural mode. Even a minimalist, denotative definition of initiation, as something "which presupposes initiation into something" (Roscoe) is potentially ambiguous, in that the term serves to designate both the body of social rites which supervise a person's transition and the fact of that person's introduction into a group (Roscoe 1995:230). Of course, as both Frank Young and Raymond Jamous have pointed out -- and as is the case with any cultural incidence -- the meaning of a rite is ultimately determined by the theoretical and methodological approach of the researcher (Young 1965:6; Jamous 1992:52). In short, the meaning of initiation is a subjective matter to the extent that it is constructed by the motives and tools of analysis deployed by the researcher.

Since initiation seems to be a term resistant to singular or abstract definition, it may prove more useful to approach the rite by way of an investigation into the conditions and circumstances in which it typically occurs. The aim of this chapter, then, is to develop a working definition of initiation, first, by briefly situating it in an historical framework; secondly, by identifying and analysing the circumstances conducive to its occurrence; and thirdly, by giving consideration to the diverse functions of initiation in the public and private spheres. Once the rudimentary concepts of the rite have been thus established, the tripartite form in which initiation typically occurs will be described in some detail.

Initiation is a relatively new object of "scientific" knowledge, as the ceremonies and behavioral patterns which characterise the ritual were only formally named in the 1860s (Roscoe 1995:119). [The rite itself, of course, is ancient: as far as the written historical

record is concerned, Walter Burkert has located evidence indicating that initiation was being performed in the sixth century BC (1987:11)]. Modern anthropological research seems to date from the publication of Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough in 1890. Frazer's text was widely adopted by anthropologists and psychologists of the early twentieth century as a reliable source on initiation. But because his research model was outmoded (as a "master narrative", it failed to take account of cultural relativism and, perhaps more importantly, did not substantiate its theorization with legitimate fieldwork [see Herdt 1982:x]), Frazer was rapidly superseded by the Belgian ethnographer, Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep's explication of initiation as a "rite of passage" (the coinage is his), which exhibits a threefold structure, soon became authoritative. Indeed, some anthropologists maintain that his schema continues to inform current investigation in the field (e.g. De Coppet 1992:16), even that "its merits have not diminished" with the passage of time (Herdt 1982:xiv).

Van Gennep's classification of initiation as a ritual facilitating an individual's smooth transition from one status or age to another, moreover a ritual which simultaneously serves to maintain social stability during this disruptive period, has stimulated research in several cognate areas of enquiry. While many theorists were directly stimulated by van Gennep's model to explore the social function of initiation, in particular as it is manifest in puberty rites, Victor Turner points out that van Gennep's paradigm is not restricted to ritual theory, and can and has been used to explain important aspects of extra-ritual social and psychological processes (1974:13).

Broadly speaking, anthropologists have reacted to van Gennep's theory in one of two ways: either they have focused on the implications of initiation as a ritual, investigating

its specific nature and function; or they have focused on the role of initiation within society, particularly with regard to the rites of puberty.

Theorists who have adopted as foundational van Gennep's classification of initiation as a ritual, have devised theories regarding the nature, function and structure of ritual. For instance, in his essay "Ritual and Office in Tribal Society", Meyer Fortes is prompted by van Gennep's classification of initiation as a ritual to address what he sees as the apparent indispensability of ritual in demarcating social change (Gluckman 1962:55). In a similar vein, Max Gluckman, in his celebrated paper "Les Rites de Passage", is inspired by van Gennep's theory to attempt to clarify the term "ritual" and in the process to pinpoint the precise nature of its relationship to society (1962:2ff.). Gluckman concludes his argument with the hypothesis that whereas ritual is necessary in traditional society to demarcate roles and facilitate transition, in modern societies it is redundant and therefore non-existent, since these functions are performed by secular institutions. In thus allowing that initiation is pertinent to traditional societies only, Gluckman adds an important qualification to van Gennep's model (1962:36-39). More recently, David Parkin, in his article examining the impact of ritual both on the body and space, is influenced by van Gennep's classification of initiation as both a ritual and a rite of passage, to equate the two terms (1992:16). All rituals, he maintains, are essentially rites of passage which conform with the tripartite structure as specified by van Gennep (ibid.).

A second broad category of theorists has been inspired by van Gennep to explore the role of initiation as a mechanism perpetuating the social structure. The anthropologists Eliot Chapple and Carleton Coon, echo van Gennep in their insistence that the cardinal function of initiation is to perpetuate social equilibrium, that is, to ensure that the

potentially disruptive element of an individual undergoing transition does not disturb the stability of the community nor undermine its unity (1942:484ff.). Similarly, Radcliffe-Brown declares that initiation serves to maintain the balance of the social system at all times by impressing upon new members the primacy of upholding the ethical codes and social values of the community they are joining (1956:146). In short, the initiand is taught to conform.

Theorists who have investigated initiation as a puberty rite include, among many others, Ruth Benedict, John Whiting and Frank Young. It is noteworthy that van Gennep himself opposed this equation vigorously, on the ground that puberty rites affix to the novice an artificial state of maturity which often does not reflect his or her actual development (1969:68). Puberty rites thus offer a rehearsal for initiation proper, which for van Gennep consists in the supervising and celebrating of change which is already evident. Yet in spite of van Gennep's emphatic denial of the correlation, Ruth Benedict, in Patterns of Culture (1934), proposes that initiation be studied not as a rite of passage but as a puberty rite bestowing adulthood and facilitating status transformation (Heredt 1982:ixv). Benedict substantiates her approach by arguing that initiation fulfils the same function as adolescent rites in effecting a transition from childhood to adulthood. Whiting corroborates Benedict by stating that initiation implies "social transition", and the relinquishing of one identity for another (1961:85-95).

One theorist whose objections to van Gennep's differentiation of puberty and initiation rites are quite explicit is Frank Young. In his book Initiation Ceremonies (1965), Young directly contradicts van Gennep by stressing that "a strong association exists between age and the dramatic recognition of sex roles" (1965:13). Young dismisses van

Gennep's argument that the converse is true by debunking his substantiating examples -- "the occasional instances when married women and old men undergo initiation along with adolescents" -- as invalid (1965:13). Yet the cogency of Young's analyses, the extent to which they conform to his own criteria of universality (1965:7), is moot. For he deduces his conclusions almost exclusively from the study of male initiation rites, as the following statement implies: "if the initiation ceremony of a given society has declined, male solidarity should also have declined" (1965:128). Thus, to the extent that it makes presumptions regarding the function of initiation for society as a whole without giving due consideration to its female half, Young's research is deficient and misleading. As Roscoe remarks, "the common assumption that initiation is a kind of socialization can be comfortably sustained when the focus is solely on male rites, but it becomes problematic when extended to female initiation" (1995:222).

As far as the latter is concerned, Lutkehaus has pointed out how the wave of feminist activism which occurred in the United States and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s sparked interest in female initiation (1995:17-19). Research has focused on the symbolic import of female initiations and the role which these rites play in legitimising and sustaining the social structure. Generally speaking, female rites register and channel sexual maturity, offer premarital guidance and reinforce the social hierarchy (Lutkehaus 1995:21). The most notorious form of initiation ritual among females is the sexual mutilation of female circumcision or clitoridectomy. This is not at all analogous with male circumcision because it is designed to ensure sexual purity rather than to test maturity or strength (Lutkehaus 1995:29). Thomas Huffman has observed that female puberty rites practised among the Venda of Northern Transvaal include mandatory attendance at a premarital

school (1984:599), while among the Navajo people the older women undertake the "moulding" of the younger females, reshaping them in terms of the (patriarchal) ethical standards of the society (Eliade 1987:236). Again, studies of the Rauto of New Britain have revealed that rites marking female sexuality simultaneously underscore the culture's worldview and disseminate its ethical and aesthetic tone (Lutekhaus 1995:xvii). But whereas male initiation rites are conducted in groups and reinforce the strong sociopolitical solidarity of the males, female initiation is performed on an individual level (according to the time of menarche), hinging on an isolation which reflects and perpetuates a structure in which females are not part of any broad-based unit (Eliade 1987:234).

To return to our historical survey of initiation, it must be remarked that the countenance of this rite has undergone significant change since it was first formally recognised in the 1860s. Perhaps one of the most conspicuous changes is that initiation has in many societies world-wide, under the impact of modernisation, lost its original status as a central, public ritual ensuring the perpetuation of the value system and the cohesion of the corporate body. In contemporary Western societies, the situation may be described in two ways: either, as Joseph Campbell declares, initiation still takes place but on an exclusively private level (1993:104); or, as Gluckman maintains, it no longer takes place at all (1962:37). Factors contributing to the decline of initiation have been the subject of much debate. Broadly speaking, two aspects have been singled out: the evolution of the social structure, and a radical change in its system of values.

Max Gluckman attributes the decline in initiation to a radical change in the structure of society, which has deprived the rite of its cardinal function. Originally, Gluckman explains, initiation served to facilitate peaceful transitions between different roles and ages,

and to define new roles. However, when society became more secular, these demarcations and transitions were segregated and sustained by social relations (1962:26-27). Consequently, secular institutions superseded initiation and rendered the ritual redundant.

Solon Kimball (1969:xviii) and Daryll Forde (1962:31) corroborate Gluckman by attributing the decline in initiation to the modernisation of society. Rapid urbanization together with technological and industrial development have been accompanied by increasing secularisation. This last development has entailed a proportionate decline in the importance of sacred ceremonies, initiation being one of them (Kimball 1969:xviii).

Barbara Myerhoff et al. agree that the secularisation and diffusion of society have effectively removed initiation from the public arena. Contemporary societies, Myerhoff continues, have become complex, fragmented and disorientating. Consequently, they no longer provide individuals with the stable infrastructure and the guidance necessary for them to effect significant changes. Bereft of this support system, individuals have had no choice but to enact private rituals and undergo change alone. The emergence of individualism is a manifestation of their adaptation (1987:385).

A number of theorists, after van Gennep, link the decline in initiation to a loss of belief in religion. They base their observations on the tenet that initiation is fundamentally a spiritualising rite which effects a transition from the profane to the sanctified mode. Hence Eliade attributes the deposition of initiation to the decline of religious belief and the fact that modern sociality is a de-sacralised realm (1958:128). The tendency of the modern individual to empty "death" -- which in terms of initiation designates the symbolic annihilation of the temporal existence prior to rebirth -- of its religious meaning and assimilate it to Nothing, cancels out its ontological and transformative functions, and is also

responsible for the discontinuation of initiation (Eliade 1960:12). Campbell would concur: to him, "the modern, enlightened individual", after having "rationalised out of existence" all the transcendentals, both benign and malign, finds him- or herself bereft of the guidance, in the form of "symbols and spiritual exercises" which a religious heritage ordinarily affords (1993:104). Myerhoff, on the other hand, opposes this view in arguing that ritual is not synonymous with religion, and that the decline in initiation cannot therefore necessarily be identified with that of religion (1987:385). I would tend to agree: the equation of religion and initiation seems no longer tenable when one considers both that initiation has evolved bases other than that of its original religious one, and that theorists have hypothesised grounds for it other than the religious. Carl Jung, for instance, has identified the unconscious as the foundation of initiation (1983:156) -- of which more, below. Generally speaking, it would seem that anthropologists who study initiation in terms of its structure and function, such as Gluckman (1962:37), deny that it exists in modern societies, while psychologists, psychoanalysts and a handful of anthropologists hold to an opposing view that initiation has survived in modern day communities, having evolved from its original forms (Jung 1983:156).

Gluckman acknowledges that "specialised ceremonies of initiation", like the initiation of apprentices in industry and scholars at school, are still practised in contemporary society (1962:37). But these ceremonies, he insists, are adulterated forms of initiation which cannot be defined as rites of passage because they fail to commemorate a change in status or mystically to transform an individual (ibid.). The ritual of initiation as described by van Gennep is simply "incompatible " with the structure of modern life (ibid.). Yet by stressing that what is absent from present-day societies is initiation (only) as

conceived by van Gennep, Gluckman leads us to infer that he does not eliminate the possibility of the ritual prevailing in other forms not specified by van Gennep.

Myerhoff maintains that the secularisation and diffusion of society have succeeded in removing initiation from the public arena. Subsequently, our most significant transitions are carried out either alone, publicly unrecognised, or in institutions. Since modern life is characterised by a greater number and range of crises and changes than previously -- such as surgery and divorce -- individuals are almost constantly faced with traumatic experiences. A dire consequence of the loss of initiation as a public ritual, Myerhoff remarks, is an escalation of mental illness (1987:385). Although initiation has declined, it seems that the need for supervised metamorphosis has not dwindled. The lack of guidance has precipitated alienation and maladjustment (Kimball 1969: xviii). Gluckman would disagree, arguing that society has evolved to the extent that such crises are mediated by secular institutions, such as psychotherapy and social work (1962:45).

Myerhoff regards Emile Durkheim's classic work Suicide as a thesis on the indispensability of initiation to life. Durkheim cites "a lack of social connection" and "feelings of unacknowledged existence and anomaly" as recurrent motivations for suicide (1987:385), suggesting a link between increased cases of suicide and the deposition of initiation (ibid.). It is significant that Durkheim recorded the highest suicide rates in religious groups which stress personal responsibility without corporate support, like protestant sects (Turner 19674:200).

Psychologists and anthropologists who claim that initiation prevails in modern-day societies seem to have reached consensus that the rite has survived in the imagination and the unconscious, and that it is manifest in the forms of dreams, hallucinations and art. In

other words, although the individual may not be conscious of his or her initiation, the process is nevertheless occurring on a vital, psychological plane (Eliade 1958:67).

Perhaps the most obvious form in which initiation is discernible is dreams. Jung maintains that "initiatory events" are played out endlessly in the "dreams and fantasies of modern people". And although the individual may be baffled by these symbols at first, he or she will eventually grasp their import, for however much the specific form of initiation may fluctuate, its psychic meaning remains constant (Jung 1983:140;156). Campbell (1993:104) and Henderson (1990:13-14) agree with Jung in declaring that through his or her dreams, the individual is able to encounter and overcome perils which are part of his or her daily life. In other words, the individual is able to relieve certain repressed content in his or her experience through initiatory scenarios in dreams.

Thus although the modern world, as Eliade remarks, is commonly described as devoid of "any meaningful rites of initiation", these rites do nevertheless still exist, if not in their original form (1958:ix). Once initiation lost its "ritual reality", Eliade explains, it became sublimated and continued to survive in a number of guises (1958:132-133). Acts involving structured participation in which the individual momentarily transcends time and space, such as folk customs and games, constitute one form in which initiation persists. A second (and for Eliade, the most important) mode in which initiation has endured, is art (1958:127-8). In Eliade's estimation, the initiatory motif has been preserved by the plastic and visual arts, especially cinema, although literature is ultimately the most influential form in which this rite manifests itself. The spontaneous and widespread acceptance of texts with initiatory themes, like James Joyce's Ulysses or T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland", is clear evidence, for Eliade, of the fact that individuals are still receptive to and capable of being

influenced by these initiatory scenarios (1958:134).

But the survival of initiation in the unconscious is not restricted to dreams. At critical periods in our lives, Jung declares, the archetype of initiation is activated to provide a meaningful transition (1983:123) This pattern is embedded in the unconscious and is triggered by the conflict between the ego and the self with the express purpose of dissipating this tension. In other words, initiation functions to promote individuation and self-integration by resolving the conflicting claims between the ego and the self. A point which Jung emphasises is that this conflict (and hence initiation) is not confined to "the psychology of youth". On the contrary, he stresses, as one of the inevitable features of human life, it may well become more dominant in the time from early maturity to late middle age (1983:139:123).

A few theorists maintain that initiation has not lost its social function entirely as is widely assumed, for its paradigm informs such public ceremonies as weddings. Partial equivalents of this "primitive" form of initiation, Young concedes, are coming-of-age celebrations, like the Jewish Bar Mitzva and the coming out of debutantes (1965:9). More recent research insists that initiation rites have become secularised and now mark ceremonies of social transformation, such as award ceremonies and adult fraternity societies (Goetz 1986:845). N. van Rensburg, in his article on initiation ceremonies in South African universities, has observed that the orientation of the first years by the senior students conforms to a large extent to the rites of initiation (1990:506).[2]

Initiation continues to be a feature in some present-day "traditional" communities. For instance, Laura Zimmer reports that the Gende people of the Madang Province, New Guinea, have adopted a card game, called "last card", as a functional equivalent of their

traditional initiation ceremonies (1987:122). In a fascinating study of the Okiek people in Kenya, Corinne Kratz comes up with evidence to suggest that initiation still plays a central role in this community. The females, Kratz explains, who are directly responsible for the economic survival of the community (based on honey), began to threaten the political supremacy of the males, as their control over the productive potential gave them increasing sense of independence. Subsequently, the men added to the initiation ceremonies speeches and songs which emphasised the controlling link between men and property (1993:49-56).

To recapitulate, substantial numbers of theorists concur that the deposition of initiation from its public status has not been synonymous with its complete disappearance from the arena of human existence. Instead, the initiatory paradigm has managed to survive through sublimation in the psyche of the individual, emerging in the modes of art, dreams, games and customs; and vestiges of this rite are still evident in the ceremonies of social transformation. In short, initiation no longer comprises both a physical and psychic test but an essentially psychological phenomenon.

II

From this sketchy outline of the `fate' of initiation in modern times, we now turn to an adumbration of some of the scenarios which typically generate initiation, and thereafter to a consideration of the functions which this rite performs for the benefit of society and the individual.

Confrontation with the unknown, the unforeseen or the incommensurable, almost invariably triggers the initiatory scenario. This alien element can be figured as a person[3] of

a different race, sex or creed, or an event or circumstance which eludes understanding and thus is a source of chaos. The occasion of conflict between the demands of the ego and the self is a second event which triggers the paradigm. Jung maintains that the pattern of initiation is activated by this tension and functions to resolve it (1983:123). M. Vizedom extends Jung's thesis to the social sphere by declaring that initiation arises to address the tension between the changes inherent in the individual and the relative stability of society (1976:19). Finally, natural changes in the individual, such as the onset of puberty, as well as in the environment, such as ecological and climactic variation, also induce initiation (Turner 1968:577).

We can conclude then that an encounter with the Other, embodied in the self (physical change, ego-self clash), in the form of another person, or figured in a situation, triggers the initiatory paradigm. The roles of initiation appear thus to be fundamentally dyadic: public and visible, on the one hand, private and invisible on the other. This distinction has prompted the polarisation of anthropological and theoretical analyses of initiation into sociogenic as opposed to psychogenic interpretations (Young 1965:2).[4]

The sociogenic approach defines initiation from the perspective of society as a body of public rites and lore which functions to perpetuate the corporate body by supervising the indoctrination of new members and instilling in them a complementary appreciation of their social responsibilities; in short, a sense of community. The psychogenic approach, in contrast, foregrounds individual psychology as both the cause and effect of initiation. In this case, initiation is a "functional or expressive response to universal psychodynamic tendencies" (Roscoe 1995:222). It is noteworthy that although each theory regards its own concerns as cardinal, neither one denies the validity of the other. Hence the sociogenic

approach recognises the existence of individual psychological reactions by establishing taboos in an attempt to monitor potentially disruptive behaviour (Turner 1974:13-14; Radcliffe-Brown 1948:276). Similarly, the psychogenic theory demonstrates its awareness that the individual undergoing initiation is conscious of his or her role as a social representative, by adverting to the ways in which the violation of certain social norms are encouraged (Lutkehaus 1995:221).

The sociogenic theory of initiation is rooted in van Gennep's classification of initiation in terms of its social function: to reduce the disruptive effects of change on society and the individual; its social goal: to facilitate change from one magico-religious or secular group to another; and its structure: a tripartite sequential rite (Roscoe 1995:226). The pivotal function of initiation in this perspective is the induction via indoctrination of new group members, such as the youth and immigrants (Radcliffe-Brown 1948:278).[5] This process, which is both protracted and complicated,[6] aims not only to ensure the novice's successful transition but also to maintain the stability of the society of which he or she is to become a member.

The ordeal begins with the novice's separation from his or her familiar environment, a process which promotes susceptibility to change and new knowledge. The trial is continued by the initiation masters, who dramatise the origin myths and sacred history to the novice, and simultaneously subject him or her to physical and psychic tortures. The purpose of these lustrations is to impress the new knowledge on the novice via the association with extreme pain. Thus initiands of the Wiradjuri tribe of Australia are told that the tooth extraction which they are subjected to has been devised by the supreme god, Baimae, and carried out by his harbinger, Daramulun. Thereafter, every time the individual

feels the gap left by this tooth, he or she will remember this god (Eliade 1958:13).

Once the novice is familiar with the prerogatives of his or her new role in the community and has received the spiritual indoctrination appropriate to his or her status (puberty initiands are merely introduced to the sacred while shaman initiands specialise in it), he or she is technically equipped to enter society. I use the word "technically" to indicate that although the novice has all the knowledge necessary for him or her to function efficiently in society, this in itself does not guarantee success. In fact, it is imperative that the initiation masters first instil in the initiand a sense of kinship and an awareness of the responsibilities of his or her position in society. With this objective in mind, they re-interpret the initiand's personal trial in general, symbolic terms, thereby giving him or her a lever through which to transcend the experience. This procedure is essential to ensure the incorporation of the individual, for if he or she perceives the ordeal as unique, he or she will resist subordinating his or her individuality to the collective body (Henderson 1990:57; Herdt 1982:101). Finally, the initiation masters inculcate in the novice a sense of duty and social responsibility which will influence him or her to live according to the community's maxims (van Rensburg 1990:496). Radcliffe-Brown summarises the significance of this last event: "We say that partaking in the performance of rites serves to cultivate in the individual sentiments on whose existence the social order itself depends" (1956:146).

Although the socialisation[7] and integration of the novice are officially what is at stake here, the survival of the society, as suggested earlier, is of equal import (Chapple & Coon 1942:484ff). An individual in the process of change has the potential to disrupt society as he or she is effectively undergoing a crisis. Initiation attempts to defuse the initiand's chaotic potential by relocating him or her to the margins of society, enveloping

his or her transition in public ceremonies, and circumscribing his or her behaviour through taboos (Young 1965:37).

After socialisation, the most important functions of initiation are social screening and social recognition (Burkert 1987:8). The first process takes the form of a test, during which the novice is subjected to a series of dramatic ordeals which attempt to ascertain his or her resilience and fitness to enter society, with the objective of assuring society of his or her credibility and normality (Young 1965:11; van Rensburg 1990:496).

As a rite of social recognition, initiation publicly incorporates the novice into society and grants him or her a social status. In other words, it dramatises his or her assumption of a new social role. Furthermore, this rite of public inclusion dispels any fears the novice may have of not belonging to society. In Eliade's estimation, the initiation ceremony was first contrived to allay humankind's natural existential fears (1958:123). The ritual, he explains, annuls the initiand's anxieties regarding solitude and death by integrating him or her into a group and re-interpreting death as a transitory, positive process, which ends in rebirth (1960:235). The abrogation of such rituals of public inclusion in modern times has deprived individuals of a vital source of guidance: "There can be no question: the psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their inheritance, we must face alone" (Campbell 1993:104).

To recapitulate, the sociogenic theory of initiation sees the rite as a social mechanism which serves to indoctrinate and register new members, ensure the survival of the corporate body and annul feelings of alienation. Yet initiation, as Young observes, does not function solely in the social realm as the "entrance requirement to a group" or to perpetuate society (1965:21); it also promotes individual maturation, on a more or less

invisible level, as the proponents of psychogenic theorisations of initiation maintain.

The pre-eminent function of initiation on the personal level is self-revelation or self-recognition: "the presentation of the self to the self in both private and public senses" (Harris 1978:146). Through initiation the individual is encouraged to cultivate an autonomous identity, assert his or her rights (Hovet 1990:19) and develop all the aspects of his or her self: spiritual, sexual and cognitive. Prior to this transition, though, the individual must submit to the obliteration of his or her obsolete self.

From a Jungian perspective, self-discovery is merely a secondary function of initiation, the springboard, as it were, for its primary function: the fostering of individuation and self-integration (1983:156). By transplanting the novice from a familiar to an unknown environment, initiation promotes self-exploration, compelling the individual to use her or his latent resources. The process of relocation also furthers self-integration, since during the liminal stage the individual's repressed or recessive characteristics emerge and he or she is thus able to explore his or her entire self (Turner 1974:257).

Besides advancing the novice psychologically, initiation fosters his or her spiritual and sexual development. Both these latter aspects of the self, Eliade declares (contrary to the common assumption that they are natural attributes), require careful, conscious construction: the human being in his or her natural state is profane, asexual, and unenlightened (1958:106-7). As van Gennep maintained, a spiritual identity can only be obtained by passing from the profane to the sanctified state through initiation (1969:1). A useful illustration is the Christian doctrine of baptism, which declares that a spiritual identity is only obtained following an individual's immersion in holy water. However, initiation functions not only to bestow a spiritual identity, but also to facilitate the periodic

"regeneration" of the spirit, such energy being periodically exhausted (van Kimball 1969:viii). This makes initiation, more specifically initiatory death, the sine qua non, as Eliade puts it, for both spiritual awakening and immortality (1958:131).

The conferring and/or clarification of a sexual identity through initiation seems to have two paradoxical objectives. First, and ultimately most importantly, it seeks to dispel sex-role ambiguity, confirming the initiand in the gendered identity he or she is to bear for the rest of his or her life (see Whiting 1961:353-80).[8] Yet a second purpose of initiation into sexuality is to promote the novice's cognitive maturation, the cultivation of an objective perspective on life. This process, according to Turner, takes place in the liminal stage of initiation during which the novice is encouraged to explore all aspects of existence, including (even if only symbolically) the experience of both sexes (1969:76). Such exploration can be focused in the infliction of a physical wound, and the miming of the other sex through cross-dressing or conduct. In New Guinea, for instance, the initiatory practice of subincision is believed to endow the male with the female sex organ (Herdt 1982:54); in the Nuba tribes of Africa, the male initiands dress as women, whereas among the South Sotho and the Nandi of Africa, the females wear men's clothing (Eliade 1958:25-26); women of an African tribe, the Kuranko, periodically enact men's behaviour and vice versa (Jackson 1983:336). The implications of this practice are twofold: first, the novice has a better chance of attaining a particular mode of being if he or she first becomes a totality (his or her identity being informed as much by what he or she is not, as by what he or she is); and secondly, it facilitates the novice's quest for omniscience and wisdom, since androgyny offers itself as an obvious model for totality and perfection (Eliade 1958:26ff.).[9]

Sexual initiation may widen the novice's vision, but it is ultimately the entire process of initiation which precipitates a radical and irrevocable modification of his or her outlook on life. This change is particularly notable when the novice returns to the society from which he or she originally came, and finds it greatly changed. We can infer that a salient objective of this perceptual adjustment is to prevent the novice from relapsing, from returning to his or her former mode of existence. Campbell demonstrates the irreversibility of this perceptual change in his analysis of puberty initiation. A child who intends to progress to adulthood must permanently alter its attitude towards its parents, discarding all "inappropriate, infantile cathexes", like motives of self-aggrandizement, personal preference and resentment (1993:136).

In short, the psychogenic approach maintains that initiation serves to facilitate the individual's self-discovery and development. In order to illustrate the operation of both sociogenic and psychogenic orientations in the analysis of initiation, I shall now turn to three initiation rites which history and religion recognise as typical to most communities: puberty initiation, entrance to secret societies, and entrance to shamanic cults (Eliade 1958:2).

Puberty or adolescent initiation is a compulsory, collective ritual which supervises the child's passage from childhood -- a profane, asexual and unenlightened state -- to adulthood -- a sacred, sexual and enlightened state -- and grants him or her a social status. This rite is mandatory, for if the roles of responsibility and life were assumed by the uninitiated, chaos would result. Campbell cites the myth of young Phaeton, who crashed the sunchariot of Phoebus, his father, as an illustration of this imperative (1993:136). The novice undergoing puberty initiation is subjected to a number of physical and mental trials.

The climax of these mortifications, as Robert Bly observes, is the initiand's symbolic death to the unenlightened, asexual realm of childhood and his or her rebirth to adulthood (1993:80). The initiation masters correlate the initiand's experience with the community's origin myths so as to provide an objective or external reference point to help the initiand make appropriate sense of and transcend his or her personal ordeal: as Bly remarks, "if we have no story we cannot take hold of the wound" (1993:28).

Besides acquainting the novice with the history of the community, puberty initiation introduces him or her to the concepts of the sacred and adult sexuality. The novice's initiation into the sacred unites the entire community, since its members are compelled to renew their spiritual beliefs whilst he or she is swearing allegiance. During the Christian rite of baptism, for instance, the entire congregation is compelled to repeat their vows of faith (Eliade 1958:116-7). It becomes evident, therefore, that society uses initiation into the sacred not only to indoctrinate new members but also to reinforce the belief of existing members. Similarly, sexual initiation functions to legitimise the existing social hierarchy, since it underscores the differences in power and status between males and females (Eliade 1987:234).

Whereas puberty initiation introduces novices to the elementary concepts of mature life, initiation into secret societies has a vastly different structure and function. First, membership is reserved for select individuals, often of one sex only. As a result, the stratification rather than the unity of the community is perpetuated. Secondly, the exclusivity of the society means that the entrance tests to which novices are subjected are much more rigorous and demanding. Thirdly, the objective of these societies is normally singular: they exist to protect and disseminate arcane knowledge (Eliade 1987:226). Thus if

socialization enjoys priority in the case of puberty initiation, then sacralization is the key function in secret societies; a sociogenic understanding seems more appropriate to the former, a psychogenic to the latter.

Initiation into shamanic cults entails the subjection of novices to the most rigorous trials, which trigger ecstatic experiences such as trances in which the novice makes contact with the old masters or the spirit world. Frequently, such experiences climax in madness, which symbolises the dissolution of the novice's old personality and his or her regression to the primeval state. The endpoint of the novice's ordeal, his or her symbolic reduction to a skeleton, regenerates both him- or herself and the tribe for whom he or she is to be a guide (Eliade 1958:92; Henderson 1990:61-67). In this sense shamanic initiation, while predominantly psychogenic in orientation, includes an important sociogenic component.

III

So far in this chapter we have examined the history of the study of initiation, considered the current status of the ritual, identified circumstances conducive to its appearance, analyzed the roles which it assumes in the public and private realms, and illustrated the latter with reference to three prominent rites. What remains to complete this introductory portrait of initiation is an account of its typical pattern or structure. I begin with van Gennep's model, both because it remains the most influential and because I have extensive recourse to it in the analysis of initiatory motifs in Conrad's work in the chapters which follow.

Arnold van Gennep pioneered the classification of initiation as a rite of passage composed of three distinct and consecutive stages: separation, transition or the limen, and incorporation. Eliade has more recently rendered these as the rites of entry into, waiting in,

and exit from no-man's land (1958:2); and Jung has reviewed them as the rites of submission, containment and liberation 1983:156).[10] According to van Gennep, all rites of passage exhibit this structure, although the significance and prominence of each stage varies according to the society and the rite [thus in funerals the stage of separation is foregrounded, while in weddings the rite of incorporation is highlighted (1969:11).

Critical response to van Gennep seems to fall roughly into two categories: those who approve of his theorem on the whole and manifest their acceptance of it by integrating parts of it into their hypotheses, and those who simply reject it.

Van Gennep's notion of the three stages of initiation hinges on his perception of this rite as (re-)sacralising, as facilitating transition from the profane to the sacred condition (1969:1). In Purity and Danger, Mary Douglas draws attention to the significance of this tripartite structure, noting that it establishes a clear division between the profane and sacred conditions. In Douglas's analysis, the individual in transition is polluting and dangerous, because he or she is released from the customary configuration of society and has no fixed place in it (1966:116-7). Hence the social value of the liminal stage: through it society can exert symbolic control over chaos and reduce the threat of contamination by enforcing taboos and surrounding the novice in proscriptive rites. Turner presents the interesting view that this very boundlessness is restricted by the knowledge that it is a unique situation and by the definition of the situation as the structured and orderly conveyance of rite and myths (1989:577).

Following Douglas, Eliade also confined his attention largely to the nature and function of the liminal stage. Taking as his point of departure van Gennep's seminal suggestion that the initiand's transition lends itself to representation as a ritual death, Eliade

conducted extensive studies on the advent of mock death during initiation. He eventually concluded that the radical transition of an individual is "almost universally symbolised by images of death and rebirth" (1958:229).[11]

Again, Van Gennep's delineation of the liminal stage provided Turner with the foundation for his extensive and valuable research on the concept of liminality and its relationship to unstructured groups of people known as "communitas" (1969:98). Following Eliade, therefore, Turner confined his study of initiation to the liminal stage. But whereas Eliade defined it as a ritual death, Turner describes it as a state of suspension outside of time and space, "a limbo of statuslessness", beyond the boundaries of life and death (1969:97). To cite one last theorist, Herdt approaches van Gennep from a historical and functionalist perspective. Herdt begins by contextualising van Gennep and lauding the pioneering quality of his paradigm as opposed to the "telescopic and speculative" work of his contemporaries, such as Frazer. He goes on to stress both the originality of van Gennep's model and its universality, citing its many aspects which have broken new ground for research (1982:x; see also Jamous 1992:53 and Parkin 1992:16).

Among the more respectful of those who are not altogether persuaded by van Gennep's hypotheses is Max Gluckman, who regards Rites of Passage as "one of the most important books written about ritual in the generation before the First World War" (1962:2). Its merits include its penetrating exegeses of rites as reflective of the structure of social relations and change within a particular community, and the fact that it stimulated and improved the documentation of tribal rituals generally. The nub of Gluckman's criticism of van Gennep is that he was a pioneer in ideas only and not in technique: since he felt compelled to replicate the research style of his predecessors, he limited the scope of his

paradigm and stopped short of devising a truly important theory. Gluckman's second reservation about van Gennep is that he leaves his theory somewhat incomplete by failing to delve deeply into any particular ritual situation and neglecting to define the type of society in which initiation functions (1962:12ff.). Similar qualifications are voiced by Meyer Fortes. According to Fortes van Gennep can be commended for demonstrating three significant theorems, for instance, that the passage rites exhibit a more or less standard pattern. Yet the merit of his research, Fortes cautions, is substantially undercut by his failure to explicate clearly crucial issues involving rituals, such as the criteria which render rituals vital to demarcate status change (Fortes 1962:55). The great sociologist, Durkheim, had little time for van Gennep's work. He attacks what are effectively the cornerstones of van Gennep's paradigm: that initiation is a ritual, and that it involves the passage from the profane to the sacred. Initiation, Durkheim argues, is not a ritual but simply a compound rite formed by the conglomeration of rites of different sorts, such as interdictions (1915:385). Durkheim's second point of contention is that van Gennep's differentiation of the profane and the sacred is simplistic as it does not take into account numerous other divisions (1915:39).

Another prominent and more recent theorist whose criticism of van Gennep is widely known is Frank Young. In Young's estimation, van Gennep's description of initiation as having a tripartite structure is deficient in two aspects. First, since all three stages of initiation are seldom present, van Gennep seemingly fails to take sufficient account of aberrational data and examples. Secondly, van Gennep did not provide explicit enough descriptions of the customs which characterise these different stages of initiation, nor did he offer an extensive study of the role of initiation in terms of the maturation of the

individual (1965:5). One of the obvious ironies of Young's polemic is that his own definition of initiation as a ritual promoting social solidarity is indebted to van Gennep's insight into the socially stabilising function of initiation.

In sum, it appears that van Gennep's work has stimulated a great deal of interest in and research into the nature of rituals and mechanisms of social transition. His terminology and ideas concerning critical stages in the transition process -- such as the liminal stage and the mock death and rebirth of the initiand -- still have currency today. His theory of the tripartite structure of initiation has however been modified in different ways by different anthropologists. Some have focused on the liminal stage as absolutely crucial, others on the demarcation between the sacred and the profane (see also Bloch (1992)).

IV

In van Gennep's paradigm of the structure of initiation, the first stage or rite is that of separation. This is a threshold experience which entails the initiand's leaving the usual environment for a new or unknown one. The main objective of the rite is to render the initiand receptive to imminent transition and to the teachings of the initiation guides by undermining his or her natural defense through a series of mental and physical trails. Van Rensburg presents the notion that the initiand him- or herself contributes to his or her suggestibility, through the anxiety which he or she feels at the prospect of an upheaval (1990:500).

The removal of the initiand to an alien environment effectively isolates him or her from all social dynamics. This relocation is premised on the tenet that solitude and separation from past influences will increase susceptibility to new ideas and transition. By

isolating the initiand in this manner society cuts him or her off from the usual ways of comprehending existence. In other words, once the initiand is removed from the context in which his or her ethical and epistemological system was originally formulated and stabilised, the system itself will be undermined. As a result, he or she will not have the customary means to comprehend life, and will become receptive to change. Eliade interprets the spatial separation of the initiand as a death experience in itself, which presages his or her symbolic death in the liminal stage which follows. For the initiand is flung into the unknown, a traditional symbol of death (1958:9).

The geographical isolation of the initiand is accompanied by ordeals which purport to strip him or her of the trappings of identity, the further to alienate him or her from his or her old self in preparation for the acceptance of a new self. Hence any accretions of the self, beliefs, principles, illusions, clothes, status and even language must necessarily be surrendered.

Puberty initiation exhibits a significant modification to the preliminal stage: the initiand's public rejection of his or her mother is the acme of the rite. This act appears to have two motives. First, since the rite introduces the initiand to the sacred lore and enjoins submission to a divine mentor, it requires that the mother, as earthly and profane tutor, be abjured (Eliade 1958:9). Secondly, the mother symbolises nature in the primordial state; she is the prima materia of the initiand who is responsible both for his or her biological existence and cognitive development (Eliade 1958:58). Since initiation involves the initiand's passage from the maternal and parental to the patriarchal and social realm, rejection of the mother is vital, freeing the initiand to obey the communal imperative without being distracted by maternal ties (Campbell 1993:136).

Although psychic purgation and physiological disorientation are the central elements in this stage, minor purifying acts may also accompany it. The North American Indian Plains tribes, for instance, include in their preliminal stage cleansing rituals such as sweat baths and fasting. These acts function to highlight the transference of attention from the outside (profane) to the inside (sacred), and to prepare the initiand for the intensification of these tortures in the following stage (Henderson 1990:49).

In sum, the preliminal stage prepares the initiand for metamorphosis by depriving him or her of the stabilising anchors of his or her identity. This condition of alienation and deprivation, though effective in facilitating the abandonment of the obsolete identity, is unable to supervise the acquisition of a new identity. For this reason the initiand must proceed to the second stage of initiation, the limen. Here the initiation guides will convert the initiand's potential understanding of his or her transition into real gnosis and in so doing help him or her to cultivate a new identity (Turner 1968:577).

In the liminal stage, the initiand, who is now known as a liminar, undergoes an ego-death during which his or her "conscious self is temporarily dissolved in the collective unconscious" (Jung 1983:123). A salient consequence of this is that the liminar's unconscious mind is liberated and transformed, whilst the conscious is repressed. This cognitive inversion, Turner maintains, is reflected in the liminar's experience of his or her identity (as ambiguous) and environment (as devoid of spatio-temporal coordinates). Since the liminar embarks on a voyage of self-discovery beyond social and biological categories,[12] he or she is caught "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention". Subsequently, he or she is profoundly ambiguous, effectively neither living nor dead (Turner 1969:95).

The suspension of secular time and space which typifies the liminal stage can be explained in terms of the fact that although all initiation ceremonies have a temporal structure (they involve the passage of an initiand from one position within society to another), when the liminar is undergoing this transition he or she must pass through the timeless, liminal zone. Subsequently, his or her identity becomes similarly, temporarily, timeless. In some ceremonies, the synchronisation of the liminar's days in ritual seclusion, the fact that each day is contrived to be an exact replica of the first one, precipitates the virtual suspension of linear chronology. Thus the liminar effectively inhabits a timeless zone (Turner 1974:238).

Prior to his or her mock death, the liminar is subjected to physical and mental tortures, such as scarification and tooth extraction, the intense pain of which is intended completely to erode his or her resistance to metamorphosis. The initiation guides frequently supplement these trials with restrictions on behaviour, such as celibacy and fasting (van Rensburg 1990:500). The idea underpinning these limitations Jackson offers, is that bodily self-mastery is believed to be a sound basis for social and intellectual mastery (1983:337). In the Kuranko tribe of Africa, for instance, an interdiction is placed on communication -- initiands are forbidden to speak unless addressed and are not allowed to cry out -- to impress upon the initiands the primacy of oaths, promises and the necessity of forbearance (1983:337). Since sex is regarded in traditional societies as an alternative medium for the transmission of knowledge, it is also subjected to prohibitions (Bohlman 1991:138). These restrictions effectively debilitate the primary receptors of knowledge until such time as the initiands are taught new lore.

The climax of the initiand's purgations and proscriptions is a mock death in which

he or she dies to all that was human and porfane, implying a mystical transformation and rebirth to an absolute mode of being (Eliade 1958:128). According to Eliade, this ceremony of symbolic death and rebirth is at the core of every liminal stage and is therefore common to all initiation rites (1958:128). An important implication of this simulated demise is the "erasure" of the initiand's old self. This reduction to what is effectively a blank slate or tabula rasa enables the initiand to inscribe his or her new self (Turner 1969:103).

Eliade distinguishes two forms of initiatory death only: descensus ad infernos and regressus ad uterum, yet the ordeals symbolic of these deaths are numerous (1987:225). Among the most widely occurring are isolation in darkness, ingestion by a monster, descent to Hell and sexual awakening. The symbolism associated with ritual death is bivalent -- it has the potential to promote either life or death -- just as the stage of liminality is characterised by ambiguity. The onus is on the initiand to transform what is potentially a death experience into an ordeal which revives his or her life.

The first death trial, the liminar's enclosure in darkness, is a re-enactment of the prenatal condition in which he or she returns to the embryonic state. Campbell equates this journey into darkness with a descent into and exploration of the spiritual core (1993:101).

Jonah's consumption by the whale, and subsequent acceptance of his calling as a prophet, is an archetypal example of the transformative potential of the second death trial, assimilation by a monster (Eliade 1960:219). A liminar who is consumed by a beast returns to his or her prenatal condition and is thereafter reborn. Archetypal images of this ordeal include a forest, a cabin or a dark night, all of which represent the open mouth of a monster (Eliade 1958:36).

Analogous to this return to the womb is the third death trial, descent into Hell. Paul

Schmitt describes this ordeal as a symbolic entrance to the underworld, in which the liminar "dies or is wedded and is symbolically reborn. The uninitiate and hence unconsecrate remains in death" (Henderson 1990:56). Eliade widens the scope of this trial somewhat by stating that it is associated not just with rebirth but with a quest for immortality. In other words, this ordeal is about "enduring death without dying, descending to the kingdom of the night yet returning alive" (Eliade 1960:221).

To recapitulate, the liminal stage involves the liminar's "death" through dislocation to a timeless, spaceless realm and/or subjection to intense physical and psychic tortures. However, the liminar's demise does not imply the termination of life but rather the creation of the means to a new end: mystical rebirth. In short, death is a rite of passage, not the cessation of life. If the liminar manages to survive this simulated "death", he or she is reborn symbolically in the final stage of initiation, reincorporation (if not, he or she remains in "death"). Van Gennep calls this stage the post-liminal, for it is here that the initiand's conscious mind re-emerges and he or she is reincorporated into the social fabric (1969:30). It is important to note that in most cases the initiand retains no memory of his or her metamorphosis, owing to its having taken place in the unconscious mind (Henderson 1990:56).[13] But while it is impossible for the initiand to testify to his or her transition, often this inward process, as Turner remarks, emerges in "outward and visible form", such as the assumption of a new vocabulary (Herdt 1982:150).

Reincorporation features as the engagement of both the initiand and society in behaviour to verify the former's death and his or her rebirth to a new status. The joint intention is to alert the public to the initiand's transition and to prevent him or her from resuming his or her former behavioral patterns and status. With this purpose in mind,

society may treat the initiand as if he or she is a stranger; alternatively, he or she may simulate amnesia as proof of death. Initiands in Liberia, for example, return to society in the symbolic role of infants, who feign ignorance of the basic acts of life, such as feeding and washing themselves (Eliade 1958:31).

Society manifests its recognition of the initiand's metamorphosis by conferring on him or her a new name and often a new language (Eliade 1958:28). Notably these external changes are accompanied by transitions of a more profound and intangible nature. The initiand's entire existential condition evolves, and his or her previous state of innocence and profanity is superseded by a more enlightened and spiritual aspect. In Henderson's estimation the assumption of a more compassionate and tolerant disposition is often the indication of this change (1990:57). In other words, this stage intends to instill in the initiand the spirit of kinship and devotion.

In sum, initiation functions to provide a structure recognised by both the potential initiand and the society to help the former to make a meaningful and smooth transition from one state to another and the help the latter to survive the potentially disruptive event intact and undisturbed. My intention in the chapters which follows is first, to ascertain whether this structured response to crises is in any way characteristic of Conrad's characters. Secondly, I hope to establish the extent to which the behaviour of his protagonists deviates from or conforms with this paradigm and the implications thereof. Once we have established this basic understanding of initiation in Conrad's texts we will proceed to assess its thematic functions and its status in selected texts.

NOTES

1. Thus whereas initiation into a secret society involves seclusion and mystery, intense ordeals, the sharing of arcane knowledge, and ends with incorporation (Eliade 1987:225), a negative initiation rite, such as exile, is a public affair and ends in social expulsion (Young 1965:154).

2. Van Rensburg cites the following common characteristics by way of justifying his proposition: "a clear liminal period during which strange actions are expected of the initiates; physical and psychological ordeals and tests; instruction with the aim of supporting the social order and authority" (1990:503).

3. Eliade confirms that initiation is often triggered by confrontation with a stranger: "He who reveals to us the meaning of our mysterious, inward pilgrimage must himself be a stranger, of another belief and another race" (1960:245).

4. Some critics suggest that both sociogenic and psychogenic causes are implicated in initiation. According to Robert Murphy, "the stuff of the unconscious tends to be expressed in cultural symbols where it serves some function in terms of social structure" (1959:97).

5. A number of anthropologists attribute the socialising capacity of initiation to its status as a ritual. Herdt maintains that ritual utilizes the "psychophysiological techniques" of "brain-washing" (1982:79).

6. The process of socialisation through initiation, Campbell declares, starts from birth as humans are born premature and require nurturing for the first few years of their lives, as well as instruction in the basic characteristics of their race, such as speech (1993:120). Initiation, Myerhoff concurs, is a rite of passage which reminds us that we are not simply organisms passing through various stages of biological development: rather we are <u>made</u> through initiation ceremonies which envelop and celebrate these changes. For instance, an act of procreation does not make a bride, a wedding must first be held (1987:385).

7. The proposition that initiation is an instrument of indoctrination for the entire community has come under heavy criticism. According to M. Visedom, the social control which this rite is reputed to assert is fundamentally arbitrary. He comments: "Just how far the control by the normative order, this cultural bribe, may be carried is apparent in the frequency with which the society through the performance of traditional rituals acts [such as initiation] claims responsibility for events that in other societies take place without them" (1976:38). Then there is the contention, advanced by the theorists, Martha and Morton Fried (1980) that initiation has little or not function in preserving the unity of a community or perpetuating its value-system. After studying four critical transitions in eight societies they concluded that

initiation is not vital to the success of the community, and thus cannot be described as fulfilling a social function (Myerhoff 1987:383). Roscoe, who conducts a comprehensive survey of female initiation rites in Melanesia, argues that initiation as a means of socialisation works only in the case of males, for in many societies where males are initiated, females are not (1995:222). He cites, as justification Marilyn Strathern's observation of the Highland societies in New Guinea: "if we regard initiation ritual as having a socializing function, then we are faced with the fact that the Highland boys need to be socialized where the girls do not" (1995:230).

8. Sexual initiation also serves underpin the socio-political power structure as its warns the initiand against insulting the male elders by indulging in transgression, such as Oedipal incest or parricide (Roscoe 1995:221). Mature males, Campbell concurs, use initiation rites, like circumcision to assert their superiority over the adolescents and to convert their sexual envy into respect (1993:139).

9. The gods, Winthuis (1928) corroborates, are themselves bisexual (Eliade 1958:25).

10. Van Gennep bases his differentiation of this rite into a tripartite and not a dual structure on his perception of initiation as a resacralising ritual. Initiation, he asserts, purports to take the initiand from the profane to the sacred condition. But since these conditions are not continuous with each other, the initiand must first be completely separated from the former, by initiatory death, beefore he or she can proceed to the latter (1969:1).

11. Eliade's theory has had a substantial influence on studies of the liminal stage. A number of theorists and anthropologists, such as Burkert (1987:23), Bly (1993:80) and Michael Mason (1993:6), have adopted Eliade's conception of the liminal stage of transition as being characterised by a mock death. As Angelo Brelich comments: "it is a well known fact that during initiation the novice must die before he or she can be reborn" (1967:204).

12. The ambiguity of this voyage, Turner asserts, is best illustrated in the "liminal phenomenon" of a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages have the ambivalent identity of being both voluntary and implicitly obligatory. Amongst the Vakaris, for instance, if someone fails to attend a pilgrimage it is assumed that he or she must be dead or dying (Turner 1974:166-70).

13. Henderson stresses that the initiand's amnesia is crucial to his or her successful completion of initiation and reincorporation into society. Were the initiand to be conscious during this process, he explains,it is probable that he or she would become either isolated or inflated by this experience (1990:57). The initiation experience is incomprehensible and inarticulatable, hence the real danger exists that the initiand may be alienated from society (instead of united), by his or her incommunicable ordeal.

CHAPTER TWO

The Motif of Initiation in Conrad's Writing

> It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. . . . Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who have never known one of those rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much -- everything -- in a flash -- before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence.
>
> -- Conrad, Lord Jim (111)

I

A recurrent feature in Conrad's fiction is the portrayal of a catastrophic awakening experience which grants the protagonist insight into himself or herself and into reality in general. The knowledge thus gained prevents the character from returning to his or her previous mode of existence by precipitating an irreversible adjustment of perspective. The dislocated subject has no alternative but to devise a new position for him- or herself within society, a process which involves also the construction of a different private identity. There can be no doubt that this ordeal and its aftermath constitutes a form of initiation, since it involves the "revelation of the self to the self", resulting in ineradicable cognitive change and psycho-social transformation (Harris 1976:146). Initiation thus plays a thematic role in many of Conrad's works, including such major texts as Lord Jim, Nostromo and The Secret Agent. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate and attempt to account for the ubiquity of this motif in Conrad's oeuvre by investigating its foremost functions and characteristic structure.

Initiation was important to Conrad for reasons of personal identification, historical appropriateness and aesthetic efficacy. Conrad's life experience was possibly the decisive factor in his use of this theme, for in the course of his life as a Polish exile, a sailor, an author and a naturalised Englishman, he was obliged to negotiate several radical and problematic transitions. It is practically a commonplace that Conrad was "never -- either literally or figuratively -- at home in the world. He remained an exile" (Erdinast-Vulcan 1991:3). The single possible exception to this generalisation is the period Conrad spent at sea. As he wrote in "A Familiar Preface", the merchant service became "[his] only home for many successive years" (1923:xvi), and his initiation into the different ranks, particularly that of captain, stirred in him a sense of belonging: he "felt adopted" (PR 1923:118). As his autobiographical writings reveal, once back on land Conrad never quite overcame the alienation of his sensed exclusion from English society: "I feel myself strangely growing into a sort of outcast. A mental and moral outcast" (letter to John Galsworthy, Aug. 22 1903; Karl vol 3 1988:55).[1] His situation was worsened by what he confessed to Edmund Gosse as his dependency on "the moral support, the sustaining influence of the English atmosphere" (letter of April 11, 1905; Karl vol 3 1988:175). If we consider that at that time, initiation as a public rite was fast vanishing in the West (becoming internalised as a paradigm functioning to resolve such personal problems as the conflict later identified by Jung as that between the ego and the self [1983:123]), it will not be excessively reductive to suggest that Conrad's entry into English society was permanently deferred, impeded or compromised by the absence of some formal rite of initiation, a ritual of incorporation "naturalising" the immigrant.[2]

Conrad's position as an author in a foreign land, moreover as a pioneer of a new

age and the new artistic idiom of Modernism, intensified his sense of estrangement and influenced his work profoundly, as this comment in a letter to Edmund Gosse suggests:

> I am acutely conscious of being neither the interpreter in any profound sense of my epoch nor a magician evoker of the past either in its spirit or its form, I have often suffered in connection with my work from a sense of unreality. (Letter of Mar. 23 1905; Karl vol 3 1988: 224)[3]

He was acutely aware of the contribution of his fractured life to the subject matter of his work: "My subjects are not medieval, if their course lies out of the beaten path it is because perhaps, I myself did in a sort, break away from it in early obedience to an impulse" (WT:154).[4]

Conrad's successful completion of initiation as a sailor may well have motivated him to "vindicate the tradition of the sea" in his early work (Bruss 1979:19). However, as memories of his sea-faring days faded or were written out, Conrad's fidelity to his realist creed obliged him to shift the focus of his attention to the moral systems and social structures of his surroundings. Here his personal experience of English society as devoid of the unifying rite of initiation came to the fore. The tragic plight of Yanko in the story "Amy Foster" (a character who is shipwrecked and ends up in an English village where he is rejected as a "castaway" [132]), stands out as an indictment against the English as a people lacking the most rudimentary social institutions to deal with and incorporate foreigners.

II

The idea of initiation encompasses several major preoccupations in Conrad's texts: the impact of moral isolation on the individual; the antinomy of action and reflection; the conflicting claims of the private and public self; the need for a saving illusion; the necessity

of an awakening, disenchanting ordeal, and the potential for self-creation and autonomy. In this section I would like to explore, by way of example, just one of these thematic strands: the occasion which initiation offers for self-creation.

Conrad was haunted throughout his literary career by the issue of self-determination as opposed to predestination ("There isn't any expiation. Each act of life is final and inevitably produces its consequences," he wrote to Marguerite Poradowska [Sept. 15 1891; Karl vol 1 1983:95]). It was a concern which informed such major texts as "The Secret Sharer", Lord Jim and "Falk". In these stories Conrad evinces a strong commitment to the development of personal autonomy and the exercise of self-determination through the overthrow of traditional authority: "The future is of our own making -- the most striking characteristic of this century is that development and maturing of our consciousness which should open our eyes to that truth -- or that illusion" (letter to H.G. Wells Feb. 1902; Karl vol 2 1986:386).

In the traditional paradigm of initiation, the initiand's development is supervised by old initiands; the implication being that he or she is "made" by these elders (Herdt 1982:195). But in actuality, change is not something imposed externally on the initiand: the way in which he or she reacts to the initiatory trials determines the form which his or her development will take. As Eliade puts it, through initiation "one may become what one performs" (Myerhoff 1987:385). In Heart of Darkness, when Marlow takes on the role of Kurtz's faithful shadow during his ordeal, he effectively changes into his ally, a transformation which the other pilgrims acknowledge in their attempts to dispose of Marlow as they did of Kurtz: by burying him in "a muddy hole" (150).

Again, initiation does not so much instigate change as catalyse a latent capacity for

transition. Axel Heyst's initiation, for example, provides him with the enlightenment of affirmation which he, poor sceptic by default, seeks at the outset of the story ("Is there no guidance?" [V:150]). For he emerges from his initiation at the hands of Morrison and Lena with the conviction: "woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to love, to hope -- and to put its trust in life!" (V:326).

The sheer mystery inherent in change made initiation an appropriate theme for a thoroughly secular mystic like Conrad. Anthropologists such as Walter Burkert and Mircea Eliade maintain that initiation has its roots in mystery and death. In Ancient Mystery Cults (1931) Burkert traces the earliest appearance of initiation as a mystery cult (1987:9); and Eliade observes that initiation is etymologically aligned with death, since the ancient Greek term for dying, teleutan, resembles the word for initiation, teleisthai (1958:110-11). Joseph Henderson attests to the impenetrably esoteric nature of initiation by remarking that it "remains in some essential way unexplained", despite the efforts of scholars in disciplines such as religion and psychology (1990:59). Conrad's abiding fascination with "mysteriousness, the almost transcendental character of human motives" (Beach 1932:340-53; see also Seltzer 1974:80) therefore discovered an apt vehicle in his exploration of the initiatory theme.[5]

To place this more securely in historical context, Conrad sought to valorise or redeem, through his concern with initiation, one of the signal characteristics of the modern age: what critics have called the loss of the numinous, or the deposition of the absolute (Brooker 1990:74; Erdinast-Vulcan 1991:2). Generally speaking, Conrad's contemporaries interpreted this event as signalling a plummet into chaos consequent on the demise of a divine ordering principle. Conrad attempted to challenge this perspective by alerting them

to the `divine' within themselves: "We are as celestial as the other bodies -- only we are obscure . . . . But we all have our illusion of being wayfarers" (letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham Aug. 26 1898; Karl vol 2 1986:88). Significantly, this last statement, by suggesting a parallel between a journey and approximation to the sacred, echoes van Gennep's thesis that it is only through undergoing the initiatory ordeal of a pilgrimage or a journey that one activates the sacred (1969:12). Thus Conrad presents initiation, which recognises man or woman and not God as the "prime mover" of spiritual life, as the principal means to attain a `sacred' aspect (Henderson 1990:11). In "Typhoon", Captain MacWhirr's initiation, as Paul Wiley observes, invests him with quasi-supernatural qualities: Jukes describes his voice as having "that strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo" (50), and later imagines him as "an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with the storm" (79) (1966:67).

Furthermore, since initiation plays the dual role of disillusioning the initiand and providing him or her with a fresh set of illusions, Conrad could explore a matter which never ceased to fascinate him: the paradoxical implications of illusions. On the one hand, Conrad endorsed illusions as vital to the sustainment of life (through faith): "My head feels full of sawdust the tragedy is my awareness of it. The man who finds out the apparently innocent truth about himself is henceforth of no use to mankind. Which proves the saving power of illusion" (letter to Helen Sanderson Aug. 8 1898; Karl vol 2 1986:90). Thus in Heart of Darkness, Marlow manages at first to stave off the moral darkness of his experience by clinging to his saving illusions of "efficiency" (50), the "idea" (52), and "surface-truth" (97). On the other hand, Conrad insisted that self-knowledge and maturation is dependent on the awakening experience which initiation generates, depriving

the initiand of comfortable illusions. "Awakening in solitude" (N:342) after his swim from the Great Isabel, Nostromo realises that he has been exploited by the rich people of Sulaco, and this insight, while triggering the development of his separate private identity, is profoundly disillusioning to him. As the narrator comments: "It may be said that Nostromo tasted the dust and ashes of the fruit of life into which he had bitten deeply in his hunger for praise" (N:343).

III

I wish now to turn from the consideration of factors influencing Conrad's use of the initiatory motif to an exploration of its functions within his fiction. These may be summarised as the promotion of self-knowledge, the creation of solidarity, and the achievement of redemption.

Conrad adumbrates one of the foremost functions of initiation -- "the chance to find yourself" (HD:85) -- in his summary of the first mate Carter's situation in The Rescue, when Lingard leaves him in charge of his brig: "His personality was being developed by a new experience, and as he was very simple he received the initiation with shyness" (379). One is reminded of Marlow in "Youth" who, after the Judea has gone down, embarks on a voyage in the ship's longboat and, free from the surveillance of Captain Beard, achieves new insight into his own potential: "I did not know how good a man I was till then" (220). This knowledge embraces the self in both its private and public dimensions. A recurrent problem complicating the protagonist's development of a public status arises when he or she has acceded to a senior position in his or her profession without having earned the right to such seniority by undergoing the (largely private) "preliminary toil and disenchantment"

(as the narrator of "The Shadow Line" puts it [50]). The narrator in Lord Jim, for instance, sounds a clear warning when observing that Jim has secured the berth of chief mate "without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of the day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff" (LJ:11). Finally, it is worth noting that while Conrad believed in the individual's capacity for change through initiation,[6] he insisted that such change was always circumscribed by limitations inherent in that individual's personality. In the preface to Tales of Unrest he wrote: "I perceived that in common with the rest of men nothing could shelter me from my fatal inconsistency. We cannot escape from ourselves" (vii); an idea he repeats in The Secret Agent: "We cannot cease to be ourselves" (74); and Lord Jim: "A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each one's destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (end Ch.17).

We find this notion articulated by Conrad as early as 1891, when he remarked in a letter to Marguerite Poradowska that we are all "slaves of fate even before birth and we pay tribute to adversity even before making its acquaintance" (letter of 8 July 1891; Karl vol 1 1983:86). And writing to Cunninghame-Graham less than a decade later, Conrad reformulated the sentiment so as to include the idea of initiation as a kind of original sin: "We are born initiated, and succeeding generations clutch the inheritance of fear and brutality without a thought, without a doubt, without compunction -- in the name of god" (Jan. 23 1899; Karl vol 2 1986:25). Moreover, accompanying this resignation to a destiny stripped of the illusions which make life tolerable one often senses on Conrad's part an acute awareness of the seeming impossibility of alleviating the condition.

Yet this pessimistic view is never expressed in the fiction without paradox or at least

irony. Perhaps the prototype of this scenario is Razumov's confession to Natalie and the revolutionaries that he betrayed Haldin. For Razumov's attempt to "betray [him]self back into truth and peace" (296) and to emancipate himself "from falsehood, from remorse" (303), ends in his violent ejection from society and mortal injury. Again, in Lord Jim, Jim's father regards salvation as unlikely: "he who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant, hazards his total depravity" (LJ:56); and yet he is a thoroughly ironised character whose credibility is undercut by the narrator's tongue-in-cheek description of him as a priest with a "comfortable knowledge of the unknown" (LJ:10). And this is followed by the whole ambiguous regeneration of Jim in Patusan, which suggests that Conrad had no real wish to renounce the possibility of salvation and autonomy through initiation. For initiation gives the initiand faith, through the illusion that his or her past identity has been erased, that purging and recreation is possible (La Fontaine 1985:65). Jim is inspired to relinquish his position of silence and solitude precisely by faith in the possibility of being purged of his disgrace by assuming "a clean slate" (LJ:74).

Finally, in his classic work, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, Victor Turner argues cogently that the symbols used in initiation set up in the initiand's mind a "symbiotic union between him or her and the society" (1974:56). This proposition seems borne out by The Nigger of the `Narcissus', when the crew emerge from their ordeal with a sense of camaraderie which was absent at the start of their voyage, and the narrator concludes: "Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from out sinful lives?" (181). Initiation works to affirm a sense of human solidarity by symbolically returning the initiand to his or her origins, the specialised term for which is `Atman', which, in Sanskrit, means the root of all human development. Through encounter with this

symbolisation, even the solitary mystic or pilgrim will gain a sense of kinship (Turner 1974:201-3). This is so widespread a motif in Conrad's work -- one thinks at once of Lord Jim, Nostromo, Heart of Darkness -- that further illustration is at this stage supererogatory.

IV

The dynamics and structure of initiation in Conrad tend to follow certain patterns. Generally speaking, Conrad's characters start off with a lack of self-knowledge, like Mr Verloc (SA:12) and the captain in "The Secret Sharer", who confesses himself to be "a stranger to myself" (233); or with a fatal ignorance of a critical aspect of life, like Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon", who is initially oblivious of the importance of communication and "lacks fellow-feeling" (Hawthorn 1990:228). Conrad dramatises the redress of this deficiency by putting the protagonist in a situation conducive to self-knowledge and insight into reality. In other words, he activates the initiatory paradigm to show the awakening of his characters through their ordeals. However, it is significant that this awakening can be a positive or a negative experience, depending on the individual. The "dangerously inexperienced" Natalie Haldin (UWE:124), for instance, is grateful for having been woken through her initiation from the bondage of her "ignorance" (UWE:124): "My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now" (UWE:310). In contrast, Willems's moment of revelation in An Outcast of the Islands, like Kurtz's in Heart of Darkness (152), is devastating: "He had a sudden moment of cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed to see what went on within him, and was horrified" (OI:81).

For a character to be placed in an initiatory position in Conrad's texts does not

necessarily entail his or her initiation in the sense of completing a cycle of change ending in reincorporation: a substantial number of his characters resist this chance for transition. According to Alan Friedman, the central situation in Conrad's stories is "almost invariably" a character's resistance to change in the form of the "moral and emotional expansion events . . . force upon him" (1966:99). The reactive psychology of this refusal is straightforward: the initiand's former identity (and illusions) must be eradicated, and although he or she will eventually be refurbished with a new set of illusions, some are unable to endure this temporary deprivation, or else lack the faith to counter the void by creating new illusions, and subsequently engage in self-destructive behaviour.[7] After casting off "the abiding illusion of his existence" (that he has established a relationship of trust with the villagers to whom he advanced food on credit), Morrison seems to lose the will to live altogether, as he easily succumbs to a bout of influenza in London (V:31). In The Secret Agent, Winnie Verloc commits suicide after the death of her brother, Stevie, "the single purpose" of her existence (242) and "the salt of her passions" (174). Stein, in Lord Jim, memorably evokes the impact which this loss of illusions has on the initiand: "a man that is born falls into a dream like a man falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns" (LJ:163).

To recapitulate, initiation entails a paradoxical awakening experience which can either morally fortify the character and stimulate zest for life, or utterly demoralise him or her and render existence intolerable. The first response is illustrated in the behaviour of Solomon Rout in "Typhoon"; for he, after having narrowly escaped drowning during the storm, expresses "an increased longing" for the companionship of his wife and implicitly a renewed passion for life (106). The second response is perhaps exemplified in The Secret

Agent, where Ossipon emerges from his initiation through his betrayal of Winnie in the excruciating position of a man utterly bereft of the will to live, yet with life at his disposal: "It was ruin. He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat" (310).

That Conrad subjects his protagonists to initiation indiscriminately, regardless of their age or ability to handle the ordeal (initiands range from the young Stevie (SA) to the older Razumov (UWE) and Jim (LJ) to the middle-aged Verloc and, finally the elderly gentleman from "The Pathetic Tale"), reveals his view of it as a vital and ongoing component of every individual's life experience. This idea was to be echoed in the theory of Jung, who stressed that initiation, contrary to the general assumption that it is confined to youth, is really a lifelong process activated by clashes between the self and the ego (1983:123).

The structure of initiation in Conrad's texts conforms in many respects to van Gennep's classical formulation of initiation into three stages. Conrad propels his characters into the first stage, separation, by dislocating them from their familiar environment and thus preventing them from relying on their habitual modes of behaviour or comprehension. As Edward Crankshaw remarks, "by throwing the individual violently out of an accepted relationship with family or society, Conrad makes him aware of a hostile or unknown world which must be learned anew, conquered or renounced, before survival is possible" (1947:23).[8]

The effectiveness of this preliminal rite, as the cases of Jim (LJ:72) and Razumov attest, lies in its unpredictability, the fact that one can "never be found prepared" for it (UWE:211). Thus characters enter this stage mainly through encounter with the unknown or when their trust is betrayed. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the unknown can

figure as an alien person, environment or circumstance. Confrontation with a stranger triggers the protagonist's initiation, yet often this meeting does not so much change things as bring them to a point: it forces a foregone conclusion. In "Freya of the Seven Isles", the arrival of the stranger Heemskirk shatters the stalemate situation between Jasper and Freya, and finally forces her to acknowledge her reluctance to marry Jasper: "I sought my own gratification . . . perhaps when the day came I would not have gone" (384).

Disorientation through the breaking of trust with social relations or the self increases susceptibility to change by increasing the sense of estrangement (Jung 1963:120). As Nostromo observes, "A man betrayed is a man destroyed" (N:346). Paradoxically, while one of the primary aims of initiation is to inculcate a sense of kinship and social responsibility, the character who is initiated by being betrayed is seldom reconciled to society again (Turner 1974:57). For instance, Jim, after concluding that "everything had betrayed him", drifts from one job to another, disdaining to attach himself to any community (LJ:72).

Characterised as it is by physical and moral isolation, a situation endemic in Conrad's fiction, this preliminal stage has been the subject of much critical commentary (see Crankshaw 1947:224-30). Perhaps Conrad's most significant comment on solitude as the first stage in an initiatory process occurs in Heart of Darkness, where Marlow establishes the link between solitude and the return to one's origins which initiation purports to effect: "how can you understand what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by way of solitude?" (HD:116). Besides promoting insight into the self and into one's "own capacity for faithfulness" (HD:177), these representations of human solitude test the moral strength of the characters, for the absence

of social sanctions "tempts them to seek unlawful successes" (Moser 1966:30). Decoud, abandoned by Nostromo on the Great Isabel, exhibits a fatal lack of "faith in himself and others" (N:408) by committing suicide when forced to confront "solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand" (ibid.). Again, in Under Western Eyes Razumov, who has "no ties" and "no claim upon anybody" (42), is eventually driven by his lack of "moral refuge -- the refuge of confidence" (34), to betray Haldin to the Prince as "no human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad" (40). Bantock proposes that the character's recognition of an imposed isolation makes him or her aware of the necessity of cultivating a moral order within him- or herself (1953:346).

That moral solitude may bring such self-discovery is undeniable. But it can never in itself guarantee development in the form of autonomy, liberty and a social self. This is only forthcoming if the initiand is able to undergo further trials as the initiation process continues.

The liminal stage, which succeeds the preliminal, entails the liminar's mock death through a series of physical and emotional rigours which test his or her fitness to enter a new status (van Rensburg 1990:500). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this stage, which involves the obliteration of the initiand's identity, produces the largest number of attempts to withdraw from initiation. The narrator of "The Shadow Line", for instance, after having inaugurated his own initiation by resigning from his job, attempts to avoid his impending transition-annihilation by going home (30). The only thing which moves him to resume his metamorphosis is the subtle guidance of Captain Giles. Giles's indirect prompting illustrates a ceremony which is central to the liminal stage: the specialised

instruction of the liminar by the initiation guides (van Rensburg 1990:499). This occurs either through direct tutelage, as evinced in the advice MacWhirr gives to Jukes ("don't be put out by anything" ["Typhoon":97]); or by example: the engineers of the Nan-Shan, by continuing to stoke the engines during the gale, present the faltering Jukes with an example of proper conduct and fidelity to duty which he eventually imitates by carrying out the captain's order to pacify the fighting passengers ("Typhoon":76).

The liminar's receptivity to change is often heightened by proscriptions on behaviour. In Lord Jim, Marlow isolates the interdiction on conversation as vital to initiation, for "words also belong to our sheltering conception of light and order" (236). In "Typhoon", Jukes's initiation is advanced by his enforced silence and solitude, since the gales, which cause the men to "lose touch with each other" and reduce their words to "shreds" and "fragments" (44), render all communication impossible. Perhaps the most common form of inhibition in Conrad's work, notably his sea narratives ("The Shadow Line", "Typhoon", "Youth"), is on action. The ship's voyage is delayed and the protagonist is subjected to a trial of "do-nothing heroics" ("Typhoon":56), which tests his capacity to keep both faith and self-control. For, as the narrator comments in Nostromo, "[i]n our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part" (409).

The mock death which constitutes the apotheosis of this stage can assume a realistic or symbolic form. Generally speaking, the first form of death is figured as a moment out of time and space, illustrated in Marlow's "death and descent to Hell" during the storm which relocates him to a timeless, spaceless limbo ("Youth":11-12). Jim's escape from Rajah Allang's prison is an instance of symbolic death, couched in terms of a birth trauma: "He

made efforts, tremendous sobbing efforts, gasping efforts that seemed to burst his eyeballs in their sockets and make him blind, and culminating in one mighty effort in the darkness to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs" (LJ:193). A salient implication of the mock death is the liminar's suspension from the framework in which he or she originally formulated his or her ethics and meaning, from secular time and space and social hierarchies. In Turner's estimation, the liminar's virtual suspension from temporal and spatial constructs promotes omniscience and wisdom since he or she is outside all categories and hence able to see from all angles (1968:577). This notion is corroborated by Hillis Miller: "The deepest experience of truth is a moment which is neither past, present, nor future, but out of time altogether, like death itself. Many of Conrad's characters reach this state, but not necessarily by dying" (1965:31-2).

The most common death trials in Conrad's fiction include confrontation with the elements, isolation in darkness, disease, and a descent to hell. These trials are bivalent, capable of advancing either life or death, and it is ultimately the initiand who determines the impact of initiation: he or she must find the courage, self-possession and resources to convert what is potentially a fatal event into a life-perpetuating one -- "Want of water and wild tribes are dangers but the magnitude of such perils depends in a great measure upon the man who affronts them" (Conrad, letter to H.E. Bontine Oct. 16 1898; Karl vol 2 1986:104).

Of all the death trials in Conrad's works, the most rigorous and possibly the most repeated is confrontation with the elements: the wilderness, water and fire. In Conrad's perspective, the protagonist's perception of the malign side of nature (which often simulates a seductive veneer) and subsequent recognition of his or her "utter insignificance within the

universe's structure", is critical for maturation (Conrad, letter to Marguerite Poradowska April 6 1892; Karl vol 1 1983:113). Marlow's initiation by water and fire in "Youth" grants him the insight to penetrate the attractive exterior of the East, "perfumed like a flower", and uncover its latent destructiveness as a "fateful enigma silent like death" (Y:38). Dr. Monygham in Nostromo reflects that acute self-consciousness, "the crushing, paralysing sense of human littleness", can tip the balance against an individual "struggling with natural forces alone" (N:237). In other words, obsession with one's survival in the face of the omnipotence of the elements can, paradoxically, reduce one's chances of enduring the encounter. This scenario is enacted in "Typhoon", where Jukes risks spiritual paralysis by becoming engrossed in "steeling himself against the worst" (57).

Initiation by the wilderness is perhaps exemplified in Kurtz's solitary surrender to the Congo jungle, in his reduction to an "ivory" skeleton. Marlow comments: "The wilderness had patted him on the head and, behold it was like a ball, an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and lo he had withered, it had taken him and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation" (HD:115). A comparable ordeal features also in texts with urban settings, pictured as having devolved into jungles. In The Mirror of the Sea, Conrad describes London as a thing "grown up not made" (107), and in The Secret Agent, three different characters suggest that London has mutated into a parasitic city, which threatens instead of protects its inhabitants: Verloc is "struck by the latent unfriendliness of all out of doors with a force approaching to positive bodily anguish" (56); the Commissioner has the sensation, when advancing into the wet London night, of being "ambushed all alone in a jungle many thousands of miles away from departmental offices" (147); and when Winnie Verloc steps into the street, she perceives London as

sunken in "hopeless night . . . a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble" (271).

Initiation by water, baptism, is symbolised by immersion. Some maintain that the symbolising potential of water stems from its association with the amniotic fluid in the womb. In "Youth", Marlow is `baptised' by the storm, emerging rejuvenated and full of exultation (179). Yet water also has the opposite potential of ending life through drowning. Nostromo, who lands on Sulaco after a long swim from the island and is overwhelmed by a sense of "the end of things", and a feeling of "bitterness that approached death", has evidently undergone a symbolic initiatory death through "drowning" (N:341).[9]

Initiation by water in the form of a storm features recurrently in Conrad's texts, possibly because it seemed so obviously to dramatise the struggle for moral discovery. As he wrote to William Blackwood: "A wrestle with wind and weather has moral value, like primitive acts of faith on which are built doctrines of salvation" (Aug. 26 1901; Karl vol 2 1986:236). In this perspective, Conrad depicts characters who are unwilling to face such ordeals, like James Wait (NN), who cowers in his cabin, and Jim (LJ), who leaps overboard, as morally immature and self-estranged. By the same token, those who confront storms undaunted, such as Singleton (NN) and Captain MacWhirr ("Typhoon"), are portrayed as resilient, morally mature heroes, to whom cling weaker men such as Jukes.

The last element, fire, initiates the liminar through decomposition, by symbolically reducing him or her to original matter, dust/ashes. Marlow's fall into the ignited cargo-hold in "Youth" precipitates his transformation into a hairless (infantile) individual, whose temporary lack of distinguishing features denotes the termination of his former identity and presages his impending assumption of a new one (Y:23). That Marlow's ordeal provides

him with insight into the paradoxically life-giving potential of this fire (which he perceives as a metaphor for the passion of youth), "the heat of life in the handful of dust" (Y:37), points to the illuminating effect of initiation, its capacity to grant wisdom.

The second death trial, through illness or disease, destroys the liminar's resistance to new insights (and thus metamorphosis) by eroding his or her physical strength and moral resistance. Freya's amnesia, for instance, forces her to acknowledge the possibility that self-love made her delay her marriage to Jasper -- "I've been a coward . . . conceited and capricious. I sought my own gratification" ("Freya of the Seven Isles":384); the crew of the Narcissus lament that the ailing James Wait is undermining their "moral certitudes" (NN:61). Yet illness does not always have an altogether adverse impact: it can, on the contrary, serve to strengthen the initiand's moral character. The captain in "The Shadow Line" is initially a somewhat heartless man with little sympathy for others; yet he gains, through his spiritual malaise and vicarious participation in the crew's illness, a sense of kinship and compassion which emerges in his concession to let the chief mate Burns stay on board (70).

The third death trial, enclosure in darkness, symbolises a return to the germinal mode through the obliteration of identity. In The Rescue, the darkness envelops Mrs Travers "like the enervating caress of a sombre universe . . . . Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space" (214). The captain of "The Shadow Line", who is immured in such a darkness -- "such must have been the darkness before creation" (113) -- emerges with the insight that "that episode had been maturing my character" (122).

Descent to Hell, the fourth death trial, entails confrontation with the chaotic, destructive element in both nature and humanity. In "Typhoon", Jukes's maturation hinges

on his descent to the "regular, little hell" of the passenger hold, which is occupied by fighting Chinese passengers, and his successful imposition of order among them (68). Marlow's initiation through three journeys to hell in "Youth" (during the storm [11-12], and his two falls into the ignited cargo-hold [see Boyle 1965:122]), verifies Eliade's classification of this specific trial as having the potential to grant immortality. For Marlow emerges from his ordeals fortified by "a feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men" (36).

After having "died" in the liminal stage, the initiand is mystically reborn in the post-liminal. This last rite entails the re-emergence of the initiand's conscious mind and the re-creation of him- or herself, culminating in re-entry into society as a "new" member. Most of Conrad's characters manage to complete the first part of this process without a problem -- Nostromo's awakening on Sulaco after his swim from the island exemplifies the process of rebirth: "He stood knee deep among the whispering undulations of the green blades with the lost air of a man just born into the world" (N:373). Yet few of them contrive to be successfully reincorporated into society.

Reincorporation in Conrad's texts entails the initiand's acknowledging his or her position in the community by establishing some relationship, or by relating his or her ordeal to an audience. By combining his energy with the crew's to quell the disorderly passengers, Jukes dramatises the process of reintegration through solidarity ("Typhoon":84). Reintegration through telling a story features frequently in Conrad's texts. Through narrating his or her ordeal the initiand hopes to forge a bond between him- or herself and the audience, and thereby alleviate his or her sense of not belonging. In Heart of Darkness Marlow exhibits his need to be part of the society which he initially scorned

because it "could not possibly know the things I knew" (153), by offering not only to retail his experience but to do so with humility: "I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally" (51).

A key issue in Conrad is often "the effort of the alienated, whatever the cause of his alienation . . . to enter again the human communion" (Penn Warren 1958:40). However, this effort is mostly doomed to failure. Despite the community's acting as "an organic synthesizer, re-engaging each initiand as a significant part of the whole", as Campbell puts it, the initiand's return to a new position in society with new knowledge is invariably fraught with problems (Henderson 1990:66; see Moser 1966:15). Nostromo, for instance, is shattered and bewildered at the prospect of returning to Sulaco yet not in his customary role as the people's hero: "The thought that it was no longer open to him to ride through the streets, recognised by everyone, great and little . . . made it appear to him as a town that had no existence" (N:342). Subsequently, many initiands are left stranded on the periphery of society. In the majority of cases, the subject of Conrad's narrative scrutiny is the incomplete or aborted initiation rather than the completed ideal.

That Conrad's interest in initiation should be manifest in his portrayal of incomplete cycles can be explained, in the first instance, in terms of his dual commitment to both the real and the ideal, a commitment in which fidelity to the real was nevertheless paramount. His persistent concern to replicate reality is counterpointed by his need to present events in terms of their ideal pattern: "all my concern has been with the ideal value of things, events and people" (Jean-Aubry 1927:11). Thus the tripartite pattern of initiation is an ideal towards which Conrad's characters aspire yet which they seldom attain. Conrad was fascinated by the inevitable failure and corruption of ideals in real life (see, especially,

Nostromo), and seems to have recognised that imperfection and incompleteness were inescapable conditions of existence. In a letter to Edward Garnett he observed how life appeared to comprise "the incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, incomplete suffering. Events crowd and nothing happens" (Nov. 29 1896; Karl vol 1 1983:321). Alan Friedman insists that Conrad's "struggle to produce something incomplete" was "a positive need" in that it stemmed from his ambition to render reality faithfully (1966:100).[10]

Three major circumstances serve to precipitate incomplete initiation in Conrad's writing. The first pertains to the conditions under which the initiand is reintegrated. The newly initiated member is forbidden to divulge his or her new knowledge in case it disrupts the status quo. Paradoxically though, it is precisely through retailing his or her ordeal that the initiand is able to assimilate and transcend it. For instance, as long as Jim has neither the inclination to speak nor the faith in the power of language to liberate him from his experience -- "speech was of no use to him any longer" (LJ:31); "there were no words for the things I wanted to say" (98) -- he exiles himself from society as a "wayfarer lost in the wilderness" (30), who can "do nothing" (79) to remedy his isolation. Bound to silence, the initiand struggles to reconcile his or her personal need -- to conclude initiation by relating his or her experience -- with the ruling of society, which forbids the disclosure of the ordeal.[11] Some of Conrad's characters, finding the burden of enforced silence intolerable, seek relief from it through writing. Razumov, who is tortured almost to the point of insanity by his "solitary individuality" (17), and by the knowledge which he cannot share of his betrayal of Haldin, manages to retain "a certain measure of composure by writing in his secret diary" (UWE:280). Congruently, the young captain in "The Shadow Line", who lapses into temporary insanity after being beset by a series of seemingly insurmountable

trials during his maiden voyage as skipper, manages to forestall his degeneration into permanent madness by writing in his diary (SL:203).[12] In some cases, this enforced solitude is fatal. Nostromo, plagued by the fact that "there was no one to understand; no one to take into the confidence of Decoud's fate, of his own, into the secret of the silver" (N:386), eventually resigns himself to death.

Status degradation is a second factor explaining the non-integration of the initiand: the initiation ceremony may have expelled rather than incorporated him or her (Garfinkel 1956:428). The psychological impact of social expulsion, as a result of free choice or social sanction, is a primary motif in Conrad's texts. Generally speaking, his characters are either morally fortified by the event, devising their own ethical systems, like Lingard, who, having "lived beyond the pale of civilised laws had evolved his own notions of justice" (OI:235); or they are demoralised by it, like Willems, who protests his exclusion from "the scheme of creation" (OI:65) consequent on his expulsion by betraying his benefactor and surrogate father, Lingard.

While Conrad seems to have regarded the uncompleted initiatory process as quite typical of the life process, he does nevertheless gesture toward the ideal by suggesting some means through which one might at once survive and benefit from completing initiation. First, one could take the stoic advice offered by Captain Giles (SL:131) and Captain MacWhirr ("Typhoon":97), which is to countenance initiation with all one's resources and afterwards to prepare oneself to face the next ordeal, instead of pondering on the significance of the one past. Stein in Lord Jim offers the second, mystical(?) option of immersing oneself in the destructive element, of transcending one's own ego in order to attain a higher level of development (232).

The third possibility is one not available to Conrad's characters, but to his readers. Thomas Moser remarks that "Conrad, by rearranging material, catches up and involves his reader in a moral situation, makes the reader's emotions follow a course analogous to that of his characters" (1966:42). We as readers can submit to initiation through Conrad's art by making ourselves receptive to the initiatory scenarios in his texts. There appears to be a clear analogy between Conrad's intention as an author to be "awakening" (letter to Edward Garnett Nov. 13 1899; Karl vol 2 1986:220), to "use the written word to . . . make you see" (NN:13), and the final objective of initiation -- to produce an enlightened individual, "an epoptes, he who sees" (Eliade 1958:10).[13] Conrad's intention to give his readers (in)sight might be construed as his assuming the role of initiation guide, for he believed that sight is ultimately what all humankind seeks: "To see! To see! -- this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity. To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence" (PR:87).

NOTES

1. The connection Conrad makes between public recognition and a personal sense of integrity as manifest in sensory receptivity, is a major preoccupation in many of his texts. In most cases, it seems impossible for the character to retain both integrity and public approval. Nostromo, for instance, who seems to "care only to be well spoken of" (N:209), and who values above all personal prestige (ibid.), loses his peace of mind and self-respect when he abandons Teresa, his surrogate mother, and then Decoud (N:443), in his quest to secure his reputation by saving the silver.

2. Michel Tournier, in his autobiography The Wind Spirit, estimates that as early as the eighteenth century initiation was beginning to decline in importance in Western societies because of the rise of industrialisation and the concurrent decline in spiritual and ethical matters (1991:43-45). In this perspective, Conrad's era was characterised by the elimination of the few remaining remnants of initiation. Mircea Eliade (1958:ix) and Soll Kimball (1969:xvii-xviii) corroborate Tournier by declaring that the modern world saw the disappearance of the meaningful rites of

initiation due to an increase in secularisation and industrio-urbanisation. But Arnold van Gennep's observations are undoubtedly the most appropriate here since he was a contemporary of Conrad's, conducting his research on initiation and publishing his classic text, Rites of Passage, in 1909. According to van Gennep, the primary divisions within all societies, which also trigger initiation, are magico-religious (between the sacred and the profane) and sexual (1969:189). From his comment that modern societies reduce to "a theoretical minimum" the distinction between male and female, we can infer that for van Gennep initiation in the modern era was in advanced decline (1969:1).

3. Ruth Nadelhaft, who investigates some of Conrad's texts from a feminist perspective, makes much of the link between Conrad's stance as an outsider and his unconventional subject matter (1991:11). "Writing as he did from a position on the margin of Western thought and society . . . Conrad took a stance which subverted Western assumptions about men and nature" (1991:11).

4. It is interesting to note that during his early days Conrad was much put out, haunted even, by the stigma of the outsider imposed on him by English society. However, as time passed, he began to see the positive implications which his difference could have for him as an author, as this letter to his agent, J.B. Pinker adduces: "One may read everybody and yet in the end want to read me -- for a change if for nothing else. For I don't resemble anybody" (July 30 1907; Karl vol 3 1988:277).

5. A letter to Ford Madox Ford, Conrad demonstrates his support with this summary: "The search for the Unknowable seems to be inherent in man's mental organisation" (Letter of early Nov. 1903; Karl vol 3 1988:73).

6. In a letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad subverts the notion of a character undergoing any profound change through initiation by insisting that the "truth of personality" exists in the "aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown" (Mar. 24 1896; Karl vol 1 1983:267).

7. In the Author's Note (vii) to An Outcast of the Islands, Conrad discusses the adverse implications of this transition: "The discovery of new values in life is a very chaotic experience; there is a tremendous amount of jostling and confusion and a momentary feeling of darkness".

8. David Daiches implicitly recognises this theme in his comment that Conrad is concerned "directly or obliquely, with situations to which public codes -- *any* public codes -- are inapplicable, situations which yield a dark and disturbing insight which cannot be related to any beliefs or rules which make human societies possible" (1960:27).

9. Despite his well-known atheism, Conrad could not have been oblivious to the irony implicit in his naming Nostromo (who turns out to be a traitor), Gian Battista Fidanza, which means John the Baptist, Fidelity (Hunter 1985:138).

10. Conrad's interest in capturing the "incomplete" nature of life probably has its roots in his deontological philosophy, the fundamentals of which he impressed on both Edward Garnett -- "To me attempt is more fascinating than achievement" (Jan. 4 1895; Karl vol 1 1983:197) -- and Emile Briquel: "To live means to struggle, and for me the pleasure resides in the struggle itself and never the victory" (Oct. 1 1895; Karl vol 1 1983:230).

11. Zabel aptly describes the impact of this realisation, which the majority of Conrad's characters undergo, as "the terror of awakening" (quoted in Penn Warren 1958:41).

12. Hawthorn, in his comprehensive analysis of the implications of writing in Conrad's texts, interprets this conduct as an attempt to alleviate loneliness and self-estrangement: "Writing, then, can be seen to bear the same relation as speech to alienated existence, contact with other people through `public selves'" (1979:21).

13. Another significant correlation exists between Conrad's aim as an artist to arouse in his readers "the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity" (NN:viii), and the final objective of the initiation ceremony: to establish "a symbiotic union between him or her and the society" (Turner 1974:56).

CHAPTER THREE

"Typhoon" and the Paradigm of Initiation

I

From its first appearance, "Typhoon", with its blend of technical simplicity (Guerard 1966:295), figurative richness (Kolupke 1988:502), and elusive thematic significance, has baffled readers' attempts to confine it to a single category. This elusiveness, besides producing the quota of antithetical responses which seems to be the norm for Conrad's texts, has generated an interesting anomaly: commentaries which, by both endorsing the tale and hinting at its limitations, remain equivocal about its merits.[1] Yet although the status of "Typhoon" in the canon of a writer "esteemed for his metaphysical and moral profundity" (Renner 1987:301) remains a matter of contention, what a number of critics are agreed upon is that initiation is a pivotal theme.[2] My intention in this chapter is to revisit some representative critical views of "Typhoon" from the perspective of its initiatory motif, and then analyse the experiences of Jukes and Captain MacWhirr in terms of van Gennep's model of initiation. By thus exposing the multiple levels of narrative and layers of meaning which the initiatory motif introduces, I hope to dispel what T.A. Birrell regards as the "general consensus of recent opinion" that "Typhoon" is a simple novella which "does not require much close attention" (1980:486). "Typhoon", like "Youth", has attracted a sharply divided critical response. One view, pioneered by the critics Douglas Hewitt and Albert Guerard, is that the tale requires "no elaborate interpreting" (Guerard 1966:294), as it fails to "throw a kind of light on spiritual and moral issues" (Hewitt

1952:122), its "preoccupations [being] nearly all on the surface" (Guerard 1958:295). The opposing view, aptly summarised by Birrell, is that "Typhoon" is "anything but a simple narrative with a simple moral" (1980:498). Critics of this persuasion, who include Joseph Kolupke (1988) and Jacob Lothe (1989), tend to focus their defence of the novella's complexity on explication of the sophistication of its structure and narrative technique.

Among those dismissive of the story, H.M. Daleski (1977), Stephen Land (1984) and Mark Wollaeger (1990) corroborate Hewitt and Guerard by classifying "Typhoon" as a minor response or "appendix" to the text which preceded it, Lord Jim.[3] Several other critics imply a low estimation of the tale by referring to it in passing or failing to mention it at all. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, for instance, refers to "Typhoon" only once -- by way of illustrating her observation that Conrad casts characters, notably Captain MacWhirr, in a similar mould to that of Singleton in The Nigger of the `Narcissus' (1990:26). References to "Typhoon" by C.B. Cox (1974:16), John Batchelor (1994:115-6) and Jacques Berthoud (1978:26) are similarly fleeting. Finally, Robert Hampson (1992) does not even mention the tale.

Ted Boyle was one of the first critics to venture a positive critique of "Typhoon" based on its dramatic and epic qualities (1965:122). After Boyle, Paul Wiley argued that although the story conforms in "pattern" to Conrad's early work, a number of crucial differences prevail (such as its satirical tone), which render a simple interpretation inadequate (1966:67). More recent opinions are emphatic that "Typhoon" possesses "figurative richness" (Kolupke 1988:502) and "narrative sophistication" (Lothe 1989:104), and has "never had its due" because of a tradition of simplistic and reductive reading (Birrell 1980:498).

Rather than attempt to referee among these divergent opinions, I would like to revisit an aspect of the story about which there is general consensus: its thematic burden. Using Jeremy Hawthorn's proposal that "Typhoon" is a "study of change, of the process of human development" (1990:230), as a starting point, I propose to investigate its central motif: initiation, the pattern which this process of change exhibits. While agreeing that "human development" is central to the story, critics are divided on a number of issues, including the precise identity of the protagonist(s) who undergo initiation, and the nature of the change they undergo: enduring or ephemeral, emotional, ontological or spiritual. These disputes can I think be resolved by appeal to the characteristic properties of initiation as ritual. For instance, it is in fact both MacWhirr and Jukes who undergo initiation, since the rite works in an essentially reciprocal way, implicating anyone involved in its process (including the catalyst who triggers the change, and the initiation guide who supervises the initiand). By posing the question: "Are the initiands themselves an audience?", Young first hinted at the complementary nature of initiation, which explodes divisions between initiands and spectators, and creates within the initiand a sense of self-division (1965:22). Jamous has subsequently refined Young's insight thus: "We engage in rituals to transmit messages to ourselves" -- performers are spectators, and vice versa (1992:98).

A second problem with the existing criticism pertains to the criteria used to estimate whether a protagonist has changed or not. Broadly speaking, if the character does not show immediate and obvious signs of development, it is concluded that change has not taken place.[4] But the impact and significance of initiation, seen as a rite, are seldom immediately apparent, either to the newly initiated or to the onlookers, because it is essentially an unconscious ordeal (Eliade 1958:5).

Critics who argue for the initiation of a single character tend to choose MacWhirr.[5] Those who recognise the initiation of both MacWhirr and Jukes, namely Daleski (1977:107), Boyle (1965:125), Wollaeger (1990:124) and Lothe (1989:104), locate the characters' interaction, or more specifically the tension which it generates, at the core of the text. Closer examination, however, reveals that these analyses are only nominally concerned with the ordeals of both characters. For while MacWhirr's role as Jukes's mentor has been extensively examined, the reciprocal nature of their relationship -- the subtle influence which Jukes has on MacWhirr -- has received comparatively little attention.[6] Part of my intention in this chapter is to demonstrate that Jukes is as vital to MacWhirr's initiation as the latter is to the former's. MacWhirr cannot teach Jukes without learning something himself. This is made clear in the chart-room scene when, by explaining his strategy to Jukes, MacWhirr seems to recognise, possilby for the first time, that his conduct is governed by a "philosophy" (39).

II

The title of the tale seems straight-forward and unproblematic. However, when we consider the omission of a prefatory definite or indefinite article, we must infer that Conrad's objective was not simply to render "a realistic description of a storm" (Kolupke 1988:502).[7] Rather, Conrad intended the tale as a study of human response to a generic "typhoon", an extreme experience beyond the normal (Wiley 1966:64-67): precisely the sort of situation conducive to initiation.

In the opening paragraphs of the concluding chapter, the Nan-Shan is described as having about her "the worn, weary look of ships, coming from the ends of the earth, from

the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth" (218); in the previous chapter, the ship's plunge into a hollow in the waves has been likened to her passing "over the edge of the world" (205). The implications are clear: by completing an excursion into a realm beyond the borders of the known world, of "life" itself, the ship has effectively entered into and emerged from a liminal zone. She has of course taken a crew with her, and Conrad's focus in the story is on the initiatory ordeals of her senior officers, Jukes and MacWhirr.[8]

I begin with the character Jukes because his ordeal conforms more closely with van Gennep's threefold schema of initiation than MacWhirr's. Jukes's initiation illustrates the stages of separation from social relations, transition during isolation, and reunion with the corporate body, whereas MacWhirr's trial inverts the paradigm: he begins from a position of social isolation, moves to interaction with others, and ends by withdrawing once again. Evoking Wiley's characterisation of Jukes as the average human being (1966:67), and Bruss's conception of MacWhirr as "the modern sailor" (1979:124), I will argue that the ordeals of these protagonists exemplify the traditional and modern paradigms of initiation, respectively.

In his article entitled "The Initiation of Jukes", Bruss usefully observes that Jukes's maturation is based on his exposure to three "typhoons": MacWhirr's verbal absurdity, the gale, and the "human storm" of the Chinese passengers (1973:46). In terms of the initiation dialectic these ordeals, and therefore Jukes's transition, constitute three typical initiatory scenarios: confrontation with the unknown, exposure to the elements, and a symbolic descent to Hell.

Jukes's first ordeal takes the form of his conversations with a man very different

from himself ("the stranger"), MacWhirr, who ushers him into the preliminal stage of initiation by disorientating him and undermining his self-confidence. The typhoon, Jukes's second trial, advances his progression to the liminal stage by exposing him to a series of mock deaths which so subvert his customary views and ideals as almost completely to erase his erstwhile identity. I stress the word "almost", because at this stage, although Jukes has lost faith in himself (181), he has managed to defer utter annihilation (and implicitly transition), by relying on his captain. But by sending Jukes into the hold to stop the Chinese passengers from fighting, MacWhirr effectively removes the mate from his last source of support. Since conditions in the hold have degenerated into "a regular little hell" (196), Jukes's fourth mock death is a symbolic descensus ad infernum. Significantly, Jukes is also symbolically reborn in the hold, his ordeal thus illustrating the structural link between the initiatory themes of death and rebirth, the springing of new life from the termination of the old (Eliade 1958:36).

Jukes initiates the first conversation with MacWhirr, yet he is also the first to withdraw from it, mortified, and without having communicated his intention. When the ship's owners find it expedient to transfer her registration from Britain to Siam, Jukes takes the change as a "personal affront" and communicates his dismay to Captain MacWhirr by commenting obliquely that there is something "queer" about the new flag (156).[9] MacWhirr, as befits a man who confines his attention to facts (159), checks to see whether the flag complies with objective standards. By reporting to Jukes that "there is nothing amiss with that flag" (156), Captain MacWhirr puts him in the position where, in order both to clarify his intention and defend himself, Jukes must make explicit his implied meaning.[10] In choosing to withdraw rather than to communicate his opinion, Jukes

manifests his refusal to take responsibility for what he intended to say.[11] It is notable that, by abandoning his meaning altogether, Jukes effectively authorises the abrogation of one of his ideals, the bond of solidarity which a shared meaning generates, as formulated in his letter, "we are like brothers here" (161). Hence he contributes to his entrance into the pre-liminal stage which is characterised by social isolation.

In sum, Jukes's first conversation with MacWhirr begins his "education" since he emerges humbled -- he resigns to MacWhirr "meekly" (157); disciplined -- by being alerted to the necessity of taking responsibility for his speech acts; and destabilised -- "He simply knocks me over" (158). Jukes's next conversation with MacWhirr continues his initiation by eroding his ideals of kinship and communication, and forcing him to re-assess his view of the older man. The oppressive heat preceding the typhoon, which returns the ship to a timeless, liminal zone destroys the "brotherly" relations between the crew and the engineers, and the ensuing conflict makes conversation impossible (166). Even the apparently "irresponsive" MacWhirr (151) is unsettled, launching an "unprovoked attack" on the unsuspecting Jukes (165) and thereby disproving the latter's perception of him as "quiet" and implacable (162). Early in the tale, Jukes forms an opinion of MacWhirr as a "dull", "innocent" man whom he would scorn to take advantage of (162); yet he is forced to modify this view virtually every time they converse. For instance, when Jukes uses a figure of speech in his defence of the second engineer, he provokes in the captain an uncharacteristic display of "passion and resentment" (168). Yet Jukes's observation, "Somebody's put a new inside to my old man" (168), indicates that his pride and ignorance prevent him from consciously recognising a truth of which he is latently aware: that his judgement is limited.

These preliminary trials leave Jukes "ripe for the culminating moment in the first stage of his maturation", namely, his discussion with MacWhirr in the chart-room (Bruss 1979:127). Although Jukes approaches MacWhirr with a firm resolve -- "Hang me if I don't speak to him" (171) -- his conviction falters when he discovers the captain reading and not resting as he said he would be, and the mate hesitates to convey his meaning. MacWhirr, by subjecting Jukes to a barrage of questions -- "`Anything wrong? . . . What do you want?'" -- and then rejecting his advice to avoid the storm as "mad", not only upsets him and causes him to "flounder", but, more importantly, discredits his ability as first mate to give sound advice regarding the navigation of the ship (172).

In his attempt to explain to Jukes his motives for confronting the typhoon, MacWhirr exposes two critical developments in their relationship. First, by abandoning his habitual self-effacing demeanour to impress upon Jukes his principles -- "the proper thing to do [in a crisis] is to go through with it" (175) -- MacWhirr actively adopts the role of the mate's initiation guide. Similarly, Jukes shows his acceptance of the identity of initiand by responding with "respect" (173), silence (174) and humility (174; van Rensburg 1990:499). MacWhirr's serenity and stability in this scene -- he neither drops his book nor loses his footing (173) -- which is juxtaposed to and underscores Jukes's progressive loss of control, exemplifies the relationship between initiation guide and initiand, during which the former contrives to render the latter susceptible to the impression of new teachings by mortifying him through the exposure of his ignorance (van Rensburg 1990:498).

The second change in their relation, which becomes more overt as the story progresses, is MacWhirr's sacralising influence on Jukes: the captain's uncharacteristic display of "feeling and loquacity" gives the mate the impression of having witnessed a

"miracle" (175). In terms of initiation, therefore, MacWhirr provides Jukes with his first glimpse of the sacred incarnate.

To recapitulate, Jukes's first trial prepares him for complete annihilation and transition in the liminal stage by exposing the limitations of his judgement and stripping him of the foundations of his identity, his verbal confidence and sense of community. Thus when Jukes confronts his second trial, the typhoon, he has "already become involved in the terrible process of self-examination" (Bruss 1979:127).

In his "Initiation" essay, Conrad stresses that in a crisis loyalty to the ship is of paramount importance. Such constancy is necessary to bring one full circle, to ensure the completion of the initiatory cycle (Bruss 1979:17). When Jukes is confronted by the crisis of the typhoon, it is finally his devotion to the ship (in combination with his personal maturation) which enables him to complete his initiation. Captain MacWhirr, who embodies the traditions of his predecessors, plays a vital role in fortifying Jukes to remain loyal to the ship. He does this by impressing upon Jukes the nature and importance of the duties incumbent on his position as first mate. It is worth noting that although Jukes officially holds the position of first mate, the fact that he has "no wide experience of men or storms" (188), suggests that he has not yet earned this title. In this aspect, the tale assumes a somewhat regressive slant, tracing the process through which Jukes secures the right to a status already bestowed on him.

Indivisible from Jukes's initiation as a sailor is his maturation as an individual. While it is only through assuming the duties of first mate that Jukes can accede to self-knowledge and autonomy, his recognition of his responsibilities is premised on his personal growth. This process is perhaps exemplified when MacWhirr commands Jukes to restore

order among the passengers (206): the mate has first to regain self-control before attempting to resolve their fighting.

I have divided my analysis of Jukes's progressive transformation through the episode of the typhoon into three phases. The first deals with his immediate reaction to the gale, the second his simulated "mock deaths", and the third his gradual dissolution which culminates in spiritual atrophy.

The end of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three depict the advance of the typhoon through the rising of a terrible gale and a "sudden lowering of darkness" (179).[12] In terms of initiation, this darkness, which obscures sight "like something palpable" (179), is an archetypal death trial which returns the crew to the prenatal condition: alone and blind (Eliade 1958:9). The immediate effect of the typhoon, therefore, is to disunite the men; its sustained effect is to prevent their reunion.

Jukes's first reaction to the typhoon is one of "stoic heroism" (Birrell 1980:495). He opposes it unthinkingly -- "he pulled himself together in an instant" -- and confidently, re-asserting command of the crew (178). He sustains his morale by persuading himself that his experience is equal to the situation -- he had "just expected this" -- and therefore, that he can handle it (178). But eventually Jukes is forced to acknowledge his limitations, that the situation is after all "rather more that he had expected" (178).[13]

At this crucial stage, when the typhoon threatens to nullify Jukes's epistemological and moral absolutes because it is "wordless, valueless, directionless", he finds MacWhirr (Bruss 1979:128). That Jukes is "uncritically glad" (179) to see MacWhirr, who relieves him of "most of the gale's weight" (179), indicates not only that the crisis has radically altered his opinion of the Captain (he originally criticised MacWhirr as "too dense to

trouble about" [162]); but also that he is reluctant to assume the duties of captain in MacWhirr's absence.

The second phase of Jukes's initiation traces his advancement to the liminal stage during which he loses his sense of time ("It seemed to him he remained there . . . for a long, long time" [180]) and space (he imagines himself washed overboard [181]), and undergoes a series of mock deaths which gradually strip him of his physical, moral, cognitive and spiritual resources. His first sensation, after the "real" fury of the gale unleashes itself,[14] is of a momentary loss of conscious identity: "everything disappeared -- even for a moment, his power of thinking" (180). Although Bruss is quite correct in identifying this moment, with "all its overtones of death", as critical to Jukes's growth (1979:127), I would argue that it is better seen as a preliminary trial, soon succeeded by further symbolic deaths. For instance, Jukes's feeling of being "bestially shaken and partly choked" by the gale is symbolic of assimilation by a monster (180), and his complete immersion in water, which hinders his breathing ("He breathed in gasps" [180]), has overtones of a mock drowning (Eliade 1958:52; Henderson 1990:139).

Besides these symbolic deaths, Jukes undergoes two additional ego-deaths when his imagination convinces him of the ineffectuality of personal volition. On the first occasion, Jukes loses "faith in himself" when he experiences the impact of the typhoon as a personal assault, "some unparalleled outrage directed at his feeling" (181). After the lifeboats are washed overboard, Jukes is temporarily fortified by the bond he forms with MacWhirr by conveying this information to him.[15] But the captain's continued silence isolates Jukes, who is "watchfully" listening for more (183), and in this state of moral solitude he undergoes his second ego-death, in which he acknowledges his powerlessness: "there was nothing to

be done" (ibid.).

By resigning himself to his impotence -- "Nothing could be prevented now and nothing could be remedied" (183) -- Jukes at once exonerates himself from his duties as first mate ("the men on board did not count" [ibid.]), and seemingly attempts to abort the initiation process. For as a liminar, Jukes is required to demonstrate his capacity to handle a crisis by retaining self-possession, conquering fear and showing self-abnegation, sympathy and passivity (Turner 1969:105). That he has lost self-possession and given in to fear, selfishness and enervation, exposes an unwillingness to deal with crises, a disavowment of solidarity and implicitly a reluctance to continue his metamorphosis.

Jukes's annihilation is momentarily arrested by MacWhirr. The immediate effect of the squall is to render him helpless, as he is "flung and rolled in great volumes of water" (181). But after a while he is "seized by the crazy resolution" to fight his way out of the situation, to recover self-control (182). That he finds MacWhirr whilst endeavouring to regain self-volition implies that by struggling for survival and self-possession Jukes virtually approximates to captaincy. MacWhirr, clasping Jukes in "a pair of stout arms" (182), demonstrates to him the life-sustaining potential of his ideal, solidarity. Together, the two men, "in the manner of two hulks lashed together stern to stern", brace each other to confront the typhoon (184). It becomes apparent, therefore, that Jukes must first experience his ideals personally, like Marlow in "Youth", before his embrace of them can be authentic and secure.

The phase ends with Jukes resigning himself, under the sway of his imagination, to the certainty of destruction -- "She's done for" (183) -- and the futility of resistance: "Nothing could be remedied now" (ibid.; see Daleski 1977:109). It is notable that at this

decisive moment, when Jukes has relinquished all hope and concern, MacWhirr shows uncanny intuition in expressing anxiety for the very thing which Jukes has dismissed: the crew (184).

The third phase of Jukes's initiation through the typhoon comprises his loss of belief in his existence, an event which is shortly followed by his physical, moral and spiritual resignation. Ironically, Jukes's attempt to regain a belief in his existence by conversing with MacWhirr has precisely the contrary effect. For his words, in rising out of him unconsciously and seemingly irrespective of his volition (he neither hears nor intends them), far from confirming his conscious existence, provoke him to doubt it: "it all became extinct at once -- thought, intention, effort" (185). Jukes's resultant physical resignation -- he "let himself go limp all over" (186); "he was letting himself sink into . . . bodily misery" (ibid.; my emphasis) -- is in sharp contrast to an earlier episode, after the first squall, when a "revolt of misery and despair" moved him to actively oppose the storm (181). In short, the event reveals that the typhoon has substantially weakened Jukes's resolve.[16]

In keeping with the analogy that the typhoon is a personal assailant --"a furious gale attacks like a personal enemy" (180); Mr Rout "fights" it with "purposeful industry" (201) -- Jukes's resignation is depicted as a relinquishing of arms: his clothes drip "like an armour of melting ice" (186). In time, however, the "great physical tumult" of the typhoon brings "profound trouble" to his soul, initiating a descent to the nadir of existence through spiritual degeneration (185). Jukes's disintegration persists until he is "daunted" and overwhelmed by a "forced-on numbness of spirit" (188), an experience which he, in his deficient sense of self, misinterprets as inexorable "calm" (188). His spiritual deterioration

culminates in a series of "hallucinations" which, as the narrator implies in his comment -- "it is said that a drowning man thus reviews his life" (188) -- comprise another mock demise.

As in the previous phase, just as Jukes has resigned himself to death -- "It was the beginning of the end" (189) -- MacWhirr recalls him to life by reminding him of his responsibility to the ship. But Jukes, who has become "corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace" (189) and a contempt for active life, rebels against "the tyranny of training and command" (ibid.) embodied in MacWhirr's order that he restore peace among the passengers. Thus Jukes resists MacWhirr's command, first, by refusing to answer him and preserving an attitude of "dumb" paralysis instead (189); and secondly, by pleading a lack of resources and initiative -- "What am I to do then, sir?" (194). In so doing, he reiterates his desire both to suspend his initiation (for a liminar is required to be innovative and creative), and to renege on his duty to the ship. In terms of the initiation dialectic, MacWhirr is sending Jukes on a mission to test whether he has internalised his master's advice and can act upon it, as well as whether he can apply the knowledge he has gleaned from his preceding ordeals.

The third phase of Jukes's initiation, like the second, depicts his encounter with a destructive force. But whereas in the former instance this element resided in nature, it is now manifest in human nature, the "human storm" of the Chinese passengers (Daleski 1977:112). The acme of this phase, therefore, is Jukes's encounter with the passengers; but prior to this, he undergoes two preliminary trials which, as Joseph Campbell explains, establish his right to embark on this descent to the underworld (1993:100).

Jukes's meeting with the demoralised crew, who are cowering in the alleyway "still

as death" (67), constitutes his first test. Here Jukes shows resourcefulness in using words -- he speaks to them "brutally" -- to reprimand both the crew and himself, for his instinctive reaction is to "throw himself down amongst them and never move any more" (195). Jukes's second threshold experience tests his ability to withstand a new and disorientating experience. For when he enters the bunker which leads to the hold, the ship's motion becomes "novel and menacing", and this alien sensation threatens to sap his resolution "as though he had never been afloat before" (195). That Jukes overcomes the urge to "scramble out again" (196) by remembering MacWhirr's voice implies that he has internalised the captain's orders so that they act upon him like a conscience, forcing him to complete his mission against his natural inclination.

Jukes's first confrontation with the passengers so terrifies him that he backs out of the room "trembling" (197) and delivers his report to MacWhirr in the hope of being "dismissed from the face of that odious trouble" (204). Jukes's fear is provoked by the fact that the passengers epitomise both the unknown and chaos. For the noises which they emit -- "incomprehensible, guttural hooting sounds, that did not seem to belong to a human language" (210) -- cast doubt on their humanity; and they are depicted in the non-human terms of animate and inanimate objects, such as "bees on a branch" and "a mass of rolling stones", without volition and order (196). Significantly, not only have the passengers become dehumanised -- "a bulky mass with a slanting outline" (192) -- but the gale has assumed an increasingly "human character, of human rage and pain" (191). This reversal of attributes implies that the entire ship has entered a liminal zone, which is typically characterised by such inversions (Turner 1969:95).

Turner's declaration that sometimes initiation gives an "outward and visible form to

an inward and conceptual process" is apposite here, as Jukes's self-annihilation is mirrored in his wretched physical appearance, his "dishevelled hair" and disordered clothes (206) (quoted in Herdt 1982:149). At this stage, when Jukes's resolve is considerably weakened, his glance is "wandering and tipsy" (202) and he feels "like a defeated man from a field of battle" (206), MacWhirr and Rout fulfil the critical role of forcing him to commit himself to his duty. For instance, Rout's insinuation that Jukes is idle (206) re-animates the mate by converting his apathy to anger. Jukes's subsequent abandonment of his ideals of solidarity and communication, evinced in his refusal both to comply with the donkeyman's request for assistance (207) and to answer him -- "Can't you speak?" (ibid.) -- indicates that he has reached a critical stage in his initiation: he has effectively rejected his identity.

Through carrying out MacWhirr's command Jukes rediscovers the ideals which he has recently repudiated and accesses his latent potential for command. When he returns to the crew from the engine room the new sense of urgency which he exudes, of preoccupation with the vital issues of "life and death", motivates and consolidates them, so that at his "first word" they all obey instantly (207). Whereas the first time Jukes saw the passengers he had withdrawn in fear of being crushed ("when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him" [196]) -- the second time he hurls himself unhesitatingly into their midst, despite the fact that their destructive potential seems to have escalated and is now comparable to that of a "landslide" (208). Significantly, Jukes extracts himself before the crew can reach him (208), for in so doing he symbolically saves himself and manifests his assumption of an independent identity. The manner in which Jukes fights to separate himself from the passengers mirrors his struggles during the first squall, but with one substantial difference: whereas his previous efforts culminated in his

discovery of the captain, these exertions lead him to discover himself as first mate.

Concomitant with Jukes's maturation in the public realm as first mate is his development of his private identity. Jukes's "mad struggle" with the passengers (209), besides heightening his perception and making his sight "preternaturally acute" (210), gives him the impression of overcoming the typhoon (209). In other words, his confrontation with this violent, irrational element in human nature provides him with a paradigm for future confrontations with this element, whether in a natural or human form.

In sum, by actively imposing order on chaos Jukes regains his self-composure, increases his self-knowledge and demonstrates his resumption of his responsibilities as first mate. In terms of initiation, by severing contact with MacWhirr, his initiation guide, and thereafter combining his energy with the crew to control the passengers, Jukes literally acts out the progression from the liminal to the post-liminal stage.

But if Jukes inaugurates his reincorporation, it is ultimately MacWhirr who supervises his self-reconstruction. For instance, by ignoring Jukes's demands for praise and emphasising his ignorance instead ("you don't find everything in books" [211]), MacWhirr strips him of his new-found pride. And by leaving Jukes alone on the deck to act as his substitute, MacWhirr compels him to exercise and hence consolidate his newly-won responsibility. It is notable that when the captain returns, Jukes seems to have matured, for besides having ensured the welfare of the crew, he has assumed a new voice, "blank" and "forced", which indicates his awareness of the importance of taking responsibility for his speech acts, instead of responding unthinkingly (215).

MacWhirr's final advice to Jukes -- not to "[meet] trouble half way", to confront crises with composure, and not to "be put out by anything" (217) -- is vital as it helps to

restore his self-confidence. The narrator's insinuation that Jukes recovers faith in himself independently of MacWhirr is not a denial of the captain's influence. Rather, it is an attempt to portray the event from Jukes's perspective, accentuating his ignorance of the source of his new self-possession: "For some reason, Jukes experienced an access of confidence, a sensation that came from outside like a warm breath, and made him feel equal to every demand" (217).

The general critical consensus on the matter of Jukes's initiation and metamorphosis is that he discovers meaning through his trials, but that once they are over he reverts to his old self.[17] Jukes's letter, and in particular his condescending evaluation of MacWhirr in it, are cited as evidence of his failure to change.[18] I would propose that this argument is invalidated by its premise, since the narrator's description of the letter as well as its contents confirms rather than denies Jukes's change. By describing the letter as a "calculated" effort to convey an "impression of . . . indomitable resolution" (107), the narrator alerts us to the deliberate artifice of the document, a factor which surely disqualifies it as a reliable index of Jukes's mental and spiritual state. The word "calculated", Hawthorn notes, is revealing, as it suggests that Jukes's primary motive is not to tell the truth but to produce an effect upon his reader, not "dishonestly but nevertheless misleadingly" (1990:226). Further, Jukes's comment on the impact of the gale on the Chinese passengers is inadvertently a confession of its influence upon him, especially if we consider that he had undergone a similar experience when his spirit atrophied: "They had a doing that would have shaken the soul out of a white man" (226). Finally, by ending his letter quoting MacWhirr's advice -- "the old chief says this was the only thing that could be done. . . . `There are things you find nothing about in books'" (227) -- Jukes reveals that

he has assimilated the captain's maxims and this factor casts doubt on the seriousness of his disparaging account of him as "stupid" (227).

While one cannot dispute Kolupke's observation that Jukes's assessment of MacWhirr as "stupid" suggests that he still does not know the captain, I cannot agree with his conclusion: that this ignorance proves the mate's failure to change at all (1988:507). It can of course be argued that Jukes has failed to reach full maturity. The fact that Jukes is "locked into a false version of [his] story" is ample evidence, in Hovet's estimation, of immaturity (1990:20). Yet the initiation dialectic also informs us that this initial misconstruction of one's ordeal is natural since maturation is a protracted process. My conclusion, then, is that Jukes does grow in self-knowledge and that his perception is enlarged, but that this development is limited: he does not emerge from the tale a fully mature individual.

III

I would now like to turn to the question of MacWhirr's initiation, beginning with the problematic nature of his characterisation, as this informs estimations of the extent to which he can respond to his ordeals and/or is capable of change. Broadly speaking, evaluations of his character are antipodal. On the one hand, critics such as Guerard (1966:296), Cox (1974:16), Wollaeger (1990:123) and Erdinast-Vulcan (1991:26), take MacWhirr at face value as a simple man who remains fundamentally unchanged by his trials, overcoming them by dint of his deficiencies in imagination and intellect. The opposing view, put forward by Birrell (1980:487), Kolupke (1988:509) and Hawthorn (1990:222), is that MacWhirr is a complex and resourceful character whose deeper nature is obscured by a

lack of social graces, yet who nevertheless undergoes radical change. I would incline towards the latter assessment and hope to demonstrate both that he is not a shallow and simple character and that he experiences permanent and profound change.

The narrator, by describing MacWhirr in the opening pages of "Typhoon", as an unremarkable character (151), lacking in both imaginative and intellectual powers, ironically sets in motion a major thrust of the tale, which is to undermine the authority of this initial account.[19] On the second page of the story, the narrator initiates the fracturing of the portrait by alluding to an event from MacWhirr's past (he ran away from home at the age of fifteen) which hints at his potential for impulsive and irresponsible behaviour. By prefacing the anecdote with the comment, "Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side" (152), the narrator warns us not to take as dismissive a view of the captain as Jukes does. Lothe is particularly emphatic that the majority of critics who categorise MacWhirr as simple have overlooked the narrator's insinuation of his complexity in this very sentence (1989:105).

MacWhirr's initiation is akin to Jukes's in that it comprises a threefold process, but deviates from the mate's ordeal in that it introduces abberations to the pre- and post-liminal stages (of which more presently). There are two aspects of MacWhirr's initiation which indicate that his ordeal exemplifies the modern experience of initiation. The first is that he enters the initiation cycle from a typically modern situation of social isolation (see Myerhoff 1987:385). MacWhirr appears to have neither friends nor social acquaintances, and the sole relationship which he has sustained, namely with his wife, is entirely nominal. MacWhirr's isolation alters the content of his pre- and post- liminal stages: instead of progressing from a state of incorporation to isolation and eventually returning to society, he

moves from a position of alienation to integration and then reverts to isolation. However, such alterations in the initiatory pattern, as Jung insists, leave the psychic content and impact of the ordeal unaltered (1983:156). A second component which suggests that MacWhirr's initiation is modern is that he undergoes his initiation alone, without the supervision of an initiation guide (Myerhoff 1987:385), for concomitant with the deposition of initiation from its public status as a mandatory rite in modern-day society has been the disappearance of initiation guides.

While Jukes's initiation develops aspects of himself as yet unformed, such as initiative and humility, MacWhirr's ordeal focuses on redressing the imbalance caused by the predominance of his public status as a captain. MacWhirr's lack of a private identity to complement his public self seems due to his complete devotion to his professional vocation. As Conrad notes in a letter to Helen Watson, the implications of such an imbalance are unfavourable: "Duty is wide and complex and a balance is necessary lest evil is done where good is intended" (June 27 1897; Karl vol 1 1983:362). Mr. Sigg's comment that MacWhirr is a man "you could be sure would not try to improve upon his instructions" (156), identifies a characteristic which is perhaps decisive in catapulting MacWhirr into initiation: his proclivity as a captain, and impliedly as an individual too, to be literal-minded, static and complacent.

MacWhirr's personal relations and his perspective on communication point to the monopolisation of his personality by the status of captain. In chapter one, the first positive and remarkable thing we learn about MacWhirr is that he is a good captain whose ships are always "floating abodes of peace and harmony" (152). This account is immediately followed and hence qualified by, a description of his inadequate personal relations. By

failing to contact his parents for eight months after running away from home, MacWhirr reveals a glaring lack of concern for others and an ignorance of the trust implicit in relationships, shortcomings for which his complete devotion to his career as a sailor ostensibly compensates.

While MacWhirr's attitude to his parents is understandable, given that maturation is naturally premised on a complete severing of the parental bond, his relationship with his "young woman" confirms that his first priority is the sea. For besides the fact that he fails to make a favourable comment about her (153), he accepts his first command on virtually the same day that they are married. Hence his bond with her is effectively eclipsed by his bond with the sea. The narrator seems to attach considerable significance to MacWhirr's marriage, only subtly to subvert this by means of a verbal parallelism which hints at ambivalence: "The great day of MacWhirr's marriage came in due course, following shortly upon the great day when he got his first command" (153).

MacWhirr's attitude to communication is similarly influenced by his duty as a captain. Stolidly committed to the view that all that necessitates conversation are "matters of duty" (155), he makes no attempt to converse on subjects outside routine, nor to express his opinions (154, 153). As a result, he is ignorant of the protocols of communication, as his remark to Jukes reveals: "I cannot understand what you can find to talk about" (162); and of conduct, as Jukes reports of him: "He told me once . . . that he found it difficult to make out what made people act so queerly" (ibid.). In other words, for MacWhirr it is people, with their mysterious relationships, who embody the unknown. In this perspective, it is necessary that his initiation entails not separation from people, but confrontation with them as representatives of the unknown.

The inadequacy of MacWhirr's understanding of communication is apparent in his letters to his wife. For these monthly documents, in which he recounts every detail of his travels, are more memoranda to himself than any genuine attempt to make contact with her (160). In this view, the fact that she overlooks his premonition of death (220) is not so much a comment on her obtuseness as a judgement on MacWhirr who, by failing effectively to communicate with others, has effectively isolated himself.[20] Through his initiation, MacWhirr gradually progresses from his fixation on duty to a more humane perspective. His changing attitude to the human "cargo" of the Chinese mineworkers epitomises this transition. Initially, his motive for resolving the fighting among them is informed solely by his dismay at this violation of the ideal order for which he as captain is responsible: "Couldn't allow fighting anyhow" (199). Later, however, this view appears to yield to a more compassionate outlook: "Had to do what's fair by them" (211); and finally, to the belief that they are equals -- "Give them the same chance with ourselves" (216) -- who are entitled to the same chances of survival as the sailors.

MacWhirr's initiation can be roughly divided into four phases. In the first phase, which is also the preliminal stage, he is made to feel "greatly out of sorts" (164) by the combined pressure of verbal and physical tension, in the form of his unsuccessful conversations with Jukes and the heat preceding the typhoon. MacWhirr's consequent loss of self-possession precipitates the emergence of repressed concerns and characteristics, such as his hatred of figurative language. During the second phase, MacWhirr progresses to the liminal stage of initiation through a self-revelational experience, a "confession of faith", during which he liberates a belief he has long repressed (176).

The third phase of MacWhirr's initiation involves his spiritual awakening through

his physical resistance to the storm and his interaction with Jukes. Ironically, the climax of MacWhirr's initiation, when his "defences" are finally "penetrated" (214), takes place during a moment of "do-nothing heroics" (187) when he retires to his cabin during a lull in the storm. This fourth and final ordeal is figured, in antithesis to the self-revelation in the second phase, as a resignation of faith and a recognition of the fallibility of his empirical perspective.

As Wiley remarks, MacWhirr's decision to face the storm initiates his first step into "the wilderness" (1966:67), in other words, the liminal zone. However, of equal importance to an understanding of MacWhirr's initiation are the steps leading up to and following this threshold experience. At the close of the first chapter, MacWhirr is portrayed as a complete stranger to the process of initiation, a man who has "wandered innocently" all his life and seems destined to remain "ignorant of life to the last" (163). Akin to the old count in "A Pathetic Tale", MacWhirr's self-confidence and sense of harmony is precariously based on ignorance rather than experience of "cataclysms" (164). The narrator's summation that MacWhirr is one of those men "thus fortunate -- or thus disdained by destiny" (163) is vital to an understanding of initiation, not only in this tale but in general, encapsulating as it does the paradoxical tenet that the awakening which initiation entails has the power either to renew or to destroy life.

The Nan-Shan begins her voyage on a sea which, since it is "full of everyday, eloquent facts" that "speak to a seaman in clear and definitive language" (160), reinforces MacWhirr's empirical perspective that "facts can speak for themselves" (155) and conduces to his anticipation that he will be reporting "fine weather" again (160). Chapter two opens with ominous portents of a drastic change: the sun shines with a "strange indecisive light",

and the Chinese passengers litter the deck "prostrate", like the dead (164). The excessive heat presaging the typhoon incites conflict bordering on mutiny amongst the crew (165). And it is possibly this incipient rebellion, coupled with the feeling that he is out of his element -- "He gasped like a fish" (164) -- which ushers MacWhirr into the preliminal stage of initiation. MacWhirr's disorientation and self-estrangement emerges in his abandonment of his duty as a captain, that is, in his failure to attempt to resolve the tension between the sailors and the engineers. That MacWhirr's personal dissolution has an adverse impact on his public status and performance illustrates the maxim that initiation renders these supposedly separate elements interdependent.

MacWhirr's conversations with Jukes advance his initiation by stimulating change in him and compelling him to recognise the limitations of his viewpoint. For instance, on two separate occasions, MacWhirr's discussions with Jukes leave him feeling "amazed" (156) and "astonished" (173), reactions which imply his discovery of a novel perspective. From the outset, the narrator has foregrounded both MacWhirr's "unruffled and irresponsive" (151) nature and his disinclination to pass opinions (154; 153;155). In this perspective, the fact that during his conversation with Jukes about the engineer, MacWhirr not only expresses a view -- his intention to retrench the second engineer for profane conduct (167) -- but does so with "passion and resentment" (168), implies a profound transition in him.[21]

The second phase of MacWhirr's initiation sees his progression to the liminal stage through an experience akin to a revelation, which supplements his self-knowledge. Prior to this, however, two incidents occur which lead him to doubt his empirical philosophy. The first involves his attempt to supplement his ignorance of typhoons by consulting a book on storm strategies. MacWhirr's failure to "bring all these things into definite relation to

himself" (174) provokes him to question the validity of his outlook. His contemptuous anger seems directed as much at himself as at the book (174).[22]

Jukes's intrusion upon MacWhirr in the chart-room constitutes the second incident, as their ensuing discussion reiterates the limitations of the latter's perspective. When Jukes speaks of a fact (the Chinese passengers) MacWhirr is unable to understand him because of the terminology he uses: MacWhirr sees the Chinese mineworkers as "coolies" (172), Jukes as passengers. Thus the conversation forces MacWhirr to reconsider his maxim that facts are axiomatic and can stand on their own, and compels him to acknowledge that personal interpretation has a substantial impact on communication. The tension generated by MacWhirr's and Jukes's initial misunderstanding culminates in the former undergoing a cathartic ordeal. In an attempt to "illustrate" for Jukes his decision to face the typhoon (174), MacWhirr embarks on an explanation of his philosophy, and in so doing at once clarifies it to himself and liberates "a belief matured in the course of meditative years" (176). His resultant feeling of "mental vacuity" suggests that he has freed a repressed part of himself, and indicates his progression to the liminal stage (Turner 1974:257).

I would like to propose that MacWhirr's "confession of faith" (176) is not simply a philosophical exposition: it is a summary of the lessons he has distilled from his experience over the years. In other words, apparently for the first time, he imparts a condensed version of his life; and in doing so, evinces his maturation. For the discovery of a voice, the acquisition of "an ability to tell one's story", is regarded as a key indicator "mark[ing] stages of maturity into a successful initiation" (Hovet 1990:23).

Boyle's comment that MacWhirr conducts himself during the typhoon as an exemplary captain who "sustains the ship by spiritual force" introduces the central concern

of the third phase: MacWhirr's spiritual awakening (1965:130). MacWhirr initially confronts the typhoon as a fighter would a personal opponent: trying to "penetrate the hidden intention and guess the aim and force of the thrust" (179). The gale first assaults him in his cabin, and his instinctive response -- to "go out and confront" it -- is reflected in the manner in which he finishes dressing -- he "lunges like a fencer" for his coat -- and in his final appearance, "vigilant" in his "panoply of combat" (176-7).

Once out of his cabin, MacWhirr is portrayed as an indomitable force, taking up a fixed position on the deck and thereby becoming an emblem of unflinching endurance. Because the tumult of the gale impairs visibility and makes effective action impossible, the characters' reactions are conveyed through their voices. Thus when Jukes loses all belief in emerging from the typhoon alive, his despair is reflected in his mute paralysis (189), while MacWhirr's resilience and hope is projected through his voice, which remains "vigorous [though] evanescent, overcoming the strength of the wind" throughout (184).

The solitariness of MacWhirr's stand against the storm is significantly qualified by the fact that whenever he makes contact with or refers to another character his voice gains in strength: he appears to fortify himself from time to time through contact with others, both verbal and physical. Thus in the early stages of the typhoon, MacWhirr's "frail" yet "indomitable" voice (183) becomes stronger and starts "to march athwart the prodigious rush of the typhoon" (184), the moment he puts his arm around Jukes. Again, when talking to Jukes about Rout, MacWhirr's voice gains in "force and firmness", "as if it had come suddenly upon the one thing fit to withstand the power of the storm" (185). MacWhirr's oblivion to his dependence on other people introduces a primary objective of his initiation: to make him, the solitary, unsociable and self-sufficient man "achieve that fellow-feeling

with and understanding of his fellow human beings" which he lacks (Hawthorn 1990:228).

MacWhirr's ability to withstand the storm inheres in a number of factors. For instance, by assimilating the catastrophe under the term "heavy weather", he converts it into a fact which he can handle (213). More importantly, MacWhirr's simple and unimaginative approach to reality (151) equips him with the self-possession and rationality necessary to survive a life-threatening force. The description of his voice as "small, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to visions of hope and fear" (185) suggests the link between his stolidity and his lack of imagination. This notion is underscored by the fact that he loses courage when he starts to imagine the outcome of the typhoon during a lull (213).

Boyle's differentiation of MacWhirr into two personalities: the man, who is "ridiculous"; and the captain, the archetypal vanquisher of the dark powers of nature, facilitates our understanding of his transition at this stage (1965:126). In his capacity as a captain whose first responsibility is to the ship, MacWhirr excels himself, while remaining unchanged; as a man, however, he undergoes spiritual awakening.

From the start of the tale, MacWhirr's relation to the spiritual or supernatural element seems contradictory. For while he, in his empiricism, consciously opposes it, confining his attention and belief to the tangible (omens mean nothing to him [153]), he is unconsciously drawn to it, for on two occasions prior to the typhoon thte sacred intrudes on his life. When he runs away from home he does so not from conscious choice, but in response to a mysterious prompting, the thrusting of "an immense, potent, and invisible hand into the ant-heap of the earth" (152). Again, when he consults the book on storm-strategy shortly before the first squall, he is motivated by a mysterious impulse, "some influence in the air" (173).

Jukes first glimpses the possibility of another dimension to MacWhirr during the captain's "confession of faith", a spectacle which convinces him that he has just witnessed a "miracle" (175). The spiritual is increasingly invoked in descriptions of MacWhirr during the typhoon. For instance, when the captain expresses concern regarding the welfare of the crew, "the strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo" envelops him (184). Again, when MacWhirr talks to Jukes through the speaking tube, the mate envisions him as "an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with the storm" (204). That MacWhirr's spiritual capacity appears to emerge in his interaction with Jukes reiterates the complementary nature of initiation in which, in this case, the mate is the catalyst. Moreover, the power invested in MacWhirr's voice becomes effectively supernatural. Initially, the gale drowns out MacWhirr's voice so that it is all but inaudible, and Jukes hears it "as if crying far away" (181). But as the squall intensifies and forces MacWhirr to fix himself in firmer opposition to it, his voice becomes proportionately stronger, so that eventually this "dwarf sound" (185) seems to overcome the very hurricane (205).

MacWhirr's spiritual awakening epitomises one of the earliest conceptions of initiation as a mystery rite stimulating spiritual development (Burkert 1987:4). Yet his ordeal also illustrates the danger innate in this approximation to the sacred, namely, that it entails neglect of the intimate (Burkert 1987:12). Thus while MacWhirr manages to allay a number of conflicts (such as the second mate's rebellion), he fails to resolve the tension between himself and Jukes which is still at large at the close of the tale (224).

To recapitulate, although the typhoon initiates MacWhirr by testing his mettle and thus stimulating the spiritual aspect of his identity and expanding his perspective (including his conception of "heavy weather" [213]), it fails to effect complete transition in him as the

foundation of his identity, his loyalty to facts (155) and adherence to "proper" conduct (175), is still intact. The fourth phase of MacWhirr's initiation entails his radical change through confrontation with a situation which, like the heat, he cannot fight. It would seem that by upholding his duties (and implicitly his status) as a captain, MacWhirr manages to forestall complete annihilation and therefore transition. This becomes clear when he momentarily suspends his responsibility as a captain by returning to the chart-room, for then his identity is completely erased.

Ironically it is then, during an ominous lull, when -- removed from the elements in the safety of his cabin -- he first recognises the destructive potential of the typhoon.[23] That the true menace of the gale is manifest to MacWhirr only in his private realm supports the notion that, in his identity as a captain he is impregnable, impervious to change. In the cabin, "the chaos of the place where he used to live so tidily" (213) gives MacWhirr "a more intimate knowledge of the tossing the ship had gone through" (ibid.) than he had gained from his position on deck.[24] Notwithstanding this, the deciding factor in MacWhirr's destabilisation seems to be the inexplicably low reading on the barometer, an instrument (we have been told earlier) which MacWhirr "had no reason to distrust" (153).

That MacWhirr does distrust the barometer (213), even consulting another instrument to verify its reading, is tantamount to his doubting his own empirical philosophy.[25] In short, the barometer confronts MacWhirr with the limitations of his thesis that "facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision" (155), and therefore that they require no personal interpretation but are universally comprehensible. For here he is presented with a fact which contradicts his conception of facts: instead of disclosing itself it remains stubbornly silent, and resists his attempts to comprehend its significance.

The sheer novelty of the experience coupled with the seemingly personal nature of the invasion (214) bring MacWhirr's psychological dissolution to a climax, when a "feeling of dismay" nearly "undermine(s) the very seat of his composure" (ibid.). Significantly, MacWhirr's apprehension prompts him to relinquish physical control in an identical manner to Jukes: he is described as "letting himself fall on the settee" (214, my emphasis). MacWhirr manages to regain composure temporarily, by remembering that the chaos wrought by the typhoon elsewhere has been resolved (that is, in the passenger hold),[26] and by discovering that his cabin is not utterly disarranged, as his matches are in their customary place (214). Guerard proposes that MacWhirr is saved by his "meticulous attention to order and detail, his submission to habits" (1958:198). I would argue that MacWhirr's salvation is ultimately attributable, rather, to the solidarity of his fellow sailors, to the fidelity of men following orders. For it is the steward who has put the matches in the right place, and it is Jukes who, by restoring order among the passengers, has provided MacWhirr with a saving illusion of order prevailing elsewhere, "a vague sense of the fitness of things" (214), which fortifies him to cope with the immediate experience of chaos. Through his ordeals, therefore, MacWhirr finally comes to an incipient awareness of the importance of maintaining solidarity with others.

That MacWhirr is moved to speak when his defences finally crumble during an "awful pause in the storm" (214) exposes the source of his strength as his silent opposition to the gale. One is reminded of the helmsman who claims to be able to "steer for ever if nobody talks to me" (199). MacWhirr's speech, in which he seems to address "another being awakened within his breast" (214), a being without hope, amounts to a resignation of faith and a recognition of doubt: "she will never clear her decks" (ibid.). In keeping with

the notion that the liminal stage is characterised by the emergence of repressed elements of the self, MacWhirr undergoes a mock death when he is suspended both from his surroundings -- "apart from the sea, from the ship" -- and himself -- "as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence" (215) (Turner 1974:257).

When MacWhirr emerges from this, his last ordeal, his behaviour implies that he has undergone transition. First, this man for whom silence is natural, dark or shine (179), now finds the silence during the lull "unbearable" (216). Secondly, by addressing Jukes as "Mr. Jukes" (216), MacWhirr demonstrates a new respect for the mate. Thirdly, by insisting that the Chinese workers, whom he initially refused to recognise as passengers, be treated with the justice due to fellow men -- "had to do what's fair by them" (216) -- MacWhirr reveals a radical adjustment of perspective and access of compassion.

The narrator's summary of the ordeal emphasises MacWhirr's resilience, his sustained opposition to the typhoon: "The hurricane, with its power to madden seas, to sink ships, to overturn strong walls . . . had found this taciturn man in its path, and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words" (218). This does not mean that the captain has emerged unchanged from his ordeal: he has been forced to confront a realm of experience beyond his ken, and he has met the challenge by drawing upon dormant, hitherto unacknowledged resources. I would argue, with Hawthorn, that the central issue of the tale is that MacWhirr's lack of imagination "does not render him immune to the educative powers of his experience" (1990:222). For the captain's "lone, test-like fight", as Lothe puts it, forms the basis of his transition and makes him emerge a wiser and more imaginative being at the end of the novella (1989:116). MacWhirr's ordeal, therefore, seems to illustrate the process of initiation which effects radical change in the subject by

giving him or her "a glimpse of [the] inmost truth" (Daleski 1977:105).

NOTES

1. F.R. Leavis defines "Typhoon" as a minor Conradian text, yet insists that it epitomises the author's strength in its "purest form" (1962:203). Baines judges "Typhoon" one of Conrad's "simplest" most important works (1960:257); while Frederick Karl describes the tale as "almost top-quality work", and then seems to contradict himself in his statement that "Typhoon" is "personal experience per se, without the forging of fact and fiction", suggesting that the story is most notable for its "storm scene" (quoted in Birrell 1980:489).

2. Recognition of the initiatory motif is either explicit -- Ted Boyle maintains that both Jukes and MacWhirr are initiated into a high state of spiritual development; H.M. Daleski speaks of Jukes's initiatory experience advancing his self-knowledge (1977:112); and the title of Paul Bruss's article "The Initiation of Jukes" (1973) leaves the reader in no doubt as to the focus of his discussion; or implicit -- Jeremy Hawthorn declares that the tale deals with "change, the process of human development under extreme circumstances" (1990:230), and Jocelyn Baines recognises the initiatory motif, or, to be more precise, the failure of the initiatory ordeal, in his observation that at the end of the tale "there is no suggestion that [MacWhirr] has learnt anything from his experience, nor been deeply affected by it" (1960:258).

3. Daleski suggests that "Typhoon" is "perhaps best thought of as a reworking of Jim's story" (1977:104); Land defines the tale as "an exercise in thematic inversion" moulded on the same text (1984:92); and Wollaeger regards it as an "antidote" to the scepticism presented in Lord Jim (1990:123).

4. It is notable that both Boyle and Bruss inadvertently acknowledge the invisible, esoteric nature of initiation, Boyle in his conclusion that Conrad demonstrates in "Typhoon" that "some people may immerse themselves in the destructive element and overcome it, yet go away with no idea of the significance of the ordeal" (1965:132); and Bruss in his observation: "it is as if MacWhirr has learnt something in despite of himself" (1979:132).

5. Guerard (1966:296ff.), Baines (1960:237-8), Hawthorn (1990:230) and Lothe (1989:114) suggest that MacWhirr undergoes initiation through which he is substantially changed. They are opposed by Bruss, who insists "it is Jukes, not MacWhirr who matures during the typhoon" (1973:46).

6. Wollaeger, for instance, maintains that Jukes's state of mind is entirely dependent on his proximity to MacWhirr (1990:124), and Birrell posits that Jukes owes to

MacWhirr the decisive step in the formation of his character (1980:495).

7. Bruss takes advantage of the open-endedness of the title by maintaining that the protagonists, notably Jukes, are subjected to three psychic and physical typhoons (1973:46).

8. As Daleski observes, the typhoon subjects the entire ship to a test or initiatory ordeal (1977:105), and hence Jukes and MacWhirr's transitions should be investigated in terms of their context: the responses of the crew, the passengers and the engineers who also confront this trial. Broadly speaking, each group presents the two men with a different response to the crisis: the crew, who cower complaining in the hold, out of harm's way yet loathe to do anything (63), represent apathy and discontent; the passengers, who fall to fighting each other for their possessions (88), exemplify chaos and destruction; and the engineers, who dedicate themselves to keeping the engines running, embody loyalty to the work ethic, order and "prudent wisdom" (80). The first two groups serve as a warning to Jukes and MacWhirr of the extent to which they can degenerate if they too resign self-control; and the impeccable conduct of the third group provides them with an ideal to imitate.

9. Jukes conducts himself throughout this conversation in a rebellious way which presages his resistance to MacWhirr's order later (59): he speaks in staccato sentences, exudes "a sort of repressed fierceness" (13) and yells at MacWhirr so loudly that every sailor on deck looks towards them (12). MacWhirr's first duty as Jukes's initiation guide and captain, it is clear, is to humble him and impress upon him the necessity of respecting and obeying his superiors.

10. Although MacWhirr's contribution to the failure to communicate is obvious and has been thoroughly examined -- he attempts to interpret literally a figurative or symbolic meaning -- Jukes's part in the process is almost entirely overlooked. For Jukes's penchant for circumlocution, evident in his propensity to use literal-seeming tropes, causes him to obfuscate his intention. For example, in their first meeting in the chart-room, MacWhirr has literally to "drive" the words out of Jukes, so reluctant is he to part with them (34).

11. Easily inflamed by discussions -- he speaks to Rout like "an excited schoolboy" (12) -- Jukes is slow to assume responsibility for his opinions. A possible explanation for this is his impressionability, which is perhaps exemplified in our first glimpse of Jukes rolling up MacWhirr's umbrella "deferentially" (4). For Jukes's opinions, like his conduct, seem to be informed by fashion; he simply adopts the prevailing views, and because his ideas are not grounded in personal experience, his attempts to defend them are hollow, half-hearted and unconvincing -- such as in this issue of the flag, where he presents and subsequently retracts a rather insipid stand for patriotism.

12. The transition between chapter two, which concerns Jukes's preliminary initiation and chapter three, during which he is initiated by the typhoon, is accomplished by

means of continuity of theme: the impact of tension on human relations. For chapter two examines the impact of verbal tension on human relations and chapter three examines physical tension caused by extremes of heat and cold.

13. I would like to point out that, contrary to wide-spread assumption -- Bruss dismisses MacWhirr as unimaginative, "trapped by his mental limitations" and insists that this deficiency impairs his ability to change (1979:123), while Boyle maintains that Jukes's and MacWhirr's lack of imagination prevents them from undergoing spiritual awakening (1965:130) -- imagination in no way hinders or facilitates metamorphosis. Initiation by definition exceeds the imagination, it gains its impact from the fact that it embodies the incommensurable. Hence a lively imagination is essentially irrelevant to rendering the individual receptive to initiation. Where it is of importance is in determining the individual's reaction to the ordeal. Jukes, who shares the overactive imagination of Lord Jim (Daleski 1977:105), tends to envision the worst (49) and hence is weakened by his imagination and inclined to resist further initiation; the unimaginative MacWhirr, by contrast, is able to survive the ordeal with his self-possession intact by confronting it literally, in its present moment.

14. The narrator's description of the gale through similes and metaphors -- "it was . . . like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode . . . as if an immense dam had been blown up" (44) -- foregrounds its enigmatic nature, the fact that it beggars literal description, which is ultimately the source of its destructive force.

15. The typhoon brings about a critical change in Jukes's and MacWhirr's relationship. At the start of the tale they fail to converse successfully, but during the storm, when they are physically divided and their sentences rendered almost unintelligible by the wind, they manage to communicate effectively. While I agree with Wiley that the temporary alliance of Jukes and MacWhirr does nothing to alleviate our impression of their essential disharmony (1960:68), the function of their communion cannot be denied: through it Jukes learns to respect his captain, and MacWhirr develops his latent spiritual capacity.

16. Kenneth Graham remarks that for Conrad the fall into inertia and loss of the self (which characterises Jukes's experiences in the second and third phases) was his vision of hell. James Wait's "hypochondriacal withdrawal", Verloc's indolence and Heyst's hiding on his island comprise the lineaments of hell for Conrad (Graham 1988:110-116). In this perspective, Jukes undergoes two descents to hell: the first when he resigns his will and surrenders to the omnipotent force of the storm, and the second when he confronts the passengers.

17. Boyle claims that Jukes discovers meaning through his ordeal but quickly loses sight of it (1965:131). Kolupke concurs that at the end of the tale the truth which Jukes has discovered in a moment of crisis is replaced by his former glib notions, and this act constitutes "a blindness more reprehensible in light of his new stock of

experience" (1988:507).

18. Boyle argues that Jukes simply reverts to his former frame of mind, and this regression is reflected in his letter which gives no sense of his having learnt the significance of the traditions of the sea from MacWhirr (1965:132). Similarly, Kolupke states that Jukes's final condescending judgement of MacWhirr as a "stupid" man represents not only a "considerable weakness of character on his part" but also implies that he has not changed (1988:502). Hawthorn concurs that while the lessons learnt by MacWhirr seem to have stuck, Jukes appears to revert to his old self in his final letter to the Western Ocean trade chum (1990:232).

19. Conrad uses this device -- of establishing an elaborate portrait of a constant environment or character only to undermine it -- on a regular basis. For instance, after introducing Winnie Verloc as an insipid woman: "nothing now could lead one to suppose that she was capable of a passionate demonstration" (SA:38), he proceeds to recount her violent and impassioned murder of her husband.

20. MacWhirr's habit of looking down during conversations reflects not only a lack of interest in his interlocutor but also impedes his ability to communicate effectively, as he is unable to observe the impact of his words on the other person. For instance, when he adumbrates his philosophy to Jukes he fails to observe the mate's "discomfiture nor the mixture of vexation and astonished respect on his face" because he keeps his eyes fixed on the floor (173).

21. Birrell notes change of a similar nature in MacWhirr's behaviour. The narrator stresses from the start of the tale that MacWhirr prioritises order and decency, every ship he commanded being "a floating abode of harmony" (152). Yet MacWhirr undermines this impression when he commits an act of violence, striking the second mate (1980:492).

22. MacWhirr's inability to apply the information in the book on storm strategies to his own situation exposes, first, a fatal flaw in his empirical perspective: it can deal with tangible facts only, not abstract ones. Secondly, it isolates as problematic his tendency to confine his attention to "the eternal present" only, "the past being to his mind done with, and the future not yet there" (155) (Daleski 1977:106); for in so doing, he has preserved himself in a state of pseudo-amnesia, denying himself the insight which his own past experience as well as the ordeals of others might have provided.

23. This last ordeal is vital to MacWhirr's perceptual maturation, for, as his comment, "I wouldn't have believed it", implies, had he completed his journey without it, his innocence of life would have remained intact (213-4).

24. It may be expedient to recall that initiation erases the initiand's identity by dislocating him or her from a familiar environment. Once his or her familiar perceptual framework is changed, it is virtually impossible for him or her to

apprehend reality in the same way. MacWhirr's situation is slightly different in that the defamiliarisation is achieved by a change in his environment, not by his being removed from it. Like Verloc, therefore, he goes home but does not feel at home (SA:193).

25. The image of MacWhirr consulting the instrument like a worshipper before a shrine emphasises his view of facts as embodying the absolute and indisputable. MacWhirr's attempt to extract an "imperceptible sign" from this instrument elaborates the analogy, as one normally seeks for such signs from a deity (213).

26. Jukes's quelling of the passengers, besides providing MacWhirr with a saving illusion of order prevailing elsewhere, gives him an understanding of the interdependence between the chaos in the human and natural realms: as soon as the passengers are calmed, the wind drops (89). This analogy, which Conrad employs in a number of texts, is perhaps best observed in the Nigger of the `Narcissus', where the minute James Wait is buried at sea, the wind rises (134).

CHAPTER FOUR

Initiatory Scenarios in "Youth" and "The Shadow Line"

I

From a theoretical point of view, the novice's progression from the pre- to the post-liminal stage of initiation should be smooth and inevitable. In reality, however, things seldom run smoothly, and often not at all. The entire process of initiation, or some part of it, may be deferred for months, as in the case of Freya ("Freya"); for years, as instanced in the plight of the old count in "A Pathetic Tale"; or forever, as is illustrated in the case of Captain Hagberd of "Tomorrow".[1] This chapter examines the protraction of the initiatory process through an analysis of the successive stages in an individual's quest for maturation in the stories "Youth" and "The Shadow Line".

"Youth" traces the incomplete initiation of a young and innocent Marlow. The covert and deficient nature of his initiation has generated conflicting responses to the tale. One perspective, advanced by Albert Guerard and later adopted by Stanley Renner, is that "Youth" is "not really an initiation story even though the Marlow who tells the story is clearly an initiand" (Renner 1987:306). Although the voyage is clearly intended to enlighten Marlow as to "the true nature of the universe" (Renner 1987:306), it seems equally clear that the "would-be initiate learns nothing" (Guerard 1966:17). The opposing view is perhaps summarised by John Batchelor's observation: "The young Marlow undergoes a rite of passage from which he

emerges a more self-possessed and fully-formed person than he was at the narrative's beginning" (1996:77).

The true nature of Marlow's ordeal would seem to lie somewhere between these opposite perspectives, and the critic who comes closest to such an understanding is Ted Boyle. Noting the potentially protracted nature of initiatory processes (see Jung 1983:123), Boyle concedes that Marlow's initiation in "Youth" is incomplete, but argues that this is vital to Conrad's broader objective: to delineate an evolution from innocence to maturity in four tales: "Youth", "Typhoon", "The Secret Sharer" and "The Shadow Line". And since "Youth" is the first tale in the sequence, it merely introduces the procedure of initiation (Boyle 1965:116). While Boyle is quite right in linking "Youth" with "The Shadow Line", he appears to err in suggesting that the latter represents the culmination of a process of initiation commenced in the former. Both tales depict the failure of the main protagonists to reach the final stage of initiation.[2] But whereas Marlow's ordeal entails disenchantment and the modification of an ingenuous, romantic perspective, the initiation of the narrator of "The Shadow Line", in contrast, involves a journey to the nadir of existence during which he is stripped of all his illusions, and forced to fall back on his "innate strengths", his "natural capacity for faithfulness" (HD:116).

Given that he is young, idealistic (5), and probably sexually inexperienced, Marlow's ordeal in "Youth" entails an introduction to adulthood, akin to puberty initiation. Three aspects of his identity are developed specifically: moral, perceptual and sexual. Marlow's moral development is triggered by Captain Beard's repeated lapses from duty (such as his absence from the Judea when it is involved in a collision), which undermine for him the ideal of the

captain's infallibility. His perceptual maturation involves his progression from a state of ignorance (of which he is retrospectively aware) -- "it seemed to me that I knew very little then" (6) -- via a false sense of achievement -- "I had been tried in that ship and come out pretty well" (18) -- culminating in (partial) self-knowledge -- "I did not know how good a man I was till then" (36). Integral to this adjustment in viewpoint is Marlow's confrontation with the elements (the gale and the fire), and his delay in Falmouth, for these trials alert him to the "pathetic fallacy" (the myth of harmony between nature and the human mind), and to the antinomies of life: appearance and reality, life and death, youth and decay.[3] Finally, his sexual awakening is insinuated in his confrontations with the feminine element, as represented by Mrs. Beard and the personified "East".

"Youth" marks a critical development in Conrad's narrative strategy: the deployment, for the first time, of the narrator Marlow (1923:ix).[4] The narrated events are focalised through the contrary perspectives of Marlow's idealistic youth and disenchanted maturity. The tale is thus bifurcated by opposing layers of meaning and discourse, and the reader is obliged to seek for truth in the commerce between the two. Most critics simply accept the older Marlow's interpretation of events. Ian Watt maintains that Marlow is "reminiscing with mainly patronising nostalgic relish about his romantic earlier self" (quoted in Lothe 1989:39); Guerard declares that the tale looks back on the "still untested twenty year old with nostalgia", but that "the earlier self is truly dead" (1966:16), and Baines describes "Youth" as "an evocation of a mood of exhilaration" (1960:210). This tendency to take as authoritative the older Marlow's account subverts what I take to be Conrad's primary objective here: to emphasise the validity of both perspectives. For the view of "existence" (4) offered by this tale is at once one in

which the struggle of humankind to forge significance out of the chaos which is life is exposed as futile (because of our impotence and the transient nature of things [4]), and one in which the struggle to extract meaning from life is endorsed for its potential to promote self-knowledge, "a chance to feel your strength" (42).

In her discussion of the narrative techniques typical of initiation stories, Hovet states that the quest for identity implies the search for some truth or dream or goal (1990:20). In other words, the individual's desire to fulfil a specific external mission reflects the need for self-knowledge. In Marlow's case the "vision" of his youth (42), which is at the same time a symbol of his latent desire for self-realisation, is to visit the East (18). The central ordeal which he undergoes to fulfil this quest is "a tussle with the sea" (42); but his journey toward self-knowledge is initiated by his confrontation with the strangers, Captain Beard and Mrs. Beard, who serve to introduce him to a new angle on life.

Traditionally, initiation is supervised by an initiation guide. This practice stems from the archaic belief that the human image is not a natural acquisition, but is artificially constructed by the initiation guides (Eliade 1958:xiv; Herdt 1982:195). Marlow's impression of himself as "a small boy", flanked by his "two grandfathers", Captain Beard and Mahon, establishes his attitude of reverential awe for the older seamen and awakens the reader's expectations of his being initiated by them (5). Marlow's first trial does indeed involve the captain, but not in the capacity which we anticipate: as an exemplar of unimpeachable conduct whom Marlow can imitate. Rather, the captain initiates Marlow by presenting him with the antithesis of good conduct. For instance, Captain Beard's absence from the Judea when it is struck by the steamer is "highly unprofessional" (Batchelor 1996:77), especially since he has

deserted his prior duty to the ship in order to save his wife. Marlow's reaction to what is effectively the captain's defection, "I was never so surprised in my life"; "Not bad for a sixty year old. Just imagine that old fellow saving heroically in his arms that old woman" (9), expresses a mixture of astonishment and wholehearted respect for the old man's courage. Underlying this ostensible admiration, though, is a grain of disappointment and disenchantment which emerges in Marlow's comment: "It wasn't much, but it delayed us three weeks" (9).

The captain's impropriety has a couple of critical implications for Marlow's initiation. First, it provokes him to adjust his idealistic perspective (which is exemplified in his upholding the ship's motto "Do or Die" as a romantic notion [5]) in favour of the unpredictability of reality. Secondly, by proving an unreliable role model (akin to the narrator-captain's mad predecessor in "The Shadow Line"), the captain prompts Marlow to develop a more flexible and autonomous moral system to deal with the vicissitudes of life. Marlow's success at devising an adaptable ethical code of his own is apparent during the fire, when he carries out the captain's duties whilst the latter is unconscious (33).

Marlow's progression to the preliminal stage of initiation is advanced not only by the event of Captain Beard's misconduct but also by its motive: his wife (9).[5] This aspect, which constitutes Marlow's second ordeal, introduces him to the potentially debilitating impact of the female on male, a phenomenon which he encounters again in the East, personified as a seductive yet deadly woman, "perfumed like a flower" and "silent like death", who `murders' most of the crew (38). Recognition of the dual destructive-creative potential of the female is vital for the initiand's maturation as it purges him or her of infantile obsession with "the

profane world of the maternal" (Campbell 1993:154). Mrs. Beard is the incarnation of this dialogic force as she fulfils a symbolic role as both Marlow's lover and mother. Marlow's observation that her behaviour was "somewhat different from the captains' wives I had known" (7), hints at an intimacy of observation which progresses to the latent sexual attraction evident in his observation that although she was "an old woman", she had "the figure of a young girl" (7).[6] Ranged against this is the Mrs. Beard who performs the motherly task of repairing Marlow's clothes (7). As a catalyst for Marlow's sexual development, Mrs. Beard advances his maturation; yet as his surrogate mother, she hinders his progress from childhood to adulthood. In this light, her departure is critical to Marlow's continued initiation.[7]

Sartre posits that self-knowledge is triggered by the gaze of the Other. The subject becomes aggressive at being objectified and thus asserts his or her subjectivity: "My awakening to myself would be unthinkable unless as an act of resistance" (Bohlman 1991:75-77).[8] Likewise, initiation generates self-realisation through the novice's encounter with an alien person (Eliade 1960:245). Thus Marlow's confrontation with the strangers, Captain Beard and Mrs. Beard, augments his self-knowledge; for the former, with his rather unorthodox ethics, stimulates Marlow to adjust his idealistic moral outlook to accommodate the very real deviations from such a code which characterise human life, and Mrs. Beard, by taking an interest in Marlow's welfare, subverts his expectations of the stereotypical captain's wife and triggers his sexual initiation (7).

The advent of the gales advances Marlow's initiation and his journey towards self-knowledge by commencing the dissolution of his personality, with a consequent heightening of his suggestibility to new perspectives. The gales test not only Marlow's physical endurance and

psychic resources ("a constant effort of body and worry of mind" [10]), but also his moral resilience, his capacity for faith. He is obliged to undergo two simulated deaths.

The first involves his loss of both a sense of time -- "it seemed to last for months, for years, for all eternity. We forgot the day of the week, the name of the month, what year it was" (11) -- and of space -- "There was for us no stars, no sun, no universe" (ibid.). The ordeal upsets his biological clock and behavioral patterns and he can no longer sleep (11). It is notable that Marlow's experience recalls the synchronisation of days during the ritual seclusion of initiands, a ceremony intended to erode the initiand's mental orientation through physical disorientation. The implication is that, since identity is originally stabilised within the secular constructs of time and space, Marlow's old identity is progressively annihilated through his relocation from the temporal zone to the timeless condition of the infinite present, or "the eternal now", as Turner phrases it (1974:238).[9] The impact of this ordeal is evident in the transmutation of the crew (and implicitly Marlow himself) into prehistoric quasi-aquatic creatures who "crawl" around the ship with "the eyes of idiots" (12).

In addition to disorientating Marlow physically, the gales upset his cognitive equilibrium by effecting a mergence of sea and sky which dissolves his normal perception of reality as stratified (10). Thus Marlow's second mock death figures as his regression to a primeval state of amorphous chaos consequent on the dissolution of his "universe" through the gales: "The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves" (10) (see Eliade 1958:23).[10] Marlow's subsequent impressions -- "it seemed as though we had been dead and gone to a hell for sailors" (12) -- confirm that he is in the archetypal process of initiatory death (Eliade 1958:64).

The nature of Marlow's initiation is incremental, for although the gales undoubtedly constitute a turning point in his moral growth (Bruss 1979:62), proof of this development is delayed: he emerges from the trial elated and full of self-pride: "here I am lasting it out as well as any of these men. . . . I had moments of exultation" (12). Otto Bohlman attributes Marlow's optimism to his incorrigible romanticism, which simply "converts all vertigo into adventure" (1991:36). I would argue that the regenerative potential of water, which is the agent of initiation in this case, is responsible for his "resurrection" from such a horrifying ordeal. During the storm, when Marlow is completely immersed in water -- "It was all one. We had forgotten how it felt to be dry" (12) -- he undergoes a symbolic death by drowning. But since water is endowed with life-sustaining powers (Henderson 1990:50) it also re-vitalises Marlow.

When the gales abate slightly and Marlow turns his attention to the comparatively mundane task of pumping water out of the ship, his recessive feelings surface. Consequently, he is plunged into an enervating pessimism, as he and the crew continue to pump "without spirit enough in us to wish ourselves dead" (12). Significantly, Marlow attempts to transcend this personal sense of dissolution by boosting the morale of the crew: "I shouted, as in duty bound, `Keep on, boys'!" (13). This scenario, of retaining faith and forestalling personal dissolution by fulfilling one's public duties, also features in "The Shadow Line", where the narrator manages to stave off insanity by committing himself to his responsibilities (89). Paradoxically, the crew's search for the cook, Abraham, an endeavour which involves "chancing death", momentarily restores their zest for life and lifts their spirits (13). But their newly resurrected, and therefore fragile morale, is shattered when they recover him, because

the storm has driven him "completely and for ever mad" (13). This confrontation with the truly destructive potential of the gale as manifest in Abraham's insanity, determines the crew to abandon the ship, and they subsequently force Captain Beard to dock in Falmouth.

In Falmouth Marlow is constrained once again to suspend his youthful eagerness to get to Bangkok when the Judea is delayed for another six months for repairs. In addition to this, his idealistic and romantic image of the Judea (Marlow describes her as both a lover: "I think of her with pleasure . . . as you would think of someone dead whom you loved" [12], and a mother: "To us aft it seemed as though we had been born in her, reared in her and had lived in her for ages" [18]), is rapidly undermined by a series of events, the most notable of which is Captain Beard's failure to resume the journey. For the crew(s), horrified at the Judea's state of disrepair, demand to return to port three times (15). The test in Falmouth therefore consists, in part, of Marlow's capacity (as a man who identifies more with the soldier, the man of action, than the sedentary philosopher [7]) to refrain from acting when the situation is irremediable. According to Bonney, the trial exposes Marlow's failure to "cope with the passage of time without the sustaining illusions of linearity", as he escapes to London in an attempt to "exorcise" the situation (1978:302).

The repeated defections of the crew, the forced inactivity and the villagers' derision of the Judea (which finally becomes "a feature, an institution of the place" [15]), have a marked impact on Marlow. The fact that the ship, which has presented itself to Marlow as "the endeavour, the test, the trial of life" (12), has become "a by-word" to "dishonest boatmen" and "longshore loafers", humiliates him and deflates his pride in his work: "I looked languidly after the rigging" (15). He is thoroughly disheartened: "Morally it was worse than pumping

for life. It seemed as though we had been forgotten by the world, belonged to nobody, would get nowhere" (16).

The outbreak of fire on the ship strips Marlow of the last remnants of his obsolete self and triggers his metamorphosis into a new person. He has no alternative but to acknowledge the true decrepitude of the Judea, enveloped as she is in "languid and unclean vapours" (20), a recognition which he, in his romantic elation, had hitherto evaded. The Judea's wretchedness is thrown into relief by the beauty of nature -- she glides in a "pestiferous cloud defiling the splendour of sea and sky" (20) -- and this contrast leads Marlow to recognise the fallacy of assuming any sympathy between nature and the human endeavour represented by the voyage of the Judea. For while the ship "crawls on" and the crew labour feverishly to save her, the weather remains serenely indifferent, the sky "a miracle of purity" and the sea "sparkling like a precious stone" (20). Interestingly, Marlow's disenchantment heightens his awareness of those around him, which signals the further dissolution of his ego, as he becomes conscious of the "good feeling" prevailing amongst the crew (21). He also observes, for the first time, the emaciated condition of the Captain and Mahon: "Captain Beard had hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. I had never noticed so much before how twisted and bowed he was. . . . It struck me suddenly poor Mahon was a very, very old chap" (22).

Shortly after the Judea begins to burn, Marlow is set alight too.[11] His trial by fire entails two falls into the ignited cargo-hold.[12] His first leap into the hold constitutes a "death" experience in the form of a loss of consciousness. The ordeal serves to humble Marlow (and thereby increase his susceptibility to new impressions), as he is motivated by pride: "Then I leaped down to show them how easily it could be done" (21).[13] Although his second plunge

into the hold is not voluntary, his loitering with the young carpenter makes him at least partly responsible for the event (22). That Marlow's first thoughts upon falling into the hold echo those of his ordeal during the gale (12) implies that he is undergoing a similar initiatory death: "Everybody's dead -- I am falling into the afterhatch -- I see fire" (23).[14]

The explosion in the hold,[15] which both frees and transforms Marlow, illustrates the paradox which is central to initiation and features in a number of Conrad's works: that progression is based on regression, salvation on extinction.[16] For Marlow emerges from what has effectively been a near-death experience with an intensified sense of existence: "I had just been blown up . . . and vibrated with that experience" (24). In a letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad glosses the implications of such an event: "An explosion is a most lasting thing, leaves disorder yet clears room to move" (Mar. 12 1897; Karl vol 1 1983:344).

Besides re-animating Marlow, the explosion obliterates his identity in that he emerges (like Lear from the heath, "a poor, bare forked animal") divested of all distinguishing features: "I had no hair, no eyebrows, no eyelashes" (23). Mahon, who fails to recognise Marlow, staring at him with "a queer kind of shocked curiosity" (23), testifies to the young mate's complete transformation (of which he himself at the time is entirely ignorant [24]). Marlow's reduction to a "bare, unaccommodated" man indicates that he has reached the acme of the liminal stage, which purports to reduce the initiand to "a blank slate" (Turner 1969:103). And Marlow's intuition of his non-existence -- "I wasn't quite sure whether I was alive" (24) -- confirms that his old identity has been annihilated.

The aftermath of the explosion, far from alleviating Marlow's impression of being caught in an "absurd dream" (24), only increases his sense of unreality, since he is confronted

with a "mad" Captain (24), a "smouldering shell of a ship" (25), and a motley collection of "battered and bandaged scarecrow[s]" for a crew (28). Possibly because his environment has undergone such extreme modifications, Marlow is prompted to revise his perception of it. The first thing which strikes his attention is the disorder of the ship in comparison with the tranquillity of nature -- "the peace of the sky and the serenity of the sea were distinctly surprising" (24) -- and this underscores his earlier observation that the cosmos is indifferent to humankind's plight (20). It is only now, when Marlow has acknowledged his powerlessness in the face of nature, that he can begin to realise his true potential: as Conrad put it in a letter to Marguerite Parodowska: "At twenty one always thinks oneself important. The fact is however, that one becomes useful only on recognising the extent of the individual's utter insignificance within the universe's structure" (Sept. 4 1892; Karl vol 1 1983:113).

The extent of Marlow's disillusionment with the Judea is revealed in his description of her as "a miserable, stripped, undecked, smouldering shell of a ship" (25); he even sees a portion of the mangled deck as "a gangway, leading over the deep sea, leading to death" (26). Yet the ordeal conducing to this perception has had at least three positive effects on him. First, it has advanced his maturation by reviving in him the sense of kinship and interest in others which he has not shown before (21). Thus he begins to contemplate the sailors' motivations: "What made them do it -- what made them obey me. They had no professional reputation -- no examples, no praise" (28).

Secondly, the ordeal alerts Marlow to the mysteries innate in nature and humankind, an insight which denotes a mature acknowledgement of the intangible and incomprehensible. For on two occasions he becomes conscious of a mysterious presence in nature, "the air, the sky --

a ghost, something invisible . . . hailing the ship" (26); and later he ponders on the obscure source of the sailors' unquestioning obedience: "No it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting . . . something solid like a principle and masterful like an instinct -- a disclosure of something secret" (28). Thirdly, Marlow comes to see the importance of fidelity, of commitment to an idea. For when the captain confronts the agitated crew after the explosion with the "mad" command of getting the ship back on course (24), Marlow realises that the "deformed little man"'s dogged commitment to this single idea is ultimately what saves them: the captain becomes "immense in the singleness of his idea" (ibid.). This theme, the empowering potential of belief, is manifest in a number of Conrad's texts, such as "Karain" and Heart of Darkness.

To return to the narrative, Marlow's "first command" in the long boat (34) free from the surveillance of his two "grandfathers" (5), enables him to put into practice what he has learnt during his term as second mate, and supplements his self-knowledge by providing him with insight into his potential: "I did not know how good a man I was till then" (360). Further, that this trip arouses in him a feeling of immortality: "I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more -- the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort -- to death" (36-7), suggests that the initiatory ordeals which Marlow has undergone have decreased his fear of death and increased his belief in immortality (Eliade 1960:227; Henderson 1990:14).

The fact that Marlow arrives in Java before Captain Beard and actually guides the latter into the jetty suggests that he has effectively superseded the captain. For the captain's failure to adapt to the crises which overtake the ship -- his degeneration into a "broken figure" (38) --

entitles Marlow, who has been fortified by the crises, to replace him. Secondly, it indicates that Marlow has come full circle in terms of initiation. For at the start of the journey, he was eager to yield to the guidance of the "thoroughly good seamen" (5), Captain Beard and Mahon, whereas now his decision to do some "independent cruising" (34) demonstrates that he has developed an autonomous identity and is no longer reliant on them.

The nature of Marlow's contact with the East has generated much debate. One view, perhaps epitomised by the arguments of John Howard Weston, is that the "potentially illusion-shattering force of this diatribe", far from robbing Marlow of his "vision of reality", gives him a positive experience of the timelessness and physical stasis which he encountered in previous trials and found unbearable, such as the delay in Falmouth (1974:296). The most prevalent critical view is that his first encounter with the East is the apotheosis of Marlow's disillusionment.[17] Void of all signs of life, "not a light, not a stir, not a sound" (38), this land is the utter converse of the clarity and illumination which he has anticipated.[18]

My sense is that Marlow's arrival in Java is both equivocal and anti-climactic. For while it concludes his physical journey, it does not signify the completion of his psychic journey through initiation. Thus although Marlow's ordeals promote his maturation both on the private and public levels (as an individual he has gained self-confidence and independence, and as a second mate, he has demonstrated his ability to carry out his duties), he does not consolidate this development by advancing to the final stage of initiation, reincorporation.

Marlow's failure to complete the cycle of initiation can be attributed to two factors.[19] First, the "mysterious" and impenetrable East fails to provide the epiphanic release which he has anticipated; and secondly, the abominable behaviour of some his colleagues (notably the

captain of the Celestial) provokes Marlow to suspend his allegiance to the West and subsequently to resist reabsorption into the sailor community.

Marlow's reaction to the "mysterious" East seems to be twofold (38). On the one hand, he undergoes an "awakening" (Renner 1987:122) in the form of an initiatory death through his regression to a primeval state stimulated by his encounter with a prehistoric land of "mute and fantastic shapes" (37) (Bruss 1979:117). It is notable that Marlow's trials appear to have fortified him to endure this death "alive", so to speak. For while his crew fall "off the thwarts as if dead" (37), he alone remains awake "exulting like a conqueror" (38). And indeed, in terms of the initiatory dialectic, this test, of whether Marlow can retain consciousness, is typical of that undertaken by a warrior.[20]

The second aspect is Marlow's disenchantment with the West. His initial and persistent response to Java is one of enchantment (37). In fact, this enigmatical land so captivates his interest that despite his being "blind with fatigue", he cannot sleep, and remains attentive to everything around him (37). In contrast, Marlow's experience of the West in this alien land is one of intolerance, arrogance, indifference and lack of endurance. The captain of the Celestial's offensive conduct -- he shatters "the solemn peace of the valley" with his swearing (39) -- coupled with the indifference of Marlow's own crew to their surroundings, provoke him to move beyond the limited, "Western" mode of comprehension. For the East presents the sailors with the ultimate trial: it exposes them to the complete negation of their habitual Western mode of perception (through passivity and silence), and tests whether they have the strength of mind and endurance to remain conscious. Marlow's disillusionment with the West is probably cemented when all the sailors fail to pass the test by falling asleep (40).[21] He

demonstrates his detachment from the crew through his sleeplessness (37) and his speech. For his comments: "the tired men from the West" (41); "the East looked at them without a sound" (ibid.), reflect the neutral perspective of an outsider, not a fellow sailor remarking on his crew.

Marlow's first and last impressions of the East are identical: "I see a bay smooth as glass and polished like ice. There was not a light, not a stir, not a sound" (38); "all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement" (41). This points to his inability to assimilate the land, to solve its enigma.[22] The silence is only broken, with telling irony, by a familiar voice: "the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice" (39) (1978:302).

Marlow's disillusionment with the West, if seen in conjunction with his enchantment with an East whose enigma he fails to penetrate, indicates that he has situated himself precariously in a nexus between two lands and two opposing viewpoints. Marlow's closing words seem to convey this equivocal position perfectly: "our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone" (42).[23] For although he is in life, he is not of it; although he is from the West, he eschews its perspective, and although he is enthralled with the East, it remains impervious to his imaginative grasp. This condition of suspension figures his position in the initiatory cycle: although he has physically passed from one stage to another through initiatory ordeals, he has yet to complete his psychic transition. Van Gennep would see Marlow's situation as typical of adolescent initiation in which "the moment of novitiate" seldom coincides with psychic maturation (1969:65).

II

"Youth" ends with Marlow's tribute to the paradoxical effect of initiation, which, in inspiring us to pursue the unattainable, at once intensifies our life and hastens our death (Y:42). My hypothesis is that "The Shadow Line", in that it details the tangible consequences of this equivocal quest, constitutes both a sequel to and a reprise of the initiatory theme introduced in "Youth".

The narrator of "The Shadow Line" resigns from a secure job, moved by a need for something which his present life, a "waste of days", lacks (23). His consequent feelings of epistemological emptying ("There was nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing to expect from the world" [23]), and self-estrangement (he had left his berth "half-unconsciously" and is therefore unable to explain his action either to himself or others [18]), establish the scenario around which this tale revolves: the "maturing and tempering" (129) of his character through a succession of trials. My hypothesis is that the narrator's "education" constitutes an initiation (47), but that he fails to complete the cyclical process of change because at the end of the story he is not reconciled to the community or its representatives.

In his Author's Note, Conrad describes "The Shadow Line" as a personal account of a rite of passage from youth to a "period of maturer life" (x).[24] Both the autobiographical nature of the tale and its proposed subject matter, initiation, have been widely debated. The majority of critics accept Conrad's proposal that initiation is the tale's central thematic concern.[25] The opposing view, that the initiatory motif is not pivotal to "The Shadow Line", is perhaps epitomised by Albert Guerard, who argues that the narrator's "living through and throwing off an immobilizing neurotic depression" is the central action of the tale, not his initiation

(1966:33). Yet Guerard's description of the narrator's ordeal, far from verifying the absence of initiation, inadvertently points to the exfoliating function of the initiation process. For during initiation the initiand affects transition from one age and status to another by living through and sloughing an obsolete and desanctified identity.

If the "line" in the tale's title is the inevitable test of selfhood, the "shadow" refers to the unpredictability of the ordeal, which "can come at different moments and perhaps extend over a number of years, if not over an entire life" (Geddes 1980:86). This foregrounds two critical aspects of the narrator's initiation: first, that it is a lengthy and protracted process; and secondly, that it is a trial for which one cannot prepare.[26] In this perspective, although the narrator braces himself for his first command as "the ultimate test of my profession" (48), he nevertheless finds his fortitude weakening (86) when confronted with the delay of the ship and the outbreak of malaria.

Another view of the title is prompted by Jungian psychology. The "shadow" is the sum of the narrator's repressed desires or characteristics. Thus the narrator's negotiation of the shadow line hangs on his facing up to an event which he, in dismissing it as "past and gone" (18), has effectively repressed: his resignation. Once again, initiation is expedient, for it facilitates the emergence and integration of the recessive elements of the self (Turner 1974:257).

I have divided the narrator's initiatory ordeal into three phases. Phase one deals with all the events depicted in chapters one and two, which usher the narrator into the preliminal stage of initiation and lead up to his appointment as captain.[27] Phase two, which spans chapters three to five, encompasses his progression to the second stage of initiation through his exposure to a

succession of trials at sea. The third and final phase incorporates the narrator's return to the Eastern port from which he first embarked and the hospitalisation of his crew. It is notable that the tale does not end with the completion of the narrator's voyage to Hong Kong. Analogously, he fails to complete the cycle of his initiation or psychic voyage by not progressing to the final stage of initiation, reintegration. But more of this later.

The narrator's "rash" (4) resignation from a "comfortable berth" (5) is the critical event of phase one which triggers his initiation. By breaking his "connection with the sea" and the sailor community (8) he propels himself into the preliminal stage of initiation, which is typified by separation from one's familiar milieu. By denouncing his time of service on the ship (which he recognises analeptically as being "full of new and varied experiences" [7]), as "a prosaic waste of days", out of which no truth could be extracted (7), the narrator increases his isolation from his former environment by establishing a perceptual distance from it.

The narrator responds to his action of resigning, which he admits had nothing to do with "common sense" (18), firstly, by deferring accountability (and implicitly self-examination), pleading disempowerment by an irresistible force: "The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off. Carried me off that ship I mean" (5, my emphasis). Secondly, he refuses to discuss his motivations with anyone, including his former captain and Captain Giles, insisting that the deed is "past and gone" (18). And thirdly, he attempts to avoid altogether the repercussions of his deed, the potential ramifications of change, by deciding to return home (and take refuge in his childhood identity). In sum, the narrator hopes to pre-empt the profound impact which he suspects this inexplicable event could have on him, by repressing it. His use of the word "divorce" (4) to describe his resignation

evinces his latent awareness of this action as an attempt to avoid impending change in the form of "a shadow-line warning one that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind" (3).[28]

In terms of initiation, the narrator is attempting to withdraw from the mechanism of transition, which he himself has activated by leaving a secure and stable environment for an alien one, and to remain within the "twilight region between youth and maturity" (26). But, as Eliade warns, "one cannot stop in any one of these stages . . . the movement always will and must continue" (1960:226). For while the stages of initiation promote the rejuvenation of life they cannot support life itself as they comprise a timeless, spaceless realm from which the sole rite of exit is initiatory death (Turner 1974:238). That the narrator, who has arrested his initiation in its nascent stage, is soon surrounded by images of death -- the clearance officer returns his papers to him as if they were "passports to Hades," and the Sailor's Home is "as still as a tomb" (9) -- corroborates the maxim that the process of initiation itself is intolerant of life.

To recapitulate, the narrator's initiatory voyage begins, paradoxically, with his attempt to avoid it. But by residing in the Sailor's Home instead of the Hotel which would have been "more appropriate to his position" (8), the narrator betrays a critical faltering in his intention: he is not absolutely committed to leaving, and this factor is corroborated by his failure to book his passage home immediately (19). Captain Giles intuits the narrator's incertitude and subsequently compels him to make a decision by helping him to secure the position of captaincy. During his stay at the Sailor's Home, then, the narrator is forced to resume his initiation by the influence of Captain Giles. This the captain does by forcing the narrator to consider the circumstances of his resignation, "something which he preferred not to talk or

even think about" (18). The narrator's initial response is anger, for he himself cannot explain his motives (14), and a resurgence of his earlier disillusionment (that life is devoid of "glamour, flavour, interest" [5]): "The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days. . . . Here was a man of recognised character and achievement disclosed as an absurd and dreary chatterer" (23). But this feeling gives way to a grudging satisfaction when he is finally able to conceive of his resignation as being a legitimately motivated "flight from the menace of emptiness" (23). That the narrator is eventually able to explain his action to the captain -- "I wanted to get a fresh grip" (42) -- is significant in that it reveals that he has managed to break the spell of its dumb dominion over him. For by refusing to discuss his resignation at all the narrator mystifies it and thereby gives it substantial power over him.

Besides helping to restore the narrator's self-confidence by forcing him to investigate and hence discover a reason for his apparently irrational action, Captain Giles assists him to secure a position of command. As a result the narrator advances from the nadir to the zenith of existence, for this prospect dispels his ennui (8) and awakens him from his "spiritual drowsiness" (23). This latter change is manifest in his description of his job interview: after meeting the "divine" Captain Ellis (30) the narrator feels as if he is "floating on wings" (33), and extols the day as "one of miracles" (ibid.). Since initiation purports to grant the initiand contact with the divine in himself and others (van Gennep 1969:12), it is clear that Giles has succeeded in commencing the initiation of the narrator. What seems equally clear, however, is that Giles's influence on the narrator is limited. For although he manages to restore the narrator's self-esteem, to provide him with insight -- "my eyes became opened to the

inwardness of things and speeches" (26) -- and to awaken him spiritually, he fails to transform him morally.

That the narrator is mistaken in perceiving his transformation as an ethical conversion ("There had been a revolution in my moral nature" [36]), is revealed by his conversations, as these expose his deficiency in the virtues of humility and compassion. Significantly, these very qualities are indispensable for his continued maturation and initiation (Burkert 1987:47). As Berthoud persuasively argues, the narrator's pride and self-confidence is abundantly evident at the opening of the narrative (1986:222). The narrator's attitude to the Steward encapsulates his arrogant demeanour: "I didn't want to hurt the Steward. I would scorn to hurt such an object" (38). His lack of compassion emerges in several episodes: his mean dismissal of the steward who has tried to commit suicide, "`Really', I said without emotion, `he doesn't seem very fit to live'" (39); his refusal to moderate his pace to suit the older Giles who struggles to keep up, "He panted a little . . . . But I was not moved. On the contrary. His discomfort gave me a sort of malicious pleasure" (42); and his arrogant denunciation of the insane: "But that fellow looks as if he were rather crazy. He must be" (42). When the narrator subsequently finds himself in identical positions of temporary insanity and near-suicide, these judgements effectively condemn him. Just as Marlow's initiation in "Youth" requires him to learn the true implications of the axiom, "Do or Die", which he innocently adopts for its "touch of romance" (Y:5), so the narrator must experience the truth of his casual condemnations and learn to base his opinions on personal experience and compassion, not ignorance and arrogance.

Although Giles is the primary agent of the narrator's initiation in phase one, he is also influenced by the trio of "derelicts" at the Sailor's Home. They function as "warning

examples" to the narrator of the extent to which he can degenerate if he resists change (Watt 1960:501) or fails to function in the sense of "taking command of one's actions and thoughts" (Geddes 1980:85).[29] The drunken officer from the Rajah's yacht has immured himself from change to the extent that he no longer has a valid social self. For instance, he cannot communicate effectively as he speaks a "horrible unknown language" (16), and he has failed to secure employment for approximately two years (14). Ultimately, he has devolved through apathy into a primeval aquatic creature with "fish-like eyes" (16). The steward, whose office is literally a shrine to the past, with its "empty boxes" and "Oriental dust"(10), seems to have been crippled by his retrospection. His inability to act effectively in the present is manifest in his eternal dilemma regarding Hamilton, whom he is too terrified to evict. Hamilton, who is probably ashamed of his permanent state of unemployment, has assumed the mask of the aloof gentleman to avert criticism (14). The sense of inadequacy which he harbours under this veneer he projects onto others, dismissing them as "outsiders" and disdaining to associate with them (12). In short, he has perfected the art of deferring self-examination and thus stunted his development, something which the narrator, in his determination to forget the past, is in danger of doing.

The conspiracy between Hamilton and the Steward to rob the narrator of a position of command officially offered to him, provides his first experience of "harm being attempted to be done to [him]" (37). In a similar vein, the captain of the Melita, who is openly hostile to the narrator (46), is the "first really unsympathetic man" he has met (47). These experiences are important in that they prepare the narrator for his meeting with the "half-hostile" Burns on his own ship (54). Besides initiating the narrator into arbitrary hostility, the captain of the

Melita impresses upon him the importance of punctuality and the agony of delay, advice which the latter, in his ignorance and overweening self-confidence, imputes to petty "jealousy" (48).[30] In short, the narrator makes a judgement akin to his earlier ones on madness and suicide, which rebounds on him when he finds himself in the identical situation later.

The narrator enters the second phase of his metamorphosis, his trial at sea, anticipating a test "of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity" (40), with great optimism: "this road my mind's eye could see on a chart, professionally, with all its complications and difficulties, yet simple enough" (44). Just as the prospect of captaincy (the "strong magic" of command [29]) restores the narrator's illusions and re-animates him (28), his first sight of the ship dispels his "feeling of life-emptiness" (49).[31] It soon becomes apparent, however, that like Lord Jim, who moves to Patusan in the hope that a different environment will grant him "a clean slate" (LJ:41), the narrator embarks on his journey with the objective of obtaining a new identity. For he anticipates his voyage as one of self-discovery -- "you too, shall taste of that peace and that unrest in a searching intimacy with yourself" -- through the agency of the sea, which, since it "preserves no memories, and keeps no reckoning of lives" (53), will erase his past identity and grant him a new one. This expectation, coupled with the belief that he has inherited this superior position without "the preliminary toil and disenchantments of an obscure career" (50), exposes the narrator's intention to forgo the death trial which obtaining a new identity will entail (36). But since renewal can only be obtained through initiatory death, it is inevitable that the narrator undergoes initiation to achieve this quest (Eliade 1958:113).

The narrator's term at sea advances his spiritual, ethical and perceptual maturation. Initially, the narrator is exulted by the fact that he has inherited "a sort of composite soul, the

soul of command" and now stands "like a king in his country. . . a hereditary king" (62). But his ideals of dynastic continuity and his visions of the captain living a "humble" life (53) of "unremitting vigilance" (52), are rudely shattered by his meeting with Burns, the chief mate. Burns's revelation of the immorality and insanity of the late captain disillusions the narrator: "I was profoundly shocked by my predecessor . . . the end of his life was a complete act of treason, the betrayal of a tradition which seemed to me as imperative as any guide on earth" (62). Further, this stranger, far from providing the narrator with an opportunity to forget his former self and re-create himself anew, serves as an uncomfortable reminder to him of the past which he intended to forget: "In the face of that man I became aware of what I had already left behind me. And that was indeed poor comfort" (55).

In his Author's Note, Conrad describes the ordeal at sea as a passing by "the brink of a slow and agonizing destruction" (xii). This trial involves the narrator in a "double fight" against delay and disease (84). But it is ultimately the former which predominates, the latter being merely "an extraneous episode", as the narrator puts it (64). For the delay of the ship on a calm sea strips the narrator of "the charm and innocence of illusions" (65), and forces him to acknowledge his insignificance in the face of nature. The episode can be said to exemplify Marlow's `epilogue' in "Youth": "You can do nothing, not a thing in the world" (4).

The outbreak of malaria, which the narrator blames on the ship's calm -- "It seemed to me that a stronger breeze would have blown away the infection which clung to the ship" (79) -- constitutes his second trial. The narrator's solitary immunity to the disease (123), coupled with the lack of medication for which he, as the captain, is largely responsible, triggers his psychic malaise. His spiritual disease culminates in his third, penultimate initiatory ordeal:

temporary insanity. Significantly, the narrator's fourth and final ordeal is a symbolic confrontation with himself, or at least the predicament which he was in at the start of the tale. For Ransome, in deciding to `sign off', re-enacts the narrator's throwing up his berth. In sum then, the narrator's journey is circular, the ending taking him back to the beginning both literally -- he returns to the Eastern port from which he originates -- and figuratively: he is made to confront, through the actions of another, the situation which he initially avoided.

Before I begin my discussion of these trials I would like to consider Albert Guerard's argument that the narrator's initiation proceeds through a process of doubling. In Guerard's estimation, Conrad deploys doubling to "dramatise the schisms of the spirit" in its struggle for integration (1966:33). The tale traces the narrator's progressive maturation through his encountering others as foils or doubles until he finally encounters himself (Geddes 1980:100). This protracted progression towards self-knowledge illustrates the paradox of initiation that distancing from the self facilitates proximity to it.

The first double with whom the narrator comes into contact is Captain Giles. In his mystery (21) and unpredictability this older man mirrors the inscrutable, intuitive part of the narrator which had motivated him to throw up his berth for "no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger" (4). Thus while the narrator judges Captain Giles's behaviour involving the Steward's plot to withhold crucial information about the command as "pointless" (19) and "mysterious" (20), he is oblivious that his own taciturnity (14) regarding his resignation must have appeared equally absurd and enigmatical to the captain.

Burns's characterisation of the late captain as an irresponsible man who determined to "cut adrift from everything" (62) establishes an equation between him and the narrator, who

has unexpectedly severed his link with the sailor community. Interestingly, while the narrator inadvertently confirms this affinity -- "And like a member of the dynasty feeling a semi-mystical bond with the dead I was profoundly shocked. That man had been in all essentials but his age just such another man as myself" (62, my emphasis) -- at the same time he denies his correlation with the captain by condemning his actions. I would argue that the narrator is moved to oppose the captain's unorthodox behaviour not so much because he is a traditionalist (61), as because he suspects his own propensity for such conduct (as the story unfolds his suspicions are confirmed, as he does indeed go mad). Thus in denouncing it in the captain, the narrator is really repressing it in himself.

Cox proposes that the late captain, like Captain Giles, represents a father-figure to the narrator (1974:152). Of course, inasmuch as this man reneged on his duties as captain, he is obviously the antithesis of Giles. But what the narrator learns from both "fathers" is the invaluable lesson of flexibility: the ability to estimate whether a dilemma requires rational or irrational measures. For example, his decision to take the ailing Burns back on board is irrational, because, requiring nursing, he will be a burden to the crew; but it is vital to maintain the crew's solidarity. In a similar vein, Burns's "awful laughter", an irrational outburst, "exorcises" (125) the ship from its seemingly interminable delay where rationality could not.

The "irrational" Burns and the "rational" Ransome are the other doubles upon whom the narrator's new identity is moulded. In his irrational fears and superstitions, Burns reminds the narrator of his incredulous, romantic side, which he, as a cynic, has repressed. The narrator's obsession with Burns's explanation for the ship's delay, which he even discusses

with Ransome (82); his misrecognition of Burns's trimming his beard as a suicide attempt, and finally the fact that he begins to speak like Burns (104), point to a connection between them (90).

Ransome is the character whom Conrad presents most obviously as the narrator's foil, since he is constantly at his side (92). Unlike Giles and Burns, whose similarities to the narrator are largely covert, Ransome's affinities to the narrator are all quite obvious. They both are immune to malaria (85) and harbour an invisible illness, in the narrator's case of his soul and in Ransome's of his heart (68). According to Watt, the narrator is most indebted to "the clear-sighted persistence of Ransome" (1960:503); for not only does he fortify the captain during moments of crisis, such as when he discovers that the quinine is fake (91), but he subtly guides him as to his responsibilities as a captain. For instance, when the narrator "shrinks from going on deck" (101) in despair of the ship ever breaking the stranglehold of calm, Ransome reminds him that it is his duty to be on deck.

To return to the narrator's first test at sea, the delay of the ship subjects him to an initiatory death through disillusionment (65). For his descriptions of delay as "black", with "a bitter taste and a deadly meaning" suggest that it is a death experience (66). Further, since initiatory death issues in disillusionment (Henderson 1990:8), it is fitting that the narrator's initial illusions of the ship as "an enchanted princess" (40), and the sea as "the only remedy for all my problems" (69), are rapidly replaced by contrary images of the ship as a "floating grave" and the sea as a "poison" (92). Yet the delay also has the positive effect of maturing the narrator perceptually, as his comment on the futility of an unpremeditated, directionless action (which indicates his new awareness of the foolhardiness of his irrational resignation earlier)

evinces: "What's the good of our letting go of the ground only to drift?" (75).

In view of the narrator's tendency to evade responsibility through action, as evinced in his resignation, it is imperative that his main test requires him to wait and not to act.[32] Furthermore, since life is composed of dichotomies, such as silence and speech, passivity and action, it is imperative that the narrator learn to deal with both equally in order to grasp life in its entirety. This is a recurrent theme in Conrad's texts: the individual's struggle to maintain an equilibrium between social integration and solitude, communication and contemplation. Nostromo, who dies friendless, disillusioned and condemned to silence (ironically by the merciful angel, Mrs. Gould), perhaps exemplifies the tragedy which can befall an individual who fails to reach this balance (N:449).

While delay is an intangible threat which the narrator is powerless to remedy, disease is a trial which he is capable of ameliorating. And it is precisely because circumstances prevent him from doing so that it plays a more active role in the annihilation of the narrator's character than does delay. The narrator's initiation is substantially advanced by his discovery that the medicine is useless and he is immune to the sickness.

The narrator's immunity to the disease increases his receptivity to change by isolating him, destroying his new-found feeling of kinship ("I felt myself familiar with them like a long lost wanderer among his kin" [73]) with the crew, who are themselves united in their illness. The remorse which he feels because he has not been afflicted by the disease is compounded by the fact that he harbours a soul blighted by the disease of indifference beneath his healthy exterior: "I stood amongst them like a tower of strength impervious to the disease and feeling only the sickness of my soul" (109).[33] Significantly, this scenario, by confronting the narrator

with his original vision of himself as "a king in his country, in a class all by himself . . . remote from the people" (62), humbles him and makes him recognise his fatuous pride.

The narrator's discovery that the late captain had sold the quinine and replaced it with a useless powder forces him to abandon his last panacea, as he has "pinned his faith" to the quinine as a "magic powder" working to "secure my first command against the evil powers of calm and pestilence" (88).[34] This discovery also impresses upon the narrator the discrepancy between appearance and reality -- "Nothing could ever be taken for granted" (102) -- and confronts him with his failure as a captain. For not only has he been unable to protect the crew from the illness in the first place, but by surrendering to "indifference" (93) and "the creeping paralysis of a hopeless outlook" (78), he has failed to uphold their morale as is his duty. Once the narrator realises his culpability, his self-esteem and self-confidence give way to "self-reproach" (93) and "guilt" (96). His sense of self-condemnation -- "the person I could never forgive was myself" (95) -- culminates in his confession to the crew, during which he shows no mercy to himself: "I would have held them justified in tearing me limb from limb" (96). This ordeal demonstrates that the tale really turns on the narrator's discovery of the alternate nature of power. For initially, he envisions himself, the captain, as a divine personage, "remote from the people and as inscrutable almost to them as the Grace of God" (62). But when he confesses to the crew he effectively appeals to their compassion and hence inverts this relationship. Thus it is finally the crew who exercise sovereign power, saving the narrator from despair by offering to support him (96).[35]

The delay of the ship, the lack of quinine, and the narrator's sense of responsibility for this lack which is aggravated by his inability to redress it, catapults him into his third ordeal,

insanity. His first fit of insanity is brought on by the "dead calm" (99) of the ship in a night of "infinite silence": "I clung to my rail as if my sense of balance were leaving me for good" (74). Significantly, the narrator is saved from moral dissolution by the support of a crew member (74). His second attack is provoked by the absence of quinine, or rather the presence of the fake quinine. For the "mental shock" which the narrator suffers induces in him a "sort of temporary insensibility" (89). The narrator manages to avert permanent insanity by carrying out his duties, made "instinctive" by his training (89), and by keeping a diary.

The circumstances of the narrator's madness are similar to those of King Lear: both men originally abdicate their responsibilities, are subsequently disempowered, go mad in a storm, and achieve self-knowledge, enriched by compassion, endurance and humility. Furthermore, both react to their insanity in a schizophrenic manner, perceiving it as something which is outside themselves: "I feel as if I were going mad" the narrator laments (93); King Lear cries: "O! let me not be mad . . . I would not be mad" (Shakespeare: 4.7.62). This self-division, which the narrator first experiences in the resignation episode (for which he cannot produce a rational motive [18]), re-surfaces during his temporary insanity. For twice he experiences a disjunction between his true and ostensible states of mind (109), his sanity and his ethics: "the seaman, the officer of the watch in me was sufficiently sane. I was like the mad carpenter making a box" (101). But although this ordeal exposes him as deficient -- his soul is not "highly tempered", nor his imagination under control (100) -- it also reassures him that he is truly a seaman (40), as he can still carry out his duties (89) despite these failings.

Among primitive tribes the shamans frequently cultivate insanity as a means to greater insights (Eliade 1958:104ff.). This practice stems from the principle that the suspension of the

rational faculty facilitates the expansion and transformation of the mind as a whole (ibid.). And true to such a function as a visionary ordeal, insanity precipitates two critical adjustments in the narrator's perspective. First, by alerting him to the limiting myopia of his viewpoint -- "The terrible thing was that the only voice I ever heard was my own" (101) -- it humbles him and increases his receptivity to others, which is a radical change from his original opinionated, self-righteous demeanour. Secondly, it grants him insight into the relation between morality and sanity. While staying at the Sailor's Home the narrator inadvertently isolates a truism regarding sanity, which Burns's account of the late captain corroborates: "high professional reputation [is] not necessarily a guarantee of a sound mind" (21). In short, status does not presuppose sanity. The narrator's personal lapses into insanity supplement his understanding of madness in the sense that because his "seaman's instinct alone survived whole in [his] moral dissolution" (109), he becomes convinced that sanity is discrete from and of less importance than morality. Hence he is inspired to comment, with hindsight, "It never occurred to me that I didn't know in what soundness of mind exactly consisted and what a delicate and, upon the whole, unimportant matter it was" (21, my emphasis). In sum, through his own madness, the narrator discovers that the single most reliable indicator of sanity is responsibility to one's duty.

Through the ordeals of delay, disease and madness, the narrator's obsolete self is slowly stripped away and he steadily approaches the threshold of death from which he initially fled. Hence his entire initiation involves his retracing his steps to the resignation episode during which he first sensed the shadow line of transformation looming (3). Hawthorn summarises the captain's ordeals as revealing to him "identity as something not given but (at

least in part) still to be constructed" (1985:xi). Berthoud contends that the narrator learns the importance of "deconstruction" (1986:522). Both critics are, in fact, right as the process of maturation through initiation involves first deconstruction, the breaking down of the old identity, and then the recreation of a new one.

The narrator's initiation climaxes in three simulated deaths which teach him to accept, "like any Conradian hero", "knowledge of annihilation, the ultimate apocalypse" (Cox 1974:156). The first one is in the form of a death wish. The narrator, in despair of his capacity to help the crew after discovering the fake quinine, envies the escape from guilt and remorse which Burns's death will provide him: "Enviable man! So near to extinction -- while I have to bear within me the tumult of suffering vitality, doubt, confusion, self-reproach" (93).

The narrator's second "death" is in the form of his regression[36] to the prelapsarian state, a void in which "[a]ll sense of time is lost" (97), and absolute space reigns, the world seemingly regressing to the time of creation: "There they are: stars, sun, sea, light, dark, space, great waters; the formidable work of the Seven Days" (97). In terms of initiation, the narrator's return to the timeless, spaceless realm of cosmogony is tantamount to initiatory death (Eliade 1958:xii). The narrator's third death experience involves a wilful surrender to self-obliteration: "The end of all things would come without a sigh, stir or murmur. The quietness that came over me gave me a sort of comfort" (108). Thus when death does come, symbolised by a "bottomless, black pit" (110), the narrator does not hesitate to meld with it: "I moved forward into the darkness that stood in front of me like a wall. Such must have been the darkness before creation" (113). In sum, whereas his former death trial returns the narrator to the time of creation, this one relocates him to an amorphous, precosmogonic state in which

"every form was gone, blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night" (113).

Perception, the phenomenologists hold, is a precondition for existence. In this view, the narrator, who is enveloped in darkness and can neither see nor be seen -- "I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything" (113) -- is temporarily non-existent. Through this symbolic annihilation he gains insight into the condition of humankind as ineluctable solitude: "He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood" (113). Yet the death which he anticipates will seal his destruction -- "the first crash will turn me into dust" -- is deferred by his return to his former condition of delay: "I waited with a horribly strained expression. Nothing happened. It was maddening" (113). The "fatal moment" (114) eventually comes when Burns's "mocking" laughter (119) and the rain (which carries symbolic overtones of baptism and rebirth), free the ship from the "evil spell" of silence and calm (125).[37]

The narrator's last ordeal, his meeting with Ransome, is critical in that it consolidates his experience of the discrepancy between appearance and reality: "I saw under the worth and comeliness of the man the humble reality of things" (129). More importantly, by putting the narrator in the position of Captain Kent (the one whose duty it is to convince Ransome to stay), Ransome makes him confront that which he initially evaded: his imminent change. His new attitude of humility towards Ransome finally testifies to the moral revolution which he claimed to feel after the interview: "Every effort, every movement was an act of consistent heroism. It was not for me to look at a man thus inspired" (124).

When the story ends, the narrator's physical voyage to Hong Kong has just begun. The distance he has travelled in terms of his psychic journey, his initiation, still remains a point in

debate. One view, that he has completed his initiation, is advanced by Gurko, who proposes that the narrator's new perspective on the port as infused with life, "I was struck by the springy step, the lively eyes, the strong vitality of everyone I met" (130), points to his own revitalisation (1962:114); and Batchelor, who argues that the narrator emerges self-empowered and this is sealed by the fact that he reports to Captain Ellis as a father-figure (1996:253). The opposing perspective is exemplified in Geddes's comment: "When the story concludes one assumes that his education has just begun" (1980:112). I am inclined to agree that the narrator has not completed his initiation, for a number of reasons. First, the narrator's intention to leave immediately after reaching port implies that he is aware of the incomplete nature of his voyage (132). Secondly, the fact that he differentiates himself from "the skittish youngsters" (132) on the shore suggests that he is still unsure about his change and must distinguish himself from others (as he has done previously with Captain Giles [45] and Burns [55]), in order to know not what he is, but what he is not. Thirdly, since the narrator has effectively undergone a form of shamanic initiation, evinced in his descent to insanity and his encounter with his dead predecessor, it is in keeping with shamanic lore that he remains alone after his ordeal, in order to remain receptive to new insights (Henderson 1990:67).

It may be tempting at this stage to agree with Kenneth Graham that "Ransome's departure is a reversal of the narrative's apparent move towards enlightenment, it throws us back into the past and casts a shadow across the tentative triumph of the narrator" (1988:153). But Berthoud's summary seems to make more sense, both in terms of the conclusion and the novella as a whole. According to Berthoud, Captain Giles's "valedictory remarks" to the young Conrad seem to close the novel. "But this conclusion", he continues, "is that there is no

conclusion: what has been learnt is that the lesson is never done. There is no point of rest, either in the past or in the future" (1986:524). Captain Giles's words -- "The truth is that one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad" (131) -- are not only a memorable formulation of Conradian stoicism, but also point to the axiom of initiation that life is, and should be, an ongoing process of irreversible change.

NOTES

1. Since initiation entails confrontation with the unknown or the unforeseen, a possible incentive for this aversion may be humankind's innate opposition to these obscure situations (Henderson 1990:5). Conrad was convinced of our in-built resistance to diversion or difference: "The human animal is adverse to change and timid before the unknown" (MS:114). In a letter to Marguerite Parodowska Conrad described the human stance before the prospect of change thus: "a sadness in all beginnings . . . distaste for new things, uncertainty of the dark" (Oct. 10 1891; Karl vol 1 1983:100).

2. Albert Cook concedes that "Youth" and "The Shadow Line" are thematically linked, as both tales depict the process of tempering through immersion in knowledge of the void (1958:327). In both tales, too, the memory of this knowledge of the void seems to be buried in the protagonists' unconscious. Plato's allegory of the cave is a useful analogy for this phenomenon. During initiation the novices experience the absolute reality of the region outside the cave -- in the sun of truth, so to speak. After the ordeal, they return to the unenlightened caverns of their conscious minds. And because this change in the unconscious seldom filters through to the conscious mind, they cannot comprehend any continuity between the black and white flickerings on the cave walls and the sights, sounds and colours of life outside. Consequently, they are left with a vague intuition of this mystery, a haunting, which is evident in the endings of both tales.

3. Bonney summarises Marlow's confrontation with the gales and the delay in Falmouth as symbolic journeys to hell, "the traditional place of timeless confinement", since they both entail a suspension of time (1978:302). The gales seem to last "for months, for years, for all eternity" (11), and in Falmouth, Marlow feels as if he has been "bewitched", and will have to "live for ever and ever in that inner harbour" (16).

4. According to Tony Jackson, Marlow's role as a storyteller, especially in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim, is as much concerned with his attempt to understand the events (and implicitly himself), as with the telling of the tale (1994:73). He cites Walter Benjamin (1968) who observes:"The art of storytelling is reaching its end because its epic side of truth and wisdom is dying out" (1994:73). In other words, the narrator has become an unreliable source of truth who uses the novel as a vehicle through which he can explore the significance of the events for himself.

5. The Captain's conduct illustrates the insurmountable split between private and public duties, a dualism which initiation purports to dissolve temporarily. For in saving his wife, the captain is indeed heroic; but the fact that he has rejected his prior responsibility to the ship in order to do so, makes his conduct unheroic.

6. Marlow's friendship with Mrs. Beard, in the light of his observation of her corrosive effect on the Captain, is perverse, suggesting his irresistible attraction to her as a sexualised woman.

7. It is noteworthy that just as the Captain is corrupted by the subtle influence of his wife, the Judea is undone by an invisible force in the form of the "lightless steamer" which collides with her in the dark (8). The congruence of these events perhaps helps to alert Marlow to the analogous existence of destructive forces in human nature and the elements.

8. This view of self-discovery as a reactionary process may account for Conrad's interest in real revolutionaries (who are practised in the art of resistance), since they have the optimum potential for authenticity.

9. John Weston, in his article, "'Youth': Conrad's Irony and Time's Darkness", presents the complementary view that this ordeal advances self-knowledge by dislocating Marlow from the milieu in which he established his epistemological framework: "Marlow and the crew are working in eternity rather than in time, disregarding their temporally limited knowledge . . . and living in the eternal knowledge that they are in the process of discovering themselves" (1974:295).

10. In Guerard's estimation, this return to the primitive source of being functions as a preliminary trial leading up to progression (1966:15).

11. Gurko makes the rather obvious yet nevertheless important observation that Conrad uses the fire, spontaneous combustion, as a metaphor for the stages of life: just as the flames of the ship will be quenched by the sea, youth will fall victim to time (1962:93).

12. It is a point worth noting that Marlow's initiation through fire and water illustrates one of the earliest initiation ceremonies as devised by Isis. This ordeal entailed first

cleansing by water and then fertilisation by fire (Henderson 1990:139).

13. In the Mirror of the Sea Conrad warns that behaviour motivated by pride has unhappy consequences (1923:18).

14. Boyle offers the interesting hypothesis that the ignited hold represents the "ubiquitous destructive element which is sublimated yet smouldering in each human endeavour", and that Marlow's initiation hinges on his recognition of the omnipresence of this force (1965:122). In other words, Marlow will only reach maturation once he recognises that he himself contains the source of his own destruction.

15. Batchelor argues that the dramatic impact of the explosion derives from Conrad's use of what has become a sophisticated Modernist technique: "the deceleration of time to characterize physical crisis". Marlow's description of himself falling through the air highlights the separation between "internal, Bergsonian time" and "external, clock time" for the duration of this crisis (Batchelor 1996:78).

16. In The Secret Agent, for instance, the apparently destructive occurrence of Stevie's death by explosion has the positive repercussion of stimulating life in the other characters -- Verloc, Winnie and Ossipon.

17. Gurko maintains that the East heralds a threshold experience in Marlow's life when the limitations of his conduct will be made manifest to him, and his youthful enthusiasm will give way to a sense of difficulty (1962:95).

18. Bonney declares that Marlow perceives the stillness of the East as "a deadly threat which parallels the stasis he encountered within the gale off the Lizards and at Falmouth" (1978:302).

19. An alternative explanation for the suspension of Marlow's initiation would be that Conrad hoped, by denying us the conventional denouement at the end of the voyage, to make the reader look elsewhere for meaning. I would argue that a theme which he intended to impress upon us is the primacy of the struggle over the goal. In other words, the journey itself, and implicitly the lessons which Marlow learns, are more important than his arrival in Java.

20. This form of initiation deviates from the norm where the initiand undergoes transition while his or her consciousness is suspended. In Marlow's case his ordeal requires him to retain and not relinquish his conscious faculty, as a sign of his strength of will and spirit (Eliade 1958:89). In fact, Marlow's initiation recalls that of the Wiradjuri novices who are compelled to remain awake to signify their being present and conscious in the world (Eliade 1958:14-5).

21. The lethal potential of this land is manifest in the reactions of the sailors: Mahon "lies as if he has been shot"; the crew are "asleep in the careless attitudes of death" (41); and the captain looks as if "he would never wake" (41).

22. Like a perfumed yet poisonous flower, the East conceals its noxious spell under a charming exterior. Nathaniel Hawthorne explores this theme with considerable sensitivity and depth in the short story, "Rappaccini's Daughter". A number of parallels emerge between Marlow's impression of the East as a scented flower and a deadly power, and Giovanni's impression of Rappaccini's beautiful daughter. For instance, Giovanni says of her: "flower and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with the same peril in either shape" (1937:1047).

23. Henderson corroborates Marlow's interpretation by declaring that once one is given a glimpse of what is beyond the world's limits, one seeks to transcend them to reach a higher consciousness (1990:38). Thus Lingard, who is initiated by his relationship with Mrs Travers, is eventually "undone" by his "glimpse of Paradise" (R:399).

24. According to Geddes, Conrad first described the novella to Pinker as "not a story really but exact autobiography" (1980:104). "The Shadow Line", Cox agrees, is a true product of Conrad's search into the nature of his own identity" (1974:151).

25. Some critics, like Norman Sherry and Jakob Lothe (1989:118), question its autobiographical basis, while others affirm it: for instance Geddes, who classifies it as "non-fiction" (1980:83); and Berthoud, who states that the tale is "closer to lived experience than Conrad's other works" (1986:250).

    Critics who explicitly identify the theme of initiation include Ian Watt, who refers to the narrator's "rite of passage" (1960:502); Gurko, who describes the tale as a "psychic study of the emergent self" (1962:110); Cox, who refers to the "moral initiation" of the "captain-initiate" (1974:150); Kenneth Graham, who defines the narrative intention as depicting the narrator's "breakdown and initiation" (1988:152); and Lothe, who talks of the tale as a "significant learning experience" which leaves the narrator "humbler and wiser" (1989:122-132). Commentators who manifest their consensus in a less explicit manner include Baines (1960:404) and Geddes (1980:84), who judge the tale as a test of the narrator by his first command.

26. Geddes' viewpoint is exemplified in Under Western Eyes, in which Razumov's life is permanently changed, literally within the time of his going for a walk: "a man goes out of a room for a walk. Nothing more trivial in appearance. He comes back and behold he is no longer the same man" (UWE:56).

27. The opening chapters of this novella, which detail the narrator's resignation and his sojourn at the Sailor's Home, have been widely criticised. In his statement that the story "gets under way very slowly and uncertainly", Guerard implies that these initial

chapters inhibit the advance of the story and are not really vital to its progression (1966:30). Batchelor is more blatant in his dismissal of these chapters as "a comic red herring", which has absolutely no bearing on "the skipper's struggle" (1996:245). This view is contested by critics such as Lothe, Watt and Berthoud, who insist that the chapters should not be disregarded as "a preamble" (Berthoud 1986:511), as they perform a number of crucial functions. Watt posits that they serve to serve to advance the initiatory motif considerably as they "exhibit for the reader the whole complex of conflicting emotions which characterise the onset of that penumbral transition from later youth to committed adulthood which is Conrad's professed subject" (1960:500); Lothe judges "the introductory narrative reflections" as providing the reader with a context against which to interpret the narrator's abrupt act of throwing up his berth (1989:112); and Berthoud states that "the notoriously problematic opening" is essential to the real concern of the novella because it constitutes the first and necessary stage of "the general inquiry into how to survive an emergency" (1986:511). I would argue that these opening chapters are crucial because they provide the reader with the vital information that the narrator's initiation is not externally imposed or motivated, for by resigning from his job he has catapulted himself into a unknown region conducive to initiation.

28. The possibility that the narrator's resignation is deliberate, exposes his denunciation of life -- "I was more discontented, disgusted and dogged than ever" (7) -- as nothing but a feigned dissatisfaction with life, a ploy to delay the inevitable: change.

29. Captain Giles (14) and Captain Ellis warn the narrator that sailors who remain in the East are prone to degeneration, as whites go "mighty soft" there very quickly (31).

30. As Geddes points out, it is only once he is imposed upon by his predecessor's irresponsibility, that the narrator grasps the implications of his burden on the mail master (1980:42).

31. The narrator's absolute trust in his command and the ship constitute the first in a series of "panaceas". For as the tale unfolds, we see him transferring this implicit faith from the ship to the sea (71), to the quinine (88), so that finally he is pared down to himself, and forced to rely on the one thing which has remained fixed amidst all these variables: the solidarity of the sailors. Thus the narrator's voyage teaches him that there are no quick and easy solutions, and that the only means for salvation lies in himself and others.

32. Conrad was fascinated by the dichotomy of action and contemplation and explored this motif extensively, especially in texts such as Nostromo and Victory. The narrator in Nostromo defines action as "consolatory", since, "Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates" (N:200), and "the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a

helpless part" (N:417).

33. Like Marlow in "Youth", whose understanding of the unknown is supplemented by his transformation into the unknown by the fire, the narrator, in his healthy disease, becomes the incarnation of duplicity, which confuses him throughout the narrative.

34. Thus the dead captain, contrary to Moser's assertion that "he remains a very external evil" and "does not make himself felt aboard", makes his presence felt in the form of the fake quinine (1968:4).

35. Watt makes the insightful observation that the crew's refusal to see things personally is most effective in ridding the narrator of his egocentric paranoia that everything is a plot against him, in his "death-haunted command" (98)(1960:502).

36. The reduction of the crew to "ghosts of themselves" and "shadows" (97) indicates that they too are undergoing this death experience; and evidences the micro-macrocosm paradox of initiation which states that the individual undergoing change, especially if he is in a position of command like the narrator, will deflect this transition onto those around him.

37. The tight construction of this tale is exemplified in this scene, for Burns's laugh had frightened the captain while he was still alive so that he "shrank within himself" (61).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Paradoxes of Initiation: `The Secret Agent'

I

Initiation in Conrad's texts is invariably fraught with problems, with many of his protagonists suspending their transition either temporarily or permanently. As a result, his work as a whole offers aberrational rather than exemplary representations of the initiatory paradigm. Since the paradoxes which inhere in initiation appear to be decisive factors in cases of deferred and incomplete initiation, this chapter proposes to investigate these paradoxes and to evaluate their influence in some of Conrad's works, culminating in an extended reading of The Secret Agent.

Myerhoff et al. suggests that initiation has implications far exceeding those which are ordinarily comprehended. One feature which Myerhoff stresses in particular is its paradoxical nature (1987:382).[1] The paradoxes of initiation can be classified into seven categories. The first inheres in the primary function of initiation: to grant the initiand a new identity by returning him or her to his or her origins or first principles (Turner 1968:577). This process, Eliade points out, is purely symbolic, since its logic precludes the possibility of an "originary" identity (1958:xiii). Just as language, in the Derridean sense, seeks in vain to arrest meaning which is endlessly deferred, so initiation strives without success to isolate our origins, which are eternally beyond our grasp. In Conrad's writing, this paradox tends to mutate into the idea that whatever identity we acquire through initiation is already in a sense our own. Jim's hope that "a fellow could begin with a clean slate" (LJ:142), is answered sceptically by Marlow: "A

clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each of our destiny is not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock" (143). And yet our notion of Jim must accommodate his astonishing triumph in Patusan, alongside the disastrous Patna episode. As the Professor in The Secret Agent observes, "we can never cease to be ourselves" (118); and yet this does not eliminate the possibility of radical change in our beliefs, illusions, morals.

A second paradox of initiation pertains to its axiom that life comes out of death, that by undergoing a near-death experience, one's perception and appreciation of life is intensified (Burkert 1987:23). A typical illustration of this occurs in The End of the Tether: after the ship crashes into a coral reef, Mr Massay emerges from this catastrophic event with "the love of life awakened suddenly" in him (332). The essence of this paradox -- that progression is premised on regression -- is encapsulated in Stein's injunction to Jim: "The way is to the destructive element submit yourself" (LJ:163). Although this paradox recalls the natural law governing growth (which defines existence as a cycle in which "death" stimulates life and life gives way to death), it negates the standard conception of metamorphosis as the culmination of an accumulation of events, rather like the way in which a wall is built: layer upon layer. It claims instead that the expense and risk of life (as exemplified in the crew's dangerous search for Abraham during a storm in "Youth") rather than its careful preservation (which is Verloc's doomed policy in The Secret Agent) is life's elixir.

In Conrad's texts a protagonist can reach this state of a life-perpetuating death through one or more of the following experiences: retrospection, relinquishing of identity, or physical relocation to a primitive setting. Recollection of the past is propitious only if it is temporary. Several of Conrad's stories, notably the Marlow series, portray an older protagonist recounting

his past as a means through which to illuminate his present situation. Understanding and self-knowledge is often registered in the recall of an earlier stage of consciousness. A classic case is the young captain's account of his first command in "The Shadow Line": the narrative discourse is littered with analeptic hindsights, such as his comment: "My education was far from finished although I did not know it" (47). But if retrospection becomes a way of life or a way to avoid life in the form of change, it obstructs the cycle of initiation. In "Tomorrow", Captain Hagberd, who is "obsessed with the idea that his son will soon return", degenerates into silence and insanity whilst waiting. When his son does return, he refuses to recognise him, for he cannot bear to live without the illusion which has now become indispensable to his existence (see Conrad, letter to H.D Davray Apr. 2 1902; Karl vol 2 1986:402).

The surrender of identity, which is the second means of regression, goes to the root of the enigma of selfhood. The establishment of the self in Conrad's texts, Daleski remarks, is a paradoxical process which is co-existent with the capacity for letting go (1977:23-25). This self-dispossession requires the individual to relinquish the mutable elements of the self: illusions, status, language. Thus in The Rescue, Lingard sacrifices "the intention of his life" (to support Immada in her bid for the throne [197]); Morrison in Victory casts off the "abiding illusion of his existence" (that his "customers" will pay him for the supplies which he has given them on credit [V:30]); and Razumov renounces his love for Natalie, who is the only "truth" of his life (UWE:297). In Friedman's perspective, the protagonist "envisions an opening -- a necessary but shaming conclusion -- in which, at the moment of critical moral choice, he (or she) gives up the attitudes, ideals, dignity and effort of a lifetime" (1966:81). The relinquishing of identity through status degradation is evident in Willems's dissolution

following his betrayal of Lingard -- "All that had been a man within him was gone" (OI:77). But the prototype of this case is perhaps Razumov, who is reduced to infant-like helplessness when he is deafened and crippled by Nikita (UWE:304).

The relocation of a character from a civilised to a comparatively primitive environment is a third scenario for regression. Nina's migration from the civilised society of London to the more "savage" societies of Almayer and Dain, is regressive (AF), as is Jim's move to Patusan (LJ), and Kurtz's to Africa (HD).[2] Although Tony Jackson is right in observing that Conrad uses this device to advance characterisation, "to illuminate what would not be evident if the character were observed only in the context that had created him in the first place" (1994:71), he overlooks Conrad's underlying intention: to promote knowledge of the self as a unit separate from society. For as Marlow remarks in Heart of Darkness, when the "little things" of duties and social restraints have fallen away "you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness" (116; cf. LJ:213).

Though in Conrad a character often begins this process of regression, his or her completion of the cycle of initiation (through advancing to progression) seldom ensues. Initiation is repeatedly arrested in the preliminal and liminal stages. To thus interrupt the cycle of change, Eliade warns, is to go against the natural flow of life and to risk rendering oneself lifeless: "One cannot stop in any one of these stages, one cannot install oneself either in death or regeneration. The movement always does and must continue" (1960:226). Unless these protagonists resume initiation, they become reduced to phantoms, compelled to prey off the vitality of others in order to sustain themselves. In Victory, Heyst, who describes himself as a "dead" man (285), and who has disdained all action and interaction with the world through the

"intelligent observation of facts" (57), is invigorated by Lena, who gives him "a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known" (169-170). The Nigger of the `Narcissus' offers the more sinister instance of the malingering James Wait, who lives off the crew who visit him: "each going out, seemed to leave behind a little of his own vitality, surrender some of his own strength, renew the assurance of life -- the indestructible thing. He did not like to be alone, because, when he was alone it seemed to him as if he hadn't been there at all. There was nothing" (NN:109).

The third paradox of initiation derives from the rite's dialogic function to promote social conditioning and ensure biological survival. Initiation purports to inculcate in the initiand the community's value-system as well as to provide him or her with the necessary time, space and, most importantly, guidance, to effect a meaningful transition. In this capacity, Myerhoff argues, initiation embodies the contradiction at the core of the human condition, which is that we "live out our lives suspended between the borders of culture and nature" (1987:380-1). However, the paradoxes inherent in the rite of initiation allow us both to contemplate and momentarily transcend our ambivalent condition (Myerhoff 1987:381). In other words, by transporting us to a zone free of the social imperatives of status and hierarchy, and the biological imperatives of time and space (the liminal stage), initiation frees us of both and dissolves the conflict. Jung agrees: such antinomies are "really only phrases we use to describe an ambivalence that troubles us and for which we never seem able to find an answer. There is an answer . . . . There is a meeting point -- in the rites of initiation. They allow the individual or whole groups to unite the opposing forces within themselves and achieve equilibrium" (1983:156).[3]

Conrad complicates the paradox by blurring the boundaries between nature and culture. For example, in The Secret Agent the city of London is described as a "jungle" (150) which is inhabited by a motley assortment of "sprats" (215), "snakes" (219), and "dogs" (131). He thus suggests that modern, sophisticated society is often more inhumane and savage than "primitive", tribal communities. The ravenous cannibals in Heart of Darkness show more self-control in refraining from eating their passengers (104) than the worthy "pilgrims" do in opening fire at the first sign of life stirring in the bushes (110). A more gruesome case is presented in Lord Jim when Stein, the highly respected trader, recounts with considerable pride his capture of a rare butterfly immediately after having killed a man (160).

Initiation plays out in the initiand the paradox not only of his or her socio-biological heritage but also of his or her private-public self. The fourth paradox of initiation is that it purports to cultivate simultaneously the private and public aspects of the self, the concerns of which may be diametrically opposed. In other words, initiation facilitates the individual's successful entry into the public arena by helping him or her to develop an autonomous identity and a personal moral code (Hovet 1990:17). But it simultaneously preserves the social infrastructure by imposing certain limits on the initiand, such as taboos (van Gennep 1969:114).

Conrad's texts and correspondence attest to his preference for private truth and values over public "honour". Repeatedly the scenario prevails where the character, anxious to retain his or her public image untarnished, ends up losing personal integrity. And once s/he has lost his or her principles, s/he is unable to function effectively in either public or private capacities. Nostromo, who tries to consolidate his heroic name by making "the silver issue the most

famous affair" of his life (N:222), inadvertently loses his integrity by sacrificing "the soul of a woman" (Teresa), and "the life of a man" (Decoud), to this cause (N:443). Thereafter, haunted by his culpability and plagued by guilt over the silver he has stolen, Nostromo resigns himself to demoralisation, assuming the life of a thief. Another example is the conduct of Freya, who, by postponing her marriage to Jasper out of concern for her reputation -- "Not before my twenty-first birthday; so that there shall be no mistake in people's minds as to me being old enough to know what I am doing" -- contributes to his ruin and her own death ("Freya":310). According to Eloise Knapp Hay, nearly all of Conrad's principal characters fall into a situation where their personal action or thought is challenged by public forces with which they must be reconciled (1972:13).

The successful socialisation of the initiand depends on his or her internalising the community's values and assuming an attitude of social responsibility, thus acquiring a sense of identity with the community. The extreme expression of this relationship is the conceptualising of the initiand as a microcosm of society, whose actions influence the whole or macrocosm (Eliade 1958:112). Yet paradoxically, the initiand is required to cast off all accumulated knowledge (including social mores and imperatives) during initiation, and hence can hardly serve as a microcosmic representative. Thus the fifth paradox of initiation revolves around the initiand's relationship with society during initiation.

In Conrad, this paradox becomes the insistence that even the most isolated and unlikely individual stands for humanity as a whole. As Conrad comments in his Author's Note, Nostromo is "a Man of the People" (N:13), and Marlow insists throughout Lord Jim that Jim is "one of us". Another version of this micro-macrocosm paradox is prominent in Conrad's sea

stories, where the Captain often seems to function as a metonym for the crew as a whole. Captain Allistoun, for example, prevents the mutiny of his crew through his sustained self-control and authority (NN). By the same token, the periodic insanity of Captain Beard in "Youth" seems to infect the crew, who repeatedly desert a ship which finally sinks.

While loyalty to the community is critical to Conrad's moral code, especially in the early stories, his attitude to fidelity is marked by ambivalence throughout his work. On the one hand, he endorses "fidelity to the law as above the individual"; yet he also expresses "a strong sense of fidelity to the individual, with the betrayal of the individual the most deeply felt of all crimes" (Guerard 1966:58). Conrad seems to deal with this contradiction by insisting that an individual must first establish self-trust (attend to private needs), before he or she can fulfil social obligations and form sincere personal relationships. Thus Razumov, who bases his interactions with Natalie and the revolutionary group on a "falsehood" (UWE:297), finally concedes that this deception has infected his personal life, preventing him from forging sincere links. Significantly, this insight leads him to perceive the self-referential basis of morality: that "in giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely" (UWE:298). In addition to its more obvious meaning, Marlow's observation that "of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself" (LJ:255), may be read as expressing the quintessence of Conrad's moral code: that all communication finally comes down to the self, that one's interactions with others are ultimately a reflection of how one deals with oneself.

The sixth paradox of initiation concerns its function of simultaneously inducing conformity and social responsibility, and stimulating self-conscious questioning (which can clearly lead to the erosion of a social identity). The latter involves the development of the

"reality function", which is

> the faculty of the independently observant, freely-thinking individual who can evaluate, without preconceptions, the possibilities of his environment and himself, criticising and creating within it, instead of simply reproducing inherited patterns of thought and action. (Campbell 1973:56).

Thus both the individual and the society can be moved by the process of initiation to profound self-exploration (Turner 1974:200).

Society is not static; it is "a process moving to the fulfilment of an unrealised potential", and hence actually depends upon the innovative contributions of initiands to rejuvenate it with fresh ideas (Campbell 1973:56). In The Secret Agent, the initiatory impact of Stevie's death, Winnie's murder of Verloc and her own suicide, all serve to disrupt the established patterns of social interaction and engender at least the possibility of different ones. Ossipon is seen as a casualty of this disruption, failing to adapt a new pattern of life: "It was ruin. He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat" (310). Since what Turner calls "reflexivity" requires an individual to relinquish his learnt social values and search for new ones, complete and continuous loyalty to social norms is impossible (1974:200). The apparent boundlessness of liminality is in actuality restricted, not so much by the external limits imposed by taboos and initiation guides, as by the initiand's knowledge of the uniqueness of the ordeal, and by an intrinsic order in the situation which dictates that the dissemination of knowledge must follow a precise, prescribed order (Turner 1974:577). Notwithstanding these inbuilt restraints, some initiands assume marginal positions permanently, so that initiation sometimes produces social outcasts.

The final paradox of initiation pertains to its dual esoteric-exoteric nature. For while

the structure and functions of this rite have been widely documented and seem relatively straightforward, a mystery still envelops the actual process of change. Frequently neither the initiand him- or herself nor the onlookers can discern signs of metamorphosis. In Victory, Heyst is perturbed at not being able to discern alteration in his personal appearance after his meeting with Lena, who inspires him with "a sort of ardour to live" (V:79). And Davidson, who expects, similarly, to find "some change" in Heyst, is disappointed by the fact that "there was none" (V:56). Again, in The Rescue, Mrs Travers's aggressive response to Lingard attests to the internal nature of this transition: "Are you looking for a change in me? No, you won't see it" (411).

The elusiveness of initiation can be ascribed to a variety of factors. First, in terms of tribal lore, the rites of initiation are accessible only to the initiated. Secondly, initiation itself resists the extraction of "phenomenologically accurate descriptions", because the process takes place in the unconscious, which is by definition inaccessible to the conscious (Herdt 1982:149). Initiation equips one with a peculiar state of mind and a language which is incomprehensible to the uninitiated (Eliade 1958:7). Geertz proposes that since what the initiands are really involved in is a form of worship, detached objective analysis is impossible (Herdt 1982:149). The implications for research are that theories on initiation can only, in the final analysis, be hypotheses without solid, experiential foundations, for not only are observers definitionally uninitiated, but the data on which these conjectures are based (namely, visible changes such as new behavioural patterns), is unreliable because it comprises the secondary by-products of an unconscious metamorphosis. Marlow's comment on the nature of Jim's experiences seems to hint at this idea: "the conquest of love, honour, men's confidence -- the

pride of it -- are fit materials for a hero's tale; only our minds are struck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim's successes there were no externals" (LJ:172). Like Gilgamesh, perhaps, who grasps yet fails to grip the plant of immortality, we intuit yet cannot conceptualise the advent of initiation.

II

Unlike the texts thus far examined, The Secret Agent does not manifestly address itself to the subject of initiation. Through the kind of attention I bring to bear on the novel I hope to demonstrate the explanatory power of a somewhat extrapolated notion of the initiatory paradigm. The paradigm is extended not only within the domain of textual explication, but also in the difficult areas of the relations between author and text and between text and reader. My primary intention in this chapter is to show how The Secret Agent in its conception, style and thematic content reflects the (paradoxical) rite of initiation.[4] I have centred my analysis on the hypothesis that the novel itself is largely a product of Conrad's undergoing radical changes whilst writing it; in other words, whilst he himself was engaged in initiation.

The Secret Agent, Martin Price points out, is a "troubling" book (1984:241), not so much because it defies easy categorisation -- this "simple tale", as Lothe warns, requires many re-readings (1989:237) -- but because of its equivocal moral stance. Conrad avoids establishing a clear moral imperative in this novel through a variety of devices, the most notable of which is his deployment of an ironical, detached narrative voice. Consequently, although the merits of the novel and its place in the Conradian canon are seldom questioned, the question of the nature of its moral stance has been widely debated.

"How is it that a tale so deeply depressing on the face of it . . . should be, for some readers at least, tonic rather than depressive in its final effect? Conrad's initial strategy of course, is to dash all our expectations" (Watt 1973:77). This summary of the "final effect" of The Secret Agent adumbrates the question which my approach to the text via the paradigm of initiation would hope to answer: is this an utterly `black' novel which denies all possibility of redemption, or does Conrad use this `blackness' as a point of departure for his explication of the means for salvation?

Broadly speaking, reviewers who denounce The Secret Agent for its lack of an ethical standpoint reach their conclusion by identifying what they construe as the novel's deviation from the convention that a text somehow embody a coherent and transparent authorial intention.[5] Baines presents his summation that the final effect of The Secret Agent is one of "negation and squalor" after censuring the novel's lack of a "unifying theme" (1960:338-40); Irving Howe argues that Conrad's irony undercuts any possibility of redemption or hope: "What one misses in The Secret Agent is some dramatic principle of contradiction, some force of resistance to serve literary ends. Conrad's irony suffuses every sentence nagging at our attention to the point where one yearns for the relief of a direct statement for ethical good" (1957:144).

The opposing viewpoint, that this novel does possess an underlying vision of redemption, states that Conrad's presentation of an atomised, corrupt society underpins his broader objective: to explore this society's potential to "radically re-order its substance" and evolve into an "ideal, organic community" (Fleishman 1965:196). Hillis Miller argues that Conrad's objective in depicting a portrait of society "rotten at the core" (1965:180) is

subordinate to his final intention: to free the reader from his or her "fatuous complacency", to awaken him or her to the "dissimulated reality" of his or her environment by effecting liberation for the main protagonists (1965:180-5).

I would incline towards the latter perspective, on the ground that initiation is one of the central themes in the novel, and initiation functions typically to redeem initiands and to purge them of their moral evils (see La Fontaine 1985:158). The redemptive function of initiation in this novel consists in the re-kindling of life and the passion for life in a stultified community which "calls nothing into question", and is thus "perhaps engaged in a death more than a life" as a result (Price 1984:234).[6] The stagnation of this society is a reflection of its obsession with order, a concern which has invested the institutions of society with more life and power than the human beings who erect and service them (Hay 1972:245). It takes the injection of madness, folly and chaos, as embodied in Vladimir, Stevie and the Professor to resuscitate this torpid society by breaking the stranglehold of order.[7]

Several critics maintain that The Secret Agent reflects a radical change of direction for Conrad. Guerard defines the text as "transitional", since Conrad departs from his highly personalised, impressionistic style to adopt a more "realistic", objective mode (1966:218); Holland judges it as "sharply marked off from the rest of Conrad's work" because it deploys new devices, such as a land instead of a sea setting (1966:163); and Batchelor states that Conrad's writing displays a "new professionalism", a greater degree of detachment and accuracy (1996:163). The essence of the change, it is unanimously agreed, is the progression from a late Victorian to a Modernist narrative stance. Thomas Mann was perhaps one of the first critics to declare that Conrad's perspective in The Secret Agent, such as his recognition of

the essentially arbitrary polarisation of comedy and tragedy, and his deployment of a dispassionately objective narrator, points to his assumption of a Modernist style (1933:106-10). Following Mann, Hillis Miller interprets Conrad's obfuscation of the truth from the reader as prefiguring modern consciousness (1965:72); and James English regards Conrad's engagement with the imperial social order as typically Modernist (1992:616).

Yet whatever changes Conrad was experiencing in his professional life, it seems that his metamorphosis encompassed his private life as well, the two meeting in the question of his standing as a writer. On Conrad's own testimony, he wrote The Secret Agent in a strange state of suspension from his rational and conscious faculties, akin to that of a liminar (see Turner 1969:95).[8] In a letter to J.B. Pinker, he confessed that the novel was "written in a state of distraction" (Mar. 5 1906; Karl vol 3 1988:212), an observation corroborated in his plaint to John Galsworthy that "all this is ghastly. I seem to move, write and talk in a kind of nightmare" (June 6 1907; Karl vol 3 1988:459). Conrad's description of himself in his Author's Preface as having been subject to an uninvited conceptual revolution -- the changes "in my imagination, in my vision and in my mental attitude stole over me unawares" (xxiii) -- further attests to the "unconscious" change he was undergoing at the time of writing.[9] Conrad's unusually detached, dispassionate narration of the story suggests the perspective of a liminar in an atemporal zone, separated from tangible reality.[10] My contention is that -- in addition to The Secret Agent's sharing several of the qualities characteristic of initiation -- ambiguity, mystery, the inversion of norms and the suspension of categories -- Conrad "transcribed" his initiatory ordeal into a number of initiatory motifs which are present in the novel.

III

As a site for initiation the novel's setting, London, is ambivalently presented. On the one hand, the city is populated by indolent, immature characters and thus seems bereft of the initiatory dialectic which functions to stimulate life and advance maturation. On the other hand, the inhabitants display certain characteristics typical of ongoing initiation, which suggests that the process is unfolding in some form or another.

Several factors imply that the characters are cut off from the life-affirming possibilities of initiation. First, the proliferation of "degenerates" -- such as the obese and child-like Michaelis and his fellow revolutionists, the wretched Professor and the mentally retarded Stevie -- seems to suggest the absence of initiation, since the cardinal function of the rite is to ensure the psychic health of the community. This impression is underscored by the figurative devolution of the characters to snakes (291), fish (145), swine (238) and dogs (226), a regression which is mirrored in the devolution of London to a "post-diluvian swamp" (147) and a "jungle" (150).[11]

Accompanying these images of atavistic stagnation is the prevailing philosophy of parasitism and cannibalism practised by the city and its inhabitants (see Hay 1972:234; Guerard 1966:225). The tendency for "one sort of wretchedness [to] feed upon the anguish of another" (171) characteristic of this society is a further indication of the suspension of initiation, for the rite functions both to regenerate and fortify the individual (which eliminates the need for parasitism), and to establish a structure to protect those who are in danger of being exploited during a process of change. The cannibalism of the characters is perhaps exemplified in their turning on each other after the initiatory deaths which deprive them

temporarily of effective power in life. Winnie preys on the prostrate Verloc while he is in a state of suspended animation after Stevie's death; Ossipon takes advantage of the hysterical Winnie, beside herself with shock after murdering Verloc. The implication is that when a character undergoes symbolic death through initiation society fails to support him or her (as it should) by providing the time, space and guidance necessary for a meaningful metamorphosis. Instead, it takes advantage of his or her vulnerability to launch an attack. Thus the entire society devolves into "a jungle of animal forms obeying the laws of predatory survival" (Fleishman 1968:209). Symptomatic of the society's integration of cannibalism into its infrastructure is its institutionalisation of jobs which require the exercise of such primal instincts as the urge to kill, in the butcher, and to hunt, in the policeman. These occupations exemplify the basic modality of a predatory society that sustains itself by allowing the law of the jungle to hold sway: the strong prey upon the weak, the rich upon the poor.

The parasitical nature of the city is apparent in the distortion of the relation between animate and inanimate objects. Hawthorn interprets this irregularity as "animism" and "alienation" (1979:73). In the case of animism, objects not possessed of life assume a vitality which menaces living things: the cracked bell clatters with "impudent virulence" behind each customer (4), and the piano executes its pieces with an "aggressive virtuosity" (61) which threatens to drown out all human speech. Alienation entails the reduction of the living to the status of a thing: Verloc is likened to an "automaton" (197); Michaelis has "a dummy's limb" (42); and Winnie is described as having a "head of stone" (260).

It is as if the pulse of life which normally flows in the characters' veins has been diverted to vitalise the inanimate environment. For while the streets throb with the colours

symbolic of passion -- blood-red, yellow, orange -- the humans emerge as shadowless (11), insubstantial automata, constantly in danger of being consumed or outlived by their preternaturally animated surroundings (150). "The shapes and colours of things", Hillis Miller concedes, "have a quality of firstness before which it is impossible to go" (1965:186). Consider, for instance, the Assistant Commissioner's nocturnal walk: the only source of "light and colour" (and, implicitly, life) which he encounters are the "glowing heaps of oranges and lemons" at the fruiterer's stall (150). Beyond that "all was black", and the people who pass the fruit stall "vanished at one stride" (150).

The text provides evidence that the characters themselves have engineered the regressive suppression of initiation. They have effectively defused the key catalysts of initiation by domesticating the unknown and neutralising all ambiguities. Further they have nullified the passions which are integral to the rite and thereby forestalled its occurrence. Price's comment that "[t]he desire to remain untroubled is far more powerful than the will to create" (1984:37) suggests that the problem is rooted in the characters' constitutional indolence. Thus Verloc does not "trouble his head" about the "strayed houses" in London, his sole concern being the "protection of the social mechanism, not its perfectionment or even its criticism" (15); and the anarchists minimise the possibility of initiation arising out of clashes between private and public matters by declaring their immunity to personal crises. The "famous terrorist", Yundt, had "never in his life raised personally as much as a little finger against the social edifice" (48); Michaelis holds that "nothing that happened to him personally had any importance" (107); and the Professor argues that "what happens to us as individuals is not of the least importance" (72). Furthermore, the characters "lack the power or will to

recognise what should at least cause a measure of disturbance" (Price 1984:37). When the fallen horses in the street move Stevie to "shriek piercingly", the crowds seem to gain "quiet enjoyment" from this "national spectacle" (9).

Initiation involves the regeneration of the spirit and the mortification, stimulation and cleansing of the body through a series of privations. The motifs of the sacred, sex and death are therefore an inevitable feature of all initiation rites and are reliable indicators of its presence (Eliade 1960:196). Thus it is significant that these qualities appear in the novel only in a monstrously degraded form.

The predominant feature of the characters is their morbid materialism: of the spirit there is no trace. Since initiation and its patterns are embedded in the spiritual life, the desacralised state of the characters may be a result of their insensibility to initiation. Their despiritualised state is manifest in their behavioural patterns, which are vacuous and mechanical. Edward Garnett was one of the first critics to recognise the robot-like manner of Verloc and Winnie: "There is a hidden weakness in the springs of impulse in both these figures and at certain moments they become automata" (quoted in Watt 1973:464). After Garnett, Wollaeger remarks that The Secret Agent is "populated by automata", whose subhuman behaviour is directly linked to the dissolution of the borders between human and machine, animate and inanimate, negating the character's soul and reducing him or her to a puppet (1990:153-5). Thus Winnie rises from her seat "as if raised by a spring" (251), and Verloc has the "automaton's absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him" (197).[12] The loss of the sacred, according to Guerard and Hillis Miller, is also manifest in the characters' obesity which serves as a sign of "universal spiritual indolence" (1966:225; 1965:185). Gross

fatness is at odds with the mortification of the flesh typical of initiation ceremonies (such as sweat baths and fasting) (Henderson 1990:49).

Sex and death appear in the novel in curiously devalued, adulterated forms. Anthropologists like Burkert (1987:91) and Joseph Campbell (1973:114) maintain that mystical union with the god or goddess during initiation at once sanctifies the initiand and grants him or her knowledge of life and death . Sex in The Secret Agent, in contrast, has neither a divine nor a tutelary function: instead it is treated as a commodity for bargaining. Winnie's marriage to Verloc is a commercial "transaction" (257); she gets into bed in a "calm, and businesslike manner" (57); and Ossipon uses women to gratify his "material needs" (307).[13]

Through the depiction of shrivelled or dysfunctional oral organs as symbolic of sex organs, Conrad accentuates the sterility of his characters. Yundt is described as a "senile sensualist", whose "worn out passion" is "badly served by a dried throat and toothless gums" (43); and the childless Michaelis, who is effectively a child insofar as he has relinquished responsibility for his welfare to others, has a voice which wheezes as if deadened by the fat on his chest (41). Significantly, infertility has become such a widespread phenomenon that it has expropriated the status of naturalness and in so doing has rendered fertility unnatural. This perversion is exemplified in the implied reaction of society to the cabman's prolific fatherhood: "The monstrous nature of that declaration of paternity seemed to strike the world dumb" (167). Finally, the frigidity of the characters (with the exception of Heat, Mrs Neale and the cabman) underscores their remoteness from initiation, since a vital link exists between this rite and fecundity (Dowden 1989:7).

However, it is not only the sacred and sex against which these protagonists insulate

themselves, but also death. Death, as Vladimir impresses on Verloc, has been thoroughly assimilated into the life of society, for "assassination is now almost conventional" (31) and murder "almost an institution" (33). As a result, as the Professor laments, the typical individual has become so anaesthetized that he or she is virtually immovable (95). The domestication of death has the critical consequence of reducing the possibility of revitalisation through initiatory demise.

To sum up, the London of the novel appears to be a desacralised moral wasteland whose inhabitants have cut themselves off from the possibility of regeneration and progression through initiation. There are, admittedly, several traces of aborted, repressed or latent initiatory cycles. Some of the characters appear to have suspended their initiation in the preliminal and liminal stages. Those who are infantilised, such as Michaelis, who has the charm and trustfulness of a child (107), and Vladimir, the "preternaturally thriving baby" (19), seem to be stalled in the preliminal stage. Those who have an ambiguous identity, such as the Professor, who is at once the frailest and most formidable character (60), and Stevie, who is a boy-man (167), appear to have been caught in the liminal stage. The fact that characters frequently embark on secret or nocturnal activities may also point to an initiatory capacity (see Burkert 1987:7). But when the novel opens the protagonists are caught in a lifeless zone devoid of the sacred (the means to sanctify life), of sex (a means to recreate life), and of death (as a means to renew life through destroying it). And despite the signs adumbrated above, none of them are in the process of, or embarking upon metamorphosis; their stolidness and self-insulation seem to have rendered them immune to all catalysts. Their predicament is not a sanctum but an asylum from life, a void perpetuated by the repression of everything which

constitutes and inspires life (Wollaeger 1990:144).

IV

Although the characters in The Secret Agent are introduced as removed from the possibility of initiation, some of them nevertheless do undergo radical change.[14] On the level of plot, the originator of the series of "initiations" in the novel is Vladimir, for it is his "mad" plot to blow up the Observatory that sets in motion the key chain of events. Before I look more closely at these, I would like to offer for consideration the proposition that, in the most basic sense, the real initiation guide or catalyst is Conrad, not Vladimir, and that the real initiands are the novel's readers, not the characters. For the book satisfies in exemplary fashion Conrad's lifelong desire to awaken or "initiate" his readers (letter to Edward Garnett Nov. 13 1899; Karl vol 2 1986:220). The abundance of impassioned responses which this dispassionate, "simple tale" has aroused, attests to Conrad's success in "making us see", in initiating us into new ways of thinking and feeling (see Hay 1972:245; Hillis Miller 1965:180-4). To invest the text with such authority is not of course to deny the possibility of "resistant" readings. But it is my conviction that the parameters of what might be deemed "appropriate" readerly response are narrower in respect of The Secret Agent than in the case of many of Conrad's other works.

The tactics which Conrad employs to control the response of the reader have been widely debated. Mark Wollaeger maintains that Conrad manipulates the reader to adopt his intended viewpoint through his "authoritative discourse" (1990:147), an authority achieved through the subtle partiality of a narrator who ensures that the reader perceives events as Conrad intends (Lothe 1989:257). Several other critics identify Conrad's use of an ironic,

detached narrator as his major "awakening" strategy (Hay 1972:245): the sustained shock of exposure to so devastatingly penetrating a level of irony serving finally to emancipate the reader from the falsity of the "dark city" (Hillis Miller 1965:183).

Two techniques seem to stand out as central to Conrad's strategy of "initiating" his readers. The first is to plunge the reader into a state of "category confusion". Conrad subverts our conventional expectations that reality will be defined by categorisation in terms of binary oppositions. He portrays a society in which the boundaries between categories have dissolved: life and death overlap -- for instance, the living Winnie is described as "death itself" (291) -- and inanimate and animate objects merge (such as the horse and van [151]). Often the categories themselves have become inverted, most frequently so as to expose the latent insidious side of that which is habitually perceived as benign (Wollaeger 1990:142). Knowledge, for instance, which is ordinarily perceived as bringing enlightenment and the virtual community of shared understanding, in this novel precipitates engulfment by darkness and alienation. When Ossipon hears of Winnie's suicide, the "cursed knowledge" (307) haunts him, seemingly preventing him from returning not only to his former mode of existence, but to life on any terms.

The second, related device through which Conrad awakens his reader is by witholding information. He keeps a very tight rein on his characters[15] through what Wollaeger calls "a violence of thematisation", that is, he "violently" reduces his characters to expressions of his themes and in so doing reduces them to puppets (1990:147). The characters are denied insight into, and control over, themselves, their situation and their actions (see Watt 1973:77). Conrad then uses a variety of narrative strategies (ellipsis, anachrony) to situate the reader in the very

same position as the characters: he or she is kept in the dark about critical information (Daleski 1976:152). "Nothing is brought to light", Holland protests (1968:170); the novel "is not charged with the promise of absolute knowledge" (Wollaeger 1990:44). The net result of this, the witholding or obfuscation of facts and their interpretation, is that the reader is compelled to assume a more active and independent role in the extraction of meaning in the reading process.[16] In other words, the reader is led into a strange and unfamiliar environment and, under the guidance of a remote but authoritative initiation master, forced to draw on his or her own resources: the archetypal introduction to an initiatory cycle.

V

The initiatory ordeals of Verloc, Stevie and Winnie all exhibit one significant feature: madness plays an integral part in their change. Verloc's initiation entails his gradual decline into insanity -- "I have been mad for a month or two" (208) -- through the execution of Vladimir's "mad" plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory (33); Winnie breaks from her life's pattern of disinterested looking on by killing Verloc in a fit of madness (262); and Stevie's "degeneracy", the fact he is "fit only for the asylum" (212), is responsible for his final awful "metamorphosis" into a thousand pieces. The implication is that the initiands have first to lose self-control before they can regain possession of their new selves.

Verloc's initiation traces the dissolution of his personality, culminating in the suspension of his duplicitous moral code which involves keeping others, including his wife, in the dark about his secret doings as a spy (245). In the instant that Verloc expresses the need to discard this facade by confiding in Winnie (239), he is redeemed, if only momentarily: he regresses rapidly to his former state of myopia and indolence, lacking the moral impetus and initiative to consolidate his change (see Raval 1986:124).

As a "soft kind of rock" (13) Verloc is the embodied refutation of himself (Watt 1973:78), or a dramatised paradox (Guerard 1966:224). His ambiguity implies that he is either in a position conducive to initiation, or is already in the liminal stage (which is typified by ambiguity). But his impassivity in the face of aberration, the fact that he is "entirely at home with perversity", eliminates the possibility of the latter situation prevailing (Fleishman 1965:209). Verloc, we can conclude, is not engaged in initiation when the novel opens.

Verloc's ambiguity is perhaps exemplified in his oratorical ability and his avocations. Ordinarily, the voice depicts the "disembodied essence" of the speaker, but Conrad subverts this correlation by stressing the link between eloquence and falsity. He advances this motif of the articulate fraud in characters such as Kurtz (HD) and James Wait (NN), who both enslave a substantial number of people solely through the power of their voices. In the character of Verloc, Conrad undermines the ability of the voice to project the self by focusing instead on the misuse of language to obscure the speaker and to obfuscate meaning. For one of Verloc's roles is to betray the "secret and unlawful proceedings of his fellow men" (245), and he relies on his rich, melodious voice to gain their confidence. His voice, as Raval notes, grants him the illusion of fidelity and potency, since he is in reality "no respecter of persons" (245), and is incapable of initiating either action or ideas (1986:119).

Another factor which underscores Verloc's hypocrisy is the incongruence of his eloquence and his sexual sterility. Throughout the text, the correlation between sexual infertility and speech deficiency or malfunctioning oral organs, is stressed. In keeping with this equation, Verloc's inability to father a child after seven years of marriage to the obviously fertile Winnie, would require him to have a speech defect. The fact that he is impressively endowed, orally speaking, implies a thorough-going duplicity. Whereas Verloc's oratorical powers verify his duplicity in verbal communication (he even adopts a different voice for private relations: "unresonant" and "husky" [196;174]), his avocations reveal that this falsity extends to all his relationships. By assuming four diametrically opposed roles: "cultivator of domestic virtues" as opposed to "seller of shady wares", "protector of society" as opposed to anarchist (38), Verloc reveals that he is literally living out contradictions.[17] Furthermore, his

equivocality is compounded by his failure to perform any of these roles successfully. Verloc as a secret agent, Guerard remarks, is entirely unconvincing, because he is ignorant of the social mechanism and lacks the lean physique of the true activist (1966:224). And he negates his role as public protector (14) by destroying Stevie, the very individual most in need of protection (Winner 1988:85; see also Fleishman 1965:201).

In essence, Verloc is a "thoroughly domesticated" character, with "neither a spiritual nor mental need to travel" (4). His indolence, which is based on his "philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort" (12), is a correlative of his "moral nihilism", for he is too sluggish to be "diabolic" (13). Significantly, Verloc's reluctance to extend himself has resulted in self-estrangement, for he is "not in the least conscious of having got rusty" (12).[18] The main task of Verloc's initiation, then, is to reverse his wilful ignorance of himself by shocking him into action and "life" again.

Verloc's interview with his new superior, Vladimir, marks the start of his initiation. By threatening Verloc with retrenchment unless he acts (22), Vladimir awakes in him the alien feeling of vertigo: "he stood motionless, as if surrounded by pitfalls" (17). In effect, Vladimir acts as Verloc's initiation guide, ushering him into the preliminal stage of initiation by shattering his complacency, and thereby transplanting him to an alien environment, which Hillis Miller describes as "out of this world" (1965:183).

Verloc emerges from the meeting oppressed by a sense of disempowerment, as if he is in "an angry dream" (37), and alienated from his surroundings, perceiving the city as an "inhospitable accumulation of bricks . . . things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man" (56). His subsequent feelings are typical of an initiand in the preliminal stage of initiation

(Turner 1969:95): defamiliarisation (he goes home yet does not feel at home, eating with his hat on "as if in a public house" [183]); psychological anguish (he is "hopelessly lonely in his crisis" [57] and haunted by it to the point of insomnia [53]); and restlessness (for a man devoted to "idleness" [12] and disinclined to travel [4], he is uncharacteristically active, often going out when he has nowhere to go [176]). Eventually, the fact that Verloc is undergoing change and is therefore "not in his usual state, physically or mentally" becomes obvious even to the deliberately unobservant Winnie (153). It is noteworthy that Verloc's anxiety advances his metamorphosis by rendering him unusually sensitive to new impressions (Van Rensburg 1990:500).

Verloc is propelled from the preliminal to the liminal stage of initiation when he is symbolically annihilated through a vicarious participation in Stevie's death. The ordeal, as the Assistant Commissioner predicts, causes in Verloc "an extremely rude awakening" (219), a psychological implosion, for he is "shaken morally to pieces" (230). Verloc's appearance and actions after the event are markedly ambiguous and unpredictable: he looks debauched although he "is not a debauched man" (193), and when he touches Winnie "it is uncertain whether he meant to strangle or embrace his wife" (196). Since equivocality and inconstant conduct are typical of a liminar, Verloc's identity as one is strongly indicated here (Turner 1974:53).

In two senses, Verloc seems to bring his death upon himself (which accords with Conrad's insinuation, in the Author's Note, that the theme of the novel is humankind's perverse desire for self-destruction [xxiv]). First, Verloc's repeated and vivid accounts of the dangers which his job entails ("What was the good of telling you that I stood the risk of having

a knife stuck into me . . .?" [238]), and of the injuries which he intends to inflict on his enemies ("I would keep on hitting until there wasn't a single unbroken bone left" [244]) -- which he offers in the hope of exculpating himself in Winnie's eyes -- have precisely the opposite effect. For not only does he give Winnie an idea for the murder weapon (238), but the boastful tone and content of his final comments -- "that man was asserting his impunity" (250) -- arouse her indignation and her desire for vengeance.

Secondly, Conrad presents Winnie, Verloc's murderer, as his female counterpart. Both characters skim the surface of life, refrain from going to "the bottom of facts and motives" (245), and are content to live in "mutual mystification" (Fleishman 1968:197). In the murder scene, therefore, Verloc's secret agent emerges as his latent female, self-destructive instinct in the form of Winnie. Verloc's reaction to his impending death -- he sees a "moving shadow" (262) -- is identical to his response to Vladimir's threat: he is paralysed, lacking the resources to respond to this unexpected circumstance. In sum, Verloc is unable to break his lifelong habit of "fanatical inertia" (15), and must consequently perish.

Verloc's ordeal exhibits three of the initiatory paradoxes we have identified: the necessity of death to inspire life, the fallacy of metamorphosis, and reflexivity-responsibility. The paradox of initiatory death re-kindling desire for life is instanced in Verloc's atypically passionate behaviour after the ordeal. Verloc is introduced as a self-absorbed and secretive individual, disinclined to divulge "his real thoughts" (183), and essentially uninterested in sex: in bed he is "mute and prone, his thick arms abandoned like dropped weapons" (179). After Stevie's death, in contrast, he is positively garrulous, confiding in Winnie for the first time in his life (239), and calling upon her for sexual favours (262).

The second paradox, the delusion of transition, is exemplified in Michealis who retains the "reclusive" lifestyle (44) and indifferent mindset of his incarceration after his release from prison (120). Unarguably, Stevie's "violent disintegration" (235) upsets Verloc, but this is primarily because his death was never meant to be part of the plan, and "Stevie dead is a much greater nuisance [to Verloc] than ever he had been when alive" (229). That Verloc is largely unaffected by Stevie's death is evinced in the rapidity with which he recovers his customary disposition, his behavioral patterns and, implicitly, his old self. He resumes his "usual air of a large animal in a cage" (237), his huge appetite, his habitual indifference to Winnie, and eventually his normal position on the couch. Significantly, even after Winnie has literally killed him Verloc's state of being in death remains fundamentally indistinguishable from his customary insentient condition in life[19]: to Winnie, the dead Verloc's "attitude of repose was so homelike" it looked as if he was "taking his habitual ease" (264).

Whether Verloc engages in innovative and original behaviour after Stevie's death, a question which foregrounds the paradox of reflexivity and innovative behaviour, and conformity and social responsibility. On the one hand, since Verloc supports the status quo and is "unable to take the initiative of action" (52), it seems unlikely that he has either the motive or the resources to break away from his standard pattern of conduct. After the murder, Verloc returns to his former robot-like self (Wolleager 1990:154). On the other hand, Verloc's self-reflection and his new-found confidence in Winnie are behavioural innovations which signify that he has transcended his usual inertia and introversion (Raval 1986:113). That both of these views are true illustrates the paradox of reflexivity-responsibility, which stipulates that the initiand engage in both original and orthodox behaviour (Turner 1974:15).

Verloc's initiation is aberrational in that (as a "real" criminal) he moves to a lower rather than a higher position in the social hierarchy; moreover, he clearly fails to complete his initiation cycle proper by being reincorporated into society. In sum, he undergoes what Harold Garfinkel has termed "status degradation" (1956:420).[20]

VI

Stevie is introduced as a character "ridden with contradictions", the most obvious of which is that he is a boy-man (Raval 1986:108). Physically he is a man, but mentally, owing to his retardation and sheltered life, he is still a child (167). A further contradiction is that despite his limited mental capacity, Stevie has the wisdom and courage to want to discover the truth, to go to "the bottom of matters" (173). In a sense, the novel pivots on the way in which Stevie eventually succeeds in conveying this idea to some of the other characters.

According to Raval, the nexus in which Stevie lives, between boy and man, social outcast and social member, "allows for being only in the sense of non-being" (1986:110). In this perspective, Stevie's existence is based on the fact that he is "nothing", a social and biological non-entity.[21] Paradoxically, Stevie's seemingly powerless position appears to equip him with the optimum potential to influence others. Conrad is perhaps suggesting that it is only the social outcast and "artist" (45) who has the power to pre-empt the complete stultification of society by bringing people to new insights.[22] Furthermore, by portraying this "half-witted" (212) lad as the only moral, sincere and passionate protagonist in the novel, Conrad makes his harshest indictment against a society which has so sidelined and devalued morality that it has become the preserve of those considered insane.

Stevie's ordeal conforms to the general pattern of initiation into adolescence since he suffers the destruction of his illusion that society is just and moral, is introduced to the concept of sexuality and cuts himself off from the female realm embodied in Winnie. His initiation begins in the traditional way by physical separation from his familiar surroundings, isolation from his mother, confrontation with a stranger and disillusionment. His journey with his mother to the old age home in "the Cab of Death" (170) in which "time itself seemed to stand still" (157), is couched in terms of a symbolic descent to Hell. And since such pilgrimages are archetypal initiatory ordeals, Stevie's experience ushers him into the preliminal stage of initiation (Eliade 1987:285).

It is vital, Eliade insists, that "a stranger of another race and belief reveals to us the meaning of our mysterious inward pilgrimage" (1960:245). The cabman is alien to Stevie both in appearance -- he has a hook arm and an "inflamed face" (158) -- and ideas, as he alerts the boy to the depravity and misery of society by recounting to him "the affairs of men whose suffering [is] great" (167). He thus becomes Stevie's initiation guide, inducing him to question his naive idealism and "trust in the organised powers of the earth" (172), and also introducing him to the reality of sexuality by referring to his four children (there are of course no children in the Verloc menage).

After his meeting with the cabman, Stevie tries to "express the view newly opened to his sympathies" (171), but Winnie discourages him by answering him "cursorily" (172) and distracting him at the earliest possible occasion (she asks him to flag down a bus). Consequently, Stevie finds her brusque explanations disheartening. By denying that the police function to redress inequality, Winnie makes him suspect this "benevolent institution" of

"duplicity" (171-3) -- and Stevie begins to distrust the woman who has been his lifelong "guardian and protector" (189). Stevie's disillusionment with Winnie seems to be triggered by his discovery that her "supreme remedy" for injuries (taking him to bed with her [167]) is of limited efficacy, for it cannot solve the cabman's problems. And his disenchantment is fuelled by his suspicion of her complicity, through passivity, with the amoral system of the police (172-3). In terms of initiation, this development signals Stevie's detachment from the female realm, a factor vital for his departure from the preliminal stage (Campbell 1993:136).

Verloc continues Stevie's initiation by consolidating the differences in ideology between him and Winnie, while physically separating brother and sister. This he does by taking Stevie on long walks and relocating him to the country. Verloc's careful indoctrination of Stevie (230) precipitates a radical change in his demeanour, as he abandons his happy, mischievous disposition and mopes "like an unhappy domestic animal" (185). This transition, which signals the rejection of his former self in preparation for a new identity, is further evident in certain behavioural changes. For he discontinues his single preoccupation of drawing (187) and assumes, in place of his "delicately honest" air (173), a secretive and "haughtily gloomy" attitude (189) to Winnie whom he has hitherto confided in and loved blindly (10). Stevie, it is clear, has been initiated by Verloc and has lost his innocence (230), but what is even clearer and more troubling, is that Winnie is oblivious to the nature of her brother's transition. For although she is disturbed by his change for the worse (189), and even raises the issue with Verloc (188), Stevie's "docility" finally satisfies her (189), so that she does not pursue the case but dismisses his depression as oversensitivity (and in so doing becomes partly responsible for his demise).

As a liminar, Stevie can only be restored to the community through initiatory death in the form of psychosis, amnesia or physical torture (Young 1965:26). But the trial to which Verloc subjects him results in his literal death. Hillis Miller observes that Stevie's death is "hinted at, imagined and approached from different angles" but remains essentially hidden, "a blank place in the centre of the narrative" (1965:188). Hence the central dramatic event in this novel, like the critical incident in Heart of Darkness (Marlow's meeting with Kurtz), is decentred and removed from our view, taking a character with it (Galef 1992:131).

Stevie's death, the void at the core of the narrative, foregrounds several crucial thematic concerns. First, since this empty space is not unlike the "blank wall" which Winnie would like to dash her head against (244), it figures her obliteration through suicide. Secondly, it evokes the mystery which envelops both his and her death, for Winnie's death is not directly related and remains "surrounded by an impenetrable mystery" (311), alerting the reader to the necessity of returning to the blank wall to decipher what is inscribed upon it.[23] A third interpretation, offered by critics such as Daleski and Ray, is that the image of nullity foregrounds the central theme in The Secret Agent: the "vacancy beneath all human composition", that which frustrates our attempts to forge significance (Daleski 1977:150; Ray 1993:81).

Jung describes initiatory death as "the temporary dissolution of the identity in the collective unconscious" (1963:123). Although Stevie's dissolution is literal and permanent, it does not render him ineffectual. On the contrary, the termination of his physical existence reverses Stevie's ineptness (Lothe 1989:258), investing him with a power to influence others which he lacked in his bodily form. As Hillis Miller argues: "Stevie is dead, but in another

sense he is not dead at all. . . . When Stevie dies, his consciousness vanishes but he does not leave a vacuum behind him" (1965:189). Using these words as a point of departure, I would propose that after his demise, Stevie lives on in the form of the impact which he has on the other characters. In brief, Stevie's death compels Verloc, Winnie and Ossipon to abandon their habitual myopia and live out his philosophy of "going to the bottom of matters" instead (173). As a result of their probings beneath the surface of life, each protagonist re-discovers his or her passion for life. Verloc's passion emerges in his attempt to abandon his role as a traitor by engaging in authentic communication with Winnie (239); Winnie, after having subsisted silently (252) in a simulation of living for seven years, protests passionately and loudly her "love of life" (308); and the cynical cheat Ossipon ends by impressing on the Professor that "Mankind wants to live -- to live" (305).

In terms of the paradoxes of initiation, Stevie's precipitation of a "commotion" amongst the traffic by his impulsive escape from a cab, in a desperate attempt to alert society to the misery to which it has become blind (157), is typical of reflexivity. Winnie thwarts his incipient campaign to change public morality by explaining that his cause is antithetical to his private ethical code, which is based on the approval of the "mysteriously good" Mr. Verloc (158). In other words, she represses his effort to have an impact on the public sphere by recalling him to his loyalties in the private sphere. This suggests a second paradox which is illustrated by Stevie's initiation: that of the microcosm-macrocosm. Despite his obvious differences from the social norm, as an initiand, Stevie becomes a microcosm, a part representing the whole. Like the Son of Man, he takes the guilt of the whole world with him and dies so that truth and value may be reborn.

VII

Initiation is fundamentally concerned with "katabasis", the exfoliation of the self through an ego death (Campbell 1993:109). This process entails the obliteration of the initiand's identity through the destruction or relinquishing of his or her predominant characteristic or ideal. Winnie Verloc has managed to preserve an "equable soul" (177) by concerning herself with the surface details of life only (245), and making Stevie's welfare her "single purpose" (242). The event of his death both renders her shallow perspective obsolete and strips her of her sole "inspiration" (242): she is forced to consider the fact of his death in relation to her own life (241).

Like Mr Verloc, Winnie is introduced as an ambiguous, phlegmatic personality, who has resigned herself to the "placid pool" of her married life (243) and seemingly surrendered her very agency as a human being: "nothing now in Mrs Verloc's appearance could lead one to suspect that she was capable of a passionate demonstration" (38). Whenever she feels tempted to examine the facts of an event which threatens her stagnant equilibrium she invokes her principle of ignoring the "inwardness of things" (153). For instance, when Verloc's obscure response to her mother's departure provokes her to ponder over his words, she quickly stops herself from falling into "the idleness of barren speculation" (178).

Winnie's initiation is activated by the transitions of those people who are effectively anchors or points of orientation in her life: her mother, her husband and her brother. Her change is figured as a gradual widening and deepening of her perspective, leading to an abandonment of her "trust in face values" (175). The first crisis which instigates Winnie's perceptual adjustment is the departure of her mother. In that her mother provides Winnie with

the sole link to her childhood identity, the prospect of her absence effectively catapults Winnie into the preliminal stage of initiation. When Winnie's mother first announces her imminent departure, the "shock" is so "severe" (153) that it makes Winnie act out of character: she "departs from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and safeguard in life" to examine her mother's motives (153).

After the physical separation, Winnie, who has never been parted from her mother before, is "not quite herself" (178); and it is in this state of self-estrangement that she ponders on the indeterminacy or multiplicity of meaning (and implicitly the multidimensionality of life): "it was borne upon her with some force that a simple sentence may hold several diverse meanings" (178). Hawthorn notes that Winnie treats words in terms of their "outer significance", until such startling events as this force her to do otherwise (1979:81).

Winnie's second ordeal consists of a loss of faith in Verloc, whose "inconsistent" behaviour and "unconquerable restlessness" (176) contradicts his "habitual indolence" (12) and "heavy, good nature" (6). His gloomy reaction to the departure of Winnie's mother (it makes him think of "rats leaving a doomed ship" [171]) moves Winnie to abandon her superficial perspective and reflect on his inexplicable change: "the taciturnity of Mr. Verloc had been lying upon her for a good many days. . . . It was affecting her nerves" (177). But it is only when Verloc, who is disinclined to travel (4), speaks of emigrating (194), that Winnie's distrust so intensifies as to leave her feeling "as lonely and unsafe as if her house were situated in the midst of a forest" (201).

Although the departure of Winnie's mother and the atypical conduct of her husband

disorientate Winnie, she soon regresses to her former willed myopia. But the third time Winnie is provoked to seek for truth below the surface, following the death of Stevie, her perception is permanently changed. Furthermore, whereas in the preceding ordeals Winnie took a passive role in her change (simply reacting to the crises of her mother and Verloc), here she assumes an active role in her metamorphosis, accomplishing the translation of her "fixed idea" (249) -- to end her "transaction" with Verloc (260) -- into reality.

In as much as Stevie is "the salt of passion in [Winnie's] tasteless life" (173), her apparent implication in his demise renders his death a rehearsal for her suicide. Her complicity first emerges in her attempts to market Stevie to Verloc, as she did herself, as a "useful" object: "You could do anything with that boy" (184). Further, by investing Stevie with a fidelity typical of only the most constant of lovers -- "He would go through fire for you" (184) -- she unwittingly gives Verloc the idea of using him in the bombing. A second factor which implicates Winnie in Stevie's death is her overzealous endeavour to protect him. Winnie's protective passion has an insidious side in that it discredits Stevie's own instinct for danger and makes him vulnerable (Daleski 1973:147).

A third factor which suggests Winnie's culpability in Stevie's death is her wilful disregard of his obvious decline in Verloc's company. She turns a blind eye to Stevie's new hostility towards her, and ignores his tendency to mime violent conduct by clenching his fists and talking in threatening tones (189). Significantly, Winnie's failure to take Stevie's change seriously is selfishly inspired, as it is directly linked to her desire to see her "supreme illusion" realised: Verloc and Stevie united as father and son (244).

The dramatic impact of Stevie's death on Winnie is heightened by the fact that she,

who has habitually confined her attention and moral code to the personal (as her conversation with Stevie evinces [174]), should receive word of this personal crisis through the impersonal media of the newspaper and a stranger. Winnie first reacts to the news as if she is rehearsing Stevie's death: she is seized by feverish fits of freezing and scorching in which her eyes become "black holes" enveloped in flame (210). In terms of initiation, she undergoes initiatory death through sympathetic identification with Stevie's demise. Hillis Miller suggests that Winnie's response highlights a central concern in the novel: "the experience of someone who survives the death of another as if it had been [her] own death and remains behind as a kind of walking corpse. The survivor is transported into a horrible realm where every place is no place, and where time moves without getting anywhere" (1968:194). Significantly, Miller's observation corresponds exactly with Turner's description of a liminar, who is suspended from secular time and space (1969:95).

Once the fever subsides, Winnie engages in the self-destructive behaviour of ripping at her face as if it were "a mask" (212). The action implies that she is attempting to uncover the real self beneath a veneer of identity now rendered obsolete. Michael North's observation that when skin itself is a mask there can be no unmasking, sheds light on Winnie's position: she has become impenetrable to herself (1994:39). Winnie has become a stranger not only to herself but also to Verloc, for when he later drags her veil off, it is only to unmask a "still unreadable face" (256).

After her attempt at "exfoliation", Winnie is transfixed by the "paralysing atrocity of the thought" that Verloc had taken Stevie away to murder him (246), and is subsequently described as a corpse (247), a dummy (256), and a stone (260). In short, she is

depersonalised, denatured and de-animated. Her paralysis culminates in a suicide wish, which is significantly impotent: she imagines dashing her head against the blank wall, yet remains "immovably seated" (244). A similar scenario occurs later when she envisions herself fighting Verloc, yet "sits still" (256). She cannot translate her thoughts into deeds[24] because with the death of Stevie she has "nothing left to desire" and "nothing left to do" (263).[25] The Winnie who had always been so quick to defend Stevie from their abusive father (242), is thus for the moment unable to lift a finger to avenge her brother's death.

The narrator prepares the reader for Winnie's retaliation by noting that "she was not a submissive creature" (246). Ironically, the "self-confident" tone of Verloc (250) re-animates Winnie by arousing her anger[26] (and confirms Ossipon's "theory" that "[w]ithout emotion there is no action" [50]). It is notable that even though she is aware of her new status as a "free woman" (251), Winnie's conviction remains unstable: she "really had no idea where she was going to" (251), feeling "her personality . . . torn into pieces" (254). Ultimately, Winnie's plan formally to close her "transaction" with Verloc prompts her to gather her "disconnected wits" (261) and regain physical control.

Winnie undergoes a second death, in the form of a return to her origins, when she murders the prostrate Verloc: "into that blow she put the inheritance of her immemorial descent" (263). Her subsequent decline to a "corpse", unmoving and unthinking (263), indicates that she is still undergoing initiatory death. Winnie's deed ironically resonates with Yundt's description of society as cannibalistic (51), for in terms of initiation practices her act is typical of cannibalistic ceremonies. A newly initiated cannibal, Eliade explains, has just been killed and in order for him or her to internalise this death experience it is necessary that

he or she repeat it (1960:199). In this perspective, Winnie herself has just undergone "death" through vicarious participation in Stevie's demise, and in order to fix the ordeal in her mind she replicates it by killing Verloc.

Winnie's "death" leaves her preternaturally awakened, having forced this woman who has always taken a shallow view of events to adopt Stevie's philosophy of looking "into the very bottom of this thing" (267). Yet the indecision which arose before the murder rapidly re-surfaces, preventing this perceptual change from translating into action. As Raval remarks, Winnie is caught in the paradoxical position of being incapacitated instead of motivated by the prospect of freedom and change. Hovet's analysis of the archetypal patterns of female initiation as depicted in Elizabeth Abel's writing sheds some light on Winnie's dilemma. The initiation of the female, Hovet notes, is couched in terms of conflict between responsibilities to others and care of self (1990:21). In Winnie's case, now that she has been relieved of her responsibility to Stevie, she lacks the courage and the self-possession to take care of herself, trying instead to resume the tattered garments of her old identity.

Ossipon meets Winnie when she is still on the threshold of the post-liminal stage, alone in her knowledge, invisible (288), and isolated from society. Winnie's solitude has given her insight into the fact that as a woman she is at a disadvantage in this "vast world created for the glory of men" (270). It is perhaps for this reason that she clings so tenaciously to Ossipon, for as a man he represents security in a world that is a "vast blank" for her (270). Significantly, Winnie's ordeal exhibits the typical features of female initiation: she undergoes her transition alone and this isolation alerts her to the strong sociopolitical solidarity of the males, and the fact that they monopolise social and economic power (Eliade 1987:234).

Hunter maintains that Winnie finds salvation in the prospect of resuming her former state of smothered individuality by becoming Ossipon's mistress (1985:169). But she only gains temporary respite from Ossipon, her "radiant messenger of life" (274), for once he discovers her crime, she literally disintegrates, her face and form crumbling until the sole indicator that she is alive is the plastic flower in her hat (291). (This powerful image of Winnie's dissolution of course foregrounds one of the major preoccupations of this novel: the inversion of inanimate and animate objects.) Furthermore, when Ossipon deserts her, despite her recently resurrected "love of life" (304), Winnie is unable to recover from the betrayal and drowns herself.

In terms of the initiatory dialectic, the implications of Winnie's death by drowning are ambivalent. On the one hand, the act illustrates her desire to relinquish consciousness and become insulated once more in the darkness of dependence and ignorance. Yet the sea is traditionally credited with a spiritualising and regenerative function: by yielding herself to it Winnie thus gains a final baptism and rebirth (Henderson 1990:139). Hillis Miller offers partial corroboration for this notion by observing that Winnie's suicide is simply the mental fulfilment of a physical state she has already reached, enabling her finally to reconcile the duality which has been a feature of her married life (1965:197).

A study of Winnie's metamorphosis in terms of initiation reveals that she exemplifies the paradox of the fallacy of renewal through initiation, which is encapsulated in the narrator's comment: "We can never cease to be ourselves" (118). Although Winnie undergoes an "awakening" (Price 1984:184) when she is stripped of her sole purpose in life with the death of Stevie, she soon regresses to her former mode of existence. Winnie's inability to change is

apparent in the fact that she fills the void left by Stevie's death with the fixed ideas of killing Verloc (249) and her own hanging (238), and resumes her former dependence on men by attaching herself to Ossipon. Secondly, although the entire pattern of Winnie's initiation is eventually clarified for the reader, the critical transition, the change of mind which compels her to drown herself, is never directly related. This "impenetrable mystery" which envelops her suicide thus resonates with the paradox of the invisibility/visibility of initiation (307).

To conclude, the redemptive, life-affirming note in this novel is sounded, ironically, by those characters who have near-death experiences, for without exception, the trials give them a renewed appreciation of life. In this sense, the novel is really about characters rediscovering their love of life through experiencing death. The redemptive function of Winnie's initiation emerges in her discovery of "the truth in a worn and artificial shape" of her past life: "She lamented loud her love of life, that life without grace and charm, but of an exalted faithfulness of purpose" (298). The tragedy is that none of the characters who recover their passion, such as Verloc and Ossipon, are able to embrace life. It is almost as if the ordeals which granted them this insight also prevent them from acting on it. Their only source of consolation and hope lies in converting others to live with passion, as Winnie does to Ossipon (208), and Ossipon attempts to do to the Professor.

NOTES

1. Myerhoff maintains that paradox is at the heart of rites of passage (1987:382); according to Turner, the liminal stage of initiation is characterised by paradox and ambiguity because the liminars occupy an indeterminate position, "neither here nor there . . . betwixt and between the positions arranged by law, custom, convention" (1969:102-3).

2. Boyle makes the incisive point that Nina's movement is regressive on the material level exclusively. Morally speaking, it is progressive, because in this less sophisticated society Nina can regain the self-respect and freedom which the more "civilised" society denied her (1965:32).

3. This resolution, Jung cautions, is conditional: "the rites do not offer this opportunity invariably or automatically. They relate only to specific phases in individual or group life, and unless they are properly understood and translated into a new way of life, the moment can pass" (1983:156). The temporality of this resolution implies that the individual must spend the majority of his or her life in a state of ambiguity and conflict.

4. In the preface, Conrad implies that his primary aim was to expose the truth hidden in paradox, to prove that "perverse unreason has its own logical processes"(xxiv). The novel of course deals with "ressentiment", the Nietschean idea which is regarded as philosophically paradoxical (English 1992:623).

5. Early reviewers who censure The Secret Agent were most perturbed by its unconventional narrative technique, the fact that it flagrantly flouts the norms of storytelling -- which was construed as in some sense morally subversive. The things most likely to discourage the ordinary reader were singled out (Watt 1973:46). Consider, for instance, this review in the Athenaeum (Sept. 28 1907): "The writer of the simple tale should show some regard for the simple reader. . . . Mr. Conrad's lordly disregard of such an element of time. . . is a little unkind to the simple reader" (Watt 1973:47); and this critique by the "Boston Evening Transcript" (Oct. 9 1907), that Mr. Conrad pays not the slightest regard to "the logic of time or place or action" (Watt 1973:53).

6. Conrad's description of Carlier and Kayerts in "An Outpost of Progress" encapsulates the condition of these protagonists: "Society. . . had taken care of these two men forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death" (OP:131).

7. In this perspective, Conrad's intention in The Secret Agent is not, as Holland (1968:165), Wollaeger (1990:150) and Ray (1993:81) suggest, to impose "some sort of

order" on the moral and social anarchy (through the proliferation of "geometric images"). On the contrary, he encourages the dissemination of chaos and insanity as life-sources critical for the re-animation of the characters. Contrary to Raval's comment that Conrad castigates madness, I believe that he actually encourages it (1986:119).

8. It is notable that, despite the negative reaction of the public to The Secret Agent (see Gurko 1965:187-9) and requests from readers for clarification, Conrad remained unbending in his conviction that the novel should stand on its own -- rebuffing even Henry James with these words: "The covers are deep red . . . . As to what's inside of them I assure you I haven't the slightest idea" (Watt 1973:2).

9. Ironically, the "suspension" of Conrad's conscious faculty empowered him to write what is undoubtedly one of his most stylistically uniform, yet thematically complex novels. "A rare book", Daleski comments, "which conceals innumerable complexities beneath a surface simplicity" (1977:145).

10. Gurko explores the fascinating, if rather moot, notion that the distant and dispassionate stance of the narrator reflects Conrad's "psychic frame" at the time of writing. For in order to write under such distressing conditions, Conrad had perforce to detach himself from his surroundings and live a "double existence" as both father/husband and author (1965:186).

11. Stevie's circles, his renderings of "cosmic chaos and eternity" (45), offer the most apt interpretation of the devolution of this society. The characters have trapped themselves in the stagnant pools of their lives, assured of their progress because they are moving. But their movement, as Raval insists, is essentially futile and their progression illusory, because it is based on vacuity (1986:35).

12. Ossipon's walk home after betraying Winnie, and in fact every walk which he takes thereafter, is invested with the identical sense of nullity. The incremental repetition of the phrase "he walked" in the closing pages of the penultimate (300) and last chapters (310) implies that the only thing left for Ossipon to do is to walk. Conversely, his walking fails to assure him that he is alive, accentuating instead his impending non-existence: "Ossipon walked . . . feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing. . . . He walked disregarded" (311).

13. See Norman Holland for the argument that the women in The Secret Agent are paragons of self-sacrifice, while the men are studies in sloth (1966:168).

14. Jung's thesis on initiation sheds some light on this event. The paradigm of initiation is embedded in the unconscious and is activated primarily by clashes between the ego and the Self (1983:123). The implication is that the content and prevalence of this rite will remain unaffected by any changes in structure. In this perspective, even though these characters have succeeded in stripping initiation

of its status as a public rite, they have failed to dismantle the rite altogether because one of its most reliable catalysts, the conflict between private and public concerns, cannot be eradicated.

15. Conrad's obsessive control of his characters and readers appears to originate in his conviction that the author is a puppeteer, whose show is animated by both the literary puppets or characters and the real puppets or readers. In an essay entitled "Some Reminiscences", his description of the author is couched in terms of a puppet master: "a figure behind the veil, a suspected rather than a seen presence, a movement and a voice behind the draperies of action" (1937:202). Compare this remark: "Marionettes are beautiful . . . their impassability in love is heroic . . . fascinating. Their rigid violence in embrace and fight is a joy to behold . . . in the marionettes that are without life, that come so near to being immortal" (Conrad, letter of Dec. 6 1897; Karl vol 1 1983:419).

16. David Galef, commenting on Conrad's technique as a whole, notes that he induces the reader to abandon his or her role as passive recipient of information, and to develop significance for the event in his or her own mind (1990:118-25).

17. Verloc's assumption of four contrary identities is made possible by his rootlessness, the fact that he is devoid of any doctrine other than that of indolence -- which he can respect only with "an inert fanaticism"(14). Verloc's likeness to a "soft kind of rock" (13) confirms the superficiality of his fidelity, a rock being symbolic of reliability and faith.

18. Verloc's self-estrangement has precipitated his impenetrability, which is evident in his confrontations with Vladimir (37) and Winnie (263), during which he is described as a "mortal envelope". Ultimately, Verloc's self-incarceration is lethal, for it requires that he be torn open in order to communicate his message. And this is precisely what Winnie does. Wollaeger's observation that, if surfaces fail to satisfy, violence must be used to achieve insight, helps to explain Verloc's situation (1990:144).

19. The manner of Verloc's death -- the fact that Winnie stabs him whilst he is issuing his mating call -- reiterates the interrelations among the passions, sex and death, established in Verloc's initial embrace of Winnie. The connection emerges again in her recollection of the event to Ossipon: "I came", she recounts to him with undisguised satisfaction, "for the last time with the knife" (290).

20. This rite of debasement, which also typifies Winnie's initiation (as a murderer she occupies the lowest social position), is a distinguishing feature of a demoralised society (Garfinkel 1956:420). In this perspective, Verloc and Winnie's moral nihilism can be seen as symptomatic of the corruption of their

surroundings.

21. Stevie's ambiguous status, the fact that he is in the nexus between child and adult, is an illustration of van Gennep's theory regarding the disparity between physical and physiological development (1969:97).

22. According to Eliade, the collapse of the initiation ceremony as a public rite has led to the artist's taking over the role of initiation guide abandoned by the elders of society (1958:134-5).

23. It is a point worth noting that Conrad's failure to describe the most important moment of Stevie's initiation, his "metamorphosis", reflects the tenet that the initiation process as a whole is shrouded in mystery.

24. Similarly, Axel Heyst is divested of his motivation at the critical moment when he must protect Lena, and he is unable to translate his thoughts of killing Jones into reality:"`If I want to kill him, this is my time,' thought Heyst; but he did not move" (V:310).

25. Winnie's description of Stevie as the "single purpose" in her life, her only "inspiration" (242), indicates that she has adopted him as a kind of talisman, not unlike the way in which the crew of the Narcissus adopt James Wait. In this view, Stevie's death robs Winnie of the empirical evidence that she has achieved something in her life.

26. A similar scenario occurs in "Typhoon" where Jukes, paralysed by the advent of the hurricane, is re-vitalised when the chief engineer infuriates him by accusing him of idleness (206).

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to explore some of the various manifestations of the theme of initiation in Conrad's fiction. The basic strategy has been to explore the initiatory motifs in selected texts in terms of the archetypal paradigm of initiation as formalised within anthropological studies by van Gennep and others. In Chapter Five I proposed the extension of this paradigm to the "meta" level of the readerly reception of Conrad's writing.

In his essay "Literature as Initiation", Loganbill suggests that the key function of initiation in literary texts is to help the reader to locate the "higher truths" by "see[ing] beyond the apparent contradictions of life to a greater reality" (1972:20). My hypothesis is that Conrad offers the reader such "flashes of insight" (HD:100) by requiring his or her vicarious participation in the characters' quest for illumination. Thus in the case of The Secret Agent, Conrad liberates the reader from his or her "fatuous complacency" by dramatising the awakening experience of the characters (Hillis Miller 1965:182).

A rather obvious, yet nevertheless critical, feature of this dual enlightenment through initiation is the changing face of the truths which are brought to light. Succeeding chapters in this study therefore adumbrate the evolution of Conrad's conception of the truths to be gained from initiation, from his earliest to some of his more mature works. In the process I hope to have conveyed an impression of initiation as an unpredictable rite which remains flexible in all aspects save that of its primary function: to provide insight.

Following a brief exposition of the problem to be investigated in the introductory chapter, Chapter One explores the basic structure and functions of initiation and outlines

the descriptive model of this rite -- Arnold van Gennep's tripartite sequential schema -- which I use to assess initiatory ordeals in Conrad's work. In its "original" form, initiation purports to fulfil the (potentially conflicting) sociogenic and psychogenic functions of promoting social unity and ensuring appropriate indoctrination, on the one hand; and advancing individual growth in terms of autonomy, resourcefulness and orginality, on the other. However, in many contemporary Western societies the sociogenic function exhibits a critical modification: it no longer perpetuates both a sense of community and socialisation, but seems to fulfil the latter function only. Coincident with this qualified survival of the sociogenic capacity of initiation is the increasing predominance of its psychogenic function. In other words, the development of the individual is prioritised over the cohesion and maintenance of the community. It is noteworthy that, while the tension between "solidarity" and individuality is never fully resolved in Conrad's work, his presentation of initiation (and his ethical development more generally) follows a similar pattern.

Chapter Two attempts to extend this theoretical analysis to Conrad's work, first, by exploring possible reasons for his use of the initiatory motif; and then by examining manifestations of the rite in selected texts. Although the initiatory scenarios which appear in Conrad's work in no way exemplify the model as formulated by van Gennep, but instead admit of distinct aberrations, nevertheless a striking correlation appears to exist between the evolution of this rite in modernity and Conrad's portrayal thereof. The critical commentaries on the three novellas and the major novel which constitute the main body of this thesis seek to reflect Conrad's changing portrayal of initiation.

Conrad's conception of initiation in his early works, notably his sea narratives, reflects an appreciation of both its psychogenic and sociogenic functions, while tending to

privilege the latter. In other words, the maturation of the individual is circumscribed by the extent to which this development will benefit or harm the corporate body. This moral stance appears to be a function of the characters' way of life: the majority of them are sailors, and therefore their physical survival hangs on their obedience to an unspoken moral code.[1] Conrad's endorsement of the subordination of individual needs to the welfare of the whole is not unqualified, however, for he cautions that "fidelity" must be supported by the initiand's construction, through experience, of his or her personal moral code. Further, if a community or its representatives are corrupt, and thus forfeit the right to command the initiand's automatic loyalty, personal development becomes more important. By presenting a substantial number of ineffectual or corrupt Captains in his early works, Conrad prepares the reader for the division between personal (psychogenic) and public (sociogenic) development intrinsic to his later work. In novels such as Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent Conrad depicts initiation largely in terms of the psychogenic function typical of the rite in modern societies. His changed attitude to initiation seems to arise out of a vision in which personal growth is increasingly prioritised over public fidelity.[2] This change seems to go hand-in-hand with the move to a terrestrial rather than a maritime setting, which effectively eliminates the interdependence of morality and mortality.

Chapter Three presents the story "Typhoon" as an illustration of initiation in which both the sociogenic and psychogenic functions are operative. Thus the initiation of Captain MacWhirr and Jukes entails their awakening to the importance of solidarity as well as ensuring their maturation as individuals. The story also seems to exemplify the discrepancy between the traditional and modern patterns of initiation. Jukes's ordeal, which is supervised by the initiation guides Captain MacWhirr and Solomon Rout, and which

involves a movement from a position of social incorporation, through isolation, to reconciliation with the community, typifies the traditional model. Captain MacWhirr's initiation illustrates the modern paradigm, as he progresses, without the guidance of an initiation master, from a position of alienation to one of communal solidarity before returning to isolation.

A second facet of initiation which this chapter illustrates is the dual nature of development: the development of the initiand's public identity is both dependent on and underpins private maturation, and vice versa. Jukes's successful execution of Captain MacWhirr's command to restore order among the fighting passengers hinges on his first regaining possession of himself. The implication seems to be that to develop one aspect of the self exclusively is counterproductive, as it will precipitate an imbalance resulting in the suspension of maturation altogether.

The reciprocal process of initiation is a third factor which this chapter highlights. By definition, initiation never arises in a vacuum, always needing a catalyst or a catalysing situation; it hence invariably involves at least two agents. Thus Captain MacWhirr, in his attempts to initiate Jukes by impressing upon him his traditional moral code, unwittingly brings himself to enlightenment simultaneously. Further, the nature of the change which initiation provokes seems to be highly contagious, in that initiands in the process of change can trigger initiation in others. The most frequent form of response is the emergence of their recessive or dormant resources. In Lord Jim, Marlow -- who initially has an unshakeable belief in the "power of words" (138) -- becomes "afraid to speak" (138) through his contact with Jim, whose disastrous experience on the Patna has left him doubting whether he will ever speak out again, "speech [being] of no use to him any

longer" (LJ:30-1). In "Amy Foster", Miss Swaffer, an apparently implacable woman with "the unmoved countenance of the deaf" (246), unexpectedly gives solace to the shipwrecked Yanko; a similar case occurs in Victory, where the seemingly insensible Mrs. Schomberg (46) shows unexpected animation and ingenuity by engineering the escape of Heyst and Lena.

In so far as the main protagonists in "Typhoon" manage to complete their cycles of initiation, are inspired by a sense of community, and gain partial understanding of their ordeals, the tale would seem to offer a standard illustration of van Gennep's tripartite initiatory schema. But since standard cases are the exception in Conrad rather than the norm, it is appropriate that the nucleus of this thesis comprises examination of irregular or deviant cases. In Chapter Four I seek to evaluate two such atypical initiatory ordeals, in "Youth" and "The Shadow Line". Both novellas reflect a partial collapse of the sociogenic function of initiation, and a suspension of the completion of the rite through reincorporation. In these tales, the changed form of initiation appears to be directly related to the misconduct of Captain-figures, who ought to serve both as unifying role models for the community and as initiation guides for the induction of new sailors. In "Youth", for instance, Captain Beard's mismanagement of the Judea, far from promoting solidarity, actively fragments the crew(s) who stage three near-mutinies.

A component of initiation which has been largely overlooked and which "Youth" demonstrates is its capacity to facilitate not only the elevation but also the degradation of status. Captain Beard's failure to cope successfully with his trial at sea effectively strips him of his seniority, his right to command. By the same token, since Marlow emerges fortified from the identical trial, he earns the right to a higher position. In this sense,

initiation is not unlike the Darwinian theory of natural selection, exposing individuals no longer fit to hold their positions in order to ensure not only the survival of society but also its periodic revival.

Another feature of initiation highlighted in Chapter Four is the flexibility and uniqueness of its configuration. The form which initiation assumes is irregular because it depends on the initiand's stage of development as well as his or her latent impulse to metamorphosis. The point is that change is not imposed on the would-be initiand; on the contrary, he or she `authorises' the pace and content of this change by the way in which he or she reacts to the trials. By controlling the Judea when the captain is disabled, Marlow inaugurates his transformation into a responsible captain. Significantly, "Youth" does not end with the protagonist's recognition of the primacy of solidarity as "Typhoon" does. On the contrary, Marlow consolidates his individuality by differentiating himself from the crew verbally (41) and by focusing on his individual experiences. Marlow's closing emphasis on "looking" implies that the final impact of the ordeal remains locked in the visual realm; a "dream-sensation" (HD:82) which, like his experience in Heart of Darkness, remains impenetrable to the core and hence "unspeakable". Thus one of the most important features of initiation is its dream-like, esoteric nature: Verloc in The Secret Agent sees life as "an angry dream" (37) after Vladimir has ushered him into the preliminal stage of initiation; and Marlow in "Youth" speaks of his initiation as "an absurd dream" (24).

My analysis of "The Shadow Line", which constitutes the second half of this chapter, explores the adverse and awkward circumstances which arise when an individual tries to avoid imminent initiation into adulthood, while at the same time attempting to function effectively in a senior position without having undergone the preliminary trials.

The most obvious lesson about initiation which this story presents is that endeavours to step back from the threshold of change are both futile and fatal; futile, because change is an inevitable part of life -- for Conrad movement, and implicitly transition, is the wellspring of life: "To move is vital -- [life]'s salvation" (letter to Edward Garnett Oct. 8 1897; Karl Vol 1 1983:392); and fatal, because without the revitalisation which initiation brings, the individual would be marooned in a lifeless zone. The narrator of "The Shadow Line"'s feelings of emptiness and detachment demonstrate, by default, some of the primary functions of initiation -- a notion which is fully explored in the analysis of The Secret Agent in Chapter Five.

Whereas in my analysis of "Youth" I call into question the common assumption that initiation necessarily promotes status elevation, my commentary on "The Shadow Line" explodes the belief that initiation invariably entails action. For here the narrator's pivotal trial involves coping with the inactivity forced upon him by a becalmed ship. This test of self-control, which also features in "Typhoon" and "Youth", illustrates Conrad's maxim that life necessarily encompasses a balance between action and repose. An excess of either generates a condition which is intolerant of life itself.

Suresh Raval's observation that "understanding as a form of therapeutic release is impossible for the major protagonists of nearly all [Conrad's] novels" (1986:17) is particularly pertinent to the two novellas analysed in this chapter. For both Marlow and the narrator in "The Shadow Line" fail to gain insight into their ordeals: the former is left haunted by an experience which he can grasp only as a visual memory; and the latter confesses that he "did not know" that the episode "had been maturing and tempering [his] character", and seems content to take Captain Giles's advice: "Better not think about it"

(SL:132). By forgoing closure in the form of the protagonist's gaining insight into the significance of his or her initiation, Conrad highlights a critical feature of this rite: the insights which it purports to provide are characteristically obscure, requiring subsequent, supplementary interpretation, or immersion in additional trials, for clarification. The openness of these endings also underpins Conrad's idea that life itself is composed of "incomplete", opaque moments (letter to Edward Garnett Nov. 29 1896; Karl vol 1:321), and the onus is on the individual to wrest meaning from the chaos of experience.

The chapter just outlined traces the failure of some of Conrad's protagonists to complete their initiatory cycles. Chapter Five presents my hypothesis that the paradoxical nature of initiation is partly responsible for such cases of incomplete initiation, notably its postulate that life is based on the expenditure of life, that extinction is necessary for salvation. My analysis of The Secret Agent evokes the key functions of initiation largely by drawing attention to their absence in the presented world of the novel. Conrad portrays a complacent society which, by turning its back on initiation, has engendered a predatory community inhabited by immature and degenerate individuals. This perversion is particularly evident in the sphere of communication, where calumny and dissimulation have superseded sincere interaction. And yet the novel contrives to dramatise a bizarre set of seemingly involuntary "initiations". This apparent contradiction perhaps finds resolution in Jung's thesis that initiation is an archetypal pattern embedded in the unconscious (1983:123). Despite their having eradicated initiation from the public arena and arrested maturation on an individual level by defusing its catalysts, the inhabitants of Conrad's London could thus never succeed in repressing the rite entirely. Conrad insists that attempts to avoid initiation are essentially futile, as it is inherent in the condition of being human.

In "Youth" and "The Shadow Line", the protagonists accomplish a voyage which grants them a sense of individuality, yet denies them full insight into their ordeals. In The Secret Agent, in contrast, both Mr Verloc and Winnie are enlightened through their ordeals, but fail to survive their awakenings. The illumination which initiation affords is not invariably of a life-affirming and positive nature; if the initiand lacks the resources to cope with the destruction of his or her illusions, the experience can be fatal.

In sum, Conrad seems to have an ambivalent view of initiation which pivots on his equivocal approach to its two key functions: to effect confrontation with truth or reality by disposing of the material and psychic armour of the self (status, illusions/beliefs); and to restore to the initiand a new identity and a fresh set of ideas or illusions ("Every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human race come to an end" [Victory 89]). In his fiction, Conrad allows that a certain degree of insentience, of devotion to the "surface-truths" and "redeeming facts of life" only (HD:97;75), is imperative to sustain life and faith on a daily basis. As Razumov comments, "[t]he trivialities of daily existence [are] an armour for the soul" (UWE:52). But of equal importance to Conrad is initiation's function of stripping the initiand of the accretions of selfhood, because of the potential of this process to bring self-knowledge. Once free of preconceived ideas, social restraints and duties, the individual, as Marlow notes, is in a position to discover his or her "innate strengths" and "capacity for faithfulness" (HD:116). Conrad seems to endorse such insight into the self as a moral victory; yet few of his protagonists are allowed subsequently to resume their lives. In The Secret Agent Winnie commits suicide after protesting her "love of life" (298); in Victory, Heyst too takes his life after finally obtaining the moral guidance which his father had denied him (326). Marlow's reaction, in Lord Jim, to

Jewel's traumatic account of her mother's death, offers a memorable illustration of the twofold process of initiation:

> It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a vision of a world which seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth . . . it as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still -- it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One must, don't you know?" (LJ:236)

Thus, notwithstanding the fact that Conrad's primary aim in deploying the initiatory motif seems to be to disclose "truth stripped of its cloak of time" (HD:97), he remains equivocal about the implications of such disclosure. For while Conrad seems to uphold enlightened existence through initiation as a moral victory in itself, his conviction is qualified by an awareness of the propensity of this rite to precipitate insights which render life (or more specifically, its saving illusions), impossible to sustain. He seems to draw consolation from the fact that this ordeal, which has the potential either to renew or to destroy life, occurs only intermittently. For constant exposure to light and truth would be as baneful as the perpetual repression of truth, something that human beings simply cannot tolerate. Marlow remarks: "When you have to attend to . . . the mere incidents of the surface, the reality . . . fades. The inner truth is hidden -- luckily, luckily" (HD:93). This sentiment seems embodied in Kurtz's painting of the blindfolded woman (representing Europe?) carrying a lighted torch (HD:79): if she were fully exposed to the light it would lose its effect on her. The light of truth, out of deference to life, falls only here and there.

To conclude, I would like to point to some areas for further research which the findings of this study suggest. Since my aim has been to establish a basic framework in terms of which the reader can interpret the initiatory theme in Conrad's work, I have been

unable to give much attention to certain more specialised topics which might contribute considerably to the explication of his themes. For instance, a study of the relationship between the human creative potential and the liminal stage could well shed light on Conrad's proclivity to focus on social outcasts and to depict cases of incomplete initiation. According to Turner, a liminar is returned to the preformal state of "first principles" in which he or she is inspired by things as they are and not as they ought to be (Turner 1989: 577-80). The liminar's emptiness, his or her (temporary) lack of a private and public identity, is strongly reminiscent of the "negative capability" which Keats saw as the precondition for artistic creation (see Cook 1990:418). Secondly, the changing role of the female protagonist in Conrad's fiction, and the extent to which her initiation, like the male's, deviates from the standard pattern, might well benefit from attention to the profusion of research on female initiation rites conducted in recent years. A third topic could be the role which communication -- more specifically, language -- plays in initiation. According to Marlow, words are part of the "sheltering conception of light and order" (LJ:236) which we must periodically slough in order to gain a fresh perspective; at the same time, it is only through articulating our ordeal that we can transcend it (hence the source of Jim's anguish: "There were no words for the things I wanted to say" [LJ:98]). Conrad's suspicion of language's ability to convey the truth of our experience is well known ("Words are the great foes of reality", etc.). Perhaps this is another reason why he was repeatedly drawn to the scene of initiation, where the meaning which emerges is nonverbal and frequently unconscious, signified in the "universal language" of symbols (Eliade 1958:119). In his observation that initiation ceremonies in "primitive", non-literate societies are more effective than those which feature in modern, literate societies, Frank

Young makes a critical connection between the effectiveness of initiation and the suppression of language (1965:130). His own conclusion, that articulation dilutes the impact of initiation by weakening the foundation of its obscure appeal to human solidarity, offers another corroborating ground for further research in this area.

NOTES

1. The crew of the Narcissus, united by their surviving the crisis of a storm, adopt the cook's declaration, "As long as she swims, I will cook" (NN:90), an anthem to further cement their unity.

2. Conrad's adoption of a private over a public morality was not as out of character as some critics imply. For as early as 1899 he dismissed the idea of fraternity as "nothing unless your Cain and Abel business" (letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham Feb. 8 1898; Karl vol 2 1896:159); and the germ of the idea is evident in an early text like The Nigger of the `Narcissus', in which he condemns pity as "the latent egoism of tenderness to suffering" (117).

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