

A STUDY OF THE METHODS OF PRESENTATION OF THE
THEMES OF WITHDRAWAL AND COMMITMENT IN
THREE NOVELS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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
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October 1968

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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and Commitment in Three Novels of Joseph Conrad

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This thesis examines the methods employed by Joseph Conrad in his presentation of the centrally important themes of withdrawal and commitment in three of his major novels, namely Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory. Revealing that much of the apparently irrelevant material in these novels is in fact functional in the presentation of these two themes, this examination demonstrates that each of these novels does possess a high degree of unity and order. Relying primarily upon the texts of the three novels themselves, this study attempts to show that in these novels Conrad displays an art which is both more complex and more disciplined than many of his readers might expect.

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CHAPTER I

The novels of Joseph Conrad clearly cover a wide range of social, political, psychological, and moral questions. Upon a first reading, however, these novels may often appear to be deficient in unity and order because of the presence of a considerable amount of apparently irrelevant material. It is only through a closer and more detailed examination that such material begins to assume significance and is seen to be functional to the novels. The purpose of this thesis is to subject three of Conrad's major novels--namely Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory--to this detailed type of examination in order to demonstrate that each of these novels is a unified work. Through such an examination, this study will reveal that material in these three novels which may appear to be irrelevant does, in fact, play an extremely functional part in the presentation of the basic themes of the novels.

In order to achieve the above purpose, this study makes a basic assumption regarding the themes of the three novels under consideration in this thesis. It is assumed that the themes of withdrawal from and commitment to life are two of the central themes of these novels and that these are readily discernible themes in the novels. It is held, then, that Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory all have at their centres the idea of withdrawal from life, involving the rejection of humanity,

together with the idea of commitment to life, involving a recognition of the bonds of humanity. It is further held that the presence of such themes is fairly obvious and does not warrant extensive demonstration. It should be observed that this study does not claim that the themes of withdrawal and commitment are unquestionably the central themes of these three novels. It is their presence alone that is held to be obvious and not their degree of importance in relation to other central themes in these novels. The two particular themes of withdrawal and commitment have been chosen because they are well-suited to a demonstration of the unity present in each novel.

The purpose of this study, then, is not to prove that the themes of withdrawal and commitment are present in the three novels under consideration. It is rather to demonstrate the ways in which Conrad treats these themes in the three novels. Thus, it will be shown that the themes of withdrawal and commitment are elaborately presented by Conrad through the use of symbolism and imagery and by means of a disciplined pattern of associations. This examination of the modes of presentation used by Conrad will reveal that much of the seemingly irrelevant material in the novels is indeed functional and that each novel does have a greater degree of unity than might seem apparent upon an initial reading.

This thesis, as has been indicated, will deal primarily with three of Conrad's major novels: Lord Jim, Under Western

Eyes, and Victory. In the presentation of its central ideas this study will adhere closely to the texts of these three novels. Biographical material, together with other writings of Conrad, will be used essentially as supplementary evidence. While no attempt is made to apply the central ideas of this study to all of Conrad's novels, an examination of the three particular novels under consideration does indicate that these works are representative of the novelist's work as a whole. All three novels are generally recognized as major works of Conrad. Dorothy Van Ghent leads a veritable host of scholars who have recognized Lord Jim as Conrad's first great work of full-length novel proportions.¹ Albert Guerard and Eloise Knapp Hay have praised Under Western Eyes as Conrad's last great work of the middle period.² Victory, however, has encountered stiff critical resistance in recent years, led by Guerard and Thomas Moser.³ While the aesthetic value of Victory is certainly debatable, it is impossible to ignore its significance within the body of Conrad's work. Thus it seems reasonable to accept Paul Wiley's

¹Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1953).

²Albert J. Guerard, Conrad, The Novelist (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 221; Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 265.

³Guerard, Conrad, The Novelist, pp. 272-73; Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 1, 156 ff.

view that Victory is indeed worthy of consideration and that Axel Heyst is "one of Conrad's most representative characters".⁴ In addition, it should be observed that the novels chosen cover the three periods of Conrad's writing life. Lord Jim, begun in 1898 and completed in 1900,⁵ covers the first phase of his career. Under Western Eyes, started in 1907 and completed in 1910,⁶ represents the middle period. Victory, begun in 1912 and completed in 1914,⁷ dominates the novels of Conrad's later years. In view of the significance of these three novels in Conrad's work as a whole, then, it seems fair to assume that trends and patterns found in these novels will be central to Conrad's artistic and philosophic position.

In this study of Conrad's presentation of the themes of commitment and withdrawal it is essential that the meaning of these terms, as they are used in Conrad's novels, be understood. They are basically terms which signify involvement and non-involvement in life. Life is here taken in a fairly broad humanistic sense rather than in a more narrow and more restricted political, social, or spiritual sense. Commitment, then, in

⁴Paul L. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 153.

⁵G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1927), I, 166-68.

⁶Ibid., II, 64, 105. These dates are my approximations on the basis of Conrad's letters to John Galsworthy (6 January, 1908) and to Norman Douglas (23 December, 1909).

⁷Ibid., II, 6-7.

Conradian terms, is an involvement or a participation in the community of humanity. Essentially it rests upon the recognition of and allegiance to what many of Conrad's critics have labelled "human solidarity." Such commitment arises from man's intuitive, irrational awareness of solidarity with others of his kind. Withdrawal, on the other hand, signifies a non-involvement in or a rejection of the life of humanity. Conrad considers its essence to be in the non-recognition or the denial of the bonds of human solidarity.

In Conrad's order of things, these two terms signify not only a position relative to humanity, but also a moral status. Since Conrad's moral and metaphysical norm is humanity, the term "withdrawal" connotes unreality and immorality because of its divergence from human values. By the same standard, the term "commitment" connotes reality and moral approbation. Before studying the role which these two themes play in the three novels to be examined, it may prove fruitful to examine the way in which Conrad arrived at and expressed such an evaluation of these two themes.

Conrad's critics have been extremely eager to identify their subject with an unqualified respect for human solidarity. It is only recently, however, that attention has been drawn to the fact that Conrad underwent considerable mental conflict in arriving at his final espousal of solidarity. Albert Guerard has dealt extensively with Conrad's "conflict between loyalty to the

individual and loyalty to the community."⁸ Jocelyn Baines has stated that "it is not too bold to claim that Conrad has presented more dramatically and profoundly than any other artist the anguished conflict between man's innate isolation and his yearning for human solidarity."⁹ Although she has restricted its application to the political sphere, Eloise Knapp Hay has also dealt extensively with this conflict.¹⁰

In a way, Conrad's attitude toward withdrawal and commitment resembled that of characters such as Jim, Razumov, and Heyst. They journey from near-withdrawal to commitment as did Conrad. In the years previous to the publication of his first novel and in the early years of his writing career, Conrad displayed an attitude of detachment and indifference not unlike that of Heyst in Victory. In a letter to Spiridion Kliszewski, written in 1885, Conrad revealed his pessimism regarding the political sphere:

You wish to apply remedies to quell the dangerous symptoms: you evidently hope yet.

I do so no longer. Truthfully, I have ceased to hope a long time ago. We must drift!

The whole herd of idiotic humanity are moving in that direction at the bidding of unscrupulous rascals and a few sincere, but dangerous, lunatics. These things must be. It is fatality.

⁸Guerard, Conrad, The Novelist, p. 24.

⁹Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), p. 443.

¹⁰Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad.

I live mostly in the past and the future. The present has, you easily understand, but few charms for me. I look with the serenity of despair and the indifference of contempt upon the passing events.¹¹

Six years later this same detachment and failure to come to grips with life is reflected in Thaddeus Bobrowski's picture of his nephew:

...I consider that you have always lacked endurance and perseverance in decisions, which is the result of your instability in your aims and desires. You lack endurance, brother, in the face of facts--and, I suppose, in the face of people too?...In your projects you let your imagination run away with you--you become an optimist; but when you encounter disappointment you fall easily into pessimism....¹²

In the same year Conrad referred to his indifference in a letter to Marguerite Poradowska.¹³ As his writing career began, Conrad seemed to indicate that while human solidarity was a pleasant abstraction, it was unattainable and must therefore be ignored. Thus he labelled the attraction to solidarity "idealism" in a letter to R. B. Cunningham Graham:

...you are a most hopeless idealist--your aspirations are irrealizable. You want from men faith, honour, fidelity to truth in themselves and others....What makes you dangerous is your unwarrantable belief that your desire may be

¹¹ Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, I, 84-85.

¹² Zdzislaw Najder (ed.), Conrad's Polish Background: Letters To and From Polish Friends, trans. H. Carroll (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 147-48. From a letter dated 30 July, 1891.

¹³ John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm (trans. and ed.), Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1920 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 35. From a letter dated 15 September, 1891.

realized. This is the only point of difference between us.
I do not believe.¹⁴

In this letter, Conrad pictured the universe as an impersonal mechanism, a "tragic accident." In the face of such a universe, he claimed in a later letter to Cunninghame Graham, man must adopt an attitude of indifference:

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 humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy.¹⁵

If this attitude of withdrawal and detachment represents one side of Conrad's thought, there is another side which was present but less evident in the early years of his career. This was his inherent inclination towards humanity which, in his later years, became the dominant principle of his thought. Like many of his fictional characters, Conrad moved from an attitude of cold indifference to one which made loyalty, service, and fidelity to human solidarity the greatest virtues. In his very first novel, Almayer's Folly, and throughout his literary career, Conrad was deeply concerned with the question of commitment to humanity. He subjected his own tendency towards detachment to severely critical

¹⁴Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, I, 215.
From a letter dated 20 December, 1897.

¹⁵Ibid., I, 222. From a letter dated 14 January, 1898.
Parentheses in the original.

examination in the early novels and gradually evolved a credo of allegiance to human solidarity. As early as 1896, Conrad had produced an elaborate treatment of the bonds of humanity in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'. In Lord Jim, completed in 1900, without clearly committing himself, Conrad presented the case for those who claim that man cannot live his life in a state of withdrawal from his fellow man. In the novels from Lord Jim to Victory, Conrad gradually worked out a full affirmation of man's commitment to humanity. By 1915 Conrad was writing a novel in which the key line is: "a man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience, and all that sort of thing."¹⁶ Conrad's final statement on this conflict between withdrawal and solidarity is to be found in the Second Preface to A Personal Record:

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity.¹⁷

In this preface, Conrad retained an attitude of resignation but made it clear that such resignation is not indifference:

I would not like to be left standing as a mere spectator on the bank of the great stream carrying onward so many lives. I would fain claim for myself the faculty of so much

¹⁶ Joseph Conrad, The Shadow-Line: A Confession (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), p. 131.

¹⁷ Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), p. xxi.

insight as can be expressed in a voice of sympathy and
compassion. 18

.....
Resignation, not mystic, not detached, but resignation open-
eyed, conscious, and informed by love, is the only one of our
feelings for which it is impossible to become a sham. 19

This position of allegiance to human solidarity, expressed in 1919
when most of his important works had been written, was not one
which Conrad had adopted throughout his life. He had approached
it with hesitation and had finally attained it only through a
careful examination of the position in his novels. In the light
of this basic dichotomy in Conrad's thought, it is not surprising
that many critics have been baffled and irritated at a very real
ambiguity in the novels.

Any examination of Conrad's progression from an attitude
of detachment to a full recognition of human solidarity must give
at least passing consideration to three significant biographical
details concerning Conrad's life. In the first place, Conrad's
Polish literary heritage must be granted its rightful place in the
novelist's development of the themes of withdrawal and commit-
ment.²⁰ The conflict between personal and social responsibility
was a basic strain in Polish literature which undoubtedly had an

¹⁸Ibid., p. xvii. ¹⁹Ibid., p. xxi.

²⁰This brief discussion of Conrad's Polish heritage is
based on the extensive treatment given the subject by Adam Gillon,
The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad (New York: Bookman
Associates, Inc., 1960) and by Zdzislaw Najder (ed.), Conrad's
Polish Background.

influence upon Conrad's work. In tracing the novelist's dependence upon Polish literature, Zdzislaw Najder has drawn attention to this strain:

Ideas of moral and national responsibility pervaded this literature [Polish literature]: it would be difficult to find a major work in which the two types of duty were not closely linked. It meant that the moral problems of an individual were posed in terms of the social results of his actions; and ethical principles were based on the idea that an individual, however exceptional he might be, is always a member of a group, responsible for its welfare. A poet was a typical example of such an exceptional individual, burdened with special duties to his nation.²¹

Najder feels that Conrad was clearly influenced by at least three basic Polish works: Mickiewicz's Pan Tadeusz, Slowacki's Kordian, and Krasinski's The Un-Divine Comedy.²² All of these works are concerned with the conflict between private concern and public responsibility. They cherish the values of honour, duty, fidelity, and friendship which Conrad himself finally cherished. Najder claims that there can be no doubt regarding Conrad's knowledge of these works and those of other Poles affirming the principle of moral responsibility:

...when leaving Poland Conrad was undoubtedly well acquainted with a rich and lively tradition, to a marked extent unified by distinctive characteristics in its moral and political attitudes. It was a serious literature obsessed with the ideas of responsibility.²³

It does, then, seem justifiable to assert that, because of the heritage of this literature affirming human solidarity, Conrad had

²¹Najder (ed.), Conrad's Polish Background, introduction, p. 15.

²²Ibid., p. 15. ²³Ibid., p. 16.

a solid basis for his positive treatment of the principle of commitment.

The second biographical detail which must be considered is that of Conrad's "jump" out of Poland in 1874.²⁴ Critics have drawn elaborate parallels between Conrad's emigration from Poland and the evasive "jump" from life which Jim takes or the betrayal which Razumov makes. Indeed they can point to the fact that in A Personal Record, Conrad himself described his emigration as a jump:

There was no precedent. I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations.²⁵

In addition, Conrad's own works indicate that he felt a profound sense of guilt at this "desertion" of Poland. In a passage from A Personal Record, written in approximately 1909,²⁶ Conrad breaks in with a partial confession of guilt which is totally irrelevant to the passage preceding it:

I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word desertion. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be allowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered. The appearances of this perishable life

²⁴Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, I, 27.

²⁵Conrad, A Personal Record, p. 121.

²⁶Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, II, 5.

are deceptive like everything that falls under the judgment of our imperfect senses. The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated experience, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse. It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal. And perhaps there is no possible explanation.²⁷

The tone of evasion and rationalization which characterizes this passage is reminiscent of Jim's rejection of the truth. However, regardless of whether it is viewed as a rationalization or as a sincere attempt to answer the charges of desertion levelled against him, this passage does indicate that Conrad was concerned about his departure from his native land. Almost immediately following this attempt to justify his action of leaving Poland, Conrad wrote "The Secret Sharer," in which, as Jocelyn Baines has suggested, the novelist's guilt feelings are again reflected in the implicit justification of Leggatt's action.²⁸ While stopping short of any identification of Conrad with his fictional portrayals of withdrawal and betrayal, one does seem justified in claiming that Conrad's experience in leaving Poland and his later retrospective doubts concerning that action did help to drive him towards an affirmation of the principle of human solidarity.

The third biographical event to be considered as an influence upon Conrad's treatment of the themes of withdrawal and

²⁷Conrad, A Personal Record, pp. 35-36.

²⁸Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography, pp. 358-59.

commitment is that of his purported suicide attempt in 1878 in Marseilles. It is not the intention of this thesis to deal with the controversy regarding the likelihood of this incident being an attempted suicide or a duel. In the light of Najder's recent publication of Tadeusz Bobrowski's letter of 24 March, 1879, to Stefan Buszczyński,²⁹ the case put by Jocelyn Baines for the theory that Conrad did attempt suicide seems irrefutable.³⁰ Baines feels that this attempt to commit suicide was yet another source of the guilt which haunted Conrad throughout his life:

An attempt to kill oneself would in all circumstances be a traumatic experience; and this would have been particularly intense in Conrad's case because, according to the Roman Catholic dogma under which he had been brought up, attempted suicide is a mortal sin.³¹

The preoccupation with suicide in his novels clearly reflects Conrad's lasting concern over this event in his life. Nine of his leading fictional characters actually do kill themselves while others attempt suicide or sacrifice themselves in a manner similar to suicide.³² The lasting memory of this event undoubtedly led Conrad to discover his relationship to life and humanity.

²⁹ Najder (ed.), Conrad's Polish Background, pp. 175-79. This letter makes three explicit and detailed references to Conrad's attempted suicide.

³⁰ Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography, pp. 45-54.

³¹ Ibid., p. 53.

³² Adam Gillon has charted the incidence of suicides and attempted suicides in Conrad's fiction. The Eternal Solitary, pp. 112-17.

While these biographical facts undoubtedly played a role in the formation of Conrad's attitude towards withdrawal and commitment, it is to the novels themselves that one must ultimately turn to understand the novelist's complex treatment of these opposing ways of life. Throughout his works are found human beings who have attempted to renounce their humanity by walking and often running away from life or by simply standing aside to watch the stream of life flow by. His early novels are almost uniformly dominated by figures of this type. In his first novel, Almayer's Folly, it is a man who has become bitter and cynical through his dealings with life to the point that he is physically cut off from his kind and left to rot in an atmosphere of decay and death. Conrad's second novel, The Outcast of the Island, returned to this withdrawn type in the person of Willems, a man who, like Jim, could not face the shame of his guilt and thus chose to flee life. In his third novel, The Nigger of the Narcissus, Conrad changed the setting but not the subject and continued to examine human solidarity and man's aberrations from it. Through all of his early novels and stories this parade of men fleeing from life continued: Arsat of "The Lagoon," who fled life and responsibility for personal love; Alvan Hervey of "The Return," who "skimmed over the surface of life" by adhering rigidly to social conventions; Jim of Lord Jim, who could not accept his guilt and thus ran from life; Kurtz of "Heart of Darkness," who renounced his humanity in an attempt to become a

god; Nostromo, who evaded life by clinging to his personal illusion.

However, as Paul L. Wiley has observed in his excellent examination of the hermit type, Conrad's use of this figure in no way implies approbation of the principle of withdrawal.³³ Conrad uses the hermit figure to emphasize the tension between the figure of withdrawal and humanity. As his work progressed, Conrad's affirmation of humanity became increasingly stronger, and the hermit figure, used as an illustration of the folly of not sharing this affirmation, continued to occupy a dominant position in his works. Through the respective fates of characters like Razumov, Anthony, and Heyst in the later novels, Conrad actually implied a strong rejection of withdrawal as a way of life.

³³Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, pp. 17, 29 ff.

CHAPTER II

As withdrawal and commitment were such central concerns to Conrad's thought, it is not surprising to find that they are also central concerns in his major novels. It will be the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that in Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory Conrad presents these principles of withdrawal and commitment through alternating states of mind. Thus it will be shown that in the three novels chosen there is a presentation of human passivity, with its associated forms of infancy and fatalism, set against a presentation of mental activity. Passivity, with its associated states of mind, will be seen to represent the principle of withdrawal from life; activity as a state of mind will be seen to represent the principle of commitment to life.

The following chapter will continue to trace out Conrad's two principles of withdrawal and commitment in these three novels but will concentrate upon his method of using natural conditions to reflect these states of mind. In that chapter, darkness, silence, and immobility will be seen to be natural reflections of the state of withdrawal, while light, sound, and motion will be seen to suggest the state of commitment to life. This demonstration of Conrad's presentation of the states of withdrawal and commitment will lead up to an examination of the association of the state of withdrawal with unreality and death. The

ascertainment of these associations will demonstrate the way in which Conrad makes an implicit judgment upon withdrawal and commitment.

In the first place, it must be shown how Conrad describes the withdrawal tendencies of the central figure in each of these three novels. Subsequent to this examination, the passive nature of the figure of withdrawal may be discovered and seen to be set against the idea of activity.

In Lord Jim the central character, Jim, is a figure whose life consists of a series of "jumps" and departures, ending only when he finally recognizes human bonds of responsibility and stops running. The metaphor of the jump is the primary device used by Conrad to create this effect of withdrawal from life. It is found even in the description of Jim's first failure to commit himself to humanity, foreshadowing his later leaps out of life. As a youth on the training ship Jim fails to act in an emergency and can only stand by and watch:

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. "Too late, youngster." The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the conscious pain of defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. "Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart."¹

Following this incident, which is a miniature reflection of his entire life up to his death, Jim makes three more significant

¹Conrad, Lord Jim (London: Dent, 1963), p. 6.

"jumps" out of life. The first is his leap from the Patna which he himself refers to as a "jump."² This evasion of commitment to human solidarity marks the point of Jim's original departure from life. His second jump is that which he takes into Patusan.³ Significantly leaping over a stockade and across a creek, Jim is actually completing that jump which he took from the Patna. Marlow refers to this jump as "the second desperate leap" of Jim's life.⁴ Elsewhere Marlow associates Jim's withdrawals from life with the action of jumping or running away:

Strange, this fatality that would cast the complexion of a flight upon all his acts, of impulsive, unreflecting desertion--of a jump into the unknown.⁵

Marlow also associates Jim's second jump with the retreat from life which the hermit makes.⁶ Jim's third jump out of life, his failure to recognize his responsibility in the confrontation with Brown, is not explicitly described as a jump but may be considered as such by virtue of Conrad's emphasis upon the fact that it occurs on the same spot as that upon which the second jump took place:

²Ibid., p. 82. ³Ibid., p. 184.

⁴Ibid., p. 279. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, this study will drop the single quotation marks which enclose most of the text of Lord Jim, namely that part narrated by Marlow. Thus all direct quotations taken from the novel, apart from those in Chapters I to IV [pp. 3-25 in the Dent edition], are enclosed in single quotation marks in the original text, although these marks have been omitted in this study.

⁵Ibid., p. 168. ⁶Ibid., p. 170.

They met, I should think, not very far from the place, perhaps on the very spot, where Jim took the second desperate leap of his life--the leap that landed him into the life of Patusan, into the trust, the love, the confidence of the people.⁷

Conrad had earlier shown that, after the first leap from the Patna, Jim had expressed a desire to swim back "to the very spot" of his jump.⁸ At that time Marlow had made much of this emphasis on the "very spot" because it clearly signified Jim's desire for a second chance. Thus Jim's meeting Brown on the "very spot" of his second leap makes this confrontation a second chance for Jim. His failure to take this chance, then, may also be viewed as a leap out of life.

While Jim's withdrawal from life is depicted primarily in terms of the jump, it is also expressed to a considerable extent by a series of departures or flights. In spite of his claim, "I may have jumped, but I don't run away,"⁹ Jim is forever retreating before the offending fact of his leap from the Patna, moving from port to port and job to job in an effort to escape that fact. His tendency to take flight, however, is best illustrated by a series of scenes in which he departs from Marlow. There are six such scenes, all rendered in considerable detail and all focussing on the figure of Jim walking away.¹⁰ One of these scenes emphasizes Jim's departure:

⁷Ibid., p. 279. ⁸Ibid., p. 84. ⁹Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 55, 113-14, 118, 136, 174-77, 245-47.

...he marched out without looking back; the sound of his footfalls died out gradually behind the closed door--the unhesitating tread of a man walking in broad daylight.¹¹

In another similar scene in Lord Jim, Marlow emphasizes Jim's departure but also poses the same question as Councillor Mikulin poses to Razumov in Under Western Eyes:

The night swallowed up his form....I heard the quick crunch-crunch of the gravel under his boots. He was running. Absolutely running, with nowhere to go.¹²

Since Marlow generally signifies the life of action and commitment in the novel, as will be demonstrated later in this study, Jim's departures from him may be viewed as flights from humanity.

In Under Western Eyes the central figure, Razumov, is also a man who consistently withdraws from life until he finally recognizes the bond of human solidarity in the last pages of the novel. In part, Razumov's withdrawal is presented in physical terms similar to those of Lord Jim. Like Jim, he seeks out the solitude of his room in an attempt to shut out life:

...he liked his lodgings better than any other shelter he, who had never known a home, had ever hired before. He liked his lodgings so well that often, on that very account, he found a certain difficulty in making up his mind to go out. It resembled a physical seduction such as, for instance, makes a man reluctant to leave the neighbourhood of a fire on a cold day.¹³

Later, in Geneva, he leads a "solitary and retired existence" in an attempt to shut out the world of humanity represented by

¹¹Ibid., p. 136. ¹²Ibid., p. 114.

¹³Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1957), pp. 248-49.

Nathalie Haldin.¹⁴ His withdrawal from life is also expressed physically in the illness he suffers immediately after the betrayal of Victor Haldin:

Then came an illness, something in the nature of a low fever, which all at once removed him to a great distance from the perplexing actualities, from his very room, even. He never lost consciousness; he only seemed to himself to be existing languidly somewhere very far away from everything that had ever happened to him.¹⁵

Towards the end of the novel, Razumov makes yet another physical retreat to the secluded island dedicated to Rousseau.¹⁶ Like Jim's, Razumov's withdrawal is also portrayed as a departure, a walking away from the demands of humanity. To Sophia Antonovna's innocent question--"You just simply walked away?"--applied to the assassination, Razumov makes his first unqualified confession in his answer, "Simply--yes."¹⁷

The crystallization of this entire question of withdrawal for Razumov is found, however, in the central scene between him and Councillor Mikulin at the end of Part One. In that scene, Razumov, while ostensibly walking from the room and the interview, explicitly adopts the principle of withdrawal:

¹⁴Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 248. This illness bears a strong resemblance to the mysterious accident which disables Jim during a storm (Lord Jim, pp. 8-9). There is the suggestion that both illness and accident are the products of unconscious desires in Razumov and Jim respectively.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 241-43.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 214. This answer is not, of course, recognizable as a confession to Sophia Antonovna.

"... really, I must claim the right to be done once for all with that man. And in order to accomplish this I shall take the liberty ... To retire--simply to retire", he finished with great resolution.¹⁸

To this, Mikulin softly poses the question which echoes and re-echoes throughout the novel: "Where to?". With this simply query, Mikulin questions Razumov's whole world of withdrawal, so that by the end of the novel Razumov must admit that, as Mikulin implies, he cannot simply retire from life.

Razumov's withdrawal is best expressed, however, in his betrayal of Victor Haldin. Before Haldin's intrusion into his life, Razumov was a figure contentedly looking inward at himself and concerned only with the security of his work and of his routine life:

Razumov was one of those men who, living in a period of mental and political unrest, keep an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life. He was aware of the emotional tension of his time; he even responded to it in an indefinite way. But his main concern was with his work, his studies, and with his own future.¹⁹

His goal in life is to find a comfortable and secure niche for himself in the echelons of an autocratic government. The symbol and first step of this rise to security is the silver medal offered for the best essay. Thus it is significant that this medal is the object of Razumov's concentration in his last moment before finding Haldin in his room.²⁰ Similarly, the loss of that medal and the whole life of security for which it stands is the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 88. ¹⁹Ibid., pp. 16-17. ²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

first thing that enters Razumov's mind when he perceives the full implications of Haldin's presence.²¹ His subsequent betrayal of Haldin, then, is clearly consistent with his seeking that silver medal. Both actions are the products of his attachment to the state, the instrument of security and withdrawal for him. In choosing to give Haldin up to the authorities, Razumov ignores the very real bond of humanity existing between himself and his "brother," Haldin.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that Razumov does decisively reject the bond of human solidarity. At no point does he decide to help Haldin out of recognition of the humanity common to them. His intention is simply to get rid of this intruder and threat to his state of withdrawal in any way possible, even if it involves helping him incidentally. This is indicated in his thought even before he leaves the room:

It was best to keep this man out of the streets till he could be got rid of with some chance of escaping. That was the best that could be done. Razumov, of course, felt the safety of his lonely existence to be permanently endangered.²²

Razumov's leaving to find Ziemianitch is, then, not a temporary recognition of human solidarity but merely an act motivated by this practical desire to "get rid of" Haldin. As Razumov approaches Ziemianitch's inn, his errand is described in these self-protective terms:

²¹Ibid., p. 21. ²²Ibid., p. 25.

It was the thought of Haldin locked up in his rooms and the desperate desire to get rid of his presence which drove him forward. No rational determination had any part in his exertions.²³

When Razumov finally makes the conscious decision to betray his "brother," it can thus be stated with consistency that "he had simply discovered what he had meant to do all along."²⁴ In performing this act of betrayal, then, Razumov is evading the commitment to humanity which Haldin represents. In so doing he is manifesting a tendency already latent within himself. Only when he renounces this association with the state and recognizes his commitment to humanity in the person of Nathalie Haldin, the living reminder of his guilt, can Razumov embrace the state of commitment.

In Victory, a more romantic and artificial novel than the previous two mentioned, the study of withdrawal is much closer to the surface. The central figure, Axel Heyst, is a man whose actual physical withdrawal is obvious at first glance. He lives in almost hermit fashion on a deserted island cut off from the stream of human life. Paradoxically, however, Heyst's potential for the recognition of human solidarity is actually greater than that of either Jim or Razumov. This potential causes Heyst to make three forays into the sphere of human commitment, each producing adverse results. The first, a sympathetic attempt to aid a fellow seaman,

²³Ibid., p. 30. ²⁴Ibid., p. 39.

ends in the latter's death. The second, an enterprise in coal mining, ends in financial ruin. The third, the sympathetic protection of a young woman, also ends in destruction, but in that destruction Heyst appears to recognize the principle of commitment to life.

In Victory, Heyst's withdrawal is presented more as a standing aside from life than as an actual flight from life. The last words of his dying father sum up this stance of the spectator in their exhortation to "look on--and make no sound."²⁵ Heyst's stance is that of the "independent spectator,"²⁶ the man who, being disenchanted with life, is absolutely indifferent to it. Thus Heyst as spectator is portrayed sitting on the banks of the stream of life as he watches it pass by:

The dead man [Heyst's father] had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it.²⁷

A second dominating image of Heyst's withdrawal is that of the wanderer who floats free from life:

"I'll drift," Heyst had said to himself deliberately.

He did not mean intellectually or sentimentally or morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything.

²⁵ Joseph Conrad, Victory (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1963), p. 150.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 166. ²⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

"This shall be my defence against life," he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative.

He became a waif and a stray, austerely, from conviction,...²⁸

The combination of his father's thought and Heyst's own experiences with humanity have given Heyst a profound mistrust of life, as is evident in his warning to Davidson:

"The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance;..."²⁹

Heyst's withdrawal, then, is a defence against this "bad dog" and must be breached by Lena before he is brought into a state of commitment.

In the three novels with which this study is primarily concerned, these states of withdrawal illustrated by Jim, Razumov, and Heyst are clearly associated with a passive attitude towards life. These figures of withdrawal belong to a group that holds the largely unconscious conviction that the world acts upon them. They regard their experiences as conditions which are imposed upon them by external forces. In their view the events of their lives happen to them and are not in any way the results of their own wills. Essentially, then, they are passive rather than active figures. Their passivity and their devaluation of the human will leads them to divorce themselves from personal responsibility for their actions as, in effect, these actions are not actions to them

²⁸Ibid., p. 87. ²⁹Ibid., p. 59.

but merely arbitrary conditions imposed upon them. This passivity is also expressed in associated states of mind in Conrad's novels. In the three novels with which this study is concerned, a belief in the controlling force of destiny is the logical consequence of passivity. Also, a belief in the inertia of the static reflects a passive attitude, as does the mental state of infancy which follows from the belief that man is acted upon.

The attitude of passivity and moral irresponsibility, together with the derivative states of mind enumerated above, is strongly developed in the three novels but is finally rejected. Conrad's condemnation of passivity is achieved primarily by the opposition to that state of mind of an active mental state. Thus, in these novels there is also found a world of activity which demonstrates a belief in change and moral responsibility. Although less fully developed by Conrad, this world clearly becomes the norm for humanity.

It will here be shown that Jim, as a figure of withdrawal, clearly exhibits an extremely passive attitude to life throughout Lord Jim. The key event of Jim's life, the leap from the Patna, is consistently presented as an event that "happens" to Jim, not as a consequence of his own action or willing. Thus, in recounting the incident to Marlow, Jim expresses the leap in a passive manner: "I had jumped--it seems." Marlow, facetiously agreeing in his mind with this, jokes, "It had happened somehow. It would

never happen again."³⁰ In his version of the jump, Jim does indeed portray himself as a passive figure who is acted upon:

"I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do. It seemed to take all the life out of my limbs. I thought I might just as well stand where I was and wait."³¹

As Marlow listens to Jim's account of the incident, Jim's passive attitude creates a marked impression upon the listener. A clear distinction between passivity and action is perceived:

The next minute--his last on board--was crowded with a tumult of events and sensations which beat about him like the sea upon a rock. I use the simile advisedly, because from his relation I am forced to believe he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke.³²

This distinction is also apparent as Marlow listens to Jim's account of his stumbling over the third engineer's legs:

This was the first I heard of his having moved at all. I could not restrain a grunt of surprise. Something had started him off at last, but of the exact moment, of the cause that tore him out of his immobility, he knew no more than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low. All this had come to him; the sounds, the sights, the legs of the dead man--by Jove! The infernal joke was being crammed devilishly down his throat,....³³

With this passive attitude, Jim can conveniently escape self-reproach by transferring the guilt which is his to the external forces which cause such events to happen:

He had been taken unawares--and he whispered to himself a

³⁰Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 82. ³¹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

³²Ibid., p. 80. ³³Ibid., p. 81.

malediction upon the waters and the firmament, upon the ship, upon the men. Everything had betrayed him!³⁴

His passivity enables him, in his own eyes at least, to rationalize his behaviour and to escape the burden of responsibility for his jump:

"Didn't I get somehow into that boat?... I did. I was plainly there with them--wasn't I? Isn't it awful that a man should be driven to do a thing like that--and be responsible?"³⁵

Jim does eventually shift to the use of the active rather than the passive voice in describing his leap from the Patna. He does this, however, only because he feels that he has absolved himself of real moral responsibility by showing that the action was not of his own conscious willing. Thus, when he first uses the active voice in referring to the jump, he carefully qualifies its implications:

"Oh, yes, I know very well--I jumped. Certainly. I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they [the crew] were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over."³⁶

Gradually, however, Jim does come to accept the fact that the leap was a conscious act on his part, although, as Marlow points out, "he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters."³⁷ Thus, without attaching moral responsibility to the act, Jim is able to admit to Marlow that he did consciously jump:

His lips quivered while he looked straight into my eyes. "I

³⁴Ibid., p. 70. ³⁵Ibid., pp. 87-88. ³⁶Ibid., p. 91.

³⁷Ibid., p. 130.

had jumped--hadn't I?" he asked dismayed. "That's what I had to live down. The story didn't matter."³⁸

Jim's passive attitude to life and its events is expressed to a considerable extent by his belief in an external force in the universe. Immediately preceding his first failure to act on the training ship, he perceives this force in nature:

There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around.³⁹

Later, in his attempt to explain his leap from the Patna, Jim is anxious to convince the court of inquiry that the mere facts of the incident were accompanied by "something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body."⁴⁰ This belief in an external force of destiny, and the implicit release from moral responsibility which it provides, are decisive factors in Jim's failure to recognize his commitment in the Brown incident. His sympathy for Brown is derived from this belief that no man is himself to blame for his sins.

The impression of Jim's passivity in the face of life is largely conveyed by the attitudes and words of Jim himself. However, Marlow, who will shortly be shown to be a figure from the world of activity, indicates that he, too, is drawn into

³⁸Ibid., p. 98. ³⁹Ibid., p. 6. ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 23.

Jim's illusion of passiveness.⁴¹ Thus he can suggest that "we are snared into doing things...by which some of us are totally and completely undone."⁴² Marlow views Jim as an object helplessly swept along in the stream of events. In the "Tuan Jim" of Patusan he sees not a man controlling events and people but rather a figure who is controlled and who passively allows himself to be owned:

He [Jim] looked with an owner's eye at the peace of the evening, at the river, at the houses, at the everlasting life of the forests, at the life of the old mankind, at the security of the land, at the pride of his own heart: but it was they that possessed him and made him their own to the innermost thought, to the slightest stir of the blood, to the last breath.⁴³

Even in death Jim appears to be controlled by forces external to him. Attempting to read Jim's thoughts in his final confrontation with Brown, Marlow feels that Jim's "fate, revolted was forcing his hand."⁴⁴

Apart from these direct insights, Jim's passivity is expressed in three indirect ways. The first is Jim's consistent characterization as a child. This characterization establishes Jim as a person who can do nothing for himself and who passively submits himself to circumstances and to the will of others. As a departure from activity, consciousness, and moral responsibility, then, these associations between Jim and the state of childhood

⁴¹Ibid., p. 81. ⁴²Ibid., p. 32. ⁴³Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 288.

tie him to the world of withdrawal. As Jim gives his account of the Patna incident, Marlow notices his child-like evasion of reality:

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

...You had to listen to him as you would listen to a small child in trouble. He didn't know. It had happened somehow. It would never happen again.⁴⁵

When Marlow goes to Jim's aid in an attempt to find employment for him, this passivity of the child is again evident and is associated with withdrawal:

He followed me as manageable as a little child, with an obedient air, with no sort of manifestation, rather as though he had been waiting for me there to come along and carry him off. I need not have been so surprised as I was at his tractability. On all the round earth,...he had no place where he could--what shall I say?--where he could withdraw. That's it! Withdraw--be alone with his loneliness.⁴⁶

Later, Jim's awe-struck praise of Stein resembles a child's hero-worship and is considered dangerous by Marlow:

He was voluble like a youngster on the eve of a long holiday with a prospect of delightful scrapes, and such an attitude of mind in a grown man and in this connection had in it something phenomenal, a little mad, dangerous, unsafe.⁴⁷

At their final parting scene Jim appears to be "no bigger than a child" just before he is finally lost to Marlow's sight.⁴⁸ Marlow also makes frequent passing references to Jim's child-like nature.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 172.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 247.

He sees him as "a dear good boy in trouble"⁴⁹ and observes that "people, perfect strangers, took to him as one takes to a nice child."⁵⁰ He refers to Jim's boyish eyes,"⁵¹ his "boyish eagerness,"⁵² and his "boyish tone"⁵³ and observes his blushes and bashful manner.⁵⁴ In addition, Cornelius and Brown frequently refer to Jim as a "little child."⁵⁵ Through the use of these associations with childhood, Conrad emphasizes the passive nature of Jim's personality.

A second indirect expression of Jim's passivity is to be found in Conrad's concentration upon the use of hands as indicators of activity or inactivity. Jim is frequently portrayed as standing with his hands literally in his pockets. In Conrad's opposition of passivity against activity this is certainly no accident. The hands are, of course, the instruments of physical action and, as such, are fitting reflectors of a man's mental activity or passivity. Jim, in keeping these instruments of action in his pockets, reveals his tendency to be passive. The French lieutenant, as will be demonstrated shortly, constantly moves his hands in full view and thus reveals his inclination towards action.

Marlow's first glimpse of Jim is marked by this passive

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 133. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 145. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 194.

⁵²Ibid., p. 169. ⁵³Ibid., p. 140. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 169.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 240, 278, 293.

stance:

The third [Jim] was an upstanding, broad-shouldered youth, with his hands in his pockets....⁵⁶

Marlow again draws attention to this stance moments later.⁵⁷ It is in Jim's account of his inaction during the Patna incident, however, that the key to this metaphor is found. Jim is seen inactive and motionless with "his feet...glued to the planks."⁵⁸ Set against this figure of inaction is that of the donkey-man, who has died of a heart attack because he has acted. Jim's observation on this man's death clearly associates the stance of standing with the hands in the pockets with the inaction of a non-participant in life:

"Ah! If he had only kept still....If he had only stood by with his hands in his pockets and called them names!"⁵⁹

Later, when Jim admits to thinking of death, Marlow notices that "both his hands were thrust deep into his pockets."⁶⁰ In another similar scene, Marlow catches both Jim's passivity and his habitual tendency to defend himself in one glimpse:

He began to walk with measured steps to and fro before my chair, one hand in his trousers-pocket, his head bent thoughtfully, and his right arm at long intervals raised for a gesture that seemed to put out of his way an invisible intruder.⁶¹

This use of hands to reflect inactivity will be seen, in the case of the French lieutenant, to function in another way.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 30. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 32. ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁹Ibid. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 93. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 92.

A third indirect expression of Jim's passivity is evident in his failure to take an aggressive posture. His lack of assertiveness on a physical level reflects the passive, unassertive temper of his personality. Throughout the novel, Jim, like Heyst, cannot strike or approach another human being aggressively except in self-defence. Significantly, Jim takes Marlow's revolver but forgets the cartridges for it as he leaves for Patusan.⁶² Later, as he arrives in Patusan, he fails to load the revolver even though he does have the cartridges.⁶³ When Jim finally does use the gun, it is Jewel who must force it, loaded, upon him.⁶⁴ When he faces death in both the assassination attempt and later as punishment for his final failure, Jim must be urged to fight and to assert himself by Jewel.⁶⁵ Clearly, he is trying to avoid adopting an attitude of assertion. Even when he does manage to assert himself physically, as he finally does with the revolver, the action is essentially one of defence rather than aggression. Those of his acts which on first sight appear to be assertive are all, upon closer examination, seen to be of this defensive nature. When he approaches Marlow outside the courtroom, Jim is merely reacting defensively to a remark which he takes to be a slur upon himself.⁶⁶ Marlow's fear that Jim will actually beat him physically is the product of his own

⁶²Ibid., p. 174. ⁶³Ibid., p. 180. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 217.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 219, 302. ⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 52-55.

imagination; it should not be taken to imply that Jim is in fact contemplating such action. Jim's most remarkable action in the Patna incident, sitting at the bow of the boat with the tiller as a weapon for six hours, is not, in fact, an action at all but merely a defensive precaution.⁶⁷ His violent attack on the Siamese lieutenant is once again essentially a defensive act in that it results from Jim's reaction to a "scornful remark" uttered by the lieutenant.⁶⁸ In the confrontation with Brown, Jim takes a defensive attitude even though he is actually in the offensive, assertive position. Even in death Jim cannot assert himself physically; he dies not by his own hand but rather at the hands of another.⁶⁹

Jim's unaggressiveness and passivity are, however, masked by a superficial appearance of aggressiveness. In the very first lines of the novel, a glimpse is given of the truth behind that appearance:

He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed as much at himself as at anybody else.⁷⁰

During his confrontation with Jim outside the court room, Marlow also observes the deception of Jim's appearance with regard to his

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 188-90. ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 145. ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 306.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 3.

seemingly aggressive nature:

It strikes me now I have never in my life been so near a beating--I mean it literally; a beating with fists. I suppose I had some hazy prescience of that eventuality being in the air. Not that he was actively threatening me. On the contrary, he was strangely passive--don't you know? but he was lowering, and, though not exceptionally big, he looked generally fit to demolish a wall. The most reassuring symptom I noticed was a kind of slow and ponderous hesitation....⁷¹

Behind an appearance of aggressiveness, then, Jim's failure to assert himself indicates his basic tendency to withdraw from life.

Since Jim is, for the greater part of the novel, a figure exemplifying withdrawal, Conrad's examination of passivity is much more extensive than his examination of activity as a state of mind. In spite of this quantitative difference, however, the world of activity does occupy a higher position in Conrad's moral scheme. In Lord Jim this world of activity or commitment is illustrated primarily by two figures and through a pointed contrast found early in the novel. Dealing with the contrast first, one should observe that the men in the Eastern port in which Jim finds himself are of two kinds. The minority are the active ones, those who "appeared to live in a crazy maze of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises."⁷² The majority, with which Jim associates and is associated, are the inactive, passive men who "were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea," who hated work and loved the "easy billet."⁷³ Conrad is clearly concerned with the condemnation of this majority:

⁷¹Ibid., p. 52. ⁷²Ibid., p. 10. ⁷³Ibid.

...in all they said--in their actions, in their looks, in their persons--could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence.⁷⁴

Of the figures representing the world of action, the French lieutenant is probably the most striking. He is portrayed in terms which make him the exact opposite of Jim. While Jim has withdrawn from life, the French lieutenant has strongly committed himself to life. While Jim is passive in his attitude toward life's events, the French lieutenant is active. He is the representative of those men who do take action and who recognize the existence of a code of human behaviour and man's moral obligation to follow the code. His philosophy of life revolves around the simple statement, "One does what one can."⁷⁵ Recognizing the lieutenant to be an example of those men who choose to fight and act, Marlow describes him as "one of those steady, reliable men who are the raw material of great reputations, one of those uncounted lives that are buried without drums and trumpets under the foundations of monumental successes."⁷⁶ The active nature of the French lieutenant is presented by Conrad in a rather subtle fashion. Ponderous and immobile, he appears outwardly to signify absolute inaction:

...he was a quiet, massive chap in a creased uniform sitting drowsily over a tumbler half full of some dark liquid.⁷⁷

He is likened to "one of those snuffy, quiet village priests,"⁷⁸

⁷⁴Ibid. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 103. ⁷⁶Ibid., p. 105.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 101. ⁷⁸Ibid., p. 102.

and to a "sack of meal."⁷⁹ As in Jim's case, however, Marlow finds that appearances are deceiving in the French lieutenant's case as well:

...his torpid demeanour concealed nothing: it had that mysterious, almost miraculous power of producing striking effects by means impossible of detection which is the last word of the highest art.⁸⁰

The key to the French lieutenant's true nature behind his appearance is to be found, as in Jim's case, in the hands. As a man of action, the lieutenant does not hide his hands as Jim does, but rather keeps those instruments of physical action in full view and keeps moving them. He is first seen "with his thick fingers clasped lightly on his stomach."⁸¹ He speaks with the aid of his hands, constantly clasping and reclasping them between gestures, and gazes at them as well.⁸² This constant focus draws Marlow's attention to the scars and stiffness, the marks of action which appropriately decorate the hands. The lieutenant's use of the hands is a physical manifestation of his activity just as Jim's hands in his pockets are signs of inactivity.

A second figure representing the world of activity is Marlow himself. He represents, with minor aberrations, the community of seamen and the allegiance to a code of duty and action. In the early part of the novel he describes himself as

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 104.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 104.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 102.

⁸²Ibid., p. 103.

"a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct."⁸³ Marlow identifies himself twice with those who fight in the ranks, even though he does question the actual significance of this identification.⁸⁴ In spite of his doubts, however, Marlow's reaction upon his return to the sea of life and activity after his stay in Patusan reveals his true attachment to that life of activity:

The light itself seemed to stir, the sky above our heads widened, a far-off-murmur reached our ears, a freshness enveloped us, filled our lungs, quickened our thought, our blood, our regrets--and, straight ahead, the forests sank down against the dark-blue ridge of the sea.

I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world. This sky and this sea were open to me. The girl was right--there was a sign, a call in them--something to which I responded with every fibre of my being. I let my eyes roam through space, like a man released from bonds who stretches his cramped limbs, runs, leaps, responds to the inspiring elation of his freedom. "This is glorious!" I cried,...⁸⁵

Without doubt, Marlow is a man who feels at home in the world of activity and life.

In Lord Jim, then, there is indeed an opposition of the passive and active attitudes towards life, the former reflecting withdrawal from life and the latter reflecting commitment to life. As will be shown, this basic opposition, central to Under Western Eyes and Victory, serves the same purpose in those novels.

⁸³Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 33, 246.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 244.

In Under Western Eyes, as has already been demonstrated, withdrawal from life is expressed in more abstract terms as compared with the physical metaphors of Lord Jim. Thus, while the earlier novel represents withdrawal by literal jumps and departures and expresses passivity through such physical metaphors as appearance and the use of hands and weapons, Under Western Eyes makes the same representation in less concrete terms. In this novel, withdrawal is expressed initially through the concept of betrayal. The continuation of that withdrawal is expressed through an identification with an essentially passive nation and through an espousal of the status quo. This, of course, is not to deny the importance of the physical metaphors in the novel. They do play an important, although secondary, role in presenting withdrawal and its opposite, commitment. In spite of this shift in emphasis from the physical to the abstract, however, the same underlying opposition of passivity and activity that exists in Lord Jim is to be found in Under Western Eyes.

This opposition is the organizing principle behind the scene in which Razumov withdraws from life and humanity by betraying Haldin. The latter, as will be demonstrated shortly, is a man who is committed to activity, a person who does things and makes events happen. Razumov, on the other hand, is immersed in passivity; he is one of those men to whom things happen. This fact is illustrated in his attitude towards Haldin's intrusion and towards his own subsequent act of betrayal. Essentially,

Razumov views the entire incident as an event over which he had no control:

He thought with a sort of dry, unemotional melancholy; three years of good work gone, the course of folly more perhaps jeopardized--turned from hope to terror, because events started by human folly link themselves with a sequence which no sagacity can foresee and no courage can break through. Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady's back is turned; you come home and find it in possession bearing no man's name, clothed in flesh....⁸⁶

This passive attitude towards the betrayal enables Razumov, like Jim, to evade self-reproach because it absolves him, in his own eyes, of moral responsibility:

Again he experienced that sensation of his conduct being taken out of his hands by Haldin's revolutionary tyranny. His solitary and laborious existence had been destroyed--the only thing he could call his own on this earth. By what right? he asked himself furiously. In what name?⁸⁷

Thus freed from blame in his own sight, Razumov frequently looks back upon Haldin's intrusion as the wrecking or ruining of his life. He considers himself to be a victim rather than a sinner. Thus he regards Haldin as a "pestilential disease" and as a "subtle pest that would convert earth into a hell."⁸⁸ In his moral blindness, he kindles a deep hatred, not for himself, but for Haldin, the figure who has made all this "happen" to him.

This passivity which characterizes Razumov's attitude towards the betrayal pervades his entire existence. In his interview with General T_____, he feels that he is the "helpless prey"

⁸⁶ Conrad, Under Western Eyes, p. 76. ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

of the man.⁸⁹ Conversing with Peter Ivanovitch, Razumov ironically emphasizes this passivity in his choice of words explaining his coming to meet the great feminist in Geneva:

"I was irresistibly drawn--let us say impelled, yes, impelled; or, rather, compelled, driven--driven," repeated Razumov loudly, and ceased, as if startled by the hollow reverberation of the word 'driven' along two bare corridors and in the great empty hall.

.....
 "Ah, Peter Ivanovitch, if you only knew the force which drew--no, which drove me towards you! The irresistible force."

I have been impelled, compelled, or rather sent--let us say sent--towards you for work that no one but myself can do.⁹⁰

Razumov's passivity is perhaps most simply expressed, however, in the statement, "We shall see."⁹¹ The reader can quite appropriately affix the words "what happens" to this simple statement, for Razumov is a person who passively waits for things to happen to him.

Like Jim, Razumov also reflects his passivity in his belief in external forces which act upon him. This belief, in fact, leads him to consider suicide as a form of ultimate withdrawal:

The true Razumov had his being in the willed, in the determined future--in that future menaced by the lawlessness of autocracy--for autocracy knows no law--and the lawlessness of revolution. The feeling that his moral personality was at

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 191-92. Italics in the original.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 72.

the mercy of these lawless forces was so strong that he asked himself seriously if it were worth while to go on accomplishing the mental functions of that existence which seemed no longer his own.⁹²

At times these external forces are those of society, at other times they seem to imply a demonic manipulation of events.⁹³ In any event, they serve to intensify Razumov's sense of passivity.

Razumov's state of passivity is also expressed through his personal identification with Russia. He thinks of himself as the personification of the land with its capacity for passive suffering. "Russia can't disown me," he claims, since he is Russia.⁹⁴ This identification is essentially a physical one, as is suggested by the similarity between Razumov's passivity and that of the land itself:

Razumov stamped his foot--and under the soft carpet of snow felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding sheet--his native soil--his very own--without a fire-side, without a hearth!⁹⁵

He describes his existence as "A great cold blank, something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow."⁹⁶ Furthermore, he emphasizes the characteristically passive nature of this land which awaits its fate and with which he has identified himself:

Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered

⁹²Ibid., p. 71. ⁹³Ibid., p. 237. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 176.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 34-35. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 252.

the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under the uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history. It covered the passive land...⁹⁷

This identification is particularly apt, for Razumov waits for the events of his life to happen to him just as the land of Russia waits for its history to be imposed upon it.

Razumov's passivity and, by implication, his withdrawal from life, are also reflected by an adherence to the status quo in his political thought and social philosophy. He consistently opts for the static and for the existing state of affairs and sets himself firmly against change. This is apparent in his reverence for the immobility and solidity of Russia and her people:

It was a sort of sacred inertia. Razumov felt a respect for it. A voice seemed to cry within him, "Don't touch it." It was a guarantee of duration, of safety, while the travail of maturing destiny went on--a work not of revolutions with their passionate levity of action and their shifting impulses --but of peace.⁹⁸

This inertia is set against the discord and change which Razumov perceives Haldin to represent.⁹⁹ The agitation of agents of change like Haldin is disadvantageously contrasted by Razumov with the passive suffering of men like Ziemianitch. As a believer in the necessity of maintaining the status quo, Razumov consistently opposes himself to the change for which Haldin and the revolutionists stand:

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 35. ⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 35. ⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

As if anything could be changed! In this world of men nothing can be changed--neither happiness nor misery. They can only be displaced at the cost of corrupted consciences and broken lives --a futile game for arrogant philosophers and sanguinary triflers.¹⁰⁰

Thus, he terms Sophia Antonovna "the personal adversary he had to meet" since she, even more than the other revolutionists, represents change and action to him.¹⁰¹

Razumov's adherence to the status quo is evident in his political, as well as his social, philosophy. Politically, he is a conservative whose convictions, as the narrator observes, are crystallized through his contact with Haldin, the representative of liberalism and change.¹⁰² Razumov's political manifesto clearly and concisely sets him in the stream of conservative, anti-liberal thought:

History not Theory.
Patriotism and Internationalism.
Evolution not Revolution.
Direction not Destruction.
Unity not Disruption.¹⁰³

This political philosophy leads Razumov to reject activism outright and to patiently stand by and await "the man...the great autocrat of the future."¹⁰⁴

This passive acceptance of the established state of affairs is also expressed by two symbols. One is the staircase which Razumov is frequently ascending or descending during the

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 218-19. ¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 63. ¹⁰³Ibid., p. 62. ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 37.

novel. The staircase is meant, in its frequent appearances, to represent the unchanging order of Razumov's routine, every-day existence. The key to this reading is found in the passage describing Razumov's return to his room following his betrayal of Haldin:

Nothing would change. There was the familiar gateway yawning black with feeble glimmers marking the arches of different staircases.

The sense of life's continuity depended on trifling bodily impressions. The trivialities of daily existence were an armour for the soul. And this thought reinforced the inward quietness of Razumov as he began to climb the stairs familiar to his feet in the dark, with his hand on the familiar clammy bannister. The exceptional could not prevail against the material contacts which make one day resemble another. Tomorrow would be like yesterday.¹⁰⁵

Again, when Razumov is running through a list of the ordinary impressions of day-to-day life, he includes the staircase among them.¹⁰⁶ On the basis of the above two passages, it seems justifiable to interpret the frequent references to the staircase as reminders of the unchanging, routine life which Razumov leads. The second symbol of the status quo is the autocratic government with which Razumov allies himself in betraying Haldin. This symbol works throughout the novel, but its effectiveness is best illustrated in the description of General T____'s room.¹⁰⁷ The General is, of course, a personification of the autocratic government and his room is described in terms consistent with his

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 51-52.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 43.

duty of maintaining the status quo and opposing change. Everything in the room is frozen into an immobility which is concentrated in the statue of the running figure, still in youth. Silence is absolute and even time, the necessary condition of change, has been arrested in a figurative sense. This scene successfully reflects Razumov's own passive adherence to the status quo in that he too becomes immobile and frozen in time through the breaking of his watch.

Razumov's passivity is presented in three additional ways which assumed much greater importance in the portrayal of Jim. In Under Western Eyes they are given only passing consideration by Conrad, but their limited use is effective. One of these modes of presentation is appearance. Razumov is characterized as a listener rather than a talker:

In discussion he was easily swayed by argument and authority. With his younger compatriots he took the attitude of an inscrutable listener, a listener of the kind that hears you out intelligently and then--just changes the subject.¹⁰⁸

Razumov is not a man who will present an argument; he merely sits and listens as he does at the Chateau Borel with Mme. de S ____.¹⁰⁹ In fact when he temporarily abandons his pose as a listener and becomes a talker in the interview with Mikulin, Razumov finds himself ill-suited for anything but listening.¹¹⁰

A second mode of presentation is Razumov's failure to assert himself. Like Jim and Heyst, he lacks the power to strike

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 185.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 82.

or to attack; thus he considers stabbing Victor Haldin and Peter Ivanovitch but cannot actually carry out the acts.¹¹¹ In his anger at what he feels has happened to him, Razumov can only long for "power to hurt and destroy."¹¹² It is true that Razumov does physically beat Ziemianitch but, as in the case of Jim's seemingly aggressive acts, this beating signifies only superficial aggressiveness. As it is administered in an irrational fit of rage, it cannot be considered an assertive act on Razumov's part.

A third mode of presentation of passivity is Razumov's association with childishness. While this played an important role in Jim's characterization, its use is relegated to only two references in Under Western Eyes. Razumov views the absurdity of his position between Haldin and Ziemianitch as "a sort of terrible childishness."¹¹³ Later, as he writes his political manifesto of conservatism in the solitude of his own room, his writing becomes "unsteady, almost childish."¹¹⁴ Here, as in Lord Jim, childishness or a state of mental infancy seems to represent withdrawal.

Just as Jim's appearance was misleading with respect to his passivity, so also is Razumov's. He is constantly mistaken for the opposite of what he actually is. His attentive attitude, referred to as a "trick," gains him "a reputation of profundity"

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 34, 176. ¹¹²Ibid., p. 33.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 33. ¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 61.

and the image of "an altogether trustworthy man."¹¹⁵ Victor Haldin says to him that "there is a solidity about your character which cannot exist without courage."¹¹⁶ "Madcap Kostia" mistakes him for "a man of ideas--and a man of action, too."¹¹⁷ Razumov himself furthers this deception by presenting himself to Mme. de S _ and to Peter Ivanovitch as a "man of action."¹¹⁸ These appearances, however, merely disguise a basically passive, withdrawn man. Razumov is as conscious as the narrator and the reader of "this conspiracy of mistaken judgement taking him for what he was not."¹¹⁹

In Under Western Eyes, then, Razumov's passivity reflects his withdrawal from life and is measured against an implied standard of activity. It is apparent, however, that Conrad's presentation of the world of activity is not uncritical. Bitterly scornful of the acts of revolutionists carried out in the name of progress, Conrad despised hypocritical action. Nevertheless, in Under Western Eyes revolutionary activity is the best of a bad choice. As Sophia Antonovna points out, man's choice in life is limited to a choice between rotting and burning,¹²⁰ between destruction passively accepted and destruction actively embraced. For Conrad, man must ultimately act to manifest his humanity, even

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 13. ¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 20. ¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 74.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 182, 191. ¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 75.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 210.

if such action is attended by destructive consequences. The active revolutionary figures of Under Western Eyes do not represent a moral norm in the novel, but they do serve to emphasize Razumov's alienation from activity of any sort, an alienation which is essentially established in the presentation of Razumov's own character.¹²¹

Victor Haldin is the most striking manifestation of activity in the novel. He is the force of activity, motion, and life which breaks into Razumov's state of passivity and withdrawal. While the latter sits immobile and listening in a chair, Haldin walks back and forth talking and waving his arms in a picture of activity.¹²² He is a man who must act; he has performed the act of assassination and is now actively attempting to escape. While making frequent references to his "weary work,"¹²³ Haldin feels that his most precious possession is his "power to do" for, he claims, he "won't live idle."¹²⁴ Razumov's betrayal of this man, is, of course, a failure to recognize the bond of humanity between them, but it is at the same time an unnatural rejection of activity.

¹²¹In fact, the world of the revolutionaries as shown in the novel does exhibit many of the characteristics of withdrawal: death, decay, stagnation, sterility. Nevertheless, it does represent a very limited standard of activity, particularly in the figure of Victor Haldin.

¹²²Ibid., p. 21. ¹²³Ibid., pp. 21, 26, 59.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 24.

A second figure manifesting the world of activity is the revolutionist, Sophia Antonovna, who wears a crimson blouse to signify her choice of burning and bloodshed in preference to rotting. Razumov considers her to be "the true spirit of destructive revolution" and thus sees her as "the personal adversary he had to meet."¹²⁵ She is known to have considerable influence in the "active" section of every party.¹²⁶ In fact, the work of the revolutionists in general is presented as a commitment to activity, however false or superficial this activity might be. Peter Ivanovitch urges Nathalie Haldin to leave the position of the spectator and to "descend into the arena" where, presumably, passivity yields to activity. In spite of the critical treatment which Conrad gives to the world of the revolutionist, then, it cannot be denied that this world does manifest an activity which Razumov will not embrace. The sin, of course, lies not in his failure to act as a revolutionist but rather in his failure to act in any way at all.

As does Lord Jim, then, Under Western Eyes presents withdrawal and commitment in terms of passivity and activity respectively. Razumov has the same sense of being acted upon that Jim has, and thus frees himself from moral responsibility in the same way. In Razumov's case, however, the portrayal of passivity has been achieved in slightly more abstract, and perhaps more

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 219. ¹²⁶Ibid.

effective, terms. Razumov's personal identification with Russia as a passive victim of suffering and his allegiance to the status quo and conservatism add subtle elements of passivity which are absent in Jim's characterization.

In Victory, the state of withdrawal is again manifested through a passive attitude towards life. The methods of presenting this passivity are essentially the same as those used in Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes. Heyst, like Jim and Razumov, effects his withdrawal from life and its obligations by regarding the events of his existence as situations imposed upon him by external forces. He is another in that line of men who consider themselves to be acted upon rather than acting themselves. Thus Heyst's involvements in life, clearly actions of his own will, are viewed by him as events which simply happen to him, as assaults upon him by life. This is the way in which he regards his first action in life, his attempt to aid Morrison which results in a human tie:

"In past years, in moments of doubt that will come to a man determined to remain free from absurdities of existence, I often asked myself, with a momentary dread, in what way would life try to get hold of me? And this was the way!"¹²⁷

His own association with Morrison is referred to by Heyst not as an act but rather as a submission, a giving in.¹²⁸ Similarly, he regards his tie with Lena as something which has happened to him and for which he can consistently feel resentment just as Razumov

¹²⁷Conrad, Victory, p. 171. ¹²⁸Ibid., p. 171.

does regarding his tie with Haldin:

His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself--that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind.¹²⁹

For Heyst, existence is primarily a resistance against the external forces of life. Thus, as Lena urges him to love and tries to draw him into the world of humanity, Heyst feels that his defenses have collapsed, that life has him "fairly by the throat."¹³⁰ Even when Jones and his followers arrive on Samburan as both literal and symbolic consequences of Heyst's actions, Heyst still feels that he has been unfairly acted upon:

The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself, any more than he knew what he had done to provoke the horrible calumny about his treatment of poor Morrison.¹³¹

This feeling of victimization reflects Heyst's own passivity. In fact, as it will shortly be shown, all of the events which seem to happen to Heyst are actually the results of his own actions.

Like that of Jim and Razumov, Heyst's passivity is manifested in a belief in external forces which control his existence. This belief undoubtedly has its foundation in the philosophy of his father who had found it easier "to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness."¹³² Thus Heyst flees with Lena and withdraws to Samburan where, he feels, they can "safely defy

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 181. ¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 212-13. ¹³² Ibid., p. 184.

the fates."¹³³ Later, when Jones and his men come to the island, Heyst again feels himself, and Lena, to be the victims of fate:

"We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by--shall I say fate?--your fate, or mine."¹³⁴

Jones eventually becomes the personification of this fate which Heyst believes to control his existence. In answer to Heyst's demand that he define himself, Jones establishes this personification:

"In one way I am--yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast--almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate--the retribution that waits its time."¹³⁵

Heyst himself recognizes this personification of fate when towards the end of the novel he likens his situation to "an elaborate other-world joke, contrived by that spectre in a gorgeous dressing-gown."¹³⁶ Walking towards his bungalow where Lena and Ricardo are together, he seems to be the absolutely passive object controlled by fate:

His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of a grave.¹³⁷

Although such personification of fate is implicit in the figures of Gentleman Brown and Victor Haldin, it is only in Victory that this identification becomes explicit. It should be observed, however, that the fatalism which seems to govern Heyst is only a

¹³³ Ibid., p. 59. ¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 284. ¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 312. ¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 312.

product of his thought and not an absolute condition governing existence in the novel. Heyst feels himself to be ruled by a type of fate and seems to be ruled by fate simply because he is a passively-minded man. In actual fact, he is a free agent under a delusion of being governed by fate.

With this passivity which leads to the attitude of fatalism, Heyst rejects action. He finds, through experience, that in such a world apparently ruled by fate, action can lead only to destruction:

"I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again."¹³⁸

As a passive victim, he describes action as "the barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress" by which he himself has been caught.¹³⁹ It should be observed, however, that in Victory, Heyst's aversion to action arises in part from experience, while that of Jim and Razumov of the earlier novels does not.

The portrayal of Heyst's rejection of action strongly resembles Jim's in its emphasis upon the failure to assert oneself. In one of the few comments upon his own work which is acceptable, Conrad pointed out this failure in Heyst:

...Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the power of

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 56-57. ¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and,...even in love.¹⁴⁰

Heyst's unassertiveness is suggested in the novel's opening pages in which his physical resemblance to portraits of the conqueror, Charles XII, is seen to be ironical since "there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man."¹⁴¹ This failure to assert himself, to be aggressive in any way, is evident in Heyst's own remarks:

"I've never killed a man or loved a woman--not even in my thoughts, not even in my dreams....To slay, to love--the greatest experiences of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either."¹⁴²

When Jones and his men arrive on Samburan, Heyst does not challenge them at all or ask any questions. This passive attitude is manifested in the mysterious disappearance of Heyst's revolver, the instrument of physical self-assertion. When their continued presence demands assertive action on Heyst's part, he doubts his own ability to take such action against them:

"Suppose I were armed, could I shoot these two down where they stand? Could I?...I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence."¹⁴³

Obviously, Heyst's inability to assert himself is even greater

¹⁴⁰Ibid., Author's Note, p. 12. ¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 178. ¹⁴³Ibid., p. 267.

than Jim's, since the latter could at least overcome this inability in self-defence.

Heyst's failure to assert himself makes him acutely aware of his own helplessness. He realizes, of course, that, without his revolver he is powerless to defend himself and Lena. His plight, however, goes beyond the realm of the physical:

"Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them?"¹⁴⁴

Heyst's unassertiveness makes him morally as well as physically vulnerable, the two conditions being intricately wound together. He is and has been, in fact, a "disarmed man" both morally and physically all his life.¹⁴⁵

Unassertiveness as a sign of basic passivity is also illustrated in the nature of Heyst's relationship with Lena. Even while making his initial approach to Lena, an action by which he seems to assert himself, Heyst retains his passive unassertiveness in his words to the girl: "What would you wish me to do? Pray command me."¹⁴⁶ During the concert-hall scene and the remainder of the novel, Lena becomes the dominant, assertive member of the pair while Heyst becomes increasingly passive in their relationship. Eventually, towards the end of the novel, it is Lena who leads the way for Heyst through the forest, Lena who directs the final confrontation scene with Jones and Ricardo, and Lena who

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 73.

must wrest the assertive weapon from Ricardo in order to protect Heyst. Since he has given up the world and has lost the power of self-assertion in the renunciation, Heyst must therefore be protected from the world by someone belonging to the world.

The sense of helplessness and the failure to assert himself, which are signs of Heyst's passivity, are characterized by a childishness similar to that associated with Jim and, to a lesser extent, Razumov. The basis of this childishness in Victory is to be found at the source of Heyst's passivity, his father. Heyst observes with surprise that his father's portrait has an air of youth.¹⁴⁷ Like the static picture of General T____'s room with its youthful statue in Under Western Eyes, this portrait associates withdrawal and childhood; both pictures physically portray the paralysis of time achieved by withdrawal. In addition, Heyst's memory of his father and his adherence to the latter's philosophy of withdrawal are both derived from Heyst's own childhood. By sustaining that memory and by continuing that adherence, Heyst is, in a way, attempting to stay in that state of childhood from which he has passed in reality. His association with childishness does go beyond this source, however. Ricardo twice suggests in the form of a question that Heyst is an infant.¹⁴⁸ Heyst himself flings his helmet to the ground in "a movement of childish petulance" and admits his childishness to

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 152. ¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 224, 262.

Lena:

"Indeed, I feel very much like a child in my ignorance, in my powerlessness, in my want of resource, in everything except in the dreadful consciousness of evil hanging over your head...."¹⁴⁹

Heyst will not admit directly to being a child but he will grant what amounts to almost the same thing:

"I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour--or is it the hour before last?"¹⁵⁰

This statement establishes the point concerning Heyst's child-like nature which is relevant to his state of withdrawal: he is a man who is out of life and who is ill-suited to live in the world. This is the essential meaning behind the metaphor of childhood in Victory.

In Victory, Conrad gives the world of activity a more explicit treatment than he does in either Lord Jim or Under Western Eyes. Thus, the central figure himself, while one of withdrawal, makes three clearly defined excursions into the sphere of activity. Admittedly these excursions do drive him further back into his state of withdrawal, but the fact remains that Heyst does act and that his actions are frequently treated as actions in Victory. Jim and Razumov also act, of course; this is what makes their attitude of passivity towards their actions so absurd. In the earlier two novels, however, these actions are viewed by the narrator in much the same light as that in which the central

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 279. ¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 289.

figure regards them. Thus Marlow tends to adopt Jim's impression of passivity while the teacher of languages is dominated by Razumov's consciousness to the point that his narrative presence is frequently obliterated. In Victory, on the other hand, the narrator cannot be duped or dominated because he is not involved in the story. Heyst is viewed through the eyes of a quite impersonal, detached narrator whose only purpose is to tell the story. As a result Heyst is seen by this detached narrator in an objective way; his actions are described as actions and not, as Heyst himself regards them, as events which happen to him. It is only through the appearance of the detached narrator that the view of action qua action, missing in Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes, is present in Victory.

This narrator observes explicitly that during his life Axel Heyst has made three unmistakable aberrations from his passivity into the realm of activity: the Morrison partnership, the Tropical Belt Coal Company affair, and the elopement with Lena.¹⁵¹ Significantly, the narrator's specific description of each of these three events demonstrates that he regards them as actions. In the Morrison affair, Heyst is described as hailing Morrison first and then crossing over to him from the other side of the street. In addition, it is Heyst himself who takes the initiative and offers Morrison the money which will form the

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 61.

concrete basis of their relationship. Heyst's second involvement in life, the affair of the coal company, is also described in terms of activity:

[Heyst] was very concrete, very visible now. He was rushing all over the Archipelago, jumping in and out of local mail-packets as if they had been tram-cars, here, there, and everywhere--organizing with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business.¹⁵²

Similarly, Heyst's third and most important aberration from his withdrawal and passivity is also described by the narrator as an action on Heyst's part. At the same time, it is explicitly linked with another of Heyst's actions:

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.¹⁵³

It is Heyst who approaches Lena and addresses her first. He is clearly taking an action which is described as such by the narrator, who, in the light of Heyst's general character, looks upon it as an "incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion."¹⁵⁴ A clear distinction must be made, however, between the narrator's view of Heyst and Heyst's view of himself. While the narrator sees that Heyst is acting in approaching Lena, Heyst himself retains the passivity described earlier in this study. In approaching Lena, Heyst is himself unconscious of his action. Although the impulse spurring him to action is the same as that which

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

moved him in the Morrison affair, he does not recognize it.¹⁵⁵

The narrator himself, while giving Heyst credit for some consciousness of his actions, casts doubt upon his capacity for perceiving the consequences of those actions:

Did he reflect at all? Probably. He was sufficiently reflective. But if he did it was with insufficient knowledge. For there is no evidence that he paused at any time between the date of that evening and the morning of the flight. Truth to say, Heyst was not one of those men who pause much.... He was not a fool. I suppose he knew--or at least he felt--where this was leading him.¹⁵⁶

Clearly, however, in spite of Heyst's own attitude and lack of consciousness regarding the act, the narrator's account leaves no doubt that Heyst's approach to Lena and the subsequent elopement are actions on Heyst's part, just as are the Morrison and coal company affairs.

Victory, then, conforms to the pattern established in Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes. In all three novels the principles of withdrawal and commitment are reflected respectively by the mental states of passivity and activity. Men such as Jim, Razumov, and Heyst who withdraw from life manifest that withdrawal in a passive attitude towards life. They believe that events happen to them and that their behaviour is dictated by forces beyond their control. The committed man, on the other hand, manifests his commitment through an active attitude towards life. He is a man who himself acts and is aware that he does act. He knows that events do not

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 72. ¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 76.

merely happen to him since he himself makes events happen through his actions. As the emphasis of this chapter indicates, however, Conrad is concerned primarily with the passivity and inactivity which characterize the condition of withdrawal.

CHAPTER III

In Conrad's novels, the presentation of the themes of withdrawal and commitment is achieved by the formulation of another pattern of associations quite distinct from that involving passivity and activity with their related states. This second pattern consists of a series of conditions of nature which are used to reflect the states of withdrawal and commitment. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that, through his descriptions of natural conditions in Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory, Conrad is able to suggest the states of withdrawal or commitment into which his fictional characters fall. Specifically, it will be shown that the conditions of darkness, silence, and stillness are used in these novels to reflect the state of withdrawal, while the conditions of light, sound, and motion are used to reflect the state of commitment.

In Lord Jim, Conrad develops to a considerable extent this elaboration of the themes of withdrawal and commitment. It will here be necessary to deal with the specific conditions involved in this elaboration in two distinct stages. Thus, in the discussion of Lord Jim, as in that of the other two novels under consideration, the first stage will examine the use of light and darkness while the second stage will examine the use of sound and silence together with the use of stillness and motion.

In the first place, then, the use of light and darkness in

Lord Jim will be examined. It will be shown that the withdrawal implied by Jim's passivity is further suggested by his frequent associations with darkness. At the same time, it will become apparent that the light which reflects commitment is generally excluded from the novel. It will be seen that Lord Jim, as Paul Wiley suggests, may well be considered as describing a movement from light to darkness.¹

Throughout the novel, Jim is presented as a figure belonging to the night. He is frequently described by Marlow as being figuratively enshrouded in mist or covered by a cloud. To Marlow, Jim seems to have been claimed as a victim by the darkness:

...he was ready to go now, and beyond the balustrade the night seemed to wait for him very still, as though he had been marked down for its prey.²

As Jim leaves Marlow after this interview, he seems to be swallowed by the night. This picture of Jim disappearing into the darkness recurs throughout the novel.

That Jim's withdrawal is associated with immersion in darkness is made apparent in a series of scenes which show him standing on the edge of a vast void. Marlow remembers Jim as he stood "in the last flickers of the candle,...with the chill and the darkness of the night at his back."³ This picture portrays Jim as he appears after his initial withdrawal from life involved in his leap from the Patna. Later, however, Marlow's picture of

¹Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 62.

²Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 113. ³Ibid., p. 111.

Jim reveals the latter to have turned and faced the darkness:

...through the open door the outer edge of the light from my candle fell on his back faintly; beyond all was black; he stood on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean.⁴

Standing "with his back to the light"⁵ and "faintly lighted on the background of night,"⁶ Jim is preparing to enter the darkness by continuing to evade responsibility as he had aboard the *Patna*.

The darkness in which Jim is finally immersed is given both a name and a location in Patusan. Thus, as Marlow last sees him, Jim is standing on the beach of Patusan "with the stronghold of the night at his back."⁷ Marlow's view of him is terminated when Jim is suddenly swallowed by that night of darkness. It is this continued immersion in darkness that reflects Jim's withdrawal from life.

In Patusan, withdrawal and darkness are clearly associated in that the description of nature helps to describe Jim's own condition. Listening as Jim self-deceptively searches his own conscience, Marlow cannot help observing that a gradual darkness seems to accompany Jim's words:

The sun, whose concentrated glare dwarfs the earth into a restless mote of dust, had sunk behind the forest, and the diffused light from an opal sky seemed to cast upon a world without shadows and without brilliance the illusion of a calm and pensive greatness. I don't know why, listening to him, I should have noted so distinctly the gradual darkening of the river, of the air; the irresistible slow work of the night

⁴Ibid., p. 127. ⁵Ibid., p. 128. ⁶Ibid., p. 130.

⁷Ibid., p. 247.

settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust.⁸

Patusan itself, as the location of Jim's retreat from the world, is also described in dark and gloomy terms. Characterized by a pervasive darkness and always seen in a "declining light,"⁹ the jungle of Jim's withdrawal is sharply contrasted with the light from which he has fled:

A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.¹⁰

As he withdraws for the last time from Marlow, who represents commitment to life, the sun has set and Jim is engulfed in the elemental darkness of Patusan, the "stronghold of the night."¹¹ Again, when he withdraws from his responsibility in allowing Brown and his men to go free, Patusan is once more darkened, as it is wreathed in a misty haze.¹² Finally, as Jim walks to his certain death at the hands of Doramin, Patusan is again veiled in darkness as the sun sets.¹³

It is apparent, then, that Jim does give himself up to darkness when he retreats to Patusan. His initial act of withdrawal does, in fact, strongly suggest the association between withdrawal and darkness so clearly established in Patusan. The accident and Jim's subsequent leap from the Patna occur on a dark

⁸Ibid., p. 224. ⁹Ibid., p. 190. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 194.

¹¹Ibid., p. 247. ¹²Ibid., p. 294. ¹³Ibid., p. 305.

night. More importantly, however, Jim likens his jump from the ship to a jump "into a well--into an everlasting deep hole."¹⁴ In evading responsibility aboard the *Patna*, Jim is clearly giving himself up to the darkness. While he does clearly have the opportunity to escape from that darkness through his choice of subsequent actions, the metaphor which Jim chooses to express his leap suggests that he himself does not recognize that freedom which is still his.

The darkness which reflects Jim's withdrawal in Patusan may well have its source in Stein. It is Stein, of course, who actually sends Jim to Patusan, thereby aiding his withdrawal. In fact, the darkness and dimness in which Stein and his house are enshrouded seem to suggest that Stein himself may be a person who has withdrawn from life. His own room is lighted in only one corner while "the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern."¹⁵ The only colour in the room is that of the dead butterfly. Significantly, as Stein presents his philosophy of the dream, he passes "out of the bright circle of the lamp into the ring of fainter light--into shapeless dusk at last."¹⁶ While he states his dream-philosophy, Stein remains invisible in the dimness of the room and seems, to Marlow, to be "out of this concrete and perplexed world."¹⁷ Only when he has completed this advocacy of withdrawal through the dream does

¹⁴Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 155-56.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 156.

Stein emerge from the darkness and return to the light. In the light, however, he who practises withdrawal through the dream is out of his element. Thus Marlow observes of Stein that "the light had destroyed the assurance which had inspired him in the distant shadows."¹⁸

Just as Marlow associates Jim with darkness in Patusan,¹⁹ so does he associate Stein's philosophy of the dream with darkness. As Jim's voice, in its attempt to rationalize withdrawal, draws Marlow's attention to the gloom falling on Patusan, so does Stein's voice, in its attempt to justify withdrawal, cast a darkness over everything and suggest the coming of night:

The whisper of his [Stein's] conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn--or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls--over graves.²⁰

The darkness of Patusan, then, is of the same nature as that which surrounds Stein, the man who opens the way to Patusan for Jim. In both cases, the darkness suggests the withdrawal which Jim and Stein are practising.

The association of withdrawal and darkness may, however, appear to be contradicted by certain apparent associations of Jim with light. Upon close examination, it is found that such apparent associations actually serve to accentuate the link between withdrawal and darkness. At one point, for example, Jim is seen

¹⁸Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 224.

²⁰Ibid., p. 157.

standing in light, but it is the brevity of that illumination rather than the illumination itself which is emphasized. As Jim stands on the edge of darkness outside Marlow's door, a sudden flash of lightning reveals him "distinct and black, planted solidly upon the shores of a sea of light."²¹ At the moment of greatest brilliance, however, the darkness rushes back and Jim vanishes. As he is evading responsibility and the facts of his own life, Jim is illuminated only for a brief moment and cannot enter the "sea of light."

Surrounded by darkness in Patusan, Jim himself is occasionally presented as a figure of light. Generally, however, these presentations actually serve to accentuate the condition of darkness in which his withdrawal is reflected. Usually dressed in white, he creates a sharp contrast with that darkness:

In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch.²²

Later, as he is seen sitting high on a hill in the sunshine, Jim seems to Marlow to dominate the gloom of Patusan and to represent those races of men that have emerged from the gloom.²³ Nevertheless, this picture is severely tempered by Marlow's persistent memory of Jim's first withdrawal from life, a memory which seems "like a shadow in the light." Finally, as Marlow leaves him for

²¹Ibid., p. 131. ²²Ibid., p. 168. ²³Ibid., p. 194.

the last time, Jim, dressed completely in white, appears to be "a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world."²⁴ Once again, it is not Jim's association with light but rather the insignificance of that light against its vast background of darkness that is important. In addition, it should be observed that even this tiny speck of light finally vanishes into darkness just as Jim is finally engulfed in his world of withdrawal.

Jim's withdrawal is presented in other terms than those of darkness. In the novel Jim is associated with the conditions of silence and stillness and is essentially divorced from the conditions of sound and motion. Since silence and stillness often depend upon each other, as do sound and motion, they will be discussed together in this chapter.

Throughout the novel and particularly during scenes dealing with the actual acts of withdrawal, Jim is consistently associated with silence and stillness. This is especially apparent in the description of the scene in which he makes his initial withdrawal from life in the leap from the Patna. The absolute stillness and silence preceding the leap foreshadow the characteristics of his life in Patusan.²⁵ Following the leap, the stillness and silence in which Jim finds himself are again

²⁴Ibid., p. 247. ²⁵Ibid., pp. 12-13.

the dominant notes and become almost overpowering:

...he became conscious of the silence. He mentioned this to me. A silence of the sea, of the sky merged into one indefinite immensity still as death around these saved, palpitating lives. "You might have heard a pin drop in the boat," he said.... "I didn't think any spot on earth could be so still," he said. "You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. Not a glimmer, not a shape, not a sound...."²⁶

Later, when judgment is passed in court upon this act of withdrawal, the same silence and stillness continue to reign.²⁷ Again, silence and stillness characterize the confrontation between Jim and Brown, in which Jim once more withdraws by shirking his responsibility.²⁸ Once he has withdrawn from life, in fact, Jim is constantly attended by silence and stillness wherever he goes. He seems to bring these conditions with him into Marlow's room²⁹ and is himself restricted by them:

...he, out there with his back to the light, as if bound by all the invisible foes of man, made no stir and made no sound.³⁰

In this silence and stillness the reader can actually sense Jim's withdrawal.

The novel's most effective and intensive use of stillness and silence to represent Jim's withdrawal, however, is found in the description of Patusan. As it represents the location of Jim's ultimate withdrawal, the place to which Stein, the dreamer, has sent him, it is appropriate that Patusan should be presented

²⁶Ibid., p. 84. ²⁷Ibid., p. 118. ²⁸Ibid., pp. 285-86.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 126-27. ³⁰Ibid., p. 128.

as a stronghold not only of darkness, but of silence and stillness as well:

All was silent, all was still; even on the river the moonbeams slept as on a pool. It was the moment of high water, a moment of immobility that accentuated the utter isolation of this lost corner of the earth.³¹

The silence and stillness of sleep constitute the dominant image as the jungle is described as "a dark sleeping sea of sombre green"³² and as having the "appearance of inscrutable, of secular repose."³³

The silence and stillness suggesting withdrawal in Patusan are perhaps most effective when they are contrasted with the sound and motion which suggest the life of commitment. Identifying the primary characteristic of Patusan as stillness, Marlow likened that land of withdrawal to an immobile picture and contrasts it with life, which is constantly in motion:

It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light. There are the ambitions, the fears, the hate, the hopes, and they remain in my mind just as I had seen them--intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression. I had turned away from the picture and was going back to the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter whether over mud or over stones.³⁴

Here is seen the sharp contrast between the stagnant immobility of withdrawal and the vibrant motion of commitment. This contrast is emphasized in two other scenes dealing with the entry to and the

³¹Ibid., p. 181. ³²Ibid., p. 190. ³³Ibid., p. 197.

³⁴Ibid., p. 243.

departure from Patusan. In the first such scene, Jim, entering Patusan for the first time, passes from the motion which represents the life of commitment to the stillness which represents withdrawal:

At the first bend he lost sight of the sea with its labouring waves forever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again--the very image of struggling mankind--and faced the immovable forests rooted deep in the soil, soaring towards the sunshine, everlasting in the shadowy might of their tradition, like life itself.³⁵

The second such contrast is found in the scene in which Jim and Marlow emerge from Patusan to the open sea.³⁶ They pass from the stagnant atmosphere of the jungle to an atmosphere which vibrates "with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world." Sound and motion return as they return to the world of commitment. Jim, of course, feels uneasy in this atmosphere and must again withdraw to the silence and stillness of the jungle of Patusan.

Throughout the novel, silence and stillness are the conditions which satisfy Jim's perpetual desire for peace. Having grown up in an atmosphere of silence and stillness, Jim has retreated towards the East, which in Conrad's novels seems to be associated with peace and death.³⁷ This desire for peace is particularly apparent in Jim's retreat to the hospital after his accident. As a place of rest, the hospital is associated with

³⁵Ibid., p. 179. ³⁶Ibid., p. 244.

³⁷This association of the East with peace and death runs throughout Conrad's novels but is particularly evident in "Youth" and in The Shadow-Line.

quietness, inactivity, and stillness.³⁸ Significantly, its description clearly associates it with the peace of the East, with "the eternal serenity of the Eastern sky" and "the smiling peace of the Eastern seas."³⁹ In addition, Jim identifies himself with those men who are "attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea."⁴⁰ On the bridge of the Patna before the accident, he finds this peace in the stillness and silence of the sea.⁴¹ In Patusan, the silence and stillness which prevail are perfectly attuned to this deep desire for peace. Significantly, when Jim first enters Patusan in his leap over the creek, he momentarily falls asleep.⁴² In his withdrawal, in fact, Jim is so attuned to the silence and stillness of Patusan that his fame is coloured with those characteristics:

It [Jim's fame] took its tone from the stillness and gloom of the land without a past, where his word was the one truth of every passing day. It shared something of the nature of that silence through which it accompanied you into unexplored depths,...⁴³

It is not surprising, then, that the only reminder of Jim's withdrawal at the end of the novel is Jewel, who leads "a sort of soundless, inert life" in Stein's house.⁴⁴ In Lord Jim, the life of withdrawal is indeed presented as a "soundless, inert life."

While Lord Jim does present withdrawal and commitment in

³⁸Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 9. ³⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 10. ⁴¹Ibid., p. 13. ⁴²Ibid., p. 187.

⁴³Ibid., p. 199. ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 307.

natural terms, Under Western Eyes, as has already been observed, makes the same presentation in more abstract terms. Therefore, since the use of natural reflections of the states of withdrawal and commitment does not play a very significant role in the presentation of those states in Under Western Eyes, the following discussion is necessarily brief.

In the first place, no significant attempt is made in the novel to employ light and darkness in any consistently symbolic way. Although it is a generally dark novel, much of the action of Under Western Eyes occurs during daylight. Admittedly, Razumov does make his initial withdrawal, his betrayal of Haldin, in the evening, just as he later meets and confesses to the revolutionists in the evening. However, no attempt is made in the novel to develop this symbolism as it is developed in Lord Jim and Victory. It appears that in this novel, Conrad, pre-occupied with the gripping psychological aspect of his theme, cannot be bothered to work out carefully a scheme of physical reflections of the states of mind with which he is concerned. The considerable darkness found in the novel is derived not from the physical setting of the plot but rather from the pervading pessimism which runs throughout.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Darkness is used symbolically to some extent in the description of the Chateau Borel. As will be demonstrated shortly, the Chateau is a place of withdrawal since it belongs to Mme. de S____, who has withdrawn from life. Even in this instance, however, darkness is used symbolically in a very limited sense and is secondary to the symbolic use of stillness and stagnation.

Stillness and silence, however, do to a limited extent suggest withdrawal in Under Western Eyes. Razumov's withdrawal is reflected in the silence and stillness of his room in which he spends so much of his time, particularly after he has betrayed Haldin. Similarly, these conditions reflect his withdrawal on the island dedicated to Rousseau. This affinity for silence and stillness is essentially the result of the same desire for peace that Jim holds. Like Jim, Razumov desires peace, as is suggested by the narrator at the very opening of the novel.⁴⁶

The most obvious association between withdrawal and stillness is made in the description of the Chateau Borel. The Chateau is presented as a silent, lifeless habitation in which no motion is discernible. Such a description reflects the fact that it houses a person who, like Razumov, has chosen to withdraw from life. Its true inhabitant is not the Russian revolutionist associated with the world of commitment, but rather Mme. de S _____, who is not a true revolutionist at all. She has withdrawn from life through hatred and resentment provoked by personal wrongs and is merely using revolutionary activity as a means of concealing her true motives.⁴⁷ As the Chateau is thus a place of withdrawal, it is appropriate that Razumov should visit there and return there after he is deafened.

The only sensory symbol developed to any significant

⁴⁶Conrad, Under Western Eyes, p. 12.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 182-83.

extent throughout the novel, however, is sound. Suggesting the state of commitment, sound represents that which breaks into Razumov's withdrawal and that from which he attempts to escape. The incident which causes the world of commitment to break into Razumov's withdrawal produces an explosive sound. Haldin, the personification of commitment, is perceived by Razumov as a voice and not as a visible figure.⁴⁸ As he slides further and further into withdrawal, Razumov apprehends time, a reminder of Haldin and the world of commitment, only as sound in the ringing of the town clock.⁴⁹ In fact, as he listens to the sound of water running, Razumov himself explicitly associates sound with the sordid life he is trying to escape:

...it occurred to him that this was about the only sound he could listen to innocently, and for his own pleasure, as it were. Yes, the sound of water, the voice of the wind--completely foreign to human passions. All the other sounds of this earth brought contamination to the solitude of a soul.⁵⁰

Eventually, Razumov's withdrawal leads him to eternal isolation from life in that he is cut off from all sound following the breaking of his eardrums. His deafness both confirms and gives a physical status to his mental withdrawal from life.⁵¹ In this relegation to a world of perpetual silence, there is the clear suggestion that Razumov never does escape the state of withdrawal

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 27. ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 65. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 243.

⁵¹Leo Gurko has made this observation in claiming that the deafening of Razumov "gives his isolation a horrifying yet relevant sensory frame." Leo Gurko, Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile (London: Muller, 1962), p. 209.

which he had originally chosen.

In Victory, there is a return to the extensive use of the type of symbolism found in Lord Jim. Darkness, silence, and stillness are once again used consistently to suggest the state of withdrawal while light, sound, and motion are used to suggest the state of commitment. In the first place, Axel Heyst is frequently associated with darkness. The actual philosophy of withdrawal by which he lives his life is itself associated with darkness and dimness when Heyst recalls that his father's dying words were imparted to him in the dusk of the evening.⁵² Heyst himself is frequently described as standing or sitting in darkness, a picture that is established early in the novel when he is seen sitting on the veranda of his bungalow before going to bed.⁵³ Attuned to the darkness of the night, Heyst does not welcome the coming of daylight:

Heyst...appreciated the prolongation of early coolness, the subdued, lingering half-light, the faint ghost of the departed night, the fragrance of its dewy, dark soul captured for a moment longer between the great glow of the sky and the intense blaze of the uncovered sea.⁵⁴

For Heyst, as for Stein and Jim, the element conducive to withdrawal is darkness, not light.

In the novel, light is frequently regarded as a malevolent enemy. The sun is described as looking down upon Samburan "with a devouring glare like the eye of an enemy"⁵⁵

⁵²Conrad, Victory, p. 150. ⁵³Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 158. ⁵⁵Ibid.

while the blaze of sunshine itself is "all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes."⁵⁶ Once Lena is drawn into Heyst's withdrawal, she also acquires this fear of light, as is particularly apparent when she and Heyst look out over the bright sea:

...they turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.

"It makes my head swim," the girl murmured, shutting her eyes and putting her hand on his shoulder.⁵⁷

In the face of this light, Heyst and Lena recoil and withdraw into the shade. As they later return past this vantage point, this fear of light and affinity with darkness is again revealed in Lena:

The flaming abyss of emptiness, the liquid, undulating glare, the tragic brutality of the light, made her long for the friendly night, with its stars stilled by an austere spell; for the velvety dark sky and the mysterious great shadow of the sea, conveying peace to the day-weary heart. She put her hand to her eyes.⁵⁸

Both Heyst and Lena, then, move from light, signifying commitment, to darkness, signifying withdrawal.

Eventually, however, there is a return to the light. It is not until the latter part of the novel that Lena finally understands the significance of the darkness. Realizing that it represents the withdrawal from which she must save Heyst, she sees that a menace lies in the darkness:

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 248.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 162.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 182.

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing stillness, at that moment she felt the nearness to death breathing on her and on the man with her.⁵⁹

At the end of the novel, Lena's ability to distinguish between the darkness of withdrawal and the light of commitment is confirmed when, disobeying Heyst's order to hide in the darkness of the night, she chooses to remain in the bright light of the room.

In Victory, withdrawal is also suggested by stillness. In the "painted immobility of profile" in the picture of Heyst's father is found the stillness which characterizes the source of Axel Heyst's withdrawal. This stillness had gradually rendered Heyst himself immobile so that in the novel he is described as "an inert body."⁶⁰ This immobility extends beyond Heyst, however, and is reflected in the pervasive stillness of his house and of Samburan itself. The novel's initial picture of Samburan emphasizes this stillness,⁶¹ which is frequently reiterated in the later scenes. Immediately after their arrival on the island, both Heyst and Lena are engulfed in stillness and silence:

They moved, silent in the great stillness, breathing the calmness, the infinite isolation, the repose of a slumber without dreams.⁶²

This picture is again presented when Heyst's world of withdrawal is threatened by the coming of Jones and his men:

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 284. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 19. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 20.

⁶²Ibid., p. 162.

Heyst looked into the dim aisles of the forest. Everything was so still now that the very ground on which they stood seemed to exhale silence into the shade.⁶³

Again, immediately after Heyst has ordered Lena to hide in the darkness of the forest, the sense of silence and stillness returns and reflects the meaning of his words:

The sense of the heavy, brooding silence in the outside world seemed to enter and fill the room--the oppressive infinity of it, without breath, without light.⁶⁴

This silence and this stillness are reflections of the withdrawal to which Heyst gives himself.

The most striking use of natural symbols for withdrawal and commitment in the novel, however, is found in the sharp contrast of sound and silence. As has been demonstrated, Heyst is surrounded by a silence which reflects his withdrawal. As a person who has withdrawn from life, he has an affinity with silence as he has with darkness and stillness:

Like most dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst, the wanderer of the Archipelago, had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without murmurs meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness. A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell.⁶⁵

It is thus appropriate that the meeting in Schomberg's hall between Heyst and Lena should be presented in auditory terms. Into the silence of Heyst's withdrawal breaks the sharply contrasted

⁶³Ibid., p. 281. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 299. ⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 67-68.

sound of the orchestra. The loud and discordant nature of the music is emphasized by phrases such as "the lamentations of string instruments" and adjectives such as "rasping" and "scraping."⁶⁶ As Heyst enters the hall, the sound assaults the silence of his withdrawal:

The uproar...was simply stunning. An instrumental uproar, screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some sort of lively air; while a grand piano...rained hard notes like hail through the tempest of fiddles.⁶⁷

As he recoils from light, so does Heyst recoil from the sound and motion of the orchestra:

In the quick time of that music, in the varied piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the strong eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality--something cruel, sensual, and repulsive.

"This is awful!" Heyst murmured to himself.⁶⁸

During this scene, the silence of withdrawal is clearly being threatened by sound:

The Zangiacomo band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence;...⁶⁹

In this concert-hall scene, then, the threat to Heyst's world of withdrawal is expressed in terms of sound. Yet, while the noise of the orchestra is antithetical to Heyst's love of silence, he does find himself inexplicably fascinated by it. This aberration from his love of silence, of course, leads to his most important and fatal aberration from his withdrawal philosophy.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 67. ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 69. ⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 70.

The presentation of the theme of commitment in terms of sound is focussed upon the person of Lena herself. She, of course, does help to make the noise which breaks into the silence of Heyst's withdrawal. While Heyst's father had taught him the art of silence, Lena's father had taught her how to play the violin, the art of making sound. Thus it is ironic that, after meeting Lena, Heyst attempts to escape the sound of the band by leaving the hall in order to seek the peace of his bedroom. He does not realize that, in accepting Lena, he has unconsciously accepted a commitment to life. Thus, even in his room, "the distant sounds of the concert reached his ears, faint indeed but still disturbing."⁷⁰

As she represents commitment, Lena continues to be presented primarily in auditory terms long after she has discarded her violin. Her voice is her most noticeable feature; in fact, for a large part of the novel she is essentially a voice rather than a physical being. The sound of her voice is thus the extension of the sound of the violins: both sounds represent the commitment which threatens Heyst's withdrawal. In their early meetings, it is apparent that Heyst perceives Lena primarily in auditory terms.⁷¹ Just as he was unaccountably fascinated by the sound of the violins, so is he enchanted by the sound of her voice:

But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 79. ⁷¹Ibid., pp. 74, 75, 78.

was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.⁷²

Throughout the novel, Lena's characterization is dominated by the sound of her voice. Its shades, murmurs, and tones give her words their meanings. Thus Heyst, after listening to her speak, finds that her words go "straight to the heart--the sound of them rather than the sense."⁷³ Eventually, this is the sound which breaks into the silence of Heyst's withdrawal.

Just as Lena's representation of commitment is presented primarily in terms of sound, so is that of Jones and his men. As envoys of the world who have come to pay Heyst a visit, they too are associated with the sound which intrudes into the silence of withdrawal. Immediately previous to their arrival, the pervasive silence of Samburan is emphasized.⁷⁴ Significantly, Heyst first perceives them not visually but audibly: he hears the sound of their boat beneath the jetty.⁷⁵ Later, in contrast to Heyst's modulated tones, Ricardo's voice is described as exploding.⁷⁶ Finally, as he sets out to destroy Heyst, Ricardo is accompanied by the sound of thunder.⁷⁷ Like the sounds of the band and Lena's voice, these sounds all represent the forces which threaten the silence of Heyst's withdrawal.

⁷²Ibid., p. 74. ⁷³Ibid., p. 186. ⁷⁴Ibid., p. 183.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 190. ⁷⁶Ibid., p. 291.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 300-301.

In the three novels under consideration, then, but particularly in Lord Jim and Victory, the states of withdrawal and commitment are presented in sensory terms as well as psychological terms. Darkness, silence, and stillness are used to reflect the life of withdrawal while their opposites--light, sound, and motion--are used to reflect the life of commitment. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, these associations, and particularly those pertaining to the life of withdrawal, enable Conrad to imply a judgment upon withdrawal and commitment.

CHAPTER IV

The associations discussed in the preceding chapter seem to imply a value judgment concerning withdrawal and commitment as ways of life. By associating withdrawal with darkness, silence, and stillness, Conrad appears to suggest that withdrawal involves a turning towards death. Similarly, in associating commitment with light, sound, and motion he suggests that commitment is life-embracing. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that, by associating withdrawal with death and a sense of unreality, Conrad further strengthens these suggestions and the implicit judgment which they involve.

In Lord Jim, a general atmosphere of unreality and death prevails throughout the novel. One source of this atmosphere is found in the episode dealing with Stein. In the first place, Stein's philosophy of life is built around the concept of the dream, suggesting the unreality of his world:

"A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns--nicht wahr? ...No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up...."¹

This answer to the question "how to be" is summarized by Stein in the words, "To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream..."

¹Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 156. Italics and the first elipsis are in the original.

usque ad finem."² As Stein's philosophy is concerned with the dream, it is appropriate that Stein himself should be presented in the unreal light of the dream. Thus, as he makes this advocacy of adherence to the dream, Stein seems to move out of the world of concrete things into an unreal world of vague and indefinable shadows:

It had an odd effect--as if these few steps had carried him out of this concrete and perplexed world. His tall form, as though robbed of its substance, hovered noiselessly over invisible things with stooping and indefinite movements; his voice, heard in that remoteness where he could be glimpsed mysteriously busy with immaterial cares, was no longer incisive, seemed to roll voluminous and grave--mellowed by distance.³

In Stein's case, then, it is seen that reliance upon the dream removes one from reality.

In the novel, Stein and his dream philosophy also suggest an escape from life which is tantamount to death. This is rather ironic since both Marlow and Stein agree that "the question is not how to get cured but how to live"⁴ and since Stein offers his dream

²Ibid., p. 157. Italics in the original. On this important point, the interpretation of Stein's philosophy of life, this study tends to agree with the conclusions made by Albert Guerard and Dorothy Van Ghent, both of whom treat the passage cited as advocating adherence to the dream. While admitting that there is some degree of rhetorical ambiguity in this passage which tempts the reader to identify the air with the dream and the sea with life, Guerard warns the reader against this temptation and identifies the dream itself as the destructive element. Guerard, Conrad, The Novelist, p. 165. Miss Van Ghent similarly affirms that, according to Stein's view, the only way "to be" is through the ideal or the dream. Van Ghent, The English Novel, p. 231.

³Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 156. ⁴Ibid., p. 155.

philosophy as an answer to that question, "how to live." Clearly, though, Stein is presented in terms which suggest death. He is surrounded by dead butterflies and beetles and is seen prowling amongst their graves.⁵ His house is dark and silent like a tomb while the dominant image is that of the mortuary:

Only one corner of the vast room...was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a sombre belt about four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung above at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word Coleoptera written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast dimness. The glass vases containing the collection of butterflies were ranged in three long rows upon slender-legged little tables.⁶

There is a clear suggestion, then, that Stein's advice to "follow the dream" is not a statement of the way "to be," but is rather a statement of the way not to be, of death.

Stein and his philosophy do have a strong influence upon Jim in the novel. One way in which this influence is kept before the reader is through the motif of Stein's ring. Returning to Marlow after visiting Stein, Jim gleefully exhibits that ring.⁷ For Jim the ring is a type of "credential" with which he identifies himself. Thus he displays considerable concern over the possibility of his losing the ring and constantly checks to make sure that he has not lost it.⁸ Significantly, it is that same ring which gains Jim admission to Doramin's community in Patusan.⁹

⁵Ibid., p. 156.

⁶Ibid., p. 149. Italics in the original.

⁷Ibid., p. 171.

⁸Ibid., pp. 172-73.

⁹Ibid., p. 189.

Just as Stein's philosophy implies death, however, so does the symbolic ring imply death. Sent to Dain Waris as a token of truth and good faith, it ironically brings death instead. It is important to observe, then, that as he views his dead son, Doramin is particularly grieved by the sight of the ring which symbolizes the cause of his son's death:

...when Dain Waris's body was uncovered at a sign of Doramin's, he whom they often called the white lord's friend was disclosed lying unchanged with his eyelids a little open as if about to wake. Doramin leaned forward a little more, like one looking for something fallen on the ground. His eyes searched the body from its feet to its head, for the wound maybe. It was in the forehead and small; and there was no word spoken while one of the bystanders, stooping, took off the silver ring from the cold stiff hand. In silence he held it up before Doramin. A murmur of dismay and horror ran through the crowd at the sight of that familiar token. The old nakhoda stared at it, and suddenly let out one great fierce cry, deep from the chest, a roar of pain and fury, as mighty as the bellow of a wounded bull, bringing great fear into men's hearts, by the magnitude of his anger and his sorrow that could be plainly discerned without words.¹⁰

The influence of Stein and of his philosophy is, in fact, evident to the end of the novel. As Jim is about to be shot, Stein's ring falls from Doramin's lap and rolls against Jim's foot and catches his attention.¹¹ Both Jim and the reader are thus reminded of the role that Stein has played in facilitating Jim's withdrawal from life. Stein is, in fact, doubly implicated in Jim's death, for it is Stein's pistol in the hands of Doramin which actually kills Jim.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 303. Italics in the original.

¹¹Ibid., p. 306. ¹²Ibid., p. 193.

While the basic association of withdrawal with unreality and death is achieved in Lord Jim through the figure of Stein and his philosophy, this association is established effectively in the presentation of Jim himself. As a dreamer, Jim constantly lives in an unreal world created largely by his own imagination, as is demonstrated by his eager espousal of Stein's philosophy advocating pursuit of the dream. That philosophy, however, is actually a description of a state at which Jim has already arrived long before he meets Stein. Early in the novel, aboard the training-ship, it is revealed that Jim lives his life in a dream, alone with his imaginary feats of heroism.¹³ Later, on the bridge of the Patna, he delights in the unreality of the dream:

"How steady she goes," thought Jim with wonder, with something like gratitude for this high peace of sea and sky. At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself.¹⁴

Consistent with his delight in dreams, Jim enjoys fiction and thus lives in his mind the sea-life of light literature.¹⁵ Furthermore, he instinctively likes Doramin and his family because they are "like people in a book."¹⁶ As Marlow observes, this strongly romantic tendency is accentuated by Jim's failure aboard the Patna.¹⁷ Stein's diagnosis of Jim as a romantic, then, merely

¹³Ibid., p. 5. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 15. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 191. ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 61, 70.

confirms a fact that has already been quite clearly established in the novel.

It is important to realize that Jim's experience in Patusan does not lift him out of his unreal, dream existence but rather plunges him more deeply into it. He is sent to Patusan by Stein, the advocate of the dream, and gains admission by virtue of the ring, the talisman representing Stein and the philosophy of the dream. Thus, Marlow finds that he must always link Jim in Patusan not with his apparently heroic deeds but rather with Stein's advice, "to follow the dream."¹⁸ As Marlow implies, Jim's apparent commitment to life in Patusan actually exists only in Jim's own mind:

In this simple form of assent to his will lies the whole gist of the situation; their creed, his truth; and the testimony to that faithfulness which made him in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of the ranks. Stein's words, "Romantic!--Romantic!" seem to ring over those distances....¹⁹

Essentially, Jim is still the dreamer who evades reality. For Marlow, in fact, even Jim's death in Patusan is consistent with his romanticism.

While Jim in his withdrawal is associated with the unreality of the dream, he is also associated with death. The death

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 290. In claiming that Jim is a dreamer throughout Lord Jim, Albert Guerard examines this apparent escape from the dream: "...in Patusan, as the dreamer gets some encouragement from life, reverie and reality interfere more than ever. Thus, Jim can come to half-believe in the supernatural power with which local legend has endowed him." Conrad, The Novelist, p. 141.

which he ultimately suffers is, in fact, the logical consequence of the withdrawal which he has chosen during life and is frequently foreshadowed in the novel. Immediately preceding Jim's first withdrawal aboard the *Patna*, the ship is enshrouded with sleep, "death's brother."²⁰ Jim himself, in fact, feels the sleepiness that foreshadows death.²¹ At the time of the jump itself, Jim figuratively becomes a dead man, for when the crew in the lifeboat shout for the dead third engineer to jump, Jim jumps in his place.²² Replacing George, Jim himself is momentarily mistaken for the dead man in the lifeboat.²³ Later, in Marlow's room, Jim brings the stillness and death-like atmosphere of his withdrawal with him as the flame of the candle flares up in the shape of a dagger, an instrument of death.²⁴

It is in Jim's retreat to Patusan, however, that withdrawal and death are most clearly associated. As Jim prepares to leave for Patusan, he is seen to be "already 'in the similitude of a corpse.'"²⁵ Furthermore, in an omen which he tries in vain to dismiss, Marlow sees that behind Jim the captain of the ship is standing with his arm raised "as if for a downward thrust."²⁶ It is quite fitting, then, that Jim's withdrawal in Patusan should be presented as a type of burial in a grave. This image is actually established immediately following Jim's first act of

²⁰Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 13. ²¹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 81. ²³*Ibid.*, p. 86. ²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 176. ²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 177.

withdrawal when he and the other crew-members seem "like men walled up quick in a roomy grave."²⁷ It is in the conversation between Stein and Marlow, however, that it becomes clear that Patusan is to be Jim's ultimate grave:

It was at breakfast of the morning following our talk about Jim that he mentioned the place, after I had quoted poor Brierly's remark: "Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there." He looked up at me with interested attention, as though I had been a rare insect. "This could be done, too," he remarked, sipping his coffee. "Bury him in some sort," I explained. "One doesn't like to do it of course, but it would be the best thing seeing what he is." "Yes; he is young," Stein mused. "The youngest human being now in existence," I affirmed. "Schon. There's Patusan," he went on in the same tone....²⁸

In sending Jim to Patusan, then, Stein and Marlow are sending him to the death to which withdrawal leads. Thus, as Jim leaps across the creek into Patusan he does indeed give himself up to the grave; finding himself mired in mud and slime, it seems to him that he is "burying himself alive."²⁹

As Patusan does represent the place of Jim's withdrawal, it is a grave for him and thus yields death rather than life. This similarity of Patusan to a grave is established by scenes such as that portraying the moon rising from the "yawning grave"

²⁷Ibid., p. 89. ²⁸Ibid., p. 161. Italics in the original.

²⁹Ibid., p. 186. Ted E. Boyle discusses this idea of burial in Lord Jim and relates it to the mythical hero's period of trial and descent into the underworld. Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1965), pp. 81-84. Dorothy Van Ghent also discusses this point but rightly observes that it is extremely doubtful whether Jim, like the classical hero, brings wisdom back to the daylight. The English Novel, p. 243.

of Patusan³⁰ and by comparisons such as that likening the stream to the river of Styx.³¹ The most striking presentation of Patusan as a grave, however, revolves around the unreality of the moonlight and the grave of Jewel's mother:

It [the moon] threw its level rays afar as if from a cavern, and in this mournful eclipse-like light the stumps of felled trees uprose very dark, the heavy shadows fell at my feet on all sides, my own moving shadow, and across my path the shadow of the solitary grave perpetually garlanded with flowers. In the darkened moonlight the interlaced blossoms took on shapes foreign to one's memory and colours indefinable to the eye, as though they had been special flowers gathered by no man, grown not in this world, and destined for the use of the dead alone. Their powerful scent hung in the warm air, making it thick and heavy like the fumes of incense. The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movements in the world seemed to come to an end.

It was a great peace, as if the earth had been one grave,...³²

This particular grave of Jewel's mother signifies that death which Jim has embraced in making his withdrawal from life. In his condition of withdrawal, in fact, everything appears to Jim in terms of death. This is particularly apparent in the portrayal of Jewel in the novel. In Marlow's eyes, Jewel's love comes from the grave of her mother and for him the two women seem to be one.³³ Thus, part of Jim's love for Jewel consists of tending the mother's grave.³⁴ Similarly, Jewel is often described as a gravestone.

³⁰Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 162. ³¹Ibid., p. 229.

³²Ibid., pp. 236-37. ³³Ibid., pp. 202-3.

³⁴Ibid., p. 202.

At one point she is described "as still as a marble statue in the night."³⁵ Later passages refer to the stillness of "the outlines of her white shape"³⁶ and to "the white statuesque immobility of her person."³⁷ For Jim, then, even love appears to be a form of death.

It must be observed that this grave of Patusan is not one from which Jim is raised in redemption, although particular images in the novel do produce an illusion of such resurrection. The most striking of these misleading images is that of the moon rising from the grave of Patusan:

On the third day after the full, the moon...rose exactly behind these hills, its diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disk, glowing ruddily, appeared, gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph.³⁸

With the moon rising "in gentle triumph" on the "third day" from the "yawning grave" of Patusan, this scene appears to suggest resurrection. Jim himself may see this meaning in the scene, for he says to Marlow, "Wonderful effect,...Worth seeing. Is it not?" Shortly afterwards, Marlow seems to encourage this view of Jim when he describes him as a bright and shining figure who appears to be "a creature not only of another kind but of another essence."³⁹ The picture of Jim's resurrection is an illusion, however, for it is the moon which is rising and, as Marlow later

³⁵Ibid., p. 227. ³⁶Ibid., p. 229. ³⁷Ibid., p. 230.

³⁸Ibid., p. 162. ³⁹Ibid., p. 168.

observes, the moon implies unreality:

...we had watched the moon float away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cold and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight. There is something haunting in the light of the moon; it has all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery. It is to our sunshine, which--say what you like--is all we have to live by, what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad. It robs all forms of matter--which, after all, is our domain--of their substances, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone.⁴⁰

While Jim himself retains reality for Marlow, his resurrection is seen to be an illusion. Unyielding in his withdrawal, Jim remains tied to the death-like atmosphere of that condition.

In contrast with Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes employs more subtle and more complex techniques in order to associate the state of withdrawal with unreality and death. This latter novel, however, is more concerned with the unreality rendered by withdrawal than with the ultimate death which results from it. Thus, the first noticeable effect of Haldin's intrusion into Razumov's state of withdrawal is an increased sense of unreality. As Razumov plans to retreat further into that state in his betrayal of Haldin, the world around him seems to lose its reality. Walking along a road after leaving his room, Razumov is engulfed in a world of falling snow and sees the sledges glide "phantom-like" by him. The few passers-by come upon him suddenly, "looming up black in the snowflakes close by, then vanishing all at once--without

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 180-81. Albert Guerard observes that Conrad uses moonlight, together with fog and mist, to blur reality. Conrad, The Novelist, p. 163.

footfalls."⁴¹ In the eerie silence of this world, there is fore-shadowed the world of silence to which Razumov's withdrawal ultimately leads him. Thus, at the end of the novel when his withdrawal is physically confirmed by his deafening, Razumov is thrust into a world of unreality:

Not a sound reached him from anywhere, and he began to walk, staggering down a long, empty street. The lightning waved and darted round him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove--noiseless like the drift of mist. In this unearthly stillness his footsteps fell silent on the pavement, while a dumb wind drove him on and on, like a lost mortal in a phantom world ravaged by a soundless thunder-storm.⁴²

Unable to perceive sound, a basic condition of reality, Razumov is plunged into the unreality which withdrawal brings.

In Under Western Eyes, however, Conrad renders the unreality of this state of withdrawal in a number of less direct but more subtle ways. One of the most important is that employing the characteristically Russian evasion of reality. This trait is mentioned throughout the novel, but most significantly when the narrator suggests that the Russian evades reality and the understandable through his form of expression:

That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian....I suppose one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and hopeless cynicism.⁴³

Thus, Razumov's name, which in both Polish and Russian means "to

⁴¹Conrad, Under Western Eyes, p. 29. ⁴²Ibid., pp. 304-5.

⁴³Ibid., p. 93.

understand,"⁴⁴ is extremely ironic, since he, as a typical Russian, does not want to understand the realities of life.

In the novel, this evasion of reality is achieved largely through the misuse of words. The primary purpose of words is to convey meaning, but the Russian perverts words and uses them to conceal and suppress meaning. This evasion of reality through words is a dominant theme in the novel and is introduced by the narrator in the opening lines:

Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot.⁴⁵

Since words are the "foes of reality," it is significant that this tale of withdrawal should be narrated by a teacher of languages, a person who works with words. While words do obscure reality, however, no one uses them for that purpose better than the Russian:

What must remain striking to a teacher of languages is the Russians' extraordinary love of words. They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with an enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes that, as in the case of very accomplished parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Gurko, Joseph Conrad, p. 214.

⁴⁵Conrad, Under Western Eyes, p. 11.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 12.

In this warning that the Russian uses words as symbols without meaning in order to hide reality, the narrator also issues a warning that Razumov's diary, the source of his tale, similarly evades reality.

This evasive use of words is employed by Razumov throughout the novel and reflects his withdrawal. As he waits with Haldin for midnight to come, Razumov must speak to disguise his true feelings. In order to conceal his own knowledge of Haldin's imminent arrest, he feels that he must continue to talk so that periods of silence may be averted.⁴⁷ Again, in his interview with Mme. de S____, Razumov uses words to fill in embarrassing and revealing periods of silence.⁴⁸ It is in his conversation with Sophia Antonovna, however, that Razumov finds the greatest necessity to use words in order to evade reality and truth. Sophia Antonovna herself realizes that any meaning which he expresses is not to be found in his words, which are only of secondary interest.⁴⁹ Razumov is clearly using words to conceal meaning and the truth, and he delights in so doing:

...she was the personal adversary he had to meet. It gave him a feeling of triumphant pleasure to deceive her out of her own mouth. The epigrammatic saying that speech has been given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts came into his mind. Of that cynical theory this was a very subtle and a very scornful application, flouting in its own words the very spirit of ruthless revolution....⁵⁰

Through words, then, Razumov is able to evade truth and the

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 203-4.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 219.

reality of life, thereby achieving in part his withdrawal from life.

A second way in which Conrad implies Razumov's removal from reality through his withdrawal is the removal from time. Since time is a necessary condition governing existence, removal from time implies a departure from the reality of existence. This is suggested in Lord Jim by virtue of the fact that Brierly, in leaping to his death, left only his gold chronometer watch on the rail of the ship.⁵¹ In leaping out of existence or in withdrawing from life, Brierly leaves time. In Lord Jim, however, this point is not developed and it is not used at all in the presentation of Jim's withdrawal. This relationship between time and the reality of existence is, on the other hand, extensively examined in Under Western Eyes. The withdrawal which Razumov chooses clearly takes him out of time, thereby taking him out of reality.

This removal from time is established in the office of General T____, a representative of the condition of withdrawal which Razumov chooses in betraying Haldin. In the General's office, time seems to stand still as the clock on the mantelpiece makes no sound.⁵² Razumov himself is acutely aware of the time and is in time until Haldin finally leaves the room, thereby

⁵¹Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 46.

⁵²Conrad, Under Western Eyes, pp. 43, 45.

completing Razumov's first act of withdrawal from life. Upon this departure, Razumov, checking his watch and observing it to be slow, becomes nervous and allows it to slip through his fingers and fall to the floor.⁵³ Significantly, the watch is broken and stops exactly at midnight, the moment of Haldin's capture.⁵⁴ Clearly, then, Razumov's withdrawal through his betrayal of Haldin causes him to allow time to slip from his grasp so that time ceases for him.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, his removal from time does cast him into deep despair and agitation. Having lost time, he desires to return to it but cannot do so:

Razumov looked wildly about as if for some means of seizing upon time which seemed to have escaped him altogether.⁵⁶

Upon awakening the following morning, Razumov is again reminded of his removal from time by the watch with "both hands arrested at twelve o'clock."⁵⁷ The entire day seems to pass inexplicably as time seems to stand still for him.⁵⁸ Even when the watch is eventually repaired, it does not actually re-admit Razumov to time, but simply enables him to relive his betrayal of Haldin, the incident by which he has initially withdrawn from life. He does this both before he visits Mikulin⁵⁹ and before he finally

⁵³Ibid., p. 60. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁵Leo Gurko examines Razumov's removal from time and observes that "in murdering Haldin, Razumov also murders time, and the slain dimension cuts him off from the world as much as the slain man." Joseph Conrad, pp. 209-10.

⁵⁶Conrad, Under Western Eyes, p. 61.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 64. ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 65. ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 250.

confesses to the revolutionists.⁶⁰ Both incidents, then, may well be repetitions of his initial withdrawal. The first certainly is since, in visiting Mikulin, Razumov pledges himself to the government which, as this study has already indicated, is representative of the state of withdrawal. As was suggested by the discussion of sound, and Razumov's removal from it, the second incident may also constitute an act of withdrawal, although this is open to question. At any rate, both incidents recall the removal from time, and therefore the removal from reality, which characterizes Razumov's withdrawal throughout the novel.

The third way in which Conrad treats the unreality which accompanies the state of withdrawal is the presentation of Haldin as a phantom. As observed previously in this study, Haldin represents the commitment which Razumov rejects. Thus, it is appropriate that, after Razumov's initial withdrawal in his betrayal of Haldin, the betrayed man should continue to appear to Razumov as a phantom. In his withdrawal, Razumov sees in terms of unreality the world which he has rejected. Even before he has actually betrayed Haldin but has unconsciously decided to do so, Razumov sees him as a phantom lying in the snow and symbolically murders him by walking over that phantom.⁶¹ Similarly, even while he still lives, Haldin himself appears to be a phantom to Razumov.⁶² Withdrawal so removes Razumov from reality that he confuses Haldin with the phantom to the point that he must

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 298. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 38. ⁶²Ibid., p. 53.

physically confirm Haldin's presence.⁶³ When Haldin finally does leave the room for his death, he departs "almost as noiseless as a vision."⁶⁴

Throughout the novel, Razumov continues to be haunted by this phantom, a symbol of the sense of unreality produced by withdrawal. Gradually, however, the phantom does assume a physical form, that of Nathalie Haldin, Victor's sister. Through the association of the phantom with Nathalie, Razumov's sense of unreality is further emphasized. Since Haldin's death, Nathalie had continued to live in Razumov's mind as a phantom:

Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcized. The most vivid amongst them was the mention of the sister. The girl had existed for him ever since.⁶⁵

Thus, when she finally does meet Razumov, Nathalie identifies herself not by her own name but rather by her brother's name. After asking him, "Can't you guess who I am?", her next words, after a silence, are, "Victor--Victor Haldin!"⁶⁶ She herself is thus confused with the phantom haunting Razumov, a fact which he clearly recognizes much later:

It was she who had been haunting him now. He had suffered that persecution ever since she had suddenly appeared before him in the garden of the Villa Borel with an extended hand and the name of her brother on her lips.⁶⁷

Again, in his letter to Nathalie, Razumov reveals that he sees Haldin and his phantom living on through the person of Nathalie

⁶³Ibid., pp. 54-55. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 59. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 143.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 147. ⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 282-83.

in order to haunt him.⁶⁸ In this phantom and in its personification in Nathalie, the sense of unreality which accompanies Razumov's withdrawal is reflected.

While withdrawal does lead to a removal from reality in the ways discussed above, it leads also to death. Thus Razumov, like other figures exemplifying withdrawal in Conrad's fiction, is treated as a dead man. In choosing to betray Haldin to the autocratic government, Razumov clearly gives himself up to the grave, as is reflected in the grave-like silence of General T_____'s room.⁶⁹ Awakening on the morning following that betrayal and initial withdrawal from life, Razumov is surrounded by an atmosphere of death:

It was the awakening of a man mortally ill, or of a man ninety years old. He looked at the lamp which had burnt itself out. It stood there, the extinguished beacon of his labours, a cold object of brass and porcelain, amongst the scattered pages of his notes and small piles of books--a mere litter of blackened paper--dead matter--without significance or interest.

He got on his feet, and divesting himself of his cloak hung it on the peg, going through all the motions mechanically. An incredible dullness, a ditch-water stagnation was sensible to his perceptions as though life had withdrawn itself from all things and even from his own thoughts. There was not a sound in the house.⁷⁰

Amongst the revolutionists in Geneva, Razumov is, like Jim, mistaken for a dead man, namely Haldin's accomplice in the assassination plot.⁷¹ This confusion serves to imply Razumov's figurative death brought about by his withdrawal. Even his confession does

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 295-96. ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 43. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 63.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 215-17.

not enable Razumov to escape this death which attends withdrawal. In fact, as the narrator observes, it appears to constitute a type of self-destruction:

It was as though he had stabbed himself outside and had come in there to show it; and more than that--as though he were turning the knife in the wound and watching the effect.⁷²

As Razumov does appear to be facing reality and life in making this confession, it can only be suggested that his withdrawal has already condemned him to at least a figurative death.

The death implied by withdrawal is also presented in another significant way in the novel. As has already been demonstrated, the Chateau Borel is a place of withdrawal in that it is the home of Mme. de S_____ who has withdrawn from life. It is appropriate, then, that the Chateau is presented in lifeless terms and is associated with death and decay. The building is extremely dilapidated and has the appearance of being absolutely deserted.⁷³ The cracked white paint, the tarnished gilt, and the terrace "flanked by two stained greenish stone urns of funereal aspect" are all signs of the decay and death which characterize the place.⁷⁴ Mme. de S_____ herself is described as a dead person, as is fitting for a person who has withdrawn from life. Her face has a "death-like immobility" while she herself is attributed the rigidity and stiffness of a corpse.⁷⁵ Described explicitly as a

⁷²Ibid., p. 289. ⁷³Ibid., p. 125. ⁷⁴Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 181.

corpse or a mummy,⁷⁶ she also has the "grinning skull" and "death's head smile" which imply death.⁷⁷ In her are found the physical marks of death, which are more subtly expressed in the case of Razumov's withdrawal from life.

In Victory, Conrad once again places his emphasis on the aspect of unreality involved in withdrawal, although, as will shortly be demonstrated, he does treat the aspect of death which must inevitably follow withdrawal. Throughout the novel, the sense of unreality suggesting Heyst's withdrawal is rendered as a submission to the dream, as it is in Jim's case. Enchanted by the Islands, Heyst gives himself up to his magic circle from which he cannot escape.⁷⁸ This magic circle, representative of the dream, is eventually reduced to the shores of Samburan, the "Round Island."⁷⁹ Living on this island or in this dream, it is appropriate that Heyst is identified as "Enchanted Heyst" and is labelled a "utopist," since Utopia was an imaginary island of ideal perfection.⁸⁰ Just as Utopia is removed from reality, so is Heyst's place of withdrawal. Furthermore, the narrator specifically points out that Heyst, like Jim, is a romantic.⁸¹ Thus, until the end of the novel, Heyst's existence on Samburan remains governed by the dream. He frequently suggests to Lena that the two of them are living in a dream and at one point

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 182, 187. ⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 182, 188.

⁷⁸Conrad, Victory, p. 22. ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 20.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 23. ⁸¹Ibid., p. 55.

despairs that nothing will do away with that dream.⁸² Even when he bursts into the room where Lena has been shot, Heyst continues to remain within the unreality of the dream:

Heyst stumbled into the room and looked around. All the objects in there--the books, the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very portrait on the wall--seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again.⁸³

Only in his eventual acceptance of Lena does Heyst escape the unreality of this dream.

In a motif merely suggested in Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes, withdrawal is given a sense of unreality in Victory through the association of Heyst and books. As books are essentially about life and are not life itself, he who lives his life in a book does not come to grips with reality. Throughout the novel Heyst is such a man, frequently seen with a book in his hand, but most significantly when he first appears in the novel and later when the arrival of Jones and his men is imminent.⁸⁴ Furthermore, books constitute one of the most striking aspects of Heyst's house.⁸⁵

The sense of unreality which accompanies Heyst's withdrawal, however, is perhaps best demonstrated in the presentation of Heyst and all the people he meets as ghosts. As he has rejected reality in withdrawing from life, all people therefore lose

⁸²Ibid., p. 288. ⁸³Ibid., p. 321.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 20, 183-84. ⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 159, 235.

their reality for him and actually do appear as unsubstantial spectres. The source of this predominance of ghosts is to be found in Heyst's own withdrawal. The last words of the elder Heyst urging the son to stand aside from life had been accompanied by the moonlight which, as was demonstrated in Jim's case, casts an aura of illusion and unreality over everything.⁸⁶ Thus, as he reads his father's works, Heyst seems to hear the ghost-like voice of his father:

It seemed to him that he was hearing his father's voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on earth--a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood.⁸⁷

As an advocate of withdrawal, the elder Heyst continues to live as a ghost, thus manifesting the unreality produced by his philosophy.

As he has heeded this "ghostly voice" and has withdrawn from life, Heyst himself is regarded as a ghost. Early in the novel, he is seen "drifting amongst the islands, enigmatical and disregarded like an insignificant ghost."⁸⁸ As he shifts between the worlds of commitment and withdrawal, Heyst shifts between visible and invisible states. As long as he maintains his withdrawal he is invisible like a ghost. When he does involve or commit himself, however, as in the Tropical Belt Coal Company affair, Heyst does become visible. After the company collapses

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 150.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 184.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 35.

and Heyst returns to his state of withdrawal, he once more becomes invisible.⁸⁹ Again, immediately before he makes his third and most important venture into the world of commitment in meeting Lena, Heyst is described as "a calm meditative ghost in his white drill-suit."⁹⁰ Eventually, Heyst actually doubts his own existence as he walks towards his house with Jones:

They found the steps, without his being aware that he was ascending them--slowly, one by one. Doubt entered into him --a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly, with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live --or perhaps was no longer living.⁹¹

Thus Heyst's figure is merged with that of another spectre, Jones, as they both stoop to peer through the window of Heyst's house. Losing the sense of his own reality, Heyst sinks deeper into his withdrawal from life.

The sense of unreality which reflects Heyst's withdrawal from life is further intensified through the portrayal as ghosts of the characters around Heyst. Wang, his servant, seems to materialize and vanish in the manner of an unsubstantial spirit. More significantly, however, Lena is also presented in ghost-like terms. In her meeting with Heyst outside Schomberg's hall, Lena is described as a "white phantom-like apparition"⁹² and as a "vaporous white figure."⁹³ To Heyst, she appears to be a ghost appealing to him from the shadows.⁹⁴ Throughout the novel, in

⁸⁹Ibid. ⁹⁰Ibid., p. 80. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 313.

⁹²Ibid., p. 80. ⁹³Ibid., p. 82. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 83.

fact, there is the suggestion that Lena has no independent existence but rather depends upon Heyst for her existence. She herself feels that if Heyst were to stop thinking about her, she would cease to exist.⁹⁵ Thus, in the face of the intrusion into his withdrawal by Jones and his men, Heyst actually does cease to think of Lena for a moment and thereby loses the sense of her existence.⁹⁶ Heyst indeed has the suspicion that his sense perceptions of Lena may be "the unsubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts."⁹⁷ At times, however, Lena does seem to give Heyst "a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life,"⁹⁸ so that by the end of the novel Lena is presented in terms of reality. This shift from unreality to reality in Lena's portrayal reflects Heyst's gradual commitment to her and to life. The fact remains, however, that in the early part of Heyst's withdrawal Lena is portrayed in terms of unreality, just as Jewel is portrayed in terms of death in Lord Jim.

Similarly, Jones and his men, "the envoys of the outer world,"⁹⁹ are portrayed as ghosts divorced from reality. When Heyst first looks out from the jetty to see these intruders he significantly sees nothing. Their eventual appearance is described as an "apparition" and is likened to that of mythical

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 159. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 205. ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 259.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 170. ⁹⁹Ibid., p. 266.

spirits:

...their apparition in a boat Heyst could not connect with anything plausible. The civilization of the tropics could have had nothing to do with it. It was more like those myths, current in Polynesia, of amazing strangers, who arrive at an island, gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants--gifts of unknown things, words never heard before.¹⁰⁰

Later, reviewing his reaction to their arrival, Heyst again likens these intruders to phantoms removed from reality:

"Think what it was to me to see them land in the dusk, fantasms from the sea--apparitions, chimeras! And they persist. That's the worst of it--they persist. They have no right to be--but they are."¹⁰¹

In Heyst's eyes, as he admits to Ricardo, the intruders are "divorced from all reality."¹⁰² It is the particular presentation of Jones as a ghost or spectre, however, that best reflects the sense of unreality which affects the perception of a person who has withdrawn from life. Jones is consistently characterized in ghostly terms. His "spectral eyes"¹⁰³ have a "spectral intensity"¹⁰⁴ and a "sepulchral stare."¹⁰⁵ He speaks in a "ghostly voice"¹⁰⁶ with a "sepulchral undertone"¹⁰⁷ and possesses a "ghostly, squeaky laugh."¹⁰⁸ Frequently described as a "spectral figure," he is also likened to "an insolent spectre on leave from Hades,"¹⁰⁹ a "starved spectre"¹¹⁰ and a "wicked

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 105.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 106.

ghost."¹¹¹ In daylight, he becomes merely "a more wierd, a more disturbing and unlawful apparition."¹¹² The fact is, however, that Jones is not a ghost or apparition nor are his men. Jones is "he who is ____" ¹¹³ and therefore does exist in reality whether Heyst can perceive him as being real or whether he cannot so perceive him. The portrayal of Jones and his men as ghosts, like that of Lena, Wang, and Heyst himself, is merely a reflection of the sense of unreality which attends Heyst's withdrawal from life.

In Victory, as in the other two novels being considered in this study, the condition of withdrawal is also characterized by death. Thus, Jones, while an indicator of the unreality of Heyst's world, is also associated with death. When he first arrives on Samburan, he is sitting in the boat "silent, rigid, and very much like a corpse" and displays a "death's head grin."¹¹⁴ In subsequent descriptions he is frequently referred to as a corpse, while his physique is said to be suggestive of the grave.¹¹⁵

This hint of death as a consequence of withdrawal is also to be found at the source of Heyst's withdrawal. The night of his father's last words to him is associated with images of death:

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 108. ¹¹²Ibid. ¹¹³Ibid., p. 257.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 192. ¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 223.

The noises of the street had died out one by one, till at last, in the moonlight, the London houses began to look like the tombs of an unvisited, unhonoured, cemetery of hopes.¹¹⁶

The philosophy of withdrawal which governs Heyst's life issues from the mouth of a dying man and is forever dominated by an atmosphere of death. This atmosphere is apparent in the ruin and decay of the novel's initial picture of Samburan.¹¹⁷ It is once again apparent as Davidson likens Samburan to a grave:

The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.¹¹⁸

Although Lena is, for a considerable time, a willing inhabitant of the world of withdrawal, she does eventually recognize the death inherent in such withdrawal. Thus, for her also, Samburan is pervaded with an atmosphere of death:

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing stillness, at that moment she felt the nearness of death breathing on her and on the man with her.¹¹⁹

It is this power of death which Lena must overcome in order to draw Heyst out of his withdrawal and into some form of commitment. In obtaining Ricardo's knife she achieves this victory over death, the product of withdrawal.

In the three novels under consideration, then, Conrad

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 150. ¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 20. ¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 284.

makes a clear association between the state of withdrawal and the concepts of unreality and death. In Conrad's view, as expressed particularly in his fictional characters of Jim, Razumov, and Heyst, withdrawal from life is inevitably attended by a sense of unreality and ultimate death. Such consequences seem to indicate that withdrawal is not a satisfactory solution to the question of "how to be" which runs through Conrad's fiction.

It has been shown, then, that in Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory Conrad is treating the themes of withdrawal and commitment in an extremely complex and interesting manner. In examining the various modes of presentation employed by Conrad in his treatment of these themes, this study has demonstrated that much of the apparently irrelevant material in each novel is functional. As a result of this examination, each of the three novels under consideration has been shown to be a much more unified work than might be apparent upon a first reading.

As a reading of the novels suggests, and as this study indicates, however, Conrad does give more of his attention to the theme of withdrawal than to the theme of commitment. This emphasis does not necessarily reflect Conrad's personal choice; in fact, as Chapter I of this study indicates, the novelist appears to have embraced commitment as his final choice of a way of life. The emphasis upon the theme of withdrawal in the novels is rather the result of Conrad's profound concern with that human condition.

It is interesting to note, however, that Conrad seems to

have understood the nature and consequences of the condition of withdrawal long before he was willing to include in his work an almost explicit and unambiguous condemnation of that condition. Such a condemnation is found late in Victory (1915) in Heyst's memorable words, "woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!"¹²⁰ As this study has demonstrated, however, in both Lord Jim (1900) and Under Western Eyes (1910) Conrad examines in considerable detail the unreality and death which attend the condition of withdrawal. In these earlier novels, Conrad implies the nature of his final judgment upon withdrawal and commitment but does not make an explicit statement of that judgment as he does in Victory. For this reason, Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes are more complex and ambiguous than Victory with respect to the themes of withdrawal and commitment.

It is Conrad's interest in the condition of withdrawal and his extraordinary insight into the nature of that condition which make his novels--particularly Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and Victory--so relevant to readers of any time or place. While they are set against romantic and often exotic backgrounds far removed from everyday life, these novels are primarily concerned with human questions which admit no limitations of time and space. As this study has demonstrated, the necessary choice which man must make between withdrawal from life and commitment to life is one such question examined by Conrad.

¹²⁰Conrad, Victory, p. 326.

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