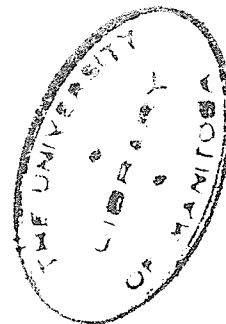


CONRAD'S LINGARD NOVELS: AN INDEX OF CHANGE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
John Carl Ridd
September 1955



This thesis is based on a study of all Joseph Conrad's writings and of all available biographical and critical scholarship on Conrad. It deals, specifically, with three of his novels--Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, and The Rescue--but the problem which it discusses in connection with these novels is fundamental to all Conrad criticism. I have not hesitated, therefore, to refer to other of his novels and short stories in order to illustrate how the conclusions I have drawn from a study of the three "Lingard novels" are equally valid when applied to other works in the Conrad canon.

The problem frames itself in the form of three questions. Why does The Rescue, as representative of Conrad's later fiction, seem different from Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, as representative of his earlier? What light does the demonstration of the difference between Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands on the one hand and The Rescue on the other cast upon the knottiest problem in all Conrad criticism: the generally acknowledged fact of the superiority of his earlier work to his later? Finally, the fact of the difference demonstrated and the relative merits of the earlier and later styles assessed, what were the reasons for the change in Conrad's art?

I have found that there is indeed a difference between Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands on the one hand

and The Rescue on the other--a difference that can be documented. It resides, largely, in the powers of creative imagination which inform the respective works. At the centre of every short story, of every novel, that Conrad wrote prior to 1905 are characters who are vibrant with life. This can be said of little of his later fiction, although there are many good things that can be said about it. (It contains, for example, some psychological insights of extraordinary depth.) The characters in his later fiction began palpably to act as the artist who made them would have them act. Conrad came increasingly to rely upon form for the transmission of the truth which he felt each character, each episode, each story, each novel, contained. The reason for these changes lies in Conrad's changing philosophy.

In the early years of his writing, Conrad as philosopher had been a pessimist. That is, he had taken a pessimistic view of man's ability to meet the forces which challenged his happiness by challenging the opinion he had built up about himself. In the later years of his writing--after 1904--he became an optimist. He avowed a belief in man's ability to conquer these forces by admitting the truth of what they had to tell him about himself and by building a new life from the shattered remains of his illusions. The fact is, however, that although after 1904 this optimistic view was the one he appeared to hold, he remained, deep down, a pessimist all his life.

It is because he was not convinced in his optimism that his later characters came to him with a lessened vividness and that they come to us with a lessened reality. Conrad strove to hold them fast. He concentrated upon the form of his novels: refined the inverted chronology technique, concentrated upon first-person narration wherever possible. But despite his most strenuous efforts his characters slipped away like will-o'-the-wisps. The more he sought to catch them the less he succeeded. He could not believe in the story of their success and so he could not believe in them.

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CHAPTER 1

TOM LINGARD AND THE PROBLEM

He had known him, there in the East, for he had been one of them--one of the white seamen, that is, who had, by the bond of their skin and their calling, formed a private, if loosely organized association. Not that the man had been common. Rather the opposite. He was memorable because he was uncommon, because he stood head and shoulders above the mass of his peers. But this was no mere physical fact, although it was that, too. He stood above them because he had found a river, because he was acknowledged a daring adventurer by a band of men who were not, one might say, exactly stay-at-homes themselves. He was a part of the magnificent East, and the impression he registered on the imagination of the only Polish seaman in the Malay Archipelago was a truly great one, for years later, when that Polish seaman became an English novelist, Tom Lingard--"Rajah Laut--King of the Sea"--continued to live in three of his books (a record for appearances surpassed only by the novelist himself in his guise as Captain Marlow).

Conrad had actually met him, in the flesh, at that establishment in Macassar just around the corner from old Hudig's--you know, the fabulous merchant-trader who owned

half the Malay Archipelago and traded with the other half. That had been many years ago, but the impression still remained as though those days had been lived through only last month.

It had been warm and still that morning, early, when the Vidar, Captain Craig master, had made port. Barely enough wind to make it, at that. The early mist had hung low over the water until the very moment of their docking, when it had seemed to rise like a curtain and reveal the burning disc of the sun, pale and fierce in an almost colourless sky. By mid-morning the decks had been blisteringly hot, and the handrails untouchable. All day they had toiled, unloading, unloading: rifles for old Hudig, nails for the new government building soon to be erected up the hill, furniture for the white colony. By dusk, white man and Malay alike had been exhausted, but the hold was empty. That evening had been his first in Macassar; and had been the date also of his first encounter with Captain Lingard.

A group of them had been talking, seated comfortably in those rattan chairs on the verandah of the Sunda Hotel. It was early in the evening, but the streets were already silent and deserted, as though the entire population had retired in order to gather strength for the prodigious feat involved in facing the next day. Conrad had sat on the fringe of the group of which his captain and Marris of the Araby Maid were the centre. He had contributed nothing to

the conversation, had merely--as befitted a youngster, a Pole and a newcomer at that--listened while the veterans of a few days in port had boisterously acquainted the new arrivals of that day with the events of the past six months. Consequently he had been among the first to hear the sound which marred in a manner unaccountably strange the perfect silence of the streets. It had begun as a barely audible murmur in the distance, and had risen through a series of crescendos and diminuendos to a swelling hum in which individual voices could be distinguished. As the still indeterminate cause of the disturbance rounded the corner of Hudig's store, Conrad had been able to make out a sizeable crowd of Malays, apparently conjured out of thin air (for the town, despite this proof of wakefulness on the part of some of its citizenry, still wore the aspect of peaceful slumber). The crowd appeared to be accompanying some particular person or object, for all heads were turned inward toward the middle, and excited ejaculations in Malay were being continually addressed to some unknown recipient. The mass of humanity moved rather quickly forward--indeed as it approached, Conrad observed that many of its individual components had, from time to time, to run to keep pace--until it reached the steps leading up to the verandah. Suddenly, the ranks split open, and a white man of rather unusual stature strode purposefully forward and up the steps, shedding the members of his entourage as a dog sheds water. He

appeared perfectly unaware of the uproar he had caused, perfectly oblivious of the fact that many of his followers below, rather than dispersing, were squatting comfortably on their heels at the base of the verandah, awaiting his return with a quiet composure which suggested long-established routine.

"Hallo, Tom."

"Hallo, Craig. Hallo Marris."

Those were the only words Conrad heard him speak all evening. He had not, in fact, stayed long.

Three evenings had gone by in much the same manner. Inevitably, Lingard had turned up for his glass of champagne, inevitably had been accompanied by his Malay admirers, inevitably had been greeted warmly but respectfully by the white seamen, inevitably had dropped into a chair rather distant from the main group; and inevitably had said little. On the fourth, he had not shown up at all, and discreet inquiry on Conrad's part disclosed that he had sailed a few hours before. It had been his longest stay in port in two years.

This account of Conrad's first meeting with Captain Tom Lingard is not documentably authentic. Conrad's first meeting with the real Tom Lingard is much more likely to have taken place in "Sambir"--Berouw --on the wharf of the

Olmeijer-Lingard trading post.¹ But the impression of Tom Lingard that Conrad has built up through Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands has been so strong that Lingard's personality can be instantly crystallized in the "moment" of the epiphany --if Joyce's term can be used to describe this imaginative account--and recognized as true and complete.

The fictional Lingard described in the epiphany is the early Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, and, it may be suspected, of that part of The Rescue composed before Conrad laid it aside in 1899. There is another Lingard in Joseph Conrad's fiction: the Lingard of The Rescue when it finally appeared in 1919. Ostensibly the same man, he resembles his predecessor in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast ("predecessor" from the point of view of previous composition, for the Lingard of The Rescue is younger than the Lingard of the other two novels) only in the fact of his name and in a few exterior details. He occupies a much more prominent place in The Rescue than Lingard does in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. He is an exceptionally interesting character--as, indeed, is

¹See John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), pp. 44-45. It may be pure imagination on my part, but I seem to recall an account of his meeting Lingard once in Macassar. A search, however, has failed to locate the reference, and in any case it would not have been, likely, the first meeting.

the earlier Lingard. But he is interesting for a different reason. And he is no longer capable of being epiphanized.

The Lingard novels are unique in that together they stretch across thirty years of Conrad's writing life, from the time he began to write Almayer's Folly in 1889 to the time he finished The Rescue in 1919. Almayer's Folly was his very first work of fiction,² and The Rescue was practically his last. The first two novels--Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands--were products of the early period of Conrad's art. The Rescue had its beginning in the same period, hard upon the heels of An Outcast,³ while the inspiration of the first two novels remained fresh in their creator's mind. It continued to grow while some of his finest work was done--"An Outpost of Progress," "The Lagoon," much of "Heart of Darkness," and some of Lord Jim. Then it was laid aside in February, 1899, and not taken up again until 1916. It thus had its completion during Conrad's "successful" period--the later period which saw the composition of Chance and of Victory.

When Conrad laid the novel aside, in 1899, he had

²Except for "The Black Mate," a story written in 1886 in a competition for publication in Tit-Bits, but almost totally revised in its present form, and therefore posterior to Almayer's Folly.

³With only The Sisters in between; but this novel was abandoned with only ten thousand words written, and never completed.

completed Parts I-III, and twenty-four pages of Part IV.⁴ But when he began his final drive on The Rescue in the summer of 1918 (1916-18 had been spent adding only bits and snatches), he drastically revised the earlier work. Parts I-III were cut down from about eighty-four thousand words to the present sixty-three thousand. Corrections were made in the earlier draft to coincide with Conrad's changed tastes and conception of the novel. The two halves--the old and the new--were integrated quite successfully. (Conrad was always immeasurably proud of the fact that it was impossible to tell where the "join" occurred.)⁵

Three statements have now been made which seem, taken together, contradictory: the Lingard of The Rescue is a consistent character throughout the novel (this is implied when we say that The Rescue is an integrated work); he is a different man from the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast; and yet he is in Part I wholly commensurate with the Lingard of the earlier novels. The explanation of this seeming contradiction lies in the fact that Conrad did not make his "join" in The Rescue quite as smoothly as he thought he had.

Lingard, in Part I of The Rescue, belongs to both the

⁴See the letter from Joseph Conrad to J.B. Pinker, June 8, 1916, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), II, 172: "I am sending you 135 pp. of Part IV consisting of old, (24pp.) newly arranged, rewritten, and new stuff."

⁵Most of these details are referred to in Gordan, op. cit., pp. 198-219.

later novel and the earlier ones. In the Lingard of Part I we easily recognize a younger edition of the old adventurer with whom, from the earlier novels, we are already acquainted. At the same time, Conrad has not left us a picture so positively in the early "adventurer" tradition that his actions in Parts II-VI will seem inconsistent. What seems to have happened is that, having Parts IV-VI ready to hook up with Parts I-III, Conrad re-worked the earlier parts, but, as is only to be expected, the heaviest emphasis of his re-working fell upon those parts lying closest to the place where the "join" had to occur. Hence, the Lingard of Part I can "go either way." He can be taken with the Lingard of the earlier novels, or he can be accepted with the Lingard of Parts II-VI, simply because he is indeterminate.

The explanation, evidently, is hindsight of the grossest sort: it would never have been possible to have derived the theory of delayed composition of The Rescue from the internal evidence of the Lingard trilogy. But hindsight or not, the theory is still valuable because it offers a plausible explanation of a very real difficulty, and because it helps to focus attention upon the noticeable difference between the Lingard of The Rescue, Parts II-VI, and the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. And this difference is important for larger reasons. It is symptomatic of a marked difference in conception between the later novel itself and its predecessors. Sometime between

1899 and 1916, Conrad's art had undergone a change. The change could be illustrated with equal validity by comparing another novel from the later period--Chance, for example--with the work of the earlier. But the comparison of The Rescue with Almayer's Folly and An Outcast is of particular interest because of the presence of Tom Lingard in all three; and because of their common setting in Malaya; and because of the known chronology of The Rescue's composition.

In what does the difference in Lingard, and in Conrad, consist, as between 1899 and 1916? The question is a big one, but it is one which demands an answer, if Conrad the artist is to be properly evaluated. The fact of the difference makes the Lingard novels of crucial importance for the Conrad student.

CHAPTER II

THE LINGARD NOVELS : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Before we go on to the main body of this thesis, it will be well to pause for a moment and consider, in turn, each of the three novels to which reference will most often be made later on. The discussion of these novels here will be brief. It is not the main purpose of the thesis to make an exhaustive critical analysis of a particular novel. But I am setting down these brief interpretations with two desires in mind: that the remarks I now make may, together with the remarks I shall later make, in some small way enrich the experience which reading these novels brings; and that I may, quickly and economically, advance my own view as to what "happened" in the novels--what Conrad "meant" by them-- for upon the basic rightness of my interpretation of them much of the argument of the later chapters depends.

Let us look first at Almayer's Folly.

The situation is simple. A white man has been deposited within the heart of a native community--thirty miles within, up an almost unnavigable river. He is alone, entirely alone. He is the only white man who ever appears in the "present time" of the story, once Mrs. Almayer--herself a native--has opened the novel with her shrill summons of her husband. Captain Lingard, who placed him in Sambir, is away in Europe, and we know of the Almayer-Lingard relationship

only by flashback. Similarly, the visit of the Dutch gunboat has already occurred by the time the novel opens. Almayer is isolated; finally and irrevocably isolated. His splendid building, the product of an awful illusion, is deserted; the wharf is rotten. The fact that there are other inhabitants of Sambir--Dain Maroola, Abdulla, Lakamba, Nina, Mrs. Almayer--only serves to emphasize Almayer's aloneness, for Dain elopes with Nina, his daughter; Mrs. Almayer hates him; Abdulla is his merciless rival in trade; and Lakamba quietly deserts him for the Arab.

These other characters are living, vital human beings--Conrad had a real instinct for portraying the native personality. But it is Almayer who holds the centre of the stage. Conrad's steady gaze is fixed unwaveringly upon him. His story is the drama.

It is the story of human disintegration. And the engine which wreaks this destruction does not come from without; it comes from within the man. Almayer's greed; Almayer's foolishness; Almayer's indecision; above all, Almayer's unparalleled capacity for self-delusion--these are the forces which lead Hudig's promising young clerk to die in middle age an ignominious death among people who do not care for him. It is a fact about Almayer the man which is at once the cause of his tragedy and the moral justification of it. Almayer's Folly is the embodiment in a work of art of the cause-and-effect relationship that exists between the

vital, living personality and the fate it suffers. The relationship cannot always be discerned in real life.

If in real life we were to meet Almayer in Sambir, we should soon get to know a great number of facts about him. We should see him in action in countless daily situations, and each view of him would be illuminating, but slightly different from all others. We should be so close to him, physically and spiritually, that a completely dispassionate, perfectly just estimate of him would be impossible. Our vision would be in every case coloured by what we ourselves felt at the moment of the revelation--or perhaps by what we had had for breakfast that morning. What would be impossible for us in that real situation would be an easy, an intuitive apprehension, of all the relevant facts in the case, and an instinctive ordering of them in the form of a judgment upon Almayer's character. It is precisely this which the more distant perspective of the work of art permits.¹

Almayer's isolation, then, throws additional emphasis upon his own inner drama. Similarly, Conrad's early seamen were placed, by virtue of their own profession, "where the conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it

¹Some Conrad critics have suggested that one of Conrad's main urges to write was the fact that only thus could he interpret for himself the meaning of events which had occurred in his past, or the nature of personalities he had met. They--the critics--mean what we have been saying: that he required the distant perspective of art fully and justly to understand.

[the moral problem] stand out with a particular force and colouring."²

Almayer's moral problem is his inability--perhaps deliberate--to know himself. Almayer of the "dream of splendid future,"³ constant in his flight from "the unpleasant realities of the present hour";⁴ Almayer the bumbling little trader of Sambir who in one breath discloses to the Dutch officers "his regret at the non-arrival of the English, 'who knew how to develop a rich country'";⁵ in his own eyes, his fate is momentous; in ours, it is pitiful. There is constantly a tension--an opposition--in the novel between Almayer's estimate of himself and our own estimate of him. His fate is disastrous but it is inevitable.

The fact that this tension does exist in the novel is proof of the vividness with which Almayer has been portrayed. Without a living Almayer, a convincing Almayer, there could have been no tension. Conrad's whole concern in the novel

²Letter from Joseph Conrad to Henry S. Canby, April 7, 1924, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), II, 342.

³Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. [Collected Edition]), p.v. All references to Conrad's Works are to Dent's Collected Edition, 1946-55, reprinted from the Uniform Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, 1923-28 (Dent, 22 vols.). Hereafter, in the case of the works by Joseph Conrad, the name of the author will be omitted from the footnote reference.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Ibid., p. 36.

was with Almayer himself. Almayer's folly is the main-spring upon which the drama of his disintegration turns.

An Outcast of the Islands shows Almayer in full tilt along the course toward his fateful end. It shows Willems arrived. The focus is a double one, replacing the single one of Almayer's Folly, with the added fact that Captain Lingard, who had sent them both to Sambir, himself appears on the scene. The reluctance of Almayer and Willems to recognize things about themselves is aggravated by their reluctance also to recognize things about one another. There is a total lack of comprehension which leads--again inevitably--to Willems' death, and points to Almayer's later one. When Willems is brought up against the incredible fact of his susceptibility to Aïssa's charms, he collapses:

He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman. Where was the assurance and pride of his cleverness; the belief in success, the anger of failure, the wish to retrieve his fortune, the certitude of his ability to accomplish it yet? Gone. All gone. All that had been a man within him was gone, and there remained only the trouble of his heart--that heart which had become a contemptible thing; which could be fluttered by a look or a smile, tormented by a word, soothed by a promise.⁶

⁶An Outcast of the Islands, p. 77.

So Almayer had been destroyed, in the first novel, by the impossible--yet indisputable--fact of Nina's departure with Dain.

There comes a situation in which even Lingard, the hardrock adventurer who "had never hesitated in his life"⁷ is forced to hesitate. He debates in seclusion for four days over the problem of what to do with Willems. He has encountered something of which he has not, in his philosophy, hitherto dreamed, and it has given him pause. Lingard's problem with respect to Willems is finally solved by rough-and-ready action; but Lingard's problem with respect to himself is reserved for future settlement. He, too, will one day have to face himself.

The Rescue shows him doing just that. Tom Lingard the sea-rover, champion of the weak, defence of the defenceless, the man upon whose word whole kingdoms are founded, whose word is his honour, whose honour his life--Tom Lingard finds himself passion's slave, wholly unable to do his duty--as he sees it--where his love conflicts. His subjection to Mrs. Travers is as complete as Willems' to Aïssa:

For the catastrophe had fallen on his head like a bolt from the blue in the early morning hours of the day before. At the first break of dawn he had been sent for to resume his talk with Belarab. He had felt suddenly Mrs. Travers remove her hand from his head. Her voice speaking intimately into his ear: "Get up. There are some people coming," had recalled him to himself. He had got up from

⁷Ibid., p. 195.

the ground. The light was dim, the air full of mist; and it was only gradually that he began to make out forms above his head, and about his feet: trees, houses, men sleeping on the ground. He didn't recognize them. It was but a cruel change of dream. Who could tell what was real in this world? He looked about him, dazedly; he was still drunk with the deep draught of oblivion he had conquered for himself. Yes--but it was she who had let him snatch the cup. He looked down at the woman on the bench. She moved not. She had remained like that, still for hours, giving him a waking dream of rest without end, in an infinity of happiness without sound and movement, without thought, without joy; but with an infinite ease of content, like a world-embracing reverie breathing the air of sadness and scented with love.⁸

But here the parallel between Lingard on the one hand and Almayer and Willems on the other ends. Lingard drinks to the very bottom the bitter liquid of the cup of self-knowledge. Almayer and Willems had only tasted of it.

They had tasted of it enough to admit that somehow events were not proceeding as, in the light of their settled opinions of themselves and their desserts, they should. But they were confounded as to the ultimate reason why. Neither probed himself deeply enough to discover within himself the cause of that dreadful dichotomy between what he felt he deserved and what he knew he got. Neither admitted his illusions. After Lingard sentenced him, this was Willems' reaction:

A raft! He imagined himself working at it, feverishly, desperately; cutting down trees, fastening the logs together and then drifting

⁸The Rescue, pp. 430-31.

down with the current, down to the sea into the straits. There were ships there--ships, help, white men. Men like himself. Good men who would rescue him, take him away, take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities; where there was proper food, and money; where there were beds, knives, forks, carriages, brass bands, cool drinks, churches with well-dressed people praying in them. He would pray also. The superior land of refined delights where he could sit on a chair, eat his tiffin off a white table-cloth, nod to fellows--good fellows; he would be popular; always was--where he could be virtuous, correct, do business, draw a salary, smoke cigars, buy things in shops--have boots . . . be happy, free, become rich. O God! What was wanted? Cut down a few trees. No! One would do. They used to make canoes by burning out a tree trunk, he had heard. Yes! One would do. One tree to cut down . . . He rushed forward, and suddenly stood still as if rooted in the ground. He had a pocket-knife.

And he would throw himself down on the ground by the riverside. He was tired, exhausted; as if that raft had been made, the voyage accomplished, the fortune attained.⁹

He continued to live his life of illusions. He died in combat with a mere slip of a girl--herself trembling and frightened and unfamiliar with the weapon she wielded--over the possession of a revolver, without which he lacked the courage to face the world.

Almayer's solution was the opium pipe, and forgetfulness.

But that solution is not Lingard's. He is forced to see every fact as it really is, and not as he would have it be. But his reward is recovery.

His love for Mrs. Travers is immense. No coquette

⁹An Outcast of the Islands, pp. 329-30.

could have captivated him more surely than she has done by her warm, pathetically eager advances, her hesitant withdrawals on the brink of giving herself up to life and to him. But he must face the truth that she is, as she herself puts it, "a mere sham":¹⁰

"Are you looking for a change in me? No. You won't see it. Now I know that I couldn't change even if I wanted to. I am made of clay that is too hard."¹¹

He faces it, honestly, though with a despair which reveals his hurt:

"I am looking at you for the first time," said Lingard. "I never could see you before. There were too many things, too many thoughts, too many people. No, I never saw you before. But now the world is dead."¹²

He is not dumb and bewildered, as Almayer and Willems were, at the up-ending of his world, for he has sought and known the real cause of its collapse:

"It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now that as long as I live you will never die."¹³

He has probed into himself even beyond this. He has confessed that the real fault was not hers; not Mrs. Travers', but his.

¹⁰The Rescue, p. 465.

¹¹Ibid., p. 463.

¹²Loc. cit.

¹³Ibid., p. 465.

He had abandoned himself to her, had surrendered--"the dreadful ease of slack limbs in the sweep of an enormous tide and in a divine emptiness of mind."¹⁴ The fault had been his more than hers. To have known about the ring would have made no difference--"Haven't you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?"¹⁵ What she takes to be the generosity of his forgiveness¹⁶ is really but his acknowledgment of his own moral complicity.

Fascinated though he still is by her, he sees her for what she is. More than that, he sees himself. He renounces her:

Mrs. Travers let fall her arm and began to retrace her steps, unsupported and alone. Lingard followed her on the edge of the sand uncovered by the ebbing tide. A belt of orange light appeared in the cold sky above the black forest of the Shore of Refuge and faded quickly to gold that melted soon into a blinding and colourless glare. It was not till after she had passed Jaffir's grave that Mrs. Travers stole a backward glance and discovered that she was alone. Lingard had left her to herself. She saw him sitting near the mound of sand, his back bowed, his hands clasping his knees, as if he had obeyed the invincible call of his great visions haunting the grave of the faithful messenger. Shading her eyes with her hand Mrs. Travers watched the immobility of that man of infinite illusions. He never moved, he never raised his head. It was all over. He was done with her. She waited a little longer and then went slowly on her way.¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., p. 432.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 465.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 466.

The spell cast by illusions is powerful. The only cure is complete and honest self-examination. Lingard faces bitter fact upon bitter fact, but the emergence of the new man from the old is painful:

Shortly after his Captain had disappeared from the deck Carter laid the main topsail to the mast. The Lightning lost her way while the schooner with all her light kites abroad passed close under her stern holding on her course. Mrs. Travers stood aft very rigid, gripping the rail with both hands. The brim of her white hat was blown upward on one side and her yachting skirt stirred in the breeze. By her side d'Alcacer waved his hand courteously. Carter raised his cap to them.

During the afternoon he paced the poop with measured steps, with a pair of binoculars in his hand. At last he laid the glasses down, glanced at the compass-card and walked to the cabin skylight which was open.

"Just lost her, sir," he said. All was still down there. He raised his voice a little.

"You told me to let you know directly I lost sight of the yacht."

The sound of a stifled groan reached the attentive Carter and a weary voice said, "All right, I am coming."¹⁸

But finally it is done:

"The brig is beginning to forge ahead, sir," he said in a warning tone.

Lingard came out of his absorption with a deep tremor of his powerful frame like the shudder of an uprooted tree.

"How was the yacht heading when you lost sight of her?" he asked.

"South as near as possible," answered Carter. "Will you give me a course to steer for the night, sir?"

Lingard's lips trembled before he spoke but his voice was calm.

"Steer north," he said.¹⁹

Lingard has won a victory over the forces which had crushed Almayer and Willems. He is ready for a new life.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 468.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 469.

CHAPTER III

THE LINGARD NOVELS AS A TRILOGY

Conrad began Almayer's Folly in September of 1899,
in London:

I had been treating myself to a long stay on shore, and in the necessity of occupying my mornings, Almayer (that old acquaintance) came nobly to the rescue. Before long, as was only proper, his wife and daughter joined him round my table, and then the rest of that Pantai band came full of words and gestures. Unknown to my respectable landlady, it was my practice directly after my breakfast to hold animated receptions of Malays, Arabs and half-castes. They did not clamour aloud for my attention. They came with silent and irresistible appeal--and the appeal, I affirm here, was not to my self-love or my vanity. It seems now to have had a moral character, for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers on this earth?¹

He was nearly five years completing it, but once it was finished he wasted no time in going on with An Outcast of the Islands. Its original title was Two Vagabonds:

J'ai commencer² d'ecrire--avant-hier seulement.
Je veux faire cela tout court--Disons 20 a 25
pages comme celles de la Revue. J'apelle ça
"Deux Vagabonds" (Two Vagabonds) et je veux

¹A Personal Record, p. 9.

²I am quoting exactly, here as throughout the thesis, Conrad's text as it is given in the source I have used. Conrad appears to have written very carelessly in French.

decrire a grands traits--sans ombres ni details--
deux epaves humaines comme on en rencotre dans
les coins perdus du monde. Un homme blanc et un
Malais. Vous voyez que les Malais me tiennent.
Je suis voué au Borneo.³

An Outcast is a literary twin for Almayer's Folly. Many characters inhabit both novels: Abdulla, Babalatchi, Lakamba, Almayer, Nina, Mrs. Almayer, Lingard. The scene is the same for both: Sambir. The quality of the prose is the same: heavy, resonant, luxurious, reverberating. The theme--human disintegration as a consequence of spiritual isolation--is the same, although the protagonists are different. Even the chronology of the two novels--and this is unusual for Conrad--is perfectly integrated: Nina is five years old at the beginning of An Outcast,⁴ before the Arabs have arrived in Sambir; and they arrive shortly after. In Almayer's Folly, the Arabs are established by the time she is six. And Vernon Young⁵ points out a further orchestration of the two novels: the fact that An Outcast of the Islands was made to end on the very note with which Almayer's

³Letter from Joseph Conrad to Mme. Poradowska, dated "Samedi" and assigned by John Archer Gee to Saturday, August 18, 1894, John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 190.

⁴An Outcast of the Islands, pp. 293-94.

⁵Vernon Young, "Lingard's Folly: the Lost Subject," The Kenyon Review, 15: 522-39, Autumn, 1953.

Folly, later in time but earlier in composition, had already begun--"hope."

Despite all this, it would not be true to say that Conrad had both novels in mind before he even began writing the first. That was never the way he worked; and besides, he began An Outcast with the idea that it would simply be a short story. He did not, even in 1894, much less 1889, have the whole vision in mind. And yet, these facts not known, if one were to read the novels one would instantly conclude that they must, surely, have been conceived together as a whole. Conrad, once he had fairly begun his second novel, found himself (naturally enough considering the circumstances) linking it up with his first. The plot of An Outcast is concerned with the present happening of those very events which constituted the past history of Sambir in Almayer's Folly. The earlier novel, although complete in itself, is enriched by a reading of the later.

So if it is not true that Almayer's Folly was begun with An Outcast also in mind, it certainly is true that, as An Outcast grew into a novel, Conrad consciously and deliberately identified it with Almayer's Folly; and that the two novels are so perfectly in harmony with one another is testimony to the fact that Conrad's art, and his vision of the world which that art reflects, had suffered no real change during the time of writing those two novels.

The Rescue was begun in 1896, and finished, except

for revision, in 1919. It was begun in the mood of the two earlier Lingard novels:

If the virtues of Lingard please most of the critics, they shall have more of them. The theme of it shall be the rescue of a yacht from some Malay vagabonds and there will be a gentleman and a lady cut out according to the regulation pattern.⁶

If this one statement seems but a slender peg upon which to hang such a large assumption, I may point out in support of it that Conrad at least made no explicit proposal that The Rescue should be different in conception from the earlier Lingard novels. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Lingard of Part I that is not fully commensurate with the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. Everything indicates that The Rescue was to constitute the third novel in a trilogy which, if not conceived as a trilogy from the beginning of the first novel, had at least been conceived as such from the beginning of the third. The fact that Conrad continued the pattern, already established in the first two novels, of reverse chronological order, is a further indication that he at one time viewed the three novels as a whole, with a definite, ordered relationship to each other.

It is impossible to say to what extent The Rescue was to have been linked up with its predecessors. The opening

⁶Letter from Joseph Conrad to T. Fisher Unwin, April 9, 1896, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), I, 164, n. 1.

of the novel aboard the Lightning (no longer the Flash, although the names are closely related) in the Straits of Carimata indicates that Conrad intended from the first that there should be a change of scenery from Sambir. The chief link, then--and perhaps the only one--was to have been Lingard himself: Lingard at the age of thirty-five, at the height of his power and greatness. The Rescue was to show Lingard of An Outcast of the Islands in the process of formation. He was to be, like the Rajah Brooke of Sarawak,

a true adventurer in his devotion to his impulse--
a man of high mind and of pure heart . . . [who]
recognized chivalrously the claims of the conquered
. . . a disinterested adventurer . . . [for whom]
the reward of his noble instincts is in the veneration
with which a strange and faithful race cherish his
memory.⁷

A Lingard such as this in The Rescue would have made a perfect antecedent for the older Lingard about whom Conrad had already written in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. But Conrad's conception of the novel, and hence of Lingard, had changed by 1916. If it had not, then the outcome of The Rescue's events would have worn a different aspect today. For the old Lingard--Lingard the adventurer--would have acted, somehow--anyhow. And by this action, he might have salvaged all or part of the situation: the tragic death of Hassim and Immada might never have been; or Lingard might have retained his powerful influence on the Shore of Refuge.

⁷The Rescue, p. 4.

He would certainly have blundered through to some rough-and-ready solution of the Travers problem. The solution might have been a bad one, and he might even have lost all, as he did by his inaction in The Rescue as we have it. But he would have acted, and by doing so have emerged the adventurer still, cursing the "bad luck" which was really bad judgment, and which arose from his fearful illusions about himself, intact still--from his inability to know himself. He would have emerged as this sort of a man because this was the sort of man he had been in the previous novels, and The Rescue had been intended to provide an early history for him. This was the sort of man Conrad, in the late 1890's, visualized Lingard to be. He had not reached the point where he felt it necessary to make him other.

As it is, he is shown in The Rescue as a man whose illusions have been shattered--who has faced up to himself, and admitted the truth of what he sees there. In his "Steer north" at the end of the novel, he acknowledges a responsibility for the restraint of the sudden impulses which have hitherto governed all his action, and which have made the adventurer what, in his own mind, he is. Yet Conrad knew that Lingard would have to revert, later in life, to the role of simple adventurer, because the novels in which he did were already written. He knew that if the three novels were to constitute a trilogy in the full sense of the word, the Lingard of The Rescue would have to be reconciled with the

older Lingard of An Outcast of the Islands, whom Almayer thus berates:

"Yes! Cat, dog, anything that can scratch or bite; as long as it is harmful enough and mangy enough. A sick tiger would make you happy--of all things. A half-dead tiger that you could weep over and palm upon some poor devil in your power, to tend and nurse for you. Never mind the consequences--to the poor devil. Let him be mangled or eaten up, of course! You haven't any pity to spare for the victims of your infernal charity. Not you! Your tender heart bleeds only for what is poisonous and deadly. I curse the day when you set your benevolent eyes on him. I curse it . . ."

"Now then! Now then!" growled Lingard in his moustache. Almayer, who had talked himself up to the choking point, drew a long breath and went on--

"Yes! It has been always so. Always. As far back as I can remember. Don't you recollect? What about that half-starved dog you brought on board in Bangkok in your arms. In your arms by . . . ! It went mad next day and bit the serang. You don't mean to say you have forgotten? The best serang you ever had! You said so yourself while you were helping us to lash him down to the chain-cable, just before he died in his fits. Now, didn't you? Two wives and ever so many children the man left. That was your doing. . . . And when you went out of your way and risked your ship to rescue some Chinamen from a waterlogged junk in Formosa Straits, that was also a clever piece of business. Wasn't it? Those damned Chinamen rose on you before forty-eight hours. They were cut-throats, those poor fishermen. You knew they were cut-throats before you made up your mind to run down on a lee shore in a gale of wind to save them. A mad trick! If they hadn't been scoundrels--hopeless scoundrels--you would not have put your ship in jeopardy for them, I know. You would not have risked the lives of your crew--that crew you loved so--and your own life. Wasn't that foolish! And, besides, you were not honest. Suppose you had been drowned? I would have been in a pretty mess then, left alone here with that adopted daughter of yours. Your duty was to myself first. I married that girl because you promised to make my fortune. You know you did! And then three months afterwards you go and do that mad trick--for a lot of Chinamen too. Chinamen! You have no morality. I might have been ruined for the sake of those murderous

scoundrels that, after all, had to be driven overboard after killing ever so many of your crew--of your beloved crew! Do you call that honest?"⁸

This is generous but foolhardy conduct. Indeed, it borders, by its repetition, on the outrageous. And Lingard has crowned it by setting up another "orphan" in Sambir--Willems; which act of irresponsible, misguided charity has resulted in the downfall not only of Almayer and himself, but of the very object of his charity. Willems is totally destroyed by his love for Aïssa and his defection to the Arabs. Yet Lingard is obviously unaware of the blame which attaches to himself in this affair. If he is aware of anything, it is only of his "bad luck":

"Well, well!" muttered Lingard, chewing nervously the stump of his cheroot that had gone out and looking at Almayer--who stamped wildly about the verandah--much as a shepherd might look at a pet sheep in his obedient flock turning unexpectedly upon him in enraged revolt. He seemed disconcerted, contemptuously angry yet somewhat amused; and also a little hurt as if at some bitter jest at his own expense.⁹

He is considerably less comprehending than Almayer of the moral problems involved when a man takes a share in another's life. He can still reply "serenely" to Almayer, "You scold like a drunken fish-wife . . . "¹⁰

Conrad, then, in writing The Rescue, deliberately wrote a novel which obviously did not "fit" with the other two,

⁸An Outcast of the Islands, pp. 161-62.

⁹Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 163.

as he had originally intended that it should. He created a role for Lingard (who was to have been the chief, if not the only link with Almayer's Folly and An Outcast) that was entirely incommensurate with those roles--already decided--which he was to play in later life. He abandoned the idea of the trilogy.

This abandonment was not a premeditated act. The art of a Bennett or a Galsworthy may at times be determined thus cold-bloodedly and superficially; but never of a Conrad. The abandonment was simply a consequence of a change in his philosophy of life which had taken place between 1899 and 1916, for inevitably Conrad had found it necessary to express that change in his art.

CHAPTER IV

CONRAD THE NOVELIST: THE THREE PERIODS

A legend has been given currency by Ford Madox Ford that Almayer's Folly had its real beginning as mere notes--jottings--in the margins of a copy of Madame Bovary. It is quite possible that this is true. Certainly, Conrad had an inordinate admiration for Flaubert. And equally certainly, he was at first very offhand about his future as a novelist.

It took him five years to complete Almayer's Folly, the shortest of his novels. He had been writing at the novel for about three years before he ventured to show it to anyone--and then to a complete stranger, a passenger whom he met while serving as mate on the Torrens.¹ To Conrad's question, whether it were worth finishing, W.J. Jacques replied, "Distinctly."² And Conrad did finish it. But he doubted, later, whether an opposite reply would have had any effect--

I had already then (though I did not know it myself) lived one of my lives. I was content with it; and had his verdict been different I would have been perfectly content with it to this day. I had no conception of what a literary ambition may be and I don't know that I understand it even now. The very form of my question proves it sufficiently. I didn't ask him whether I should write. I didn't think of

¹A Personal Record, pp. 3-25.

²Ibid., p. 17.

writing then. I really did not care what he might say. But I imagine that if he had said "No" I would have gone on and finished that piece of writing, simply because, in truth, I did not care.³

He did not care what Jacques would say, because he was not writing the novel for the benefit of any other public than himself. He cared that it should be good for his own sake, and for no other reason. At least, that is the spirit in which he began Almayer's Folly, and, although it would be impossible to deny that other elements probably crept in--the hope of modest fame and the possibility of a small financial return--that is the spirit in which he finished it. The same attitude toward creation, naturally enough, did not remain with him throughout his literary career.

The attitude of the husband and father who is a writer is, for example, bound to differ from that of the bachelor who is a seaman. And these differences are important because they help to explain the special qualities which, as we shall later see, characterize one work, and yet do not characterize another.

Conrad's relationship to the craft of fiction is readily divisible into three "stages" or "periods." When we say this we are already in difficulties, because these terms suggest a pigeon-holing of works, a lumping together which can at best be only partially substantiated. Yet absolute grouping is not our intent. Indeed, we shall be at pains to

³Letter from Joseph Conrad to Gerald Cumberland, Nov. 20, 1919, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), II, 235.

point out that, in the case of Conrad even more than in the case of most, absolute divisions are impossible. These stages or periods shade into one another very gradually--so gradually that it would be laughable to attempt to erect precise chronological boundary lines. We are going to violate at once, for purposes of convenience, that precept that precise chronological boundary lines not be erected, by saying that the first stage ended on December 31, 1898, and the second on December 31, 1904. But it will help to atone for this outrage if we concede that in any given stage there are always elements peculiar to other stages at war with the dominant elements of the current stage, either anticipating the emergence of a new one or echoing the passing of an old.

In the first of these three stages, Conrad was a seaman who wrote novels. That is the sense in which it is true that Conrad did not care what might be the reaction of W.H. Jacques to his embryo novel. Some men, it is reasonable to suppose, first write novels because they wish to be other than what they are. In their minds they are already novelists, not businessmen or sailors. They think as they believe novelists must think; they theorize over their novels as they believe novelists must theorize. There is a conscious intention to be a novelist, and it is this conscious intention which Conrad the seaman did not have. He was a competent member of a profession that was rigorous and exacting. And this

sense of competence in the face of the demands which it made upon him inspired his love for it. He had no wish to change it for another. In his own words, " . . . the ambition of being an author had never turned up amongst these gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day-dream . . ." ⁴

Some men first begin to write novels as a spare time means of making money. But Conrad, as a seaman and a bachelor, earning a good wage with little opportunity to spend it, could hardly be said to have begun for this reason. Indeed, the fact that he had saved some £2,000 by the time of his marriage (a sum which he promptly lost in a foolish speculation), ⁵ is a good indication that it was not the need for money which drove him to write.

It was not the outcome of a need--the famous need of self-expression which artists find in their search for motives. The necessity which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon. ⁶

The phenomenon was not exactly unaccountable, either. Conrad had already begun his second novel when the conversation with Garnett took place in which the latter, in these terms,

⁴A Personal Record, p. 68.

⁵Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (London: Duckworth & Co., [1924]), pp. 112-113.

⁶A Personal Record, loc. cit.

urged him to write "another" novel:

My thesis was that the life Conrad had witnessed on sea and land must vanish away into the mist and fade utterly from memory, did he not set himself to record it in literature. And Almayer's Folly showed that he had the power.⁷

Yet if urging had been needed, it is impossible that Garnett could have struck a note more likely to have had the desired result, because it was for this reason that Conrad had already written Almayer's Folly. For this reason, and for another closely connected with it: life, he felt was a collection of chaotic experience which, unordered, made little sense. For him, writing was a means of ordering. Art made existence comprehensible, or at least as comprehensible as was possible for the mortal mind: "Only in men's imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence."⁸ He could never have been that explicit about his motives in the beginning. But his work is one long testimony to his bafflement by the riddle of the universe and to his search for an explanation of it.

He was, then, a strict amateur in this first period. The instinct to write was of the purest kind. He was a sea captain with an unusual capacity for writing fiction; that was all. Indeed, it took the action of circumstance to

⁷Edward Garnett, editor, "Introduction," Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895-1924 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, [1928]), p. 4.

⁸A Personal Record, p. 25.

wrench him finally from the sea and make him a professional novelist. He had not accepted the career of novelist to the extent that he could consciously choose it.

In the course of his life on the sea, he had had his share of accidents and of sickness. The Congo trip in 1890 had prostrated him for six months, and, in fact, had very nearly killed him. He confessed in April, 1898, to Cunninghamham Graham--

Don't you take it into your head you are getting old. You are simply run down, and strong men feel it so much more than weaklings like me,--who have felt overtaken ever since the age of 28. True! And yet I had another ten years of sea,--and did my work too. It isn't your body,--it's your brain that is tired. The battery wants re-charging. Time, with common caution, will do that.⁹

Chronic ill-health and the plain fact that he was unable to find a berth conspired to turn the sailor more and more to writing as a means of subsistence.¹⁰

The last voyage he ever made was on the Torrens, on which he served as first mate from November 25, 1891 to July 26, 1893; and the last berth he ever held was on the Adowa (which never left Rouen) from November 29, 1893 to January 14, 1894. His literary career is often assumed to have begun at this point, but in truth he had not yet accepted it. He continued to search assiduously for marine employment. The manuscript of Almayer's Folly, significantly,

⁹Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 234.

¹⁰I have been unable to discover why, suddenly, naval employment was closed to him. Perhaps ship-owners were unwilling to risk taking on a man whose health was as doubtful as Conrad's had become.

was sent to Unwin from the offices of the Shipmasters' Society,¹¹ an institution which Conrad frequented in the hope that Captain Froud, who had placed him in the Adowa, would place him also on another ship. When he finally sent it, some two months after completion,¹² to Unwin, it bore for signature the pseudonym "Kamudi"--"Rudder".¹³ The mere fact of the pseudonym is another sure indication that he viewed the whole matter in the spirit of the amateur rather than the professional.

Still, there is evidence that as early as 1896 his attitude was changing; that he was at least considering very seriously the possibility of becoming, permanently, a writer. In fact, he had already convinced himself:

A few days ago I was offered the command of a sailing ship. This idea pleased Jessie (who is fond of the sea) very much, but the conditions were so unsatisfactory that I refused. Only literature remains to me as a means of existence. You understand, my dear friend, that if I have undertaken this thing, it is with the firm resolution to make a name--and I have no doubt that I shall be successful in this connection. I know what I can do. The question is only to earn the money "qui est une chose tout-à-fait à part du mérite littéraire," yet I am not sure of it--but my needs are very moderate and I can wait. I therefore look towards the future rather calmly.¹⁴

¹¹Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 158-59.

¹²Loc. cit.

¹³John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 183.¹⁴

¹⁴Letter from Joseph Conrad to Charles Zagórski (original of letter in Polish), Mar. 10, 1896, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 185.

But it is likely that it was merely the occasion of his coming marriage, at which time a man may convince himself of his intention to do almost anything, that made him speak so positively; for on October 16, 1898, he wrote to R.B. Cunninghame Graham's mother, the Hon. Mrs. Bontine:

I have no ship (but I still have la nostalgie de la mer), though Robert has really done almost the impossible for me [Graham had been Conrad's chief interceder in the matter of soliciting berths]. . . . Early next year, when that torment [of The Rescue] is over (and I am hardly able to realize that such a time will ever come), I will without scruple use and abuse everybody's goodwill, influence, friendship to get back on the water. I am by no means happy on shore.¹⁵

He had gone back to regarding himself as a seaman condemned by unfortunate but temporary circumstance to remain on shore. "Neither in my mind nor in my heart had I then given up the sea,"¹⁶ he wrote in 1919, confirming in later years the earlier impression of his frame of mind in those days when he wavered so delicately 'twixt land and sea.

In the second and third periods he had absolutely given up the sea, although this urge died a hard death. Jessie Conrad reports a flare-up of the old desire:

Only once more did he entertain the hope of returning to his old life. Borys was then nearly old enough to go to school.¹⁷ Apart from the fact that by this time I had grown sufficiently bold to demur and point out that he was now well established as an author and

¹⁵ Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 251.

¹⁶ "Author's Note," An Outcast of the Islands, p. vii.

¹⁷ This means about 1905, for in Joseph Conrad and His Circle (London: Jarrods Publishers Limited, 1935), p. 104, she says, "It was after our return from our Italian holiday [they returned from Capri on May 24, 1905] that the small boy embarked seriously on the steep path of learning."

coming into his own, there was also the great difficulty I now had in getting about. Finally, he gave up the idea for ever, and settled down to his writing for good, though the delightful project of making a company of seafaring friends and taking a long voyage in a sailing yacht some day, still dangled before us.¹⁸

That was the last time the subject was ever mentioned, and its recurrence then was more likely the result of a sudden whim than the result of a serious decision. After 1898, the subject drops completely from his correspondence, and, it seems safe to assume, from his mind.

The great friendship between Conrad and Edward Garnett, who had "found" him for Unwin, continued strong and unabated throughout all Conrad's life. Yet their relationship underwent somewhat of a change as Conrad passed out of the first period of authorship. Garnett's particular value to Conrad in the beginning had been as a critic, and he continued to function in this way to the very end. But in the second and third periods Conrad had less need of him. In the first he had been indispensable:

My dear fellow you keep me straight in my work and when it is done you still direct its destinies! And it seems to me that if you ceased to do either life itself would cease. For me you are the reality outside, the expressed thought, the living voice! And without you I would think myself alone in an empty universe.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), p. 124.

¹⁹ Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, [April 20, 1897], Garnett, op. cit., p. 97.

In the last two periods Conrad felt the need to write according to his own vision, whatever the consequences:

And of course your critical ability, that very sensitiveness in response, has made you put your finger on the weak spot. I can honestly say that I did see it myself, but not so clearly as since I have read your letter. You were not likely to miss Scevola, and, by Jove, now you have uttered the words he does look to me like a bit of a "scarecrow of the Revolution." Yet it was not my intention. It is not the fault of the original conception but the fault of presentation of the literary treatment . . .

Yes, my dear, I know you will believe me when I tell you that I had a momentary vision of quite a great figure worthy of Peyrol; the notion of a struggle between the two men. But I did deliberately shut my eyes to it. It would have required another canvas. No use talking about it. How long would I have had to wait for that moment?--and the mood of the other was there, more in accord with my temperament, more also with my secret desire to achieve a feat of artistic brevity, once at least, before I died. And on those grounds I believe you will forgive me for having rejected probably a greater thing--or perhaps only a different one.

What I regret now is the rejection of a half-thought-out scene, four pages or so, between Catherine and Scevola. But when it came to me the development of the story was already marked and the person of Catherine established psychologically as she is now. That scene would have checked the movement and damaged the conception of Catherine. It would have been, and it would have looked, a thing "inserted." I was feeling a little bit heartsick then, too, and anxious also to demonstrate to myself as soon as possible that I could finish a piece of work. So I let it go.²⁰

He granted Garnett the validity of his criticism. But, pointing out his own justification, he went his own way. It is true that he sought and accepted Garnett's criticisms

²⁰ Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, Dec. 4, 1923, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., II, 326-27.

of the Land and Water text of The Rescue in 1919-20,²¹ but the concessions to Garnett--although granted almost entirely-- were minor. He rejected Garnett's largest alteration because he felt it would have interfered with the plot.

There was a decline in the frequency--though not the warmth--of his correspondence with Garnett after 1898. In 1895, he wrote him ten times; in 1896, twenty-eight; in 1897, thirty-six, in 1898, twenty-two; in 1899, eleven. In 1900, he wrote him only five times. Altogether, in the twenty-six years of his life after 1898, he wrote one hundred and eighteen letters to Garnett--or just twenty-two letters more than the ninety-six he had written in the first four years of their friendship.²² His dependence upon Garnett declined as his professional sureness grew.

The stories of the agonies which Conrad went through in writing are legion. And it is an interesting fact that he was not uniformly troubled, through his career, by the inability to write. Almayer's Folly, written at a time when he was more a seaman than at any other time of his literary life, took him five years to complete. But there was never a murmur that he found the writing unpleasant. The novel proceeded slowly simply because Conrad found little time to

²¹ Gordan, op. cit., pp. 217-18.

²² This is my count of the letters cited in Garnett, op. cit.

work on it. It was the labour of a dilettante, who could still enjoy the difficulties, even, of creation:

Je suis en train de lutter avec Chap. XI; une lutte a²³ mort Vous savez! . . . Je regrette chaque minute que je passe loin du papier. Je ne dis pas de la plume car j'ai écrit fort peu, mais l'inspiration me vient en regardant le papier. Puis ce sont des échappées à perte de vue; la pensée s'en va vagabondant dans des grands espaces remplis des formes vagues. Tout e[s]t chaos encore mais--lentement--les spectres se changent en chair vivante, les vapeurs flottantes se solidifient et qui sait?--peut-être quelque chose naîtra dans le choc des idées indistinctes.²⁴

With An Outcast of the Islands, the difficulties began. The problems and responsibilities of the novelist began to encroach upon the carefree attitude of the seaman:

"L'autre ouvrage va très doucement. Je suis très découragé. Les idées ne viennent pas. Je ne vois pas ni les personnages ni les événements. A vrai dire je suis préoccupé de mes plans pour partir et comme ils n'ont pas l'air de se réaliser je suis dans un état d'irritation qui ne me permet pas de m'oublier dans mon récit--par conséquent le travail ne vaut rien.²⁵

Again,

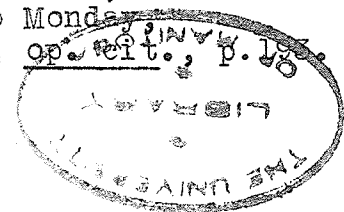
On travaille le plus quand on ne fait rien. Voilà trois jours que je m'assois devant une page blanche--et le page est toujours blanche excepté pour un IV en tête. A vrai dire je suis mal parti. . . . Je ne ressens le moindre enthousiasme. C'est fatal, cela.²⁶

²³The French quotations in this chapter are given exactly as they appear in the source I have used.

²⁴Letter from Joseph Conrad to Mme. Poradowska, dated "Jeudi" and assigned by John Archer Gee to Thursday, March 29 or April 5, 1894, cited by Gordan, op. cit., pp. 180-81.

²⁵Letter from Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, October 23, 1894, cited by Gordan, op. cit., p. 191.

²⁶Letter from Joseph Conrad to Mme. Poradowska, dated "Lundi matin" and assigned by John Archer Gee to Monday October 29 or November 5, 1894, cited by Gordan, op. cit., p. 186.



By the time he was plunged into work on The Rescue, the pressure of writing had mounted immensely:

I sit down religiously every morning, I sit down for eight hours every day--and the sitting down is all. In the course of that working day of eight hours I write three sentences which I erase before leaving the table in despair. There's not a single word to send you. Not one! And time passes--and McClure waits--not to speak of Eternity for which I don't care a damn. Of McClure however I am afraid.

I ask myself sometimes whether I am bewitched, whether I am the victim of an evil eye? But there is no "jettatura" in England--is there? I assure you--speaking soberly and on my word of honour--that sometimes it takes all my resolution and power of self control to refrain from butting my head against the wall. I want to howl and foam at the mouth but I daren't do it for fear of waking that baby and alarming my wife. It's no joking matter. After such crises of despair I doze for hours still half conscious that there is that story I am unable to write. Then I wake up, try again--and at last go to bed completely done-up. So the days pass and nothing is done. At night I sleep. In the morning I get up with the horror of that power-²⁷lessness I must face through a day of vain efforts.

With Lord Jim, difficulties persisted, but the cries of despair became less frequent. Still--

I am at it day after day, and I want all day, every minute of a day, to produce a beggarly tale of words or perhaps to produce nothing at all.

. It is strange. The unreality of it [writing fiction] seems to enter one's real life, penetrate into the bones, make the very heartbeats pulsate illusions through the arteries. One's will becomes the slave of hallucinations, responds only to shadowy impulses, waits on imagination alone. A strange state, a trying experience, a kind of fiery trial of untruthfulness. And one goes through it with an exaltation as false as all the rest of it. One goes through it,--and there's nothing to show at the end. Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!²⁸

²⁷Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, March 29, [1898], Garnett, op. cit., pp. 207-8.

²⁸Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward L. Sanderson, October 12, 1899, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 283.

Finally, Nostromo: "I drop you these lines just to say that Nostromo is finished; a fact upon which my friends may congratulate me as upon a recovery from a dangerous illness."²⁹ But despite this admission, he had managed to write Nostromo--his longest novel--in twenty months. The difficulties of authorhood persisted on into the second period, but the experience of the professional was helping to solve them.

Actually, the difficulties continued all his life, for there was nothing of the hack writer in Conrad. He was constitutionally incapable of producing a story simply for the market. But the note of complaint has changed, from the second period to the third, betokening a new-found relief from the agonies of creation. The tales of hours spent fruitlessly over blank sheets of manuscript vanish. There are no more outcries of awful doubt over the quality of the few pages managed; and where doubt is expressed the tone is quieter, more philosophical, as in this letter written to Galsworthy on August 27, 1910:

Another couple of thousand [words], which I must do by next Monday, will end it ["A Smile of Fortune"]. This will mean over 20 thous. words in two months, because I did not really start till July. June's work was mere fooling,--not on purpose, of course.

²⁹Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, September 3, 1904, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 335.

I was still too limp to grasp the subject and most of the pages written then have been cancelled in typescript. It was strangely nerveless bosh.

Of course I will do the Rescue. To tell you the truth, I've forgotten that stuff. I've a hazy recollection of something lightly inflated and verbose. But no doubt I can match it well enough out of the rubbish floating in my softened brain.³⁰

Doubtless, a growing freedom from financial worry was in part responsible for the fact that writing became somewhat easier. And yet that does not hold all the answer. On July 30, 1907, five months before Conrad's debt to Pinker had hit £1572,³¹ and in the very same letter in which he could say, "It has been a disastrous time. You must help me settle down now on an economical basis,"³² he could still aver confidently to Pinker:

I think I can say safely that the Secret Agent is not the sort of novel to make what comes after more difficult to place. Neither will it, I fancy, knock my prices down. Chance itself will be altogether different in tone and treatment of course, but it will be salable I believe. By the end of Sept^r you will have a really considerable lot of it to show.³³

The main reason for the difficulty he still did have in writing, in the later period, was his own ill health and that of his family. But that did not stop him. He wrote on through

³⁰Jean-Aubry, op. cit., II, 114.

³¹See the letter from Joseph Conrad to John Galsworthy, January 6, 1908, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., II, 66.

³²Letter from Joseph Conrad to John B. Pinker, July 30, 1907, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., II, 55.

³³Ibid., p. 54.

it. The more powerful difficulties which hampered him in the earlier years were mental and not physical, and they stemmed from the very nature of his work.

Theory for its own sake meant nothing to him in the first two periods. He declared it to be the "cold and lying tombstone of departed truth,"³⁴ and suggested to Edward Noble, in a letter dated November 2, 1895, what was the only proper course for him:

Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life,--a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me.³⁵

The act of writing a novel was for him an instinctive one. It involved merely giving himself up to his emotions. In another letter written to Edward Noble (October 28, 1895), he insisted that everything was as easy and as difficult as that:

Remember that death is not the most pathetic,-- the most poignant thing,--and you must treat events only as illustrative of human sensation,--as the outward sign of inward feelings,--of live feelings,--which alone are truly pathetic and interesting. You have much imagination: much more than I ever will have if I live to be a hundred years old. That much is clear to me. Well, that imagination (I wish I had it) should be used to create human souls: to disclose human hearts,--and not to create events that

³⁴Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, March 15, 1895, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 174.

³⁵Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 184.

are properly speaking accidents only. To accomplish it you must cultivate your poetic faculty,--you must give yourself up to emotions (no easy task). You must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image,--mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse: You must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain,--you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost: you must do it so that at the end of your day's work you should feel exhausted, emptied of every sensation and every thought, with a blank mind and an aching heart, with the notion that there is nothing,--nothing left in you. To me it seems that it is the only way to achieve true distinction--even to go some way towards it.³⁶

There was his theory of art, in a nutshell. And not laid down in formal terms, either, but suggested casually, in a letter, during the process of encouraging a friend who had suffered some literary reversals. Therein lies the secret of Conrad's greatness: for him, as for all great novelists, no labour was ever too exhausting if the product, shaped honestly in the simple shop of the author's soul and nowhere else, showed forth the human models in their splendour and their folly, with sympathy and understanding. This principle, formulated so early, underlay all his best work, and was the basis for the theory of art he enunciated two years later in the preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus."

The theory of art in the preface to The Nigger guided the formation of the great works of the second period. But in the third period, Conrad for the most part ceased

³⁶Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 183.

talking altogether about his art. It is likely that he believed his theory and his practice to have been pretty well settled--that he was continuing to write according to the principles of the Preface to The Nigger and the letter to Noble. He believed himself in the third period to be writing according to the same general pattern that he had always written: with his eye on the subject, and from the depths of his own innermost belief. But on the rare occasions when he did speak of his art, it was to do so in a rather more complex vein. He wrote to Barrett H. Clark on May 4, 1918:

Coming now to the subject of your inquiry, I wish at first to put before you a general proposition: that a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character. This statement may surprise you, who may imagine that I am alluding to the Symbolist School of poets or prose writers. Theirs, however, is only a literary proceeding against which I have nothing to say. I am concerned here with something much larger. But no doubt you have meditated on this and kindred questions yourself.

So I will only call your attention to the fact that the symbolic conception of a work of art has this advantage, that it makes a triple appeal covering the whole field of life. All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty.³⁷

This is true enough. But the great characters of literature have been first and foremost alive and vital human beings. They have taken on symbolic stature only because they are so

³⁷

Jean-Aubry, op. cit., II, 204-5.

truly alive, so truly us. But in thus advising a conscious attempt at symbolism, Conrad betrays, explicitly, a flaw in his own art which was anyway only too obvious from his later novels themselves: that his eye is now less certainly upon a particular individual character; that he is less concerned with making a man who is, first of all, alive, than he is with making a work of art. It is no coincidence that at the time he wrote this letter he was just finishing one of his poorest novels, The Arrow of Gold.

In the first and second periods, he had drained his soul. It was the only way the beginning novelist had known how to write. It had been exceedingly simple and exceedingly difficult, and what he had written had been good. Until 1905 he continued in the same manner. But--and this is a general statement which will require later qualification--after 1905 his art became more artificial and less real. The reasons for this will be discussed in another chapter. But we might stop to point out here one of the most evident consequences of his new attitude toward creation: direct personal experience ceased almost altogether to be a basis for his work. Prior to 1905, it had been almost invariably a basis. In the third period, however, he wrote mainly from anecdotal or historical points of departure, and this loss of immediacy--loss of the freshness and vitality inherent in direct personal experience--led, in turn, to an even greater artificiality. The Polish and Napoleonic stories suffer particularly from

this malady.

The change in attitude helps to explain why he was, finally, able to complete The Rescue in the third period and not before: He was trying to do in The Rescue in 1918 something quite other than what he had been trying to do in 1899. To write a novel was no longer simply to drain the soul; to make a man in the image of men as he knew them, and set him in a world which was real, letting the chips fall as they might, letting the work of art speak its own message. To write a novel was to make a deliberate attempt to interpret the world; to be symbolic, to declare a preconceived message (for if a man is to be made consciously symbolic, it can only be because his creator has already decided how he must act. The character is allowed no chance to work imaginatively upon his creator, carving out, so to speak, his own individuality).

This new approach to the work of art is the differentiating principle behind the changes which we shall notice in Conrad's work after 1904.

CHAPTER V

THE LANGUAGE AND THE POINT-OF-VIEW

What is truth? What is that golden quality which all artists would agree they must offer in their work, but for which each would have his own special definition? Conrad acknowledged that every man had his own conception of truth. But he was very clear about what it meant for him:

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile--such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve.¹

Especially in fiction was the achievement limited to a very few. The artist who deals in prose has fewer tools to hand than the artist who deals in poetry. And the literary art itself is, of all the arts, the least plastic. That is, it is the least capable of being moulded to the artist's vision, because a certain hard core of denotation is always present in prose. Yet Conrad had neither aptitude nor love for poetry; painting he did not understand, and music bored him. He conceded their validity as arts, and indeed recognized their special beauties and qualifications. But for himself, he had no enjoyment of them. He permitted the sculptor

¹ Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. xii.

Jacob Epstein to do a bust of him, at the insistence of Muirhead Bone. He even acknowledged great admiration for the work. But the concession came at the end of his life, and is the only instance of such a departure. His pleasure is largely explained by the fact that he found it "nice to be passed to posterity in this monumental and impressive rendering."²

From these two facts--his single-minded love of fiction, and his desire that it should rival the other arts--sprang his concern for language. Since all art was an appeal to the senses, the art of fiction, if it were to achieve the effect of the other arts, could only do so by the novelist accomplishing with words what the musician could accomplish with notes or the painter with his colours.

Fiction

must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music--which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.³

²Letter from Joseph Conrad to Elbridge L. Adams, March 26, 1924, G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), II, 341.

³Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. ix.

Such a creed might easily have landed him alongside Joyce. But not Conrad. He admired Joyce, and envied him the effects he achieved. But he deplored the cost: the reduction of his audience to a small group of initiates.

For Conrad, the solution had to be one which spoke to all men--to those who "in the fulness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused . . . "⁴ as well as to those who were prepared--and intellectually able--to surrender completely to the artist. For the last group he had no fear; it was to the first that he addressed himself:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see. That--and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm--all you demand--and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.⁵

Therefore the need that the written word should have power. It had to grip the reader's interest: to shock him, charm him, edify him, console him; but above all to tell him the truth about himself and the men and women he lived with.

In the beginning, Conrad wrote from the "outside." He had not yet discovered the omniscient Captain Marlow, who, by virtue of his sympathetic and detailed knowledge of character and motive, was later able to give him such help

⁴Ibid., pp. ix-x.

⁵Ibid., p. x.

from within in making personalities and events real and comprehensible. Everything had to be done from the "outside." Of course, that was the normal starting point for a not-so-young sea captain who was beginning his first novel in a language which fifteen years before had been entirely unknown to him; a sea captain who for nearly ten years had travelled extensively in the Malay Archipelago, who had laid the scene of his first books there, and who believed firmly in the powerful role which Malaya itself played in the lives of the human beings who found their way into his stories. This conviction of the importance of the surroundings fitted in perfectly with his desire at once to grip and instruct his reader. The climate, humid and hot; the turgid brown river, swirling its way to the immense blue of the ocean between banks of matted undergrowth, spawning ground of innumerable mosquitoes--these and other elements were the things which fired his imagination, and gripped that of his readers. And they gripped the imagination the more because they were always expressed in language of the utmost fidelity, yet of the greatest colour. The range of Conrad's vocabulary was tremendous, and he strained it to the limits to find the exact word for his meaning in the physical context of the story, and yet the one which would reach behind the cold line of reasonable, sense-making words, and present, by its very sound, or by the associations with which time had invested it, a dram of the spiritual truth--

the love, the pity, the wonder, the hate, the mystery-- underlying the plain facts of life (with which, alone, plain language can deal).

So much did the setting and the language account for in his characters, too, that, as it worked out, the characters would have been infinitely less themselves without the setting.

All this is not to say that Conrad had a complete plan established, and wrote his early novels according to it. Nothing was worked out. He wrote from instinct, from intuition. He wrote from what he saw--or at least from what he saw when the raw materials had emerged from the "deep well." He wrote from his love of the English language; and he wrote from his love for struggling, pitiful, noble man. But, as we can see from the preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus," it became immediately apparent to him, once he did begin to theorize about his work, how happily the instincts of the beginner had coincided with the objectives of the artist.

For these reasons, then, we find in the early Conrad rich descriptive passages; a highly evocative, Oriental style such as Flaubert used in Salammbô. He was trying to reach behind the surface of events, of places, of people, to present a vision of the truth he knew to be there. But, since he was working from the "outside," it was only by first giving the object, and giving it in all its detail, its brightness, by describing the odour it gave off, the

mood it created, that the "truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect"⁶ could be discovered and presented.

Hence his very real difficulty in writing, strongest in the early period before 1899, but continuing, somewhat abated, to the very end. And hence his admiration for a man like Henry James who could, inevitably it seemed, master both the "colours" and the "shades."⁷

Hence, too, a passage like the following from Almayer's Folly:

In the middle of a shadowless square of moonlight, shining on a smooth and level expanse of young rice-shoots, a little shelter-hut perched on high posts, the pile of brushwood near by and the glowing embers of a fire with a man stretched before it, seemed very small and as if lost in the pale green iridescence reflected from the ground. On three sides of the clearing, appearing very far away in the deceptive light, the big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction.

On the fourth side, following the curve of the bank of that branch of the Pantai that formed the only access to the clearing, ran a black line of young trees, bushes, and thick second growth, unbroken save for a small gap chopped out in one place. At that gap began the narrow footpath leading from the water's edge to the grass-built shelter used by

⁶Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus," p. vii.

⁷Letter from Joseph Conrad to John Galsworthy, [Feb. 11, 1899], Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 270-71.

the night watchers when the ripening crop had to be protected from the wild pigs. The pathway ended at the foot of the piles on which the hut was built, in a circular space covered with ashes and bits of burnt wood. In the middle of that space, by the dim fire, lay Dain.⁸

This is a fine example of the early Conrad. The picture is exact, precise, if we care to read the passage purely for an idea of the physical layout. And yet there are many words which, if the mere location of Dain in his surroundings is the intention, are superfluous. But this is clearly not the sole intent. What Conrad wants above all to suggest is the remorseless, suffocating power of the life hemming Dain in on all sides. The paradox of the jungle is that its riotous, exuberant growth means death, and not life, and every individual word, as well as the passage as a whole, betrays the fact, and adds its ounce of horror to the general picture. "Lashed," "bonds," "tangled," "sombre," "strength," "merciless," "cable-like coils," "leaped," "hung," "thorny festoons," "tendrils," "victims," "exulting riot," "silent destruction": the words have a value of their own, independent of their value in the context. It has been said,⁹ referring to modern poetry, that even if neither the general sense of the poem nor the references it contains are intelligible

⁸ Almayer's Folly, p. 165.

⁹ By T.S. Eliot, I think, although I cannot find the reference.

to the reader, he will still, from the sound of the words, and the rhythm, understand something of it. The average reader is forced to fall back upon this fact for an explanation of most of his enjoyment of the later James Joyce. Not so with Conrad; he is readily understandable. But the enjoyment which the reader derives from understanding the sense of this passage is enhanced by the discovery that the sounds of the individual words, and their rhythm together, reinforce the over-all sense, and contribute to its effect.

It is a deliberate, conscious attack that we are witnessing. Live, animate, snake-like, with irresistible strength, some monstrous creature is slowly squeezing to death with its powerful coils the clean giants of the forest, while sending on high its slender, tentative, inquisitive--deadly--tendrils to choke the smaller shoots. And the awful part about it all is that the attack is silent. Silent, swift, and fierce.

In the midst of it all, in the baleful light of the fire by which we are witnessing this carnage, "very small, and as if lost in the pale green iridescence reflected from the ground," lies Dain. He has one narrow pathway to freedom--to the river and life. Clearly, if he is to live his life decently, if he is to be the man he might be, he must get away--away from the white man, and the curbing, stultifying influence he is upon the natural life.

Association with the white man, for the native, brings death--spiritual death, the death of the soul, the negation of all true instinctive values. This is the truth that those two paragraphs from Almayer's Folly convey. It is the only truth with which Conrad was concerned--indeed, the only truth he saw worth telling. The picture as a picture scarcely mattered to him at all.

The general method which we have described--that of writing from the "outside"--continues through An Outcast of the Islands, "An Outpost of Progress," and "The Lagoon" (which he finished in August, 1898).¹⁰ The method brings with it the particular verbal characteristics which we have noted, and these characteristics reach their culmination in "The Lagoon," written, as Conrad himself points out, with no change of pen--figuratively speaking--from An Outcast.¹¹ (Conrad's claim¹² that "The Lagoon" preceded "An Outpost of Progress" has been corrected by Gordan.¹³)

¹⁰ Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, Edward Garnett, editor, Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895-1924 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, [1928]), pp. 67-68.

¹¹ "Author's Note," Tales of Unrest, p. v.

¹² Ibid., p. vi.

¹³ John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), pp. 244-45.

"The Lagoon" is one of the finest short stories in the language. It is one of the shortest that Conrad wrote, despite the fact that it is piled high with the verbal machinery of the early period. It is not verbose--each word has its special function. And the "germ"--the idea--of the story is sufficiently sturdy to bear the heavy weight of the words. But it represents the early method pushed to its extreme. It leaves the impression that the slightest weakening of the idea would make the verbal loading seem extravagant. One can turn to it again and again with pleasure; but one must acknowledge the justice of Max Beerbohm's parody of it.¹⁴ Conrad had gone about as far as he could go.

The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is told, in the early pages, from the "outside," by an omniscient author, just as Almayer's Folly and An Outcast had been told. But suddenly, on page 36, there is a shift to the first person, to "we" instead of "they" when speaking about the crew. From then on, in Professor Beach's words,

there is a constant alternation between the objective third person and the first person which implies participation by the writer. Very often there is a shift from the third person to the first on one page and back again on the next.¹⁵

¹⁴Max Beerbohm, "The Feast," in A Christmas Garland (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1926), pp. 125-30.

¹⁵Joseph Warren Beach, "Impressionism: Conrad," The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, [1932]), p. 351.

Beach thus assigns a technical cause for the difference between The Nigger and "The Lagoon." I had hitherto regarded the difference as being merely one of language, the language of the novel being markedly more restrained and economical than that of the short story. It is easy to see, in the light of Beach's observation, why this restraint and economy were possible: first person narration assumed an involvement in the story; it made possible for the reader, through the narrator, a penetration to the centre of the meaning of the episode--a penetration beyond the surface of the facts, a penetration that Conrad had been forced to attempt, when he wrote in the third person, by rich and suggestive flow of language.

This is the beginning of the writing from the "inside" which characterized the second and third periods. It is the beginning of Captains Marlow and Davidson, and a whole host of anonymous narrators.

The new method enabled Conrad to "get inside" his characters without the tremendous verbal machinery. (He certainly did not lay the latter aside entirely, however.) He was able more directly to describe the truths he saw about their lives. The images of his characters moved into sharper focus. The characters themselves became rounder, deeper. Jim, Nostromo, Gould, replaced Almayer and Willems.

Chance, his first financially successful novel, stands as the ultimate refinement of the new method, only

by now, of course, it is no longer new, and has, indeed, as a result of its refinement, suffered a deterioration from the high point of the second period. Where in The Nigger Conrad used, occasionally, the "screen" of an anonymous crew member-narrator for the filtering and interpreting of experience; where in Lord Jim he used Marlow, and in Nostromo "Fussy Joe" Mitchell, in Chance he used, at times, five "screens" between the original experience and the witnessing reader. The reader learns some of the events of Flora's childhood, for example, from the narrator, who has got them from Marlow, who has got them from Fyne, who has got them from Mrs. Fyne, who has got them from Flora. In each case, the information relayed is conditioned and changed in its emphasis by the hearer's opinion of his informant, so that we get, finally, several impressions of the original situation, each of them more or less true.¹⁶

This technique he abandoned in The Rescue, and the reason is obvious. The Rescue was begun in 1896, and was half finished by the time he laid it aside in 1899. When he began work on it again, seventeen years later, he had to build upon that half of the edifice already erected, and according to a pattern to which he was already committed. He had not discovered the "screen" technique when he began

¹⁶ See Ibid., pp. 356-59, for a full explication of the method.

The Rescue, and it would have been awkward to impose it now upon a half-finished work.

The reason for delay in the composition of The Rescue now becomes clearer. Or at least, it is possible to hazard a pretty shrewd guess as to an important cause of the delay.

The Rescue was begun while Conrad was still using the omniscient-author technique of An Outcast and Almayer's Folly. He was experiencing an increasing desire to communicate the truth about his characters, and an increasing difficulty in doing that because of the limitations of the method he was using. Shortly after he began The Rescue (the end of March, 1896),¹⁷ he turned to "The Idiots" (May, 1896),¹⁸ then to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" (June, 1896),¹⁹ then back to The Rescue,²⁰ then to "An Outpost of Progress" (July, 1896),²¹ then to "The Lagoon" (August, 1896),²² then to The Rescue (late August, 1896),²³ then back to The Nigger

¹⁷Letter from Joseph Conrad to Mrs. Sanderson, April 6, 1896, Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 188.

¹⁸Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, May 24, 1896, Garnett, op. cit., pp. 52-54.

¹⁹Gordan, op. cit., p. 203.

²⁰Jean-Aubry, op. cit., I, 164.

²¹Garnett, op. cit., p. 62, n. 1.

²²Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, August 5, 1896, Garnett, op. cit., p. 64.

²³Ibid., pp. 63-64.

(September, 1896).²⁴ He was in desperate need of discovering a solution to his problem of expression, and found temporary relief in the composition of short stories. The short story was a convenient vehicle for the omniscient author technique because its very brevity precluded a sustained probing of the depths of character, whereas in the novel it was just that sustained probing which was demanded, and for which the omniscient author technique had become, for Conrad, inadequate. It is an interesting fact, in support of this theory, that the very first short story he wrote after his discovery of the narrator technique in The Nigger--"Karain: A Memory"--was written in the new method. And so were many others subsequently.

In The Nigger, he stumbled upon the new method. At least, it seems likely that he did, to judge from the frequent and awkward shifts in the point-of-view. He became so much a part of the crew of the Narcissus that the "we's" began to slip in accidentally.

But by this time The Rescue was far along (he was well into Part II), under the omniscient author technique. The "we's" did not drift unconsciously in, and it was too late to introduce them consciously, unless he started all over again--a possibility which, had it occurred to him, would doubtless have appalled him. He saw clearly what he must do, but the doing, under the present conditions of his art, was

²⁴Jean-Aubry, loc. cit.

impossible:

You see I must justify--give a motive--to my yacht people the artificial, civilized creatures that are to be brought in contact with the primitive Lingard. . . . Now the justification that had occurred to me is unfortunately of so subtle a nature that I despair of conveying it in say 20 pages well enough to make it comprehensible. And I also doubt whether it would be acceptable (if conveyed) to a single creature under heaven--not excepting even--especially!--you. Besides I begin to fear that supposing everything conveyed and made acceptable (which seems impossible) supposing that--I begin to fear that I have not enough imagination--not enough power to make anything out of the situation; that I cannot invent an illuminating episode that would set in a clear light the persons and feelings. I am in desperation and I have practically given up the book.²⁵

Again,

In the matter of R. I have lost all sense of form and I can't see images. But what to write I know. I have the action only the hand is paralysed when it comes to giving expression to that action.²⁶

In the Author's Note to The Rescue he articulates his difficulty most clearly:

The truth is that when "The Rescue" was laid aside it was not laid aside in despair. Several reasons contributed to this abandonment and, no doubt, the first of them was the growing sense of general difficulty in the handling of the subject. The contents and the course of the story I had clearly in my mind. But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts. I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and, at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate

²⁵Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, August 5, 1896, Garnett, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

²⁶Letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, [May, 1898], Garnett, op. cit., p. 139.

creation of the atmosphere to the detriment of the action. I did not see how I could avoid becoming wearisome in the presentation of detail and in the pursuit of clearness. I saw the action plainly enough. What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression, the only formula that would suit. This, of course, weakened my confidence in the intrinsic worth and in the possible interest of the story--that is, in my invention. But I suspect that all the trouble was, in reality, the doubt of my prose, the doubt of its adequacy, of its power to master both the colours and the shades.²⁷

In the later years, when he turned again to The Rescue, his prose had the power to master both the colours and the shades, for he did complete the novel, and with the same omniscient author technique with which he had begun. He returned to the "outside" in his depiction of truth.

But if the prose is now capable of mastering the colours and the shades, it is very different prose from what it had been. Not so different as not still to be patently Conradian, but different in that its joyful exuberance is gone. The individual words no longer play their large, independent part in the over-all effect; their function is to draw the physical lay-out of a scene; to suggest, in plain terms and not by analogy, the subtle changes in feeling of the characters. Conrad appears to feel that the truth he seeks is on the surface, and can be caught by a careful transmission of facts; that the changing attitudes of his characters may be described, directly, explicitly, in words,

²⁷"Author's Note," The Rescue, pp. viii-ix.

where, before it was necessary to be indirect, to suggest, merely, by revelation in action or by heavily loaded verbal analogy (as for Dain lying in the clearing in Almayer's Folly), the inner truth. The lapse of twenty years had not shown him how he could handle the story without that worrisome over-presentation of detail in the pursuit of clearness. Here is an example. The occupants of the Emma are surrounded--as Dain was in the forest. But Conrad's prose deals with them in their external situation only; it makes no effort to get beneath the mere fact of the Whites' existence at this time and in this place. It does not raise (as the earlier passage did for Dain by analogy) the intolerable fact of their virtual captivity. Its function, compared with that of the earlier prose, is almost purely utilitarian:

An ingeniously constructed framework of light posts and thin laths occupied the greater part of the deck amidships of the Emma. The four walls of that airy structure were made of muslin. It was comparatively lofty. A door-like arrangement of light battens filled with calico was further protected by a system of curtains calculated to baffle the pursuit of mosquitoes that haunted the shores of the lagoon in great singing clouds from sunset till sunrise. A lot of fine mats covered the deck space within the transparent shelter devised by Lingard and Jörgenson to make Mrs. Travers' existence possible during the time when the fate of the two men, and indeed probably of everybody else on board the Emma, had to hang in the balance. Very soon Lingard's unbidden and fatal guests had learned the trick of stepping in and out of the place quickly. Mr. d'Alcacer performed the feat without apparent haste, almost nonchalantly, yet as well as anybody. It was generally conceded that he had never let a mosquito in together with himself. Mr. Travers

dodged in and out without grace and was obviously much irritated at the necessity. Mrs. Travers did it in a manner all her own, with marked cleverness and an unconscious air. There was an improvised table in there and some wicker armchairs which Jörgenson had produced from somewhere in the depths of the ship. It was hard to say what the inside of the Emma did not contain. It was crammed with all sorts of goods like a general store. That old hulk was the arsenal and the war-chest of Lingard's political action; she was stocked with muskets and gunpowder, with bales of longcloth, of cotton prints, of silks; with bags of rice and currency brass guns. She contained everything necessary for dealing death and distributing bribes, to act on the cupidity and upon the fears of men, to march and to organize, to feed the friends and to combat the enemies of the cause. She held wealth and power in her flanks, that grounded ship that would swim no more, without masts and with the best part of her deck cumbered by the two structures of thin boards and of transparent muslin,²⁸

Another feature of the prose of The Rescue is the increased use of conversation, as compared with the use in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. Conrad expresses his truth dramatically, now in the words which the characters speak to one another. He reveals it in the full explicitness of person-to-person statement. Mrs. Travers is about to make her confession to Lingard:

"I wonder you can bear to look at me," she murmured. Then Lingard spoke again.

"I had to see you once more."

"That abominable Jörgenson," she whispered to herself.

"No, no, he gave me my chance--before he gave me up."

Mrs. Travers disengaged her arm and Lingard stopped, too, facing her in a long silence.

²⁸The Rescue, pp. 277-78.

"I could not refuse to meet you," said Mrs. Travers at last. "I could not refuse you anything. You have all the right on your side and I don't care what you do or say. But I wonder at my own courage when I think of the confession I have to make." She advanced, laid her hand on Lingard's shoulder and spoke earnestly. "I shuddered at the thought of meeting you again. And now you must listen to my confession."

"Don't say a word," said Lingard in an untroubled voice and never taking his eyes from her face. "I know already."

"You can't," she cried. Her hand slipped off his shoulder. "Then why don't you throw me into the sea?" she asked, passionately. "Am I to live on hating myself?"

"You mustn't!" he said with an accent of fear. "Haven't you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?"

"Am I to believe this? No, no! You are too generous to a mere sham. You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that--and yet you wanted to look at me again."

"I told you I never had a chance before," said Lingard in an unmoved voice. "It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now that as long as I live you will never die."²⁹

Nothing is left unsaid. The whole truth of the novel is contained in the words of their meeting.

Conrad had been deprived in The Rescue of what had become one of his main ways of describing human nature: the use of "screens." And so, reverting to his early method, he pushed it to its uttermost limits and drained every situation and every character of everything it contained.

²⁹The Rescue, pp. 464-65.

This exhaustiveness is at once the strength and the weakness of the novel. It is the strength because we know Lingard and Mrs. Travers better than we know any other figure Conrad ever created. The details of their relationship he has transmitted to us with an exactitude which explains everything. The Rescue is subtlety made explicit, a masterpiece of sophisticated writing of which the shade of Henry James doubtless approved. But it is not, somehow, quite--right. Conrad himself insisted to Richard Curle that some things must be left to the imagination:

Didn't it ever occur to you . . . that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my life and even of my tales in the background? Explicitness . . . is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusions. . . . In "Youth," in which East or West are of no importance whatever, I kept the name of the Port of landing out of the record of "poeticized" sensations. The paragraph you quote of the East meeting the narrator is all right in itself; whereas directly it's connected with . . . it becomes nothing at all . . . is a damned hole without any beach and without any glamour, and in relation to the parag. is not in tone. Therefore the par., when pinned to a particular spot, must appear diminished--a fake. And yet it is true!³⁰

The facts must be given, but the particular details which spoil the impression must be omitted. The artist must convey truth by giving the essentials. He must not labour the minutiae too hard. This is one flaw which renders The Rescue, for all the beauty of its intricate design, a lesser achievement than Lord Jim or Nostromo:

³⁰Richard Curle, Conrad to a Friend (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), pp. 113-14, cited by Gordan, op. cit., p. 50.

it tells too much. It tries to tell all. In the passage last quoted even the ring is referred to explicitly, when in the concrete situation--as Henry James knew--it would far more likely have been referred to as "it." I am not quibbling over Conrad's right to choose to refer to the ring explicitly, if he wished, in the individual situation. If that were the only point at issue, then whatever the judgment concerning his choice it would be of small consequence. But "ring" appeared, and not "it," for the same reason that the function of all the rest of his prose in the third period was direct rather than suggestive: Conrad had become intensely anxious that every detail of every situation, of every relationship, be understood in its fulness. He was unwilling to run the risk of his readers failing to substitute "ring" for "it" in their minds. He had not the faith in the power of his art to cause that substitution. The result is a lesser artistic achievement, or a complete failure, depending upon whether the price paid for the certainty of being understood is a lesser or a greater loss of reality--of the ability to seize, in a moment of time, the men busy about the work of the earth, and present them, with conviction and with fidelity, to their fellows.

CHAPTER VI

CONRAD'S HANDLING OF CHRONOLOGY

It is Conrad's sense of the elusiveness of human nature which leads him not merely to view his subject from so many angles and strain it through so many media, but also to keep moving his camera backward and forward in time so as constantly to get the subject into some new and illuminating perspective. It is as if human nature were a rare and skittish bird which he must approach with every circumstance of precaution and which must by all means be taken by surprise.¹

We have examined in the last chapter Conrad's use of one method of stalking human nature: the use of "screens"; and the consequences of his being deprived of their services, after he had grown accustomed to their help.

The one other device which he primarily used in this "hunt" he used consistently, from first to last. He never, in fact, wrote a novel without it. The forward-and-backward ranging over time is a feature of Suspense, just as it is of Almayer's Folly. Yet the degree to which he used this device varied during his writing career. It is important to note the variations, because the more frequently he used the technique, the less he had to depend on other methods of rendering character; and the less he used the technique,

¹Joseph Warren Beach, "Impressionism: Conrad," The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, [1932]), p. 364.

the greater was his dependence on other methods.

Almayer's Folly opens dramatically with Mrs. Almayer's shrill interruption of her husband's reverie on the verandah of his "Folly" overlooking the Pantai. Immediately, we get our first glimpse into the past as Almayer resumes his reminiscences, recalling the circumstances which brought him to Sambir. Dain arrives, and we are in the present again. Then we retreat to the past, and Mrs. Almayer's disillusion with and growing hatred of her husband are described, bringing us once more to the present. Then we witness Abdulla's proposal to Nina on behalf of his nephew, Syed Reshid--an event which took place nearly three years before the story opened--shortly after her return at the age of sixteen to Sambir. We remain in the past, moving forward chronologically, while the growing attachment of Dain and Nina is described, including Taminah's and Babalatchi's witnessing of the lovers in the canoe together one afternoon. We jog back in time again to participate in Dain's and Nina's afternoon before moving forward, finally, to the present once more. From here on the story moves straight ahead: Dain converses with Lakamba and Babalatchi; his "death" is arranged; the Dutch gunboat arrives; Dain and Nina elope; Almayer pursues them; Nina breaks with her father and the lovers escape to the sea; and Almayer returns to his tragic end.

In Almayer's Folly we revert from present to past

time only three times, with one additional reversion from the past to an antecedent past. In An Outcast of the Islands, there are five reversions.

We begin with a rapid survey of Willems' present life as confidential clerk for old Hudig, and encounter him as, on a particular evening, he wends his way home. Then we get an account of how Lingard placed him with Hudig, years before, and are brought back to the present when disaster strikes Willems in the form of Vinck's revelation to Hudig of the embezzlement, now nearly repaid. Still in the present, Lingard encounters Willems again, and--in the past once more--the circumstances of Willems' marriage are described. We move to Sambir, and remain in present time right up to Lingard's arrival and conversation with Almayer, at which time Almayer tells of Abdulla's entrance on the scene, an event of six weeks ago. Still in the past, Lingard gives an account of the grounding of the Flash, and of bringing Willems' wife, Joanna, with him to Sambir. In the present once more, Lingard meets Willems. Then we see Almayer, musing, and follow in his thoughts the building of his "Folly," and the arrival of Joanna. The story follows through from this point in strict chronological order up to the death of Willems, at which point we jump several years forward to the arrival in Sambir of Almayer's European visitor. The loose ends of the story are then tied together by Almayer's recollections to his friend.

We have seen before how, in The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Conrad began to interpose a narrator between the actual events of the story and the reader. There is a very close relationship between the use of the human "screens" and the inversion of chronology. It is evident that if there are, for example, five "screens" operating between the actual event and the reader, then we must make five separate jumps into past time. A, the narrator, is recounting to the reader events which he got previously from B; but he must tell us, ultimately, how B got them from C, C from D, D from E, and how they struck E to begin with. Now it does not necessarily follow that a reduction in the number of "screens" used will involve a reduction in the use of inverted chronology. In Nostromo, there is only one "screen": "Fussy Joe" Mitchell. And he is not used all the time. But Nostromo is Conrad's largest, most intricate canvas. It exceeds the "five-screen" Chance in its non-sequential treatment of narrative.

The fact explains why some critics (notably Professor Beach) have found Nostromo a confusing novel to wade through, while no-one has levied the same accusation against Chance, a novel scarcely less intricate. The use of "screens" helps to order the shifts in time sequence in Chance. By remembering that we are listening to A's description of what B told him that C had told him, we know exactly how far back in the story we are placed at the moment. "Screen" C provides an automatic perspective.

The Rescue we have already characterized as a novel composed without the aid of "screens"--although the statement is not entirely true, because Tom Lingard is often given to us through the eyes of Mrs. Travers. Still, it is a novel, completed late in life, in which Conrad was largely thrown back upon those technical resources--those and no more--which he had used at the very beginning of his career. It is interesting, therefore, to observe the chronology of The Rescue.

The scene opens aboard Lingard's brig, Lightning, becalmed in the Straits of Carimata, and the novel proceeds straight forward in time through the entire Part I--up to the point of the brig's arrival off the Shore of Refuge toward noon one day. Then the scene shifts back to Hassim and Immada early in the morning on the day of the brig's arrival. Then we go back further for the story of Hassim's rescue of Lingard--their first meeting--and Lingard's reciprocating rescue of Hassim. Then, moving forward, but still in past time, we discover that Hassim has been left with Belarab on the Shore of Refuge; Lingard meets Jörgenson; we go back again to pick up Jörgenson's history. Then the actual account of Lingard's depositing Hassim with Belarab is given, and the strategic disposition of the Emma. Only then do we return to the present and Lingard's interview with the yacht people. Events move forward chronologically for a time, until Jörgenson's letter throws us into the past once more for an account of the growing power of Tengga,

the arrival of Sheriff Daman, and the irresolution of Belarab. The present again, and the yacht people--minus Travers and d'Alcacer--are removed to the brig. Hassim arrives, and through his account to Lingard we are told of the intrigues of Tengga and Daman, and the capture of the prisoners from the yacht--events already occurred. In the present, Lingard and Mrs. Travers leave for the Shore of Refuge. Life on the Emma is described, and the circumstances of Travers' and d'Alcacer's release, already effected, are given. Carter's letter to Lingard moves us into the past once more, where we pick up the details of his destruction of Daman's praus. Jaffir then tells the story of the attack. In the present again, Jaffir is sent after Hassim, who has gone after Belarab to his tomb. From this point of departure we are given a commentary on the character of Belarab, that he should have chosen this moment to retire, and the circumstances of his retirement. The story then returns to the present, and events move swiftly forward until, suddenly, we find ourselves once more aboard the Lightning. The dénouement is given by flashback as Lingard recollects the events which preceded their sudden return: the conference with Belarab, the explosion, the lifting of the fog. As soon as we have caught up with the present, Wasub recalls us to the past with Jaffir's account of the explosion of the Emma, and his escape. Lingard sees Jaffir and hears his message; Jaffir dies; Lingard and Mrs.

Travers meet by his grave; and the story ends with the iron command, "Steer north."

Altogether, there are eight major shifts from present to past time, and innumerable shifts forward or backward within past time. The design of The Rescue is less intricate than Nostromo, or Chance, or Lord Jim. But of the fifteen novels he wrote,² The Rescue stands fourth in the use of inverted chronology.³ And the three which stand before it are written with the use of one or more "screens," which, as we have seen, automatically involve one or more time shifts. Certainly, The Rescue is told with a fuller use of inverted chronology than either An Outcast or Almayer's Folly. (The last three-fifths of Almayer's Folly are in strict chronological order.)

There is every likelihood that Conrad's increased use of this technique in The Rescue came as a natural consequence of the "screen" technique of character expression being lost to him. He had become increasingly dependent upon the form of the novel assisting him in his transmission of the truth he saw: "dependent" to the extent that the faithful application of the doctrine which he and Hueffer promulgated--of giving a characterization or narration by first seizing a person or a scene with a strong impression,

²Counting The Nigger as a novel; and counting Romance, the collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer [Ford] with which, of the three, Conrad had most to do.

³This is my own count.

and then working forward and backward over him or it-- constituted for him almost an automatic transmission of the truth which that character or situation contained. That is a harsh accusation to make. But Galsworthy⁴ and many others have remarked on Conrad's quick, unfailing instinct for character. That instinct served him well in The Rescue and saved that novel from what it might have been in the hands of a lesser artist. D'Alcacer and Travers are excellent portraits, and there are some things about the major characters which are very good indeed. But still, in The Rescue (as we have stated in the last two chapters and shall show more fully in the next) there becomes evident a change in the conception of character, and this change in conception is a weakening--a weakening which, in other works of the third period, had been less noticeable. The reason it becomes more noticeable now is perhaps that form for us, as for Conrad, had substituted effectively for a time for a convincing grasp of character. The use of "screens" and inverted chronology had covered up any loss of reality. We--and he--believed that we held the real thing, when we only grasped the shadow. But in The Rescue where, denied for the first time in many years the use of one of the two principles which had come to dictate the form, he had to fall back upon the sole use of the other, the weaknesses

⁴John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad," Castles in Spain and Other Screeeds (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 123.

of his current practices of characterization are betrayed. He is forced to an exceptional reliance upon the remaining prop; and he is forced to an over-explicitness in the delineation of motive and personal relationships which violates our sense of reality. The characters are missing a something which, as we shall see, a Jim, a Nostromo, a Monygham which even an Almayer and a Willems--possess: a worshipful sense of the ultimate mystery enshrouding mankind, as conceived by this strong man who looked, fascinated, on life and brooded over its inner meaning.

CHAPTER VII

"THE MATERIAL OF THE NOVELIST": A CHANGING CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER

"The material of the novelist is the world of human beings and their relations to each other."¹

But art is not so exclusively the question of presentation and arrangement that some of our more pretentious critics seem to think; art is not the same as craft. If it were, Fletcher would be a greater dramatist than Webster, Goldsmith a greater poet than Blake. No, the specific mark of a work of art is that it is a 'creation', a new, individual and living entity, owing something of its character, no doubt, to its subject and more to the personality of its creator, yet differing from and independent of either. Without this independent vitality the most accomplished portrait remains a photograph, the most intimate history a record. Nor can any 'craft', however skilful, create a work of art till the raw material of experience on which it is working has been first transmuted to the stuff of which art is made. And the distinguishing, essential qualification of the artist is what for want of a better name is called 'creative imagination'; the power, that is, which generates that union of artist and material in which alone the child of artistic life is born.²

This is the accusation which we are really levying against the later Conrad when we talk of his increased reliance upon particular techniques and methods: we are saying that the novels of the later period were written

¹David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, [1948]), p. 19.

²Ibid., pp. 18-19.

with a reduction of the "creative imagination" which made the novels of the second period pre-eminent. The characters of The Rescue, Chance, The Rover do not "live" as the characters of Nostromo and Lord Jim assuredly do, as the characters of the first period--of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast--assuredly do. Whether the characters do not "live" because of a desiccation suffered when Conrad became more preoccupied with form, or whether the preoccupation with form arose as a consequence of the relatively slight, but still noticeable, devitalization of character, is a question which we shall answer shortly. But for the moment, our task is to show that his writing of the third period was characterized by a reduction of the creative imagination which inspired the works of the first and second. For this purpose, we could take almost any novel or story of the third period and compare it with almost any novel or story of the first or second (there are exceptions which we could not compare, and we shall note some of them, and the reasons why they could not be compared, later). However, since we are dealing with the Lingard novels, it will be convenient to use Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands on the one hand and The Rescue on the other for purposes of comparison. Actually, the works of the second period would make for more forceful comparisons with the third than the works of the first, being, as they are, of greater depth. An Outcast of the Islands and, more particularly, Almayer's Folly, are

slender novels. But they approximate Lord Jim or Nostromo in the powers of the creative imagination which inhere in them; so they will serve our purpose.

It must be said here that when we compare The Rescue with Almayer's Folly and find the former wanting in some important particular which the latter has in abundance--in this case, "creative imagination"--we are not necessarily saying that The Rescue as a novel is inferior to Almayer's Folly as a novel. Characterization is very important to the novelist. He must discover "Mrs. Brown"--or a part of her: a trace of her perfume, or a wisp of her hair. If he does not, he fails. But the history of the novel is one long testimony to the number of different ways novelists have of giving us "Mrs. Brown." And the method of The Rescue, although less imaginative, makes possible insights which that of Almayer's Folly does not--which that of Lord Jim does not. We know things about Captain Lingard in The Rescue which we cannot hope to know about Almayer, or even about Lord Jim--important things, things vital to his character: his emotions, his impulses; things deep in his soul, of the very nature of the man; things we can only guess at from what we are "given" in Almayer or Jim. And to this extent the value of the novel in which he appears is greater than that of any novel of the first or second period. But he ceases to "live." That is true for all the major figures of The Rescue. Their world is a real enough world,

their problems real enough problems, their individual traits very human indeed. But one believes they exist because one can see that their world is real enough, their problems real enough, their traits real enough, and not because one sees them breathe. When the creative imagination operates at its highest, reality is taken for granted--the picture must be real because the characters are, so obviously, alive.

Taken altogether then, The Rescue is a considerably better novel than Almayer's Folly or An Outcast. Its range is much greater--it is longer--and this goes, too, for most of the other works of the third period when compared to those of the first. But the works of the second period, possessing both the depth of creative imagination of the first and the range of the third, are by far his finest; and it is in just this measure that we shall henceforth call The Rescue inferior to Almayer's Folly or An Outcast: that these two novels could lead to Lord Jim and Nostromo--to two of the highest peaks to which fiction can aspire--while The Rescue had irretrievably lost the formula.

Captain Tom Lingard inhabits all three of the Malayan novels around which our discussion is centred. And a logical first step in examining the change in conception of character which we have said took place in the third period of his writing is to compare the Lingard of The Rescue with the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast, and note the

change of character he undergoes between the first two novels and the last.

The changes are many. Lingard in The Rescue is an entirely different man from what he was. He is no longer an adventurer, a man of action with a relatively simple code of behaviour. All sorts of complications have entered his life--as indeed complications entered the life of the earlier Lingard. But the complications now weigh with him as never before. Every alternative of action has moral implications to which he had hitherto been blind. In Almayer's Folly, his action was governed only by a strong sense of what he wished to do. His carefree boyish philosophy that all things happened for the best in this best of all possible worlds, combined with his own innate generosity, made possible a sureness of the rightness of his own beliefs that gave those beliefs ready issuance in action. And once the action took place, he never regretted it. He could always avoid the consequences of it by a trip to Europe or by losing himself in some other new project. He believed that things had to happen as they had. The same is substantially true of the Lingard of An Outcast of the Islands. Yet there is one moment at which he doubts the rightness of his own position. When he was about to "sentence" Willems,

He felt a great emptiness in his heart. It seemed to him that there was within his breast a great space without any light, where his

thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish--and to relieve him from the fearful oppression of their existence. Speech, action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there. This wouldn't do.³

He abruptly pulled himself together, though. The old Lingard returned:

"I regret nothing. I picked you up by the water-side, like a starving cat--by God. I regret nothing; nothing that I have done."

But he had taken the first faltering step toward a proper assessment of his own responsibility for the lives with which he had become involved.

His main attitude, however, is still one of complete confidence in himself and in the justice of his acts. The fact that Willems has brought in the Arabs to Sambir is obviously distressing, but as to his own, Lingard's, responsibility--he having placed Willems there--why, what else could he have done, anyway? Besides, he has "been ruined more than once"⁵ before, and sees plenty of ways of redeeming the situation.

The same Lingard does not exist in The Rescue, except

³An Outcast of the Islands, p. 272.

⁴Ibid., p. 273.

⁵Ibid., p. 163.

in the early pages, where he is patently the same man we have met before. He is recounting to Shaw the experience he shared with a French skipper in Ampanam--

. . . the beggars got to windward of us by fair words, till one morning a boat's crew from the Frenchman's ship found the girl lying dead on the beach. That put an end to our plans. She was out of her trouble anyhow, and no reasonable man will fight for a dead woman. I was never vengeful, Shaw, and--after all--she didn't throw that flower at me. But it broke the Frenchman up altogether. He began to mope, did no business, and shortly afterward sailed away. I cleared a good many pence out of that trip, I remember.⁶

The highlight of the trip was the profit made, and that profit was sufficient justification for having made no fuss about the murder. After all, the moral judgments of those natives were no business of his.

The man with whom we deal later in Parts II-VI of The Rescue is startlingly different. And the demands of the plot necessitated that he should be different in some respects, because the story of The Rescue is the account of the gradual reduction of the man of action to quivering impassivity. It is therefore difficult to say how much of the change of character of Lingard in The Rescue from what he was in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast is due to a change in Conrad's style, and how much is due to the deliberate modification demanded by the story itself. But

⁶The Rescue, pp. 21-22.

that there was a change in Conrad's conception of Lingard's character in the seventeen-year interval cannot be denied. When Conrad resumed work on The Rescue in 1916, he eliminated in the portion already written many passages which made him out to be an adventurer and a man of action⁷-- in short, the passages which identified him with the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. Lingard became a new, highly sophisticated man. And yet Conrad apparently wanted to hang onto his identification with the earlier Lingard. At least this is the logical deduction from the fact that although in terms of his character as revealed in speech and action he was anything but, Conrad referred to him, from time to time, as an "adventurer,"⁸ implying his possession of all those qualities he had had in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast. He wanted to keep him a simple adventurer still; but the demands which Mrs. Travers made upon the sensibility of Captain Lingard were far greater than the bluff man of action could have met, and the Lingard which emerged was necessarily a different man altogether from what he had been.

If one can even partly explain the fact of his change of character by pointing to the demands of the plot,

⁷Walter F. Wright, "Conrad's The Rescue from Serial to Book," Research Studies of the State College of Washington, 13: 209, December, 1945.

⁸The Rescue, p. 219.

one cannot explain so glibly the weakening in conception of character and the change in method of portraying it, that came over Conrad's fiction in the third period generally, of which the change in Lingard is only a part. The causes of the change will be discussed in the next chapter, and its manifestations insofar as form was concerned were discussed in the last. But now, what was the new way of portraying character. Had his people, in the third period, really lost vitality?

Character had hitherto been revealed in action. We knew Almayer because he had built the "Folly," because he had married Lingard's adopted native daughter, because he had reacted as he had to Willems; or we knew Jim because of what he had done, or because of what Marlow believed him to be. But in either case, our knowledge of the man had never been complete. Jim remained to the end an enigma:

"And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side.

"But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. Is he satisfied--quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us--and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all? Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence

comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments, too, when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades."⁹

In the third period, the day of the enigmatic character is over. The causes of Captain Anthony's restraint are documented, as the causes of Lingard's indetermination in The Rescue are documented:

"I had forgotten you--and now--what? One must--it is hard--hard----" went on Lingard, disconnectedly, while he looked into Mrs. Travers' violet eyes, and felt his mind overpowered and troubled as if by the contemplation of vast distances. "I--you don't know--I--you--cannot. . . . Ha! It's all that man's doing," he burst out.¹⁰

Again,

Mrs. Travers looked at Lingard, because of all the faces in the cabin his was the only one that was intelligible to her. Hassim began to speak at once, and when he ceased Immada's deep sigh was heard in the sudden silence. Then Lingard looked at Mrs. Travers and said:

"The gentlemen are alive. Rajah Hassim here has seen them less than two hours ago, and so has the girl. They are alive and unharmed, so far. And now. . . ."

He paused. Mrs. Travers, leaning on her elbow, shaded her eyes under the glint of suspended thunderbolts.

"You must hate us," she murmured.

"Hate you," he repeated with, as she fancied, a tinge of disdain in his tone. "No. I hate myself."

"Why yourself?" she asked, very low.

"For not knowing my mind," he answered. "For not knowing my mind. For not knowing what it is that's got hold of me since--since this morning. I was angry then. . . . Nothing but very angry. . . ."

"And now?" she murmured.

"I am . . . unhappy," he said. After a moment of silence which gave to Mrs. Travers the time to wonder how it was that this man had succeeded in penetrating

⁹Lord Jim, p. 416.

¹⁰The Rescue, p. 144.

into the very depths of her compassion, he hit the table such a blow that all the heavy muskets seemed to jump a little.

Mrs. Travers heard Hassim pronounce a few words earnestly, and a moan of distress from Immada.

"I believed in you before you . . . before you gave me your confidence," she began. "You could see that. Could you not?"

He looked at her fixedly. "You are not the first that believed in me," he said.

Hassim, lounging with his back against the closed door, kept his eye on him watchfully and Immada's dark and sorrowful eyes rested on the face of the white woman. Mrs. Travers felt as though she were engaged in a contest with them; in a struggle for the possession of that man's strength and of that man's devotion. When she looked up at Lingard she saw on his face--which should have been impassive or exalted, the face of a stern leader or the face of a pitiless dreamer--an expression of utter forgetfulness. He seemed to be tasting the delight of some profound and amazing sensation. And suddenly in the midst of her appeal to his generosity, in the middle of a phrase, Mrs. Travers faltered, becoming aware that she was the object of his contemplation.

"Do not! Do not look at that woman!" cried Immada. "O! Master--look away. . . ." Hassim threw one arm round the girl's neck. Her voice sank. "O! Master--look at us." Hassim, drawing her to himself, covered her lips with his hand. She struggled a little like a snared bird and submitted, hiding her face on his shoulder, very quiet, sobbing without noise.

"What do they say to you?" asked Mrs. Travers with a faint and pained smile. "What can they say? It is intolerable to think that their words which have no meaning for me may go straight to your heart. . . ."

"Look away," whispered Lingard without making the slightest movement.

Mrs. Travers sighed.

"Yes, it is very hard to think that I who want to touch you cannot make myself understood as well as they. And yet I speak the language of your childhood, the language of the man for whom there is no hope but in your generosity."

He shook his head. She gazed at him anxiously for a moment. "In your memories then," she said and was surprised by the expression of profound sadness that over-spread his attentive face.

"Do you know what I remember?" he said. Do you

want to know?" She listened with slightly parted lips. "I will tell you. Poverty, hard work--and death," he went on, very quietly. "And now I've told you, and you don't know. That's how it is between us. You talk to me--I talk to you--and we don't know."

Her eyelids dropped.

"What can I find to say?" she went on. "What can I do? I mustn't give in. Think! Amongst your memories there must be some face--some voice--some name, if nothing more. I can not believe that there is nothing but bitterness."

"There's no bitterness," he murmured.

"O! Brother, my heart is faint with fear," whispered Immada. Lingard turned swiftly to that whisper.

"Then, they are to be saved," exclaimed Mrs. Travers. "Ah, I knew. . . ."

"Bear thy fear in patience," said Hassim, rapidly, to his sister.

"They are to be saved. You have said it," Lingard pronounced aloud, suddenly. He felt like a swimmer who, in the midst of super-human efforts to reach the shore, perceives that the undertow is taking him to sea. He would go with the mysterious current; he would go swiftly--and see the end, the fulfilment both blissful and terrible.

With this state of exaltation in which he saw himself in some incomprehensible way always victorious, whatever might befall, there was mingled a tenacity of purpose. He could not sacrifice his intention, the intention of years, the intention of his life; he could no more part with it and exist than he could cut out his heart and live. The adventurer held fast to his adventure which made him in his own sight exactly what he was.

He considered the problem with cool audacity, backed by a belief in his own power. It was not these two men he had to save; he had to save himself! And looked upon in this way the situation appeared familiar.¹¹

Not only are the causes documented, but the entire situation is laid bare in all its intricateness. Lingard's problem is exactly Jim's problem; or Almayer's problem. He has to save himself. But only in The Rescue is it made explicit. There is none of the vagueness of Stein's proposed solution for Jim.

¹¹The Rescue, pp. 216-19.

Conrad recognized the danger of over-explicitness. It meant a lack of art. He was always dissatisfied with the scene at the rock between Felicia Moorsom and Geoffrey Renouard in "The Planter of Malata" for this reason:

Of more seriousness was the spoken criticism of an old and valued friend who thought that in the scene near the rock, which from the point of view of psychology is crucial, neither Felicia Moorsom nor Geoffrey Renouard find the right things to say to each other. I didn't argue the point at the time, for, to be candid, I didn't feel quite satisfied with the scene myself. On re-reading it lately for the purpose of this edition, I have come to the conclusion that there is that much truth in my friend's criticism that I have made those people a little too explicit in their emotion and thus have destroyed to a certain extent the characteristic illusory glamour of their personalities.¹²

The scene between Mrs. Travers and Lingard on the sandpit at the end of The Rescue is open to the same criticism.

The truth which resides in character may be given in many ways. But the only legitimate way for the artist is to give it naturally and spontaneously, as an integral part of the work of art which contains it. That is why character revealed in action, or through the lips of Marlow, is valid and convincing. But when Mrs. Travers stands up and says this about herself, it does not ring true:

"Do you know the greatest difference there is between us? It is this: That I have been living since my childhood in front of a show and that I never have been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or by anything that went on on the stage. Do you understand what I mean, Captain Lingard?"¹³

¹²"Author's Note," Within the Tides, pp. vii-viii.

¹³The Rescue, p. 305.

One might know this much about oneself. One might even tell it to a comparative stranger. But one would not likely use those words, and if one did it would be a character of rare understanding and sympathy who, without having himself undergone the experience, could understand them. It is Conrad telling us exactly what Mrs. Travers is.

Not only that, but Lingard does understand her. He is (what he was not before) sensitivity and perceptiveness personified. Our gruff, bluff adventurer is perfectly at home in the sophisticated intellectual milieu of which Mrs. Travers is a part. He out-d'Alcacers d'Alcacer, the subtle Latin, in his delicate comprehension of suppressed emotions and complex moral situations. This change in him can not be justified by the plot. The Rescue is the story of his enervation by Mrs. Travers. But when the man of action becomes the man of inaction he cannot ipso facto become also the man of supreme acuity unless the author can make us feel that that quality has been latent in him. This Conrad has failed to do. Lingard was the adventurer, pure and simple, in the two earlier novels. And, as we have pointed out,¹⁴ he was to have been the same man in The Rescue. There is not a hint, prior to his encounter with Mrs. Travers, of the wide capacities he is soon to demonstrate. In fact, he is still

that child of generations of fishermen from the coast of Devon, who like most of his class was dead to the subtle voices, and blind to the

¹⁴
P. 24.

mysterious aspects of the world--the man ready for the obvious, no matter how startling, how terrible or menacing, yet defenceless as a child before the shadowy impulses of his own heart . . .¹⁵

The powerful influence of Mrs. Travers, to whom he is strongly attracted, goes part of the way toward explaining the refinement of his sensibility. But even so potent a force as she could not refine a non-existent faculty. The potential must have been there, and we have not been shown it. The fact is that Lingard became, suddenly, sophisticated because Conrad had begun to write sophisticated novels. He was plumped, name and all, into a new environment and made to act in accordance with it.

This fact does not mean that his validity as a character in The Rescue has been lost. It simply means that his vitality has. If we take The Rescue by itself, and eliminate our prefabricated impression of Lingard, he seems perfectly consistent within The Rescue. The early evidence in that novel of his moral non-involvement is too slight a base upon which to found any permanent conclusions about his character. (Perhaps part of the difficulty we have in accepting the Lingard of The Rescue in terms of what we know of him from Almayer's Folly and An Outcast is the fact that in those two novels he is older than he was in The Rescue, but possesses not the slightest residual legacy of those spiritual attributes with which he has been endowed

¹⁵The Rescue, pp. 10-11.

in that novel.) We accept him in The Rescue for what he is: a sensitive, perceptive creature whose awareness of the most intricate moral problems and of the subtlest emotional verities, when it is matched by an equal awareness on the part of others, makes for the drama which we see. Conrad seemed to feel, in this third period, that truth could best be presented, not by giving us a man and letting us make of him what we might, but by dissecting him, turning him round and round, probing him, squeezing out of him every last ounce of emotion and sensation; if necessary, by making him (or her) stand forth and declare himself--as Mrs. Travers was made to do in the passage previously quoted¹⁶ and in this:

"Don't go, pray; don't stop them. Oh! This is truth--this is anger--something real at last."

"No, but this is--such--such a fresh experience for me to hear--to see something--genuine and human. Ah! ah! one would think they had waited all their lives for this opportunity--ah! ah! ah! All their lives--for this! ah! ah! ah!"¹⁷

Then, to drive the point home, and perhaps to add verisimilitude to an otherwise unconvincing speech, Conrad insists that "These strange words struck d'Alcacer as perfectly just, as throwing an unexpected light."¹⁸ The result is that the reader has an understanding rare in literature of the niceties of every situation, and of the manifold and

¹⁶P. 92.

¹⁷The Rescue, p. 132.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 132-33.

complex motivations which determine the actions of the characters, and make them what they are.

The price which Conrad pays for this extraordinary achievement is a loss of reality--a loss of "life." The Lingard of The Rescue, as suggested in the first chapter, is no longer capable of being epiphanized--of being seized in an illuminating moment for what he is. He is no longer capable of being epiphanized because he is no longer truly alive. But the Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands is. Conrad has breathed life into him. A few strokes of the pen and we have his world--a world which he has done much to create--his stamping grounds, his friends and companions. Given those things--given Sambir, and Macassar, old Hudig and Almayer, given Mrs. Almayer and Lakamba, the Pantai and the jungle, rubber and riches--we are given Lingard.

It is true, as Virginia Woolf says, that

After the middle period Conrad never again was able to bring his figures into perfect relation with their background. He never believed in his later and more highly sophisticated¹⁹ characters as he had believed in his early seamen.

Lingard of The Rescue has no world of concrete things of which he is a part. He had the Emma and Jörgenson, the friendship of Belarab, of Hassim and Immada; he had his

¹⁹Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, First and Second Series (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, [1948]), I, 316.

ship. But he has renounced these things for the intangible world of spiritual realities. We know him not by the men he has bent to his will (although there are many in the novel), or the fortunes his daring has lost and won (although there have been these, too). These things do not count in our estimate of him in The Rescue, for they are of the past, when he was a different man. The things that count now are the comments that Mrs. Travers, d'Alcacer, Carter, and Conrad himself make about Lingard's feelings, his gropings and strivings, his perceptions and his moral insights. These are the realities about Lingard now, and Conrad is asking the reader to assess him mainly within these terms of reference. The power of the creative imagination which could give us an Almayer or a Lingard in Almayer's Folly and let us glean for ourselves that grain of truth for which we had forgotten to ask has been diverted. The formula for truth is now exhaustiveness and explicitness. Full and complete mastery of the colours and the shades is now possible because those colours and shades no longer have to render the living character and to suggest, vaguely but unmistakably, his vital truth; they have merely to paint the details of the figure in all exactitude.

Accompanying this loss of vitality, and in an effort, perhaps, to compensate for it, was an attempt by Conrad to make "universal" figures out of his men and women. Victory

is a more highly allegorical novel than any that preceded it, and the figures of Lena and Heyst, almost as much as the pasteboards Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro, are

...calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.²⁰

In The Arrow of Gold, Conrad goes even further toward converting flesh and blood into universals of experience, emotion, existence. Mills refers to Rita as "A person of imagination . . . a young virgin intelligence, steeped for nearly five years in the talk of Allègre's studio, where every hard truth had been cracked and every belief had been worried into shreds," and Conrad describes Blunt as "the intellectual personality altogether adrift."²¹ For Monsieur George, "The Rita that haunted me had no history; she was but the principle of life charged with fatality. Her form was only a mirage of desire decoying one step by step into despair."²² One cannot fall in love with a principle of life charged with fatality. She may be that to M. George, but she must be more than that to us. A principle of life charged with fatality, if it is to play a lead role in a story, must first of all be a concrete, a particular, a flesh-and-blood figure. As it is, the horrible Therese has a greater reality than she.

²⁰Epigraph to Victory.

²¹The Arrow of Gold, p. 56.

²²Ibid., p. 268.

The Arrow of Gold was written while Conrad was completing The Rescue, and Mrs. Travers bears some of the marks of Doña Rita. D'Alcacer is speaking:

"She is a representative woman and yet one of those of whom there are but very few at any time in the world. Not that they are very rare but that there is but little room on top. They are the iridescent gleams on a hard and dark surface. For the world is hard, Captain Lingard, it is hard, both in what it will remember and in what it will forget. It is for such women that people toil on the ground and underground and artists of all sorts invoke their inspiration."²³

A comparison which will illustrate Conrad's change in his view of character between the first period and the third is that of Almayer in Almayer's Folly and Lingard in The Rescue. Here is the opening of Almayer's Folly:

"Kaspar! Makan!"

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon.

He shuffled uneasily, but took no further notice of the call. Leaning with both his elbows on the balustrade of the verandah, he went on looking fixedly at the great river that flowed--indifferent and hurried--before his eyes. He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer's thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured--dishonestly, of course--or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody

²³The Rescue, p. 411.

would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return! And return soon he must--in his own interest, for his own share. He was now more than a week late! Perhaps he would return to-night.

Such were Almayer's thoughts as, standing on the verandah of his new but already decaying house--that last failure of his life--he looked on the broad river. There was no tinge of gold on it this evening, for it had been swollen by the rains, and rolled an angry and muddy flood under his inattentive eyes, carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage, amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily.²⁴

A man on the balcony of a decaying house; a river; a voice and a few random thoughts. That is all we have, but we have Almayer in them. We have him in his simplicity and in his complexity--for in Conrad's experience people are always both. We grasp him at once--intuitively, in a moment, in the full roundness of his nature: a weakling and a fool, but pathetic, too, and with redeeming virtues which make their strong appeal because they are common to us all. He is alive. He breathes. He is simple in that we can make from this first page and a half an instinctive measurement of him which will always be right; we can formulate instantly a theory about him which will explain his every action, and which will never be disproven. He is complex in that, being a man, he can never be understood in detail.

By the time Conrad came, in 1916-19, to put the final

²⁴Almayer's Folly, pp. 3-4.

form upon the figures of The Rescue, the process of character revelation had become considerably more mechanical. Lingard is made both simple and complex by a deliberate effort. So deliberate, in fact, and so artificial, that we have to be told that he is both simple and complex. It is no longer for Conrad a matter just of making a man. "Mrs. Travers found that Lingard was touching, because he could be understood."²⁵ "This man," we are told, "had presented to her his innermost self unclothed by any subterfuge. There were in plain sight his desires, his perplexities, affections, doubts, his violence, his folly . . ."²⁶ When Carter attempts to dissuade her from accompanying Lingard to the Shore of Refuge on the grounds that she does not know the man, her reply is firm:

"I do know him," she said, and before the reproachfully unbelieving attitude of the other she added, speaking slowly and with emphasis. "There is not, I verily believe, a single thought or act of his life that I don't know."²⁷

And Lingard: "It's true--it's true."²⁸ The earlier method has suffered an inversion. Lingard is simple here precisely because we can know him in detail; and he is complex because, these details known, they do not add up to anything substantial--

²⁵The Rescue, p. 167.

²⁶Ibid., p. 166.

²⁷Ibid., p. 236.

²⁸Loc. cit.

to what is the man. Not even to Mrs. Lingard: "She thought with wonder that of all the men in the world he was indeed the one she knew the best and yet she could not foresee the speech or the act of the next minute."²⁹ To us, Lingard remains complex and even confusing. We understand him particularly well at special moments--as when he himself explains the inner causes which gave rise to an action:

"You must hate us," she murmured.

"Hate you," he repeated with, as she fancied, a tinge of disdain in his tone. "No. I hate myself."

"Why yourself?" she asked, very low.

"For not knowing my mind," he answered. "For not knowing my mind. For not knowing what it is that's got hold of me since--since this morning. I was angry then. . . . Nothing but very angry. . . ."

"And now?" she murmured.

"I am . . . unhappy," he said.³⁰

In Lingard of The Rescue we have a credible semblance of life, because that is the natural consequence when a character is exhaustively, carefully rendered by a master artist who knows human nature thoroughly and intimately, and is able, with consummate skill, to put his observations into words. But when the novel is over, and we sit in judgment upon the work of art, we are inclined to ask ourselves, "Now what was it all about? Just what was the matter with Lingard, anyway? What sort of a man was he?" The details which once seemed so real, and which, while we were in full contact with them, made all intelligible, have faded. The

²⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

³⁰ The Rescue, p. 217.

truth they present is of short duration.

The truth we have in *Almayer* is of long duration, for in him we have, not a semblance of life, but life itself--real, vibrant, pulsating. We know him not by the details, but by the fundamentals of his nature which are immediately and enduringly apparent. We know him just as we know people in real life: intuitively, for taken in the round he is simple; yet not at all, for in the subtle complexities of his innermost thoughts he is unknowable. Conrad himself said, "It is when we try to grapple with another man's need . . . that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun."³¹ In grappling with Lingard, Conrad violated his own dictum, and tried to lay bare Lingard's every thought and feeling. And as he dealt with Lingard so he dealt, in greater or lesser degree, with most of the characters of the third period.

If, then, the characters of *The Rescue* do not "live," as the characters of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast* do, we are left with the problem cited at the beginning of this chapter: "Whether the characters do not 'live' because of a desiccation suffered when Conrad became more preoccupied with form; or whether the preoccupation with form arose as

³¹Cited by Arthur Symons, *Notes on Conrad With Some Unpublished Letters* (London: Myers & Co., 1925), p. 35.

a consequence of the relatively slight, but still noticeable, devitalization of character." I believe the latter explanation is the true one.

To argue the question may seem at first like debating the age-old issue of "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" But there is more at stake than just that academic question, or any like it. What we are really debating is whether the foundation of Conrad's art rests in formalism or in human nature; whether an increasing preoccupation with form could destroy the vitality of a character fully and dynamically conceived in the mind of the novelist; or whether there must not first have been some weakening of that powerful urgency with which his characters had been wont to thrust themselves upon his imagination-- a weakening which compelled the novelist to search out a more inclusive but a more mechanical means of transmitting their lessened vividness.

Conrad wrote at first from direct personal experience: the experience, simply, of one human being encountering, in the course of events from day to day, many others. People, the people he met, constituted the only food upon which his art could feed. The indelible impression which William Charles Olmeijer made upon him was responsible for Almayer's Folly, and, indeed, for his whole career: "But if I had not got to know Almayer pretty well it is almost certain

there would never have been a line of mine in print."³² Similarly, it was Jim Lingard who made Lord Jim,³³ and Klein who made "Heart of Darkness." Above all, though, it was the creative imagination of Joseph Conrad, acting upon the plain facts of personalities he had known or experiences he had undergone, which made his fiction. He needed to feel a close identity with the characters about whom he was writing. His was not one of those natures that can take a situation or a principle and spin therefrom a story. The first condition that was necessary to his art was that he should have been able to feel, somehow--whether through actual experience or some deep psychological process--so compulsive a sense of identification with the characters that each moment of their lives made him throb with excitement because he found in theirs his own. In the first two periods (i.e., prior to 1905) his fidelity to his art was so high that he accepted for it only those experiences and those characters of whose truth he was, somehow, deeply assured; and so his creations were good. In the last period the life went out of them because he ceased to believe in them.

³² A Personal Record, p. 87.

³³ At least he was the "starting point." The Lord Jim of Patusan was based mostly upon the Rajah James Brooke of Sarawak, about whom Conrad had only read. (See John Dozier Gordan, "The Rajah Brooke and Joseph Conrad," Studies in Philology, 35: 613-34, July, 1938.)

After 1904 he wrote very much less from direct experience than from hearsay or from his reading, whereas before the preponderance had been heavily on the other side. Actually, much of his fiction prior to 1905 owed a great deal to anecdotes that had been passed around in Malaya while he was there, or to his reading; but it almost invariably had a groundwork in fact, too--in personal experience of however slight a nature. But Conrad did not need much to work on. The slightest hint was enough for him.³⁴ He had an instinctive feeling for character.

The fact of his writing more from personal experience in the early years helps to explain, too, why he wrote so slowly and painstakingly all his life, but especially in the first two periods. Then, as not so much in the later, it was a direct experience that he himself had felt which he was trying to transmit, or a person whom he himself had known, or a trait he had seen in a real person. And he strove to catch in prose that direct experience in all its original intensity. That is why he had to spend whole days deciding upon "azure" for page 20 of "Youth".³⁵ Had the experience been less real and personal, it would not have been quite so imperative that he find the right word.

Several months ago, before this study was even contemplated, I drew up, in order of merit (as it seemed

³⁴See Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: a Personal Remembrance (London: Duckworth & Co., [1924]), p. 238, for evidence of Conrad's absorption with and interest in small details.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 160-64.

to me), a list of Conrad's fiction. No effort was made to support the instinctive judgment by any virtues critically derived, and yet--and this naturally enough--it will be seen that, by and large, those works rated highest which literary criticism most applauds. In the final analysis, all judgments are subjective. The list ran as follows:

<u>Date of completion</u>	<u>Title</u>
1900 ³⁶	<u>Lord Jim</u>
1899	"Heart of Darkness"
1904	<u>Nostromo</u>
1909	"The Secret Sharer"
1897	<u>The Nigger of the "Narcissus"</u>
1901	"Typhoon"
1896	"The Lagoon"
1915	<u>The Shadow-Line</u>
1910	"A Smile of Fortune"
1914	<u>Victory</u>
1896	"An Outpost of Progress"
1902	"The End of the Tether"
1912	"Because of the Dollars"
1919	<u>The Rescue</u>
1910	"Freya of the Seven Isles"
1905	"Gaspar Ruiz"
1897	"Karain"
1901	"Falk"
1912	<u>Chance</u>
1907	"Il Conde"
1913	"The Planter of Malata"
1916	"The Tale"
1898	"Youth"
1907	"The Duel"
1906	<u>The Secret Agent</u>
1912	"The Inn of the Two Witches"
1905	"The Informer"
1910	"The Partner"
1905	"The Brute"
1922	<u>The Rover</u>
1895	<u>An Outcast of the Islands</u>

³⁶The dates are those given in Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge, Eng: Bowes & Bowes, [1952]), pp. 139-40.

<u>Date of completion</u>	<u>Title</u>
1894	<u>Almayer's Folly</u>
1911	"Prince Roman"
1916	"The Warrior's Soul"
1905	"An Anarchist"
1910	<u>Under Western Eyes</u>
1901	"Amy Foster"
1903	"To-Morrow"
1896	"The Return"
1886	"The Black Mate"
1896	"The Idiots"
1918	<u>The Arrow of Gold</u>
1924	<u>Suspense</u>
1903	<u>Romance</u> (collaboration with Ford Madox Ford)

In looking over the list recently, I realized that the top eight works--each of them acknowledged by competent critics as among Conrad's best--all owe their birth to a personal experience of a particularly powerful nature. Of those works which fall in the bottom half of the list, but whose inspiration was demonstrably at least partly personal, "The Idiots" is a "derivative" piece of work,³⁷ The Arrow of Gold is characterized by Galsworthy as "tired work,"³⁸ and Almayer's Folly and An Outcast were the first things he ever did.³⁹ For the most part, the work which stemmed mostly from secondary experience--as the Napoleonic stories stemmed from his reading--gravitates to the bottom of the list.

³⁷"Author's Note," Tales of Unrest, p. vii--"derivative" from de Maupassant.

³⁸John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad," Castles in Spain and Other Screeds (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 110.

³⁹Save for "The Black Mate," much revised in its present form.

The high rating of The Shadow-Line and "The Secret Sharer" can only be explained in terms of the theory that his best work had vivid personal experience as a basis. The "Sharer" was written in 1909, and The Shadow-Line in 1915--both well beyond the 1905 deadline which we arbitrarily, and most critics by common consent and practice, have set as the end of the period in which he did his best work. But these stories took their being from Conrad's own experience on the Otago, and so rose beyond the heights of the rest of his later work, bound as it was by the limitations of secondary experience.

His best characters were people like Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, who, although much was owed to the Brookiana,⁴⁰ was founded upon real men: Tom Lingard of Berouw⁴¹ and Dominic Cervoni of Marseilles.⁴² Lingard of The Rescue was a synthetic achievement and is therefore less "alive."

Another fact which seems beyond explanation except in terms of this theory is that the natives which populate many of his works are, from first to last, splendid creations. There is no weakening in the character of Belarab

⁴⁰John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 46.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 44.

⁴²G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), I, 97.

of the creative imagination which blew life into the Rajah Allang or Lakamba. Gordan points out⁴³ that practically all the natives in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast are drawn from Conrad's direct personal experiences while with the Vidar. And although Lord Jim's natives owe a good deal to Conrad's readings in Brookiana, the debt is mostly a surface one: names and physical characteristics.⁴⁴ The natives of Lord Jim and The Rescue owe practically all of their basic psychology to personal observation by Conrad. They have a close resemblance to the natives of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast, whose roots, in turn, lie deep in Conrad's own life.

There are minor differences, it is true, but Belarab (The Rescue), Rajah Allang (Lord Jim), and Lakamba (Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands) have much in common. Each governs by a policy of hesitant procrastination, and this is at once his chief weakness and his dominating characteristic. All three are the ostensible rulers of the land, but in each case the rule is challenged by three people: another native (Tengga in The Rescue, Doramin in Lord Jim, Babalatchi in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast); an Arab (Sheriff Daman in The Rescue, Sherif, Ali in Lord Jim,

⁴³Gordan, op. cit., pp. 47-49.

⁴⁴John Dozier Gordan, "The Rajah Brooke and Joseph Conrad," Studies in Philology, 35: 613-34, July, 1938.

Abdulla in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast); and a white man (Lingard in The Rescue, Jim in Lord Jim, Lingard in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast). The three challengers, in turn, have much in common--so much, in fact, that it is probable that each trio is ultimately derived from the same source--at least that is true of the native and the Arab. The parallel is not entirely exact (Babalatchi, for example, plays a different role from Tengga and Doramin, and he differs in some important characteristics), but it is close to being so. Dain Waris of Lord Jim has much more in common with Dain Maroola of Almayer's Folly than the resemblance of name. Jaffir of The Rescue is another Tamb' Itam. Immada (The Rescue), Lena (Victory), Jewel (Lord Jim), Aïssa (An Outcast), and even Nina (Almayer's Folly) are of a common stamp.

Richard Curle wrote in the Times Literary Supplement for August 30, 1923,

His creative imagination can only work at its best when it is attached . . . to a remembered incident. . . . This sense of contact with life . . . gives to his pages the feeling that things happened so and no otherwise.⁴⁵

Conrad himself held much the same view. He called "Gaspar Ruiz"

truly fiction, by which I do not mean that it is merely invented, but that it is truly imagined from hints of things that really happened and of

⁴⁵ Cited by John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: the Making of a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 74.

people that really existed. . . . That sort of work is of course of a creative (not reminiscent) nature. . . . I need not say that such knowledge as I had was used throughout with a scrupulous regard to the truth of it. No incident was introduced arbitrarily but only as a necessary touch in the general picture. In this arrangement consists the art of story telling as distinguished from the style.⁴⁶

Characterization, not formalism, was the basis of his art. And when after 1904 characterization--the simple making of a man--had ceased to be his primary concern, a vital element crept out of his work. The characters did not "live" as before. He remedied the loss, in part, by a concentration upon form--the "screen" and inverted chronology techniques--but when, in The Rescue, the use of one technique was denied him, he attempted, in an almost super-human effort, to draw character by means of the other, and by means of an explicitness, an exhaustiveness which was wholly new to him. As a result, The Rescue is a tremendous achievement from the point of view of subtle and sophisticated writing. And at the same time, the insights into character are enormous. Here is Conrad's description of Mrs. Travers' attraction for Lingard:

It seemed to Lingard that he had been awake ever since he could remember. It was as to being alive that he felt not so sure. He had no doubt of his existence; but was this life--this profound indifference, this strange contempt for what his eyes could see, this distaste for words, this unbelief in the importance of things and men? He tried to regain possession of himself, his old self which had things to do, words to speak as well as to hear. But it was too difficult. He was seduced

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 30.

away by the tense feeling of existence far superior to the mere consciousness of life, and which in its immensity of contradictions, delight, dread, exultation and despair could not be faced and yet was not to be evaded. There was no peace in it. But who wanted peace? Surrender was better, the dreadful ease of slack limbs in the sweep of an enormous tide and in a divine emptiness of mind. If this was existence then he knew that he existed. And he knew that the woman existed, too, in the sweep of the tide, without speech, without movement, without heat! Indestructible--and, perhaps, immortal!⁴⁷

Yet for all this, Lingard lacks the vitality of Lord Jim, Mrs. Travers of Mrs. Gould; and that is the reason why The Rescue ranks below Lord Jim and Nostromo. It is the reason also why we have not hesitated to call it in some respects a lesser work than Almayer's Folly or An Outcast of the Islands.

For the achievements of the art of letters, the fall of a phrase, a man or a moment made vivid in a few scrawls of ink, can survive, fresh with all the glowing tints of youth, when towered temples and embattled cities have become no more than sunshine and silence and a chip of stone in the sand.⁴⁸

⁴⁷The Rescue, pp. 431-32.

⁴⁸Cecil, op. cit., p. 26.

CHAPTER VIII

CONRAD AS PHILOSOPHER:

FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Why?

Why, in this last period, the loss of that creative power which we have remarked? Did Conrad grow tired, as Galsworthy suggests?¹ Or did he simply run out of direct personal experiences, which alone could stimulate him to the highest achievement? Failure of direct personal experience to present itself compulsively to his imagination was the immediate cause of the deterioration of his art. But it was not the fundamental cause of that deterioration--or, put another way, there was a reason why it failed.

It was his desire to present a philosophy--a philosophy which, if it was not optimistic, was not pessimistic either--which caused the drying up of the otherwise inexhaustible reservoir of personal experience upon which he was able to draw. And it is this desire for a philosophy which must ultimately bear the full brunt of the blame for the deterioration of his art.

"Philosophy" is a dangerous word to use in connection with Conrad, because he never at any time conceived or

¹John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad," Castles in Spain and Other Screeds (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 110.

sought to present a fully ordered, completely worked-out system. Ideas?

Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!²

But to him, and to the people for whom he wrote, certain concrete beliefs were necessary if one were to hold one's sanity in a world where Chance and Fortune ruled with aspects of savage jesting. And it was in asserting, in his art, his faith in the efficacy of his few simple beliefs to avert major disaster that he lost his way.

Conrad believed that every human life followed a particular pattern: a man grew up cherishing a set of illusions as to the conditions of life and as to his own ability to meet them. These illusions were born out of a lack of experience. Sooner or later in a man's existence, the theoretical code, formulated in the light of these illusions, by which he was accustomed to live and to regard himself, was challenged by the hard facts of raw reality. In Morton Dauwen Zabel's words:

When the moment comes, the victim is forced to commit himself to it. It is the signal of his destiny, and there is no escape for the one who meets it unprepared. The terms of life are reversed by it. It is the stroke by which fate compels recognition-- of one's self, of reality, of illusion, error, mistaken expectation, and defeat. At that moment, if a man can measure up

²Lord Jim, p. 43.

to it, his conscious moral existence begins, an existence for which previous intellectual or theoretical anticipation can never fully prepare.³

Conrad's belief in this much of the pattern never wavered. He had observed its truth in the lives of others, and had felt it, indeed, in his own:

. . . and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more--the feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort--to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires--and expires, too soon, too soon--before life itself.⁴

He had lived, in his youth, the life of illusion, but now, in his early authorhood, he was stripped of the false comforts attendant upon that life and saw existence as it truly was: a grim struggle in which the soul of man, if not his body, was doomed to destruction; or, if the man were of superhuman moral strength, a struggle from which he might emerge, at terrible cost, purged of his unwholesome illusions.

It is over the outcome of this moral crisis that Conrad's philosophy after 1904 differs from his philosophy before.

In the first two periods of his art one looks almost in vain for a character who succeeds in mastering his fate, who succeeds in shedding his illusions about himself and

³Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Joseph Conrad: Chance and Recognition," The Sewanee Review, 53: 4, Winter, 1945.

⁴"Youth," pp. 36-37.

the world and emerging a sadder, but a wiser--and better--man.⁵ On the other hand, the numbers of those who, in the fight, go down are legion. There is Decoud:

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.⁶

There is Nostromo, who is referred to by Conrad as "The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, victim of the disenchanted vanity which is the reward of audacious action . . ."⁷ There is Kurtz; there is Captain Whalley; there is Falk; there are Kayerts and Carlier, Almayer and Willems; there is Lord Jim.

The inclusion of Lord Jim among those who suffer defeat may cause surprise. Actually, Jim, of all Conrad's heroes in the first two periods, comes the nearest to achieving a victory. He returns to his doom at the hands of Doramin, and in doing so, although at the cost of his life, achieves a measured triumph. But, in the final analysis, Jim remains isolated from his fellow man, as Kurtz, Decoud, and the others were isolated. He is proud

⁵The one exception is Dr. Monygham in *Nostromo*, but Conrad does not lay much stress on his triumph: he is of lesser importance in the novel than Decoud, Nostromo, or the Goulds, all of whom are, in some way, defeated. Furthermore, except by Mrs. Gould, he was universally regarded in Sulaco as sardonic and scornful--a poor sort of man, embittered and a failure.

⁶*Nostromo*, p. 498.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 501.

and unflinching before Doramin when he should be painfully aware that his unqualified faith in man has produced in fact disaster. The opportunity which presents itself at the last moment to expiate his crimes comes to him "like an Eastern bride,"⁸ and in marrying her, he divorces himself for all time from the Western world. He will never be "one of us."

In addition to those characters which face a moral crisis, Conrad distinguishes two kinds of people who do not, but their fate is not, for this reason, less hard. Aissa--a native--is one. The "blessing of illusions"⁹ was never hers. It is with the "curse of facts"¹⁰ that she has had always to deal. She is dumb, like an animal, and can only cringe beneath the blows that fate rains upon her:

And in her eyes there was the wonder and desolation of an animal that knows only suffering, of the incomplete soul that knows pain but knows not hope; that can find no refuge from the facts of life in the illusory conviction of its dignity, of an exalted destiny beyond; in the heavenly consolation of a belief in the momentous origin of its hate [fate].¹¹

⁸Lord Jim, p. 416.

⁹"Author's Note," Almayer's Folly, p. viii.

¹⁰Loc. cit.

¹¹An Outcast of the Islands, pp. 334-35. An Outcast of the Islands (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), p. 335, reads "fate" for "hate," and it is evident from the context that the former is the correct word.

The other sort is the man of action. He is able to perpetuate the illusions around which he has built up his conception of himself and the world in which he acts:

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates.¹²

Some of the most horrible characters in Conrad are men of action. For them, action is an opiate which stifles the pangs of conscience and permits them to retain--although at an ever-increasing price of wild and irresponsible conduct--a strict sense of their own identity. Pedro Montero is such a man. "His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person."¹³ The anarchists of Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent and his short stories are similarly grotesque. The best that can be said of the lives of men of action is that they are ignominious and stupid. Captain Lingard of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast, who is the finest of them,

does not understand, and goes on, full of contempt. He never loses his way. He knows where he is going and what he wants. Travelling on, he achieves great length without any breadth, and battered, besmirched, and weary, he touches the goal at last; he grasps the reward of his perseverance, of his virtue, of his healthy optimism:

¹²Nostromo, p. 66.

¹³Ibid., p. 387.

an untruthful tombstone over a dark and soon forgotten grave.¹⁴

The illusions of such a man are shattered in death. All that his armour of action has won for him is a postponement of the inevitable knowledge of the conditions of existence. When it is too late to demolish the false premises around which he has built his own life, he learns.

Conrad's vision, in the first two periods of his writing, is of man fighting a losing battle. And he who faces life honestly, says Conrad, is bound to admit that there is not in our tragedy any visible purpose. Our pain, anguish, torment, is entirely useless. To the gods--if any there be--we are as flies to wanton boys. Our fate, like that of Daudet's characters (as he wrote in 1898), "is poignant, it is intensely interesting, and of not the slightest consequence."¹⁵ This is the reason for Conrad's lifelong insistence upon "restraint," upon "behaving decently." He saw the romantic over-evaluation of man's worth as one of the major pitfalls to be avoided. His own natural sympathy for man made the danger all the greater for him: he tended, if anything, to over-value. And so he imposed, in both his personality and in his writing, a classic restraint upon a core essentially romantic.

¹⁴An Outcast of the Islands, p. 197.

¹⁵"Alphonse Daudet," Notes on Life and Letters, p. 21.

If one took it too seriously, the spectacle of existence-- as he viewed it in 1898, and, deep down, all his life-- was crushing:

The machine is thinner than air and as evanescent as a flash of lightning. The attitude of cold unconcern is the only reasonable one. Of course reason is hateful,--but why? Because it demonstrates (to those who have the courage) that we, living, are out of life,--utterly out of it. The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least. The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement, for virtue, for knowledge and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances, as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men.

Life knows us not and we do not know life,-- we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore: thoughts vanish: words, once pronounced, die: and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of to-morrow,--only the string of my platitude seems to have no end. As our peasants say: "Pray, brother, forgive me for the love of God." And we don't know what forgiveness is, nor what is love, nor where God is. Assez!¹⁶

Hand in hand with scepticism, at once its cause and its effect, goes isolation. Conrad's sense of human isolation was enormous, and in the first two periods he was

¹⁶G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), pp. 222-23.

by no means sure that that isolation would end at the grave: ". . . and beyond our last acquaintance there lies only a vast chaos; a chaos of laughter and tears which concerns us not . . ." ¹⁷ Again,

Her hands slipped slowly off Lingard's shoulders and her arms fell by her side, listless, discouraged, as if to her--to her, the savage, violent, and ignorant creature--had been revealed clearly in that moment the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelopes, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond. ¹⁸

Altogether, it is a gloomy picture that Conrad gives us in these first two periods. H.L. Mencken would have us believe that the picture never changed:

Like Dreiser, Conrad is forever fascinated by the "immense indifference of things," the tragic vanity of the blind groping that we call aspiration, the profound meaninglessness of life--fascinated, and left wondering. One looks in vain for an attempt at a solution of the riddle in the whole canon of his work. Dreiser, more than once, seems ready to take refuge behind an indeterminate sort of mysticism, even a facile supernaturalism, but Conrad, from first to last, faces squarely the massive and intolerable fact. His stories are not chronicles of men who conquer fate, nor of men who are unbent and undaunted by fate, but of men who are conquered and undone. Each protagonist is a new Prometheus, with a sardonic ignominy piled upon his helplessness. ¹⁹

¹⁷An Outcast of the Islands, p. 198.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁹H.L. Mencken, "Joseph Conrad," A Book of Prefaces (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1927), pp. 11-12.

But it did change. Mencken's view, although true in its estimate of Conrad's earlier work, disregards the fact that most of Conrad's later heroes achieve a victory over themselves, over the doubts and illusions which have bound their lives. Many of them--Captain Anthony, Razumov, Heyst, and Peyrol--pay the supreme price for their victory: death; but it is still a cheap purchase. And many of them--the captain of the Sephora in "The Secret Sharer," the captain in The Shadow-Line, Lingard of The Rescue--pay only the price of temporary misery. Conrad describes Heyst, in the Author's Note to Victory, as

the man of universal detachment, [who] loses his mental self-possession, that fine attitude before the universally irremediable which wears the name of stoicism.²⁰

His deliberate intention is to show Heyst triumphant. And triumphant, in Conrad's opinion, he assuredly is. It is true that Heyst's realization of his error comes too late to benefit Lena--that her pure innocence is sacrificed on the altar of his folly. It is true that he suicides. But his last words in the novel affirm those very things which his life has denied, and which Lena's death has finally taught him. Lena--love--dead, life has no further meaning for him, under the new terms of his philosophy, and with his own death he erases the last trace of the old Heyst.

²⁰ "Author's Note," Victory, p. x.

It is impossible to imagine Heyst the "indifferent stroller" taking his own life.²¹

But it is not only in his fiction that Conrad's more positive philosophy concerning the world is made manifest. In his essay, "Poland Revisited," written in 1915, he is able to talk about his "simple trust in the government of the universe":

I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it sometimes with success, and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe.²²

It is true that there are bad moments when this trust is partly removed, but, still, it is the habitual garment.

Early in the third period of his career, then, he had been able to clothe his pessimistic view of life in weeds of warmth and hope. He still saw life as a terrible struggle, but he had convinced himself that the chances of man's winning through to self-knowledge and a richer, fuller existence were decidedly improved. The gods, for the right

²¹The interpretation may be made that the lateness of his triumph constitutes a powerful ironic qualification of that triumph. But then we are forced to say that in Victory Conrad's estimate of man's ability to triumph over his fate was altogether different from his estimate of that ability in the other works of the third period in which that problem was raised.

²²"Poland Revisited," Notes on Life and Letters, p. 168.

men, were usually propitious; and his heroes were always "right men." His explicit statements in works of non-fiction also evinced his new attitude.

It is not too difficult to account for the change.

The people of Conrad's generation found themselves in a world which offered them little of comfort. The cult of scientism had undermined religious faith, but was itself incapable of acting as a substitute. Europe was drifting slowly into war, and the tools man had with which to fight were awful indeed. New gadgets had revolutionized the art of living, and as surely new beliefs the art of thinking. To put together any set of beliefs which might form a philosophy in any way permanent seemed impossible; and yet the people of Conrad's generation found it--as it had been found before, and as we have found it since--essential that they should. One had to believe in something. One might believe in a beneficent and omnipotent God as the guiding principle of the universe, or one might believe in purposeless mutability; or one might believe somewhere in between. But one had to have something to believe.

Conrad, by virtue of his position as littérateur, and by virtue also of his own personal attributes--his brooding, sensitive, sympathetic personality and his razor-sharp mind--found himself in the forefront of intellectual thought of the day. His original view of the universe, once he had outgrown the unbounded optimism of his youth, was that

it was purely spectacular. He saw the arbitrary hand of Fate pulling the switches which governed the lives of struggling creatures all over the world. And out of this conviction of the spectacular nature of creation grew his pessimistic vision as to the outcome of man's moral crisis. Man did not have within himself the power to rise. Once his illusions--his only defences--were shattered, and he was confronted by the disgusting and ignominious facts of life, he was beaten. Even the man who, like Dain Maroola, succeeded (for he is a native and has not surrounded himself with illusions), had the Damoclean sword hanging over him in the hour of his greatest triumph:

A sigh as of immense sorrow passed over the land in the last effort of the dying breeze, and in the deep silence which succeeded, the earth and the heavens were suddenly hushed up in the mournful contemplation of human love and human blindness.²³

But the story of man's ultimate defeat was infinitely pathetic and infinitely beautiful. Even in the moments of his deepest pessimism Conrad saw this. The iron fact of man's great value was the one immovable anchor about which his philosophy swung: not a deceptively bulky anchor of extravagant over-evaluation; but a firm, solid weight of settled conviction.

Gradually, as his experience as a man and an artist--and, hence, as a philosopher--grew, the pessimistic view

²³Almayer's Folly, p. 173.

of life became intolerable to Conrad. In 1905, at about which time the shift in his thinking occurred, he was forty-eight; and it is not contrary to human experience for a man of mature years to adopt, gradually and unconsciously, a more mellow view of this present life (which he is about to leave), and a more optimistic view of the possibilities of the after-life (which he is about to join), than it had previously been possible for him to entertain. He himself recognized the truth of the urge in his essay on Henry James, written in 1905. Still darkly pessimistic, he acknowledged that

the last utterance [of mankind] will formulate, strange as it may appear, some hope now to us utterly inconceivable. For mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity.²⁴

It was a foreshadowing of his own future attitude. His search, though in a larger context, was precisely that of Marlow in Lord Jim:

Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something [behind the apparent realities], some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse.²⁵

In 1900 this was all he saw:

I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible--for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy

²⁴"Henry James," Notes on Life and Letters, p. 14.

²⁵Lord Jim, p. 50.

doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death--the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct.²⁶

But his pressing need for a more positive philosophy found a formidable ally. Conrad had always wanted to be a "popular" artist--but not, of course, to the point where he would sacrifice his artistic principles to the public demand for pure sensation. It is eminently possible that he realized--subconsciously, for to have recognized the possibility consciously would have made the project seem invalid in his own eyes--that in presenting a more positive philosophy in his fiction he would be making his work more palatable to the masses. This realization, reinforcing as it did his own growing desire for affirmation, may well have contributed to his taking a more optimistic view of man's ability to rebound victoriously from the shock of a moral crisis.²⁷

Conrad found ready to hand a very natural foundation upon which to build his more optimistic philosophy: his everlasting conviction of the worth of man. Nostromo, Decoud,

²⁶Loc cit.

²⁷To maintain that these and no other were the causes of the change in philosophy would be to make a greater claim than I am prepared to make. Actually, it is beyond the scope of this thesis (and indeed of all textual criticism) to determine the cause of the change. It is the fact of the change that I seek to demonstrate. Still, it has seemed worthwhile in the course of this study to suggest those explanations which at appropriate moments have seemed most likely to account for the facts we have observed.

Jim--even Almayer and Willems--these were men of no little value, if only because they were men. But in the first two periods of his art he recognized no more than their worth. He denied, both explicitly in his non-fiction and implicitly in his creative work, the efficacy of man's merit in averting his destruction. In the third period he made this belief in man's merit the core of a system of "simple ideas" upon which "the world, the temporal world rests."²⁸ The ideas were necessarily simple, because a complex philosophy, through the potential refutation of one or more of its tenets, laid itself open to complete disbelief. Nobody, though, would argue against the validity of a philosophy which simply proclaimed fidelity and love as the salvation of mankind. Seamen, he wrote in 1918, are morally strong because

With them the inner soundness is caused by another kind of preservative of which (nobody will be surprised to hear) the main ingredient is a certain kind of love that has nothing to do with the futile smiles and the futile passions of the sea.²⁹

And he went on to speak of his by now positive assurance that

For the great mass 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. In other and in greater words, what is needed is a sense of immediate duty, and a feeling of impalpable constraint.³⁰

²⁸"A Familiar Preface," A Personal Record, p. xix.

²⁹"Well Done," Notes on Life and Letters, p. 185.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 190-91.

Fidelity, love, constraint, are three virtues with which The Rescue has a great deal to do. The novel ends with the practical application in the life of Tom Lingard of one of these three virtues: the iron constraint exercised upon him by his new-found sense of duty makes him renounce Mrs. Travers and save himself. And in that constraint are embodied fidelity and love and courage--all that a man needs.

These are simple beliefs indeed. They are beliefs with which a man cannot argue. A philosophy built upon them is safe, for although men's conceptions of "fidelity" will vary widely, men will be unanimous in agreeing that "fidelity" is a thing in which they certainly might have faith. Every man is free to make what, at any given moment, he might out of "fidelity," and Conrad is himself, finally, vague as to his meaning.

Thus, in this third period, Conrad erected into a positive, but loosely formulated and vaguely enunciated philosophy these simple truths of which in his life he had been a sympathetic and constant observer--and to which, even in his darkest moments, he had clung as a drowning man clings to a straw. He attempted to justify, in art, his hope that those principles--those simple beliefs--upon which he had built his own life might be sufficient after all, if a man held rigidly to them, to withstand the buffetings fate might give him.

Unfortunately, in the third period he was only in rare instances successful in embodying this hope in his art. Of all the protagonists who win through to victory, only two--the captains in "The Secret Sharer" and The Shadow-Line--are convincing, and that is because, as we have seen, they were drawn from direct personal experience; from Conrad himself. The other characters are not convincing because they do not, first and foremost, live their own particular and individual lives. We feel that Heyst's triumph is a thing imposed. His "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!"³¹ comes too pat. Similarly, Freya is made to enunciate the moral of her story--

"I've been conceited, headstrong, capricious. I sought my own gratification. I was selfish or afraid. . . . Draw the curtain, papa. Shut the sea out. It reproaches me with my folly."³²

The figures speak for Conrad rather than for themselves. The Lingard of The Rescue is a less real character than the Lingard of Almayer's Folly or An Outcast because he is the product of a theory in which Conrad wished to believe; his triumph was unsupported by the facts of life as Conrad saw them; he had no real existence in Conrad's imagination.

³¹Victory, p. 410.

³²"Freya of the Seven Isles," 'Twixt Land and Sea, p. 238.

The man who did exist, to Conrad's perfect knowledge, was the man who disappeared in Europe, searching for funds for a hopeless mission, a victim of his illusions still.

We, ourselves, are victims of those same pressures which made Conrad's generation seek, and Conrad himself seek to present, a positive, optimistic philosophy. H.L. Mencken has well said,

Whatever is profound and penetrating we stand off from; whatever is facile and shallow, particularly if it reveal a moral or mystical color, we embrace.³³

Readers of the twentieth century are anxious for assurance. The world, and our position in it, appears hopeless, pointless; and we are anxious to be told that there is both hope and point. Thus a novel with a moral which proclaims itself in every line is "valuable," is "good," while a novel which is only a work of art, which carries its high morality within its very form, is "superficial" or "indecent." Conrad's best novels have rarely been called "superficial," and never "indecent." But novels of lesser achievement (and Conrad's novels of the third period, without exception but in greater or lesser degree, fall into this class) have often been acclaimed above their deserts for just this reason.³⁴

³³Mencken, op. cit., p. 24.

³⁴This statement refers to the criticism of other novels than just Conrad's--the sort of criticism which appears regularly in the daily newspapers and in the magazines. In Conrad criticism, the outstanding example is Barker Fairley, who praises The Rescue above all Conrad's works. (See "The New Conrad--and the Old," The Canadian Bookman, 2: 26-29, January, 1920.)

Not that Conrad's works of fiction after 1904 are blatantly moralistic or didactic. But Conrad, in writing them, was more consciously concerned that they should provide his readers and himself with a guide to their lives than he had ever been before; and this is the main reason why none of the novels of the third period can be ranked with The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Lord Jim, or Nostromo; and why in certain respects, as we have seen, they cannot even be ranked with Almayer's Folly or An Outcast of the Islands. Edward Wagenknecht has said,

It can hardly be said too often--it is not the function of a writer's metaphysic, such as it is, to provide his readers with a guide to their lives; it is simply its function to serve his own art as a frame of reference.³⁵

The "optimist-pessimist" battle which has been raging over Conrad for the last twenty years is also a product of our preoccupation with the philosophic content of a work of art. We have been anxious to "place" him as a philosopher. Right evaluation of a work of art demands, first, complete surrender to it; and some critics of the last twenty years have come to Conrad looking for something--for a positive or a negative world view, as Barker Fairley has done. They have found it, one or the other, but the finding has distorted their critical judgment. Conrad's philosophic

³⁵ Edward Wagenknecht, "'Pessimism' in Hardy and Conrad," College English, 3: 554, March, 1942.

viewpoint is revealed in his art, all right. But it is not revealed on the surface, or anywhere near it. The ascription to him of an optimistic philosophy on the basis of a protagonist's victory over the disintegrating influences of a moral crisis is absurd; it is a common practice;³⁶ and the high rating of the novel simply on that account is bad criticism--although of the better Conrad critics only Barker Fairley appears to be involved here. The work of art must first be judged as a work of art. When that is done, and the strengths and weaknesses are apparent, it is possible to go beyond the work of art and determine what was the real feeling of the artist. And often that feeling will be different from what it at first appeared. Where the artist's work lacks final conviction, as does Conrad's after 1904, it will be because he does too; and where the artist's work is real and vital, it will be because his vision has been the same.

Still, the "optimist-pessimist" battle has been, in one respect, a good thing. It has contributed a great deal to the renewed interest in Joseph Conrad which has been manifest in the last twenty years, even if the

³⁶ See, for example, William Wallace Bancroft, Joseph Conrad: His Philosophy of Life (Boston: The Stratford Company, [1933]); and Wilbur Lucius Cross, "Joseph Conrad," Four Contemporary Novelists (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), pp. 9-60.

preponderant emphasis on philosophic content which it implies is misplaced.

The danger of this study has been that, in comparing the work of the third period with what went before, and in seeking to destroy some of the misconceptions and misjudgments that have been built up concerning Conrad's art of the third period, particularly, I will have seemed to value very lightly his later work. That is not the case. I approach all Conrad's work in a spirit of reverence, for I believe him to be the greatest novelist the twentieth century has so far produced. I have wished only to state my belief that the works of the third period, although fine in their way, were a lesser achievement than the great works of the second; and to state why. And although I have assigned different causes for the deterioration of his art than did Conrad's friend, John Galsworthy, I agree with Galsworthy's main contention that

It does disservice to Conrad's memory to be indiscriminate in praise of his work . . . to lump all his work together, as if he were always the same Conrad, imperils a just estimate of his greatness.³⁷

Perhaps the justest estimate of his greatness was penned by E.M. Forster:

Is there not also a central obscurity, something noble, heroic, beautiful, inspiring half a dozen great books; but obscure, obscure? . . . These

³⁷Galsworthy, op. cit., pp. 109-10.

essays [Notes on Life and Letters] do suggest that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; and that we need not try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this particular direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd. Opinions held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with the stars, and therefore easily mistaken for a creed.³⁸

In Conrad, we find not a jewel but a vapour: not the jewel of a positive, consistent philosophy, simply the vapour of a host of convictions, each one strong in itself, but tending, ultimately, to destroy the effect of the others, to blur all. We may not "write him down," in the third period, for anything definite on the basis of the way he makes his stories turn out, or what he himself has said, or caused his characters to say, because he does not believe, deep down, in the truth of the optimistic view he has attempted to articulate.

In the first two periods, his art truly reflects his vision of man's state. But we may not "write him down" for anything definite in the first two periods, either, because that vision is of a thing of infinite mystery, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, in which man's obscure fate is of not the slightest consequence.

³⁸ E.M. Forster, "Joseph Conrad: a Note," Abinger Harvest (London: Edward Arnold & Co., [1936]), p. 135.

He will be unconditionally written down for--nothing. His favourite word then--and it remained highly popular with him--was "inscrutable."

Conrad looked steadily, penetratingly at life. He hoped to find a jewel at the centre, and, in the third period, believed that he had, and tried to tell his readers about. But the jewel was not there, for him; and so not for us. It was the greatest of all illusions.

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