

CONRAD AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

BY

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57

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## ABSTRACT

In Conrad and the Idea of Progress, I attempt to show how the concept of progress is embodied in Conrad's works, The Nigger of the Narcissus, Heart of Darkness, and Nostromo. In doing this, I examine the roots of the idea of progress and its influence on Victorian thought in the nineteenth century and Conrad's time. I show how the liberal bourgeois idea of progress exemplifies for the countermoderns (including Carlyle) a pessimistic prospect for human growth in wisdom and morality, and for the organic community. To counter the emphasis on mechanical theories of progress, Conrad advocates self-sacrificial labour as a barrier against the nothingness of a materialist worldview. He also advocates compassionate and humane values which take into account the reality of the inner life; and the individual's membership in an organic community which provides hope and encouragement for a renewed commitment to life's trials and tests.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family, friends, and Prof. J. Flynn for their help and encouragement during this time of trial.



## Introduction

"That is the question . . . How to be! Ach! How to be."

Stein, in Lord Jim

For Conrad, the artist's problem of "rendering the truth" of life through language extends to all human life in relation to the world. All human beings, for Conrad, are also artists who must confront the problem, in Stein's words, of "how to be":

We want in so many different ways to be . . . This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so. (213)

Throughout history, man has attempted to construct unifying theories and beliefs, in order to discover "how to be" in relation to himself, to his fellow humans, and to the cosmos. The idea of progress is one of these theories, and it has made a startling impact on the culture and history of the last two centuries.

The idea of progress in the nineteenth century, as Almond suggests, gives the Victorians a "cultural self-identification" (1). An essentially optimistic doctrine, it presupposes the ultimate perfectibility of humankind and human societies, and in its optimism, can to some extent be seen as an offshoot of Romanticism.

Conrad, as a late Victorian and a romantic, could hardly escape the influence of such a powerful idea, but in his hands the doctrine undergoes subtle transformation. Less optimistic than many of his contemporaries, he rejects the uncritical faith in material progress and the narrow definition of humanity as "economic man" that was, as we shall see, so much a part of the Victorian idea of progress. In contrast, Conrad pins his faith, rather like Carlyle, on the notion of

spiritual progress to be achieved by a continual striving for inner perfection and betterment of the outward conditions of life, under the guidance of the heroic few.

In this study, I will make frequent reference to Carlyle. I do so because many of Conrad's ideas have clear origins in the work of the earlier writer. In Conrad's works, however, Carlyle's earlier ideas sometimes undergo significant transformation as I shall try to demonstrate.

Like Carlyle, Conrad sees a deterioration of the moral sensibility under the influence of the liberal universe. But both still maintain their commitment to ideal values, such as the progress and fulfillment of self and society through fidelity to humanized labour and the organic community. Carlyle's later despair, however, and his advocacy of compassionless rule by a military elite, contrasts sharply with Conrad's cherishing of undying hope and faith, to the end, "and even beyond." He believes in the capacity of humankind to achieve wisdom and self-knowledge, mainly through maintaining heroic efforts and a self-sacrificing and benevolent interaction with the organic community of believers, believers who provide encouragement and hope for renewed commitment to moral ideals and to life itself. Conrad rejects the despairing nihilism of Decoud in Nostromo, as well as the fanatical work-ethic of Gould and Kurtz, portraying them as betrayers of humanity and of genuine progress. Instead, he contrasts the above with the examples of the undying devotion of the crew of the *Narcissus*, and Marlow's heroic labours and compassionate values, along with Mrs. Gould's and Linda's devotion to ideal values. Though he sees the virtues of love, community and self-sacrificial labour threatened in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Heart of Darkness and Nostromo, Conrad nevertheless refuses to give up hope on humanity's potential for fidelity to these ideals.

## Chapter One

### Historical Background

In History of the Idea of Progress, Robert Nisbet says that "No single idea has been more important than, perhaps as important as, the idea of progress in Western civilization for nearly three thousand years" (4). In the course of this study, I intend to show how Conrad's concept of progress is embodied in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Heart of Darkness and Nostromo. As a foundation for that discussion, I shall undertake to summarize the essential points concerning the origins and development of the idea of progress as it impinges on the works of Conrad.

Most scholars of the idea of progress agree with Baillie, who sees the idea as "essentially a philosophy of history. The light and solace it offers derives entirely from a way of regarding the historical scene, past, present, and future" (41). George Hildebrand concurs, claiming that the idea is "above all a conception of history, an organizing principle for the interpretation and comprehension of the incredibly complicated record of human experience" (3). The idea, from the perspective of the modern, has ethical and philosophical implications, as Becker notes in Progress and Power:

It is so heavily loaded with moral and teleological overtones that no scientist with any sense of decency will use it. It implies that there are values in the world. It implies, that the world moves forward to some good purpose, to some more felicitous state. In short, the word Progress, like the Cross or the Crescent, is a symbol that stands for a social doctrine, a philosophy of human destiny. (3-4)

In his classic study, The Idea of Progress, Bury says that it assumes that "civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction" (2). Likewise, for Nisbet, the belief in progress is a belief in humanity's movement upward to perfection: it is

the idea that mankind has slowly, gradually, and continuously advanced from an original condition of cultural deprivation, ignorance, and insecurity to constantly higher levels of civilization, and that such advancement will, with only occasional setbacks, continue through the present into the future. (10)

It is an optimistic view of humanity's destiny, which "contains assumptions as to the continuity, the gradualness, the naturalness, even the inexorability of these stages of development" (Nisbet, 5). Thus, the idea of progress assumes a positive linear movement toward the future. But it is important at the outset to note Stevenson's comment that the idea is "not a scientific fact. It is, in fact, a theory" (3).<sup>1</sup>

Although certain scholars have argued that the germ of the idea of progress can be seen in the Judeo-Christian linear concept of history, most historians of the idea of progress agree with Baillie that "the modern belief in progress is essentially a product, though a late-appearing product, of the movement of the Western European mind known to us as the Renaissance" (96). In Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse, Wagar contends that the modern idea is an evolution in thought "between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment" (15); this transition period was one which, unlike the otherworldliness of traditional Christianity, attached more importance to the mind and reason:

it was the [era of] growth of a distinctively modern religion. It was a religion of the mind, which built no churches and inspired no rites or creeds. Yet it ministered to the same needs as Christianity, and for many intellectuals it took the place of Christianity. This new religion was a rational and liberal humanism, a celebration of the dignity of man through the cultivation of reason (14) . . . Confidence in human power was the prime mover. (15)

Western culture moved from a spiritual mindset to an interest in the values of the temporal life. It was, in Stevenson's view, "a time of breaking away from the Providence idea" (26), a questioning of traditional views such as feudalism and the authority of the church.

Unlike medieval thinkers, who saw the present as a degeneration from the past, French philosophers like Fontanelle and Perrault, though they believe that the modern world is superior to the ancient, are less concerned with utopian futures than with demonstrating that "they were not inferior" (137) to the ancients. It is only in the eighteenth century, with the extension of the idea of progress in knowledge and science to the realm of morality, society and politics that "the fully developed idea" (Keohane, 32) emerges, with its optimistic emphasis on ultimate perfectibility.<sup>2</sup>

Perfectibility--its nature and its implications for a progressive view of history--is defined in no uncertain terms in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Frankel says that in the Age of Enlightenment, "two great traditions, humanism and science" (7), came together. The Enlightenment, which D'Alembert calls "the philosophic century par excellence" (*Oeuvres*, II, 9-11), took the scientific revolution and its achievements, and dedicated itself to providing an idea of society through the methods of science and a new interpretation of history, which sees humanity as a "unity", advancing in "a desirable direction". This notion, however, while it might have originated in France, soon transcended national boundaries: according to John Stevenson, "It was given to the eighteenth century fully to declare the idea of the perfectibility of man" (57) and the "new religion of humanity" (Becker, 139).<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of human perfectibility was extended by the Abbe de St. Pierre to include the amelioration of society and the general happiness and well-being of man. The Abbe looked even farther into the future than his predecessors, and was, Bury says, the first to "name immense periods of time" in regard to the future of civilization: "civilization is only in its infancy" (106).

A further development contributing to the emergence of the modern idea of progress is the eighteenth century's substitution of its own,

largely secular, view of history for the traditional Christian providential view. As Bury notes, if the philosophes' idea of progress

was to be more than the sanguine dream of an optimist it must be shown that man's career on earth had not been a chapter of accidents which might lead anywhere or nowhere, but is subject to discoverable laws which have determined its general route, and will secure his arrival at the desirable place. (144)

Using the Cartesian doctrine of the invariability of nature's laws and applying it to a concept of man and society, the philosophes succeeded in founding a modern religion with an appealing order and design: civilization and humanity, through reason, are moving naturally and necessarily in a desirable direction. Thus, there is no degeneration and no need for a conception of Providence to guide humanity's affairs.

Inevitably, the doctrine of progress leads to a certain contempt for the past. Voltaire, Turgot, and Condorcet all contributed to the new view of progress as liberty from what was seen to be outdated traditions. One of the greatest opponents of religion and superstition was Voltaire, who waged a "lifelong battle against Christianity," which culminated in his adoption of the "only alternative: the religion of humanity" (Stevenson, 65). Similarly, Turgot ascribes progress, not to Providence, but to "an organizing conception" of civilization (Bury, 158). This organizing conception is based on the stages of advancement in civilization, culminating in "the manufacturing-commercial system" (Nisbet, 185).

Most historians credit Condorcet with expounding the full theory of progress, the idea that advances in the institutions of society would also entail simultaneous advances in brotherhood and human happiness. He follows the lead of both Turgot and the Encyclopedists, who carried on a propaganda campaign "against authority and superstition" (Bury, 164), and proposed to show that "by shaping the character of men by legislation and institutions, the perfectibility of humanity could be reached" (Stevenson, 67). Condorcet says that the

"real advantages that should result from this progress . . . can have no other term than that of the absolute perfection of the human race" (Sketch, 184).

Condorcet's work influences the rise of the liberal tradition, especially of the social sciences of Comte and the Saint-Simonians. Condorcet declares that progress is linked with the liberation of humanity from anything that might impede its movement upward. That movement is necessary and natural, even defined (in pre-Comtean fashion) in Condorcet's Esquisse, as the law of successive stages of civilization. He believed himself to be living in the ninth stage of humanity's progress, with the tenth to be inaugurated by a revolution. Science and scientists would be humanity's liberators, breaking the chains of superstition and enabling humanity to "become intellectually free and thus able to move forward toward eventual perfection" (Nisbet, 207).<sup>4</sup>

Like many of the other philosophes, Condorcet proposes that progress is the determining factor of history: its function is to "establish the fact of progress, and it should enable us to determine its direction in the future, and thereby accelerate the rate of progression" (Bury 211). By these "facts" of history, a definite advance in knowledge and enlightenment for humanity is assured, as Condorcet links his view of history to a view of a unified mankind, advancing toward perfectibility on earth.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, though many may see the idea of progress as a product of the historical conditions of the Industrial Revolution, the idea itself has grown out of a combination of sources, mainly the emphasis on rationality and the progress of knowledge, and the scientific revolution. Thus, in order to replace the old heaven with the new religion of humanity, the philosophes substitute nature and posterity for God:

For the love of God they substituted love of humanity: for the vicarious atonement the perfectibility of man through his own efforts; and for the hope of immortality in another world the hope of living in the memory of future generations. (Becker, 130)

Though the idea of progress espoused the idea of a linear view of history that is contained in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is the influence of science and natural law which forms the modern secular definition as we see it in the eighteenth century.

In turning to the reception of the modern idea of progress in the Victorian period, we find that the English were not so ready to accept the doctrine as the French were, mainly because of the disastrous results of the French revolution. At first, with its watchwords of Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite, the Revolution seemed to be "the herald of a glorious future" (Chapman, 39), especially among some of the Romantic poets like Wordsworth, who writes in The Prelude of the youthful optimism of that period: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very Heaven!" (Bk. 2, l. 108ff.). With the onset of the Terror, however, many prominent figures, including Wordsworth, lost faith in the revolution as a means of effecting progress.

But there was a still deeper division between the English and the French views was that, while the French attempt at elucidating a theory of progress was largely a deliberate break with the authority of the past, especially with that of the Christian religion, the English mind, characteristically, proposed to forge some kind of bond between the rational concepts of the French Enlightenment and many other influences in English thought, from Puritanism to German Transcendentalism. As Baillie suggests, many used the theory of progress "not as an alternative to the traditional Christian outlook, but as a supplement to it" (117).

During the seventeenth century, the English attempted to reconcile the Biblical linear pattern of history with the view of history as natural development. Most relocated the millenium to the future.



According to Tuveson in his Millenium and Utopia, the Biblical scholar and master of the Cambridge Platonists, Joseph Mede, reinterpreted Scripture "to give the apocalyptic movement an entirely new direction, which was to make it ultimately the guarantor of secular and religious progress alike, rather than the harbinger of decay and a pessimistic prospect for mankind" (76).

Moreover, the apocalyptic theories, Puritanism, and Baconian thought melded together in "the notion of history as a process generally moving upwards by a series of majestic stages, culminating inevitably in some great, transforming event which is to solve the dilemmas of society" (86). As we have noted, fundamental to the acceptance of the idea of progress by many, is the progress and advance of knowledge, especially that contained in sciences and physical laws of nature, and faith in the "capacity of such knowledge to lift humanity to ever-higher levels of human life" (Nisbet 128). But as Nisbet argues, in order to be accepted into Victorian thought, the idea had to be linked to a faith, or dogma, for

so sweeping a proposition as that which declares progress a necessity for mankind can scarcely be supported by the common rules of evidence. Deeper wells of faith are required, and these necessarily lead not so much to conclusion as to dogma . . . And here is where Puritanism comes into the picture. This religion, more than any other making up Christianity, endowed knowledge--theoretical, practical, above all scientific--with millenarian importance. (129)

The Puritans gradually transferred the role of Providence to natural law or stages of advancement through which God operated.

Thomas Burnet (1635-1715) was influential in the movement to reconcile Christianity with the suppositions of the scientific revolution. His optimism in the historical process was linked to the chiefly Baconian view of the world operating by natural law. As Tuveson says, Burnet saw "nature and human history being worked out as parallel developments caused by the workings of natural law" (Tuveson, 117).

Combined with the empiricist view of the French historians, the Baconian-Puritan doctrine of progress helped to lay the foundations for the rationalist, secular views of man, society and government that were to colour the age.

With the advent of the nineteenth century, many other influences develop the British idea of progress. Romanticism was one force: "the idea of progress (was) extended on the one hand by the inheritors of the scientific and rationalist movement, and on the other hand modified by the acceleration and reactionary force of Romanticism" (Stevenson, 96). The clash of the scientific, rationalist view with that of the idealistic and romantic prevails throughout the period, and it is this idealist strain of thought (even more, its "reactionary force" against mechanistic views of humanity) which Burke, Carlyle, Arnold, and Conrad seem to share in their respective philosophies of the progress of man and society.

German idealism contributed to the development of the idea through its emphasis on the notion of moral development (man's realization of ideals), and on the organic unfolding of the universe according to divine principle. Both these elements were incorporated into English ideas on progress, mainly through the philosophy of Burke in the early 1800s, and Carlyle in the 1820s and 1830s. During the 1830s and later, Carlyle attempted to put the idealist notions to the forefront, but generally accepted views of progress seemed more concerned with establishing the fact of progress rather than the value of it.<sup>6</sup>

Saint-Simon, Comte, Darwin, and Spencer, through their various philosophies, further aided the general acceptance of the Baconian rational view of man and the universe, and their purpose was to establish the laws of development of humankind and human society through rational-scientific assumptions. Bury says that both Saint-Simon and Comte extended the theories of Condorcet in an attempt to "lift [the

eighteenth century's hypothesis of progress] to the rank of a scientific hypothesis, by discovering a social law as valid as the physical law of gravitation" (284). In fact, what they both advocated was a new religion of humanity: for Saint-Simon, civilization passed through stages which he called 'organic and critical', and the last stage would be an organic one, "that of the New Christianity, resting not upon religion in the traditional sense, but . . . [on] science, technology, and industrialism" (Nisbet, 250). Saint-Simon saw the golden age appearing, through "the perfection of the social order" (Nisbet, 281).<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Stevenson says that Comte advocated his positive programme as "a scheme of salvation" (117). According to Bury, Comte, believing he had discovered the fundamental law of progress through sociology, the "one great science of man" (Nesbit, 253), is the one person who did more "than any preceding thinker to establish the idea of Progress as a luminary which could not escape men's vision" (290). For him, the "concept of progress belongs exclusively to the positive philosophy":

This philosophy alone can indicate the final term which human nature will be forever approaching and never attaining; and it alone can prescribe the general course of this gradual development. (Positive Philosophy, II, 208)

As Nisbet says, for Comte, "Positivism . . . is Christianity denatured of its superstitions and converted into worship of the Grand Being, which is society or humanity" (257). W.K. Clifford predicted that, once the new science was mastered, we could attain a "rationally organized society for the training of the best citizens . . . Those who can read the signs of the times read in them that the kingdom of Man is at hand" ("Cosmic Emotion" (1877), Lectures and Essays, 2, 284-5). The above-mentioned all believed in the efficacy of science and reason to provide a social physic, and thus to "work out the laws of salvation for man in this world" (Stevenson, 120).

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, both science and the view of history as a linear, gradual development gained further acceptance in the philosophies of Spencer and Darwin. Though, in his Origin of Species and Descent of Man, Darwin saw the progress of human affairs as being only tentative: "progress seems to depend on many concurrent favourable conditions, far too complex to be followed out" (Descent, 500-501), both works challenged traditional religious views to the core by providing a scientific basis for society's progress. It was easy for philosophers such as Spencer and Huxley to transfer the belief in natural biological development to a science of man and society.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it was Spencer's task to link evolutionary theory; "the survival of the fittest", to the unlimited progress of man; "to convert the doctrine of evolution into an instrument of unbridled optimism" (Baillie, 145). Unlike many in the eighteenth century who believed that human nature was constant, Spencer held that man and society, like nature, "obeys the law of indefinite variation" (Bury quoting Spencer, 336). In nature, there is a necessary and inevitable law of change and adaptability which will, according to Spencer, result in a golden age: "all imperfection must disappear. Thus the ultimate development of the ideal man is logically certain" (Spencer, Social Statics, 78).<sup>9</sup>

From a law of man and society, Spencer extends the belief in progress to a cosmic law. Faith in the ability of Baconian science and the inductive method to ameliorate the human condition is now coupled with faith in progress as a cosmic and automatic law. As Darwin had said at the end of The Origin of Species, the theory of evolution by natural selection "works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (373).

The belief in progress was so amenable to the Victorians in general because of the Industrial Revolution and the changes it brought about in society: the steam engine, the railway, the growth of

manufacturing and commercial enterprise, and the expansion of England's economic and political power over the world were only a few justifications for the belief in a dream of a secular utopia on earth. Politically and socially, the laissez-faire system of competition and the improvement of human institutions held the key to personal and societal perfection: humans could and would reach the highest state of perfection attained in the history of humanity.

History became identified with progress. As Christopher Dawson notes, "faith in human progress became more and more the effective working 'religion' of our civilization" (34), from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The whole age was marching toward perfection, or so many believed: "The history of England is emphatically the history of progress. It is the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society . . . "(Macaulay, "Sir James MacKintosh," Essays, I, 707). Furthermore, Macaulay comments that "We rely on the natural tendency of the human intellect to truth, and on the natural tendency of society to improvement . . . History is full of the signs of this natural progress of society" ("Southey's Colloquies", Essays, I, 263).

For many Victorians, the one event which symbolized the apotheosis of progress was the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was, Bury notes, "a public recognition of the material progress of the age and the growing power of man over the physical world" (329). The Exhibition stood as the epitome of British power and ingenuity, an "enormous and self-conscious display of the accomplishments of progress . . . (and) the relation between science and material productivity" (Almond, 5). Even Tennyson, in his early days, expresses the mood of the Exhibition in Locksley Hall:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,  
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;  
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,

Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales; .  
 Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle flags were  
 furl'd.  
 In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world.  
 (l. 227-244)

Many leaders and thinkers tended also toward identifying the material and political successes of the age with "a benevolent or moral purpose . . . the course of nature and the hand of Providence" (Randall, 135). Economic progress, said Prince Albert, would bring about "that great end to which indeed all history points--the realisation of the unity of mankind" (Bury 330). The Times related that the Exhibition was "The first morning since the creation that all peoples have assembled from all parts of the world and done a common act" (Times, May 1, 1851).

Thus arose the liberal middle-class ideology of progress, based on faith in the ability of science and materialism to lead man to what many believed would be a secular utopia. The great promises of the Enlightenment, that through science and economics, man would be released from dependence on superstitious philosophy and would regain the kingdom of heaven on earth, seemed to be coming true. It seemed that Condorcet's eighteenth century prediction was coming true in the Victorian age: he sees the human race "emancipated from its shackles, released from the empire of fate and from that of the enemies of progress, advancing with a firm and sure step along the path of truth, virtue and happiness" (Sketch, 201).

Soon after the Exhibition, however, the optimism surrounding the idea of progress in the Victorian mind was replaced by growing feelings of pessimism and despair. Though progress had its triumphs in ameliorating the material conditions of life and in overseas successes, many Victorians were wary of its social and cultural implications. Neff points out that "the triumph of machinery and cash in the political and economic realms excited sober middle-class Englishmen to dithyrambs of praise and thanksgiving" (74), but others found the new world outlook

disconcerting. The new theories, many believed, instead of guaranteeing happiness and progress, were grave threats to a view of man and society as progressing "in a desirable direction" (Bury, 2).

On the economic front, there was serious ambivalence about the notion of forward progress after the "High Victorian period." British progress was questioned as being only a "short run hope" (Altick, 10). During the mid to late nineteenth century, British idealism encountered serious setbacks on all sides. Britain's claim to industrial supremacy was contested by both Germany and the United States, and in its "failure to integrate science with industry" (Paradis, 483), Britain faced an economic depression from which only a miracle could save it.

Furthermore, Enlightenment faith that "the brain which had bridged chasms, driven tunnels through mountains, and sent steamboats to defy adverse winds, was just as capable of solving the problems of society" (Altick, 108) proved to be unwarranted. Industrial progress seemed to threaten social ruin rather than act as a guarantee of progress. There was the constant fear of revolution or anarchy by the lower classes, who were angered by the unequal distribution of wealth which they saw arising out of the new laws of laissez-faire competition and supply-and-demand. Addressing the "Condition of England" question forty to fifty years earlier, Carlyle had made a plea for human ethics in business in response to the plight of the isolated worker, who, straining under the effects of "Industrial work still under bondage to Mammon," was left in unbearably "wretched" conditions:

It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched . . . But it is to live miserable we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal laissez-faire: it is to die slowly all our life long, imprisoned in a deaf, dead, infinite injustice. (Past and Present, 147)

Perhaps the most discouraging and morally divisive result of the linking of progress--on social, political and even individual levels--

purely to reason and economics, was the destruction of faith in accepted traditions and ways of viewing the self, society and the cosmos. A bleak view of the world and the self was the result largely of new biological, geological, and scientific theories of man's relation to the universe. The primary effect of these theories, in Watt's words, was to force "man to confront his infinitely minute and equally transitory role in the total scheme of things" (152).

The growth of rationalist views of humanity threatened the Providential view, driving Carlyle to doubt and to the "Everlasting No" of Sartor Resartus. Also, the "temporalization of the Chain of Being" (Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, 244) through Darwinian theory, was even more destructive of what little belief was left in an ordered hierarchy of existence. Ruskin called Darwinian theory the "Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century" (Works, vol. 34, pp. 78-9).

Whatever promises the doctrine of evolution had held out for the advance of civilization through cut-throat competition were rejected by Tennyson, who wanted to "hush this cry of "Forward" till ten thousand years have gone" ("Locksley Hall Sixty Years After", 1. 78), while Huxley, who supported Darwin's theory of evolution (in Evolution and Ethics), explicitly rejected the Social Darwinist tendencies inherent in laissez-faire capitalism: "The ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it" (83). With the emergence of the "survival of the fittest" and the "laissez-faire" tendencies inherent in Social Darwinism, freedom to "do as one likes" threatened both a humane progress of civilization and the heroic view of man in the world.

Contributing to the pessimistic outlook of the time was the total breakdown of traditional thought, occasioned by the wearying strain of the "struggle for existence", the "sick hurry" of change, and the split between religion and science. Many Victorians suffered from feelings of ennui, dislocation, and spiritual paralysis. As Ruskin notes in Modern



Painters, the breakdown of traditional thought resulted in frustrated action and thwarted will: "There never yet was a generation of men (savage or civilized) who . . . so woefully fulfilled the words, "having no hope, and without God in the world", as the present civilized European race" (MP, 3 (1856), ch. 16, sec. 5, 9-10, in Works, 5, 321-2). Ambiguity about progress turned to pessimism and despair--the "mournful gloom" (3) of Heart of Darkness--and in some, to decadence and escape into fantasy. "Science grows and Beauty dwindles", says the old man of Locksley Hall. In a letter to Clough, Matthew Arnold laments "how deeply unpoetical the age and all one's surroundings are. Not unprofound, not ungrand, not unmoving--but unpoetical" (Letters of M. Arnold to Clough, 111). He sees how the split between faith and rationalism, between the individual and society, could drive many sensitive Victorians toward a spiritual struggle: "wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born . . . " ("Stanzas", l. 85-86).

By the time Conrad arrived in England in 1878, the postulation of a mechanical universe, purposeless and indifferent to humanity, whose law was inevitable degeneration, seemed to be the final interpretation of "progress". Conrad, in his metaphor of the knitting machine, echoes Carlyle's rejection of the faith in progress through machinery and mechanical social philosophies. Progress through automatic law or laissez-faire morality did not mean liberation of the spirit, but, says Watt, undermined both "man's political as well as his individual aspirations . . . [Conrad's view] was very close to the steam-engine view of the universe which symbolised the 'Everlasting No' for Carlyle" (152-3):

I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider,--but it goes on knitting. You come and say: "This is all right: it's only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this,--for instance,--celestial oil and the machine will embroider a most beautiful design in purple and gold." Will it? Alas no! You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a

knitting machine . . . It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions,--and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing. (LL, I, 216, Dec. 20, 1897)

Furthermore, the law of entropy, which also affected Conrad's outlook on humanity, suggested that the universe would eventually run down and therefore, "all human effort was doomed" (McCarthy, 56)). This indicated to most that individuals are insignificant atoms in a world without hope, as Conrad, in one of his pessimistic moods, puts it:

There is no morality, no knowledge, and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and fleeting appearance. (Letters to CG, 71)

It is a view of a universe as a remorseless and meaningless process, devoid of "celestial feeling" (LL, I, 216, Dec. 20, 1897), and indeed of all human feeling. In view of the law of entropy--this "postulation of universal and irreparable decay"--Altick concludes that "the Victorians' confidence in the ongoing, divinely ordained improvement of man's estate could not but seem shallow, narrow, and petty--not to say ill-founded" (111).

Thus, the story of the history of the idea of progress in the nineteenth century emerges at first as a confident belief in the improvement of humanity and society, mostly through human reason and industry, through a science of morals and society, and automatic laws such as that of Spencerian evolution. Most, such as Carlyle, believed that Providence still guided human endeavour and that men would work in accordance with the Divine Law, thereby achieving "higher and nobler developments of whatever is highest and noblest in him" ("Characteristics", Essays, 369). At the same time, many questioned the assumption that human perfectibility would be assured by industrial progress, and by the views of the liberal ideology of progress. By the late Victorian period, the cosmological evidence turned the very belief

in the value of human action, and the progressive advance of humanity under the guidance of Providence and a benevolent administration, into a question mark. Despair at the human situation rather than belief in human potential for progress was the feeling of many Victorians and Edwardians.

But though both the mid-Victorians and the Edwardians heard the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the tide that Arnold speaks of in Dover Beach, they did not cast aside the belief in progress altogether. Many of them constantly struggled to "fill the moral vacuum surrounding them" (Batchelor, 4), proposing their own view of human perfectibility and progress in opposition to the generally accepted views of the day. Joseph Conrad is one of these men. Though he claims to have no philosophy, his view of progress, in its distrust of purely material progress, and with its emphasis on the individual's inner growth and his link to and responsibility to the organic community, shares fundamental affinities with philosophers like Carlyle in Past and Present.

## Notes

1. Stevenson, like Wagar, points out the transitional nature of the age: the "transition was a period of moving from a predominantly spiritual and theological world to a secular and scientific world . . . it was a time of throwing off of feudalism and church authority, and of replacing the old framework with classicism and the authority of the ancients. The significant feature, however, was the turning of interest to the inherent values of life in this world" (26).

2. This philosophy based on reason was also utilitarian in nature: both Bacon and Descartes attempted to discover and elucidate, in Descartes' words, "a practical philosophy by means of which, understanding the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies that surround us, as clearly as we understand the various crafts of the artisans, we should be able to apply them in a like way to all their proper uses and so to make ourselves lords and masters of nature" (Baillie, 102).

3. Keohane notes that the fully developed idea of progress required an "explanation for such asymmetries between technique and virtue in the past, along with arguments to show why increasing control over our world in the future will assure increasing happiness and moral excellence" (32).

4. The character of the age might best be introduced by Becker's statement: "mankind has at last emerged, or is emerging, from the dark wilderness of the past into the bright, ordered world of the eighteenth century. From this high point of the eighteenth century the Philosophes survey the past and anticipate the future. They recall the miseries and errors of the past as mature men recall the difficulties and follies of youth, with bitter memories . . . yet with a tolerant smile after all, with a sigh of satisfaction and a complacent feeling of assurance: the present is so much better than the past. But the future, what of that? Since the present is so much better than the past, will not the future be much better than the present? To the future the Philosophes therefore look as to a promised land, a new millenium (The Heavenly City, 118).

5. Nisbet quotes Condorcet's Esquisse, that science and scientists would be humanity's liberators: "Nature has set no term to the perfection of our human faculties, that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us. This progress . . . will never be reversed as long as the earth occupies its present place in the vast system of the whole universe, and as long as the general laws of this system produce, neither a general cataclysm nor such changes as will deprive the human race of its present faculties and its present resources" (207).

6. Houghton remarks that "this distinction between a scientific and an idealist interpretation was made by only a few philosophers", because in the popular mind, the idea was "a loose blending of both (sides) into a general notion of progressive development" (Victorian Frame of Mind, 30).

7. In his "Social Physiology", Saint-Simon says that "The imagination of poets has placed the golden age in the cradle of the human race. It was the age of iron they should have banished there. The golden age is not behind us but in front of us. It is in the perfection of the social order. Our fathers have not seen it; our children will arrive there one day, and it is for us to clear the way" (Nisbet, 281).

8. Stevenson summarizes the point by saying that "the organic nature of the physical world led to the corrolary belief in the organic nature of society as a whole, moving from the simple to the complex through the process of natural selection" (137). Many were convinced that this vision of humanity entailed an endless upward movement of mankind, as Chapman suggests in The Victorian Debate: "if man had emerged from primitive life by his fitness to survive, was there any limit to what the human race might yet accomplish? The Godwinian belief in human perfectibility found a new course, with new and stronger reasons for optimism" (311).

9. In Spencer, the law of progress is linked to a law of change and adaptability; therefore, "progress . . . is not an accident but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation; and provided the human race continues, and the constitution of things remains the same, those modifications must end in completeness . . . so surely must the human faculties be moulded into complete fitness for the social state; so surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear; so surely must man become perfect" (Social Statics, 79-80).

## Chapter Two

### Work and Progress in The Nigger of the Narcissus and Heart of Darkness

The nineteenth century countermoderns (those who oppose the idea of mechanical progress), like Carlyle and Arnold, perceive the human element, the inner life, to be under threat by the overwhelming emphasis on what they see as being mechanical philosophies of the progress of humanity and of society. Carlyle had termed the Victorian age not an age of belief but an "Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word" (Works, II, 233) "Free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul" ("Signs of the Times", 27). According to Conrad, the gravest threat in the nineteenth century is to the human spirit: the vision of bourgeois liberal progress perpetrated on both the human and natural landscape of Conrad's Congo in Heart of Darkness threatens to extinguish "that great and saving illusion" (Heart of Darkness, 71), the "light of belief and love" (76)--the capacity to believe in the human enterprise and in God. Caught in a world of doubters, and in a doubtful vision of humanity's and civilization's future, the countermoderns view their task as "how to be" in a world they perceive as being poised on the edge of an abyss.

Against the bourgeois liberal doctrine of material and scientific progress, Conrad, like Carlyle before him, proposes a notion of spiritual and moral progress, and the essential driving force of that progress, for Conrad as it is for Carlyle, is a particular reformulation of the nineteenth-century's work ethic, one which emphasizes fidelity to duty as a restraint against the despair, the moral nihilism, and the nothingness of a materialist worldview. Conrad and the early Carlyle of Sartor Resartus and Past and Present define themselves as "believing and productive labourers" (Reifel, 81), engaged in a selfless, devoted battle to defend and uphold the values of a way of life that seems lost

in the mechanism of what Carlyle terms the "cold, universal Laissez-faire" (PP, 210) attitude of industrial society.<sup>1</sup>

Both Conrad and Carlyle believe that man cannot progress inwardly or in his outward circumstances unless he actively devotes himself to upholding a moral conception of his existence and of society's progress. "Formulas . . . have a reality in Human Life" (128), Carlyle says in Past and Present. Conrad would agree, and also like Carlyle, would agree that the formula must have "vitality withal . . . a living skin and tissue" (PP, 128), and be sustaining to the human spirit and to human civilization. It must extend itself in a manner that ensures the peace of the inner life and of the nation: as the Russian narrator says in Under Western Eyes, "I take it that what all men are really after is some form or perhaps only some formula of peace" (UWE, 5). The liberal bourgeois doctrine of progress is untenable because, as we see in the hollow souls of Heart of Darkness, it has "no heart beating through" it (PP, 128). It is very destructive to both individuals and to the organic community.

Conrad's "formula of peace" is the work ethic: he defines moral conduct as a saving grace that ensures the peace of both the inner and the outer world. His view of work is linked to the task of the artist: Conrad views both the goal of his art and that of work as the achievement of solidarity:

(that) latent feeling of fellowship with all creation--and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity--the dead to the living and the living to the unborn. ("Preface" to The Nigger of the Narcissus, xl)

This sense of solidarity and the glimpse of the best self, a vision of the God-like in man, is the moment of perfection for the worker, as The Nigger of the Narcissus will show us.

Conrad's view of the spiritual and social value of work to the individual and to society is similar to Carlyle's, who also believes that work well done is a measure of the individual's progress to perfection--for Carlyle, "a man perfects himself by working":

Foul jungles are cleared away, fair seedfields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work! (PP, 196)

Not only does this passage show the purifying value of work for the individual, but it also links it to the progress of society.

For Carlyle, work, relieving moral doubt and psychological depression, leads to inner health and harmony:

Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like helldogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man. The blessed glow of Labour in him, is it not as purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up, and of sour smoke itself there is made bright blessed flame! (196)

Similarly, in The Mirror of the Sea, Conrad also notes that engaging in a routine of selfless labour has "a therapeutic and redeeming nature" (Burgess, 32): it is

a great doctor for sore hearts and sore heads . . . your ship's routine, which I have seen soothe--at least for a time--the most turbulent of spirits. There is health in it, and peace, and satisfaction of the accomplished round . . .  
(7)

For both Conrad and Carlyle, the progression toward perfection comes about as man undergoes the tests of life, takes "the wheel", and heroically puts all his energy into fulfilling his appointed task. Usually in both Carlyle and Conrad, man is purified of his illusions through trials and tests. In this "Fight of Life" (PP, 193), man must work and grapple with the contradictions within and without: "To work:



why, it is to try himself against Nature, and her everlasting unerring Laws; these will tell a true verdict as to the man" (160), Carlyle says. Similarly, in Youth, the younger Marlow says of his experience on the Judea, after having been tested "by those events of the sea which show in the light of day the inner worth of a man" (LJ, 10), "I did not know how good a man I was till then" (Y, 56).

Conrad's The Nigger of the Narcissus affords us a prime example of the transforming power of work in its effect on the crew of the Narcissus. Gaston calls The Nigger Conrad's "strongest affirmation" (208) of the work ethic. Indeed, it is Conrad's tribute to labour and to the men who undertake it: labour becomes a "purifying fire", a means of self-realization and of creating an organic community, which the text of Lord Jim defines as "a body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct" (LJ, 50). As in Carlyle's philosophy, perfection takes the nature of inner purification and renewal through the crew's successful completion of the task of caring for the ship and steering it safely to port.

For the Narcissus crew, the test of the sea provides them with a way to overcome the divisions among and within themselves. In this connection, Conrad pits the anarchic individualism of men like Donkin against the selfless, heroic devotion of men like Singleton and Captain Allistoun. Donkin is the man "who curses the sea while others work" (11) and "who knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company" (11). In contrast, Singleton's selfless devotion exemplifies the heroism of the seaman who "stands in the van of men", and gives "his Life away" (PP, 204) to the service of the ship: "He steered with care" (NN, 89).

It is only by struggling with the darkness both within and without that the crew can progress through the storm, as Berthoud notes, achieve "a purifying disinterestedness" (42), and, as the narrator

comments, wrest "a "meaning from" their "sinful lives" (NN, 173). Perfection is only momentary, but it is this feeling of harmony with themselves, with their fellow crew members, and ultimately with the Universe, which constitutes the "meaning" they achieve in "their sinful lives". Through their dogged devotion to the ship and their obedience to the wise authority of their captain, they are transformed. They exist within sight of eternity, and even the sea itself is transformed in their eyes, from a "savage autocrat" to the "immortal sea." It is their sense of having engaged in an elemental struggle and having overcome the dangers within and without which gives them a taste of what it means to live.

All this supports Gary Geddes' contention that "work becomes a symbol of man's involvement in life, in the troubled but fervid water of existence" (560). Though death and destruction face him and inevitably destroy him, by engaging in life man can make of "the chaos a kosmos or ordered world" (PP, 95), and he may also achieve his best self through "hard work and exacting calls of duty" (Within the Tides, v.). Labour for a cause greater than ego raises us above "the frailties of our dead selves" (NLL, 183) and affirms a tradition constituted by the "long continuities of labour and struggle" (Thorburn, 93) and the communal values necessary to hold up the "edifice" of civilization. Conrad sums up the benefits of work in "Tradition:"

From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practice which makes great craftsmen, the sense of right conduct which we may call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born. (NLL, 194)

Conrad once said to Elbridge Adams that the only class he belongs to is "the class of honest and able men . . . the class of workers throughout the nation" (LL, II, 285, November 20, 1922), because "A man is a worker. If he is not that he is nothing" (NLL, 190). Similarly, it is

only to the workers, all the men who have said and done "a true and valiant thing in England" (PP, 135) that Carlyle gives the name "'heroes, sacred Band of the Immortals'" (202).

An important element of Conrad's idea of progress is his definition of the work ethic and its promise of individual growth and self-realization within an organic community led by the heroic few. This theme can be seen in The Nigger of the Narcissus, and in deeper, more detailed form in Heart of Darkness. Through Marlow, Conrad, like Carlyle, affirms a notion of spiritual progress through heroic devotion to duty and to civilization's precious order.

Conrad's view has several points of resemblance with that of Carlyle. Both embrace the ideal conception of man as a hero and fear the threat of the liberal universe to their view. Both see the emphasis on self-interest and the progress of man only in material affairs as endangering the possibility of true leadership, and both see the essential problem as the survival of the moral self in a materialist society. McPherson comments on the problems which the countermoderns face in regard to the self in a materialist society:

How could the moral self survive and flourish in a world of explosive growth, of shifting social patterns, of ceaseless temptations toward egoism and indulgence? (MacPherson, vii)

"How to be" or cope becomes the task for Teufelsdröckh in Sartor Resartus and for Conrad's Marlow in Heart of Darkness. Instead of succumbing to the materialist view of man and the universe, both Marlow and Teufelsdröckh defend and uphold a different reality. They do this through work, which, for them, is a labour of belief, in that their work is a manifestation of their belief in their own value and in the ideal value of life.

As in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Conrad's Heart of Darkness emphasizes the work ethic and its redeeming value to the individual, as exemplified by Marlow's heroic devotion to the task. "What saves us is

efficiency--the devotion to efficiency (6)". In this sense, he echoes the sentiments of Carlyle, and many others of the nineteenth century, concerning the psychological value of work as a strategy in maintaining one's "precarious grip on existence" (41). Marlow's singleminded attention to the task at hand, or the surface truth, often saves him from looking into his "creepy thoughts". "Do the duty which lies nearest thee" (148), Carlyle says in Sartor Resartus, and Conrad echoes this sentiment when he says that, for the majority of mankind, "the only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort" (NLL, 102). Both advise man to avoid "meddling" beyond his depth and instead to confine his dreams to a life-purpose and immediate goal in the here and now. "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness" (PP, 197).

But unlike Carlyle, who advocates work as religion, and later, military efficiency and rule by an elite, Conrad acknowledges that work in this manner is simply not enough to sustain the individual or society. Though work does save Marlow from the fate of Kurtz who "went beyond the bounds of permitted aspiration" (67), we must note that for Conrad and for adventurous men like Marlow, efficiency means more than robot-like responses to the universe and one's fellow man: work must be seen in a humanized context, as Kisner suggests: "It is devotion to work with a specifically human relationship and sanity, that humanizes the world, but Conrad shows that there is more than devotion to efficiency in this humanizing process" (86).

This humanizing process calls for compassion and an acknowledgement of solidarity with one's fellow man. "What redeems (the conquest of the earth) is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (7). Instead of the progress of material interests, Conrad sees the

work of men and women in the imperial mission as contributing to the "real progress of humanitarian ideas" (NLL, 84) and to the work of solidarity. Thus, Kurtz's inability to serve something larger than ego is the cause of his downfall. Though he could procure "as much ivory as all the others put together" (19), his work is a kind of frenzied "eye-service, [a] greedy grasping of wages" (PP, 206): "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--everything belonged to him" (49). Only in his final cry, Marlow believes, does Kurtz achieve self-knowledge. As we have noted, efficiency encompasses a lot more than the social and cultural imperialism imposed on the Congo landscape.

One of the most important forms of work for Conrad and Carlyle alike is the work of the artist. Both Conrad and Carlyle are aware of the conception of the artist as the hero of society, the "spiritual legislator," who could lead man to the Promised Land. For Carlyle, the task of the world's priest can be either to lead us heavenward or hellward, showing us both "the upward and downward potential of man" (McLauchlan, 5). Thus, without an accompanying moral purpose, "to have the gift of words is no such great matter" ("Books" NLL, 7). Like Marlow, Conrad's artist must use his talent, which is a "God-given trust", responsibly and in the service of humanity. In this sense, we can see Marlow's lie as an exercise in artistic creation, covering over the untempered truth in the service of humanity, and made in the spirit of piety, which Conrad says informs his work: "It is a sentiment akin to piety which prompted me to render in words assembled with conscientious care the memory of things far distant and of men who have lived" (A Personal Record, 9-10).

In this connection, the parallels between Heart of Darkness and Past and Present are worthy of note in the sense that both Conrad and Carlyle, aware of the threat of an immoral standard of conduct to both self and society, stress the necessity of noble and heroic leaders. These leaders include the artists whose sense of their connection with

the Divine Spirit helps them to motivate the spirit in each individual to the consistent conduct and noble effort necessary for wisdom and self-knowledge, and ultimately for the creation of the organic community. Conrad and Carlyle both agree that if genuine humane progress is to happen, humanity needs both the sense of security provided by the belief in the divine and a fixed standard of moral conduct, as we see in Conrad's description of events in the Congo. Without God, nothing can impel men to conform to a standard of conduct or to carry out beneficent actions in the world. Instead, "Man has lost the soul out of him" (PP, 139), "marches forward nothing doubting toward the abyss, "hopefully trying to recoil on the cliff's edge!" (149). Heart of Darkness is replete with men "hollow at the core" (59), like trees "swayed by the wind" (52), enchanted by the promises of Mammon, worshipping Mammon and what Mammon leads to. Without a guiding authority, men follow the sham rather than the true. As Marlow notes, they have become "a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence" (23). Their ruthless quest for ivory leads Marlow to say of them that they "looked like they were praying to it" (23).

In Past and Present, Carlyle calls on both the common man and his leaders to regenerate a dissolving society through noble labour, just as Marlow attempts to do by his heroic fidelity. But though Conrad would agree with the early Carlyle's notion of progress, he differs with Carlyle's later views. Once Carlyle senses that society is not taking up his scheme for reform, he resorts to advocating compassionless military rule by an elite. Freedom for self-realization now becomes obedience to Carlyle's order. In Latter Day Pamphlets, work is linked to slavery (303). In contrast, Conrad, knowing that the Captains of Industry and their sham work cannot measure up to the selfless heroes of the past, emphasizes in Marlow the necessity for undying fidelity and compassion in the individual if there is to be hope for humanity.

Marlow exemplifies through his unfailing example of work and perseverance the limited heroism that is possible in the modern world.

Conrad called the European engagement in the Congo "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience" (Last Essays, 17). The Congo, Marlow says, and both Conrad and Carlyle would agree, is created by the same stunted spiritual vision that created the "condition of England", the vision of men whose only desire is "to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land . . . with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (31). The journey through the Congo is, for men like Marlow, "a progress through darkness" (Daleski, 51), "a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (14), where, Erdinast suggests, the "ready-made distinctions between civilization and savagery are gradually whittled down until (they) become virtually identical" (103).<sup>2</sup>

Marlow's view of the Congo, especially seen in his ironic comments about "these high and just proceedings" and this "noble enterprise" (both jabs at the "cause of progress" or in this case, capitalist imperialism) is that it has become an extension of the defiled and dehumanizing values of the "whited sepulchre" (9) of Brussels (and by implication, Europe), a city of hollowness and dead values. This uncaring and ruthless spirit is what Marlow sees in the managers of the enterprise during his sojourn in the heart of darkness.

Instead of criticizing the natives, both Conrad and Marlow attack the lack of vitality and humanity with which most of the managers undertake the Congo enterprise. Conrad, when he returned from the Congo, also wrote Blackwood of "the criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa . . . " (Letters to Blackwood, 36-37). Indeed, the Congo under European administration becomes an example of "the wrong way of going to work": it is a "depraved mix of violated nature and decayed society" (Lange, 198): "I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass . . . I came upon

more pieces of decaying machinery" (16), says Marlow. He almost stumbles in a "vast artificial hole" (17), a scar in the hillside that seemed to be there for no useful reason. This desecration of the landscape is the result of human energy misdirected and turned to destructive purposes: it is "a wanton smashup" (17).

Conrad, like Carlyle in Past and Present, sees that the cash-payment nexus (or Mammon worship) is destroying the inner life and the ideal ordered pattern and progress of society. "Industrial Labour, still under bondage to Mammonism", operates "to no purpose" (PP, 207), says Carlyle, and Marlow notes the lack of productivity and progress in the work undertaken by the men apparently engaged in building a railroad:

a heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the rock, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way of anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on. (16)

Carlyle had hoped to find a cure for the ills of industrial society in the Captains of Industry, men whom he hoped would act according to the Laws of Nature, perfecting both the individual and society by leading the population to the "Heroic Promised Land". But as Conrad shows us, nowhere (except in Marlow's behaviour) does the colonial administration in Heart of Darkness recognize the "imperishable dignity of man," Carlyle's first criterion for a moral society. On his journey to the first station, Marlow notices a lack of human connection between the administrative machine and the white agents: "nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went" (13). Many go mad, as the Swede says of a compatriot who committed suicide: perhaps "the sun [was] too much for him, or the country perhaps" (15).

Furthermore, in their dealings with the natives, the "Captains of Industry" certainly are not heroes, acting out of brotherhood. In fact,



the rulers of the Congo are blind to the human needs of the native population whom they have "brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts" (17). Chained, they are not even treated justly according to the minimum morality of the cash-payment nexus, which requires a "fair day's wages for a fair day's work." Instead, they are "fed on unfamiliar food" (17) or given a meaningless piece of brass wire, which they cannot exchange for food. Like the workers in Carlyle's vision of alienated labour resulting from the cash-payment nexus of liberal society, they are "girt in with a cold universal Laissez-faire: . . . to die slowly . . . , imprisoned in a deaf, dead, Infinite Injustice" (PP, 210).

The usual result of this inhuman treatment of the natives by the imperialist conquerors is starvation and death: "they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest" (17). Marlow sees them in "all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair . . . as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence" (17-18). Even more dispiriting is the punishment meted out to the native who "gets in the way" of the "noble enterprise" (31): Marlow's search for a sign of "upkeep" leads him to find a negro "with a bullet hole in the forehead" (20), on which he sardonically comments that this could not be "any sign of permanent improvement" (20). The leaders of the enterprise are mirrors for the compassionless military rulers of Latter Day Pamphlets, where Carlyle says that the only remedies for shirkers are the whip and gun:

Refuse to strike into it (work); shirk the heavy labor, disobey the rules,--I will admonish and endeavor to incite you; if in vain, I will flog you; if still in vain, I will at last shoot you . . . ("The Present Time," 303)

Indeed, the "Captains of Industry" in the Congo are the "flabby devils" of laissez-faire capitalism, men who, entrusted with the care of the human and natural landscape of the Congo, fail to do their duty and instead work according to a mechanical efficiency that masks their inner

emptiness and lack of selfhood. As both Berthoud and Lange note, they are men who exhibit an "internal alienation" (Berthoud, 48); Marlow sees them as "small souls" (Lange, 205) rather than men.

Marlow encounters the "great demoralization of the land" (18), and like Carlyle, finds in it a threat to the psychic life. To ward off the sense of "spiritual desolation" (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, 223), Marlow seeks out the accountant, a man who, though in appearance a hairdresser's dummy, is a kind of "miracle", because in all the disorder, he has "kept up his appearance" (18). Both his books and his clothes are in "apple-pie order", and he has even been teaching one of the natives to iron his shirts.

The accountant's brand of efficiency, however, is inadequate. Both superficial and heartless, it is not a sign of any moral progress or beneficent leadership. "His order and efficiency are at the expense of the human element" (Geddes, 565). His lack of concern for the dying agent just outside his door is revealed in his cold remark: "When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages--hate them to the death" (19). Marlow notes that the accountant is "barred from neck to heels in narrow strips of sunlight" (19), which suggests that his vision is both narrow-minded and imprisoning. In contrast to the accountant, Marlow offers the dying negro a biscuit and in this simple act of humanity, exhibits "an unconscious commitment" (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, 220) to human solidarity. In a world where most men have "lost the soul out of them" (PP, 139), Conrad shows Marlow maintaining his commitment to humane progress in the face of inhumanity.

As Marlow progresses on foot along the nightmare trek through the wilderness to the manager's station, he finds that even the accountant's mechanical devotion to appearances and simple ordering tasks of the moment have been abandoned by the men at the station. He encounters hollow men whose only aim is to satisfy their lust for ivory and for

power. The assistant-manager's task is "the making of bricks . . . but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station" (24). In his desire to "get on" in life or reach a high position in the company, he occupies his time in spying on his fellow agents for the manager. He is an example of Carlyle's idle diletante, and his "laissez-faire donothingism" causes Marlow to describe him as a "papier-mache Mephistopheles . . . it seems to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe" (26).

Nor does the manager live up to Carlyle's early ideal of the Industrialist-Ruler-Hero. Instead of guiding his fellows in a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, he is a "type of exploiter" (Berthoud, 49), and, like his uncle (the leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition), he is bent on acquiring the greatest amount of wealth and power with the least expenditure of work. Marlow suspects that he too, "had nothing within him" (22). The only thing that keeps him manager is his healthy constitution, his ability to outlast all the rest. In his ruthless destruction of Marlow's steamboat--and implicitly, in his murder of Kurtz--he exemplifies the "survival of the fittest" concept of Social Darwinism.

Along with his compatriots, the "sordid buccaneers" (31) of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, the manager exhibits no "atom of foresight and serious intention", things which "are wanted for the work of the world" (31), as Marlow says. Instead, he rules by force: "Transgression--punishment---bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way" (26). As McLauchlan concludes, "the total inhumanity of the manager is evident" (16).

Thus, the quest for Mammon does not inspire men to purposeful work, as Marlow shows us in the example of the 'pilgrims'. "An air of plotting" (25) pervades the station, but as Marlow notes in the examples of the faithless pilgrims wandering around with useless staves in their

hands, "nothing came of it" (25): "It was as unreal as everything else-- as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work" (25). The pilgrims exhibit only a "desire to get appointed to a trading post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account--but as to effectually lifting a little finger--oh no" (25). "United" in the common aim of worshipping ivory, the pilgrims are, as Watt notes, an ironic comment on the theme of the pilgrimage as "a small human community united for the purpose of a single journey by a religious aim" (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, 222). Their quest for ivory, in fact, does not unite them, but divides them against each other, exemplifying Carlyle's analysis of liberal societies: no longer possessing a "Spirit of active Method, a Force for Work" (PP, 201), men cease to exist as an organic society: "Call ye that a society . . . where each isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbor, clutches what he can get--where friendship, communion, has become an incredible tradition" (SR, 76).

One would think, given the deterioration of the moral sensibility, of the capacity for true leadership, of the Congo society, and of the capacity for work, that Marlow would see no hope for nineteenth century man, and indeed, his irony about the "cause of progress" and these "high and just proceedings" suggests to us Marlow's temptation to dismiss all actions as futile: "It occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed, any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored?" (39). But though he may see the reality of the outward facts which deny human purpose and meaning, Marlow's example, more than his words, is, like Abbot Samson's "all-penetrating" eyesight which makes order out of chaos, the "testimony to his belief in a meaningful universe" (Chandler, 144-5), and thus it can be construed as a belief in humankind. Like Carlyle's labour of belief, Marlow's is also a work of believing: one of the main themes of

Conrad's philosophy is that man, apparently living in a world that denies purpose, meaning, and fellowship, must not avoid life, but must "make the best of it" (WT, v) in faith that the stream will carry him, through his own efforts in conjunction with the efforts of his fellow man toward the goal which is unnameable but real, a vision of life lived according to a moral ideal. Life may seem a "weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (14) or, as Carlyle says, "wholly a dark labyrinth" (SR, 118) that might rather be evaded than encountered, but Conrad says that man's duty is to engage and affirm life: "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young--to hope, to love, and to put its trust in life!!" (Victory, 326). Marlow is willing to "submit to the destructive element", and through his beneficent actions, "make the deep, deep sea keep [him] up" (LJ, 214). Marlow testifies to the resilience of the human spirit, even though he sees, like Carlyle, this so-called society teetering on the edge of the abyss.

The idea that the crisis of man and civilization requires not despair but decisive action is also Conrad's theme, and thus the Congo can also be seen as both a test of Marlow's powers of fidelity to duty and his capacity for belief: "That difficult times call for heroes . . . implies that hostile circumstances bring out the very best of which man is capable, requiring him to stretch himself to the utmost to overcome a great obstacle" (Behken, 31). Man cannot, like the pilgrims, wait for something to happen, but must, like Singleton, put his shoulder to the wheel or "perish utterly" (NLL, 182). The motto of the Judea is "do or die" (Youth, 30). It is this "individually willed commitment" (Arneson, 421) to life which suggests Marlow's idea of deliberate belief or inner conviction that life is worth living. Both Conrad and Carlyle believe that man must affirm life by engaging in its struggles. For Carlyle and Conrad, work undertaken in a spirit of solidarity in organic community is all one needs to sustain oneself in the chaotic world of the nineteenth century.

Indeed, as we have seen in The Nigger of the Narcissus, work is a coping mechanism for the spirit, "the source of whatever safety there is for men in the heart of darkness" (Lange, 200). For Conrad as for Carlyle, work saves the self from the fragmenting and paralysing effects of this "Age of Machinery": "I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life" (23), says Marlow; and "It was a great moral comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat" (29). Like Teufelsdröckh in Sartor Resartus, Marlow is saved from succumbing to the "nightmare" vision by his efforts to create a different vision of reality, which he distinguishes from the "unreality" of the whole Congo enterprise undertaken by the Europeans.

Furthermore, fidelity to humanized labour is not only a protection against the chaos within and without, but the necessary precondition for any self-knowledge that man might attain. "Self-knowledge" will come "so soon as Work fitly begins" (PP, 197), Carlyle argues. Work can be a means toward what little sense of selfhood and transcendence one can find in a prison. As it does for the crew of the *Narcissus*, work tests Marlow's strength of character: the ship, he says, gives him "the chance to come out a bit--to find out what I could do" (29), and it also gives him an opportunity for self-discovery: "I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know" (29). In contrast to Kurtz, whose work is a kind of forgetfulness, Marlow sees work as a chance to find himself, echoing Carlyle's dictum that only through work can the self know itself: "Our Works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments. Hence, too the folly of that impossible Precept, Know thyself; till it be translated into this partially possible one, Know what thou canst work

at" (SR, 125). As we shall see in Kurtz, his lack of moral identity comes from the fact that he has no real, purposeful work to do.

Marlow "works to be a civilized man--a man of self-restraint" (Lange, 202). In his relationship with the steamer and his fellow man, Marlow, unlike the Europeans or Kurtz, defines the qualities necessary in approaching the task of creating a "shelter of light and order" (LJ, 313) out of the darkness. It is only by embodying in action these qualities that humans can create a stable order for society, and between each other. Work, for Conrad, is not a gospel of salvation for society as it is for Carlyle, but work performed in the right spirit can create an organic community.

In Heart of Darkness, the Europeans' relationship to the world is defined as one of conquest and possession: "they grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got" (7). In contrast, Marlow's relationship to the ship "is not tainted by the pride of possession" (NLL, 137), but informed by a selfless devotion: friendship and love are his guiding sentiments. The kind of solidarity that Marlow feels for his ship is the kind that all seamen do. It is a "disinterested sentiment", Conrad tells us in The Mirror of the Sea, "that sentiment (of) embracing in a feeling of intimate, equal fellowship the ship and the man, backing each other against the implacable . . . hostility of their world of waters" (137).

Indeed, Marlow identifies much of his concept of selfhood with his ability to command or navigate the ship through rough waters. He too sees, as Conrad writes in The Mirror of the Sea, that "the only mission of a seaman's calling is to keep ship's keels off the ground" (67): "After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that's supposed to float all the time under his care is an unpardonable sin" (HD, 35). Much of his time is spent navigating the steamboat away from "infernal snags" in the riverbend, and towards Kurtz. Like Singleton in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Marlow steers "with care."

Unlike Carlyle, whose desperate attempt to reform the inner man and England led him to say that one should "work at anything", even working at making money, both Conrad and Marlow believe that what makes an individual valuable, and what enables him or her to achieve inner peace and solidarity with others, work done in a spirit of solidarity with others, a spirit which Conrad cherishes over working mechanically in isolation from one's fellows: Marlow calls the cannibals "fine fellows" because "They were men one could work with" (35), and of the boilermaker, he says "he was an improving specimen" because "Instead of stamping his feet on the bank . . . , he was hard at work . . . full of improving knowledge . . . He was useful because he had been instructed" (37). The foreman also was a "good worker" (29). Even the Russian's devotion to Kurtz elicits Marlow's admiration. And in comparing Kurtz's worth to the helmsman's, Marlow, Watt notes, shows his "decided preference" (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, 230) for work over words:

I am not prepared to affirm the fellow [Kurtz] was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. And why this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black sahara. Well . . . he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back--a help--an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. (51-52)

We see that, even in the moment of the helmsman's death, he and Marlow share "a moment of distant kinship" (52). As Joffe concludes, "Marlow as a cultural relativist, unlike any of the other Europeans, [is] able to acknowledge a shared humanity with the blacks who people his profoundly disturbing continent" (81).<sup>3</sup>

In reality, Marlow finds it more difficult to affirm solidarity with Kurtz than he does with the natives, his fellow workers, first because Kurtz's "work" is entirely self-regarding, and it isolates him from others and contributes to his madness, whereas work in solidarity for Marlow is what sustains the individual and creates community. In



addition to Kurtz's work being self-centered, it alienates him because it does not involve action: "I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing" (48), says Marlow. "He was hollow at the core" because his "words are not connected to a meaningful plan of action" (Lange, 205). Words can be a medium for work, but Kurtz's words are whitewash which hide his inner lack of moral identity: "there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (58). What he lacks is restraint. The power of restraint, or, for Carlyle, renunciation, is an essential part of the progress toward manhood and toward the maintenance of civilized life. Teufelsdröck's "preliminary moral act" in Sartor Resartus is "annihilation of self" (SR, 141), or "repudiation of his own egoism" (Moore, 189). He has to renounce the desire to be "happy", and realize his duty to his fellow man in working toward creating a just society. As Conrad says in Notes on Life and Letters, it is not the time or place in which an individual lives that proves whether he or she is civilized, but his or her capacity for renunciation: "Wherever he stands, at the beginning or the end of things, a man has to sacrifice his gods to his passions or his passions to his gods. That is the problem . . . " (NLL, 16).

To support his belief in renunciation and duty as measures of man's success, Marlow gives the example of the cannibals, men living "in the night of first ages" (36). Watt notes that many "Westerners in the post-Darwinian period believed that primitive people were morally inferior to civilized ones" ("Heart of Darkness and the Critics", 10). But Marlow shows that the cannibals prove to have a greater capacity for restraint than Kurtz or the Congo entrepreneurs, and it is this capacity that makes them seem great men in Marlow's eyes: although "It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's soul than this kind of prolonged hunger . . . and these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple" (43), miraculously, they hold

off from devouring the crew. Like Marlow, they too, in holding fast to the task of caring for the ship, sacrifice their desires for self-gratification to God.<sup>4</sup>

Because of his total lack of restraint, Kurtz is in fact less civilized than the cannibals, and can be seen as economic man, the "epitome", says Watt, "of the inner moral void which Marlow has found in all the representatives of Western progress" (233). Though Kurtz is touted by the assistant manager as "the emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (23) and a member of the "gang of virtue" to which Marlow also belongs, we can see that he is not of Marlow's company, but of the devil's: he is a portrait of Carlyle's failed Captain of Industry. He makes a pact with the wilderness, takes "a high seat among the devils of the land" (50), and becomes the thing he has worshipped, "an animated image of death carved out of old ivory" (60), indiscriminately running rampant in his desire for more and more worldly possessions. It is an "exotic and lethal unrestraint" (Lange, 206) which Kurtz exhibits.

In contrast to Marlow, who, if he achieves greatness in our eyes, does so through his selfless devotion to the craft, through his adherence to the ideal of solidarity, and through his responsible use of words, Kurtz's "greatness" or megalomania is achieved through the use of force and his irresponsible use of language. He subdues the native population with firearms: "He came to them with thunder and lightening . . . and they had never seen anything like it" (57). He is a vision of the later Carlyle's military rulers who believe only in their own rightness, and like the later Carlyle, "fail to notice the tone of self-righteousness, to see any of the horrible self-destruction or the temptations to might and power" (LaValley, Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern, 217).

Kurtz's power over his disciples is achieved through words. The Russian exclaims that Kurtz preached on "love, justice, conduct of life-" (59), but the Russian's devotion to Kurtz, Marlow says, is "about the

most dangerous thing in every way he [the Russian] had come upon so far" because "he had not meditated over it" (56). Kurtz's last disciple, the Russian, worships at the temple of Kurtz's words, unable to see the difference between "illusion and reality" (Geddes, 566), between false and true heroism, between false and true work.

Conrad defines "a remarkable man" through the contrasts between true and false work, and between Marlow and Kurtz. Bereft of the guideposts of society and public opinion, both Marlow and Kurtz are faced with the same temptations of succumbing to the fascination of the abomination, the wilderness within and without, but it is Marlow who endures, through his view of himself manifested in his work ethic. Although some characters and critics believe that Kurtz, during his final moment, meets the criteria of "remarkable", Marlow's undying fidelity to a conception of duty and therefore of mankind makes him even more remarkable than Kurtz.

Again, Conrad's view of the work ethic is more complex than Carlyle's. Even the simple labourer should not work at just anything. Duty must be informed by a sustaining, "deliberate belief" (37). When Marlow encounters "truth stripped of its cloak of time" (37), the "wild and passionate uproar" (37) with which he feels a remote kinship, he is offered the choice of "go[ing] ashore for a howl and a dance" (37) to participate in the primeval, or of working. Marlow opts for work, and learns, as Kurtz in his existential freedom must also discover, that because "the mind of man is capable of anything, because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future" (37), man needs more than mere principle which he defines as "pretty rags--rags that would fly off at the first good shake" (37). In order to maintain a sense of self or equilibrium in the midst of nightmare, "fine sentiments" are not enough. Man needs "a deliberate belief" (37), which is, in Marlow terms, an inner conviction about himself and his purpose in life which he obtains from God, by doing His work in the world. This deliberate belief, along

with purposeful action, defines man's relationship to the world. His power to counter the reality he finds, and to establish the grounds for meaningful action, comes, Lange notes, "from his own sense of self" (209); his voice which "cannot be silenced" (HD, 37) stems from undertaking backbreaking work in the world:

A man is . . . someone who cultivates the self-knowledge which comes through devotion to "obscure, backbreaking work". What such work yields a man is a presence which emanates in a "voice" whose speech is truly human, and therefore unable to be silenced. That it cannot be silenced, Marlow concludes, stems from the fact that it derives its authority not from chimeras . . . but from something real . . . it is a compelling sense of his own reality and voice, a private conviction of purpose born out of fidelity to the modest lessons gleaned from actual work in the world, which permits Marlow to exercise restraint. (Lange, 203)

In contrast to the characteristics of a remarkable man, Kurtz, as we have mentioned, exhibits those of economic man or the hollow man. Because Kurtz's work and his words are only shams which do not connect with the ideals he proclaims, because he is merely a "man of fine sentiments", but not of a sincere belief, he lacks selfhood. He exhibits the "unbounded power of eloquence, of words--of burning noble words" (51), but his words are "mouthing pretense" (MS, 7). He is a man without faith or conviction: He is an actor, taking on roles: "He could get himself to believe anything--anything" (74), which means, of course, that he does not really believe in anything: he is "a tree swayed by the wind" (52). His eloquence is therefore unbounded in a negative sense, because it fails to define any limits to man's power or any conviction of human identity. For Marlow and Conrad, Kurtz's words are not connected with anything; neither himself nor humanity. I believe that only in his last cry does Kurtz redeem himself and define an ethical belief. Conrad shows in Kurtz that words as well as work have redemptive power if they are used to define a moral identity, a "human

reality" (344), which is what Donald Benson says Marlow is questing for in the heart of darkness.

Kurtz is an example of what happens to men who do "not share in the burden of toil" (Wiley, 79) and who also do not believe in God. Rejecting these realities, which are restraints against man's succumbing to the darkness within and without, Kurtz, Marlow says, goes mad: "His soul was mad" (68). The Russian agrees, when he says of Kurtz that "he forgot himself" (57). Instead of "humanizing, improving, and instructing" (33), instead of being the heroic light-bearer of progress, Kurtz projects himself as an all-powerful white God--"he had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" (50); "descend[ing] below the savage" (McLauchlan, 13) in his attempt to become a white God. Marlow sees him "crawling on all fours", and engaging in "unspeakable" rites and ceremonies where human sacrifices are offered up to him. In this view of Kurtz, "pure, uncomplicated savagery" is "a positive relief" (59) to Marlow.

But Kurtz's final redemption out of "his impenetrable darkness" (70) also suggests that he does ultimately attain self-knowledge. "The animated image of death carved out of old ivory" succeeds in what Marlow believes is a transcendence of his former self, and, through his sincere "expression of some sort of belief" (72) ("The horror! The horror!" (71)), achieves a "moral victory" (72); he sheds the "clothes" of economic man, and truly becomes "a remarkable man" (72).

Significantly, many critics link Kurtz's victory to the work ethic: like Marlow's "hard-won gospel of selfless work" (Zak, 12), Kurtz's victory is also "hard won", "paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions" (72). Zak comments that Kurtz's struggle with his soul is "clearly related to the principle from which the work ethic itself derives its effectiveness":

In his dying words, Kurtz, as to a degree, Marlow had in work, 'finds himself': he defines his limits and becomes

meaningful to himself and Marlow for the first time only in his separation from the primeval through consciousness."  
(15)

Like Marlow who is unsatisfied with the unredeemed reality of the Congo and who determines to counter this nightmare with God's view that defines humanity in a moral vision, Kurtz's final cry suggests to Marlow that Kurtz too, affirms the moral view of humanity and the universe. He pronounces "a judgment on the adventures of his soul on this earth" (71). Previously, he paid only lip-service to his values, but as Berthoud notes, Kurtz finally sees in a "rending flash" his values connected with his life, revealing it to be a "'darkness' . . . [his] words . . . are no longer merely pronounced, but meant" (59). Similarly, Tretheway says that this experience is one which "conclusively . . . engages his innermost self": Kurtz's hypocrisy is gone: "he means what he says; his language and meaning are one" (107).

Levin claims that Kurtz was not hollow to begin with, but came to be so from the values he professed, "the European philosophies that have formed his mind (440)". Seen in this light, Kurtz's victory takes on an heroic aspect: though he has sunk to the depths of depravity, and the wilderness has wasted his body, the essence of his soul still survives, and by "regaining a human vantage point from which to judge and to condemn this unrestraint" (Benson, 346), his moral essence triumphs over the darkness it has created. It is this human essence that Marlow is seeking, and which Benson says, "is itself a point of faith" (344). As Carlyle proclaims in Sartor Resartus, though the "Genius of Mechanism smothers him worse than any Nightmare did" (SR, 167), "there is an Infinite in man, which . . . he cannot quite bury under the Finite" (SR, 144), and ultimately, this heroic essence will triumph. This is why, even though Marlow does not worship Kurtz, he affirms a kind of solidarity with Kurtz: "I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own

voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal" (72).

Though we could go on at length about Hopwood's contention that Kurtz can be seen as "a sardonic sketch of Carlyle himself" (168), it seems to me that the more important route is the one which links the conclusion of Heart of Darkness to Conrad's theme of work, solidarity, and the cohesion of society. Through his final trial, Marlow achieves a greater perception than Kurtz does at his death. Marlow realizes that he must once again be the upholder of civilized norms against the onslaught of the dark side of human nature, mirrored in Kurtz's words, "the horror."

Even though he claims Kurtz won a moral victory, Marlow is still confronted with a dilemma which suggests Marlow's own struggle to believe. According to Marlow, Kurtz's final words, "the horror" suggest another, darker meaning: "no eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity" (68). We must agree with Berthoud that Kurtz's cry also suggests "a verdict against human life" (59), a pronouncement on the depravity of man. Indeed, his words, "the horror", can also be seen as a pronouncement on the ultimate value of human action and of life: "he had summed up--he had judged" (71). In Kurtz's proclamation of "his debasement, failure, and hatred" (McLauchlan, 11) as a universal, Marlow is once again confronted with a challenge to his faith. Nevertheless, he determines to carry on. Although he cannot explain his reasons (74), he goes to see Kurtz's Intended to "surrender personally all that remained of him [Kurtz]" (74).

Marlow's hesitations suggest that he is still trying to overcome the challenge of Kurtz's words, "the horror." When he returns to the sepulchral city, the vision of Kurtz in his degraded aspect returns to Marlow and haunts him: "I had a vision of him on a stretcher, opening

his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (74). The vision of the horror now lives in Marlow:

he lived as much as he had ever lived--a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities . . . the vision seemed to enter the house with me--the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart--the heart of a conquering darkness. (74-75)

Confronted with this darkness of imagination within himself, Marlow, in his encounter with the Intended in the sepulchral city, undergoes the test which will either affirm or deny his fidelity to a redeeming view of Kurtz, humanity and civilization, as well as his own fidelity to the unselfish idea of good service. Marlow must realize that perfect manhood means facing one's own darkness, and the limits of one's own conception of selfhood, which for Marlow is largely that of the hero, holding "back the wilderness for the salvation of another soul" (75). The fact that he takes up the challenge suggests that he is still fueled by hope, which is the underlying essence of all labour in the world.

The encounter with the Intended involves the lie. The lie itself is distasteful to Marlow--"there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies" (27), which seems to put him in the category of the flabby devils and hollow pretenders in the Congo. Marlow had initially disdained Kurtz because, in his inability to connect his words with his actions, he became "little more than a voice" (49). But what Marlow also learns from Kurtz's cry is that the voice, expressing a sincere conviction, can mitigate the darkness. Marlow realizes he has to be a creative artist and "hold back the wilderness for the salvation of another soul" (75). As Joffe notes, though Marlow "compromises and violates his ethic of honesty, [he discovers] . . . the need to support positive illusions of shared values which will enable those in the metropolitan society to live in some form of communal harmony" (88).



Just as Marlow's work, which is only "surface truth" and provisional, mitigates "the inner truth, which is hidden--luckily" (34), so too is Marlow's art, his lie, a surface truth, "a heroic and poetic clothing on the surface", a clothing which sustains the human spirit along the journey of life. In fact, Marlow's lie is his admission of limitation and what Watt calls "a constrained choice" (243), because there is nothing else Marlow could do, given the circumstances. In the Intended's cry, "I want--something--something--to--to live with" (79), Marlow recognizes a human need, and therefore chooses the words which will sustain the Intended's belief in the essential nobility of Kurtz, a view of Kurtz which she worships. Instead of telling her that Kurtz's last words were: "the horror!", Marlow says: "The last word he pronounced was--your name" (79). Marlow's words, like his work, are actions which are barriers against the meaningless vision of the universe and of humankind. His words are a coming-to-terms with dual realities existing simultaneously--the negative vision of humanity, and the opposing claims of civilized norms, solidarity and a woman's undying fidelity. He chooses the latter, but once again, Conrad suggests that Marlow finally must be helped to affirm solidarity.

Marlow's encounter with the Intended and his compassionate revision of the truth reveals Conrad's notion of solidarity: men and women working together to uphold the ideal view of humanity and civilization. Although Marlow might have capitulated to the negative vision of humanity, he is saved from this demoralizing view through the Intended, who re-interprets Kurtz for both Marlow and the reader. But it is not the Intended's view of Kurtz's nobility, his vast plans, his greatness as a speaker and worker for civilization that sparks Marlow's sympathy and final disclosure. Rather, what makes Marlow participate in the Intended's vision and affirm solidarity with her, are the Intended's claims to know "him [Kurtz] best" (76) and her vision of Kurtz's essential loneliness and common humanity at the point of his death.

Also, the Intended's undying, if naive, fidelity, inspires Marlow's participation, because, as Berthoud notes,

[it] is an illusion, because it is contradicted by the facts; yet it is not unreal, for it is held with all the force of a truly unselfish conviction. It serves to keep alive, in the darkness of Marlow's experience of actuality, the light of visionary purpose." (63)

Marlow, bolstered by the Intended's "unextinguishable light of belief and love" (76), and seeing Kurtz from the Intended's view, alone and at the point of death, with "nobody to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps nobody to hear" (78), is persuaded to affirm belief also, erecting a voice of compassion as a barrier against the chaos and meaninglessness. In the face of these he is the artist who constructs a redeeming fact: the lie.

Marlow's lie, then, is both an affirmation of his faith in Kurtz's moral triumph and of the Intended's belief in Kurtz's nobility, but it is important to note that Marlow needs the Intended's "light of belief and love" in order to affirm his faith and his belief in humanity. Significantly, the fact that the Intended and Marlow still cherish "undying hope" to the "end and even beyond" suggests that this light, however fragile, which shows the victory of humanity over the darkness within and without, will prevail as long as men and women defend and uphold it. The Intended's belief produces in Marlow a "hope" which was previously "utterly inconceivable" (NLL, 13-14) to Marlow in his pessimistic frame of mind.

Responding to the Intended's truth, Marlow feels "infinite pity" (78), and is compelled to fill the darkness not with the voice of division or untempered knowledge, which is what his knowledge of Kurtz in its darker aspect suggests, but with the voice of compassion and understanding. Unlike Gould in Nostromo, or the later Carlyle, Marlow is not a man with a fixed idea about what the world should be like. He realizes that his ideal conception of himself does not quite hold true

in the modern world, but it is this very realization which makes him heroic in that his knowledge of his own fallibility impells him to behave humanely toward others. Unlike the imperialists, and to a certain degree Carlyle, who believed they were God's Chosen People called to wean "those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (12), Marlow, like Conrad, points out that we are all imperfect, we all exist in a condition of ignorance, "which is the condition of humanity" ("Tradition", NLL, 194). Work will overcome everything except man's fallen condition.

Nineteenth-century man's and Marlow's claim to full knowledge is also contradicted by other truths, and the Intended's claim: "I knew him best (76)" shows us the importance of the other side of the argument to the survival of the human spirit. "And perhaps she did (76)," Marlow concedes, surrendering the negative view of Kurtz, and instead bowing before the "faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion--the unextinguishable light of belief and love (76-77)." Through Marlow's renunciation of the negative view, Conrad suggests the duty of all humanity to bow before this light of belief and love.

In contrast to Carlyle, who eventually becomes discouraged by the state of affairs of men and society, abandoning both hope and compassion to notions of military rule, Marlow realizes that one should never give up hope, and that, in fact, it is man's duty to love his fellow man in the belief that although men are ignorant and stray from the right course, they and their society are not intrinsically evil. As Marlow himself realizes, Kurtz is also partially the victim of an ideology: "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (50), as it did to the making of the Russian, the Intended, and Marlow himself. Men and women are partially products of the age, conditioned by the fears and hopes of the times.

In addition to his heroic acts of will in the Congo, Marlow thus succeeds as artist, sustaining not only both his own and the Intended's

redeeming view of humanity, but producing, through his narrative, a change in the narrator's vision. Initially, the first narrator, like the early Carlyle, has an idealistic view of the civilizing mission, believing that its goal is to bring glory to the "Knights" who bring "light" to the dark places of the earth (or who civilize). In the end, however, the narrator sees that the waterway "Leading to the uttermost ends of the earth . . . seem[s] to lead into the heart of an immense darkness (79)". The effect of Marlow's art on his audience suggests that it is still possible to alter the vision of destruction in the Congo, but that this can only be achieved by rigorous examination of ourselves and our motives--by a journey into our own "hearts of darkness"--where we will learn what is at hand to do. If men have created the horror of the Congo, cannot they alter it? "If Clothes 'so tailorize and demoralize us', have they no redeeming value; can they not be altered to serve better?" (SR. 45) asks Carlyle, and Conrad, through Marlow, leaves the reader wondering the same thing. The final lines of Heart of Darkness give hope, because they suggest that time and the sharing of personal stories will produce more people of conscience like Marlow. Conrad's optimism on this point is in sharp contrast to Carlyle's ultimate despair.

In spite of this difference, it is clear that there are similarities between Conrad's and Carlyle's work ethic, especially in The Nigger of the Narcissus and in Heart of Darkness. Even though Conrad and Carlyle both see the threat to civilization embodied in the hollow men, both also underline the necessity of undertaking faithful service and working "in the right direction" (SR, 99), according to the Divine Pattern. Like Carlyle in Past and Present, Conrad urges his readers to fulfill self and society through productive labour, in order to counter and overcome the abyss within and without; and to make meaningful moral connections with our fellow man, whether in the role of the Captain of Industry, the Artist-Hero, or the Worker. Both believe

in the sanctity and viability of brotherhood, in organic community (at least, the early Carlyle does), and in humanity's duty to work toward creating a world based on the Divine Pattern.

Conrad, however, having lived through the autocratic regime of Russia, stresses ultimately that work must be imbued with humane qualities. He never fails to stress these qualities, nor does he advocate subordinating the individual's life to that of a mechanistic order. What Henry James calls Marlow's "noble sociability of vision" (347), his commitment to the "solidarity of all mankind in simple ideas and sincere emotions" ("Author's Note", Chance, 10), is not only revealed in Marlow's sympathy for the oppressed, but also in his devotion to the idea of work selflessly undertaken for the good of the "ship under one's care", or symbolically, for humanity and therefore, for civilization. Marlow's work testifies to his belief in the human enterprise. As "master of . . . illusions" (The Nature of a Crime, 66) or artist, Marlow recognizes and fulfills his responsibility to create redeeming truths in order to uplift the human spirit to the vision of the Ideal Truth. Conrad challenges the artist to exercise responsibility toward his art, his fellow humans and the earth, for his art is a God-given trust. For Conrad, a civilized man has great qualities of craftsmanship, endurance, courage, loyalty, and restraint. Above all, as we see by Marlow's deliberate lie, a civilized man attempts to see the other side of the argument, and to exercise pity and compassion.

Like Carlyle's view of redeeming labour, Marlow's words and works are bulwarks against despair, nihilism, and the vision of nothingness. Indeed, Marlow can be seen as Christ-like in his compassion which redeems the sins of mankind, the Intended's naivete, and Kurtz's megalomania, a compassion which is obtained through a knowledge of human depravity which almost destroys him.

Marlow succeeds in upholding the "light of visionary purpose" through his selfless work in the world, and this work, ultimately, attests to his belief in his fellow man and in human progress in wisdom and self-knowledge (under the right guidance). The one "act of faith" which Conrad requires from the artist is the "cherishing of an undying hope, and hope . . . implies all the piety of effort and renunciation" ("Books", NLL, 8). Fidelity to the "idea" through productive work in the world is a manifestation of belief that the fragile "light of belief and love" (76) will prevail over the negative view of humanity. Marlow's belief in the "idea" is challenged throughout his journey down the Congo, but unlike Kurtz, he does not acquiesce in a pessimistic vision. Instead, he combats it through selfless actions. Like Carlyle's soldier who must "give his life away", Marlow discovers that the "choking nightmare" vision of the universe "will choke us no longer" (PP, 41-42), that it is possible to maintain a stable equilibrium, "an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature, and the seductive corruption of men--backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts . . . " (LJ, 43).

One might argue that if Conrad portrays all Europe as a whited sepulchre, and if it is Europe which has created the Congo, then the dream of social progress seems even less a reality for Conrad than it is for Carlyle. But although Conrad seems skeptical of man's national progress, we have to look at the part of Conrad's philosophy in which he looks toward the vision of "the time of concord". Both Conrad and Carlyle are more concerned with stressing the importance of the struggle than the ultimate victory. Each, however, at least hints at the possibility of eventual triumph. Carlyle speaks of the "Heroic Promised Land" which the workers will create under the leadership of the Captains of Industry, and the pessimism of Conrad's assertion that "the architectural aspect of the universal city remains as yet inconceivable"

(NLL, 107) [my italics] contains the seed of hope in the qualifier, "as yet".

Unlike Carlyle, who becomes isolated in his fight against the evils of democracy and a laissez-faire morality, Conrad never loses faith in his conviction that the community of belief acts as a barrier against despair by creating mutual encouragement for hope and faith. Uncle Bobrowski encourages his "Panie Bracie", Conrad, concerning his Congo journey, when he writes: ". . . let us live in hope in spite of the proverb that 'hope is the mother of fools'--for without it even the wisest of men couldn't survive: Let us then be fools, but let us live and hope!" (Conrad's Polish Background, 130-31). Similarly, Marlow and the Intended give each other hope. In Conrad's eyes, man's duty, on perceiving the real horror epitomized by the life of Kurtz, is to counter it through good works, love and fellowship, in a rejection of Carlyle's later advocacy of despotic regimes which have no concern for the inner life of the individual. Marlow hopes his words are not words of "careless contempt" (72), but words which, like his work, invest life with meaning, purpose, and humanity, thus creating a "shelter . . . of light and order which is our refuge" (LJ, 313) and our only "formula of peace" in a world at war.

## Notes

1. The later Carlyle, however, disillusioned because his theory of progress was not generally accepted, lost faith and advocated military rule by the elite.

2. Achebe contends that Conrad sets up "Africa as a foil to Europe, a place of negations . . . in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (783).

3. Significantly, this episode (among others previously discussed) refutes Achebe's claims that Conrad uses Africa "as a setting and backdrop that eliminates the African as human factor" (788).

4. This episode refutes Achebe's argument that Conrad is a "bloody racist", because here, as elsewhere, he shows that so-called savages can act with honour and restraint, and that in fact (as Conrad writes to Casement), the "black man shares with us the consciousness of the universe in which we live--no small burden . . . (Polish Perspectives, 29). So, even though there may be an argument, as Daleski notes, that Marlow had initially "assumed that the civilized man has the inborn strength to restrain himself and the savage . . . lacks it" (65), ultimately we can agree with Arneson, who, referring to Kurtz's unrestraint, argues that even "savagery is more civilized than what imperialism unleashes" (426), and Marlow quickly comes to this realization as he progresses on his nightmare journey down the heart of darkness.



### Chapter Three

#### Progress and the Betrayal of Self and Society in Nostromo

In turning to Conrad's Nostromo, I intend to show his growing pessimism concerning the possibilities of human community, moral growth and social and political achievement. Unlike his view of Marlow in Heart of Darkness, Conrad gives us a bleaker picture of humanity and its leaders. Marlow in Heart of Darkness at least attempts to uphold civilized norms and the virtues of fidelity, courage, and restraint. Hope for the future stems from noble and humane service to humanity, but most characters (with the exception of Mrs. Gould, Linda, and to a certain degree, Monygham) in Nostromo neglect the values of honourable labour and solidarity between men and women. Instead of becoming remarkable human beings through their undying devotion to ideals, many of them betray both their ideals and themselves to "the wrong way of going to work", the wrong standards of conduct.

Conrad's history of Costaguana, by its ironic and circular narrative, suggests that there is no progress, no rational order in a world where men are propelled into action by illusions which are self-serving and ultimately self-defeating. There seems to be no way out of the circle of degradation and endless changes in political power.

The new Sulacan state at the end, Spatt argues, that it is the result of a human nature which puts material interests before humanity:

one begins to realize, as one is drawn ever deeper into the fictional image that is Costaguana, just how little progress is made when one imposes order on chaos, capitalism on feudalism. At the conclusion of Nostromo, some ten or more years after the revolutionary victory of technological interests, the electric lights of modernity illuminate only the domain of the rich: the mine, the docks, the Calle de la Constitution. In the struggle against the greatest oppressor, man, no one can prevail (41).

Marlow's work ethic reveals that true work must be informed by unselfish service to humanity, and that all people must work to create an organic community. In Nostromo, however, many individuals become great oppressors and destroyers of the organic community of love and belief, because, more often than not, neither their ideas nor their work are based on a concern for the whole of humanity. Instead of uniting all mankind in a "feeling of unavoidable solidarity" ("Preface", xlii) many characters, such as Gould and later, Nostromo, are concerned with ideals of fidelity and duty only insofar as they can serve their own ends, their own ideas of greatness and self-sufficiency. Nostromo, like Heart of Darkness, is a comment on corrupt motivation and its results for the human family and the organic community. Many people bring corrupted ideas to the public arena, and thus, corruption is institutionalized and divides men from each other, whereas true progress for Conrad is based on humanity's genuine concern for the causes of moral growth (inner transformation) and the organic community.

Through his portrait of Costaguana, Conrad asks: what moral progress has man achieved? Does he even know what morality is, or has he, in striving to create a world based on his ideas of what that world should be, betrayed both himself and his community to a false idea? Like Stein in Lord Jim, Conrad sees man as the "master of illusions", creating and following his own dream of a world, but unlike Stein, he does not advocate following the dream usque ad finem, because he believes that anything man does individually ought to benefit humanity. If the dream fails in this ultimate task, as Gould's does, history shows that it will be overturned by yet another dream of ushering in a new era in human history, as Monygham notes at the end of Nostromo: "Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back" (511).

In the person of Nostromo, we see the price of progress in human terms. The naive Nostromo pays the price for his unthinking vanity and concern for reputation. Echoing Bobrowski's command concerning humble service and duty to the group, Nostromo is Conrad's portrayal of a "man of the People" ("Author's Note", xlvi), "a model of perfection . . . the incarnation of the courage, the fidelity, the honour of the people" (515). Indeed, he is the hero of the novel, "Gian' Battista", a forerunner of Christ. His task involves delivering the people from the unruly mobs, and getting his people to work dutifully. Nostromo, at the beginning, exists in an unconscious state; as Decoud notes, he makes no distinction between "thinking and acting" (246). However, when he realizes how he has betrayed both himself and his family in seeking to preserve his public reputation, he undergoes a kind of dazed enlightenment, realizing that somehow his character has been betrayed. Although, as Fleishman suggests, Nostromo, in attributing his betrayal to the rich, can be seen as representative of the growing class consciousness of the Proletariat, Conrad's major concern is with Nostromo as an individual, with his suffering, guilt, and knowledge of his own responsibility for the betrayal of himself and others. Though Nostromo is ultimately corrupted by the silver, he still retains a heroic dignity, because we know "the fellow has tried ("Preface", NN, 148)" to overcome his bondage to moral corruption.

What is intimated by the triumph of Nostromo's "genius" over the gulf tinged with darkness is that, in a world where material interests threaten to crush the human spirit, fidelity to the ideal view of the individual will enable the human community to survive. Mainly through the undying fidelity of the women characters (and Monygham), who guard the positive conception of mankind, and obversely, through Decoud's suicide, Conrad intimates that a belief in humanity's goodness is the only way to achieve progress. Unlike Decoud, whose cynical railing against the motives of mankind exhibits his hollowness, Conrad affirms

the necessity for man to believe in himself, in others, and in the possibility of a better order, in the face of pessimism, despair, ignorance, and death--a belief that eventually, the "big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver" (566) will clear the horizon after the storm. We realize in Nostromo that the possibility of a better order lies in the future, and that fact opens the possibility for beneficial change and growth in human understanding. There is not, however, the slightest chance for individual, political and social improvement unless men and women act honourably, courageously, and according to strict moral discipline, in the spirit of self-sacrifice and solidarity. Nevertheless, even though men may not live up to the "ideal, Conrad nonetheless affirms the validity of ideals themselves, seeing in them our only hope of . . . progress" (Cousineau, 27). Conrad affirms the source of this possibility for beneficial change through the few characters who survive and work to make the "light of belief and love" (HD, 76) shine on the morally darkened world around them.

All the major characters advocate ideas for political and social progress, but the text indicates that political and social institutions can never be a means of progress unless humankind's heart is transformed. The modern temper which believes in the concomitant progress of the outward appearances of society and the moral betterment of the inner individual is sadly mistaken. Leo Gurko says that Conrad believes that the lack of political and social progress stems directly from human nature:

Conrad did not believe in the liberal conscience or in the improvability of institutions as such; to him, these were the reflections not of some manoeverable machine but of human nature. As long as human nature was unchanged, it was fruitless to change institutions; change alone would not bring improvement, though it was part of the modern temper to think so. (139)

In Nostromo, the constant recurrence of revolution is a manifestation of humanity's inability to bring about a better order,

both inner and outer, from its own ideas. In fact, most characters in the novel still exist in a state of moral and political immaturity. They live in their own isolated perceptions of themselves, and as a result are imprisoned by their limited perceptions. These limited perceptions and their harmful effects can be seen as another force against the idea of community.

Furthermore, the imperialists depicted in this novel reduce true Christian morality to "the morality of success" (386). As Conrad notes in "The Crime of Partition": "Progress is a great moral adventure as its leaders and chiefs know very well in their hearts, and in such an enterprise the victims do not count" (NLL, 118). The idea of progress as an historical faith in the manifestation and the ultimate triumph of the Divine Will in history, which is the idea of progress in its original form, is reduced to the idea of progress as the triumph of material interests, which will somehow bring about moral progress.

Benita Parry comments on the moral inadequacy of the imperialists' aims:

The theoretical project that contrived to invest the pursuit of economic interests with spiritual attributes by decreeing worldly achievement a sacred obligation, the creation of wealth a moral duty and domination of the world the performance of God's work, is displayed in the fiction as intellectually untenable and morally reprehensible. (113-114)

When we look at Gould's proposal, we can see that he has perverted the Christian view of man's quest in life, which is to "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). Instead, Gould's idea is to "Seek first material interests and the Kingdom of God will be added to you": as a Captain of Industry, he is trying to achieve moral triumph through materialism, and not as Carlyle would have had it, through striving to create an organic community:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security.  
Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to

material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing , and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterward. That's your ray of hope. (84)

Conrad does not object to the ideals of "law, good faith, order, and security", as we have seen in Heart of Darkness, but he does object to the illogical faith Gould places in the mine as an agent of moral progress and order.

Fleishman calls Gould Conrad's "deepest probing of the Captain of Industry's soul" (163). Initially, Gould possesses some admirable qualities: his desire to rehabilitate the mine is potentially admirable. "'I simply could not have touched the mine for money alone,'" he tells his wife. He is fired in his efforts by "the supreme illusion of love (82)", which can conquer the earth, and his statements about making the mine a centre of security, peace, and prosperity express noble sentiments. The mine is to become "a defence of the commonest decencies of organized society" (365).

But Conrad, through the action, shows us the enormous price Gould pays for his success with the mine. The notion that "Gould is not morally and psychologically degenerated by the problems of keeping the mine inviolable" (Krajke, 262) seems to me untenable. Gould suffers mentally when he realizes that he must compromise principle and moral identity to keep the mine in power: "he suffered too much in his fellowship in evil" (407), especially with Hernandez the outlaw. Realizing fully the moral implications of his own behaviour, he nevertheless sacrifices his moral scruples to the preservation of the mine.

Significantly, Gould achieves considerably less in the way of wisdom and self-knowledge through labour than Marlow does in Heart of Darkness. In Nostromo, Conrad shows definitively that mechanical,

robot-like efficiency is not enough to sustain the soul of the individual or of the organic community.

Gould's small growth in wisdom comes to nothing. Although he attains a certain self-knowledge in the realization that he has "something of an adventurer's easy morality" (365), this does not make him turn back from possessing the mine. Increasingly, as the novel develops, he acquiesces in the knowledge of his own moral degeneracy, and in the end, he ceases to exist apart from the mine: he is always either "coming from the mountain" or "off to the mountain" (112). The mine, instead of being the "inviolable sanctuary" that he desires it to be, becomes instead his jailer, "consuming and burning" up his soul. As Armstrong notes, "Gould seems increasingly demonic as his devotion to the mine becomes fanatical" (8). Instead of using his power constructively, he becomes like the "impious adventurers" (5) of the Azuera peninsula, who perpetually stand guard over the treasure. He is an apostate to the Christian faith, and to the values of self-sacrificial duty and fidelity to humankind which Conrad advocates through Marlow in Heart of Darkness.

We can further see that Gould's motivations for opening the mine are not based on the principles he had elucidated, but are, in fact, a cover for his self-concern, and the public reputation of his family. He is motivated not by a love of community, but by individual interest. His is also a kind of ancestor-worship, seen in his pathological desire to re-establish the Gould name, after the mine had sapped the life from his father. Rejecting his father's warning against touching the Gould Concession, Gould turns the mine into a symbol for the resurrection of his father's reputation, feeling bound to rehabilitate the mine, and "make it a moral success" (66). Gould brings this consoling illusion of triumph over death through material interests and human self-sufficiency into the fray of Costaguana politics and life. His operation, however, is doomed from the start because he has disobeyed his father's edict

and, like Adam and Eve, brought down the curse of destruction on himself and his family. In effect, Gould disobeys his father to follow the "immense occult influence" (117) of the mine. As Mrs. Gould notes at the end, it is a "terrible success for the last of the Goulds" (522). What ensues is the triumph of the barren "religion of silver and iron" (71), symbolized by the mine, over the human essence of Gould:

but she saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirits of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. (522)

Mrs. Gould says Gould is "perfect" (521) in his role as industrialist-ruler-hero, but his fanatical version of the work-ethic has, she knows, blinded him to his true value as a human being, and rendered their marriage sterile. Gould's seed is turned into "a stream of silver and his offspring a lump of silver" (Schwarz, 40). His devotion to the mine constitutes a conjugal betrayal, as all of Gould's energies, including the sexual, go into the operations of the mine. Conrad suggests that Gould's fidelity to his illusion of success is a betrayal of humanity, including his own.

Gould "falls a victim to the impersonal logic of material interests and in the end is a slave of his silver, not by avarice, not by vanity, certainly not vanity in any simple sense, but because has lost love to the enormous abstraction of his historical role" (Warren, 367). As Warren suggests, human love (the Gould marriage) is a potentially saving alternative to possession by heretical faiths. Gould must stoop for his weapons and becomes a victim of the politics of the mine, and of his own weakness for power, because he lacks an identity free from his public role.

In the person of Emilia, Conrad stresses that the only sense of order available to man in a revolutionary and chaotic world is within the love bond: "over against the abstractions she sets up the human



community, the sense of human solidarity in understanding and warmth and kindness outside the historical process" (Warren, 367). Conrad notes that Mrs. Gould has a sympathetic "intuition" (560):

she was able to appreciate the great worth of the people.  
She saw the man under the silent, sad-eyed beast of burden.  
(89)

"Exemplify[ing] the wisdom of the heart" (Berthoud, 129), Mrs. Gould's giving nature is able to elicit the loyalty of Monygham. Her devotion to ideals helps him avoid the cynical attitude about mankind brought about by his loss of self-respect at the hands of Father Beron; he is finally willing to sacrifice his life for her, as we see when Sotillo attempts to take over Sulaco.

Although Mrs. Gould is a force for community and love, she cannot save Gould from his fanatical obsession with the mine ["nothing but dynamite shall be allowed to dislodge it from there (206)"], or prevent him from sacrificing their marriage and love itself (which is to Conrad "the supreme illusion"). Eventually, the mine creates a wall between Mrs. Gould and her husband:

[initially, the mine] had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. (222)

Monygham angrily disparages the reasons for Gould's infidelity:

Was it for this that her life had been robbed of all the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe? (512)

Whereas Marlow's work allows him the chance to find himself and to realize the qualities that make up a "remarkable human being", Conrad only grants individual progress to Mrs. Gould in the form of tragic

vision. This fact shows us a development toward greater pessimism in Conrad's view about humanity's potential for moral progress.

Although Mrs. Gould pays for her initial belief in Gould's type of progress, and ends disillusioned and bitter, her progress in wisdom and self-knowledge is, as Bennett notes, a kind of "tragic awareness" (84). It is heroic in the sense that she becomes more fully aware of how blind she was previously to the amorality of their view of success.

At first, Mrs. Gould too shares Gould's youthful idea of adventure and excitement. She, like Gould, once held up the mine as a scheme of salvation:

by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle. (107)

But she finally realizes that no progress or order comes out of material interests if they sacrifice love and community in the process. Mrs. Gould's fairy-tale illusion that her "young ideal of life, of love, of work" (522) will be fulfilled through the success of the San Tome mine is brought crashing down. Conrad portrays her as "a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by a withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic (522)". She is also portrayed as being plunged into "the painful dream (522)", symbolizing the captivity of love by the merciless nightmare world of material interests:

The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passively in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words--"Material interests." (522)

Material interests have not brought Gould and Mrs. Gould closer, but have resulted in their total and complete emotional, physical, and intellectual separation.

As we have noted above, what contributes to the destruction of the moral view of man and of community is humanity's obsession with material interests. Conrad once wrote to Bendz that the silver is the hero of the novel: "Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale" (Aubrey, 296). Indeed, it is the blinding, artificial light that keeps men and women under its spell, until it finally crushes them spiritually or physically. The episode of the lighter laden with silver and its disastrous effect on two men show Conrad's view of the silver as indifferent to humanity's fate.

The lighter episode reveals most tellingly the plight of humanity existing in a nightmarish world void of progress or order. Unlike Marlow's heroic efforts, this episode suggests no possibilities about humanity's capacity to overcome the darkness within and without. The plight of Decoud and Nostromo, enveloped in darkness, unable to tell whether they are even moving, adrift, is emblematic of human life given over to "material interests". At the opening of the novel, we are given a description of the gulf:

At night the body of clouds advancing higher up the sky smothered the whole quiet gulf below with an impenetrable darkness . . . The eye of God Himself--they add with grim profanity--could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there; and you would be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness. (6-7)

The Gulf, exemplifying nature, is oblivious to humanity, and this fact makes the need for human solidarity paramount, because only the human community can be moved to attach importance to humanity. In the lighter, Decoud and Nostromo are in total darkness. In this obscurity, they cannot tell where they are going. Nostromo cries to Heaven on "this blind gulf" (269). Decoud asks: "Do we move at all, Capataz?" But action in the cause of material interests does not relieve the darkness. The action on the lighter, "the emblem of the common cause,

the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests" (260), shows us that material interests, are, like Nature, oblivious to humanity--they leave man in the void, both physically and spiritually, open to irrational forces, crises of identity, and to death. Significantly, identified with material interests, it is the silver that Decoud eventually puts around his neck; it is the silver which aids him in completing his suicide.

As Decoud's suicide and Gould's possession by the mine suggest, the blinding darkness is not confined to the Gulf, but is shared by men, who exist in a condition of ignorance, "which is the condition of humanity" (NLL, 194). H.M. Daleski notes that "Captain Mitchell is a representative figure, for he is said to be 'utterly in the dark though imagining himself to be in the thick of things' (112)--a condition even more strangely exemplified by the man who is really at the center of events (Gould)" (119). Moreover, as Juliet McLauchlan notes, light cannot break through the darkness of corruption:

Tiny gleams of light are inadequate to break through or dispel the darkness, and they are images for the inadequacy of all ideals and illusions by which in *Nostromo* men see and live. All are powerless to dispel the blindness and pervasive corruption (individual and collective). (16)

The San Tome mine keeps "a whole mountain ablaze like a lighted palace above the dark Campo" (485), but the light is the light of power, not of moral enlightenment; it is the triumph of Gould's illusions of grandeur at the expense of humanity.

The silver does not, as Gould hopes, constitute the building blocks for a secure and peaceful community. Although many men and women worship the mine because it gives them feelings of peace and security (something they did not have under the previous rulers), it is really a false security that they worship, because it has to be maintained in military fashion, a fact indicated by the language used to describe it; every time the silver is brought down from the mine, it is another

"victory in the conquest of peace for Sulaco" (115). And the train, another usher-in of progress, startles Decoud by its whistle resembling a "scream of warlike triumph" (172).

In spite of the energy implied by the war-like vocabulary, as I noted earlier, the narrative strategy suggests the futility of political action in Costaguana, the inadequacy of all men's ideas to effect order and progress. The orderly, rational account of events in Decoud's letter gives us a pessimistic view of human progress and regeneration in Costaguana. I shall argue, however, that while Conrad shares Decoud's skepticism about human progress, he refuses to endorse that skepticism. Instead, he suggests that it is itself an illusion, and that pure rationality will not bring about humanity's salvation.

As I argued earlier, Conrad is profoundly skeptical of the possibility of practical action bringing about human progress. Decoud shares this view. At one point, he observes that there has not been any progress in men's actions and ideas, only "high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption" (171), and he is equally pessimistic about the motives of his compatriots:

We have no political reason: we have political passions--sometimes: what is a conviction? A particular view of a personal advantage either practical or emotional. No one is a patriot for nothing. The word serves us well. (198)

Decoud's despair ultimately leads him to suicide, and here I think one can argue that Decoud's suicide reflects Conrad's repudiation of Decoud's despair.

Decoud's suicide is the result of isolation and a loss of faith in himself and others. Wiley calls Decoud "one of Conrad's greatest studies in the pathological effects of isolation for a civilized mentality lacking in self-knowledge" (105).

Although Decoud proclaims his disbelief in his fellow man in his "universal raillery" (153), he is not uncommitted to helping his fellow citizens. He is moved by both Jose's and Antonia's passionate belief:

He submitted to being embraced and talked to without a word. He was moved in spite of himself by that note of passion and sorrow unknown on the more refined stages of European politics. (156)

He helps to bring arms to Sulaco, and the new Sulacan state is initially his idea. While it may not be a perfect state, as Mitchell thinks it is, it is certainly better than the Guzman Bento regime, which, Langland observes, "represents a past and present history of unstable, greedy, corrupt and brutal governments" (369). Through these actions, Decoud regains a measure of dignity and thus, no longer feels "an idle cumberer of the earth" (257). Through his involvement in the community, Decoud refutes his own reasoning, that there is no redeeming value in human community or in political or social action.

Ultimately, then, while Conrad may share Decoud's skepticism about human progress, he does not share Decoud's despairing nihilism because, in Conrad's view, this is itself only a partial view of the human situation, and a construct of Decoud's own imagination once he is left alone on the island. Intellect will collapse in solitude: without belief in oneself and others, skepticism cannot exist as a state of being. In solitude, one goes a step beyond skepticism into complete unbelief:

Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief. (497)

When he is left alone with his thoughts, Decoud's soul is consumed by solitude because of his lack of faith in anything:

He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith. (498)

Decoud achieves a realization of "a misdirected life", "the first moral sentiment of his manhood" (498), but instead of overcoming his past failures (as Monygham attempts to), he succumbs to nihilism, and is swallowed up in the "immense indifference of things" (501), a mirror for his own "disillusioned weariness" (501).

The narrative commentary on Decoud's suicide indicates a belief in community as a unifying and stabilizing force on mankind. While nature itself is impersonal, society is not. As Fleishman says: "society, unlike nature, cares--or can care when it moves toward community" (178). Decoud lacks what for Conrad is man's only hope--faith both in oneself and in a community which works together for order and peace for all. Ultimately, Decoud's despair is nihilistic--he does not believe in social objectives; he does not believe that man has any good ideas for social reform, and, in his eyes, humanity is incapable of goodness. In Decoud's reasoning, both humanity and civilization are doomed to utter failure.

Nor can Decoud fill "the void" of his heart through his love for Antonia. Unable to believe in the power of love, the binding force of community, he dismisses his own feelings as "the supreme illusion of a lover" (189). These are in any case, very ambiguous, leaving the reader to wonder if he really loves Antonia, or whether he is acting on the need to master her:

I have only one aim in the world . . . this aim which, whether knowingly or not, I have always had in my heart--ever since the day when you snubbed me so horribly once in Paris, you remember. (179)

She makes him doubt the value and efficacy of his own intelligence and ironic outlook, but instead of admitting that his intelligence is not the sole component of his being, and that he needs her love to feel

whole, he deceives himself. Arnold Davidson says that, because she once criticized him, Decoud can regain his sense of stature only by conquering Antonia's "austere personality": "In short, Conrad suggests that even with Decoud, the cynical denouncer of other's self-deception, the self deceives itself in the shadow of a different self it pretends to be" (40). Indeed, Decoud's life, like Gould's, had been erected on his own illusion of his identity. But when Decoud thinks he knows most, he knows least of all. He holds up "intellect" as the only thing upon which to base a view of the progress of mankind. Gould pins his faith to material interests, but both neglect love and community, and implicitly, their own humanity.

The betrayal of love and the deterioration of community in the name of an idea are also shown in Nostromo and his relationship with his adoptive family, the Violas. Teresa believes that he wants "To be first somewhere--somehow--to be first with these English" (23). Indeed, as Winner remarks, Nostromo carries "the banner of progress" (44), and as Decoud notes of him, he is "the active usher in of the material implements of our progress" (191). He does fine work as the head of the Cargadores, and lives mostly on the adoration of the people, naively believing that his own loyal character is taken into account by the establishment in his dangerous attempt to help them get the silver to the northern steam ship.

But Nostromo's vanity, his treasuring of his reputation, blinds him to the truth of Teresa's statement that he is being used by the upper classes for their own interests: "Clearly he was one of those invaluable subordinates whom to possess is a legitimate cause of boasting" (44), muses Captain Mitchell. With the episode of the Gulf, Nostromo finally realizes that his fidelity has been betrayed, that he has betrayed himself and his own family.

Nostromo's betrayal is also a betrayal of part of his private identity, linked to his family ties to the Violas. Conrad calls love



"the strongest of illusions" (74), and Teresa calls fidelity to family "the supreme test" (256). Nostromo's knowledge of his failure to fetch a priest for Teresa--because he wants to save the silver instead--makes him aware that he must succeed, and he vows to make this "the most desperate affair" (268) of his life, in order to avoid Teresa's curse.

But although Nostromo's vanity and his failure of Teresa are evident, the narrative views him sympathetically as yet another victim of the silver mine and the inhuman logic of material interests. As Winner notes, "the account of Gian Battista's decline from the service of the state to the pursuit of self-interest that dominates the final quarter of the novel emphasizes pathetic waste rather than human hollowness" (50). Conrad retains the heroic view of Nostromo. In his Author's note, Conrad says that Nostromo always remains a man of the people:

Years later . . . listening in unmoved silence to anarchist speeches at the meeting, the enigmatical patron of the new revolutionary agitation, the trusted, the wealthy comrade Fidanza, with the knowledge of his moral ruin locked up in his breast, he remains essentially a man of the people.  
(xxi--xxiii)

Once the mission of the silver fails, Nostromo knows he "had been betrayed" (418). Fleishman suggests that this betrayal parallels the betrayal of the common people by selfish interests, that "Nostromo is to be understood as a symbol of class" (164). I believe, however, that Conrad is more concerned with the effects of the silver on individual character rather than on expounding any political doctrine.

As in Gould's case, once again the theme of obsession is related to material interests. Like Gould, Nostromo becomes a captive of the mine. He is also a captive of a fixed idea--that of revenge against his enemies. He declines his only hope for absolution (in Linda), just as Gould's fanatical obsession with the mine leads him away from Mrs. Gould and the community of love.

But unlike our attitude toward Gould, we have sympathy for the naive Nostromo, captured and betrayed by he knows not who. Like Gould, Nostromo suffers, but unlike Gould, who finally acquiesces to corruption and becomes devoid of feeling, Nostromo continues to suffer as he sees the progressive loss of his moral identity in his obsession with the silver. As Conrad says:

And he suffered most from the concentration of his thought upon the treasure . . . A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever. Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities were destroyed. (523)

With Nostromo's fate, Conrad suggests that progress in purely material interests cannot fill the void in the individual's heart. Nostromo's attachment to the silver, representing wealth and power, alienates him further and further from community as he rejects Viola's advice that instead of worshipping money, he sacrifice his own personal interests "for the love of all humanity" (32). Although Viola agrees that reputation is a great treasure, we see that even that treasure can become a kind of materialism if it makes one willing to stoop to any depth to preserve it.

Nostromo's knowledge is the knowledge of his guilt and sin in having abandoned a woman and a man in their extremity. The only remedy for a sin against the community is to confess it to the community. But Nostromo cannot do this because he fears a loss of status. When he attempts to confess to Viola, he discovers that Viola still sees him as his son and as the "incorruptible" Nostromo. Reluctant to lose Viola's esteem, Nostromo remains silent.

By the end of the novel, Nostromo has no relation with anyone, not even with himself:

He was afraid, because, neither dead nor alive, like the Gringos on Azuera, he belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness of his audacity. (531)

Like Gould, who perverts the work ethic and betrays his family and himself because he cannot renounce the silver, Nostromo betrays himself, and uses his family to preserve the silver and his false reputation. The only request that Nostromo ever makes to Mitchell is that the Violas take over the lighthouse on the Great Isabel, the place where, as only Nostromo knows, the treasure is buried. At all costs, Nostromo still tries to be master of his fate.

But his knowledge of guilt and sin make him "a drowning man clutching at straws". Love for his lost reputation and for the silver overshadows his love for both Linda and Gisele. Not even his love for Gisele can release him. While he may achieve a momentary release when he tells Gisele that he is a thief, and she responds with "I love you! I love you! (540)", Conrad shows us that her love cannot overcome the spectre of his slavery to the silver:

He had not regained his freedom. The spectre of the unlawful treasure arose, standing by her side like a figure of silver, pitiless and secret, with a finger on its pale lips. His soul died within him at the vision of himself creeping in presently along the ravine . . . creeping in, determined in a purpose that numbed his breast, and creeping out again loaded with silver, with his ears alert to every sound . . . that work of a craven slave! (542)

Unlike Marlow, who holds fast to the idea of humanized work carried out in the spirit of solidarity, Nostromo not only rejects love and community, he also rejects human limitation, an acknowledgement of which is part of both love and community. Love is defensive and acknowledges human limitations; in our common bond with others is the acceptance of ourselves as we really are: not masters of our fate, but limited in our power to change things and to master our destinies. Nostromo operates under the belief that he can achieve absolution, while still holding on to the unlawful treasure, but he fails to see that the only way to accomplish this is through renunciation of the treasure. Even when he comes to the Great Isabel, he still has a "sense of having mastered the fates" (530). When Nostromo dies, the narrator is

ambiguous on his moral judgement of Nostromo: he is portrayed as both "master and slave of the San Tome treasure . . . " (554). In believing he is master of his fate, Nostromo, like Gould and Decoud, has constructed a false identity which leads to both physical and spiritual destruction.

Warren notes that "the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning" (383), thus suggesting that there has been progress on a societal level. If so, it is a very ambiguous progress and primarily material. The fact is that by the end of the novel, most of the major characters are either dead spiritually or physically; the organic community is almost destroyed. As Howe observes, the narrator suggests this order is already passing, that "progress has come out of chaos but it is the kind of progress that is likely to end in chaos" (106). As we have noted earlier, Monygham predicts that dissatisfaction of the people will result in another revolution for Costaguana. Mrs. Gould also agrees with Monygham that neither peace nor a stable order has been secured by modernity (ie. capitalist imperialism). Upon hearing about another impending revolution, this time against the Gould Concession, Monygham says:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the force and continuity that can be found only in a moral principle. (511)

What hope for progress toward peace can only be found in the force and continuity of moral principles and in men who live by these principles. Material interests are not a means to individual and social progress, because the progress which must come first for all individuals is inner transformation of the human heart. Not only private citizens, but also world leaders must be concerned with service to the people, not with self-gratification. According to Conrad, "the true greatness of a State"

. . . is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude. Many States have been powerful, but, perhaps, none have been truly great--as yet. (NLL, 91)

Although Albert Guerard concludes: "my view of the novel's ethics and politics remains unmodified--that Nostromo is a deeply skeptical novel" (190), I would argue for a more optimistic vision, based on Conrad's hope for mankind through friendship and women's devotion to the ideal. Though Mrs. Gould's "young ideal of life, of love, of work" (522) is brought crashing down, she and Monygham maintain a friendship that, Berthoud notes, is an enduring symbol of a moral continuity: their friendship "endures all the vicissitudes of Sulaco's tumultuous history; [that] it should continue to flourish in the desolation of material success is not irrelevant to the final assessment of the novel's quality" (130).

Furthermore, Mrs. Gould, like Marlow, exhibits undying faithfulness to the ideal view of Nostromo and of mankind, by denying Monygham access to the truth of Nostromo's betrayal. Though disillusioned and somewhat bitter, Mrs. Gould achieves a wider sympathy for people, by acknowledging that her husband's actions have detrimentally affected the people around her. She also realizes that Nostromo deserves sympathy as a victim of Costaguana's politics. To Monygham's brutal and impatient questioning concerning Nostromo and the lost silver, Mrs. Gould replies steadily, "He told me nothing" (560).

Fidelity is also Linda's trademark, seen in her cry "I cannot understand. I cannot understand. But I shall never forget thee. Never!" (566), which pierces the darkness of the gulf (along with her eyes, which have the power to hold and defend love). We can see in Linda's indomitable spirit of heroic endurance, not only that moral identity and faith itself will endure, but also that there is the possibility of hope for a renewed future. Nostromo's incomprehensible

actions cannot break Linda's spirit because her love for Nostromo overpowers the former; her love is based on faith, not on the material facts of his behaviour, not even on his betrayal of her with her younger sister, Giselle. Her inability to understand Nostromo does not endanger her love for him. Faith triumphs, not reason.

Finally, although like Parry we can say that the epitaph, "so foul a sky clears not without a storm," suggests "hope deferred to the future" (132), we must also agree with Warren, who says that "nothing is to be hoped for even in the most modest way, if men lose the vision of the time of concord when 'the light breaks on our black sky at last'" (387). There is only one 'illusion'--and it is not an illusion for Conrad--and that is that humanity must work and live in faith, grounding its work in moral principle and maintaining the organic community in the hope of a renewed future. This indeed is the whole duty of men and women as constructive artists in the world, as Conrad suggests in "Books":

To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so. (NLL, 9)

If individuals are motivated by a belief in the reality of moral ideals and seek the "time of concord", perhaps they will act now, on the public stage, bringing love to the community instead of division and anarchy. Perhaps they will unite all mankind in a feeling of solidarity "in simple ideas and sincere emotions" (Author's Note, Chance, 10), which is the effect of Linda's "true undying cry of passion" (566). Perhaps humanity will progress to the point where it can emerge out of the wilderness of moral blindness; perhaps men and women will clear the inner jungle, and then hopefully, they will see the "architectural aspect of the universal city" (NLL, 107) as clearly as ships at sea see the guiding light of the lighthouse faithfully tended by Linda in Nostromo.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Conrad in The Nigger of the Narcissus, Heart of Darkness, and Nostromo, proposes a notion of spiritual and moral progress against the prevailing materialist doctrine of self and society. In The Nigger of the Narcissus and Heart of Darkness, Conrad believes that the fulfillment of the individual and the creation and maintenance of the organic community can only be achieved through the transforming power of self-sacrificial labour. In Heart of Darkness, Marlow achieves the status of a remarkable man as he labours in the spirit of solidarity amidst chaos. Though he is powerless to change the society around him, Marlow realizes that the only way to progress is for each individual to uphold moral ideals and to work them out in a spirit of solidarity with others in organic community. Marlow's work is an example of the solidarity of outlook necessary for the creation of the organic community, so essential to both Conrad's and Carlyle's ideas of progress. The time of concord will come about as each of us takes the wheel, upholds civilization's precious and fragile light of belief and love, while at the same time heroically leading the people to the promised land.

As in Heart of Darkness, so in Nostromo, human progress must come about through the transformation of the human heart to the vision of the Ideal in life. Conrad believes in the ideal but in Nostromo, his anxiety and skepticism arise as he pictures few persons living by these ideals. Without each individual's adhering to a definition of progress as life lived according to fixed standards, the possibilities of individual and national progress are very remote, if not impossible. Most men in Nostromo live only for their own gain and reputation, not for the benefit of the organic community nor even of their own well-being. Like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, Gould works, but his work ethic

is a betrayal and perversion of the norm. It has no redeeming value for himself or society. Rather, it is an example of capitalist imperialism and goes against the notion of fidelity to duty, which includes fidelity to one's fellow men and women. Thus, self-realization in Nostromo can only be a tragic awareness of misdirected lives.

Whereas Carlyle's ultimate despair leads him to advocate military despotism and rule by anFaith elite, Conrad never gives up on hoping for the time of concord, nor on the idea that humanity still has the capacity to create the kind of society that Conrad advocates. Through Marlow's fidelity to duty in Heart of Darkness and through love and women's devotion to the ideal in Nostromo, Conrad offers us a fairly optimistic view of human progress, though we can definitely see his optimism tempered by caution. There are threats to this optimism in the failure of leadership, of the love bond, and of individual morality. The moral progress and regeneration of the individual and society calls for men and women like Captain Allistoun, Marlow and Mrs. Gould, individuals who are committed to upholding the fragile light of civilization in a spirit of self-sacrifice and solidarity in organic community. Heroically, they maintain their commitment to humane progress in the face of inhumanity, despair, nihilism, and death. Their undying devotion is a "testimony to [their] belief in a meaningful universe" (Chandler, 144-45).



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