

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE MAJOR NOVELS

OF

JOSEPH CONRAD

by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The need for a study of Conrad's technique, of the manner in which he wrote fiction, seems to arise plainly from a survey of the present state of Conrad criticism. Ever since the publication of the novels and novellas, serious critical discussions of their meaning and their place in modern literature have appeared steadily, and continue to appear at the rate of one or two a year. Almost all these affirm Conrad's virtuosity as a master of the novel form, and explain that he learned the craft of fiction writing from the French realist writers and from Henry James, and that he influenced a generation of younger practitioners of the form as diverse as William Faulkner and Graham Greene. And though the novels themselves indicate so obviously an interest in the technical resources of the form, no Conrad critic has so far devoted a study to an evaluation, or even a mere exposition of Conrad's technique.¹

The desirability of such an examination provides the impetus for the present study. Its intention is to try to establish Conrad's characteristic fictional technique. It is at the same time an examination of particular works, an investigation of the means used, and an estimate of how these means contribute to the value of the work as a whole. There are times when,

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1. Several studies have appeared, the titles of which suggest a technical bearing, *viz*
- R.L. Megroz: *Joseph Conrad's Mind and Method*, London, 1931;
- J.D. Gordan: *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist*, Russell, New York, 1963;
- W.S. Dowden: *Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 1970;
- E. Crankshaw: *Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel*, Macmillan, London, 1976.

at least in the judgment of one reader, an awareness of means throws fresh light on the meaning and, indeed, the value of a work. The study has, for reasons of space, been directed upon the major works, and, apart from Chapter Two, upon the major novels, though it is arguable that Conrad's one or two most perfect works fall in the category of the novella. The current estimate of the titles which attain to major status¹ has been adopted, except for the cases of *Chance* and *Victory*, where there is a divergence of opinion; both these novels will be examined and will prove to be of special interest in that the approach from the angle of technique appears to throw fresh light on their value and place in the canon. The works will be examined in chronological order so that it will be possible to note indications of development in the technique.

Before the fiction is examined, an attempt will be made, in the present chapter, to establish Conrad's own view of his technique. Despite his evident reluctance to theorize about it, it is possible to infer from his rare comments or asides on the subject what his essential view or at least his orientation with regard to his technical approach was. An attempt will be made to elucidate it as it is reflected in his letters to various correspondents; in his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*; and in what his

1. As reflected in:

- F.R. Leavis: *The Great Tradition*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1948;
 D. Hewitt: *Conrad, A Reassessment*, Bowes and Bowes, London, 1952;
 A.J. Guerard: *Conrad the Novelist*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass. 1958.
 J. Baines: *Joseph Conrad*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967.

collaborator F.M. Hueffer said of it in his biographical writings about Conrad.

A search in Conrad's letters for any considered view of his technique meets with disappointment; he simply did not care to pursue the subject beyond the simplest formulations. Edward Garnett sums the matter up in his introduction to his collection of letters from Conrad.¹

Conrad worked by intuition after a preliminary meditation, just as his criticism of other men's work was intuitive and not the fruit of considered theory. He was, of course, always interested in literary technique and good craftsmanship, such as Flaubert's and Maupassant's: he said, May, 1898, of the latter's *Bel Ami*, 'Its simply enchanting to see how it's done.' But he never theorized about technique and many years later, on asking me why I had never written on the art of fiction and receiving my reply that the subject was too difficult for my brains, he declared that it was also too difficult for his and that he had₂ never formulated any rules for his own practice ...

This observation is borne out by the letters. An elementary notion of his art does in fact emerge from the letters, and forms the basis for the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, and though it will not take the student of Conrad's technique very far, it will provide him with a useful initial orientation: the notion that the novelist is a story-teller who is distinguished from his kind by an ability to heighten his material so as to make it convey an idea. In a letter to William Blackwood he wrote:

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1. Edward Garnett: *Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895 - 1924*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1962.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 24-5.

... *Youth* itself ... exists only in virtue of my fidelity to the idea and the method - The favourable critics of that story, Q amongst others, remarked with a sort of surprise 'This after all is a story for boys yet -' Exactly. Out of the material of a boys' story I've made *Youth* by the force of the idea expressed ...¹

He touches on the same notion when writing to Richard Curle to suggest how Curle might plan an article on Conrad for the T.L.S.:

Suppose you opened by a couple of short para's of general observation on authors and their material, how they transform it from particular to general, and appeal to universal emotions by the temperamental handling of personal experience?²

When Curle's article was published, it offended Conrad by identifying the actual places and other biographical information on which his novels were based, and Conrad's angry letter to the offending Curle came nearer to a statement of method than his letters normally do:

Didn't it ever occur to you, my dear Curle, that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my life and even of my tales in the background? Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it³ of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion.

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1. *Joseph Conrad, Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. by William Blackwood, Duke University Press, 1958, letter of 31 May 1902.
 2. R. Curle: *Conrad to a Friend: 150 Selected Letters from Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle*, London, 1928, p. 195 (17 July 1923).
 3. *Ibid.* p. 142 (24 April 1922).

The following observations to the same correspondent refer again to the process of heightening a narrative:

The thought for effects is there ... (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative) and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective, which are purely temperamental and wherein almost all my 'art' consists ... it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective.¹

The 'unconventional' treatment refers to what Conrad does to transform the ordinary, linear yarn, to his manipulation of chronology in particular, to his leaping over unimportant events and his isolation or juxtaposing of important events, to his moving backwards and forwards over chronology to link events thematically.

There is little else to be gleaned from the letters. The Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, on the other hand, constitutes a serious attempt by Conrad to state his aims in writing fiction, and is equally a statement of the methods he used. It coincides chronologically with the first work of fiction in which a characteristic narrative method emerges. His approach is, again, to consider how fiction may be raised to 'the condition of art'. The process involves 'an attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe' in order to bring to light 'the truth, manifold and one'.² The artistic narrative thus rises above the level of the popular yarn by distilling out of the 'enigmatical spectacle'³

1. *Ibid.* p. 191 (14 July 1923).

2. *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Collected Works of Joseph Conrad, Dent, 1950; p. xxiii.

3. *Ibid.* p. xxiii

some kind of underlying truth. The truth is not that which the scientist and the thinker pursue; ideas tend to be discarded by successive generations,¹ and what the artist reveals is likely to be 'the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation ... the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations ...',² but it is nonetheless the pursuit of truth and raises the mere narrative to the level of art. Conrad now considers means. All the arts have to make their appeal through the senses. The literary artist must emulate the 'plasticity' of sculpture, the 'colour' of painting, the 'magic suggestiveness' of music - and this last by a 'care for the shape and ring of sentences'.³ His task is restated as 'by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you *see*.'⁴ He has additionally to accomplish 'the perfect blending of form and substance',⁵ *viz* to ensure that the forms and techniques selected are appropriate to his intention. More than that Conrad cannot say, for, he adds, the aim of art is 'obscured by mists'. In his 'uneasy solitude' the artist is abandoned by all such critical labels as Realism and Romanticism to 'the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work.'⁶ It is in other words evident that Conrad was an intuitive craftsman who was disinclined to theorize about the particulars of his craft.

1. *Ibid.* p. xxiv

2. *Ibid.* p. xxiv

3. *Ibid.* p. xxv

4. *Ibid.* p. xxvi. Whether the third term of the famous dictum is intended both literally and figuratively is unclear; the meaning of the other two terms perhaps restricts the third to a purely sensuous meaning.

5. *Ibid.* p. xxv

6. *Ibid.* p. xxvii

What Conrad discussed with F.M. Hueffer in the conversations they had on the writing of fiction may be roughly inferred from the two memoirs Hueffer wrote about their period of collaboration. In *Joseph Conrad, A Personal Remembrance*,¹ published in 1924, the year of Conrad's death, Hueffer has more to say about Conrad's opinions than his craftsmanship. However, Hueffer mentions more than once their belief that the novel needed a new form.² There is no discussion of what the phrase meant to them, but there is an interesting observation about chronology:

... it became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the Novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straight forward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straight forward ... To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past ...³

In other words it is more natural and more conducive to an illusion of reality to create a character in a series of views arranged in some mental order of association than in a chronological order. This argument is of course of a piece with the assumption of the Phenomenologists at the turn of the century that reality must always be an observed and an experienced reality; and therefore the novelist should present it with the imprint of the observer upon it:

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1. Duckworth, London, 1924. Hueffer's later memoir, *Return to Yesterday*; Gollancz, 1931, contains a chapter, 'Working with Conrad', which discusses their three collaborations; this contains nothing about their or Conrad's fictional technique.
 2. *Joseph Conrad, A Personal Remembrance*, pp. 35, 60.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 130.

... on the whole, the indirect, interrupted method of handling interviews is invaluable for giving a sense of the complexity, the tantalization, the shimmering, the haze, that life is.¹

Hueffer is not referring to the use of a narrator, but it is obvious why Conrad took readily to the use of a narrator in some of his works in the interest of realism. The novelist himself, on the other hand, was to be eliminated as far as possible:

... the object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious of the fact that the author exists - even of the fact that he is reading a book.²

Thus 'showing' is in principle preferable to 'telling', although sometimes authorial summary or interpretation is unavoidable:

Sometimes to render anything at all in a given space will take up too much room - even to render the effect and delivery of a speech. Then just boldly and remorselessly you must relate and *risk* the introduction of yourself as author, with the danger that you may destroy all the illusion of the story.³

While some latitude as to the precise manner of presentation is permitted, there is no room for the novelist's own judgments:

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1. *Ibid.* p. 191.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 186.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 184.

The one thing that you can not do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause ... It is obviously best if you can contrive to be without views at all; your business with the world is rendering, not alteration ... If, however, your yearning to amend the human race is so great that you cannot possibly keep your fingers out of the watchsprings there is a device that you can adopt ... You must then invent, justify, and set going in your novel a character who can convincingly express your views. If you are a gentleman you will also invent, justify and set going characters to express views opposite to those you hold.¹

Hueffer does not take up the more difficult question of whether the novelist who is gentleman enough to remain neutral and aloof towards his characters should not also be a conscience of mankind.

Apart from saying that Conrad liked to begin with a dramatic opening,² Hueffer refers only once to the matter of narrative structure:

In writing a novel we agreed that ... as the story progressed, (it) must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity. This is called *progression d'effet*.³

This structural rule-of-thumb applies more properly to Conrad's novellas which have only a single crisis; it does not apply to such complex structures as *Lord Jim* or *Under Western Eyes*, while in *Nostromo* there is properly speaking no narrative acceleration at all.

A reading of Hueffer's rather hastily assembled memoir takes the student of Conrad's technique only a little further than do the letters and the *Preface*. It does

1. *Ibid.* p. 209.

2. *Ibid.* p. 172.

3. *Ibid.* p. 210. Hueffer also discusses Conrad's interest in style, in achieving cadence and sonority.

show that Conrad had a professional attitude to the writing of fiction. It also shows that Conrad had no theories, but that his nearest approach to a theory was a commitment to objectivity, to 'rendering, not alteration', in the creation of an illusion of reality. A reading of these sources leaves one unprepared for the surprising technical resourcefulness which the works themselves reveal. Though his craftsmanship was clearly of an intuitive kind, it was of an order which implied an intense and a constant preoccupation.

The critical view which emerges above from Conrad's own writings, that the story is the novelist's raw material which he heightens in various ways to make of it a vehicle of 'truth', provides the basic orientation of the study which follows. It is a study of the means Conrad uses to tell his story. It is a study of the essential structures which underlie the narratives, of the narrative strategies adopted, including the manipulation of chronology to which the criticism of Conrad's technique has hitherto tended to confine itself, and of the non-narrative structural elements of imagery and motif which in the major works supplement the narratives. Conrad speaks on a few occasions as if he had been able to transform the story into something else.¹ But such a transformation is only apparent, for the narrative remains throughout Conrad's career the basic and skeletal structure upon which his works are built.

1. He says of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, for instance, 'There are twenty years of life, six months of scribbling in that book, - and not a shadow of a story. As the critic of today's D'ly Mail puts it tersely: "The tale is no tale at all."' (Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 6 December, 1897.) The same opinion is expressed to E.L. Sanderson, 26 December, 1897: G. Jean-Aubry: *Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters*, Heinemann, 1927.

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY WORKS : THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TECHNIQUE

Conrad's first two works, *Almayer's Folly* (1894) and *Outcast of the Islands* (1895), aroused interest on their publication by their deliberate and literary style, their frequently sonorous phrasing, and their descriptions of tropical scenes, whose languidly sensuous quality was appropriate to their theme. But they are conventional in structure and conception. In both, the story of the protagonist extends through various vicissitudes, spread over many years, until the straightforward and conventional narrative is terminated by his death. It is not until after these two novels that Conrad's characteristic management of narrative begins to emerge, that he begins to prune his narratives until they consist of a few major episodes linked by minor incidents and authorial summary. In the Phenomenological philosophies of the later Nineteenth Century reality is seen as a phenomenon related to the nature of mind; and to the novelist of the time, chronology tends to have significance only insofar as the mind works selectively over it, can work 'backwards and forwards' (to use F.M. Hueffer's phrase¹), to assemble a significant rendering. The short story and the novella present themselves as natural forms to the novelist who, with the example of James, the Flaubert of *Trois Contes* and Maupassant before him, wishes to isolate and concentrate, to render those parts of a sequence which convey its significance. Though he may find, as the author of *Lord Jim* did, that the significance of a single episode has to be brought to light over a longer sequence: that the novella grows into the full novel. Yet even the vast panorama of *Nostromo* is built upon the short sequence of events which constitutes the crisis of the Sulaco Republic. Conrad's essential technique emerges virtually complete in *Lord Jim* (1900), and the rapid progress which occurs

1. See above p. 9.

between *Outcast of the Islands* (1895) and that novel is best gauged by an examination of the two technically significant works of this period, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

In *The Nigger* the narrative is still paramount: the action is still in the main recorded in a straightforward manner. Yet the narrative is restricted in the sense that this tale of a ship's crew is rendered within the limits of a single voyage. It relates Wait's effect on the crew, his release from duty, the storm off the Cape, the rescue of Wait from his cabin during the storm, the cook's disturbing conversation with Wait resulting in Captain Allistoun's intervention whereby Wait is confined to his cabin, the outraged crew's reaction of near-mutiny; the sighting of the Azores followed by Wait's death and burial at sea, and the change of wind that blows for the Channel and home. The narrative is on the one hand given a highly naturalistic rendering by the particulars of weather, navigation and ship management and by the frequent use of nautical terms, while on the other hand it is heightened by its projection of the themes of community, of solidarity under stress, the disruptiveness of the self-regarding impulses, and a concern with death. The straightforward narrative already embodies, at least in embryo, several of the narrative devices of Conrad's mature manner. The slight time shift at the very beginning, where Mr Baker's summoning of the crew is mentioned¹ and then delayed until an eleven-page account of the fore-castle and its occupants has been furnished², is the only instance of chronological rearrangement in

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1. *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Collected Edition, Dent, 1950, p. 3.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 14.

the novella. Its effect is minimal, and its interest is that it points forward to the complex rearrangements of the later fiction.¹

Hardly noticeable in the seemingly straightforward narrative are two instances of that skill in manipulating the reader's response which is so distinctive of the novelist's mature method. The first is the way Conrad uses Singleton's superstition about death at sea, that a man's dying is always accompanied by a troublesome headwind which persists until land is sighted and death occurs. Conrad makes this piece of nautical lore come true to convey the deeper truth that a shirker impedes a ship's progress. Conrad presents Singleton's superstition by means of a device he is to use often: the repeated allusion which has a cumulative effect. The superstition is casually alluded to nine times, beginning with Captain Allistoun's rather surprising remark during the threatened mutiny: 'Pah! This - nothing ... This head wind is my trouble'², and ending with his thundered command immediately after the burial service, 'Square the yards! ... Breeze coming.'³ The method gives the idea a subtly insinuating effect which is lost on the unobservant reader.

The other instance of Conrad's skill in engaging and directing the reader's response is the treatment of Wait's illness. The question of its genuineness is kept in doubt till the last possible moment, almost

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1. The first instance in Conrad occurs in *Almayer's Folly*, where Chapters Two to Five constitute a substantial digression into Almayer's past to explain his present situation.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 126.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 160. The other references are on pp. 137, 142, 147, 156, 157, 158, 161.

until he dies of it. The matter is first raised, in a startling and ambiguous manner, when Wait reports on board the ship and his majestic introduction of himself to Mr Baker gives way to an explosive and distressing coughing, which is passed over without authorial comment.¹ The reader is made to share the crew's uncertainty about it, as when the crew learn from Singleton that Wait will die, and then realise that the oracle may have a merely general meaning.² The matter seems settled after all for the reader when Wait is shown admitting privately to Donkin, after the storm, that he *is* shamming, but then a sudden fit of coughing which leaves Wait 'gasping like a fish' puts the matter in doubt once more. When the cook arouses the terror of damnation in Wait, the reader concludes that he must be on the point of death, and that his supposed shamming was a piece of self-deception of the same order as his present keenness to resume work. Captain Allistoun's intervention leaves the matter still unclear: he accuses Wait of having shammed sick³ and forbids him the deck because he is dying.⁴ The crew are outraged because they take Wait at his word, and the reader is still not quite sure of the truth until the master comments presently to Mr Baker, 'Past all help ... Well, let him die in peace.'⁵ Even then Wait on his deathbed continues his duplicity by looking forward to a normal landfall and homecoming.

1. *Ibid* p. 18.

2. *Ibid* p. 42.

3. *Ibid* p. 120.

4. *Ibid* p. 118.

5. *Ibid* p. 126.

The device of holding the question of Wait's health in suspense is no doubt intended to convey a savour of Wait's mendacity, to make him resemble on the plane of parable his prototype of the Father of Lies¹; it is in any case intended to ensure the reader's closest attention to the narrative.

Another significant aspect of the mainly straightforward narrative in *The Nigger* is the uncertain management of the viewpoint. Conrad's admiration of French realism probably suggested the use of an omniscient, objective viewpoint, which he had maintained fairly consistently through *Almayer's Folly* and *Outcast of the Islands*. On the other hand, the theme of the small community clearly suggested a centre of consciousness close to or identified with the crew, and led Conrad to use a shadowy narrator.² The unidentified member of the crew at times reports the ship's progress objectively and in elevated Conradian prose while at other times voicing the shifting moods and colloquial folk-wisdom of the fore-cabin. At one point Conrad can be seen straining to avoid inconsistency: at the height of the storm when Wait is rescued from his up-ended cabin, five men set out for the cabin, four of them named and the fifth unnamed: presumably the narrator.³ Three of them leap into the carpenter's

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1. A view of the novel as bearing some resemblance to a morality play, with the Captain and Wait playing the rôles of God and Satan respectively, is convincingly presented by W.R. Martin in 'The Captain of the Narcissus', *English Studies in Africa*, September 1963, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.
 2. Perhaps modelled on the indeterminate 'we' used in *Madame Bovary*. Jocelyn Baines concisely reviews the question of early literary influence, *op. cit.*, pp. 143 - 148.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 65.

shop through which the rescue is to be effected, two of them named, the third unnamed: presumably the narrator, for at this point the pronouns, which refer to the latter three, change from 'they' to 'we', until Wait is extricated, when 'we' again refers to the original five.¹ The narrator must be where the action is, yet he must not be too particularized. Such a faceless narrator in the midst of named and known members of the crew is a little awkward. Also awkward, as critics have pointed out,² is the detailed description of Wait's deathbed scene, of which Donkin is the only witness, not to mention the two occasions when Mr Baker's thoughts are narrated,³ nor the occasion of Captain Allistoun's introduction, where mention is made of his secret ambition, his manner of dealing with his officers, his fear of the Creator, his hopes for his retirement - all matters difficult of access to a member of the crew.⁴ In this tale Conrad is still seeking a suitable formula for a narrator; it is not the last time that the matter will give him difficulty.

While the narrative technique of this early masterpiece shows a distinct development, there is an advance also in the non-narrative sphere of its imagery. In *The Nigger* as in the first two novels, Conrad, following his French realist masters, is concerned to give his narrative a vivid, concrete texture. Most of the imagery of the novel is purely descriptive and subserves the narrative. But he begins to use a few images, tentatively and experimentally, to add an imaginative dimension to the confined world of the shipboard action. The images of this kind, mostly

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1. *Ibid.*, pp. 70 - 72.
 2. Notably A.J. Guerard, *op. cit.* p. 107.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 103, 107.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 31.

similes and metaphors, are counterpointed to the narrative and provide potentially a powerful vehicle for mood and theme, though their effect in *The Nigger* is as yet vague and ill-defined. The sea during the storm is 'mischievous and discomposing as a madman with an axe.'¹ The berths in the forecabin are compared to 'narrow niches for coffins in a whitewashed and lighted mortuary.'² Later that night the forecabin is described as 'as quiet as a sepulchre.'³ When the forecabin is swamped during the storm, Archie's coat emerges 'resembling a drowned seaman floating with his head under water.'⁴ These images are ominous and disquieting, and intensify the mood of the action. They are as yet suggestive rather than symbolic, peripheral rather than structural, as they will become in the major novels. But there is one set of images in *The Nigger* to which this stricture does not apply: the imagery of darkness and light.

On several occasions people are shown passing rapidly from darkness into light or *vice versa*. In the first sentence Mr Baker 'stepped in one stride out of his lighted cabin into the darkness of the quarterdeck.' At the roll call on deck each man steps 'into the circle of light, and in two noiseless strides pass(es) into the shadows.'⁵ That night Mr Baker is seen turning in: 'Upon the dark deck a band of light flashed, then a door slammed, and Mr Baker was gone into his neat cabin.'⁶ These images act beyond the scope of the

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1. *Ibid.* p. 57.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 8.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 24.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 58.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 16.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 21.

narrative, evoking a sense of contrasting moral worlds existing side by side on the ship.¹

There is one other occasion when the above stricture does not apply. When the paid-off crew know a transient moment of gay solidarity on their way to the Black Horse, the light imagery is used to convey this. The clouds break and 'The sunshine of heaven fell like a gift of grace' upon the 'dark' group and their sordid surroundings.²

There is one other use of imagery in *The Nigger* which will become a characteristic part of Conrad's method later: the recurring image or phrase which gains in effect (often ironic effect, as here) as it is repeated. The notion of his imminent death with which Wait cows the crew is ironically presented as a companion in a sequence of four images. Two instances will suffice:

... we hardly gave a thought to Jimmy and his bosom friend.³

Jimmy's hateful accomplice seemed to have blown with his impure breath undreamt-of subtleties into our hearts.⁴

The writer has taken care to vary the wording in the allusions so that there is nothing mechanical in the repetition.

1. A similar notion, but applied to the universe, seems to be evoked tentatively by two sea images given at the height of the storm:

'To leeward, on the edge of the horizon, black seas leaped up towards the glowing sun.' (p. 75)

'A crested roller broke with a loud hissing roar, and the sun, as if put out, disappeared.' (p. 75)

2. *Ibid.* p. 172.

3. *Ibid.* p. 53.

4. *Ibid.* p. 41; the other references are on pp. 43 and 73.

Heart of Darkness (1899) represents a crucial advance. In one stride Conrad accomplishes the development which marks his mature art: the supplementation of the narrative by imagery and other means whereby the tale is raised to the level of a parable. Kurtz is a symbol of the enlightenment and enterprise of Nineteenth Century Europe and of the depravity of certain phases of its colonial history; furthermore, he represents a moral susceptibility which distinguishes the gifted individual from the unimaginative bourgeois majority of the colonial establishment, so that he acts out a parable, enduring rather than modern, about moral knowledge.¹

The heightening is accomplished partly by the use of a narrator. The shadowy and faceless voice in *The Nigger* has grown, in *Youth* (1898) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899), into the character-narrator Marlow, who, like a Jamesian narrator, reflects the moral significance of a sequence of events in his past, a significance which is given the unity of a single point of view. Marlow, while on the whole retaining the chronological sequence of his experiences, is able by his discursive procedure to highlight, to connect, to ponder. A comparison of *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness* in respect of the dimension added by the narrator reveals at once how far the latter tale has advanced beyond the former in this respect. *Youth* is almost entirely a record of action, sensitively and convincingly rendered, with a minimum of reflection.² The narrator of *Heart of Darkness* mediates the whole complex fabric of reflection

narrator-
heightening

to parable

single
point of
view

chronology
&
analysis

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1. It was this aspect of the tale that T. S. Eliot borrowed in 'The Hollow Men', where the moral excesses of the 'lost wild souls' bring them a knowledge not attained by the 'hollow men'. There is, however, at least one moment in the tale when Kurtz is seen as both 'hollow' and 'wild'.
 2. The reflection simply consists of a single notion: that of youth, its splendid energy, its transience, its illusoriness.

and imagery which characterizes this tale.

The narrative of *Heart of Darkness* is presented in a straightforward manner, and the few chronological complications which do occur are deliberate. Marlow's explanation of how he gained his appointment as steamboat skipper includes a brief glimpse ahead¹ to his finding the remains of his predecessor in the bush. This digression is structurally appropriate in suggesting early in the tale the futility of the whole colonial enterprise. When the boat is later fogbound while surrounded by hostile natives, a digression occurs which expresses Marlow's thoughts about the cannibal crew, its lack of proper provisions, its inexplicable restraint.² This, too, has a thematic relevance, firstly to its immediate context in that it reveals an additional threat to the colonists, and then to a wider context in that the crew's restraint contrasts ironically with Kurtz's unbridled appetites. The latter relevance is, however, left to the reader to perceive, for Marlow as yet avoids explicitness, observing, 'The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.'³

The most notable digression occurs when Marlow's longing, while he travels upstream, to consult Kurtz, leads to a forward time shift in which Kurtz's voice, his 'Intended', his appearance, his pretensions, and his possession by the wilderness are explicitly discussed.⁴ It collocates ironically Marlow's longing

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 53 - 54.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 102 - 105.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 100.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 115 - 119

chronological

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explain
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lary)

to meet the man who will enlighten him, and his dismay at the real man. Inserted just before the actual meeting, the digression presents the first of a series of explicit comments on Kurtz which are woven into the later parts of the narrative to heighten it and point its meaning. There is a reference to 'the women' at the beginning of the digression which suitably illustrates this function, bringing together and clarifying the parts Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's 'Intended' play elsewhere in the tale:

Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it - completely. They - the women I mean - are out of it - should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse.¹

This comment articulates the meaning implicit in the final scene, where Marlow meets Kurtz's 'Intended'. The same is true of the digression as a whole. The reason why the digression occurs just ahead of Marlow's actual meeting with Kurtz appears to be to generalize the impression which the digression gives of Kurtz, extending its effect beyond its immediate context. Its explicitness contrasts with the gradual and more oblique manner in which Kurtz is presented by the narrative hereafter: first through the wonder-struck eyes of the Russian merchant, and then in symbolic detail as he is carried, an ivory skeleton gesturing to the natives, towards the boat.

Several briefer digressions providing further explicit comment on Kurtz's moral progress follow

1. *Ibid.* p. 115.

the above.¹ They reflect Marlow's deepening understanding of Kurtz without disarranging the sense of narrative movement in the tale. This sense is created by the suspense of such events as the natives' attack on the steamboat, Kurtz's mysterious disappearance from the boat, and the uncertainty about the natives' attitude to Kurtz's removal.

The sense of a narrative movement is strengthened by the suspense which attends Marlow's relations with Kurtz. Marlow at first regards Kurtz as merely the object of a rescue assignment, until the frequent mention of Kurtz's name arouses a mild interest in him.² Then, as Marlow becomes intrigued by the corruption all about him, he begins to look forward to meeting Kurtz as someone who will interpret the strange situation to him, and a note of desperation presently creeps into his longing when it is rumoured that Kurtz may already be dead.³

Marlow's account must be seen, then, as a skilful interweaving of explicit and implicit elements, where explicit comment is used to heighten the tale to the level of a parable to a point where it does not detract from it as a readable narrative containing a degree of suspense. A remark Conrad made in a letter to Elsie Hueffer suggests that he felt

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1. They occur when Marlow discovers the heads on the poles surrounding the station house, *ibid.* p. 131; when Marlow compels Kurtz to return to the boat, *ibid.* pp. 144-145; when Marlow acclaims Kurtz's faculty for self-judgment before he dies, *ibid.* p. 151.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 88.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 113.

uneasy about the explicit elements: 'What I distinctly admit is the fault of having made Kurtz too symbolic or rather symbolic at all. But the story being mainly a vehicle for conveying a batch of personal impressions I gave rein to my mental laziness and took the line of least resistance.'¹ Conrad is presumably referring to the explicit digressions discussed above and assuming that their effect might have been achieved by more oblique, and thus more 'artistic' means. Though Conrad, unlike his master Flaubert, did not avoid direct comment, the attribution of laziness is hardly just, considering how skilfully he has balanced the explicit and the oblique elements.

The most notable advance in the technique of *Heart of Darkness* occurs in the non-narrative area of imagery. It is the prominence of this element in the story that prompted Conrad's oft-quoted observation that, while the meaning of the yarns of ordinary seamen lies inside their tale, the meaning of Marlow's tale lies 'not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale ... in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.'² Conrad oversimplifies here, of course, for nowhere in his art does the ordinary 'seaman's yarn', the narrative, cease to play a vital and sustaining, skeletal rôle; but it is true that at its height, as in this tale, Conrad's art is richly complemented by non-narrative, 'poetic' elements.

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1. This extract from a letter is quoted in Baines, *op. cit.* p. 227, where the source is given as Aubry, G.J., *op. cit.*, letter of 3 December 1902; however, no such letter appears in this locus.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 48.

The chief poetic element, imagery, occurs in profusion. Some images, like that of the missing rivets, have a merely denotative value and are tied to the narrative. Others, like the hippo that strays into the Central Station at night and cannot be shot, or like the ivory that is accumulated by the pilgrims, or the patchwork dress of the Russian trader, have a connotative and symbolic value. Some of these belong to a single context where they are tied to the narrative, while others, like the stillness of the primeval forest, are interlinked and repetitive, and have an effect beyond their immediate context. Some images are single objects, while others constitute a whole event or situation, like the fog which besets the boat when the natives attack it, or like the shipping office in the sepulchral city, which functions as a kind of House of the Dead, its doors guarded by two *parcae*. All these images, however they arise in their context, are in varying degrees related to the wilderness, to the heart of which Marlow travels, and which constitutes the overarching and unifying image of the tale. It is characteristic of this prolific phase of Conrad's art that a few images are left uncertain and incomplete in their suggestiveness, as if the writer did not under the pressure of the creative process have time to work them all fully into the fabric of the tale.¹

It is not the profusion of images that is the remarkable achievement of this tale, but the extent to which they are fused and project a single overarching image - the wilderness - in terms of which the tale presents its parabolic truth. The accomplishment of this fusion is best illustrated by distinguishing a number of threads of imagery in the fabric of the wilderness.

1. Instances are given below on pp. 28-29 and 30-31.

It is firstly a place of death characterized by the smell of rotting mud banks¹ and rotting hippo meat, sick and dying savages and company agents; it is a 'grove of death'² and an 'overheated catacomb'³ where Kurtz is seen as a 'disinterred body',⁴ an 'animated image of death carved out of old ivory';⁵ a place to which the 'sepulchral city'⁶ in Europe serves as a kind of forecourt.

It is given an otherworldly character by its population of shades and phantoms; it is a 'tenebrous land'⁷ where Marlow has a sense of being held captive by a spell,⁸ where the chanting and drumbeat have a 'strangely narcotic effect on my half-awake senses.'⁹ This character merges with its character as a place of moral depravity, where Marlow feels he 'had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno',¹⁰ a place of horned shapes,¹¹ 'weird incantations',¹² 'monstrous passions',¹³ of 'unspeakable rites',¹⁴ of possession;¹⁵ whose river seems like an 'infernal stream'.¹⁶

It is evoked as a place of great antiquity. The journey up the river is 'like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world';¹⁷ its earth is the 'mould of primeval earth';¹⁸ its trees are

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1. *Ibid.* p. 81
 2. *Ibid.* p. 70
 3. *Ibid.* p. 62
 4. *Ibid.* p. 115
 5. *Ibid.* p. 134
 6. *Ibid.* pp. 78, 152
 7. *Ibid.* p. 147
 8. *Ibid.* p. 95
 9. *Ibid.* p. 141
 10. *Ibid.* p. 66
 11. *Ibid.* p. 143
 12. *Ibid.* p. 144
 13. *Ibid.* p. 144
 14. *Ibid.* p. 118
 15. *Ibid.* p. 116
 16. *Ibid.* p. 160
 17. *Ibid.* p. 92
 18. *Ibid.* p. 147

'secular'¹ or centuries old; the river is disturbed by distant splashes and snorts suggestive of an ichthyosaurus.² And having experienced the antiquity of the Congo, Marlow sees in the mind's eye the same primitive darkness beneath the surface of modern Europe: he sees the Thames in Roman times, when it was also 'one of the dark places of the earth'.³

The wilderness is characterized by imagery of darkness. The coastline of Africa is 'so dark green as to be almost black';⁴ the 'black shapes' in the grove of death lie in 'greenish gloom';⁵ it is in a dark blue darkness that Kurtz escapes from the boat and is brought back by Marlow⁶ - and so forth. This imagery extends, as in a sense the wilderness itself does, beyond the Congo, but it is probably the most distinctive feature of the wilderness there. Darkness and light will become the most frequent image in Conrad's later works. In this tale his use of it, as in the above three instances, is usually sporadic, though there are two instances when it is sustained through a scene in the manner that will be seen in some of the major novels. One instance will suffice as an illustration.

When Marlow arrives at the inner station and surveys the scene from the boat and sees and hears something of Kurtz's savage practices, the sun is setting and the station lies in gloom, while the banks, the river and the boat 'glittered in a still and dazzling splendour, with a murky and overshadowed bend above

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1. *Ibid.* p. 148.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 86.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 48.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 60.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 66.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 142

and below.'¹ Kurtz, carried on a litter and controlling the emerging crowd of savages, is seen in the shadow area of the station. When Kurtz has been brought on board, some splendid savages, including the statuesque woman, appear on the sunlit bank, so that the last rays of the sun pick out details of tall spears, fantastic headdresses and glittering ornaments. At the moment when the woman sorrowfully throws her arms to the sky, 'the swift shadows darted out of the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer in a shadowy embrace.'² The light and darkness imagery is used with a mature skill to dramatize the scene, giving it an almost staged quality, and also to imply moral distinctions between Kurtz and the new arrivals, and again between Kurtz and his savage worshippers; it also suggests a progression towards darkness in the scene and in the tale as a whole.³

The alternation of the visual use of light imagery with its metaphoric use is less satisfactory; an

1. *Ibid.* p. 133.

2. *Ibid.* p. 136.

3. The other instance of light imagery sustained through a scene is the scene of Marlow's visit to Kurtz's 'Intended' at the end of the tale; it is of interest in that the meaning of the scene is conveyed almost entirely through imagery. The meaning, the girl's tenacious but illusory faith in Kurtz which Marlow both admires - wishes to preserve - and rejects, echoes Marlow's earlier statement that the women's world should be preserved lest the men's deteriorate. The interview occurs in the ebbing light of dusk which causes the girl's hair to glow like gold; Marlow falls silent before her faith: 'that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness'. *Ibid.* p.159.

image is less effective as a symbol if it has been used as a simile or metaphor a page or so earlier. For instance:

His (Kurtz's) was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines.¹

There is finally the recurring image of stillness. It is contrasted in Marlow's mind with Kurtz's resonant voice and with the 'one immense jabber' of all the voices of the colonial venture, and it waits patiently for 'the passing of the fantastic invasion.'² On one occasion the stillness is brooding and menacing;³ on another it is felt to be unnatural and trance-like⁴ and connected with the otherworldly and trance-like connotations already mentioned.

These various threads in the fabric of the imagery illustrate its wealth and pervasiveness in the story. It is not surprising to find in so prolific a use of imagery one image whose effect is incompletely realised. The vivid image of grass growing through the ribs of Fresleven's skeleton⁵ is followed on the next page by Marlow's mention, when visiting the sepulchral city, of grass sprouting between the flagstones.⁶ The connection may seem fanciful

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1. *Ibid.* p. 149. Another example occurs at the end of footnote 3 on the previous page.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 92.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 93.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 101.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 54.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 55.

until the reader encounters the strange image of two pilgrims at the Central Station 'tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade.'¹ These three images seem to echo the idea made explicit elsewhere of the wilderness disregarding or trying to repel man's vain enterprise, but their suggestion is too slight to be effective.

It is not only images which are charged with meaning through repetition in a variety of contexts; there is also the device of charging the meaning of a situation by repeating it. The incident of the gunboat futilely shelling the bush, 'firing into a continent',² is echoed by the pilgrims on the river boat 'simply squirting lead into (the) bush'³ to counter an attack more effectively checked by the use of the boat's whistle; it is echoed again when the pilgrims have 'their little fun' firing at the savages on the bank who are watching Kurtz's removal.⁴

All the elements of Conrad's art but the purely narrative and the directly explicit may be charged with suggestiveness: images, characters, situations - all may in various degrees represent an idea greater

1. *Ibid.* p. 92; there are further references to grass, not in themselves suggestive, on pp. 81, 121, 133, 142.
2. *Ibid.* p. 62.
3. *Ibid.* p. 110.
4. *Ibid.* p. 147. Perhaps the most striking illustration that could be given from all the novels of a situation functioning as a symbol is the episode of the pilgrim ship colliding with an underwater derelict in *Lord Jim*: it symbolizes Jim's grievous encounter with an unseen, unacknowledged but disastrous element in his own nature.

than themselves. In this context it seems useful to use the terms 'suggestive image' and 'symbol' to distinguish respectively a lesser and a greater degree of completeness with which an idea is obliquely conveyed, and they will be so used hereafter. For instance, stillness or darkness is an image of the wilderness, while the magnificent native woman is used as a symbol of it.

Accordingly, the following symbols may be indicated in *Heart of Darkness*: the ivory which is the main object of the entire colonial enterprise; the gorgeous woman of the jungle; the two knitting women who guard the 'door of darkness' and who figure as the *parcae*; the painting, which Kurtz has left behind in the Central Station,¹ of a woman 'draped and blindfolded, carrying a torch'. Symbolic also are some broader features of the tale: the river as a means of crossing over and forgetfulness; the journey as a quest; Kurtz as a type of Western Modern Man, and of man confronting good and evil; and the wilderness as the type of the moral universe wherein man is judged. These symbols play an important part in giving the story the character of a parable.

Perhaps an alertness to the use of images and symbols in the story is more useful than precise classification. One symbol which repays special attention is the ivory. When Marlow mentions that the natives have a habit of burying ivory, and that

1. *Ibid.* p. 79. Of course, where Marlow reflects explicitly upon the meaning of these, as he does in the case of the ivory and of the savage woman, they cease strictly speaking to be symbols.

the pilgrims call this 'fossil' ivory,¹ it is not clear what the point of the observation is. But it is given some point when Marlow has his first view of Kurtz. Marlow notes his thin arms, his mobile lower jaw, his bony head, his rib-cage, and likens him to 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory.'² Conrad evidently tries to extend the connotation of greed, which ivory already has in the story, to include by way of its similarity to bone a connotation of death: skeletal, buried death. Ivory thus acquires a compounded connotation of 'deadly greed' or 'greed-unto-death'. This complex meaning is not obvious, and Conrad might well have revised the passage if he had worked longer on the tale, as he might have revised the grass images noted earlier. It is a pointer to how prolific of non-narrative means Conrad's art at this point was.

Heart of Darkness is unique in the Conrad canon because of the phantasmagoric density of its imagery. It is a matter not merely of the novelist's being more lavish of his imagery here than he is in some later works, but that he has succeeded here in linking and weaving the images together into a single fabric to a degree that he will not find possible to do again in the larger major works which follow - the loose threads noted above notwithstanding.

What needs finally to be noted of this tale is the part which it plays in the development of

1. *Ibid.* p. 115-116.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 133-134.

Conrad's technique. Its technical advance lies in the new rôle which the non-narrative means play in the whole. They now have a structural, not a peripheral rôle. The narrative retains its primary function of detailing the story of a river journey and of Marlow's progressive understanding of Kurtz and his situation. But the non-narrative means raise the meaning of the narrative to a more essential level of truth; in other words, they help to transform the story into a parable. It is this counterpointing of narrative and non-narrative elements which constitutes Conrad's characteristic technique, as will be seen in the following chapters. That a narrator's mind has been used to give coherence to the whole also represents a technical advance at this point, but this is not an essential element in Conrad's characteristic technique.

CHAPTER THREE

LORD JIM

The first impression of *Lord Jim* is one of competence: the sheer excellence with which the novel is managed suggests a novelist who knows exactly where he is going. He provides a precise portrait of Jim through a succession of views of his life, each scaled to the exact degree of its importance, its meaning brought out by various oblique means like suggestive images, symbols, rearranged chronology, reiterated phrases, as well as by the direct, illuminating comments of the perceptive and sympathetic narrator. It is only on further examination that questions arise about the reader's judgment of Jim; essentially, the question whether Jim was guilty. Paradoxically, the well-managed construction yields only glimpses of an answer to this question 'through rents in a mist', as Marlow puts it.

The interest of the narrative material and of the presentation are subordinated to Conrad's interest in this question. The novel is a Jamesian exploration of Jim's situation, in which every significance is extracted and weighed, every argument pro and con in Jim's complex moral situation recorded. The splendid material of the novel is thus made to subserve a kind of larger judicial inquiry. Douglas Hewitt expresses the dissatisfaction many critics have felt about the novel thus: 'We remain at the end, I believe, uncertain as to what our verdict on Jim is meant to be.'¹ The ambiguity is perhaps best exemplified by looking at the final episode. Jim's refusal to carry the fight to Brown, even after the attack on Dain Waris's camp, can be regarded as cowardice, the cowardice Jim showed earlier in the

1. Douglas Hewitt, *op. cit.*, Third Ed., p. 34.

Patna episode aroused again in the confrontation with Brown across the creek, which leads him now to cast off Jewel and to embrace a kind of suicide. On the other hand Jim's refusal to fight may be regarded as consistent with a personal rehabilitation, involving the appalling destruction of his achievement in Patusan and his relationship with Jewel but not diminishing his stature,¹ which is sealed by his ability to face the death he could not face in the *Patna* episode.² The ambiguity is intended. Conrad has written the book to a formula of holding a deliberate balance between Jim's guilt and his 'innocence', or to put it differently, he records Jim's guilt and then adduces arguments which extenuate or complement the verdict of the court of inquiry, as if to see if it may be undone.³

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1. 'the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success!' *Lord Jim*, Collected Edition, Dent, 1946, p. 306.
 2. The latter view is held by Baines, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
 3. The debate which the novel presents is an artistic not a biographical one, yet it is of interest to remember a probable biographical reason for Conrad's interest in the debate. The tragedies of Conrad's early life were closely related to his father's visionary and impractical enthusiasms, and Thaddeus Bobrowski, in whose eyes the young Conrad seemed to have inherited this quality, never tired of urging a sense of responsibility in his letters to his young nephew. Such an explanation is not inconsistent with the philosophic view expressed by Tony Tanner that Conrad's ambiguous view of Jim is part of an 'epistemological scepticism in which the whole truth can never be known': Tony Tanner: *Lord Jim*, Studies in English Literature, Edward Arnold, 1963, p. 11.

If *Lord Jim* could simply be read as the story of a character flawed by its romantic temperament, everything would fall into place, and the novel would perhaps be enhanced by its greater clarity. But Conrad's formula does not allow this; the romantic, self-regarding impulse at the heart of all Jim's endeavours is not to be finally judged - as Stein refuses to judge it in his words: 'I understand very well. He is romantic¹ ... And that is very bad ... Very good, too'.² Marlow insists on the difficulty of gaining a clear view of Jim, on the inadequacy of explanations, on the extenuating circumstances, on Jim's disinterestedness and good intentions in Patusan, as well as on Jim's egoism and self-absorption at other times, so that the reader is left with Marlow's enigma:

For me that white figure in the stillness
of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart
of a vast enigma.³

This view of Jim is of course Marlow's view, and the question arises whether the reader may not reach behind Marlow to form his own judgment, and whether Conrad has not concealed any hints and pointers in the novel which enable the reader to do so. It is true that there are a few ironic images recorded by Marlow of whose irony he is unaware. But such instances are rare,⁴ and the novel is not layered with different levels of meaning. The authorial technique which accompanies Marlowe's

1. *Lord Jim*, p. 155.

2. *Ibid.* p. 158.

3. *Ibid.* p. 247.

4. An instance is given below, p. 54, in the quotation beginning, 'The sun ... had sunk behind the forest ...'

uncertain and searching point of view is appropriate in its flexibility and resourcefulness. It may even be described as exuberant, and in places it lacks consistency a little - a feature which will not be found in the later major novels.

The technique is characterized by Marlow's use of the summary method appropriate to the narrator who varies his narrative method from the mere mention of an event to the building of a scene, depending on the emphasis he wishes to give, and always interspersing his thoughts, comments, evaluations, so that even his fuller scenes stop short of full dramatization. The fully dramatized scene of the realist novel is not found in *Lord Jim*, so that a plan of the novel like the following¹ gives a somewhat misleading impression of how it is built up:

The *Patna* collides with a derelict (Ch. 3)
 The inquiry: Marlow assumes the narrative
 (Chs 4, 5)
 Jim tells Marlow his story in the Malabar
 Hotel (Chs 7 - 12)
 The French Naval Officer's view of Jim (shift)
 (Chs 12, 13)
 The court's verdict. Chester's view of Jim (Ch.14)
 Jim's inner crisis in Marlow's hotel room
 (Chs 15 - 19)
 Jim's frequent changes of place of employment
 as a water clerk (Chs 18, 19)
 Marlow's visit to Stein; Stein's view of
 Jim (Chs 20, 21)
 Jim's story to Marlow of his arrival in
 Patusan (Ch 25)
 Jim makes peace in Patusan by defeating Sherif
 Ali (Chs 26, 27)
 The attempt on Jim's life (Chs 30-32)
 Brown's arrival in Patusan, the confrontation
 across the creek (Chs 38-42)
 Jim's abandonment of Jewel and his death (Ch.45)

1. A fuller résumé of the novel is provided in an appendix to this study.

None of the above is a fully dramatized event, though two items receive the weighted attention of a dramatized event: the pilgrim ship episode, and Brown's attack on Patusan. These two episodes constitute the crises around which the novel is constructed, with three lesser episodes - the inquiry, Jim's inner struggle in Marlow's hotel room, and Stein's conclusion about Jim - functioning as linking episodes. It is only in the simplification of retrospection that these look like events; when examined they are seen to be rendered as it were by a method of explosion, by a variety of part-narratives and personal accounts sometimes given out of chronological order, having to be reassembled by the reader. There are furthermore Marlow's commentary and conversational discursiveness. This narrative method calling for assembly by an alert reader is the chief characteristic of the novel. An examination of a few representative parts will serve to illustrate the method.

The change of method at the end of Chapter Four from objective narration to the use of a narrator involves problems which clearly did not daunt Conrad. The inquiry is of course a suitable moment to introduce Marlow as it is a convenient place for Marlow to become engrossed in Jim's case. But the change of method from the view of an omniscient author able to give both an external and an internal portrayal of Jim, to the strictly external view of a narrator bound by limitations of space and time, who has to go to great lengths to obtain his information, calls for unusual resourcefulness. Conrad succeeds in making the transition quite inconspicuous, but it is clear that he gave it very careful attention.

A neat link is provided by Jim's reflection during the inquiry that 'speech was of no use to him any longer'¹ followed a few lines further on by Marlow's readiness 'many times ... to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.'² The transition is assisted further by its placement at the inquiry and by the direction of the last moments of the objective method upon Jim's thoughts there, where it is natural for Marlow, who is interested in what Jim thinks, to pick up the thread. The transition is assisted also by Marlow's playful fancy about a familiar devil which, he suggests, puts him unwillingly in the way of other people's confidences.³ That Conrad is fully competent to work within the limitations of the time-and-place-bound narrator's point of view is at once evident from the narrative coup of the yellow cur incident. By means of this device of a remark made about a dog which Jim thinks was directed at him, he and Marlow are thrown into conversation and Jim's charged state of mind is at the same time strikingly revealed.⁴

A notable device is the heightening of interest by the withholding of information, among other means by the time shift. The chief instance in the novel occurs when the scene at the end of Chapter Three shifts from the deck of the *Patna* immediately after the collision to the inquiry 'a month or so afterwards'.⁵ The reader is hereby kept in suspense as to what happened to the *Patna* - a suspense cleared up by deliberate stages so that the reader's close attention at every point is ensured.⁶ The suspense

1. *Ibid.* p. 24.

2. *Ibid.* p. 24.

3. *Ibid.* p. 26.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 52 - 55.

5. *Ibid.* p. 20; p. 21.

6. The mystery is not finally cleared up until ...

begins even before the impact, for the *Patna* has been travelling under an 'invincible aspect of peace',¹ so that no-one but the reader sees 'the shadow of the coming event'.² The mysterious way in which the impact occurs³ adds to the impression, already hinted, of a treacherously insecure universe. The next hint is Marlow's mention of a mysterious cable from Aden containing a 'naked and ugly' fact which set the 'whole waterside' talking.⁴ Then the officers of the *Patna* arrive at the harbour, the captain seeks to make a statement at the harbour office, and he has a row with the Master Attendant. Another hint comes when Marlow, describing his first sight of Jim, observes mysteriously that Jim had no business to look so self-assured.⁵ There is a further hint of an offence when Marlow philosophizes in general terms, in his usual discursive manner, of the hidden weakness to which no-one is immune, and then adds more pointedly:

I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes - and, by Jove! - it wouldn't have been safe! There are depths of horror in that thought.⁶

The mystery of what happened is compounded by Captain Brierly's suicide, disclosed by a forward time-shift, and then by a hint about Jim's situation contained in Brierly's last conversation with Marlow: the fact that Brierly has lost confidence in the trustworthi-

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1. *Ibid.* p. 15.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 14.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 19, 20.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 27.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 30.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 34.

ness of his profession.¹

The reader is meant to gain some reassurance in his prolonged disorientation from the fact that Marlow's view, too, is imperfect: Marlow remarks, 'The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through shifting rents in a thick fog'.² Marlow now encourages Jim to tell what transpired on the deck of the *Patna* while they dine at the Malabar Hotel. From Marlow's discursive report and observations the reader learns that the officers of the *Patna* were picked up by a steamer;³ that Jim did not stick to the ship;⁴ that the bulging bulkhead convinced Jim that the ship would sink at any moment;⁵ that the situation of 'Eight hundred people and seven boats - and no time!⁶ left him without choice; and that he feared what would happen on deck once the pilgrims grasped their situation.⁷ As a full disclosure of what Jim did approaches, he is allowed to speak for himself, and his report becomes more circumstantial: the method approaches that of the dramatized scene. The full significance of Jim's

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1. The story of Brierly's suicide suggests that he sees in Jim's case and in himself a betrayal of professional trustworthiness, that his suicide is a sentence on his profession. This becomes clear in retrospect; the immediate effect is to suggest something disquieting about Jim's case. (*Ibid.* pp. 42 - 51)
 2. *Ibid.* p. 56
 3. *Ibid.* p. 60.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 62.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 63.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 64.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 63

leap is not disclosed, however, for another four chapters, until the reader learns that the *Patna* did not sink.¹ This deferral highlights Jim's sensitiveness in avoiding mention until now of a point he has known throughout the conversation; his guilt is emphasized both by the event itself and by his reluctance to reveal it.

This technical procedure is most successful, for while Marlow listens to Jim at the Malabar Hotel, the reader is able to follow both the events and the emotion - the mental involutions of guilt, the romantic distortions - which accompany Jim's narration. The method enables Conrad to throw every light on Jim and to highlight some strongly extenuating evidence. Two illustrations will suffice. Romantic distortion is evident in the fact that he 'had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain',² viz an opportunity for heroic performance; and Marlow comments on Jim's rapt expression at this point: 'It was an ecstatic smile that your faces - or mine either - will never wear, my dear boys.'³ A few pages later Jim appears virtually blameless when he persuades Marlow (and the reader) that he would have done precisely what Jim did: no-one would single-handed have made a move to shore up the rotten bulkhead, or would have started a panic among the eight hundred pilgrims. Marlow is sufficiently startled to exclaim

1. *Ibid.* p. 98.

2. *Ibid.* p. 61.

3. *Ibid.* p. 62. It is noteworthy that Jim is not here for Marlow 'one of us'.

I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision.¹

Apart from providing a vivid rendering of Jim, the technique also ensures that the reader is tied to Marlow's incomplete understanding, so that the reader's judgment of Jim shall remain an open question. From this incompleteness of judgment Conrad extracts a technical interest. The face-to-face arrangement of the scene might have allowed a directness of portrayal, but Conrad prefers an indirectness whereby the reader has to guess at Jim's original state of mind on deck from the few clues that are allowed to filter through.² Jim's capacity for self-deception induced a state of abstraction which made him unaware of his moving towards the boat and of jumping into it until after he had jumped. It made him insist on the one hand on his difference from the other officers,³ and on the other on their influence over him in compelling him to jump.⁴ Jim saw his error as a mere lack of readiness, and then proceeded to prove his readiness to himself by holding a piece of wood for six hours in an attitude of defensive alertness.⁵ The reader, like Marlow, does indeed see Jim through the rents in a thick fog.

Marlow's view of Jim during these conversations is supplemented by the views of a number of commentators: Brierly, the French naval officer, Little Bob Stanton, Chester, Stein, and two of Jim's employers for whom he worked as water clerk. Their comments create an

1. *Ibid.* p. 69.

2. The sheer extension of this conversation-episode, from Ch. 7 to Ch. 12, is unique in the novel.

3. *Ibid.* p. 90.

4. *Ibid.* p. 91.

5. *Ibid.* p. 90.

impression of fresh light being thrown on the subject, but they do not in fact dispel the fog or bring the reader nearer to a final judgment. But they illustrate the novelist's creative power, and the way they are deployed shows great technical resourcefulness. Though they all belong to the middle section which concerns the inquiry, the novelist avoids in their presentation any impression of a mechanical procession. Brierly's suicide with its implied comment on Jim's case is moved by a time shift away from the other commentators to a point before the inquiry. The French naval officer's 'professional opinion', which is inserted by a time shift to a point immediately after the inquiry (it really occurs three years later) is more significant in its placement than it seems. His comment 'when the honour is gone ... I can offer no opinion'¹ seems negative, but it implies that with his reputation lost Jim is in uncharted territory, and that his only recourse is to make a fresh start in new surroundings, rather than by painfully enduring the inquiry to try to demonstrate a courage that has become irrelevant. The French officer's opinion thus points the way ahead for Jim. The brief digression about Little Bob Stanton, which follows immediately,² varies the formula of comment by providing a wholly unstated and oblique opinion: that a courage which leads to fruitless self-sacrifice is as valueless as cowardice. Its application is a little ambiguous, for it can be taken to apply either to Jim's leap into the boat, or - more likely in the context - to Jim's dogged endurance of the inquiry. Chester's comment, that Jim is 'no good' if he is 'taking it to heart,'³ is appropriately placed at the end of the inquiry. It contrasts with the previous opinions

1. *Ibid.* p. 109.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 109 - 110.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 122.

in that it represents the outlook of the 'stragglers,' of that unscrupulous world in the East to which the cancellation of his officer's certificate now exposes Jim.

Stein is given more prominence than the other commentators, both by the central position and by the length of the episode devoted to him, so that the reader may well be surprised at how brief his actual comment is - though it proves reverberative. The explicit part of Stein's comment, that Jim is romantic, merely confirms what was already clear, so that Marlow presently remarks, 'Even Stein could say no more than that he (Jim) was romantic.'¹ There is an implicit comment contained in Stein's life, however, which sheds rather more light. Stein has achieved a balance between the dreamer and the man of action. This is the point of the narrative of how Stein's presence of mind extricated him from an ambush and at that very moment showed him, as if as a reward, a rare butterfly.² It is this presence of mind, this will to manage a difficult situation, that Jim lacks. This episode, which incidentally provides a fine portrait of Stein, leaves Marlow with a sense that it has not advanced his understanding of Jim on the eve of his retirement to England,³ but it does also provide the symbol of the beetles and the butterflies, and helps the action forward by providing Jim with a place where he may be safely 'buried'. It is indeed difficult to see how the Stein episode could have contributed more, since it shows Jim's romantic trait to be a fate he cannot throw off.

1. *Ibid.* p. 164.

2. *Ibid.* p. 153 - 4.

3. Marlow remarks: 'I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly - not even to this day'. p. 162.

Before turning to the handling of the narrative in the last part of the novel, further note should be taken of Conrad's manner of characterization in the middle chapters, and especially of his use of an oblique rendering of Jim. The most noteworthy instance is the episode¹ in which Jim wrestles with the thought of suicide in Marlow's hotel room after the verdict. A brief survey will suffice, as the episode will be considered again in the section on imagery below. Marlow's commentary is reduced so that he becomes an observer of signs and sensations. No words are spoken in the heavily charged atmosphere of the room until the crisis has passed. Jim's inner crisis is expressed in terms of a thunderstorm, with its violent sounds and its play of light and dark, and in terms of his action of stepping out onto the verandah to face the storm and his return to the room. The reader has to divine the character's obscure state of mind by reading signs and pointers on the surface. Conrad characteristically resorts to an oblique method to render the most crucial and most disquieting moment in his protagonist's career. Particularly characteristic is the breaking of the suspense just before the climax to give the reader a glimpse ahead: a view of Jim's later 'Arcadian happiness'² in Patusan. Characteristically oblique, again, is the manner in which Jim's state of mind is indicated during his series of engagements and resignations as water clerk. In the two instances which the novelist has detailed, the narrative stress falls not directly on Jim's motives, but on his employers' reaction to Jim: on their satisfaction at his zeal and competence, and on their disbelief and dismay when he vanishes.

1. *Ibid.* Chs 15 - 17.

2. *Ibid.* p. 129.

Egström's final remark, when the truth about Jim dawns on him, has likewise an oblique and prophetic quality: 'I told him the earth wouldn't be big enough to hold his caper.'¹

The Patusan section with its larger narrative element characteristically curtails its suspense and subordinates its narrative element to mood. In the early pages of the section an impression is built up both of Jim's perils and his achievements to come.² The latter impression becomes the dominant one in the middle chapters of the section, until it gives way to an ominous mood which anticipates Brown's irruption. This dominance of narrative by mood is accomplished by Marlow's discursive manner which allows him to look ahead and to generalize, by a deliberate rearrangement of the chronological order, and by the use of the non-narrative means to be considered in the section on imagery below. Conrad knows exactly how far he can take the process of complicating the narrative basis of the novel without destroying it.

The whole narrative of Jim's arrival in Patusan is provided retrospectively by Marlow after being told it by Jim during his visit to Patusan two years later.³ This means that despite the perils Jim endured, he is well two years later and Patusan is safe enough to visit. And when Marlow's narrative

1. *Ibid.* p. 143.

2. For instance, 'He had regulated so many things in Patusan', *ibid.* p. 162; 'to Jim's success there were no externals', *ibid.* p. 166; 'Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds.' *ibid.* p. 168.

3. *Ibid.* p. 178 ff.

of Jim's arrival¹ reaches the crucial moment of his arrest by the Rajah's men,² the suspense is dispelled by an interruption depicting Jim proudly showing Marlow the settlement (bathed in moonlight), to which he has brought security.³ The mood here established is not merely Jim's mood of a 'certitude of rehabilitation,' however, for this merges with an overriding sense of mystery which gave the earlier hints of peril - the alligator-infested river, the empty revolver, the sudden imprisonment in the stockade - an ominous resonance. The sense of mystery is established by the moonlight:

It is ... misleading and confusing ... It robs all forms of matter - which, after all, is our domain - of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone.⁴

The moonlight is an image of Jim's illusory dream-world, and, it may be interjected, provides quite as firm a comment on Jim as the Stein episode did, and has the authority of the novelist.

With the mood of Jim's optimism balanced by a deeper apprehension established, the narrative proceeds with Jim's fortunes. These show a steady rise. There are Jim's two spectacular leaps - out of the stockade, and across the creek - and the successful storming of Sherif Ali's camp, which is singled out for narrative treatment. The pattern is again of a preliminary image establishing the mood and significance of an event before it is narrated. Marlow, visiting the site of the battle with Jim, sees him elevated against the sky:

1. *Ibid.* p. 178 ff.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 180.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 180 - 182.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 180 - 181

And there I was with him, high in the sunshine on the top of that historic hill of his ... He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that had emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic.¹

And the narrative of the battle is interrupted just before its climax by the story of the dispute over the brass pots,² to illustrate the high regard he won by the subsequent victory. Such dislocations and interruptions are not simply evidence of an idiosyncratic discursive manner on Marlow's part, but reflect Conrad's characteristic fictional procedure.³

Another facet of Jim's success is his relationship with Jewel. Her 'white form' and character are convincingly rendered in a few sentences of direct description,⁴ supplemented by the oblique means of the rumour current along the coast that Jim had acquired a priceless emerald which he concealed on the person of a woman. The tale is a delightful instance of Conrad's use of oblique, poetic methods; the fact that it has an explicit moral appended to it is also a sign of Conrad's incomplete technical experience: referring to the 'deep hidden truthfulness' of the rumour, Marlow remarks: 'Romance had singled Jim for its own - and that was the true part of the story, which otherwise was all wrong.'⁵

1. *Ibid.* p. 194.

2. *Ibid.* p. 196.

3. Here lies the reason why the reader who is bent on a more direct gratification turns away from Conrad.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 203, 206.

5. *Ibid.* p. 206.

Jewel's introduction is prefaced by an image which establishes the mood and the destiny of Jim's relationship with her: the grave of Jewel's mother, given six lines of description,¹ followed by a discussion of the tragedy of abandoned womanhood which, characteristically of Marlow's manner and of Conrad's as yet imperfect technique, runs to two pages.² Conrad will at his best maintain a better balance between 'showing' and 'telling'.

The episode of the attempt on Jim's life, frustrated by Jewel, is narrated at this point, instead of before the battle where it belongs, because it belongs thematically with the love material (it is of course also part of the story of Jim's success, with which it here remains). The episode is a remarkable feat of characterization in that it provides expression for Jewel's devotion not in terms of emotion but of action and dramatic gesture. She wields a bright torch in the night to save her lover from Sherif Ali's murderers, and her actions with the torch mark the beginning, middle and end of the episode precisely. There is first the image of her face brightly lit and wreathed in smoke above Jim as she wakes him;³ then there is the statuesque image of her arm thrust through the window of the storehouse, holding the torch;⁴ and thirdly there is her act of flinging the burning torch with a wide arc into the river after Jim has dealt with his enemies⁵ - this last gesture, the most significant, being left unexplained until she later tells Marlow that:

1. *Ibid.* p. 202.
2. *Ibid.* pp. 202 - 203.
3. *Ibid.* p. 217.
4. *Ibid.* p. 220.
5. *Ibid.* p. 222.

She had flung the torch in the water
because he was looking at her so.
There was too much light ...¹

The gesture implies her inner conflict, her desire to have Jim to herself even while urging him to live elsewhere for safety's sake, and she throws the torch away because she cannot bear Jim's grateful and admiring glance. Conrad in these three gestures has found an oblique and economical means of rendering her, and has also effectively modulated the dramatic pattern of the episode. There is nothing of the inexperienced craftsman here; this is Conrad's art at its height.

The highwater mark of Jim's fortunes in Patusan is clearly marked in time, *viz* Marlow's last day in Patusan - two years after Jim's arrival there. It is an inward state rather than an outward event, and is marked by Jim's saying, 'I am satisfied ... nearly ... I've done a thing or two for them, but this (*i.e.* his sense of achievement) is what they have done for me.'² But the light imagery of the scene points ahead, compounding the mood by adding suggestions of both lateness and illusoriness:

The sun ... 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.³

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1. *Ibid.* p. 227.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 224.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 224.

The changing mood is marked more dramatically by Jewel's nameless apprehension about Jim at this point. It is worth pausing at her extended conversation with Marlow¹ because Conrad's preference for obliquity leads here to a degree of obscurity. The river which they overlook in the dusk is 'as black as Styx'.² She struggles to understand her own disquiet, seeming at first troubled about Jim's safety and wanting him to leave the house in which she and Cornelius live. But then the contrary fear emerges that Jim, like her father, will one day faithlessly return to his country of origin.³ She flatly rejects Marlow's staunch, even fierce⁴ assertion that Jim will not return there because 'he is not good enough',⁵ leaving Marlow with the sense of having wrestled with a spectre which has thrown him and slipped from his grasp.⁶ This wholly negative ending to the conversation leaves the reader who is armed with hindsight with the perception that the spectre could not be mastered because Jewel's intuition had revealed it to her as identical to Jim's 'eastern bride'; she surmises correctly that Jim's first loyalty is to his own dream. The most disquieting truths in Conrad's novels are characteristically conveyed by oblique means.

The ominous mood is now deepened for Marlow by the rising moon,⁷ whose light has again for him a

1. *Ibid.* pp. 225 - 234.

2. *Ibid.* p. 229.

3. *Ibid.* p. 230.

4. The word is used of Marlow's defence on p. 233.

5. *Ibid.* p. 234.

6. 'How do you shoot a spectre through the heart...? It is an enterprise you rush into while you dream, and are glad to make your escape with wet hair and every limb shaking.' *Ibid.* p. 232.

7. *Ibid.* p. 236.

connotation of delusion, to which is added one of strangeness, of a world of death. It is brought into clear focus at Marlow's parting from Jim, when the people of Patusan seem to Marlow to 'exist as if under an enchanter's wand.'¹ As they are being rowed downstream, Marlow feels himself gradually released from a sense of being enchanted, and he is able to identify the enchanter:

... at the bend it was as if a great hand far away had lifted a heavy curtain ... 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 freedom. 'This is glorious!' I cried, and then looked at the sinner by my side. He sat with his head sunk on his breast and said 'Yes,' without raising his eyes, as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offing the reproach of his romantic conscience.²

This is perhaps the nearest approach to a final comment on Jim from Marlow and Conrad.

The final episode is elaborately constructed, even for Conrad. Marlow's absence from the scene, balancing his absence from the pilgrim ship episode, enables him to remain the detached observer. A sense of separation is suggested also in the changed technique, the assemblage of reports from various participants in the action. There is furthermore a stylized effect in the provision of preliminary reports from the three eye-witnesses. Brown exclaims contemptuously: 'He had me there - but he hadn't devil enough in him to make an end of me';³ Tamb'Itam

1. *Ibid.* p. 243.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 244.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 253.

cannot understand why '(he) would not fight';¹ Jewel is roused to a fury because 'He went away from me ... as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep'.² These preliminary hints are a little uncertain in their effect: they both remove suspense by touching on the outcome, and create it by their mysteriousness:³ they certainly create, together with other formal features of the final episode, a stylized effect which controls its dramatic quality. Equally mysterious and tantalizing is Marlow's own preliminary remark which he places ahead of the aforementioned characters' comments, and which a more traditional novelist would have placed at the end of the episode: 'there is to my mind a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it ... The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword.'⁴

The full narrative treatment of the episode which now follows is reinforced by a time-scheme, as Conrad does elsewhere in the narration of a crisis:⁵ Brown's long-boat entered Patusan reach 'early one afternoon';⁶ his men entrenched themselves by the creek by nightfall;⁷ at eleven that evening a council meeting was held in Jim's absence;⁸ once during the night and three times the next morning Kassim negotiated with

1. *Ibid.* pp. 254-5.

2. *Ibid.* p. 256.

3. It is an experimental effect which is not repeated in later works.

4. *Ibid.* p. 252. Marlow means that Jim has wilfully subordinated the game of Patusan's politics to his personal vision, and has discovered that he has overlooked some fearful rules of the game.

5. But not in *Lord Jim*: the *Patna* episode is not constructed upon a time scheme as it would be inappropriate to its mood of sudden disaster.

6. *Ibid.* p. 263.

7. *Ibid.* p. 264.

8. *Ibid.* p. 267.

Brown through Cornelius;¹ that evening one of Brown's men was shot while fetching tobacco from the boat,² and his cries for water punctuated the silence of the night until the rising tide covered and drowned him;³ just before dawn Jim's arrival was hailed by the firing of a brass cannon⁴ - and so forth. The time scheme gives a sense of the inevitable progression of time, of fatality, which is reinforced by a number of references to the tides of the river, on which the action is also dependent.

The episode is constructed in two halves, separated by a deliberate break to create a stylized effect: the story of Brown's irruption into Patusan is allowed to move rapidly up to the point where Brown takes up a fortified position at the creek. Then there is a narrative lull marked by the formalized confrontation of Brown and Jim across the creek. Then the narrative regains momentum, reaching its climax with Brown's treacherous attack, followed by disarray in the settlement, Jim's abandonment of Jewel, and ending with the stylized and somewhat melodramatic gestures of the final scene of Doramin's anger and Jim's death.⁵

1. *Ibid.* pp. 268, 270.

2. *Ibid.* p. 276; this balances the Yankee's gratuitous killing of the villager, p. 273 (for which there is no time reference).

3. *Ibid.* p. 277.

4. *Ibid.* p. 278.

5. Conrad's tendency to give his crises a stylized and solemn character partly explains the Elizabethan quality often noted in his works.

The novel is even more prolific of technical means of a non-narrative kind: suggestive imagery, symbols, repeated phrases and motifs.

Some images and iterative phrases relate more naturally to their setting and context than others. Marlow's image for his difficulty in seeing Jim, of seeing him through shifting rents in a fog,¹ may perhaps be accommodated to Eastern latitudes, but on two occasions it is unhappily juxtaposed with other images, as when Marlow imagines seeing Jim through fog when, a few lines earlier, Jim 'was thankful the night had covered up the scene before his eyes'.²

More appropriate to Eastern latitudes and to the mental climate of the novel are the related notions of languor and sleep, with their implications of a relaxation of moral responsibility, which are applied a number of times to the protagonist. While recuperating in an Eastern hospital, Jim is caught up in the world of Eastern shipping among whose men 'could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence.'³ When Jim is on duty on the bridge of the *Patna* shortly before the impact, the 'line dividing his meditation from a surreptitious doze on his feet was thinner than a thread in a spider's web.'⁴ When he leaps from the *Patna*, he is in a tranced state of abstraction.⁵ Sitting in the canoe which takes him to Patusan, Jim feels as if he dozes off for a while in the midst of his fatigue.⁶ He again has a sense - 'a sort of happy thought' - of momentarily falling asleep while in the

1. used on pp. 56, 84, 94, 98, 162.

2. *Ibid.* p. 84.

3. *Ibid.* p. 10.

4. *Ibid.* p. 18.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 81 - 2.

6. *Ibid.* p. 180.

throes of struggling clear of the muddy creek he has tried to leap across.¹ Jewel protects Jim's sleep by her untiring watchfulness, and when an attempt on his life is imminent, she wakes him 'notwithstanding his desperate determination to sleep on'.² She remembers him at the end 'as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep.'³

Consistent with this motif of sleep are references to ghosts, spectres, bewitchment, moonlight and mist - all of which serve as oblique indications of aspects of Jim's mind, and which become more frequent as the dénouement approaches. During the inquiry we hear of 'all the extravagant ghosts and austere shades that were the disastrous familiars of his youth.'⁴ One of these is the eastern bride of opportunity always at his side,⁵ the prize his imagination has created, to be unveiled when opportunity is ripe. Unlike some other images, this is a clear instance of Marlow's irony, which is nowhere so incisive as when Marlow remarks on the last page, 'He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct.'⁶ Marlow after struggling to 'exorcise' Jewel's disquiet has the feeling that he has wrestled with a 'spectre' and been worsted by it.⁷

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1. *Ibid.* p. 187.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 217.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 256.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 115.
 5. *Ibid.* pp. 179, 185, 247, 306.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 306.
 7. *Ibid.* pp. 232 - 4. Two other references to shades and ghosts are on pp. 144 and 180.

On two occasions when Jim's fortunes stand high, the Patusan to which he has brought peace and order lies in moonlight. On the first occasion,¹ to which reference has already been made, the moon adds an ironic comment, a light of deception to the seeming peace of the scene which gives Jim a 'certitude of rehabilitation'.² The effect of the imagery on both occasions is counterpointed with that of the narrative. On Marlow's last night in Patusan, which had grown 'pitch-dark'³ while he wrestled in vain with the spectre of Jewel's disquiet, the moon rises while he goes for a solitary stroll. In its strange light he sees the field Jim intended for a coffee plantation, and he comments, 'Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans'.⁴ The suggestion of deception in the moonlight merges with a suggestion of deathliness in the scene:

... 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,⁵ and destined for the use of the dead alone.

Strolling further, Marlow comes a second time upon the grave of Jewel's mother. Its earlier symbolism of the death of Jewel's young love now gains a wider scope:

... 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.⁶

On the night when Jim makes arrangements for Brown's

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 180-182.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 182.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 230.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 236.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 237.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 237.

peaceful retreat, and the dénouement is imminent, there is no moon, and the darkness is the deeper for its absence,¹ presumably (since the imagery often points ahead) because the time for deceptive appearances is past.²

While the moonlight imagery links up on the one hand with the motifs of sleep and bewitchment, it connects on the other hand with the imagery of light and darkness which is used intermittently throughout the novel.

A pointed use of darkness occurs when the officers of the *Patna*, absconding in the boat, all stand up to verify that the light on the *Patna* has gone out and that they are in total darkness.³ Jim makes its deeper meaning explicit:

'You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear ... Everything was gone and - all was over ...' he fetched a deep sigh ... 'with me.'⁴

The meaning is sustained in Jim's subsequent inability to sleep in the blazing sun while the other three sleep under a sail.⁵ The implication that he had a clearer perception of their situation than they is reflected in his reference to his jump: 'Perhaps I could not see then. But I had plenty of time and any amount of light in that boat.'⁶ Although the novel necessarily contains a great deal of conversation and explicit reflection, it is a pity that the meaning of the imagery, too, is occasionally made explicit and its deeper resonance reduced, as in this

1. *Ibid.* p. 291.

2. or will be past when Brown has practised his deception.

3. *Ibid.* p. 83.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 84-5.

5. *Ibid.* p. 92.

6. *Ibid.* p. 96.

quotation, or as in the preceding one beginning, 'You couldn't distinguish the sea ...'

The conversation in the Malabar Hotel gallery is rendered in progressively diminishing light. As the guests depart and the lights are gradually put out, Jim and Marlow talk by a single candle. Marlow becomes aware of the mysterious universe behind the world of men; he has a momentary fancy of an illusory light emanating from Jim's youth:

The dim candle spluttered within the ball of glass, and that was all I had to see him by; at his back was the dark night with the clear stars, whose distant glitter disposed in retreating planes lured the eye into the depths of a greater darkness; and yet a mysterious light seemed to show me his boyish head, as if in that moment the youth within him had, for a second, glowed and expired.¹

The mingling of two different orders of light, the natural and the psychological, is a little awkward, and will rarely be found in the major novels which follow *Lord Jim*.

When the candle splutters out, the interview ends. Marlow has taken the measure of Jim's dark situation, and the darkness of an unknown future swallows him up.²

The descriptive imagery of brilliant sunshine and vivid colour 'like a damaged kaleidoscope' outside the courtroom³ where the verdict is to be given is uncertain in its effect. Conrad may have intended to use imagery ironically, to convey the meanness

1. *Ibid.* p. 94.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 114.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 115 - 116.

and futility of the proceedings,¹ but the effect is, for once, unclear.

The scene in the hotel room where Marlow brings Jim after the inquiry to 'have it out with himself' is a *tour de force* in the art of oblique narrative rendering; from a certain point on the scene is rendered virtually in terms of imagery and what it suggests. Early on Marlow remarks,

I can't say I was frightened; but I certainly kept still as if there had been something dangerous in the room, that at the first hint of a movement on my part would be provoked to pounce upon me.²

Marlow lights a candle, and when Jim forcefully opens the verandah door and steps out, he stands on the very edge of its light: 'beyond all was black; he stood on the brink of a vast obscurity.'³ His inner turmoil is given tangible form in the thunderstorm which breaks; his thought of suicide is rendered by the sudden reversal of light and darkness produced by the lightning:

At the moment of greatest brilliance the darkness leaped back with a culminating crash, and he vanished before my dazzled eyes as utterly as though he had been blown to atoms.⁴

The storm develops as if it were a psychological event; violently attacking trees and buildings, then settling into a more steady downpour and producing

1. *Ibid.* pp. 116 - 117.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 126.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 127.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 131.

sounds of sobbing and lamentation in the gutters, it is suggestive of a release of pent-up grief. The 'release' parallels Jim's movement of turning his back on the darkness, re-entering the room and exchanging some remarks with Marlow.¹

At this point, where a less skilful novelist might have ended the scene, Conrad gives it a new direction, using the storm, which before represented Jim's inner state, to represent now the menacing universe of which Jim has an imperfect awareness:

The downpour fell ... with a sound of unchecked, overwhelming fury that called to one's mind the images of collapsing bridges, of uprooted trees, of undermined mountains. No man could breast the colossal and headlong stream that seemed to break and swirl against the dim stillness in which we were precariously sheltered ...²

While Marlow clearly perceives these menacing forces, it is Jim's illusory optimism and imperfect perception of them that ^{now} become the point of the scene. He has to be persuaded by Marlow to stay until the storm is over; when he leaves, it is with 'the unhesitating tread of a man walking in broad daylight',³ while Marlow, left alone by the light of a single candle, smiles at the illusory thought that occurs to him that 'it was yet he, of us two, who had the light.'⁴

1. *Ibid.* p. 131.

2. *Ibid.* p. 133.

3. *Ibid.* p. 136.

4. *Ibid.* p. 136: these words are an interesting pointer to Conrad's ambiguous view of Jim, and to the formula he uses for him.

Light imagery is used in the portrayal of Stein to an extent not adequately perceived by critics of this novel. Stein is first shown moving between the strong light of his writing desk and the gloom which fills the rest of his room.¹ The effect is to Marlow 'as if these few steps carried him out of this concrete and perplexed world', as if his form is 'robbed of its substance'; and his voice ceased to be 'incisive' and became 'voluminous and grave'.² Stein, in other words, knows how to pass at will from the world of practical realities to the world of the dream, where he creates an order *sui generis* among insects. The notion that delusion is linked with the world of dream is suggested for the first time in the novel at the end of the Stein episode, where Stein's conversation cast 'a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls - over graves.'³ The same notion is conveyed more indirectly by the interiors of Stein's house that evening:

We passed through empty, dark rooms, escorted by gleams from the lights Stein carried. They glided along the waxed floors, sweeping here and there over the polished surface of a table, leaped upon a fragmentary curve of a piece of furniture or flashed perpendicularly in and out of distant mirrors, while the forms of two men and the flicker of two flames could be seen for a moment stealing silently across the depths of a crystalline void.⁴

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1. *Ibid.* p. 149; this image has the same effect as that noted on the first page of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 156.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 157.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 157. Stein's 'two-branched' candlestick is presumably symbolic of his two-sided personality.

The reflecting surfaces rob reality of its substance and transform it into something beautiful, mysterious and deceptive, as the moonlight does in the scenes already considered. Later, when Jewel and Tamb'Itam have brought their bad news to the house, there is a significant disturbance of the gloomy interiors:

The rattan screens were down, and through the strange, greenish gloom made by the foliage of the trees outside a strong wind blew in gusts, swaying the long draperies of windows and doorways.¹

And while Jewel expressed her cold anger, 'the wind passed in gusts, the crystals (of a chandelier) kept on clicking in the greenish gloom.'²

The fog through which Brown retreats down the river also suggests delusion. Jim allows him a 'clear road', but the fog makes Brown's retreat seem like a spectral disappearance ('fading spectrally without the slightest sound'³) rather than a departure.

The two sunset scenes - that of Marlow's departure from Patusan, and that of the final disaster - avoid melodrama by a stark originality of presentation. In the first, Marlow sees Jim growing progressively smaller by the light of the half-submerged sun, until he is 'a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world ... And, suddenly, I lost him'.⁴ The sunset in the other scene provides a startling symbolism that is almost too emphatic: 'The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein.'⁵

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1. *Ibid.* p. 255.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 256.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 294.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 247.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 304.

The imagery considered above, of sleep and bewitchment, of light and darkness and various conditions of sky and weather, seems the most successful of the non-narrative devices, since it is concrete and perceptible, is repetitive without being mechanical, and is reinforced by being interwoven. There are also images which though repeated are not linked with others. On two occasions a fire, burning conspicuously in the night while Jewel is conversing with Marlow, suggests symbolically her passion, or perhaps her passionate fear that Jim will desert her. On the second occasion, when the climax of their exchanges is reached, Marlow says, 'I noticed the fire on the other shore blaze up, dilating the circle of its glow like an amazed stare, and contract suddenly to a red pin-point.'¹ Jim is made conspicuous by his frequently-mentioned white appearance,² which *prima facie* suggests goodness and innocence. It is probably to be taken as his estimate of himself, though it may once or twice have an ironic overtone. However, since the question of Jim's guilt or innocence is so loaded a matter, this image is more troublesome than illuminating. Then there are a number of references to Jim's 'truth' which lack any ironic connotation, and occur with increasing frequency towards the end; for instance, 'He was romantic, but none the less true.'³ These may well be intended to counteract the impression of Jim's romantic aberrancy as this becomes plainer towards the end of the novel, as may be the other iterated phrases Marlow increasingly uses of Jim: that 'nothing can touch him' and that he is 'one of us'. Finally,

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1. *Ibid.* p. 234. The first occasion is on p. 231.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 3, 168, 247, 252, 279 (twice), 280, 281, 290.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 246. The other instances are on pp. 266, 289, 290 (twice), 301.

the iterative phrase that he is 'under a cloud' is rather ambiguous as to what attitude to Jim's guilt or innocence it implies.

The most memorable instance of the iterative phrase in the novel is the use of 'jump'. Jim's crucial jump is first mentioned unobtrusively by Jim himself: he 'blurted out: "I had jumped ..." he checked himself, averted his gaze ... "it seems," he added.'¹ The word becomes loaded as it is repeated; there are Brierly's jump into the sea,² Jim's leap out of the canoe onto the soil of Patusan,³ his leap out of the Rajah's stockade,⁴ and his leap across the creek;⁵ the word is also figuratively used - most ominously when Brown challenges Jim. Brown uses the word twice; at the second instance he unconsciously (it can hardly be deliberately) opens the almost-healed wound of Jim's cowardice:

This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another. I am sick of my infernal luck. But it would be too easy. These are my men in the same boat - and, by God, I am not the sort to jump out of trouble and leave them in a d - d lurch.

The iteration is most effective here, providing a strong pointer to the cause of Jim's paralysis and subsequent behaviour.

There are also a few less effective devices. Long before Jim has leapt out of the Rajah's stockade,

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1. *Ibid.* p. 82.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 44.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 168 and p. 180.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 184.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 186.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 281.

there is a reference during the inquiry to Jim's trying mentally to escape from a figurative 'enclosure of high stakes'.¹ The reference is too remote from the incident to draw strength from it. Stein's butterflies and beetles are clearly intended as symbols of two modes of life relating to Jim's situation: the butterflies, presumably, of Jim's dream of heroic endeavour, and the beetles of the limitations and ugliness of earthly realities.² These images fail to work as symbols because they are in no way heightened by their context or by repetition.

An examination of the technique of the novel reveals that Conrad is already disposing all the means which characterize his subsequent major novels: the concrete vision; the flexible use of a wide range of narrative methods ranging from narrative summary to the dramatized scene; the time shift used to create suspense and surprise and to make significant juxtapositions; the use of both explicit and oblique methods of characterization; the extensive and resourceful use of image, symbol and motif; the heightening and charging of a word or phrase by iteration. The novel gains a sense of creative exuberance from the assurance and the flexibility with which these means are used. Conrad succeeds to a notable extent in interrelating many of the means; the limited success of a few instances points to an adventurousness not as yet matched by experience, while the instances of redundant and ineffective devices are very few indeed. The impression of a technical exuberance in the novel is confirmed by the realization that after *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent*, the novelist begins to use these means less extensively and more sparingly.

1. *Ibid.* p. 23.

2. Tony Tanner discusses their meaning as symbols, *op. cit.*, p. 41 ff.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOSTROMO

It is a commonplace of Conrad criticism to say that *Nostramo* is both Conrad's longest and greatest novel, to say that it is distinguished by its large extension in space and time, its variety of characters, its austerity of tone, and indeed by its endeavour to render the modern world in its essential economic and political instability and disorder. What has been less adequately acknowledged is the novel's sheer architectonic achievement, its highly-wrought texture, its clarity of design. *Nostramo*, more than any of Conrad's novels, is diminished when the reader takes its construction for granted, as a recent Conrad critic does when he says of the novel:

Conrad's ability to control the mechanics of the story without wearying us is obvious, and though this manifestation may fill other writers with admiration or envious despair it will not help us to see more clearly the significance of the novel.¹

It is such a view of the novel that caused Conrad to exclaim:

Oh, que j'envie le technicien et le savant qui écrivent pour des gens qui non seulement comprennent le sujet mais sont aussi, pour la plupart, capable de comprendre la méthode.²

Indeed, the novel is wellnigh unreadable unless the reader brings to it a closeness of attention which should make him aware of its constructional and architectonic features.

The complex construction of the novel is accompanied

1. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 66.
2. From Joseph Conrad: *Lettres Françaises*, quoted as epigraph in Juliet McLauchlan, *Conrad: Nostramo*, Edward Arnold, 1969.

by an essential simplicity and clarity of design. It is built upon a single situation: the political crisis experienced by the community of a South American harbour-town. European commercial interests have gained a foothold in this ancient and long-isolated town, and have established the liberal regime of Señor Ribiera. The regime is challenged and overthrown by a popular, anti-foreign dictatorship, so that the commercial interests experience a critical time until they succeed in setting up a separate republic and restore order and commercial prosperity. But while the design is in essence simple, its presentation is another matter.

The wide scope of the novel has necessitated an impersonal point of view, and its tone and temper are detached, august and ironic. Beneath the detachment there is indeed a more complex relationship between the novelist and his material. It parallels, in this novel more closely than in any other work of Conrad, the prescription of the French realist school that life itself should be seen to pronounce upon the characters, and not the novelist. In *Nostramo* character is described in terms of public report, the judgment of other characters, and in particular, of the outcome of action.¹ The relationship goes further; it contrives the defeat of the hopes and objectives of the main characters. On the level of public affairs, the Ribierist regime falls, the crucial silver consignment goes astray in the gulf, the railway company has to suspend operations for a time, the Monterist regime is ended by an assassin's bullet, Colonel Sotillo fails to find the

1. Conrad does on occasion also pronounce directly upon characters, as in the satiric presentation of Guzman Bento or the Monterist brothers.

treasure and is killed, and at the end the commercial interests have to face a new challenge from social revolutionaries. On the individual plane the same irony is reflected: political motives suffer defeat or distortion or are shown to lack a professed or presumed idealism. Nostromo's courting of repute is thwarted by the revolt; when he undertakes his heroic ride to Cayta whereby Sulaco is saved, he does so only because he feels constrained by Teresa Viola's dying plea to him to 'save the children'. And in the end he does a great deal of harm to both the Viola girls. Gould achieves the survival of the silver mine (there is good fortune involved also) at the cost of the degeneration of his ideal and of his relationship with his wife. Dr Monygham acts with courage and selflessness in the Sulaco crisis, but fails to overcome his self-mistrust or to alleviate Mrs Gould's unhappiness. Decoud's is the most interesting case. After his experience on the gulf has induced him to take his life, the eminent success of his plan is like an ironic comment on his suicide. He has trusted life too little, and the vision he has lightheartedly conjured up proves durable. Viola is in a sense defeated. He has chosen to live in Costaguana for the absurd reason, as his wife points out, that he will not live under a king; and his choice renders him aloof and ineffectual, a mere heroic posture. There is irony in General Barrios's fate: with his shabby uniform, his compulsive gambling and his talk of retiring to the country, he should have performed poorly in the field (he filled Mrs Gould with misgivings), yet he wins the day for the Occidental Republic. The Montero brothers and Sotillo meet with a fate that sorts with their infamous motives. Captain Mitchell suffers no defeat, yet there is irony, too, in the part he plays in the

Sulaco crisis: his courageous behaviour when arrested stems from nothing more heroic than outrage at the removal of his watch.

It is in this particular sense of the defeat or distortion of the motives of the main characters, that the term 'irony' should be used to describe Conrad's attitude to his material in *Nostramo*, and that it will be used in this chapter.

It is to give form to his irony that the novelist has chosen the particular narrative means of the novel; notably, of a bold manipulation of its chronology. Since the hopes and interests of individuals and groups are bound up with time, the novelist has by a trenchant rearrangement of the time dimension accomplished the dual objective not only of thwarting these hopes, but of detaching the reader's sympathies from them by showing him their defeat in advance. The terms 'time shift' and 'flash-back' are usually used in this connection, but it would be more appropriate in *Nostramo* to speak of a fragmentation of chronology and a diminution of time, while it should be remembered at the same time that the author of *Typhoon* remains a master of suspense, and that there is a dual process of the building up and the breaking down of suspense at work. The hopes of characters are thwarted by the changes time brings; they are equally discredited and devalued by the novelist's drawing out or otherwise deforming chronology, by means of digressions which accompany the introduction of new characters or which throw fresh light on a character on a special occasion; by the fragmentation of single events for the purpose of significant juxtaposition or diffusion of their significance over a number of contexts, or by shifts

which neutralize the reader's participation in a character's hopes simply by showing the reader in advance the unfavourable outcome of an event.¹

The detachment of the reader is also achieved by non-chronological means when he is shown a character's adherence to a false belief, or a character's vain efforts to learn information already revealed to the reader.

The narrative technique of the novel may now be examined in some detail. The résumé of the novel provided in the appendix may be convenient to consult in the course of the examination, though it is not sufficiently detailed to reflect the numerous re-arrangements of the chronology of the novel.

The first event, Ribiera's flight and rescue from the rioting mob, is a tour de force of narrative method, illustrating Conrad's meticulous control of his reader's reaction. Its drama is curtailed when it is introduced as a mere afterthought in Captain Mitchell's rambling survey of the Sulacan scene.² His survey ends with the assurance that the mob's attack failed in its objective of seizing the silver and did only negligible damage. His closing sentences which mention that Viola's hotel was unharmed, ensure that in the next chapter, I.3, the reader will not share the anxiety of the Viola family while they await the attack of the mob.³

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1. Of course the narrative as a whole does nevertheless move forward in time.
 2. *Nostromo*, Dent's Collected Edition, 1947, pp. 10 - 15.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 15.

It is only gradually that the reader realises that this event, described in I.2 - 4, is is the climactic event of the novel, the fall of the Ribierist regime, and that this event implies a judgment, wholly lost on Captain Mitchell, upon the ideals which have established this regime: Don José Avellanos's dream of democratic institutions, and the ambitions of European commercial interests. This is implied by means of a time shift in I.5 to an event eighteen months earlier, the official visit of Ribiera, where the 'material interests' are gathered and their hopes voiced. The description of the dinner party is left incomplete, and is followed (after some background information about the President-Dictator and General Montero), by a yet earlier event: the visit of Sir John, the chairman of the railway, to a surveying camp in the mountains. There seems to be no narrative reason why the chairman's presence at these two places should be given in reverse order, until the reader realises that the scene at the camp is the first of a series of scenes describing the 'material interests', and also that this order carries an ironic implication of the chairman appearing at the dinner as a courteous and amiable gentleman, and then at the camp as a hardheaded entrepreneur who will move mountains and uproot settled communities for his railway, if need be. Other features of the skilful narrative are the introduction of Higuero¹ into the scene, and the rôle Nostromo plays in it. The chairman hardly notices the peak, though his purpose is to make a breach in the Cordillera which has long

1. The use of repetitive and other images will be discussed later in this chapter.

isolated Sulaco. The chairman's dependence on the trustworthy Nostromo during his descent from the mountains indicates the dependence of the material interests on the loyalty and the natural aptitudes of the people.

The dinner party, which was left incomplete in I.5, is not resumed until I.8. Its purpose, the celebration of the pride and hopes of the material interests, is interrupted because the material interests have as yet to be portrayed. The intervening chapters are accordingly devoted to a digression about Mr and Mrs Gould and the San Tomé mine, the growth of which creates stabler conditions, and makes possible the establishment of Señor Ribiera's regime, which in turn brings more European interests to Sulaco, including the visit of the chairman, at which point the dinner party is again reached in I.8. The description of it which now follows¹ carries ominous overtones which were missing in the earlier fragment:² the dominant theme of the material interests is being furnished with an equally dominant mood. Listening to Señor Ribiera's address, Mrs Gould thinks him 'more pathetic than promising,' and feels uneasy. General Montero's speech and presence alarmed the whole gathering; his effect on Don José was such that the latter 'did not open his lips for a long time.' The fireworks display witnessed by the guests after the dinner from the deck of the *Juno* does not allow the reader to forget Señor Ribiera's flight from the mob eighteen months later from this very wharf:

1. *Ibid.* pp. 117 - 122.
2. *Ibid.* pp. 34 - 36.

Faint bursts of military music would be heard suddenly, and the remote sound of shouting. A knot of ragged negroes at the end of the wharf kept on loading and firing a small iron cannon time after time.¹

Book One, whose subject is the impact of European commercial interests upon Sulaco, ends thus with a reference to the incident with which the narrative casually, almost light-heartedly began. It requires all of Books Two and Three to set this incident within its context of the full crisis and its aftermath. Book Two comprises the outbreak of the Monterist revolt which precipitates the 'three days' of troubles in Sulaco. The Ribierist regime falls and Señor Ribiera has to be rescued from the Sulaco mob. While Pedro Montero approaches Sulaco over the mountains, and Sotillo progresses up the coast from Esmeralda, Nostromo and Decoud take the silver onto the gulf to save it from capture. Book Two ends in the middle of the crisis, and the novelist pauses appropriately upon the episode on the gulf with its symbolic import of the moral darkness and disorientation which attend the pursuit of wealth. This helps to give a formal emphasis to the episode and its theme, which is also the theme of the novel.

While the various aspects of the crisis are narrated and interrelated in Book Two, the effect intended (and achieved) is a brooding, ominous mood which overshadows any sense of narrative momentum. The deliberation with which the novelist attains this

1. *Ibid.* p. 122.

effect may be illustrated by his management of the ceremonial embarkation of the Sulaco garrison in II.2-4. First, in II.2, the occasion is briefly alluded to.¹ A mere mention of Mrs Gould's carriage at the harbour on this occasion in II.3 serves to introduce Martin Decoud, to whom the rest of the chapter is then devoted. II.4 is then devoted to the topic of the embarkation, though it is suspended for three pages² to sketch General Barrios's character and background. The broken narrative has nevertheless a continuity of effect because all the parts bear on the deepening Sulaco crisis and project a mood of concern and gloom. In the first mention of General Barrios, his expression of confidence in victory is accompanied by a desire to retire³ - not a reassuring sign. Martin Decoud 'felt an absolute change of atmosphere' in Sulaco upon his return there, and he is taken aback by a welcome which assumes that he will throw in his lot with the Europeans.⁴ In II.4, which continues the embarkation, Barrios arouses a sense of misgiving in Mrs Gould and Antonia by his nondescript uniform and the compulsive gambling which it implies. The mood of the occupants of Mrs Gould's carriage is well conveyed by their silent reception of the frank observations made by young Scarfe.

His artless grin disappeared slowly before the unanimous gravity of the faces turned upon him from the carriage ... The stares of these creoles did not matter much; but what on earth had come to Mrs Gould?⁵

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1. *Ibid.* pp.147, 148, 149.
 2. *Ibid.* pp.161-4.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 148.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 156-7.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 169.

Most ominous is the ending of II.4. The description of the locomotive shunting outside the city gate, as Mrs Gould's carriage rolls under its ancient stone archway, is raised to a symbolic level. The occupants of the carriage are startled by a 'strange, piercing shriek' followed by 'a series of hard, battering shocks, mingled with the clanking of chain-couplings, (which) made a tumult of blows and shaken fetters under the vault of the gate.'¹ This symbol works on an elemental level, evoking a blind force suggestive of violence, violation and enslavement² trying to enter the ancient city which has so long remained inviolate. The force represents of course the railway as part of the material interests which are gaining a foothold. Decoud's remark early in II.5, made while he is still ruminating on the noises, confirms this:

Now the whole land is like a treasure-house, and all these people (*i.e.* the foreign interests) are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other's throats.³

As symbol and event are interwoven, so are private motive and public outcome, which often have a discrepancy that carries an unspoken irony. Martin Decoud has come to Sulaco and involved himself in the work of the rifle-purchasing committee in order

1. *Ibid.* p. 172.

2. A link is suggested with Viola's talk of 'esclavos' and Nostromo's later sense of being enslaved by the silver: enslavement is one of the motifs of the novel.

3. *Ibid.* p. 174.

that he may see Antonia. Since he cannot carry her away from the 'deadly futilities of pronunciamientos and reforms',¹ he hits on the idea of making Sulaco secure by separating it from the rest of Costaguana, an idea eventually crowned with success. A similar discrepancy is apparent in Charles Gould. Decoud, observing Father Corbelan in the sala of the Casa Gould, formulates a theory of 'conviction' to himself:

It seemed to him that every conviction, as soon as it became effective, turned into that form of dementia that the gods send upon those they wish to destroy.²

As the sala empties, leaving only Charles Gould and Senor Hirsch, it becomes clear from their conversation that Decoud's notion is being illustrated. Gould's rebuff of Senor Hirsch is that of the great entrepreneur who has no time for the problems of a smaller one. And, to complete the illustration, Gould presently intimates to the engineer-in-chief his resolve to dynamite the mine if his control of it is threatened.

Interaction between events to project a theme occurs in the case of Hernandez's proposed enlistment in the defence of Sulaco (to the great indignation of the chief magistrate),³ and Señor Hirsch's complaint that a highwayman 'robbed' him of a cigar.⁴ The implication is that the distinction between the 'legitimate' exploitation of natural resources and robbery is so narrow as to be questionable.

1. *Ibid.* p. 183.

2. *Ibid.* p. 200.

3. *Ibid.* p. 198.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 201-2. The 'highwayman' is of course Nostromo.

When the riots are reached, the method is calculated to neutralize suspense. The news of their outbreak is anticipated by Decoud's late-night visit to Mrs Gould with the rumoured news of a Ribierist defeat in II.6. II.7 gives Decoud's account of them in a letter to his sister in Paris, written on the evening of the second day of rioting when order has already been restored and a truce arranged. The chapter opens with notable casualness with the statement that Decoud 'did not believe in the possibility of friendship between man and woman.'¹ The opening statement of Decoud's letter has the flippancy of a *flaneur* of the boulevards: 'Prepare our little circle in Paris for the birth of another South American Republic. One more or less, what does it matter?'² Decoud's tone strikes a remarkable note, a mixture of flippancy, immediacy without suspense, and disquiet. He mentions almost at once³ that the riot failed in its objective of seizing the silver, that the Blanco women and children have been evacuated, and that Señor Ribiera has been rescued by Nostromo. What gives his mood of uneasy alertness a metaphysical quality is the presence of death in Sulaco. He writes because he wants to leave a correct record of his situation in case he dies.

The introduction at this point of Teresa Viola's dying in the Albergo illustrates how the novelist subordinates his narrative to mood. Decoud, who is writing his letter in the same house, expresses his sense of an eerie silence and of isolation which projects a symbol and a mood: the state of the house is also the state of Sulaco; it is a moment

1. *Ibid.* p. 223.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 223.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 226.

of 'pause under the hovering wing of death in that silent house buried in the black night, with this dying woman, the two children crouching without a sound, and that old man whom I can hear ...'¹ The symbolism of Teresa's dying is reinforced by the impending death of Don José, who has collapsed after attending a meeting of deputies deliberating surrender. Teresa's dying is at the same time an event purposefully woven into the narrative texture; it delays Nostromo's departure with the lighter, and it occasions presently her admonition to him to 'save the children' which will have a profound effect on him, and, in turn, on the new republic.

While Pedro Montero and Colonel Sotillo converge upon Sulaco, and a narrative tension inevitably mounts, chief prominence is given in the remainder of Book Two to an event which, for all its urgency and its circumstantial realism, is given a timeless dimension - the removal of the silver in the lighter. Again, as in Decoud's writing his letter in the Albergo, there is a tension here between the suspense of events and a sense of timelessness which transcends them. The suspense of the mission arises from its removal of a consignment which represents the labours and hopes of many people in Sulaco; also from the absence, for once, of any advance intimation of its outcome; and then from the tense incremental developments of the discovery of Hirsch hidden in the lighter, liable to cry out at a critical moment; of the near approach of Sotillo's steamer; and finally of the collision. On the other hand the suspense is held in check by the deliberate tone of the prose, and by the frequent allusions to the legend of the Azuera treasure hunters, which adds a timeless dimension to the

1. *Ibid.* p. 249.

episode. One example, Dr Monygham's remark to Nostromo about the venture, will suffice:

Illustrious Capataz, for taking the curse of death upon my back, as you call it, nothing else but the whole treasure would do.¹

The sense of timelessness is of course strongly conveyed in the experience of disorientation in the occupants of the lighter, which also implies an allusion to the legend:

In this foretaste of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that² may haunt the souls freed by death ...

Indeed, the whole mission is very much a symbolic action, intimating the loss of direction and the disastrous consequences of the pursuit of material interests; on the purely narrative plane no-one in the councils which precede the mission advances any cogent military or strategic reasons for undertaking it, though it is several times said to be necessary.³

Book Three presents the remaining phase of the struggle for the consignment of silver and the control of Sulaco, followed by the dénouement which leads to the return of prosperity to the city and the death of Nostromo. Book Three is so heavily laden with events that it is instructive to see how the novelist maintains the primacy of mood and theme in the narrative. It is maintained in the first place,

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1. *Ibid.* p. 259.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 262.
 3. The need to maintain good standing with Holroyd may be surmised, but it is not borne out by the event.

of course, by the austerity of tone and the unhurried deliberation of the narrative procedure; also by the weight given to imagery and symbol in the setting and elsewhere. It is maintained by the irony inherent in the working out of the fates of the main characters. The dominant theme of wealth is kept to the fore in such incidents as the heated exchange about robbery which Captain Mitchell has with Sotillo over the confiscated watch, and in the rôle played by Hernandez the Robber, whose provision of sanctuary to the women and children leads Charles Gould to the following reflection:

In his determined purpose, he had the mine, and the indomitable bandit held the campo by the same precarious tenure. They were equals before the lawlessness of the land.¹

Conrad's management of the crisis is masterly. Its lowest point is clearly marked; and two events - Teresa Viola's death, and the evacuation of the women and children,² mark the descent to this point. To deal with Teresa's death first: the earlier account of her deathbed, which included a dramatic confrontation with Nostromo, was left incomplete; now follows the moment of death after the shot in the kitchen has startled her into a dying cry to the

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1. *Ibid.* p. 360. The implication of a community relates also to the incident already alluded to of Senor Hirsch being 'robbed' of a cigar by a 'highwayman', viz Nostromo. Indeed, throughout the episode on the Gulf, Nostromo made biting references to the mission, implying that the removal of the silver was something in the nature of a robbery; e.g. 'I am sent out with it into this darkness ... as if it were the last lot of silver on earth to get bread for the hungry with.' *Ibid.* p. 265.
 2. narrated at the ends of III.2 and III.3 respectively.

absent Nostromo to save the children.¹ The repeated recollection of her cry later in the book is structurally important. It persuades Nostromo, when told of it, to undertake his ride to Cayta (which saves Sulaco) after he has already decided to refuse the mission. Later still, her plea becomes the measure of his moral failure in that he wrongs both the Viola girls. This primarily symbolic episode is thus also fully integrated into the narrative. Its symbolic value is given maximum effect by dispersal: the episode is broken into four dispersed fragments. First there is a brief reference in Decoud's letter, where Teresa's dying seems to him a part of the 'great solitude' and ominous silence about him.² Then there is a fuller sequence when Nostromo, having brought her a doctor, has to endure her jealous fault-finding.³ Then there is the fragment referred to above, which ends with her death.⁴ Finally the whole episode is recalled when Nostromo revisits the Albergo upon his return from the gulf, and learns of her dying plea, which after his meditations on the gulf he readily takes to heart.⁵

The other event, the evacuation of the women and children to Los Hatos, has also a strongly symbolic intention, though it, too, has its narrative value in indicating the plight of the citizens of Sulaco. It is in fact a flashback to the 'three days' and has already been alluded to. Now it is fully narrated,⁶ and the narrative focus falls on one

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1. *Ibid.* p. 340.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 231.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 252 ff.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 340.
 5. *Ibid.* pp. 466-470.
 6. *Ibid.* 358 ff.

particular carriage in the stream of carriages, that bearing the stretcher with Don José, 'vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness.' The emotional value of the scene is heightened by the lurid red light cast upon the refugees by the large fire burning fortuitously by the roadside, providing a symbol of destruction:

Great masses of sparks mingled with black smoke flew over the road; the bamboos of the walls detonated in the fire with the sound of a regular fusillade. And then the bright fire sank suddenly, leaving only a red dusk ...¹

As before, the reader is moved by the spectacle, but hardly identifies himself with the emotions of the participants, for a few pages earlier he has been momentarily projected into a stable future by a casual remark about 'the new Occidental State (whose flourishing and stable condition is a matter of common knowledge now)'.²

The situation of Sulaco reaches its nadir in III.4, a chapter whose close construction, powerful mood and skilfully interwoven imagery exemplify Conrad's art at its highest level. The chapter begins on a characteristic note of detachment:

... with the colourless light the chill of the snows seemed to fall from the mountains upon the disjointed pavements and the shuttered houses with broken cornices and the plaster peeling in patches ...³

The death of the wounded cargador in the patio of the Casa Gould is an appropriate background against

1. *Ibid.* p. 360.

2. *Ibid.* p. 354.

3. *Ibid.* p. 363: the very cadence of the sentence suggests coldness and detachment.

which the deliberations of Dr Monygham and Mr and Mrs Gould will take place. Just before the doctor tells the disastrous news he has brought, a long flashback to his earlier years in Costaguana intervenes.¹ The disclosure of the doctor's torture under Guzman Bento, which explains his abrupt manner and bitter speech, is notable because it involves a sudden shift of perspective on his character, about which more will be said in the discussion of characterization below. What is to be noted here is the timing of the disclosure.² It is appropriate because it accords with the mood of the present crisis, and also because in a vanquished Sulaco, such treatment might be meted out to all the blancos. It is furthermore appropriate because the crisis is a time of growth for the doctor's character, and to appreciate this the reader needs first to know the doctor's background.

Then Dr Monygham's news follows immediately: that the lighter has sunk and Nostromo and Decoud have been drowned. As the reader has already heard the 'news' and knows it to be false, it is not detailed; the novelist concentrates wholly on its effect on Mr and Mrs Gould, making full use of the opportunity

1. *Ibid.* pp.370-376.

2. The digression consists in fact of two flashbacks, this (*ibid.* p. 370-376), and the earlier inserted in the account of the 'three days' (*ibid.* p. 311-312); they are placed in reverse chronological order to suggest a progressive uncovering of his past, though the surprise is contained in the 'present' flashback. The latter is neatly framed by ending with the words with which it began.

offered for characterization. Gould is shown staring abstractedly at the wall, seeing only the implications for 'his' mine, and assessing the situation in measured terms as if composing a letter to Holroyd;¹ Mrs Gould's concern is, first, her husband's intense abstraction, which she has come to fear as a kind of insanity, and then, Antonia's loss, felt in personal terms:

'What would I have done if Charley had been drowned while we were engaged?' she exclaimed, mentally, with horror.²

Gould's reflections lead him naturally to Decoud's plan to save Sulaco.³ But then he realises gloomily that with Nostromo dead, Barrios cannot be reached.

At this point, the nadir of the crisis, Conrad performs a narrative coup that is perhaps the most memorable in all his fiction. The sound of bells booming all over Sulaco bursts upon the occupants of the sala with an uproar which had 'a power of suggesting images of strife and violence which blanched Mrs Gould's cheek.'⁴ Panic spreads through the house because the meaning of the sound is unknown. The novelist extends the effect of the sound first by exploiting its mysteriousness, and then by using its meaning - the arrival of Pedro Montero's force in Sulaco - to provide a dramatic opening for the next chapter.⁵

1. *Ibid.* p. 379.

2. *Ibid.* p. 379.

3. The plan to save it by summoning Barrios and separating the province from Costaguana, a step he had previously recoiled from because of his desire to avoid involvement in politics.

4. *Ibid.* p. 382.

5. *Ibid.* p. 384.

The narrative presentation of Pedro Montero and his followers shows a variety of means and a resourcefulness which ought to interest any master of modern cinema. There are a few instances of direct comment in such details as Pedro Montero having 'a genius for treachery', and his force looking like 'a torrent of rubbish'. Equally scornful is the indirect comment implied in the distancing of the point of view when his speech in the plaza is rendered. Only Montero's opening word, 'Ciudadanos!'¹ is quoted, with a report of his gestures as seen from a distance. The explanation that his words were inaudible to a large part of the crowd suggests ineffectiveness; it also carries the implication that they were in any case not worth recording:

In the intervals (*viz* between the *vivas* of those closest to the orator), over the swarming Plaza brooded a heavy silence, in which the mouth of the orator went on opening and shutting, and detached phrases - 'The happiness of the people,' 'Sons of the country,' 'The entire world, *el mundo entiero*' - reached even the packed steps of the cathedral with a feeble clear ring, thin as the buzzing of a mosquito.²

His consternation at the damage done to the interior furnishings of the Intendencia indicates his love of luxury and belies the democratic sentiments he has been uttering. Ironic juxtaposition of what a character says and does is also the method applied to the portrayal of Gamacho. His grotesque oration is ridiculed by the heat of the advancing day and by his need for a siesta. The description of him

1. 'Citizens!' *Ibid.* p. 390.

2. *Ibid.* p. 390.

at the end of the day of 'liberation', with which Chapter III.5 closes, implies an oblique judgment on the whole democratic cause:

Gamacho, Commandante of the National Guard, was lying drunk and asleep in the bosom of his family. His bare feet were upturned in the shadows repulsively, in the manner of a corpse. His eloquent mouth had dropped open. His youngest daughter, scratching her head with one hand, with the other waved a green bough over his scorched and peeling face.¹

The various developments detailed in III.5-9 are intended to reveal individual motives and show their connection with public action; they also draw out the Sulaco crisis to a stalemate. There is the return of Nostromo brooding on a sense of betrayal; there is Sotillo now uncertain how to learn the whereabouts of the treasure, and prudently withdrawing his force from the Customs House; there is Dr Monygham engaging Sotillo in a pretence of negotiations to detach him from Pedro Montero; there is the doctor suggesting to Nostromo that he travel to Cayta to summon Barrios, a suggestion first rejected and then accepted when Nostromo learns of Teresa's dying plea to him. While these developments are necessary to the working out of the narrative, they slow down its momentum.² The novelist therefore sweeps them aside at the beginning of III.10 in a bold shift to a time some years ahead.

Captain Mitchell, guiding distinguished visitors around a regenerated Sulaco which is now the capital of the Occidental Republic, gives a sunny account

1. *Ibid.* p. 393.

2. As mentioned before, there has already been a casual intimation (*ibid.* p. 354) that the Occidental State will in due course flourish.

of how the Sulaco crisis was resolved.¹ The account is rambling and superficial. The fighting is alluded to in scattered references, beginning characteristically with the climactic event: the failure of the charge of Pedro Montero's cavalry upon Barrios's troops armed with special rifles.² The account is 'layered' in the sense that while on the surface it is rambling and disjointed and sets the important visitor yawning, on a deeper level it is a model of concise relation which swiftly brings the reader up to date on the aftermath of the 'three days', barring of course an insight into human motives.³ One coincidence which occurs in the account is unfortunate. Dr Monygham's last-minute rescue from being hanged on the deck

1. *Ibid.* pp. 473-489.

2. *Ibid.* p. 476.

3. The time scheme which emerges from the time references scattered through the account is on the whole consistent, sustaining the impression of a carefully designed whole:

Ibid. p. 479: the fight against Gamacho's National Guard occurred on 3 May.

Ibid. p. 483: Nostromo is stated to have begun his ride on 5 May.

Ibid. p. 483: Nostromo's return with Barrios's troops occurred on 17 May.

Ibid. p. 488: this last event is stated to be 'sixteen days since the sinking of the silver', viz the silver must have been 'sunk' on 1 May. This tallies with the first reference above, and with the general impression that the truce (*ibid.* p. 228) which followed the two days of fighting (*ibid.* p. 224) and the removal of the silver lasted only a few days before the arrival of Pedro Montero. It is not, however, clear why there are several references to 'three days' of fighting when Decoud's account (*ibid.* pp. 224-230) clearly refers to two days of rioting followed by two days of truce. H.M. Daleski's report of an error in the time scheme cannot be sustained. He quotes Gould's remark made

of Sotillo's transport just when Barrios's transports arrive is unconvincing, and must be accounted an

the morning after Sotillo's arrival: 'I had no idea that (Hirsch) was still in Sulaco. I thought he had gone back overland to Esmeralda more than a week ago.' (*Nostramo*, *ibid.* p.381). Daleski avers, 'Hirsch in fact came to speak to him only three nights previously, on the night of the reception following Barrios's departure.' (H.M. Daleski: *Joseph Conrad. The Way of Dispossession*, Faber, 1977, pp. 218-219). Daleski's arithmetic involves an unwarranted assumption. If we count backwards from the morning when the remark was made - in the conversation in which Dr Monygham has just broken the news of the loss of the silver and *Nostramo's* drowning - then the previous day was the day Gould accompanied Antonia and the stream of refugees part of the way to Los Hatos: the day the silver was removed. The day previous to that was the first day of the riots. But we cannot say, as Daleski does, that the day before that was the day of the reception at the Casa Gould, when Hirsch spoke to Gould, and Decoud told Mrs Gould the rumoured news of a Ribierist defeat in the South (*Nostramo*, p. 212). The first day of the riots and the day of the Gould's reception are not clearly related in time. Decoud does say to Mrs Gould on the evening of the reception that, as the silver consignment is to be brought down the following day, the rumour might cause trouble if it became known, and that 'we may suppress it for many days' (*ibid.* p. 220). If we suppose that it *was* suppressed for a few days, allowing several days to elapse before the riots begin, then Gould's 'week' would accord well with the whole time scheme.

error of judgment on the novelist's part.¹

Before the final episode is considered, notice should be taken of a criticism which has been directed upon Book Three as a whole. Guerard feels that the novel deteriorates after the end of Book Two, and wonders if it might not have been ended at this point.² The chief among his objections is the inordinate length of the Custom House episode:

The Custom House is the solid immovable
object on which the novel nearly founders
...³

and,

Conrad's imaginative concern with the death of Hirsch is obsessive, even sadistic. Perhaps Hirsch has something to do with the imagination's apparent 'imprisonment' in the Custom House?⁴

It is true that a part of III.2 (pp. 330-342), and part of III.3 (pp. 343-349) deal with Captain Mitchell's and Dr Monygham's imprisonment in the Custom House, and that III.8 returns, with Nostromo, to a now deserted Custom House, while III.9 provides a flashback to Sotillo's earlier activities in it to explain how Hirsch's strappadoed body comes to be there. It may indeed be asked why Mitchell should be imprisoned in it in III. 2-3 when the only action on this occasion, the removal of his watch, is after all a rather trivial incident; and it may be asked

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1. It is not of the same order as the collision of the lighter with the steamer, which is also a coincidence, but which by the force of its context reflects the intervention of the unforeseen.
 2. Guerard, *op. cit.* p. 203 ff.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 207.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 207.

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why he should be made to have a conversation with Dr Monygham in a small dark cell about Teresa's death, the sinking of the lighter, and the drowning of Nostromo and Decoud, when these developments come as no surprise to the reader or are known by him to be untrue.

The scene is presumably intended to be similar in effect to the episode of the lighter on the gulf, where two characters, isolated and disoriented, experience the crisis of Sulaco partly in a symbolic form. Mitchell and Dr Monygham are isolated by their imprisonment and by the darkness of their cell, as well as, in a sense, by their misinformation about the situation in Sulaco. The later torture episode and the grisly figure which bears a mute witness to it, should surely be regarded as a reflection of the passions released in a disordered society, rather than of Conrad's personal sadism. The two sequences set in the Custom House have in the first place an important bearing on the characterization of Dr Monygham. His witnessing of the fact of torture at a time when he faces the possibility of renewed torture and yet decides to go forward with his plan, indicates a development in his character. The sequences do, furthermore, produce a sense of imaginative confinement, and they thereby provide a symbol of the experience through which Sulaco passes.

As to Guerard's wish that an ending after Part Two might have been possible, one may sympathize with his desire for a simpler plot and a shorter narrative. But our last view of a 'regenerated' Sulaco, thriving and growing but facing a future to be challenged by organized labour, needs to be left intact. An earlier ending would also leave the

story of Nostromo's corruption in mid-air.

The remainder of the Book, from III.11 onwards, represents a turn in the design, a step-down from the public canvas of Captain Mitchell's account to the personal destiny of Nostromo. Conrad nevertheless clearly intended Nostromo's bondage to the silver to have a wider bearing. Firstly, it is made to suggest something of the essential nature of passion. Nostromo visited the island on the fatal night seemingly because he could not stay away from the silver, and because he could not stay away from Giselle. We read that he was 'caught unawares by old Giorgio while stealing across the open towards the ravine to get some more silver.'¹ But in the next sentence he says to Giselle, 'It seems as though I could not live through the night without seeing thee once more.'² The fusion of the two motives suggests a more essential enslavement to passion.

Nostromo's corruption is given a wider reference also by its affecting the Viola girls in a manner which parallels Mrs Gould's experience of the material interests. Both the Viola girls are desolated by their love of Nostromo; Mrs Gould is embittered by her experience of the brevity of love and by her childlessness:

love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through.³

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1. *Nostromo*, p. 554.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 554.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 521

Mrs Gould's rôle in the final episode is a dual one. She acts as a reflector who witnesses Nostromo's relationships with the Viola girls, and who, present at his deathbed, hears his dying confession. And she provides in her own disillusion a parallel to the barren love which the Viola girls have experienced.

The final episode provides in Nostromo's betrayal of himself and others a climactic illustration of the influence which the material interests have exerted over the whole community. The fact that he dies while others survive - some sadder and wiser after the crisis while some like Captain Mitchell remain essentially untouched - to meet the next crisis, presumably to be provided by organized labour, provides a satisfactory close to a panoramic and necessarily open-ended novel.

Perhaps the statement that the material interests have corrupted, or at least influenced, a whole society needs to be moderated. Conrad's overall theme is clearly the material interests, but the novel's complex material did in some respects resist being brought wholly into relationship with it. A conspicuous example of this is Decoud. His part in the novel affords a compelling study of the self-destructive tendency inherent in a sceptical cast of mind. But his story in no way reflects the influence of material interests, and he strictly speaking needs a novel to himself.

The salient feature of the management of the narrative of *Nostromo* is the extent, remarkable even in Conrad, to which the narrative dimension has been subjugated

and put to the service of theme and mood. The anticipation, fragmentation and rearrangement of events result in a grandeur of effect which raises the novel above Conrad's other major works.

The characterization of *Nostramo* is remarkable for the variety of means employed. The most conspicuous means is that which one would expect in a realist novelist, indeed in any good novelist: the gift for creating character through action, the characteristic response, economically selected. A telling example is Captain Mitchell's impatience under questioning by Sotillo, his outburst of rage at the removal of his watch, and the fact that the Colonel's counter-argument, that the real thieves are the Europeans who plunder the wealth of Costaguana, is wholly lost on the Captain.

Character formulas, which serve the purpose of conciseness and enable the novelist to move rapidly over a wide canvas, are again frequently used. Don José is 'the Nestor-inspirer of the party';¹ Ribiera is 'the hope of honest men';² Nostromo is 'the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo, the Mediterranean sailor come ashore casually to try his luck in Costaguana.'³ Apart from recapitulation they may strike a humorous note, as in 'El Señor Gobernador' for Don PÉPÉ⁴ or, more

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1. *Ibid.* p. 144.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 117.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 130.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 98.

often, an ironic note, as in 'The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards'¹ for Decoud, or 'Rey de Sulaco'² for Charles Gould, or the 'Never-tired Señora'³ for Mrs Gould.

As a resourceful pragmatist, Conrad varies his method from 'showing' character in action to 'telling' by means of character-formulas which save time. He will interpret a character at greater length where necessary, as he does with Gould, who thinks and feels much but remains outwardly unexpressive. This is how Conrad reports and interprets his feelings at the height of the Sulaco crisis:

He was prepared, if need be, to blow up the whole San Tomé mountain ... This resolution expressed the tenacity of his character, the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts, something of his father's imaginative weakness, and something, too, of the spirit of a buccaneer throwing a lighted match into the magazine rather than surrender his ship.⁴

No amount of characterization-through-action would have led the reader to such a concise understanding, certainly not to Gould's 'remorse' about his relations with his wife. Where such an interpretation is necessary, the novelist clearly prefers to let it approximate the character's own reflections:

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1. *Ibid.* p. 496.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 182.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 506; the phrase has no ironic intention to those who use it; yet it gains an ironic connotation from the weariness of her later outlook.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 365-366.

Unlike Decoud, Charles Gould could not lightly play a part in a tragic farce ... To him, as to all of us, the compromises with his conscience appeared uglier than ever in the light of failure ... He might have known, he said to himself, leaning over the balustrade of the corridor, that Ribierism could never come to anything.¹

But it is noteworthy how often the novelist can find an oblique and dramatic way of rendering an interior state. Mrs Gould's feelings about her childlessness are vividly and poignantly rendered, without any verbal reference to the matter, in the following little incident in her garden:

Through the garden gate emerged Basilio, grown fat and sleek - stooping carefully behind an ornamental clump of bushes, he put down with precaution a small child he had been carrying on his shoulder - his own and Leonarda's last born ...

He remained squatting on his heels for a time, gazing fondly at his offspring, which returned his stare with imperturbable gravity; then, solemn and respectable, walked down the path.

'What is it, Basilio?' asked Mrs Gould. 'A telephone came through from the office of the mine. The master remains to sleep at the mine tonight ...'

A profound silence reigned for a time under the shade of the biggest trees in the lovely gardens of the Casa Gould.²

Conrad's characterization is perhaps most accomplished when character is rendered obliquely through association with imagery. We learn a great deal about the reticent Charles Gould from his room. It contains his grandfather's cavalry sabre, a glass

1. *Ibid.* p. 364.

2. *Ibid.* p. 519.

case of arms, a hammock which he is in the habit of using, and it is bathed in 'a white glaring light'.¹ He rides to and from the mine, his riding whip and spurs are mentioned several times,² and he is associated in the popular mind with the Horse of Stone, the equestrian statue of Charles IV in the Alameda,³ an association which is subsequently alluded to in phrases like '(his) rock-like quality of character'⁴ and his 'stony courtesy'⁵ and 'El Rey de Sulaco'. This method of characterization will be exemplified further in the discussion of imagery below.

A method which Conrad uses several times in *Nostramo*, but rarely elsewhere, may be called pairing. By showing the impact of a situation on two characters, an effect of contrast is obtained which throws a strong light on both. When Nostromo meets Dr Monygham in the Customs House at the height of the crisis, their meeting reveals what amounts to a reversal of rôles. Nostromo, hitherto the fearless man of action, is now enervated by a sense of betrayal, while Dr Monygham, the cynic who has lost his self-regard, is prompted by the crisis to undertake the hazardous task of bargaining with Sotillo:

in a few words (Dr Monygham) described the story of his arrest and the circumstances of his release ...

Nostromo had listened with profound attention. 'You have made up your mind, then, to a speedy death,' he muttered through his clenched teeth.

'Perhaps, my illustrious Capataz,' the doctor said, testily. 'You are not the only one here who can look an ugly death in the face.'⁶

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1. *Ibid.* p. 209.
 2. *E.g. ibid.* p. 207.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 48.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 86.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 143.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 437.

Another instance occurs when Nostromo returns to the Great Isabel in an attempt to learn how Decoud disappeared. The writer shows that in both Nostromo and Decoud a destruction of self-regard has occurred, and he uses parallel language to make the point:

A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity, the brilliant Decoud ... disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things ... Then, after a few days, another form appeared striding away from the setting sun to sit motionless and awake in the narrow black gulley all through the night, in nearly the same pose, in the same place in which had sat that other sleepless man who had gone away for ever so quietly in a small boat about the time of sunset ...

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, victim of the disenchanting vanity which is the reward of audacious action, sat in the weary pose of a hunted outcast through a night of sleeplessness as tormenting as any known to Decoud.¹

This parallel is alluded to once more when Nostromo discovers that a lighthouse is being erected near the site of the buried treasure. His immediate reaction is an impulse to drown himself by leaping overboard from the deck of his schooner as Decoud had done.² It is again alluded to when Nostromo says goodbye to Giselle at the end of their first day of love:

1. *Ibid.* pp. 501-2.

2. *Ibid.* p. 525.

weighted with silver, the magnificent Capataz clasped her round her white neck in the darkness of the gulf as a drowning man clutches at a straw.¹

Another instance of character-pairing occurs when Hirsch and Captain Mitchell are brought before Colonel Sotillo, and the extremity of Hirsch's terror² is contrasted with the Captain's loudly expressed indignation. The novelist comments:

The old sailor, with all his small weaknesses and absurdities, was constitutionally incapable of entertaining for any length of time a fear of his personal safety. It was not so much firmness of soul as the lack of a certain kind of imagination - the kind whose undue development caused intense suffering to Señor Hirsch ...³

A sophisticated device which Conrad does not often use, a shift in the reader's view of a character in the interest of enhancing the drama of the presentation, is used in the presentation of Dr Monygham.⁴ Up to III.4 (p. 376), the reader has accepted the public estimate of the doctor as an embittered eccentric. The reader is then shown that the source of the doctor's bitterness is a tragic episode in his past, in which he lost his self-regard; also that he has resources of compassion and loyalty which, evoked by Mrs Gould, enable him to rise to

1. *Ibid.* p. 545.

2. *Ibid.* p.329.

3. *Ibid.* p.338.

4. The only other true instance occurs in the portrayal of Winnie Verloc; the long-delayed disclosure of Razumov's decision to spy for the regime does not really affect the reader's understanding of his character, and is therefore not a shift of viewpoint.

heroic achievement. The use of the device at the very crisis of the novel is a masterstroke of irony, which implies that the other characters' estimate has been built on sand, with perhaps just a suggestion that the reader's has been equally slight; at any rate the device neatly detaches the reader's view of the doctor from the characters' estimate of him.

Mrs Gould, who retains the reader's sympathy and approval throughout the book, is of course the one clear exception to the above statement. Her portrayal, too, is in one respect different from that of the other characters. She is fairly consistently used as a reflector in the sense Henry James used this term, conveying by her mere presence at a scene something of the writer's evaluation of it. She accompanies her husband in his search for labour, and it is she rather than her husband who 'with each day's journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior'.¹ The first ingot of silver produced at the mine is placed in her 'unmercenary hands'.² When the silver consignments are escorted to the harbour for shipment, she is on the balcony of her house to see them go by. When Señor Ribiera addresses the European entrepreneurs at the dinner party, it is her response that is noted.³ And the description of General Montero's address on the same occasion ends with the words, 'Mrs Gould turned away her fascinated eyes at last.'⁴ At the embarkation of Barrios's troops it is to her that the General addresses his reassuring words.⁵ It is to her that

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1. *Ibid.* p. 88.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 107.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 119.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 122.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 148.

Decoud brings the rumoured news of a Ribierist set-back in the South.¹ It is her voice which calls the Capataz to begin his adventure with Decoud and the silver on the gulf.² And it is to her that the Capataz confesses the secret of his corruption and offers to disclose the whereabouts of the silver when he is on the point of death.³ In view of the panoramic dimensions of the novel, Conrad naturally avoided the use of a single narrator. Yet the frequent use of Mrs Gould as a reflector should be seen as a significant structural element, an indication of an important structural centre of the novel. It is noteworthy that it is given to Mrs Gould, who, as Nostromo says on his deathbed, is famed far and wide for her compassion,⁴ and not to the sceptical Decoud or to the embittered Dr Monygham, to utter the strongest condemnation of the material interests to be found in the novel:

She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness.⁵

The novel abounds and, one may well say, luxuriates in imagery. The images vary, ranging from the suggestive to the symbolic, from the single object to the episode, from the single instance to the series having a cumulative effect. If by a quirk of history the date of *Nostromo* were to become unknown,

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 211-212.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 260.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 560.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 559.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 521

it would be possible to group it with *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent* purely on the grounds of the wealth of its imagery.

The silver imagery associated with Nostromo has often been noted, *viz* the silver items of his dress,¹ and the silver-grey colour of his mare.² It should also be noted that his display of silver ceases when he becomes corrupted, whereafter he dresses inconspicuously, and further, that the silver symbolism is not confined to Nostromo but is widely dispersed through the book, unobtrusively reinforcing its theme. There are usually 'grey and black'³ clouds hanging over the gulf; Mrs Gould has 'grey' eyes;⁴ Gould rides a 'slate-coloured' horse;⁵ the Sulaco ladies cover their faces with 'pearl powder' on public occasions;⁶ Holroyd wears a 'grey' coat⁷ and has 'iron-grey' hair;⁸ Don P  p   wears epaulettes of silver thread⁹ - the instances could be multiplied.¹⁰

Charles Gould's spurs and whipstock, and the furniture and the quality of the light in his room have already been mentioned as instances of imagery used to portray character. The passage in which they occur

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 125, 129.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 22, 95, 124, 129, 186.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 411.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 46.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 49.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 49.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 71.
 8. *Ibid.* p. 76.
 9. *Ibid.* p. 99.
 10. A count of colours in Book One yields sixteen instances of silver/grey, ten instances of black, and only a few of other colours.

continues thus with reference to Mrs Gould:

In contrast with the white glaring room the dimly lit corridor had a (sic) restful mysteriousness of a forest glade, suggested by the stems and the leaves of the plants ranged along the balustrade of the open side. In the streaks of light falling through the open doors of the reception rooms, the blossoms, white and red and pale lilac, came out vivid with the brilliance of flowers in a stream of sunshine; and Mrs Gould, passing on, had the vividness of a figure seen in the clear patches of sun that chequer the gloom of open glades in the woods.

Both Mr and Mrs Gould are here portrayed obliquely through the imagery of their surroundings; they are, incidentally, paired.

The madonna in the niche which silently overlooks the staircase of the Casa Gould is likewise used obliquely in the portrayal of Mrs Gould. When the Goulds return from their visit to Europe, 'the Madonna, in blue robes and the child on her arm, seemed to welcome her with an aspect of pitying tenderness.'² It provides a focus for several of Mrs Gould's virtues: the open-handed hospitality and sanctuary provided by the Casa Gould; her cherishing of the past traditions of Costaguana;

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1. *Ibid.* p. 210. Not all the character-imagery of this kind is so effective. The description of Emilia's girlhood in Italy is accompanied by imagery of the ruined palazzo in Lucca where she grew up, and a cracked marble urn in its hall is twice mentioned, *ibid.* p. 62. These images vaguely suggest an old, perhaps moribund, European tradition, but they lack a proper development and have no clear purpose in the novel.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 505.

the humanity which she projects by her mere presence at various occasions; the secret sorrow which is her lot.¹

The threatening sounds produced by the shunting locomotive, heard after the send-off of Barrios's troops, have already been referred to. This image is meant to link up with another, which occurred a few pages earlier, and which is also symbolic of the material interests:

the sparse row of telegraph poles strode obliquely clear of the town, bearing a single, almost invisible wire far into the great campo - like a slender, vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land.²

These two sinister images of the material interests are complementary; the first (the above) seeming to imply the insidiousness, and the second the brutality of the force which is entering the land.

The most conspicuous imagery in the novel is, of course, the recurrent imagery of light and darkness.

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1. The Madonna is mentioned five times: *ibid.* pp. 68, 71, 206, 234, 505. In two of these references the Madonna's child is mentioned; whether this is meant to reflect on Mrs Gould's childlessness is unclear.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 166. The full force of the word 'waiting' is of course provided by Holroyd's words in an earlier conversation with Gould: 'We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry ... And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not.' *Ibid.* p. 77.

It is so extensively and deliberately used that it would justify a full-length monograph. Its meaning is not fixed, as it was in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*; Conrad is clearly moving to a freer and more flexible use of imagery.

The description of the scene of the novel, the topography of Sulaco, is given a note of disquiet by the quality of its light. The town, the harbour and the gulf lie in the shadow of the Cordillera during the morning, and under a densely overcast sky in the afternoon, while at night they lie in an impenetrable darkness.¹ An early reference to folklore gives the light imagery a deeper meaning:

The eye of God Himself - they add with grim profanity - could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there; and you would be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness.²

It is, then, a region of obscured light, and the meaning to be attached to this state is only gradually disclosed.

The significance of the Casa Gould is suggested on several occasions by means of light; for instance:

Only the sala of the Casa Gould flung out defiantly the blaze of its four windows, the bright appeal of light in the whole dumb obscurity of the street.³

1. *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 7.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 187.

The lighthouse being built on the Great Isabel assumes for a moment a symbolic significance for Nostromo when he fears that it may throw 'a far-reaching light upon the only secret spot in his life.'¹ Its meaning presently shifts to signify the quality of Linda's love - staunch and forthright, virtuous, but tragic in that its beam burns in vain within the cloudy obscurity of the gulf:

The whole refracting apparatus, with its brass fittings and rings of prisms, glittered and sparkled like a dome-shaped shrine of diamonds containing not a lamp, but some sacred flame.²

The San Tomé mine, brilliantly lit up at night, is one of the sights of Sulaco which Captain Mitchell includes in the tour on which he takes important visitors: 'a whole mountain ablaze like a lighted palace above the dark Campo.'³

Several of the above images seem to be coordinated to suggest that the isolation of early Sulaco was a kind of darkness which was dispelled by the coming of the commercial interests, as represented by the brightly lit Casa Gould, the lit San Tomé mountain, and the blindingly brilliant beam of the locomotive piercing the darkness ahead. But as in the case of the lighthouse image above, the light imagery shifts its meaning, and as the novel proceeds, it becomes clear that it accommodates a discrepancy. As the mood of crisis deepens, darkness becomes the keynote of the various phases of the crisis. Some of the more conspicuous instances of images of darkness so

1. *Ibid.* p. 525.

2. *Ibid.* p. 552.

3. *Ibid.* p. 500.

used are examined below.

The Viola family await an attack by the mob on their house in a room darkened by the closure of the shutters. The narrow threads of sunlight which fall perpendicularly across the interior from cracks in the shutters are mentioned several times.¹ The general effect is clear, but one detail, though highly suggestive, remains obscure: a thread of light cuts perpendicularly across the darkened portrait of Garibaldi. Perhaps the reader is intended to infer that the idealism of the great reformer is passé, or has no relevance to the present sordid revolt.²

Decoud writes his account of the riots in the same house by the light of a single candle: the darkness of Sulaco has deepened. Looking out of the window, he notes

a darkness so impenetrable that he could see neither the mountains nor the town, nor yet the buildings near the harbour; and there was not a sound, as if the tremendous obscurity of the Placid Gulf, spreading from the waters over the land, had made it dumb as well as blind.³

The symbolism of the darkness is extended not only to the silence of the surroundings, but the deathbed of Teresa Viola, which is occurring elsewhere in the same house. Decoud writes:

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 18, 19 (twice), 21.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 21.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 229.

now it is a pause under the hovering wing
of death in that silent house buried in₁
the black night, with this dying woman.

In the coming and going of people at the Albergo
later this evening, the harsh glare of torches
gives further emphasis to the darkness; for instance:
'The half of the horse with its half of the rider
swung round outside the door.'² The lantern which
Captain Mitchell has fastened to a post at the end
of the jetty is the last light which the two men
on the lighter see as they proceed into the profound
darkness of the gulf.³

The celebrated description of the experience of
the two men which follows depends for its power on
the absence not only of light and sound but of all
sensation of physical orientation. The sense they
have of floating like disembodied spirits⁴ is
symbolic of the state of drift, the metaphysical
disorientation and isolation which overtakes those
whose material ambitions make them unfit for the
true community. The experience is also a re-enactment
of the legend of the Azuera treasure-hunters.⁵

1. *Ibid.* p. 249.

2. *Ibid.* p. 250.

3. *Ibid.* p. 261.

4. *Ibid.* p. 262.

5. The repetitive device of the Azuera legend,
which adds an imaginative dimension to the
motif of treasure, is alluded to intermittently
through the novel; it is a prominent part of
I.1; it is referred to obliquely in the last
sentence; there are thirteen references (not
counting indirect allusions) between: pp. 247,
255, 258, 259, 262, 264, 460, 487, 496, 501, 526,
531, 558.

The light imagery of the exodus of refugees to the Los Hatos woods has already been referred to. The scene is illuminated briefly by the lurid light of a roadside fire which reveals 'horses, mules, and a distracted, shouting crowd of people.'¹ It is a compelling symbol of destruction.

On the morning when Dr Monygham brings the news of the drowning of Nostromo and Decoud to the Casa Gould, the sun shines brightly in on the sala.² This morning sun and the reference to the setting sun at the beginning of a following chapter³ do not continue the earlier significance of the light imagery, but merely serve to mark a time orientation.

Nostromo's awakening in the ruins of the fort is accompanied by several symbolic circumstances which dramatize the inner change he is undergoing: suggestions of ruin, corruption and death are conveyed by the ruins of the fort,⁴ the alighting carrion vulture,⁵ and the owl's cry of doom⁶ respectively. This multiplication of omens is saved from becoming rather melodramatic by the dramatic sunset which accompanies it: a 'conflagration of sea and sky:⁷

The great mass of cloud filling the head of the gulf had long red smears amongst its convoluted folds of grey and black, as of a floating mantle stained with blood.⁸

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1. *Ibid.* p. 359.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 376.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 394.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 413.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 413.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 418.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 411.
 8. *Ibid.* p. 411.

The dejected conversation which Dr Monygham has with Nostromo in the Custom House room containing Señor Hirsch's strappadoed body begins in the light of two candles.¹ Soon one dies out,² and the last goes out when Nostromo drops it in his surprise at recognizing the body to be that of Hirsch, so that the remainder of the conversation here proceeds in the near darkness of the starlight admitted by the two small windows.³ When they separate, Nostromo revisits the Albergo, which 'he had never known so lightless, so silent, before.'⁴ Entering the kitchen, he has a momentary illusion that its darkness 'was as vast as the Placid Gulf, and that the floor dipped forward like a sinking lighter',⁵ continuing his experience of having lost his bearings. This darkness, in which Viola has sat ever since the light upstairs by Teresa's body had burnt itself out, is a suitable metaphor for the desolation he experiences, until the 'splutter and flare' of a match reveal the miraculous return of Nostromo.

The narrative of Decoud's suicide is placed in the context of a sunlit world. A time-orientation is provided by the sun's first setting and then rising again on the solitary figure, marking a passing of time of which Decoud is hardly aware; the sun is then used as a symbol of the life on which the suicide has decided to turn his back:

he pulled away from the cliff of the Great Isabel, that stood behind him warm with sunshine, as if with the heat of life, bathed in a rich light from head to foot as if in a radiance of hope and joy.⁶

1. *Ibid.* p. 427.

2. *Ibid.* p. 428.

3. *Ibid.* p. 461.

4. *Ibid.* p. 465.

5. *Ibid.* p. 466.

6. *Ibid.* p. 500.

Nostromo's end, too, is set in a context of light imagery. His visit to the island to arrange to marry one of the Viola girls occurs at sunset. The sky is as doom-laden as it was when he awoke in the ruined fort; during his visit the island lies

in the dusk and gloom of the clouded gulf,
with a low red streak in the west like a
hot bar of glowing iron laid across the
entrance of a world sombre as a cavern...¹

The red glow becomes an image of self-destructive passion, to which Giselle surrenders herself:

Giselle Viola, with her head resting against
the wall of the house, her eyes half closed
... seemed to surrender herself, tranquil and
fatal, to the gathering dusk.²

Nostromo is moved by the same 'ambient seduction':

The dusk of purple and red enveloped him,
too - close, soft, profound, as no more
than fifty yards from that spot it had
gathered ... about the self-destructive
passion of Don Martin Decoud's utter
scepticism.³

There is a suggestion of a counter-effect in the other light on the gulf, that of the lighthouse tended by Linda and symbolizing her less seductive, more forthright love:

1. *Ibid.* p. 536. The suggestion of confinement becomes more explicit in this and the next chapters in such references as the following: '(he) felt the weight as of chains ...' *ibid.* p. 539; 'He wrestled with the spell of captivity ...' *ibid.* p. 540; 'his silver fetters...' *ibid.* p. 546.
2. *Ibid.* p. 537.
3. *Ibid.* p. 537.

they could see the long shaft of light, kindled by Linda, go out to strike the expiring glow in a horizon of purple and red. ¹

They declare their love in the intense blackness of the gulf later that evening. While Nostromo is paying the visit to the treasure which will cost him his life, the symbolism of a closing prison is completed:

the moonlight in the offing closed as if with a colossal bar of silver the entrance of the Placid Gulf ...²

When Nostromo is shot, he lies in the black shade - it is a moonlit night - of the very tree under which Decoud spent his last days.³

The light and darkness imagery in *Nostromo* distinguishes itself from that in the other major novels in that it undergoes shifts of meaning, accommodating itself in such contexts as those noted above to signify the primitive isolation of a pre-Capitalist Sulaco; the anxiety of the commercial interests in a beleaguered Sulaco; the life which Decoud turns his back on; and two kinds of sexual passion.

The last group of images which calls for notice is that which mediates Conrad's irony by indicating nature's remoteness from human affairs. The most prominent example is of course the snowy peak of

1. *Ibid.* p. 537.

2. *Ibid.* p. 552; a play on both of the two possible meanings of 'bar' is perhaps intended.

3. *Ibid.* pp. 553, 554.

Higuerota which dominates the town, the Campo and the Placid Gulf topographically. The recurring references to it create a cumulative impression of purity, coolness and aloof majesty. Its silent presence has the effect of detaching the reader from the feverish human scene; for instance:

On this memorable day of the riot ... (Viola) did not look up once at the white dome of Higuerota, whose cool purity seemed to hold itself aloof from a hot earth. His eyes examined the plain curiously ... the movements of the animated scene were like the passages of a violent game played upon the plain by dwarfs mounted and on foot, yelling with tiny throats, under the mountain, that seemed a colossal embodiment of silence.¹

Another reference draws attention to its austere beauty. While awaiting the arrival of Sir John, the railway chairman, at the surveying camp, the chief engineer notes the last changing hues of the sunset on the enormous flank of Higuerota, and thinks that

in this sight, as in a piece of inspired music, there could be found together the utmost delicacy of shaded expression and a stupendous magnificence of effect.²

Sir John significantly arrives too late to hear the magnificent music of the sunset, and presently, while the two men are discussing how to blast a way through the basalt walls of the Cordillera, the moon rises:

1. *Ibid.* pp. 26-27. There are sixteen references to Higuerota interspersed through the novel.

2. *Ibid.* p. 40.

The white Higueroa soared out of the shadows of rock and earth like a frozen bubble ...¹

C. B. Cox in a discussion of this passage argues that Conrad has here shifted his view of nature, and that now 'all the forms of Nature are insubstantial, as transient as a bubble.'² But if the passage is examined closely in its context, it yields a different meaning. All the other references to Higueroa in the novel show it as an object of austere dignity. Coming so soon after its comparison to 'a piece of inspired music', and coming immediately after the engineer's disparaging suggestion about moving mountains, the description of it as a 'frozen bubble' can only be read as a reflection of Sir John's attitude to the mountain, an ironic reference to the ambience of the material interests. It is of course made clear that, as the salient point of the Cordillera, Higueroa guards the isolation of Sulaco on the land side, so that it presents a special obstacle to these interests.³

It is effectively used to diminish the drama 116 import of the crucial interview between Pedro Montero and Gould at which the future of the San Tomé mine is at stake; Higueroa is mentioned as a visible presence outside the window of the Intendencia.⁴

Higueroa is not the only image which signifies nature's remoteness from human affairs. The narrative of Nostromo's vain attempt to understand Decoud's disappearance on the gulf is accompanied by two instances of nature's elusion of human understanding.

1. *Ibid.* p. 41.
2. C.B. Cox, *op. cit.* p. 61.
3. Nostromo, p. 135
4. *Ibid.* p. 405.

The author mentions casually that sharks 'for some reason' are unknown in the gulf though they are numerous beyond the Punta Mala.¹ A few pages later it is noted that

For some good and valid reasons beyond mere human comprehension, the sea-birds of the gulf shun the Isabels.²

In the closely interwoven texture of this novel, an incident, too, may function as a symbol. Such an incident is the breaking loose of the horses belonging to the railway company in the course of the riot. Viola watches the troop:

They came on like a whirlwind, and dashed over the line snorting, kicking, squealing in a compact, piebald, tossing mob of bay, brown, grey backs, eyes staring, necks extended, nostrils red, long tails streaming ... within six yards of Giorgio only a brown cloud with vague forms of necks and cruppers rolled by, making the soil tremble on its passage.³

Of special interest is the relation between this symbolic incident and its larger context of the riot: the riot, which the reader has been told did negligible damage and was by now well under control, is deliberately undervalued, while its real menace, yet to be revealed, is intimated obliquely in this incident.

The deaths of Teresa Viola and of Don José are to be regarded, as has been shown, as symbols of the death of the Ribiera regime. Their mood and significance are diffused, in the case of Teresa's death, by the fragmentation of the event, and in

1. *Ibid.* p. 491.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 496.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 27.

the case of Don José's death by the actual moment of death being left unmarked, so that he is last seen being carried to the Los Hatos woods 'stretched out, hardly breathing' and 'vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness'.¹ There is indeed a third death which functions like the above two: that of the wounded cargador which occurs at the height of the Sulaco crisis. As Charles Gould returns home from his ride towards Los Hatos, and is about to hear the bad news of the supposed drowning of Nostromo and Decoud, he sees in a dark corner of the patio a mortally wounded cargador with a praying woman by his side;² a few moments later, when he reaches the gallery upstairs, he hears the shrill cry of the woman as the cargador breathes his last.³

The event which is most distinctly symbolic is of course the episode of the lighter adrift on the gulf. As it has already been discussed, it will suffice to say that this circumstantially narrated event becomes the focus of the purposes of the whole commercial community of Sulaco, and that the vicissitudes of the consignment of silver become a parable of the encounter of the material interests with an unforeseen reality. The discovery of a hidden person on the lighter, and its collision with the steamer are not melodramatic coincidences, but belong to the same order of symbolism as does the collision of the *Patna* with a submerged derelict in *Lord Jim*.

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1. *Ibid.* p. 362.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 364.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 366.

One further instance of an event which has symbolic overtones may be mentioned: the confinement of Captain Mitchell and Dr Monygham in the Custom House in the very cell in which the silver had been stowed until its removal onto the gulf.¹ The fact that during their conversation they are both confined and plunged in darkness gives the episode a sense of isolation similar in effect to the episode of the lighter drifting on the gulf. Their conversation concerns other developments of the crisis: the death of Teresa Viola and the loss of the silver and the supposed drowning of Nostromo and Decoud, and since this latter item is untrue, they may be said to be isolated also in the sense of being unaware of their true situation.

The grandeur of this highly-wrought novel is attained by the subordination of its complex narrative to a simple design - the pattern of the Sulaco crisis - accompanied by a clearly articulated theme and a dominant mood. The imagery of the novel gives it its remarkably vivid and seen quality. It is not surprising that in so large a work containing such a wealth of material the novelist was not able to weave his imagery into a continuous fabric, as he did so successfully within the novella-format of *Heart of Darkness*, and as he was able to do to some degree in *Lord Jim* and will do in *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes* and *Victory*. Indeed in the most extensively used image-group, that of light and darkness, a tendency for the meaning to shift reflects a certain looseness in the conception of the novel. For just as, in the imagery, the light

1. *Ibid.* 330-349.

of modern commerce replacing the darkness of Sulaco's age-old isolation is itself turned into the darkness of the crisis which the material interests endure, so there is some vagueness in the working out of the central theme. There is no doubt what the theme is; the technique of the novel projects it clearly enough. But not all the main characters are brought into relation to it. Apart from the clear cases of the Goulds and Nostromo, Don José is related to the material interests inasmuch as they depend on his labours to produce a favourable political climate for them. But Decoud's fate is worked out without reference to them. Dr Monygham's partial recovery of self-regard is accomplished through his loyalty to Mrs Gould and not to the mine or them. Captain Mitchell and Corbelan remain uninfluenced by them. Yet when the material interests are threatened, these characters respond collectively and come to their defence. The reader consequently does well to remain a little awed by the broad panorama and masterly technique of the novel, and not to question too closely what the story of the Sulaco crisis demonstrates, and what moral is to be inferred from the material interests' narrow survival of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECRET AGENT

The narrative texture, the varied and resourceful characterization, and the non-narrative elements of imagery and motif in this novel give evidence of the novelist's closest attention, and again reflect an architectonic and an imaginative resourcefulness of the highest order. The structure is naturally different in kind from that of *Nostramo*. Instead of a slow-paced presentation of a broad panorama and a deliberate progression through the stages of a crisis which has already begun at the commencement of the novel, and where suspense is carefully restricted, *The Secret Agent* has for its scene a murky city where bad weather and obscure light tend to create a sense of confinement, and where despite the Conradian deliberation of manner, the narrative method creates a dramatic concentration and an increasing narrative momentum. Ford Madox Hueffer's notion of the 'progression d'effet' as a structural feature applies not at all to *Nostramo*, but characterizes *The Secret Agent* fairly well.

Yet while the structure of the novel is taut and dramatic and has a satisfying logic, there is, as in *Nostramo*, some uncertainty as to theme. One may sympathize, even after several readings, with the difficulty Jocelyn Baines confesses to in discovering a principle of cohesion in the novel. Assuming that it is a study of certain instances of moral baseness, he wonders about the relevance of the parts played by Heat, the Assistant Commissioner, and the Home Secretary, and concludes,

although the ironical treatment provides a unity of mood, the book lacks ... a unifying theme, and when it is carefully examined, falls apart into a succession of only superficially related scenes.¹

1. Baines, *op.cit.* p. 340.

A more positive statement of theme is furnished by Conrad himself in the subtitle to the serial version of the novel: 'A Tale of Diplomatic Intrigue and Anarchist Treachery';¹ a statement which does not adequately cover the parts played by the police officials, the Secretary of State, and the lady patroness. Further light is provided by Leavis's statement, which takes a more abstract view:

The pattern of the book is contrived to make us feel the different actors or lives as isolated currents of feeling and purpose - insulated, but committed to co-existence and interaction in what they don't question to be a common world, and sometimes making disconcerting contacts through the insulation.²

This statement of theme is fair as far as it goes, and seems corroborated by the fact that the various characters seem to add up to a representative social spectrum. But while the notion of isolation, of social fragmentation, applies clearly to the political and the domestic groups, it does not fit the remaining characters very well: the police officials, the Secretary of State, the lady patroness. The theme is made no less elusive when it is realised that the notion of isolation is but one of a cluster of related motifs: among them indolence, the pursuit of security, insanity and imbecility: motifs which operate on an imaginative level where their precise reference remains somewhat obscure.

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1. Quoted in Norman Sherry's introduction to *The Secret Agent*, Dent, 1974, p. viii.
 2. Leavis, *op. cit.* p. 210.

Probably the most salient feature of the novel is its consistently ironic intention. The complex technique should be seen as the instrument of the irony, interposed, almost like another Marlow (as Guerard puts it¹) between Conrad and his material. So accomplished is the technique that it needs to be examined in stages.

Perhaps the aspect of the narrative technique in which the irony is most conspicuous is the style of the novel. Its register is predominantly one of austere impersonality which rises at times to a high rhetoric or turns to wry comedy. It is sufficiently flexible to embrace also a business-like discursiveness or a conversational or colloquial tone, as the occasion demands. The predominant tone of austere detachment is reflected in the use of such fastidious words as hebetude, Hyperborean, charabia, panjandrum, villegiature, mansuetude. Equally ironic are the allusions to myth and history whereby the sordid material of the novel is devalued.²

The following description of Winnie's mother shows the comic use of the rhetoric:

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1. Guerard, *op. cit.* p. 228.
 2. For instance, Mr Verloc sees a butcher boy cycling 'with the noble recklessness of a charioteer at Olympic Games' *The Secret Agent*, *ibid.* p. 14; the Professor meeting Heat in the alley is said to be more fortunate than Caligula 'who wished that the Roman Senate had only one head for the better satisfaction of his cruel lust' *ibid.* p. 83. Further instances occur on pp. 115, 116, 118, 166, 183, 185, 246, 309, 310.

Her soul was triumphant and her heart tremulous. Inwardly she quaked because she dreaded and admired the calm, self-sufficient character of her daughter Winnie, whose displeasure was made redoubtable by a diversity of dreadful silences. But she did not allow her inward apprehensions to rob her of the advantage of venerable placidity conferred upon her outward person by her triple chin, the floating amplex of her ancient form, and the impotent condition of her legs.¹

In the moments of high drama the diction becomes plainer and the rhythm and sentence-length measured and ominous:

The blood trickling on the floor off the handle of the knife had turned it into an extremely plain case of murder. Mrs Verloc, who always refrained from looking deep into things, was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing. She saw there no haunting face, no reproachful shade, no vision of remorse, no sort of ideal conception. She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. Mrs Verloc was afraid of the gallows.²

The repetition of a phrase in the last sentences is a frequent device of the style. Mrs Verloc's terror of death by hanging is conveyed with growing vividness by her iteration, presently, of the words 'The drop given was fourteen feet'. And Ossipon's obsession with her fate when he realises that he is partly responsible for her suicide, is conveyed by his iteration of phrases he has read in a newspaper: 'An impenetrable mystery is destined to hang for ever ...'³ where the play on 'hang' is not accidental.

1. *Ibid.* pp. 152 - 3.

2. *Ibid.* p. 267.

3. *Ibid.* p. 307: the words are repeated twelve times in Ch. 13.

The elevation of the style does not preclude a telling colloquial note when required, as in Sir Ethelred's remarks to the Assistant Commissioner:

'I am glad there's somebody at your shop who thinks that the Secretary of State may be trusted now and then.'
The Assistant Commissioner had an amused smile.

'I was really thinking that it might be better at this stage for Heat to be replaced by -'

'What! Heat? An ass - eh?' exclaimed the great man, with distinct animosity.

'Not at all. Pray, Sir Ethelred, don't put that unjust interpretation on my remarks.'

'Then what? Too clever by half?'

'Neither - at least not as a rule ...'¹

The dialogue captures exactly the impatience of the great man, suggestive at once of his busyness and his mental mediocrity.

The plot is relatively simple. It is built upon a crisis which has two distinct and contrasted phases, so that it is almost preferable to speak of two crises: the explosion and the murder of Mr Verloc. The early chapters are all related to the explosion. Mr Vladimir's detestation of the anarchists and their activities and of the British public's indifference to them leads him to induce Mr Verloc to carry out the bomb outrage. The Professor assists by supplying an explosive device. Mrs Verloc unwittingly assists by encouraging her husband to take Stevie with him on his walks.

1. *Ibid.* p. 139 - 140

Mrs Verloc's mother unwittingly assists by causing Stevie to mope by her withdrawal to the almshouse. The events centred on the explosion take us to the end of Chapter Seven and to the time shift which introduces a more domestic orientation.

The consequences of the explosion lead logically to the second crisis. The police investigation leads to Mr Verloc's confession to the Assistant Commissioner, to the latter's warning of Mr Vladimir, to Heat's disclosure of Stevie's death to Mrs Verloc, and thereupon to the more private developments of the second half of the book and the climactic murder. Mrs Verloc's suicide forms the final stage of the dénouement.

The two crises are a study in narrative resourcefulness. They form a sharp contrast. While the first is more an organized nexus of intentions and consequences, the second (itself a consequence of the first) has greater dramatic intensity. While the first occurs offstage in the obscurity of a foggy day, is reported, and has to be pieced together like so many scattered fragments of an explosion,¹ the second is dramatized in the full, garish light of Mr Verloc's parlour, and is given intensity by every means of Conrad's art.

1. Mainly from Heat's train-of-thought digression, *ibid.* pp. 84 - 93; there is a further fragment in Mr Verloc's account to Heat, *ibid.* p. 209; another in Mr Verloc's recollection of fetching Stevie at Michaelis's cottage, *ibid.* p. 232; he mentions why he used Stevie, *ibid.* p. 257.

Though the two crises are so opposite in their rendering, they are linked by their sensational and fatal nature and by the circumstance that in each a witness reacts by retching violently. They are related also by their division of the book respectively into a predominantly public and a predominantly private half,¹ each neatly separated from the other by the time shift between Chapters Seven and Eight and by the unique character of the cab-ride episode in Chapter Eight.

Though the plot is simple and transparent, the narrative surface is not. Apart from the complication of the time shift in Chapter Eight, there are many minor ripples and disturbances on it. To take the major shift first, though it often draws critical comment, its intention is not always clearly perceived. Now that the recovered address tag points to Mr Verloc's shop and the Assistant Commissioner has taken personal charge of the case and directs his steps to Brett Street, the dramatic momentum is suddenly slowed by the introduction of the domestic concerns of the Verloc household at an earlier time. One reason is of course to build up suspense. But there is another. The whole cab-ride episode separates itself from its context² by its leisurely manner and symbolic suggestiveness.

It is in the first place an episode about Stevie,

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1. How the public and private strands within the second half are related by means of a time reference is discussed more fully below.
 2. It begins at the beginning of Chapter Eight and ends in Chapter Nine, *ibid.* p. 196, when the Assistant Commissioner rings the shop-bell.

whose imbecility is here given less prominence than his responsiveness to pain and suffering, evoked by the pitiful horse, by the grotesque cabman and his large family, and later in the chapter by Mr Verloc, who appears to Stevie a good man full of sorrows. The moral alertness¹ and sympathetic disposition of the impending victim thus established, his instantaneous destruction is thus ensured a highly ironic significance. The interpolation of the episode at a point later than its occurrence places it where it is dramatically most effective: immediately before the identity of the victim of the explosion is divulged in Chapter Nine.² The interpolation has lastly the more general function of a death symbolism. It is made to resemble a funeral procession. Various verbal hints make it seem like the last ride of Winnie's mother and a ceremonial indication, in the larger context of the novel, of the three deaths to come. The expressions are: 'what might

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1. Stevie's moral alertness is illustrated by his grappling with the paradox of 'one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other - at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home.' *Ibid.* p. 171. His expression of concern at human suffering: 'Bad world for poor people', *ibid.* p. 171, is the strongest to be found in the book.
 2. The cab-ride episode, in *the cab-ride episode*, in other words, anticipates. The view of some critics, *i.e.* Baines, *op. cit.* p. 322 and Robin Lee: 'The Secret Agent: Structure, Theme, Mode,' *English Studies in Africa* of 11.2.1968, that the interpolation points backwards because the reader sees in Chapter Five that Stevie is the victim, is not convincing; Winnie has not yet persuaded Mr Verloc to take Stevie with him on his walks, and the observation that the human remains on the waterproof sheet are of a fair and slight figure (*ibid.* p. 89) is surely a mere, vague pointer, not an identification.

well be supposed the last cab ride of Mrs Verloc's mother's life;¹ 'I am a night cabbie, I am';² 'the slow cortège';³ 'On that evening ... it may be said that Mrs Verloc's mother ... had also departed this life';⁴ 'this transient life';⁵ 'such a perfection of grotesque misery and weirdness of macabre detail, as if it were the cab of Death itself'.⁶

At the end of the episode the stage is set for the two police officials to call at the shop, and for the intimation of the news of Stevie's death to Mrs Verloc, which ushers in the second crisis and the whole dénouement.

There are two train-of-thought digressions. The first occurs in Chief Inspector Heat's thoughts when he happens upon the Professor in an alley, early in Chapter Five. Heat's pregnant remark, 'I am not looking for you',⁷ conveys his reaction to the sinister little figure. It conveys the realization that this anarchist does not lie in his line of inquiry. It conveys also his distaste at the sight of the little figure which can only be explained by a flashback to his investigations earlier that day. This provides, apart from a few author's comments and generalized truisms, an account of the explosion. The digression is neatly

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1. *Ibid.* p. 155.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 166.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 168.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 169.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 169.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 170.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 83.

framed¹ and collocated with the repulsive Professor and his extreme form of anarchy for the purpose of irony: a theory-and-reality juxtaposition.

The other train-of-thought digression occurs in the Assistant Commissioner's mind when he recoils from Heat's proposal that Michaelis be arrested. It supplies the background to this reaction by explaining the lady patroness's infatuation with Michaelis, and the Assistant Commissioner's unwillingness to offend her by reason of his connection with her through his wife. It is framed at its end by the comment that it transpired in the Assistant Commissioner's mind in the space of a long silence in the conversation between the two police officials.² Its function, apart from supplying necessary information about the lady patroness and Michaelis, is to indicate the Assistant Commissioner's motive for wanting to avoid Michaelis's arrest, so that it may be juxtaposed with Heat's motive, disclosed immediately after the digression, for wanting him arrested. It suggests, as the first digression did less distinctly, the private and partial nature of the official's motives.

There are a few brief digressions. Mr Verloc's picture of Michaelis's cottage, where he fetched

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1. It is framed by ending with virtually the same words - 'You are not wanted, I tell you', *ibid.* p. 93 - as it began.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 113. The digression begins on p. 103. It reinforces the notion (see below) that days and months of living can be re-enacted in a fraction of a second.

Stevie in Chapter Eleven,¹ though intended only to supply information, has a brief, vivid life of its own. Mrs Verloc's series of visions of her past in the same chapter² are equally vivid both to herself and the reader; they reveal the course of her unspoken and instinctive thinking, disclose her motive for marrying Mr Verloc, and anticipate her act of murder: in other words they reveal the mental disposition which explains her sudden action.

There is a further aspect to the dislocations of chronology which becomes clear only when they are seen as part of the whole treatment of time in the novel. The topic is treated only briefly here as it will be dealt with again in the section on imagery below. The many clocks heard in the book, the numerous references to time passing, and the allusions to time speeded up or time slowed down to a sense almost of timelessness create an impression of time besetting or mocking or, indeed, hounding the characters. One instance will have to suffice here. When Winnie Verloc becomes aware, after the murder, of the ticking of a clock, and then discovers that she is in fact listening to the dripping of blood, which presently turns into a trickle, she is made to realise by the collocation of time and blood that time is against her, that time is 'running out.' Time played an important part in the irony of *Nostromo* in that the fragmentation and dislocation of time implied a devaluation of the characters' hopes and ambitions, which were in any case frustrated in the course of time. In *The Secret Agent* time is again the instrument

1. *Ibid.* p. 232.

2. *Ibid.* pp. 240 - 260.

of the novelist's irony, with this difference, that clocks and other indexes of time's passage mock the characters almost explicitly.

The rearrangements considered above all involve a rearrangement of chronology. Equally frequent, and equally aimed at controlling the reader's response is the kind of rearrangement which involves not chronology but a withholding, deferring or minimizing of crucial information. Several narrative involutions of the latter kind occur in Chapter Four which presents the conversation between Ossipon and the Professor at the Silenus Restaurant. Two mysterious topics are woven into the conversation: the ominous character of the Professor and the news of the bomb outrage. For fifteen pages Ossipon's companion is referred to only as 'the little man' or 'the other' before the nickname by which he is known is given. His work and character are intimated in a similarly deferred fashion. The reader does not hear what the Professor's object in working with explosives (the development of the perfect detonator) is until nine pages after the beginning of the chapter.¹ Even longer deferred is the disclosure of his aim of 'a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life', and the provocation of the police into the kind of warfare in which they will jettison 'legality.'² Interwoven with these matters is the even more sensational one of the news of the explosion. On the first page of the chapter, p. 61, Ossipon refers to 'this confounded affair'; on page 63 he mentions that he is upset by 'the thing' which the newspaper vendor has shouted. The

1. *Ibid.* p. 69.

2. *Ibid.* p. 73.

contents of this news, *viz* that a man has blown himself up in Greenwich Park that morning, is not given until p. 70. And not until p. 74 do we learn that it is the Professor who has supplied the detonator and dynamite, and that he supplied them to Mr Verloc. Conrad's method is to 'meter' his most vital information piece by piece; it may be described as his incremental method.

Several other instances of deferred information should be mentioned. What Chief Inspector Heat sees on the small piece of cloth to make him retrieve it from the contents of the waterproof sheet is not explained at the time,¹ nor when he reports to his superior later in the chapter, nor indeed until well on in the following chapter when the Assistant Commissioner accuses him of duplicity and presses him for further information.² In Chapter Eight the efforts of Mrs Verloc's mother to obtain a place in an almshouse are detailed and much of the cab-ride has been narrated before her motive for leaving the Verloc household is disclosed.³ It may be that apart from evoking suspense, the novelist is hereby making light of her motive, that by moving the disclosure of her motive of trying to make Stevie's future more secure nearer to the event of his instantaneous disintegration, he is directing his irony upon it.

There is one occasion when the novelist seems content to leave the reader temporarily with a piece of misinformation. When the Professor admits to

1. *Ibid.* p. 90.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 125.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 162.

Ossipon that the explosive device was given to Verloc,¹ the reader is likely to conclude with both of them that Verloc must have been the victim of the explosion, particularly when Ossipon describes Verloc as 'intellectually a nonentity' and the Professor complains that in spite of his efforts to make his device foolproof, 'there are more kinds of fools than one can guard against.'² Admittedly Ossipon is the primary object of this delusion: he must remain under it so that when he later sees Mr Verloc's body intact but with a knife handle protruding from it, he may be unnerved and have his facile attitude to women destroyed by Mrs Verloc. But it seems as if the reader is intended to share this delusion - at least until the matter is put in doubt when the human remains on the waterproof sheet are seen to be those of a 'slight' person, and then settled when Mr Verloc is seen coming home at the end of the day of the bomb outrage.³

Evidently, information may be withheld from a character, or from the reader, or from both together. The first case occurs when Mrs Verloc tries to recall the location of the explosion in Chapter Eleven. When she is put in mind of it by her husband's chance mention of Greenwich Park, her ability to visualize the event precipitates her sense of outrage, so that the murder and the whole dénouement follow. An instance which is of special importance to the structure of the novel concerns information withheld from the reader, Mr Verloc,

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1. *Ibid.* p. 74.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 76.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 190.

and indeed everyone but Mrs Verloc: her motive for marrying Mr Verloc. Mr Verloc with his concern to escape the knife of the supposedly infuriated anarchists is taken completely by surprise. He who has deceived the anarchists with whom he has so long associated, is shown to have been just as completely deceived by his wife, by the belief that he was 'loved for himself.' He and the reader are undeceived together by the disclosure of Mrs Verloc's motive. It is marked ceremonially, first by her appearance in the parlour fully dressed to leave and wearing a black veil,¹ and then by her removal of the veil.² Only now does the reader appreciate the guardedly worded intimations of her motive which he was given earlier. For instance, when she assures Stevie that he need not trouble himself with the thought of hunger, there is an authorial addendum that 'she had taken effectual steps to that end.'³ Only after the disclosure does the

1. *Ibid.* p. 254.

2. *Ibid.* p. 256. The symbolism of her veil is extended to her episode with Ossipon. After the murder she refastens her veil, *ibid.* p. 268. Ossipon accosts her by peering at her veil, *ibid.* p. 271. Several references to it follow, like, 'Through her black veil the whites of her big eyes gleamed lustroously like the eyes of a masked woman', *ibid.* p. 294. When they wait for the boat train to leave, she lifts her veil and reveals a face which prompts Ossipon's classification of 'a murdering type', *ibid.* pp. 296-7.

3. *Ibid.* p. 174. In another the reader is told, 'she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she had taken a few years before (which) had cost her some effort, and even a few tears.' *Ibid.* p. 187. Another guardedly worded intimation occurs on p. 243.

reader appreciate fully the special relationship between brother and sister, and only after the murder does he appreciate the family likeness implied in Stevie's tendency to take up the kitchen knife when he has heard stories of inhumanity and cruelty.¹ The collocation of three events in this chapter: Winnie Verloc's realization of what has happened to Stevie, the disclosure of her motive for marrying Mr Verloc, and the murder, make for a highly dramatic concentration, so that we may speak of a *progression d'effet* toward the end of the novel.

The final instance of rearrangement which needs to be examined again involves the chronology. The increased tempo from Chapter Eleven on is accompanied by a more dramatic presentation and by the provision of a detailed time scheme. The time scheme enables the reader to note a small time shift at the beginning of Chapter Eleven, whose significance is not at once apparent. At the end of Chapter Ten the Assistant Commissioner looks back with a certain satisfaction upon the evening's achievements.² He has traced the man responsible for the bomb outrage; he has discovered the complicity of a foreign embassy; he has set the anxieties of the Secretary of State at rest; and he has given Mr Vladimir a veiled warning. Now, looking at his watch, he notes that it is half-past ten. Chapter Eleven resumes the narrative concerned with Mr Verloc from a point a few hours earlier, and provides the domestic drama against a clearly marked time-scheme,

1. *Ibid.* p. 60.

2. *Ibid.* p. 228.

as follows. When Winnie, fully dressed, prepares to go out, Mr Verloc deters her by pointing to the late hour: twenty-five past eight.¹ After the murder she is disturbed by a ticking sound which causes her to look at the clock and see that it is ten minutes to nine.² Preparing to escape from the shop, she notes that two minutes have elapsed.³ The night train on which she departs leaves Waterloo Station at 10.30 p.m.⁴ The alert reader is intended to note that the whole Winnie Verloc-Ossipon sequence is chronologically aligned with the Assistant Commissioner's above-mentioned moment of satisfaction, that the public and the private strands of the narrative have here been brought together. The police have accomplished their work; the private victims of the tragi-comedy go their ways, alone.⁵ Conrad's sense of narrative design provides a satisfyingly lucid close to the novel.

There are a few respects in which the characterization of the novel calls for notice. The fact that the novelist has set limits to the scope of the characters is in accordance with his ironic vision. They are not allowed much complexity of motivation or conflict of conscience lest the reader identify

1. *Ibid.* p. 255.

2. *Ibid.* p. 264.

3. *Ibid.* p. 268.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 295-299.

5. There is a final time reference which notes that the report of Winnie's suicide is printed in a ten-day old newspaper, *ibid.* p. 306. It serves to show the whole final episode receding into the past.

himself with them. Winnie Verloc's obsession with her brother, for instance, which determines her choice of a husband against the prompting of her heart, seems unusual, if not abnormal, but any question about it must lie beyond the purview of the novel. Despite this limited scope the characters are all endowed with a vivid illusion of life.

The political characters are of course the most absurd and grotesque. But even these are mostly¹ endowed with at least a hint of complexity, so that they read as credible members of an actual society - the London of the 'eighties which the novel depicts. Ossipon, for instance, whose view of women is hardly that of a balanced person, is sane enough to study madness in others. The saintly Michaelis who lives wholly isolated in a visionary political world, is made credible by the fact that he loses his thread if interrupted. The Professor is credibly sketched because his practical work on the perfect detonator is motivated by a developed philosophy,² and this is in turn backed with an indication of deep-seated personal grievances, as well as with a self-doubt springing from a fear that a multitudinous humanity may be able to defy or ignore him. The illusion of reality is also achieved by Conrad's aptitude for singling out the eloquently characteristic detail, like Stevie's drooping lower lip and squint; Mr Vladimir's thumb-and-forefinger manner

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1. Yundt is admittedly merely an animated gesture.
 2. *Viz* the need for established society to be swept away by, in the first place, provoking the police into the kind of warfare in which 'legality' will be jettisoned.

of exposition and guttural intonation when making a threat; Sir Ethelred's horror of detailed accounts; Winnie's neat hair (a reflection of her impenetrable compliance with the way things are); Michaelis's tendency, already mentioned, to become disoriented when spoken to.

Peculiar to this novel is a tendency among the characters which cuts across individual differences: the tendency to obesity or largeness of bodily size, which carries an implication in some cases of mental dullness. Apart from the obvious cases of Mr Verloc, Michaelis¹ and Winnie's mother,² there is Mr Vladimir with his round face, his way of 'throwing one leg over a thick knee,'³ and his 'large, white, plump hand.'⁴ Sir Ethelred is described thus:

Vast in bulk and stature, with a long white face, which, broadened at the base by a big double chin, appeared egg-shaped in the fringe of thin greyish whisker, the great personage seemed an expanding man. Unfortunately from a tailoring point of view, the cross-folds in the middle of a buttoned black coat added to the impression, as if the fastenings of the garment were tried to the utmost ...⁵

Winnie Verloc is 'a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips.'⁶ Apart from the implication of a sexuality which is not met by her husband and which later goes out

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1. 'pathetic in his grotesque and incurable obesity which he had to drag like a galley slave's bullet to the end of his days', *ibid.* p. 107.
 2. See the quotation on p.128 above.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 19.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 21.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 136.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 5.

to Ossipon, there appears also to be here an implication of the indolence and the shallowness which is to some extent generalized, and which seems to be implied in Yundt's remark about 'this world of gorged fools'.¹ It is implied also by the author's comment about Winnie that she 'wasted no portion of this transient life in seeking for fundamental information (and that) such a view accords very well with constitutional indolence.'² The device of generalizing a certain character trait in order to project a theme or motif is not encountered again in Conrad's fiction.

It would be possible to assemble further instances to show the resourcefulness and the flexibility of method in the characterization of *The Secret Agent*, but as these have already received attention in *Nostramo*, it would be more illuminating to examine here one character to whose presentation the novelist has given special attention: Winnie Verloc. Her presentation in the climactic eleventh chapter draws on a variety of methods to produce an essentially simple and highly dramatic result. As her response to what she has learnt of Stevie's death occurs mainly on a primitive and irrational level, and the novelist can make only limited use of verbalized thought, he makes striking use of oblique methods. This kind of rendering has been put to brief comic use in the description of Mr Verloc's distress during the interview at the embassy:

1. *Ibid.* p. 47.
2. *Ibid.* p. 169.

Mr Verloc's immobility by the side of the armchair resembled a state of collapsed coma - a sort of passive insensibility interrupted by slight convulsive starts, such as may be observed in the domestic dog having a nightmare on the hearthrug.¹

But this comedy, reminiscent of Dickens, turns into a relentless objectivity, more reminiscent of Flaubert, in the rendering of Winnie Verloc.

When Heat leaves the shop after informing her of Stevie's fate, she is left sitting thus behind the counter:

The palms of her hands were pressed convulsively to her face, with the tips of her fingers contracted against the forehead, as though the skin had been a mask which she was ready to tear off violently.²

The posture conveys not only her present anguish, but prefigures her coming unmasking, or more accurately, her unveiling. Her immobility indicates also, of course, the isolation of man and wife despite the vain protestations of Mr Verloc in the earlier pages of the chapter. These are presently cut short by her strange, disconcerting stare, past Mr Verloc, upon the wall³ behind him.

The visions she now sees induce her growing passion.

1. *Ibid.* p. 34.

2. *Ibid.* p. 212.

3. This image of isolation is of course anticipated by Mr Verloc's earlier meditation in his parlour, which, 'like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world ...' *ibid.* p. 154. The image was likewise used in portraying Charles Gould's isolation.

They are at first flashbacks to her earlier life, and centre on Stevie, showing how he determined her choice of Mr Verloc as husband. When pressed to speak, she cannot do so, because she 'did not see any alternative between screaming and silence, and instinctively she chose silence.'¹ Her anguish begins to crystallize in a fixed idea which repeats itself involuntarily at intervals in her mind: 'This man took the boy away to murder him.'² Her anguish grows at each repetition:

Mrs Verloc's whole being was racked by that inconclusive and maddening thought. It was in her veins, in her bones, in the roots of her hair.³

The interior description is extended by an allusion:

Mentally she assumed the biblical attitude of mourning - the covered head, the rent garments; the sound of wailing and lamentation filled her head.⁴

As the compulsive idea is repeated, it produces a sequel: as the boy is now dead, her marriage is concluded and she is free to leave. The thought issues characteristically in action, not speech: she goes upstairs to dress to leave. When she returns to the parlour and is stopped by Mr Verloc, the reiterated thought becomes a half-question: this man has killed the boy 'somewhere'.⁵ Six pages later the half-question becomes a complete question:

1. *Ibid.* p. 246.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 246, repeated on pp. 247, 249, 250, 251, 256.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 246.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 246.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 250.

The man had taken Stevie out from under her very eyes to murder him in a locality whose name was¹ at the moment not present to her memory:

Mr Verloc's chance mention of Greenwich Park four pages later answers her question and prompts the last of her visions, which in turn precipitates the whole dénouement:

That's where the boy was killed. A park - smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone all spouting up together in the manner of a firework ... Mrs Verloc closed her eyes desperately, throwing upon that vision the night of her eyelids, where after a rainlike fall of mangled limbs the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone, and fading out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display.²

Recalling the location enables her to visualize the event, consummating its horror and substantiating her husband's guilt.

The vision contains an allusion to the earlier fireworks episode in which Stevie had given vent to a sense of injustice by setting off fireworks during his brief spell of employment.³ The allusion is one of the masterstrokes of the irony of the novel. Stevie's perpetration of this miniature bomb outrage may be simply taken as a manifestation of his half-wittedness and his need of 'protection' by

1. *Ibid.* p. 256.

2. *Ibid.* p. 260.

3. *Ibid.* p. 9; there is another allusion to this event on p. 220.

Winnie. It should be taken further as an illustration of the half-wittedness of those who indulge in such juvenile games, and of the way individual intentions undergo providential distortion.¹

The gradual precipitation of a decision is accompanied by some description from without:

Her face was no longer stony. Anybody could have noted the subtle change on her features, in the stare of her eyes, giving her a new and startling expression...²

At the same time the change is recorded from within:

she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body. It was all her own, because the bargain was at an end. She was clear sighted. She had become cunning. She chose to answer him so readily for a purpose. She did not wish that man to change his position on the sofa which was very suitable to the circumstances. She succeeded. The man did not stir.³

In her primitive thinking she momentarily attains, it is suggested, a magical control over her intended victim - a control she will not succeed in repeating with Ossipon. Once she has decided to murder him, the act is precipitated by his lover's command 'Come here'. The primitive nature of the act is signified by the comment that into her blow she put all the 'simple ferocity of the age of caverns,' and again by the evidence of a regression

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1. Though the connection occurs in Winnie's mind, it should be thought of as made for the reader's benefit rather than for hers, as she is in no state to appreciate parallels; it is a case of dramatic irony.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 260.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 261.

to a familial likeness:

... the resemblance of her face to that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes.¹

When, after a fleeting sense of liberation, the ticking sound of the dripping blood recalls her to a realization of what she has done, the realization is not expressed in thought but in a frantic rush to escape, the sequel of which is detailed in the following chapter.

Conrad's achievement lies in the convincing elemental clarity of the characterization. The movement from her state of inert shock to decision, to violent action, and then to terror projects a sustained dramatic pattern which lends this chapter and the second half of the book its distinction.

Another feature of her presentation, the sudden shift in our estimate of her when the reason for her marriage to Mr Verloc is disclosed, has already been discussed in a different connection. It remains to note the skill with which she is 'distanced' after the intimate view given of her in the crisis. In the case of Mr Verloc the distancing is managed by means of the formula method which has been used for the lesser characters from the beginning; as the door of the shop closes for the last time on Mr Verloc's body, the writer comments:

1. *Ibid.* p. 262.

night had fallen on Mr Verloc, the tried revolutionist - 'one of the old lot' - the humble guardian of society; the invaluable Secret Agent Δ of Baron Stott-Wartenheim's despatches; a servant of law and order, faithful, trusted, accurate, admirable, with perhaps one single amiable weakness: the idealistic belief in being loved for himself.¹

In the case of Winnie Verloc the distancing is accomplished by means of the imagery of dress, whereby attention is drawn to her indistinct and mysterious outward appearance as 'A lady in a black dress and black veil'² wandering vaguely on the quay alongside the steamer,³ and finally disappearing unseen into the dark waters of the Channel.

It was remarked at the beginning of this discussion of the characterization of the novel that the characters are all presented in the light of Conrad's pervasive irony. Something should finally be said about the Assistant Commissioner in the light of this statement. When we read of him at the very end of Chapter Ten, 'He looked at his watch. It was only half-past ten. He had had a very full evening',⁴ we cannot help projecting upon these deliberately neutral words a sense of the official's satisfaction at what he has accomplished. As stated earlier, he has, with Heat's assistance,

1. *Ibid.* p. 288.

2. *Ibid.* p. 308. Her dress, first mentioned on p. 254, becomes a black dress and black veil on p. 268; they are mentioned again on pp. 280 and 295. Her veil is mentioned several times in Chapter Twelve as covering her face, except when she looks closely at Ossipon on p. 296.

3. *Ibid.* p. 308.

4. *Ibid.* p. 228.

traced the bomb outrage to Mr Verloc. He has discovered the complicity of a foreign embassy. He has set the apprehensions of the Secretary of State at rest. And he has given Mr Vladimir a veiled but distinct warning. The moment provides the public part of the narrative with a satisfying close, but it has also brought the Assistant Commissioner close to winning the reader's approval. His overriding of Heat's authority to prevent action being taken against Michaelis is shown to have a private and unprofessional motive, but it is nonetheless proved correct by the event: his appeasement of the lady patroness coincides in this instance with justice. The irony which overlies the novel as a whole lies rather thinly over the Assistant Commissioner.

The imagery of *The Secret Agent* occurs in the exuberant abundance which the foregoing works would lead one to expect; it shows, indeed, some advance in the boldness of its scope. It occurs again in groups, each of which projects a specific motif, and which are to some extent interlinked to form a kind of structure which complements the more logical structure of the narrative.

The imagery of light and darkness, which Conrad uses with approximately the same meaning in all his major novels, is here given its most elaborate employment. Its scope is usefully indicated in the oft-quoted words of the Author's Preface:

the vision of an enormous town presented itself ... indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light.¹

1. *Ibid.*, Author's Preface, p. xxvi.

That this imagery is intended to give the novel a coherent setting is clear from such descriptions of the city as the following:

... an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night ...¹

and

... the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, was sunk in a hopeless night, (and) rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which² no unaided woman could hope to scramble out.

The imagery of darkness is usually, as here, linked with unpleasant weather. At the beginning a kind of sun still hangs over the city:

... a peculiarly London sun - against which nothing could be said except that it looked bloodshot - glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. The very pavement under Mr Verloc's feet had an old-gold tinge in that diffused light, in which neither wall,³ nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow.

The perceptive reader will conclude that light will play an important rôle in the novel, though its precise meaning here is not at first clear. Armed

1. *Ibid.* p. 150.
2. *Ibid.* pp. 270-1; two other examples which might equally well have been quoted occur on pp.56 and 276.
3. *Ibid.* p. 11. There may be a connection in Conrad's mind between this passage and Michaelis's remark about 'metaphorical lurid suns of vengeance rising above the horizon of a doomed society', *ibid.* p. 43.

with hindsight, he may conclude that the sun's rays cannot freely penetrate the air of the city, and that an illusory effect of splendour is created which is as unstable as the opulent streets Mr Verloc has passed with an approving eye, and whose 'blood-shot' colour belies its 'benign aspect'.¹ Certainly this light effect will not be seen again in the novel, where darkness will soon predominate. The London which Mr Verloc sees from his bedroom window after his painful interview with Mr Vladimir reflects his own gloom:

the enormity of (a) cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man.²

There is repeated mention of the gas being put out in various parts of Mr Verloc's shop and house, and twice a chapter ends with Mr and Mrs Verloc agreeing to put out the light in their bedroom. The Assistant Commissioner exclaims upon the wretched rain and gloom of the city as he stands before a window of his office discussing the explosion with Heat.³ When the Assistant Commissioner makes his way through the city to Mr Verloc's shop, this is how he sees Brett Street:

Only a fruiterer's stall at the corner made a violent blaze of light and colour. Beyond all was black, and the few people passing in that direction vanished at one stride beyond the glowing heaps of oranges and lemons.⁴

1. *Ibid.* p. 12.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 56.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 100.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 150.

The moral connotation behind the sensuous and imaginative reference of the imagery is made explicit from time to time, as when the blaze of light above is related on the following page to Mr Verloc's house:

This barrier of blazing lights, opposing the shadows gathered about the humble abode of Mr Verloc's domestic happiness, seemed to drive the obscurity of the street back upon itself, make it more sullen, brooding, and sinister.¹

After the murder of Mr Verloc, Winnie plunges into this darkness, the darkness of the passage above where London is sunk 'at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out'.² Dressed in black and wearing a black veil, 'all black from head to foot',³ she becomes less a person than a part of the darkness. When she and Ossipon have to return briefly to the shop, the drama of the scene is conveyed largely in terms of light and darkness, though these are momentarily given a reversed meaning: the lighted parlour has such a shocking revelation for Ossipon that he fumbles frantically with the gas tap to restore the darkness.⁴ Winnie Verloc's exit is a literal merging with the darkness in her act of suicide. Ossipon's escape from her is signalled by the rays of the rising sun falling on him.⁵

The imagery of light and darkness in the novel,

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1. *Ibid.* p. 151.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 271.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 268, and again on pp. 280, 295, 308.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 284-7.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 301.

which has so far received little critical notice,¹ is controlled with great care. Despite the fact that the time span of the book is not that of a single day - there is for instance a hiatus of ten days between Chapters Eight and Nine² - the light and darkness imagery creates a distinct impression of the events of the novel occurring in the span of a day, of the novel's beginning with a few hours of daylight which gives way to the darkness of a long night. The novel opens with a bloodshot sun gleaming upon Mr Verloc's walk to the embassy. By the end of Chapter Three the darkness and rain have overtaken Mr Verloc's shop and all London, creating a world of things 'unlovely and unfriendly to man'. At the end of Chapter Four, after the conversation at the Silenus Restaurant, the late afternoon sky is 'grimy'.³ Chapter Five shows the Professor meeting Heat in a gaslit alley. There is only one further instance of daylight before the end of the novel: the report of the Greenwich explosion as having occurred in the foggy light of the morning,⁴ which is elsewhere fixed at 'a little before eleven',⁵ Hereafter all the scenes of the novel occur in darkness, until the very end, when the sun rises. The damp gloom

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1. H.M. Daleski is the first critic to give an adequate assessment of it: *Joseph Conrad. The Way of Dispossession*, Faber, 1977, pp. 153-157.
 2. *The Secret Agent*, p. 182.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 79.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 86.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 84: there is a slight discrepancy between the report: 'his department received the first telegram from Greenwich a little before eleven in the morning', *ibid.* p. 84, and the newspaper report: 'Bomb in Greenwich Park ... Half-past eleven. Foggy morning.' Ibid. p.70.

evokes from the Assistant Commissioner the inward exclamation, 'Horrible, horrible! ... We have been having this sort of thing now for ten days; no, a fortnight - a fortnight.'¹ The cab-ride is overtaken by darkness.² The Assistant Commissioner's two visits to the Secretary of State, and the visit of the two police officials to the shop in Brett Street all occur in darkness, as do the wanderings of Winnie and Ossipon after the murder. The course of the light imagery comes full circle when Ossipon, having wandered about the city all night, falls asleep on his bed under the rays of the rising sun, exhausted but free from entanglement in the tragedy-comedy.³

In no other novel does Conrad use light and darkness imagery to the same extent. In *Nostramo*, which provides the nearest parallel, darkness is used as a consistent part of the setting in a minor section of the novel, viz the part of the crisis which runs from the first rumour of a Ribierist defeat in II.6 (p.210) to the night before the arrival of Pedro Montero's force in Sulaco in III.3 (p. 362). In *The Secret Agent* darkness is a consistent part of the setting through a major part of the novel, so that it becomes almost a metaphor for the setting itself. The light and darkness imagery plays a central part in the creation in the novel of a moral hell, a place at once London and cosmos,⁴ or, in Professor Norman Sherry's words, 'a landscape of the inferno'.⁵

1. *Ibid.* p. 100.

2. *Ibid.* p. 159.

3. *Ibid.* p. 301.

4. 'a rendering of cosmic chaos' is the novelist's comment on Stevie's drawing of circles, *ibid.* p.237.

5. *Ibid.* Introduction p. xix.

Another group of images which plays an important structural rôle is drawn from inanimate objects, which are given a seeming life of their own.¹ When these are considered together as a group, the novel becomes a little like a gallery full of the mechanized figures and toys beloved of the Nineteenth Century. They might at first be mistaken for mere sallies of a whimsical style, such as occur in a novel of Dickens, until the reader notes their deliberate recurrence. Their world is introduced, rather puzzlingly, when Mr Verloc walks to the embassy through a street which has an alien quality:

In its breadth, emptiness, and extent it had the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies.²

The possibility that living things might be claimed by or assimilated into this alien element is subtly suggested by the description of Mr Verloc as being 'steady like a rock - a soft kind of rock',³ and by the brief appearances in the street of a cat and a constable:

A guilty-looking cat issuing from under the stones ran for a while in front of Mr Verloc, then dived into another basement; and a thick police constable, looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he, too, were part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post, took not the slightest notice of Mr Verloc.⁴

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1. Several critics have noted and discussed this group; mention should be made of A. Fleischmann, whose essay 'The Symbolic World of *The Secret Agent*', is reprinted in part in *The Secret Agent*, The Casebook Series, Macmillan, 1973; and also of C.B. Cox, *op. cit.* pp. 83-101.
 2. *The Secret Agent*, *ibid.* p. 14.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 13.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 14

That inanimate nature has a will of its own which may seem to scorn the will of men is suggested also in the reference to London's 'strayed houses'¹ about which Mr Verloc did not trouble his head. The reference to the material world of the novel as 'things unlovely in themselves and unfriendly to men',² already quoted, shows the connection of this imagery with that of darkness and wretched weather. A glimpse of the inanimate world lurking strangely on the edge of the human world is given when Heat meets the Professor in the dark narrow lane:

Facing the only gas-lamp yawned the cavern of a second-hand furniture dealer, where, deep in the gloom of a sort of narrow avenue winding through a bizarre forest of wardrobes, with an undergrowth tangle of table legs, a tall pier-glass glimmered like a pool of water in a wood.³

When Heat goes to report to the Assistant Commissioner, there is an equally bizarre quality in the latter's surroundings:

He found him, pen in hand, bent over a great table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal. Speaking tubes resembling snakes were tied by the heads to the back of the Assistant Commissioner's armchair, and their gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows.⁴

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 56.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 82.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 97.

A moment of embarrassment for Winnie's mother is described thus:

The heroic woman swallowed a playful and inconvenient object like a billiard ball, which had tried to jump out of her throat.¹

The mechanical piano of the Silenus Restaurant plays with 'aggressive virtuosity'² and with 'brazen impetuosity',³ and falls silent 'all at once, as if gone grumpy.'⁴ When the piano is added to the list of inanimate objects, they seem intended to obtrude an ironic comment upon the unheeding human world. This is clearly the effect of the frequently heard cracked bell of Mr Verloc's shop door. Hanging on a curved ribbon of steel, it sounds at the slightest provocation with 'impudent virulence'.⁵ There is also the bizarre whistling or contented purring of the gas burners in the shop. When Mr Verloc on one occasion flung himself fully dressed on the sofa, his hat 'made for a safe shelter under the table' because 'it was accustomed to take care of itself'.⁶ And when its owner had died, it lay on the floor 'as if to receive contributions of

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1. *Ibid.* p. 163; the same effect of a character ridiculed by his own body occurs in the following description of Sir Ethelred: '(he) opened a wide mouth, like a cavern, into which the hooked nose seemed anxious to peer ...' *ibid.* p. 138.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 61.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 67.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 310.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 4.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 259.

pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr verloc ...'¹

The clocks whose ticking is heard throughout the novel form a special group of mechanical objects. One has a 'shy, feeble tick;² another a 'ghostly, evanescent tick',³ and another in its loneliness 'stole into the room (the Verlocs' bedroom) for the sake of company.'⁴ There is the sinister ticking which Winnie hears after the murder, which presently grows 'fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock', and turns out to be not a clock, but blood dripping from the body.⁵ At the end of the novel a clock tower by the river (Big Ben?) 'boomed a brazen blast'.⁶ The clocks should be seen as belonging to a larger group of references to time, showing it to have, like the inanimate world, a will of its own and a capacity by various means such as acceleration or retardation to confuse and dismay men. It is partly a matter of showing the characters beset by time for the reader's benefit, and partly a matter of causing distress to the characters themselves. The novelist has for instance a way of noting that a pause between two remarks or two actions lasts a precise number of seconds or minutes:

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1. *Ibid.* p. 285. There is one instance of Mr Verloc himself resembling an automaton. When he has just returned home after the explosion, he has to answer the doorbell: 'Mr Verloc obeyed woodenly, stony-eyed ... this resemblance to a mechanical figure went so far that he had an automaton's absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him.' *ibid.* p. 197.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 144.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 137.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 179.
 5. *Ibid.* pp. 264-5.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 300.

Lost for a whole minute in the abyss of meditation, Mr Verloc ...¹

'That poor boy is in a very excited state tonight,' she murmured after a pause which lasted for three ticks of the clock ...²

That utter stillness in his brain lasted about three seconds ...³

While he was speaking the hands on the face of the clock behind the great man's back ... had moved through the space of seven minutes.⁴

Winnie's misinterpretation of the sound of dripping blood, above, illustrates how time may be speeded up to the dismay of a character. There is also Heat's dismayed speculation as he looks at the contents of the waterproof sheet:

The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye.⁵

On the other hand it may be slowed down or seemingly brought to a stop in an equally disquieting way; Mr Verloc, trying to fall asleep at the end of the day of the interview with Mr Vladimir, hears footsteps in the street passing his shop 'unhurried and firm, as if the passer-by had started to pace

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1. *Ibid.* p. 53.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 58.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 100.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 137. Similar instances occur on pp. 181 ('... fifteen ticks into the abyss of eternity'), 243 ('A few seconds only had elapsed since ...'), 268 ('... only two minutes had passed since ...').
 5. *Ibid.* p. 88.

out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end.¹ And Mrs Verloc has the anxious impression after the murder that the clock in the parlour has stopped, because she has heard that clocks always did this at the scene of a murder.² During the cab-ride it is observed that 'time itself seemed to stand still.'³ While the occasion is not immediately distressing, its larger bearing is likewise ominous.

The other groups of imagery are less distinct and more diffused and interwoven with each other and with a number of motifs expressed directly as ideas. If the theme of the novel is taken to be certain kinds of political activity threatening society, and the plot is taken to be the working out of this threat (a somewhat simplistic view, as noted), these groups of images and motifs may be seen as complementing the theme most effectively. There are many scattered references to butchers,⁴ to their meat,⁵ to the revulsion inspired by the sight of a dead human body, intact or dismembered,⁶ to the use of knives for carving meat, for hunting and

1. *Ibid.* p. 57.

2. *Ibid.* p. 269.

3. The bravado of Ossipon's remark about eternity in his last conversation with the Professor does not erase the disquiet of both characters at the end of the book:

'...you carry in your pocket enough stuff to send yourself and, say, twenty other people into eternity. But eternity is a damned hole. It's time that you need ...' *ibid.* p. 305.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 14, 33, 40.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 88, 193, 232, 253.

6. *Ibid.* pp. 87, 285.

for killing,¹ and to cannibalism.² These images have an insidious effect: they are too generalized to be associated with particular characters or events. At first hardly noticed, they gradually create a sense of monstrous evil at large, a sense of conflict lurking just below the staid surface of society which is partly made explicit in the anarchists and Mr Vladimir, and partly produced by the imagery and the political theorizing. The saintly Michaelis avers that 'struggle, warfare (is) the condition of private ownership'³ and speaks of 'The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists'.⁴ Yundt speaks of law as the 'instrument invented by the overfed to protect themselves against the hungry',⁵ and Winnie Verloc explains to Stevie that the police 'are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have.'⁶ These anarchist views are brought close to the image group in question in Yundt's assertion:

Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic ... They are nourishing their greed on the quivering⁷ flesh and the warm blood of the people.

The fact that these notions are echoed in the imagery of the novel does not of course imply Conrad's endorsement of them, but an ironic commentary on them. The fact that Stevie overhears Yundt's

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 42, 60, 61, 193, 231, 238, 248, 253, 256, 262, 289, 290.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 51, 59, 86, 88.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 43.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 49.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 47.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 173.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 51.

sentiment and 'gets into his passions' over it;¹ that Stevie, who is hypersensitive to the idea of pain, presently becomes a nameless heap on a waterproof sheet - 'what may be called the by-products of a butcher's shop';² and that Mr Verloc returning home after the explosion is suddenly overcome by hunger and, cutting himself thick slices of beef with the carving knife, partakes 'ravenously, without restraint and decency'³ suggests that Conrad does indeed see a kind of monstrous, cannibalistic evil at large in the 'monstrous town'. Conrad sees it ironically, unlocated and pervasive, defying the efforts of Mr Vladimir and the anarchists to direct it, defying the efforts of the Professor to control it by means of a well-designed detonator, and the police to keep it under a 24-hour surveillance, and destroying Mr Verloc, when he is anxious to escape the knife of the supposedly enraged anarchists.⁴ Because of the irrational dimension of the evil, it is appropriate that it should be described, as often in Conrad, obliquely - in terms of imagery, and that the Professor should be allowed to leave the final impression in the novel:

His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction ... He passed on unsuspected and deadly, ⁵ like a pest in the street full of men.

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1. *Ibid.* p. 59.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 88.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 253 (also p. 232)
 4. He is of course killed with the very knife with which he has just been heartily carving large slices of meat for himself.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 311.

The imagery and the motif of butchery and cannibalism are linked with those of corpulence and indolence which have been noted as being to some extent generalized among the characters. Two further reiterated notions which are given sufficient emphasis to qualify as motifs, remain to be noticed, though they lack embodiment in images: the notions of protection and isolation.

A concern with protection and security is of course felt by Winnie and her mother on behalf of Stevie, and leads them to make unusual sacrifices. It is repeated in other contexts. Mr Verloc is introduced as having the vocation of 'a protector of society',¹ and when on his walk to the embassy, he looks upon the opulence of Hyde Park Corner as in need of protection.² The sun is shown hanging over this scene with an air of 'benign vigilance'.³ Chief Inspector Heat is referred to as a name 'familiar to the great public as that of one of its zealous and hard-working protectors',⁴ while the Assistant Commissioner is seen at one moment as taking 'a special kind of interest in his work of social protection.'⁵ Heat is presently shown as reluctant to surrender his 'protection'⁶ of Mr Verloc. When Winnie stumbles upon Ossipon in Brett Street after the murder, she builds on him 'a dream of security'.⁷ On the other hand, Mr Verloc feels after his interview with Mr Vladimir that

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1. *Ibid.* p. 5.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 12 and 15.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 11.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 101.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 103.
 6. *Ibid.* pp. 131, 140.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 279.

his situation is 'like your horse suddenly falling dead under you in the midst of an uninhabited and thirsty plain.'¹ Such references clearly establish a motif upon which the irony of the novel is directed, as it is upon the other motifs connected with it: those of corpulence and indolence.

Another motif is that of isolation. Of Michaelis we learn that:

He talked to himself, indifferent to the sympathy or hostility of his hearers, ² indifferent indeed to their presence ... He was no good in discussion ... because the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcerted him painfully, confusing his thoughts at once ...³

Ossipon, conversing with the Professor at the Silenus Restaurant, makes some of his remarks half audibly, to himself, 'in the manner of a man reflecting in perfect solitude.'⁴ The motif is skilfully linked at a few points with the imagery and motif of darkness. The Assistant Commissioner, for instance, rebukes Heat thus: 'Your idea of secrecy seems to consist in keeping the chief of your department in the dark.'⁵ And it is Heat himself who is presently seen to be 'in the dark' when he asserts mistakenly that Michaelis will turn out to be the man behind the explosion. But the chief instance is of course the scene of the

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1. *Ibid.* p. 57.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 44.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 45.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 78.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 132.

isolation of husband and wife which ends in the murder in Chapter Eleven. The alternation of his futile protestations with his wife's silences and private visions is a study in non-communication of which something has already been shown in an earlier discussion; it will suffice here to say that their isolation is made equally apparent on earlier domestic occasions where Mrs Verloc's habit of 'not taking notice of the inside of facts' is matched by Mr Verloc's tendency to 'intense meditation' which 'like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances.'¹ The two occasions when they are shown going to bed together² provide further instances of the irony which is directed upon their hollow domesticity.

The above account does not exhaust the tally of image groups and motifs. There are enough references to insanity³ to suggest a generalized notion constituting a motif. Again, Winnie Verloc's drowning is anticipated by enough allusions to it to constitute a motif, some of which create a more general notion of a damp, rainy London as a physically alien and choking environment.⁴

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1. *Ibid.* p. 154.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 60 and 181.
 3. Apart from the many references to Stevie's half-wittedness there are references to particular instances of imbecility or to general states of insanity on pp. 33, 208, 212, 262, 278, 283, 290, 307.
 4. For instance, the Assistant Commissioner, entering the streets, 'advanced at once into an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night', *ibid.* p. 150. Other references to drowning occur on pp. 44, 88, 269, 274.

In *The Secret Agent* Conrad gave to the non-narrative structural elements of imagery and motif a larger rôle than in any other novel. The various groups - light and darkness, inanimate nature and mechanical objects and a subordinate group of clocks and time-references, butchery and cannibalism, corpulence and indolence, protection and security, isolation, insanity, drowning - are all neatly accommodated in the narrative texture without overloading it, so that it is surely among Conrad's novels the richest in suggestion and the most poetic. The largeness of the oblique element also results in a certain blurring of meaning, for the image and the motif function by suggestion, not by precise reference. The motif of isolation, which Leavis regards as the theme of the novel, and which was seen to apply specifically to Michaelis, to Ossipon, to the Verlocs, and perhaps (briefly?) to Heat, must surely be judged to apply more specifically to Mr and Mrs Verloc than to the Assistant Commissioner, to Sir Ethelred, or to the lady patroness, to Stevie, or to his mother. It may be that Stevie's obsessive drawing of circles¹ provides a symbol of defective human interrelation, and confirms the importance of the motif. But Baines's uncertainty about the theme of the novel is not groundless since we cannot judge to what extent a certain image group or motif is to be applied in a novel. Sir Ethelred in his pursuit of the nationalization

1. 'circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos ...' *ibid.* p. 45. Other references occur on pp. 10, 49, 187, 237.

of fisheries, the lady patroness in her sentimental attachment to Michaelis and her approval of the ruin of the economic system, and the Assistant Commissioner in his unprofessional indulgence of Michaelis may be short-sighted, but they are hardly benighted, imbecilic, murderous, indolent or socially isolated. The large rôle allowed to the oblique elements in this novel is evidence of its imaginative resourcefulness and its virtuosity; it has also the effect of diffusing and blurring somewhat its final meaning.

CHAPTER SIX

UNDER WESTERN EYES

The present vogue of this novel has brought it the popularity for which Conrad never ceased to hope and which he never achieved in his lifetime; its political subject matter ensures it a topicality which makes it of the Twentieth Century. Moreover, the bold ingenuity of its design gives it a special place in the Conrad canon. As in most of the novels, the plot is essentially simple, consisting of a political assassination and the vain attempts of a gifted student to shake off his accidental association with the assassin after betraying him to the authorities, the break-down of his studies and prospective career, and his growing sense of guilt leading to his self-denunciation and ruin. This simple plot is complicated by its extension over two separate locations: St Petersburg and - a haven of escape from Russia - Geneva; and this extension is accompanied by different phases of the narrator's understanding of the action. The assassination occurs in the first chapter; the hero's self-denunciation and ruin occur in the second-last chapter; all the intervening space is devoted to the shifting perspectives of an intense psychological drama: the hero's attempts to escape the pressures consequent upon his act of betrayal, exerted by both the revolutionary forces and the autocratic regime, as well as by his conscience. In this drama the two cities come to have a thematic polarity: St Petersburg representing an autocratic, idealistic and inhumane East, where a crime has occurred, and Geneva representing a democratic, pragmatic and humane West, where there is a desire to learn about this crime. The narrative plan of Parts Two and Three strengthens the polarity: Razumov's arrival in Geneva and his meeting with Haldin's mother and sister, as well as a succession of Russian revolutionary exiles, confront him with his predicament of

conscience in an acute form, so that he takes refuge in a tormented and cynical reticence. The design of the novel emerges thus:

- Part One: St Petersburg: the assassination and its effects on Razumov.
- Part Two: Geneva: Razumov's arrival here, his meeting of the Haldin women, his reserve towards them.
- Part Three: Geneva: Razumov's meetings with various revolutionaries, notably Sophia Antonovna, the most perspicacious and thus the most dangerous.
- Part Four: St Petersburg and Geneva: Time shift back to St Petersburg to reveal Razumov's political commitment; return to Geneva revealing his sense of futility over this; his need to confess; the dénouement.

It is a somewhat asymmetric plan, bearing a distinct resemblance to that of *Lord Jim*. Part Four is much more heavily loaded and much faster-paced than Parts Two and Three, but it is balanced in these respects by the dramatic action of Part One. Part Four is relatively complicated in geography and chronology, and it gives the long-withheld information about Razumov's political involvement; it is also distinguished by rapid shifts between two points of view used by the narrator: those of editor and of eyewitness. Parts Two and Three are characterized by a long-drawn-out psychological suspense over the question whether Razumov can sustain the pressures upon him and keep his secret; these slower-paced parts balance the dramatic action of Parts One and Four, preparing the way for the dénouement.

The resemblance to *Lord Jim* extends to Conrad's use, resumed after an interval of objective presentation

in *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent*, of a narrator, the modest teacher of languages who becomes the confidant of the Haldin women. The narrator in James and Conrad serves the purpose of bestowing upon the action a unity of viewpoint which enhances the illusion of reality. Here he is used furthermore to realise the East-West polarity of the novel. Conrad had strong feelings on the subject of Russia, and, aware of the danger of bias, took pains to keep a balanced view.¹ The narrator thus serves the further purpose of providing a defined view of the Russian material, a view which veers between an admission of limited understanding and comment. He is on the whole portrayed sympathetically and may be taken as the novelist's mouthpiece, voicing the novelist's own puzzlement and exasperation over Russian attitudes. His viewpoint involves a certain latitude and ambiguity. He disavows any comprehension of Russian attitudes. For instance:

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.²

Here he evidently cannot help interpreting and judging what he records. He sometimes does so explicitly:

... the pen being ready for its office of setting down black on white I hesitate. For the word that persists in creeping under its point is no other word than 'cynicism.'

For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism.³

1. 'My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality.'
Under Western Eyes, Collected Edition, Dent, London, 1947; Author's Note, p. viii.

2. *Ibid.* p. 104.

3. *Ibid.* p. 67.

Indeed on the second page of the novel the narrator's judgment of the 'illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, the frequency of the exceptional'¹ casts its shadow ahead over the whole book, so that even the most sympathetic of the Russian characters are darkened a few shades. Aside from such caricatures as Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S-, Conrad takes pains to give a number of the characters a fuller and more sympathetic treatment: Nathalie, Sophia Antonovna, Tekla, as well as Razumov himself. Yet these do not escape the implication that, however good their intentions or noble their sentiments, they are touched by an essential irrationality. Nathalie Haldin, whose portrayal is the most sympathetic, is 'so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced!'² The real meaning of her trusting grey eyes, which are frequently mentioned, is her naive belief in an apocalyptic future of love and concord.³ When she meets the egregious Peter Ivanovitch, she is willing to be directed by him.⁴ Razumov is first introduced as someone who is seen by his fellow students as 'a strong nature - an altogether trustworthy man'.⁵ But the impression of soundness soon becomes questionable. When he is confronted by Haldin's request for assistance, he co-operates to the extent of seeking out the sleigh driver; then, finding him incapacitated by drink, he begins to vacillate. His distress is accompanied by signs of

1. *Ibid.* p. 4.

2. *Ibid.* p. 142.

3. For instance, she is 'wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears.' *Ibid.* p. 377.

4. *Ibid.* p. 132.

5. *Ibid.* p. 6.

distinct weakness. When he considers betraying Haldin, he is overwhelmed by a sense of 'moral solitude'¹ which finds expression in a fantasy of a passionate confession to Haldin ending in 'embraces and tears'.² The 'brilliant glance' of a pretty woman passing him then dispels this fantasy, and a glimpse of a passing grey whisker³ evokes the image of Prince K-, his protector, and precipitates his decision to betray his fellow student. The narrator (and the novelist) makes every allowance for Razumov, showing that he is under pressure because his studies - the only link with society which is open to him - are put at risk. The sympathy in Razumov's presentation is balanced by detachment and even irony.

The fact that even the sympathetic characters are marked by a foreign irrationality does not, however, mean that they are affected by the modest narrator's imperfect vision or, on a deeper level, deformed by Conrad's personal bias regarding things Russian. It is misleading to say, as Douglas Hewitt does, that, because the characterization contains descriptions of extreme states, the novel is a 'melodrama, over-written and exaggerated', 'heavily indebted to Dostoevsky',⁴ and that

Our inability to form a concrete and deeply realised picture of Razumov's mind is to be seen as a positive success. We are not asked to understand; we can only join the narrator in his uncomprehending observation in what he calls 'my character of a mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes'.⁵

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1. *Ibid.* p. 39.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 40.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 40.
 4. Hewitt, *op.cit.* p. 83.
 5. Hewitt, *ibid.* p. 83.

It is precisely upon the rounded and convincing humanity of the abovementioned characters that the claim of the novel must rest. Conrad's characterization is essentially that of the realist novelist who intends his characters to have a life and logic of their own, and a destiny that issues from character and not from the novelist's opinions. Hewitt should have noted that there is a latitude and an ambiguity in the narrator's view. The characterization of Sophia Antonovna may be taken as an example of characterization in the novel, and it will at the same time serve to illustrate the abundant variety of the means of characterization which is employed.

When Razumov, leaving the grounds of the Chateau Borel, meets her, a short introductory paragraph notes her physical features, dress and characteristic expression,¹ particularly those features which will be repeated until they convey her essential character: her grave, intent expression suggestive of her humanity; her crimson blouse suggestive of the inflammatory nature of her cause; her tireless, brilliant black eyes, and, in contrast to their animation, her almost white hair, which (together with her occasional exclamations of weariness) mark her many years of service to the cause; the Mephistophelian slant of her eyebrows, which suggests her practical sagacity and the sinister side of her activities.

In the course of her conversation with Razumov she explains the reason for her arrival, exclaims upon his sarcasm, reflects upon a fellow-revolutionary, probes Razumov's reserved words for what may

1. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 238.

lie behind them. She leads him towards the gate, reassures him about his misgivings about his standing among the revolutionaries, and interprets his apparent political stance:

... your ideas are probably all right ...
What's the matter with you is that you
don't like us.¹

She exclaims upon men's incompetence and vanity, learns with pleasure of his supposed revolutionary mission, ignores his ironic references to Peter Ivanovitch, and then defends the latter by stressing, in words which give a flash of insight into her outlook, a revolutionary's need of an unquestioning faith:

Truly there are millions of people in Russia who would envy the life of dogs in this country. It is a horror and a shame to confess this even between ourselves. One must believe for very pity.²

She complains of weariness, looks forward to tea at the Chateau, exclaims upon Razumov's irony at the expense of the cause. When Razumov expresses distaste at Peter Ivanovitch's mercenary motive in cultivating Madame de S-, she asserts the need not to judge an 'inspired person'. Right at the end of the long interview she mentions Ziemianitch's suicide, which at first disquiets Razumov and then reassures him, since it is taken as an indication of the sleigh driver's guilt in the Haldin affair. Gradually Razumov gathers, as does the reader, a

1. *Ibid.* p. 243.

2. *Ibid.* p. 245.

strong impression of her perspicacity, Razumov seeing it mainly as a threat to his security, while the reader sees it as the mark of a sensible and practical, though politically misguided, woman of affairs. Occasionally the narrative glances at the wider political context, as when the Chateau, in whose grounds they stand, is seen as a 'house of folly, blindness, of villainy and crime.'¹ Light is also thrown on Sophia Antonovna by the placement of the scene after Razumov's discussion with Madame de S-, who was introduced to him as a person of great penetration, but who failed to arouse in him any sense of insecurity.² The placement implies that Sophia Antonovna is indeed a person of 'perspicacity'. The portrait is at once sympathetic and critical, and entirely convincing. It illustrates that foremost characteristic of the realist novel, the creation of an illusion of reality by rendering a character's moment-by-moment living with all its surprises and fluctuations of feeling, which would lead to formlessness if it were not given form, among other means, by the recurrent use of the significant detail.

A further examination of Razumov's characterization is needed if the novel is to be vindicated against Hewitt's criticism, and the means employed are to seem appropriate to a clear and four-square conception of his character. Hewitt points in the passage quoted above to a supposed vagueness at the core of the novelist's conception of Razumov, a vagueness that is part of the novel's 'melodramatic' quality.

1. *Ibid.* p. 248-9.

2. Peter Ivanovitch says of her: 'Nothing can remain obscure before that ... inspired penetration'. *Ibid.* p. 213.

Hewitt adds that the 'overwritten and exaggerated' passages like the description of Razumov's walk in the streets after Haldin has asked him for shelter are 'heavily indebted to Dostoievsky.'¹ It was noted in an earlier chapter of this study that in the portrayal of Jim, the novelist at times chose an oblique approach to characterization. In particular, while the more obvious points were made directly, the more surprising or shocking implications of Jim's behaviour tended to be conveyed obliquely, often entirely in terms of imagery, as when Jim's tendency to idealistic dreaming was conveyed by reference to ghosts, spectres, bewitchment and moonlight. In *Under Western Eyes* Conrad is clearly influenced by a recent reading of *Crime and Punishment*,² but it would be misleading to see in Razumov a vague incompleteness of characterization and then to ascribe this to the influence of Dostoievsky. Correctly read, the character of Razumov presents at times an impression of frustration, vacillation, of directionless and irrational behaviour. His only constructive action (until the end) is his drafting of a series of principles

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1. Hewitt, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
 2. The parallel between the two novels is so strong that one might suspect Conrad of wanting to redo Dostoievsky's novel on his own terms. Both novels have as protagonist an intelligent, proud and lonely student; a noble, self-sacrificing sister and a mother drawn into his tragic destiny (Conrad turns Dostoievsky's single student into a pair); an early crime which imposes its constraint on him and those near him; the sustained extremity of his state of mind accompanied by severe psychic and physical symptoms; a skilful and cunning police official; a love element which induces the protagonist to confess; and of course the characteristic combination of idealism, self-abasement and cynicism in many of the characters which to Conrad were Russian features.

beginning 'History not Theory ...'¹ But beneath the surface there are signs of a counter-movement which causes not only an exhausting restlessness but a perverse tendency to blurt out allusions to the things he wants to keep hidden. This impulse grows until it emerges as a need to confess his act of betrayal, first to Nathalie, and then to the assembled exiles, whereupon the breach of community is again healed as far as the distracted and embroiled state of Russia allows. This is the deeper logic of Razumov's character, a logic which underlies his Russianness and irrationality, and which belies any supposed weakness or incompleteness in the author's conception of him. Conrad's conception of Razumov, perhaps of an intuitive order, must in other words be seen as extending beyond the narrator's purview. The narrator may be regarded as Conrad's mouthpiece, but he does not see the whole truth about Razumov.

With his interest in oblique rendering of character well established when he approached the writing of *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad must have felt, nevertheless, that the kind of oblique rendering Dostoevsky used in the portrayal of Raskolnikov would be particularly suited to the rendering of the irrationality of Russian characters.² Raskolnikov is so largely rendered by means of moment-by-moment experience conveyed in all its contingency and unresolved tensions that the whole of Dostoevsky's novel becomes 'psychological' in the sense that an

1. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 66.

2. There is no mention in Conrad's correspondence of his reading *Crime and Punishment*, neither during the period when he wrote *Under Western Eyes*, 1907-1910, nor at any other time. Yet the close parallel between the two novels strongly suggests that he read Dostoevsky's novel about this time, when Constance Garnett's translations of Russian novels were making their impact.

objective time orientation all but disappears in it. The reader is given the seemingly-unedited thoughts and feelings which come to the surface of Raskolnikov's mind, and he has to interpret them and divine the underlying thinking implied but not articulated in them. Raskolnikov may be said to do some of his most essential thinking not only wordlessly, but involuntarily, merely putting together what he hears and sees around him and allowing painful decisions to form themselves in his mind. Having heard when Lisaveta will be absent from her sister's apartment, his realisation of the need to act is manifested not as a decision but as the onset of painful physiological symptoms:

It was only a few steps further to his lodging. He went in like a man condemned to death. He did not reason about anything, he was quite incapable of reasoning, but he felt with his whole being that his mind and will were no longer free, and that everything was settled, quite finally.¹

An important element in this 'psychological' method is the use of dreams. Each of Raskolnikov's four dreams is structurally connected with his state of mind at the time of its occurrence, and represents a judgment upon his situation. For instance, his dream of witnessing a horse being beaten to death by a drunken crowd is Raskolnikov's own deeper comment on the news of his sister's impending marriage to Luzhin and, indeed, on his own criminal plan. His dream of the old woman laughing in his face when he returns to the scene of the crime and

1. *Crime and Punishment*, translated by Jessie Coulson, W.W. Norton, New York, 1964, p. 59.

re-murders her, has a similar structural meaning, reflecting his deeper realization that his murder plan has been an unintelligent and a ludicrous failure.

Conrad uses the same 'psychological' method for Razumov, reporting his surface thoughts but leaving their interpretation very much to the reader, while all but eliminating an objective time-orientation. Razumov's thinking is at times made to seem involuntary, seemingly controlled by things glimpsed in his environment, as when his train of thought is reversed when he glimpses a pretty woman glancing at him as she passes him in the street.¹ His deeper thinking is likewise conveyed by means of fantasy and hallucination, as when he imagines himself stepping over Haldin's body lying on the snow-covered pavement, when he considers the notion of betraying Haldin to the authorities.² It is a vision which he experiences rather than understands; it distils his essential situation for his own as well as the reader's benefit, so that it is at once a psychological event and a literary symbol. It is pregnant with meaning, representing at first, to Razumov at least, merely a human obstacle, but reflecting,

1. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 40.

2. *Ibid.* p. 36-37. It may or may not be fanciful to see in Razumov's hallucination a verbal memory of Dostoievsky's novel, in whose Russian title the word for 'crime', *prestuplenie*, literally means 'a stepping across' or transgression. Even if Conrad had no knowledge of Russian whatever, as he asserts in a letter to Edward Garnett (Edward Garnett: *Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895-1924*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, Letter of May, 1917), he may have recalled the notion that Raskolnikov stepped over an obstacle, figuratively speaking, a number of times; for instance, three times in Part III. Ch.V: *op.cit.* pp. 249, 250 ('to march over corpses') and 255

in due course, his sense of guilt. He comes to see the figure in the snow as his double, whose betrayal is also a betrayal of all men and a self-betrayal.¹ The vision testifies to the logical completeness of Conrad's conception of Razumov. Conrad did not need to learn oblique methods of characterization from Dostoievsky in order to write *Under Western Eyes*. He nevertheless took a leaf out of the Russian master's book in order to give the protagonist an appearance of irrationality which he thought typically Russian.

It is now possible to return to the question of the effectiveness of the narrator. His rôle of interposing a Western viewpoint between the reader and the Russian material is convincingly accomplished, and is not unduly disturbed by the fact that while he acts at times as Conrad's spokesman when commenting on the nature of revolutions or on the Russian character, he at other times disclaims any understanding of the phenomena he records, shaking his head in disbelief or incomprehension at the antics of the Russian colony. Also effective on the whole is the flexible use of the narrator, so that his rôle of overall editor, who has full knowledge of Razumov's document, is supplemented by his rôle as eyewitness and actor within the narrative context, the companion and confidant of the Haldin women, who shares their ignorance of and curiosity about what has happened in St Petersburg. In his first rôle

1. It is another instance of the device of the unforeseen partnership. Razumov obsessively re-enacts Haldin's departure from his rooms down the stair-well in his anxiety to come to terms with him, and feels in the end that the man whom he betrayed saves him, by the power of love, through the mediacy of his sister. *Ibid.* pp. 257, 300, 362.

he can say, looking at Nathalie's unfolding destiny:

I saw the gigantic shadow of Russian life deepening around her like the darkness of an advancing night. It would devour her presently.¹

On the other hand he is used in Part Two and frequently in Part Four at an earlier stage of his knowledge, to heighten the dramatic contrast between what the reader knows to have happened in Russia, and what the characters in Geneva are unaware of and seek to know. For instance, his misinterpretation of Razumov's aloofness during the latter's first meeting with Nathalie provides this dramatic irony:

He must have been stern indeed, or perhaps very timid with women ... Those lofty and solitary existences ... make a young man shy.²

Another instance of his effective use in the second rôle occurs when, after Razumov's climactic confession to Nathalie and his departure, the narrator, who is present at the scene, fusses needlessly over Razumov's carrying off her veil.³ This serves to underline the symbolic significance of the veil, and to underline also, by means of an age-youth contrast, the drama and agony of the young people.

This use of the narrator is an interesting development of the simpler rôles given him in *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Falk*. While he is much more effectively used than the Marlow of *Chance*,

1. *Ibid.* p. 202.

2. *Ibid.* p. 171-2.

3. *Ibid.* p. 356.

there are some shortcomings in his use in the present novel. In Part Four the alternation between the two rôles becomes frequent. This is appropriate to the critical character of this part, and accords with the protagonist's hectic state of mind at the point of confession. But there are a few occasions when this sudden switching of perspective - between the narrator-actor who does not know Razumov's secret, and the narrator who does - becomes bewildering to the reader. For instance, after the narrator has entered the apartment in the Rue des Philosophes with Nathalie, and has witnessed the effect on Mrs Haldin of Razumov's explanation to her, the narrator suddenly reverts to his other rôle, portraying Razumov from within:

I had this glimpse behind the scenes, and then Miss Haldin, passing the young man, shut the door...There was in the immobility of that bloodless face the dreadful aloofness of suffering without remedy.

Meanwhile the young man kept his eyes fixed on the floor. The thought that he would have to repeat the story he had told already was intolerable to him. He had expected to find the two women together. And then, he had said to himself, it would be over for all time - for all time. 'It's lucky I don't believe in another world,' he had thought cynically.¹

Then there are a number of fine narrative passages endowed with the Conradian virtues of graphic circumstantial detail and fine nuances of feeling, like the account of the assassination or the interview with Mikulin, which the narrator, a teacher of

1. *Ibid.* p. 339. It is also rather awkward that when the narrator first meets, as an eyewitness, Sophia Antonovna (*Ibid.* p. 327), and Peter Ivanovitch (*Ibid.* p. 328-9), the narrative slows down while the narrator notices the same visual details as the reader has earlier been given.

languages who disclaims any gifts of imagination, could not possibly have evoked from Razumov's document, however detailed it may have been. There are besides the various narrative techniques and the artistic use of images, symbols and echoes which are foreign to a narrator who disavows the skill to invent a transition.¹

A salient feature of the narrative technique of this novel, the treatment of chronology, calls for notice. In large parts of the novel chronological time is suspended and replaced by a kind of inner, psychological time-momentum, whose purpose is partly to approximate Razumov's extreme state of mind, and partly to give the novel a more dramatic momentum. On a few occasions, time references are given for a specific narrative purpose. For instance, in the transition from St Petersburg to Geneva at the end of Part One, the novelist dovetails the two narrative sequences precisely by marking the same moment of time in both: Haldin, the narrator remarks, was entering his last silent hours on the afternoon his mother was giving an 'at home'.² But normally the novel detaches itself from time, as for instance in the following description of Razumov's state of mind after the betrayal:

He was mildly surprised to discover himself being overtaken by night. The room grew dark swiftly though time had seemed to stand still.³

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1. *Ibid.* p. 100.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 105: this is in spite of the narrator's statement that he cannot invent a transition, *ibid.* p. 100.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 69.

Apart from such descriptions of timelessness, the novelist detaches the narrative from time by simply omitting almost all indications of time, in order to slow or accelerate the events to achieve a desired momentum. This is best illustrated by a review of the larger narrative units of the novel.

The events of Part One precipitated by the assassination are so dramatic that the novel almost at once strikes a dramatic pace. At the end of Part One there is a distinct halt and a firmly managed geographic shift to the quieter and more sedate world of Geneva. Here a complementary tension is gradually built up: a growing desire for news of Haldin, especially on the part of Nathalie and her mother. As this is progressively satisfied,¹ the desire arises to learn from the newly-arrived Razumov the missing details of Haldin's arrest. This tension, which gives to Parts One and Two something of the relationship of obverse and reverse, slackens again when Razumov disappointingly communicates nothing but a scornful reserve and inner unease. Part Three slackens the momentum a little further, since the action here consists entirely of Razumov's discussions with a number of revolutionaries: Peter Ivanovitch, Madame de S-, Tekla, Sophia Antonovna, Julius Laspara. The absence of time references is sustained until the very last pages of Book Three, when a sinking sun and a

1. The progression is skilfully managed: first there is the news that the assassin has been caught and executed; then comes the ladies' concern at the lack of news of Victor Haldin; then a friend in St Petersburg writes that he cannot trace Victor in the city; and finally there comes the newspaper report of Haldin's arrest: pp. 107-110.

deepening twilight¹ are mentioned. Conrad deliberately ignores the impossibility of Razumov's seeing so many people at such length in one day (indeed, even his earlier interview with the narrator, which occurs in the preceding chapter, II.5, is included in this day), in order to complete a certain phase of the drama in one continuous sequence and in a fairly low key. Some critics have complained of the slowness of this sequence,² though it is deliberate and appropriate in its dramatic context. It would be wrong to regard it as merely a series of portraits of revolutionaries introduced to fill out the ideological panorama; the point of each meeting is not only to provide another portrait, but to sustain the drama of concealment.

Peter Ivanovitch, for instance, contributes unwittingly to this drama by recommending Madame de S- to Razumov with the words, 'Nothing can remain obscure before that ... inspired penetration, this true light of femininity.'³ There is a further dramatic effect in Razumov's seeing first Madame de S- and then Sophia Antonovna: while the boast of the former that she can see into him proves hollow, the latter with her lively black eyes and 'perspicacity' proves someone to be reckoned with:

1. *Ibid.* pp. 290-291.

2. Guerard: 'Certain scenes in the second and third parts, carried on the "deluge of dialogue," are much too long.' *Op. cit.* p. 248. M.D. Zabel: 'in its second and third parts ... there are stretches of dramatic indirection that are likely to put any reader's patience to a test.' Anchor Books edition of *Under Western Eyes*, Doubleday, New York, 1963, Introduction p. xx.

3. *Ibid.* p. 213.

'he judged her ... as being a distinct danger in his path.'¹ She is struck by his scorn and suspects that there is more to him than he reveals. At the end of the meeting there is some relaxation of tension as Razumov learns from her that the revolutionaries believe Ziemianitch to be guilty of Haldin's betrayal. But it mounts again when Laspara's request for a revolutionary article from him rouses him to a sudden fury.² As he seats himself under the statue of Rousseau with the vow that he will 'write something', his anger is dramatic but as yet unexplained.

The dramatic tempo suddenly gains momentum with the narrative coup at the opening of Book Four. The time shift which returns the narrative to the interview with Councillor Mikulin overturns the complacency with which the reader has regarded the ignorance of the characters in Geneva; learning that Razumov has become a secret agent of the regime, the reader has suddenly to revise his reading of the two preceding books. Though Razumov's unfitness for such a rôle is obvious, it is clear now why his discussions with the revolutionaries were at once necessary and painful to him. In IV.2 the narrative thread is taken up in Geneva again at the precise point where it was dropped: on the little island under the statue of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, where, it is now clear, Razumov has been trying to do what he came to Geneva for - to write secret reports on the revolutionaries in exile. As he gives up his

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1. *Ibid.* p. 242. Even the harmless Tekla provokes his anger when she remarks innocently that he 'inspires trust', unwittingly expressing the very notion which both Haldin and General T-
[redacted] used of him. The drama is more internal than external.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 287-8.

attempt as futile, the narrative begins to move strongly with the news that Mrs Haldin's critical state makes an interview with Razumov about her son's end imperative. This in turn provokes further dramatic developments - Razumov's deepening response to Nathalie, his revulsion from his political commitment, his compulsion to confess to Nathalie, and the remainder of the dénouement.

Conrad has detached his narrative to a large degree from chronological time and has arranged it into larger movements which enable him to regulate with notable precision not only the dramatic tempo, but the timing and weight of each fresh development. Conrad's method, here as in other major works, is precisely incremental. The information withheld from the reader until the beginning of Part Four would have been far less dramatic if disclosed in its chronological context at the end of Part One.

While the above account attempts to reveal the total narrative design of the novel, it does not do justice to several well-modulated sequences within the design, of which at least one ought to be examined more fully: the sequence constituting IV. 2-3. It begins with Razumov leaving the island of Rousseau in the deepening dusk, feeling the uselessness of his attempts to write political reports, and, while wandering the streets, he impresses the narrator, who catches a glimpse of him, by the shocking wretchedness of his face. At the point where the narrator calls at the apartment in the Rue des Philosophes, the narrative becomes dramatic. Just as he approaches the house door, it opens to reveal Nathalie coming out to seek him. He is apprized of her mother's overwrought state and of the need, even at this late hour, for Razumov

to be found so that he may set her mind at rest about her son's end. The drama here lies in the fact that Razumov in the state of mind which the narrator glimpsed is clearly unfit to be of assistance to Mrs Haldin. When the search for Razumov's address leads Nathalie and the narrator to a group of revolutionaries gathered round a brightly-lit map in Peter Ivanovitch's apartment, the intrusion of this new political subject matter threatens to dissipate the dramatic tension. But it is maintained by Nathalie's learning Razumov's address here, and furthermore by the news that something more has been learnt of her brother's end, and that Razumov can give her this news. The tempo then slackens when Nathalie and the narrator fail to find Razumov at his lodgings. Reluctant to give up their quest, they walk about the streets and return half an hour later. When they find that he is still out, they decide to give up their search until the following morning, and a deliberate sense of anti-climax marks the end of the chapter, a sense of much dialogue and movement of characters having been enacted to little purpose.

Chapter IV.3 opens a few moments later with a surprise. Nathalie approaches her apartment wondering how to convince her mother that she has indeed failed to find Razumov. While a peal of distant thunder in the Rhone Valley marks the growing momentum of the chapter, she and her companion learn on entering that Razumov is already at the apartment, and that he is at that moment speaking to Mrs Haldin.¹ As the momentum continues to mount

1. *Ibid.* p. 336.

in this chapter, it becomes clear why the previous chapter ended as it did. It was the only suitable point for a pause before the narrative would rise to its full climax. And the sense of anti-climax at the end of that chapter was scrupulously balanced by an image the meaning of which was not at first clear: the image, in the last sentence, of the two lighted windows, 'very conspicuous from afar,' signifying that a new drama had already begun to unfold within the apartment.¹

The remainder of this sequence concerns the dramatic effects of Razumov's disclosures to the two women. These have a wholly destructive effect, causing Mrs Haldin to withdraw into a state of stony unbelief, and Nathalie to be prostrated in grief. The most dramatic moment in Part Four occurs when Razumov, persuaded to tell Mrs Haldin a false account of her son's end, is induced by circumstances to tell the true account to Nathalie, to make his confession. It is a drama of a reversal of intentions which concludes the private part of the dénouement, and leads into the drama of the public confession in IV.4. The private betrayal and its consequences, and the public 'drama of autocracy' have been closely interwoven throughout the novel, but they are separated in the dénouement for formal emphasis.

A final word should be said about the last chapter, which details Razumov's return to Russia in the care of Tekla. It should not be regarded as a carelessly appended afterthought. In moderating

1. *Ibid.* p. 335.

the tempo of the novel to a kind of normality, it creates the impression that the terrible events of the novel are part of a continuing process, that revolutionary and autocratic excesses will continue as before. The note is well conveyed in the last words, which voice the incurable illusion of an almost sympathetically presented revolutionary; Sophia Antononovna asserts:

Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man.

The imagery of *Under Western Eyes*, like that of the other major novels, forms a part of its structure: together with a number of symbols, it forms a network of meanings which extends alongside the narrative and complements it. All Conrad's major fiction is characterized by its concreteness, by its seen quality, its highly sensuous rendering. However, when the imagery of *Under Western Eyes* is examined in the context of the whole canon, a slight change becomes apparent. The earlier works may justly be described as abounding in imagery; from *Under Western Eyes* on it is used less abundantly and more selectively. Whereas in the earlier works almost any narrative detail is likely to be heightened to a suggestive or symbolic level, the imagery from this point on tends to be used either in the service of character presentation, or to be clustered about the crises. *The Shadow Line* illustrates how, in a late example of Conrad's major fiction, the imagery is used selectively. The tale is competently narrated in a single continuous sequence and in a spare style which is virtually devoid of imagery until the crisis is reached. The crisis episode, in which the becalmed ship is overtaken by a stormy shower which signals

the beginning of a wind, is heightened by a cluster of striking images of darkness, ominous of danger and uncertainty, which cease when the ship has fairly taken its course.

In *Under Western Eyes* imagery supplements the presentation of character by means of the significant visual detail. One of the most memorable visual images used to describe Razumov's appearance has such an intention:

His good looks would have been unquestionable if it had not been for a peculiar lack of fineness in his features. It was as if a face modelled vigorously in wax... had been held close to a fire till all sharpness of line had been lost in the softening of the material. But even thus he was sufficiently good-looking.¹

This striking simile is probably intended to be read symbolically rather than visually, as indicating the pressures which he will undergo in the course of the novel.² Such images are intended as an index to a character trait. For instance Nathalie has quiet, trusting grey eyes and a frank handshake; Mrs Haldin has 'delicately cut' lips and an immobile face;³ Tekla is a 'girlishly elderly woman' wearing black clothes that are frayed and shabby;⁴ Sophia Antonovna has 'steady, brilliant black eyes'⁵ and 'thin Mephistophelian eyebrows'⁶ and so on.

1. *Ibid.* p. 5.

2. His facial appearance is described otherwise later, as if Conrad had forgotten the earlier description: 'His features were more decided than in the generality of Russian faces ...' *Ibid.* p. 179.

3. *Ibid.* p. 101.

4. *Ibid.* p. 146.

5. *Ibid.* p. 240.

6. *Ibid.* p. 245.

When used repetitively such visual details become loaded and thus provide a useful shorthand notation. And when they become loaded with ironic intent, as in the case of Peter Ivanovitch or Madame de S-, their repetition intensifies the irony inherent in their characterization by the suggestion of something mechanical and sub-human in their make-up.¹ Thus Peter Ivanovitch is 'the heroic fugitive', 'the arch-priest of revolution', 'the greatest of feminists', 'Europe's greatest feminist' and so forth. Madame de S- is 'his painted Egeria', 'the Egeria of the Russian Mazzini' and so forth. There are also repeated references to her claw-like hand and her harsh voice; to her corpse-like rigidity and angularity; to her glittering and unwinking stare, which is indicative of her pretensions to a supernatural insight into people and events. The same reductive treatment is used for the revolutionist Nikita, whose heavy portliness is coupled with a thin voice that pipes with comic peevishness. Conrad takes care not to carry the reductive process too far. The details are not repeated too frequently, and the formulaic phrases are never exactly repeated. The effect, which combines the human, the comical and the sinister, is never directed to farce, unlike the case of the infamous trio in *Victory*, where the author imperils the credibility of his characters by too mechanical and reductive a treatment.

Imagery is of course used also to portray character through characteristic manner or action. Tekla, whose life is devoted to others, is shown holding

1. It is worth noting that Peter Ivanovitch is not allowed eyes; his gaze is hidden behind dark glasses.

and stroking a cat while describing the sordid truth about Peter Ivanovitch's feminism; when he insults her in the presence of others, her gesture of suddenly dropping the cat is more expressive than words would have been.¹ Mrs Haldin is seen more than once sitting rigidly in an armchair by the window which gives on the respectable but lifeless vista of the Rue des Philosophes.² Imagery evokes the character of places like the Chateau Borel, the cobwebbed neglect and degradation of which reflects on the revolutionaries' competence to take over the institutions of a bourgeois Europe.

The most significant imagery of the novel is, however, connected, together with a number of symbols, to the crises in Parts One and Four. The onset of the first crisis³ is marked by an ominous image. Razumov's unexpected discovery of Haldin in his rooms is rendered in stark visual terms:

All black against the usual tall stove of white tiles gleaming in the dusk, stood the strange figure.⁴

The moment of Razumov's crisis - the moment when he finds that the sleigh driver Ziemianitch is unable to assist in a plan which will take Haldin off his hands - is marked precisely by the irruption of

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1. *Ibid.* p. 161.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 177.
 3. Consisting in its public aspect of the assassination, and in its private aspect of Haldin's request to Razumov for his assistance, of Razumov's anguish at being thus forced into complicity, and of his betrayal of Haldin.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 14.

a group of images in the narrative. Looking up at this moment, Razumov finds himself surrounded by a reality that is part vision and part actual environment: a landscape of resplendent snow under a clear black sky which fills him with awe and a sense of support and safety. In this peaceful vision of Russia, revolutions with their 'passionate levity of action' shrink into insignificance. The keynote of the imagery is the snow which 'covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness ...'¹ It is a compelling symbol, which the novelist loads with the same weight and with a similar meaning as the image of moonlight in *Lord Jim*. The snow is to Razumov deceptively alluring, obliterating in its uniformity the manifold and varied needs of Russia's peoples. It represents, of course, the falsehood of autocracy which seems to Razumov like 'a touch of grace'.² The imagery is reinforced by symbolic incident. As Razumov's thoughts move towards a decision, two sledges collide in the street; when one driver shouts to the other, 'Oh, thou vile wretch!'³ Razumov thinks that the shout is directed at him.⁴ This is followed at once by the hallucination of Haldin stretched on the snow in his path; his involuntary decision to 'walk over' the phantom⁵ which implies a decision to betray Haldin, is presently followed by the words 'I shall give him up.'⁶ The hallucination seems

1. *Ibid.* p. 33.

2. *Ibid.* p. 34.

3. *Ibid.* p. 36.

4. It is the same device as that of the yellow cur incident in *Lord Jim*.

5. *Ibid.* p. 37.

6. *Ibid.* p. 37.

to its surprised subject at first merely a crystallization of the situation as it has befallen him: Haldin is an obstacle to him. But it comes to reveal a further meaning to him. While his mind returns again and again to the idea that he can 'walk defiantly' over the phantom, his conscience begins to insinuate that the act is a betrayal.¹

More images and symbols occur on the visit to General T-. The general's room had 'the silence of the grave' so that 'the clock on the mantelpiece made no sound',² recalling the silence of the snow. Spontini's statue 'Flight of Youth', to which the Prince draws the young man's attention, symbolizes the latter's situation.³ When the silence of the room is referred to again, it resembles 'the silence of a deep dungeon, where time does not count';⁴ and when Razumov becomes aware of the General's suspicion playing momentarily upon him, he has the sensation of the floor moving slightly.⁵ When, a little later, Haldin leaves Razumov's rooms noiselessly, his descent down the stairwell seems to Razumov that of a phantom:

It was a light, swift, pattering sound,
which sank away from him into the depths:
a fleeting shadow passed over the glimmer⁶
- a wink of the tiny flame. Then stillness.⁷

1. *Ibid.* pp. 55, 57, 61, 71, 96, 99.

2. *Ibid.* p. 43; see also p. 46.

3. *Ibid.* p. 43. The statue is symbolic in the sense that after the act of betrayal, Razumov loses all the opportunities and hopes which belong to youth.

4. *Ibid.* p. 48.

5. *Ibid.* p. 49.

6. *I.e.* the small gas light by the exit.

7. *Ibid.* p. 63; see also p. 94.

As soon as Haldin has left, he turns to his studies and is distressed to find that he cannot concentrate. The image of his watch falling on the floor and stopping¹ symbolizes his inability to return to his old life, as does that of the lamp which has burnt itself out.²

While a few images occur between the two crises,³ it is clear, from the sudden increase in their incidence in the last part of the novel, at what point the novelist considers the final crisis to begin. It begins on pages 299-302 where Razumov after the betrayal continually encounters the 'phantom' of Haldin while trying to resume relations with his acquaintances, and finds himself recalling and re-enacting the details of Haldin's visitation to his lodgings. Particularly frequent on these pages are images of Haldin and other Russians as phantoms, people asleep or hypnotized or in a trance, while Razumov's state is that of uneasy or nightmarish dream. The connection with the snow image is clear; just as sleep and trance are the negation of wakefulness and rationality, so is the snow blanket the symbol of the great negation, *viz* of humanity, of democracy, of true community, which embraces revolutionary and loyal Russian alike, and which Razumov cannot evade:

1. *Ibid.* p. 64.

2. *Ibid.* p. 68.

3. *Viz* that of Razumov watching the headlong rush of water under the bridge, suggestive of an irresistible fate, *ibid.* p. 198; that of the Russian shadow advancing upon Nathalie, *ibid.* p. 202; as well as a few images which recall earlier ones, like the submerged stone at the lake's edge which attracts Razumov's attention, *ibid.* p. 282, which alludes to General T's earlier remark: 'if he (Haldin) had not come with his tale to such a staunch and loyal Russian as you (Razumov), he would have disappeared like a stone in the water', *ibid.* p. 47.

Everything was gone. His existence was a great cold blank, something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists.¹

When Mikulin's invitation to commit himself politically comes, Razumov responds to it 'pale like a corpse obeying the dread summons of judgment'.² He experiences his departure from Russia as a dream, whose development he watched with great attention.³ The word 'dream' occurs six times in this description⁴ and twice in the first paragraph of the next chapter when Razumov, in Geneva, is trying to 'write' under the statue of Rousseau.⁵

What has above been called the 'final' crisis should properly be seen as a further instalment of the first crisis, Razumov's commitment to the regime following inevitably on the betrayal. By means of the time shift this further instalment has been linked closely to the second or final crisis proper, Razumov's confession to Nathalie and to the assembled revolutionaries. At this crisis the images again become frequent; this time they are, appropriately, light images, interspersed with further images of bewitchment.⁶

The symbolism of the two lighted windows of the apartment seen from afar under a black, ominous sky⁷

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1. *Ibid.* p. 303.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 303.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 315.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 315-316.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 316.
 6. 'haunted somnambulist', *ibid.* p. 336, 'phantom' *ibid.* p. 340 (twice), 'apparition' *ibid.* p. 341, 'haunting' *ibid.* p. 342, 'spell' *ibid.* p. 345, 'unexpected apparitions' *ibid.* p. 345, and so forth.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 335.

is now clear. It is developed further to distinguish between the false 'confession' to Mrs Haldin and the true confession to Nathalie, the first intended to deceive and the second involuntary. The scene of the first, the drawing room, is 'lost in semi-transparent gloom backed by heavy shadows',¹ a condition of light appropriate both to Razumov's intention merely to retail the false report of Ziemianitch's supposed betrayal of Haldin and subsequent suicide, and to the mother's refusal to listen and to 'give up' her son. In contrast to this scene is the lighting of the ante-room:

The light of an electric bulb high up under the ceiling searched that clear square box into its four bare corners, crudely, without shadows ...³

After Razumov's disclosure of both his guilt and his love, Nathalie's veil appropriately falls to the ground, presumably to suggest that she can now see clearly.⁴

The two scenes with their light imagery are linked with the other imagery by being given the character of *tableaux vivants*, suggestive of the immobilizing bewitchment which emanates from Russia. Mrs Haldin's figure is seen to have in the dim lighting 'the stillness of a sombre painting',⁵ contemplating 'something in her lap, as though a beloved head were resting there.'⁶ In the ante-room, Razumov

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1. *Ibid.* p. 338.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 338.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 342.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 348, referred to also on pp. 349, 356.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 355.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 339.

stands after his confession 'as if rooted for ever to the spot', gazing 'spell-bound' at Nathalie's dropped veil.¹ The narrator remarks that when Razumov leaves, something 'dimmed my eyes, so that he seemed to vanish before he moved.'² Nathalie is similarly affected. She is prostrated in a chair, her hands 'lying lifelessly, palms upwards, on her lap', and whispers, 'I feel my heart becoming like ice.'³ The tableau-like quality of the scene serves to link the private scenes with the public scenes of the drama, for it reminds the narrator of that other tableau of the revolutionaries gathered round the large, brightly-lit map in Peter Ivanovitch's hotel room, which he saw earlier that evening, so that he comments, 'I had this other glimpse behind the scenes (that of Mrs Haldin), something more profound than the words and gestures of the public play.'⁴ As the scene closes, the novelist apparently tries to draw into its imagery the earlier image of the advancing shadow, which was used to describe Russian affairs.⁵ If this is his intention, the effect seems a little forced, as seems the interweaving of another image which has been used several times, that of stale or poisoned air emanating from Russian falsehood:

She raised her grey eyes slowly. Shadows seemed to come and go in them as if the steady flame of her soul had been made to vacillate at last in the cross-currents of poisoned air from the corrupted dark immensity claiming her for its own ...⁶

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1. *Ibid.* p. 355-6.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 356.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 356.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 339.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 202.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 356.

The last stage of the dénouement, Razumov's confession to the assembled revolutionaries and his subsequent maiming, both at their hands and in a street accident, is accompanied by the imagery of the mounting thunderstorm and of the silence which attends his deafness. Leaving his rooms on the stroke of midnight in order to re-enact Haldin's end, Razumov runs down the stairs¹ and plunges into the thunderstorm. Beside its ominous and violent qualities there are references to the cleansing force of the rain² and to its refreshing of the air which to Razumov seems stale.³ More closely linked with the dominant images of the novel are those of a ghostly soundlessness which attend Razumov's loss of hearing. One illustration of his new state will suffice:

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 thunderstorm.⁴

Under Western Eyes is distinguished, even within the Conrad canon, by its bold and shapely four-part design, attained by a marshalling and concentration of complex narrative material which is uncommon in the history of the novel. The rôle of the narrator in this design shows a development from earlier instances, leading, indeed, on a few occasions to an undesirable complexity and a

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1. *Ibid.* p. 362.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 357.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 334, 360, 361.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 369-70.

clumsiness of narration which point forward to the excessive complexity of the narrator's rôle in *Chance*. The imagery of the novel gives the narrative the seen quality characteristic of Conrad's major fiction. There is a decline in its abundance as compared with earlier major works. The novelist clearly sought to exercise this aspect of his art in a more deliberate manner to highlight and reinforce the crises. Furthermore, he uses it in a manner not seriously attempted since *Lord Jim* - and not to be attained again except in *Victory* - that is, by the interlinking of the imagery through the novel to set up a fabric of meanings which complements and heightens the narrative, and which plays a decisive part in the projection of themes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHANCE

Chance,¹ like most of Conrad's novels, has at its centre an essentially simple situation, the relationship of Flora and Captain Anthony, but it employs, even for Conrad, an unusually elaborate manner of presenting this situation. It is not surprising that a novelist as interested as Conrad was in the effects produced by the use of a narrator should for once want to see how far these effects - it might almost be called the drama of presentation - could be pushed. The dissatisfaction often felt with the novel should not be ascribed to its experimental method, but rather to a weakness distinct from it: a general relaxation of muscular tone and a pervasive looseness of construction. The intensity of engagement called for by so exacting a method as Conrad here employed was not forthcoming, so that despite the interest of its central situation and the possibilities of its ambitious narrative scheme, the novel fails to rise to the level of the major novels.

The narrative scheme consists firstly of the overall narrator, someone to whom Marlow speaks, so that Marlow can be placed at a remove from the reader, as he was in previous works, and become more objective than he would be as a mere mouthpiece.

Marlow is the key figure in the scheme in that the other reporters, the Fynes, Flora, Powell, report to him, so that all observation is filtered through and interpreted by him. A feature of Marlow's which is a departure for him is that while he does virtually all the interpreting in the novel, he does

1. Begun in 1906, laid aside in 1907, resumed in 1910, completed in 1912.

little direct observation and does not participate in the action. The only event which he witnesses is the first, which initiates the action: Flora's attempted suicide at the cliff-edge of the quarry. He never meets Captain Anthony, and he only once catches a glimpse of de Barral. He is deliberately kept absent from the scene of action, as for instance when business in London prevents his meeting Captain Anthony, as the Fynes had invited him to do, at their holiday cottage in the country. Marlow comments twice on his relation to events; for instance

the disclosure which so often rewards a moment of detachment from mere visual impressions gave me a thrill ...¹

Although this preference for remaining at a distance from events may well point to an aspect of Conrad's temperament, the purpose in the whole narrative scheme is wider: it is to provide the novel with a secondary drama of reconstruction, a drama whose excitement is generated by the exigencies of bringing the truth to light; that is, the sense that the truth may be lost if the significant fact is not come by, or is 'lost' by not being interpreted correctly. This secondary drama is heightened by such developments as Flora's disappearance; the moments of admiration, suspicion or impatience aroused between Marlow and the Fynes when they try to define Flora's situation; the comedy of the domestic discord between the Fynes; the slowness with which Powell

1. *Chance*, Collected edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, Dent, 1949, p. 87. The other reference is 'it may be that a glimpse and no more is the proper way to see an individuality ...' p. 85.

recognizes that something is wrong on board; Franklin's outraged incomprehension of what is wrong, voiced in anguished complaints to Powell.

Marlow plays an appropriate part in the secondary drama by his tone of amused detachment. His humanity is evident in the interest with which he traces Flora's destiny as he earlier did Jim's, but it is balanced here by a sense of the human comedy and a detachment which are occasionally surprising. When Marlow is startled by Flora's attempt at suicide, he decides that she is a minx,¹ and he complains of her 'lack of consideration' and wonders whether he is involved in a farce or a tragedy.² As his understanding of Flora's situation deepens, his flippancy does not disappear; life is 'the sublunary comedy'³ the girl's life is a 'tragi-comedy',⁴ and the *Ferndale* is 'the floating stage of that tragi-comedy'.⁵ The qualities of wisdom, sagacity and levity which characterize Marlow's outlook provide on the whole a stable anchorage in the midst of so many viewpoints and so much conjecture. On the other hand the discursiveness of his thought in earlier works has here become a mere looseness in his thinking which would be less objectionable if it were not echoed by a looseness in the construction of the novel. Marlow frequently pauses to express his views on a variety of subjects⁶

1. *Ibid.* p. 53.

2. *Ibid.* pp. 55, 64.

3. *Ibid.* p. 148.

4. *Ibid.* p. 310.

5. *Ibid.* p. 272.

6. *Viz* on marriage, p. 209; confessions, p. 212; curiosity, p. 280; experience, p. 282, feminism and the nature of women, pp. 53, 63, 93-4, 144, 145, 150, 155, 172, 188, 261, 281, 327, 330, 353, 366, 378.

in a manner more appropriate to the genre of the essay than of the novel. As the point has been generally noticed by critics of the novel, a single illustration will suffice. When de Barral learns upon his release that Flora is married, the following statement tells the reader all he needs to know of de Barral's feelings: 'he felt a furious jealousy of the man he was going to see ... this man in the seclusion of his prison had thought himself into such a sense of ownership of that single human being he had to think about, as may well be inconceivable to us who have not had to serve a long (and wickedly unjust) sentence of penal servitude.'¹ There is no need for Marlow to pursue the point as he does:

She was positively the only thing, the one point where his thought found a resting-place, for years. She was the only outlet for his imagination. He had not much of that faculty to be sure, but there was in it the force of concentration. He felt outraged, and perhaps it was an absurdity on his part, but I venture to suggest rather in degree than in kind. I have a notion that no usual, normal father is pleased at parting with his daughter. No. Not even when he rationally appreciates 'Jane being taken off his hands' or perhaps is able to exult at an excellent match. At bottom, quite deep down, down in the dark (in some cases only by digging), there is to be found a certain repugnance ... With mothers of course it is different. Women are more loyal, not to each other, but to their common femininity, which they behold triumphant with a secret and proud satisfaction.²

Apart from its dramatic quality, the narrative scheme needs to be considered in the light of its

1. *Ibid.* p. 371.
2. *Ibid.* p. 371.

plausibility - the aspect of the novel which has made it controversial. One critic, Baines,¹ complains of the implausibility of the conversations between the governess and Charley which no-one could have reported.² But Marlow himself admits the difficulty and solves it by falling back on his intuition: 'In what I am telling you of now ... is a dark, inscrutable spot. And we may conjecture what we like. I have no difficulty in imagining that ...' and so on.³ And to show that his perspicacity can fill any gaps in the information passed on to him, Marlow presently provides a clever piece of conjecture about the governess's motives:

... what if I were to tell you that disappointment had most likely made them (the governess and Charley) touchy with each other, but that perhaps the secret of his careless, railing behaviour, was in the thought ... 'Now there's nothing to prevent me from breaking away from that old woman.' And that the secret of her envenomed rage ... concentrating its venom on de Barral and including the innocent girl herself, was in the thought, in the fear crying within her, 'Now I have nothing to hold him with ...'⁴

There are further instances of this kind, where Marlow gives no sign that his imagination is filling a gap in his information, as when Captain Anthony's unspoken thoughts are described. For instance:

'What big eyes she has,' he said to himself, amazed. No wonder. She was staring at him with all the might of her soul awakening slowly from a poisoned sleep ... He plunged into them breathless and tense, deep, deep,

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1. J. Baines, *op. cit.* p. 383.
 2. *Chance*, pp 97-107, 110-111.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 101.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 103.

like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time.¹

It is difficult to imagine Captain Anthony, who was 'unaccustomed to the chatter of the firm earth,'² subsequently describing these thoughts to Flora, and her relaying them to Marlow.³ If challenged, Marlow, (*i.e.* Conrad) might have said that he had seen it all in his mind's eye, as he might have said also of a great many thoughts and conversations reported in a degree of circumstantial detail not compatible with the average memories of his informants.

But if the world Marlow presents is largely a conjectural reconstruction rather than a first or second or third-hand report, then the whole purpose of using a narrator is defeated. A narrator, as Henry James taught and Conrad himself stated in the Author's Note to *Under Western Eyes*,⁴ is used to enhance the authenticity of a novel by bringing it into a more immediate relationship with its characters. At the end of Chapter 5 of *Lord Jim*, the omniscient author is replaced by the narrator-character Marlow, who, in accordance with a clearly understood convention, must be at pains either to meet Jim himself or gather reports about him.

1. *Ibid.* p. 331.

2. *Ibid.* p. 333.

3. There is another instance on pp. 396 - 7.

4. Conrad speaks here of a 'desire to produce the effect of actuality' p. ix.

But when, in *Chance*, the narrator has to work (or prefers to work) at such a distance from his subject that his extraordinary powers of reconstruction have to fill the gaps in the observations of his reporters, or have partly to rework them, then to that extent the authentic note for which he was invented is lost, and we have virtually an omniscient novelist in disguise, a sort of novelist-within-the-novelist, together with a cumbersome and all-but-superfluous machinery of reportage.

The structure of the novel as a whole remains to be discussed. This has every appearance of careful workmanship, though this impression has to be modified upon further examination. The main structural feature is the large pattern implied in the deceptively simple subtitle 'A Tale in Two Parts.' The division into two parts, entitled respectively 'The Damsel' and 'The Knight', means not only that Flora dominates the first half while Captain Anthony is the more active partner of the couple in the second; it also marks a shift of scene from land to sea, and a shift from one set of moral values to another. The land, of whose depravity Flora is a product, comes in the first part to represent meanness, duplicity and folly, while the sea in the second part is represented as a refuge from these and a home of the virtues of innocence and heroism. In the first part there is room for an evident ambiguity: the Fynes, who seem at first to be sympathetic observers who intervene to save Flora from the forces of depravity, come gradually to side with these forces. However, the same significance cannot be attached to the main development which occurs in Part II. In the partial dénouement of Flora and Captain Anthony coming to an understanding, the couple turn their back on

the Fynes and on the land, and seek their salvation at sea; but they do not find it there until almost the end of the book, and then not because of the benign influence of the sea. That the relevance of the maritime virtues to the predicament of the couple is left unclear is not a sign of irony, but an index of the looseness of the construction of the novel.

Chronological rearrangement is a prominent feature of the structure of the novel. A comparison with its use in earlier novels may throw light on the novelist's intentions here and the care with which he has constructed the novel.¹

The placement of Chapter I.1, Powell's story of how he qualified as a second mate and how he obtained a berth, seems at first puzzling, but when the reader comes to the beginning of Part II and recalls this chapter, particularly the young ship's officer's surprise on coming aboard at night at the instruction that the captain and his wife are not to be disturbed, he has an exhilarating moment of seeing the whole of Part I fall into place from the new perspective of the voyage about to commence. What is accomplished is a rapid binding together of Part I and a transition, and a note of hope is struck by Powell's youthfulness. On the other hand the critics who complain about the irrelevance of Chapter I.1 are to this extent right that it is an unnecessarily lengthy means to this end, despite the fact that Powell's struggle to find a place under the sun has a rough parallel to Flora's situation, and despite the fact that it introduces the theme of chance.

1. A résumé of the novel is provided in the Appendix for reference.

The story of Flora in Part I, that is, up to her decision to marry Captain Anthony, is presented largely in reverse order. The reader first hears of her suicide attempt at the quarry¹ and her mysterious disappearance.² Then a significant detail, her surname, is given,³ followed logically by a regression to the earlier history of de Barral, *viz* the rise and fall of his financial empire;⁴ this is followed by an account of Flora's life in the care of a governess after her mother's death but before the crash, including the fact of the governess's plot to marry Flora to an accomplice; and then, in slow motion, so to speak, the effect of the crash on this situation, *viz* Flora's humiliation and desertion by the governess and her accomplice.⁵ The story moves on through three painful engagements Flora has with strangers,⁶ which bring her to the 'edge' of suicide and return her story to the 'present' of her disappearance.⁷ The meaning of the earlier suicide episode is now plain, and the meaning of her elopement is becoming clear by being linked with it:

She was certainly walking very near the edge - courting a sinister solution. But, now having by the most unexpected chance come upon a man, she found another way to escape from the world.⁸

The novelist has, then, used chronological dislocation to begin with a dramatic event seemingly empty of significance, and has then gone back and, 'working backwards and forwards,' has worked forward to it, giving it its proper significance. The method is effective in providing an initial surprise and in

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1. *Ibid.* p. 43.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 49.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 68.
 4. *Ibid.* pp. 69-88.
 5. *Ibid.* pp. 96-126.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 165-182.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 184.
 8. *Ibid.* p. 189.

binding a sequence more firmly together. This is of course not so trenchant a use of chronological dislocation as in the ironic collocation in *Nostramo*, where the defeat of a regime's hopes is shown before its endeavours are detailed.

A closer examination is desirable if the characteristic structure of the novel is to be seen; for reasons of space the examination which follows is confined to Chapters I.5-7, which form a convenient group for study.

The two threads of Flora's story, and the comedy of Marlow's conversations with the Fynes through which this story emerges, are so closely interwoven that the reader is often not sure if he is being shown Flora or the characteristic vision of the reporter. The truth about Flora thus emerges slowly and in retrospect, as Marlow's surmises are confirmed or disproved by further developments. What adds to the difficulty of reading the book is the rapid transitions and the seemingly random changes of subject or direction in the conversations. These can of course be justified on grounds of realism.¹ But sometimes the reader loses his bearings not because the presentation is complex but because it is in a state of imperfect coherence.

When Mrs Fyne completes the first sequence of Flora's past history ending with Flora rushing across the road to the shelter of the Fynes' hotel rooms,² the reader is left with two main impressions. Flora with

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1. As F.M. Hueffer put it: 'on the whole, the indirect, interrupted method of handling interviews is invaluable for giving a sense of the complexity, the tantalization, the shimmering, the haze, that life is.' *Op. cit.* p. 191
 2. *Ibid.* p. 141.

her ghastly white complexion emerges as a figure of suffering, 'a creature struggling under a net.'¹ And Mrs Fyne, who on the whole amuses Marlow with her 'readiness to confront any sort of responsibility,'² now impresses him by her sympathy for Flora, and by the sympathetic intelligence with which she handled Flora's question whether the governess had told her the truth about her father.³ But a few pages later Marlow is taken aback by Mrs Fyne's objection to the proposed match on the disquieting grounds that 'I know perfectly well what Flora has seen in my brother',⁴ and a little later that 'she threw herself at his head'.⁵ In the midst of all these opinions the reader must suspend judgment on Flora because Mrs Fyne alone knows the contents of Flora's letter and is evidently withholding something in it. Marlow can see no objection to the match,⁶ and the reader may incline towards Marlow's more tolerant view, but the reader has nonetheless to suspend a final judgment because Marlow has not read the letter. And his judgment must remain suspended while the Marlow-Fynes comedy takes its course and becomes more complicated. At the tea party at his cottage where their conversation is resumed, Marlow learns that Fyne does not share his wife's objection, that the Fynes are distressed about their discord,⁷ and that Mrs Fyne's motive for coming to the tea was to gain Marlow's support so that he might persuade her husband to change his mind and go to London to warn her brother against the match.⁸ Marlow banteringly

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1. *Ibid.* p. 140.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 126.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 141.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 147.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 157.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 147.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 148.
 8. *Ibid.* p. 150.

refuses to play her game, and concludes that she is engaged in an 'eminently feminine occupation of thrusting a stick in the spokes of another woman's wheel.'¹ The reader, who may well be inclining towards Marlow's view because of his evident maturity and perceptiveness, is nudged to keep his judgment suspended by the additional reason that the conversation is gaining a feminist/anti-feminist animus. Marlow admits that he feels vindictive 'in a small way' towards women,² and Mrs Fyne is a dedicated feminist. They almost quarrel. The reader is reminded a second time of Marlow's possible bias against Mrs Fyne and feminism and presumably in favour of Flora and the more conventional match she has decided on, by a brief colloquy between Marlow and the narrator who calls Marlow's knowledge of women in question. It is uncertain whether the novelist intends Marlow as a partisan or an adjudicator amongst the other characters. When Marlow puts it to Mrs Fyne that Flora's disappearance with the Captain bears every resemblance to the Fynes' own elopement, Mrs Fyne resentfully rejects the parallel without further discussion,³ with the probable result that the irony at the expense of Mrs Fyne, which is surely inherent in the parallel situation, will be lost on most readers.

The question of how the reader is to think of Flora's elopement is set aside when Mrs Fyne resumes for a matter of twenty pages her narrative of Flora's past:⁴ her episodes with the family of her uncle, the cardboard box manufacturer; with the old Bournemouth lady; with the German family in Hamburg:

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1. *Ibid.* p. 151.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 150.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 161.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 162.

experiences which all prove disastrous to her morale and result in her return to the Fynes ready to commit suicide.¹ When the conversation returns to the question of Flora's disappearance, Mrs Fyne laments her distress over her difference with her husband, but she holds to her objection with the cryptic remark, 'And suppose I have grounds to think that he (the Captain) can't take care of himself in a given instance?'²

After so long a suspense, the reader wonders if his understanding is being advanced when Marlow abandons Mrs Fyne and, going to her husband on the porch, gives a new assessment of the situation: that Mrs Fyne teaches young women that almost any vengeful action against a man-mismanaged society is justified,³ and that her humanity is deficient:

What I see is that in dealing with reality Mrs Fyne ceases to be tolerant. In other words, that she can't forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman.⁴

The reader isn't certain what to do with this assessment of the case as simply one woman's jealousy of another, nor with Marlow's equally sweeping conclusion at the end of the chapter that, so far from trying to protect her brother, Mrs Fyne, in sending her husband to warn him, is trying to provoke a breach with him and his intended wife.⁵ The reader remains the more at sea with Marlow's conclusions when he considers that Flora's letter did apparently have 'an unpleasant strain of levity',⁶ as Fyne now claims, suggesting in the reader's mind at least some justification for

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1. *Ibid.* p. 162-183.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 186.
 3. See also *ibid.* p. 187.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 188.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 194.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 196.

Mrs Fyne's attitude. The reader cannot be sure whether he should regard Marlow as the arbiter of the moral questions discussed, or simply a partisan in them.

When Marlow meets Flora on the pavement outside the Eastern Hotel in London, he notes from her appearance that 'she was an appealing and - yes - she was a desirable little figure',¹ but when he hears her account of the suicide episode and why she did not go through with it,² he falls far short of an arbiter - neither he nor the reader learns anything to advance his understanding:

What struck me most was her - I suppose I must call it - composure. One could not tell whether she understood what she had done. One wondered. She was not so much unreadable as blank; and I did not know whether to admire her for it or dismiss her from my thoughts as a passive butt of ferocious misfortune.³

The passage strikes a convincing note of psychological realism, and links up with other references of Marlow's to the fragility and insecurity of our knowledge of our fellow men, which will be more fully examined below. But there is a motive other than that of psychological realism in the above passage: the novelist wants to tantalize the reader and keep his judgment of her suspended. Earlier in this study there has been much evidence of Conrad's skill in controlling the reader's response by a process of graduated, step-by-step disclosure; Conrad's skill has here deteriorated into a mere extended postponement of disclosure.

1. *Ibid.* p. 201.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 202-3.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 207.

There are signs of imperfect coherence in Marlow's attitude to Flora. On the one hand he can be surprisingly detached. He stifles a fit of laughter when she begins to describe the Captain's courtship, and presently comments:

There was something prettily comical in her attitude and her tone, while I pictured to myself a poor white-faced girl walking to her death with an unconscious man striding by her side.¹

On the other hand Marlow's concern and perceptiveness towards Flora are obviously born of a sympathy similar to his earlier feeling for Jim. Not only does he read her feelings as she describes the wooing situation to him, but he shows a notable quickness in perceiving that all her past is working towards a single outcome: all Captain Anthony's dislike of shore life ('the fads and proprieties and the ceremonies and affectations',²) and his lack of friends on shore subtly harmonize with her despair and incline her to prefer his proposal to suicide.³

As the scene progresses, the reader feels his sympathies nudged towards Marlow's more generous view of the girl's motives. She tells him with patent sincerity that in her letter to Mrs Fyne she pleaded her innocence of any intention to influence the Captain.⁴ But the reader is given nothing to erase Fyne's report that it contained 'an unpleasant strain of levity'.⁵ Instead he is given before the end of the conversation a dark hint that Flora's innocence may be equivocal. The passage

1. *Ibid.* p. 217.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 221.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 189; pp.221-7.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 231.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 196.

needs to be quoted:

'And you have got what you wanted? Is that it?' (Marlow asks her.) 'The daughter of the egregious financier de Barral did not answer at once this question going to the heart of things. Then raising her head and gazing wistfully across the street noisy with the endless transit of innumerable bargains, she said with intense gravity: 'He has been most generous.'¹

By a skilful interweaving of the background, Conrad has implied that Flora did perhaps strike a bargain of sorts with Captain Anthony, that she has 'sold' herself (her father uses the term when he accuses her later) on certain terms. A few lines earlier she had admitted that she has 'given him what he wanted - that's myself'.² The ambiguity of her situation rests on whether she returns the Captain's love, and this is as yet unclear.

While this ambiguity - the question in what spirit Flora has made her decision - remains pending till the end of the Chapter 'On the Pavement,' the remainder of the chapter is superficially more coherent, advancing the reader's understanding in one direction, as if Conrad is at pains to wind up this account of the world Flora is about to leave. The remainder of the chapter³ begins by clarifying the Fynes' view of Flora; Fyne discusses with Marlow the interview he has just had with the Captain, and mentions de Barral's imminent release from prison - a circumstance of which Marlow was unaware - to prove the correctness of his view:

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1. *Ibid.* p. 233.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 233.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 238-253.

I tell you she has led him on, or accepted him, if you like, simply because she was thinking of her father. She doesn't care a bit about Anthony, I believe. She cares for no-one.¹

In this reasoning Fyne depends on Flora's letter, of whose contents his wife has told him. He argues,

There is a passage in it where she practically admits she was quite unscrupulous in accepting this offer of marriage, but says to my wife that she supposes she, my wife, will not blame her - as it was in self-defence.²

The point to be noted is that the essential difference between the two views is crystallizing. Marlow seems prepared provisionally to accept the facts of Flora's case as Fyne reports them to him, but Marlow appraises their meaning more hopefully, seeing in her words 'He has been most generous'³ a positive response to the Captain; besides, Marlow is at a loss to see how else Flora could have acted, having a father to take care of and no independent means.⁴ This dual appraisal of Flora's case becomes the point of the chapter. The Fynes come to represent the outlook of the land, of which the city traffic, repeatedly glimpsed⁵ while Marlow talks to Flora and to Fyne, constitutes a vivid, representative image. For instance,

We held our peace in the odious uproar of that wide roadway thronged with heavy carts. Great vans carrying enormous piled-up loads advanced swaying like mountains. It was as if the whole world existed only for selling and buying and those who had nothing to do with the movement of merchandise were of no account.⁶

1. *Ibid.* p. 243.

2. *Ibid.* p. 241: there are in this section two further references by Fyne to the letter: pp. 246 and 250.

3. *Ibid.* p. 233, recalled on p. 251.

4. *Ibid.* p. 246.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 209, 211, 233, 239, 248.

6. *Ibid.* p. 209.

Fyne is characterized as 'the emissary of an order of things which stops at the edge of the sea.'¹ His discrediting is accompanied by a number of comical touches, as when Marlow, crossing the street with him, has to pull him sharply out of the way of 'the noses of two enormous sleepy-headed cart-horses.'² 'Have you a more compassionate scheme ready?' Marlow shouts after him as Fyne clammers onto a tram-car at his last appearance in the book.³ The remark epitomizes their difference of outlook, for it refers to Fyne's scorn for the arrangement the couple have made.

The dichotomy of views of Flora's case is intended to mark the transition of the story from a land to a sea setting, and to raise land and sea to a symbolic level. But the symbolic intention is not achieved because the opposing views lack coherence. The Fynes' view cannot be finally appraised until the matter of Flora's letter is cleared up, and this is not done until Marlow asks Flora about it many years later, four pages from the end of the novel.⁴ And even if the reader had been able to appraise the Fynes fully at the end of Part I, he would not have been able to form a coherent view of all the forces which beset Flora: the governess's hate, the financial world which has produced her father, the world of buying and selling represented by the city traffic, the various moral deficiencies of the people with whom she stays after the governess's departure, and those of the Fynes themselves. Though there are

1. *Ibid.* p. 250.

2. *Ibid.* p. 239.

3. *Ibid.* p. 252.

4. 'I wrote recklessly ... It was the echo of her own (Mrs Fyne's) stupid talk. I said that I did not love her brother, but that I had no scruples whatever in marrying him ... There was no harm in that letter. It was simply foolish. What did I know of life then?' *Ibid.* pp. 443-4.

numerous allusions to the contrast between land and sea, they fail to become symbols simply because they fail to play distinctive rôles in the lives of the protagonists.

This examination of the characteristic construction of the novel need be taken no further; some illustration has been provided of its characteristic looseness and the failure of its symbols in any sense to raise the narrative to the level of fable.

The title of the book, alluded to in the epigraph and echoed repeatedly in the text,¹ is evidently intended to play a structural part. It refers no doubt to the play of the contingent in human life, to the limited scope for human hopes and intentions. Powell's chance appointment, his good fortune in escaping being robbed on his way to the *Ferndale*, Flora's chance meeting with Captain Anthony at the Fynes's cottage, the near-collision at sea, the collision in which the *Ferndale* goes down and the oversight whereby Captain Anthony goes down with it - these illustrate the theme and give it a kind of structural validity; even more significantly the central predicament of the couple does rest upon the play of circumstances, in that their anguished separateness is shown to be liable at any moment to be overthrown by passion, and is thus overthrown in the final crisis. On the other hand the epigraph from Sir Thomas Brown: 'Those that hold that all things are governed by Fortune had not erred, had they not persisted there' points with typical Conradian ambiguity in the opposite direction, as do references

1. 46 times on one count.

as in references in the text to Providence,¹ to fate,² to Nemesis,³ to Nature.⁴ Clearly neither the title nor the epigraph of the novel is part of a coherent view. There are two major developments in the novel which could be used as illustrations of the working of cause and effect and the connectedness of things. When Fyne visits Anthony at his hotel and accuses him of taking advantage of Flora's distress,⁵ the accusation has a profound effect on the Captain and precipitates all the harm which follows,⁶ so that a stalemate ensues which persists until the final crisis. Another development which shows the connectedness of things is Flora's surprise, after she has undertaken the marriage to provide her father with a refuge, to find that de Barral jealously rejects the arrangement, calling the ship a 'prison'. This turn of event may illustrate a perverse irony, but it does not suggest blind chance. It is indeed hardly surprising that the rôle of chance in the novel is limited, for it could hardly be a fruitful theme for a novelist who some years

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1. Flora talks of 'tempting Providence', *ibid.* p. 201, of leaving nothing to 'Providence', p. 202, and Marlow speaks of what Providence offers Captain Anthony, p. 340.
 2. Powell's comment on p. 438 on Captain Anthony's death could be taken as an attempt to reconcile 'chance' and 'fate': 'Good men go out as if there was no use for them in the world. It seems as if there were things that, as the Turks say, are written. Or else fate has a try and sometimes misses the mark.' *Ibid.* p. 438.
 3. 'There is a Nemesis which overtakes generosity too, like all the other imprudences of men who dare to be lawless and proud ...' *Ibid.* p. 350.
 4. Marlow says of Captain Anthony, 'He was not a common sort of lover; and he was punished for it as if Nature ... were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct.' *Ibid.* p. 339.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 251.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 329.

earlier spoke of 'bringing to light the truth, manifold and one' which underlies the visible universe.¹ The importance which the theme is allowed in the novel is a pointer to the imperfect coherence from which the novel suffers.

An examination of the characterization of the novel is necessary because it bears on the question of looseness of construction. It should be said at once that Conrad continues in *Chance* to give evidence of his power to evoke the reader's sense of a character; the Fynes, de Barral, Franklin, the main characters - all are evoked in a few sentences and invested with a characteristic illusion of reality. It is when the reader attempts to judge the consistency, the continuity or the development of the characters that a question arises. consistency arises Indeed Marlow himself raises it.

The secondary drama of the novel rests on the vicissitudes of coming by and making out the truth about the main characters. Conrad was sufficiently preoccupied with a general question of our knowledge of others to return to it a number of times, as if he regarded it as an epistemological problem. Marlow mentions it in *Chance* quite as often as he did in *Lord Jim*, though perhaps not as urgently, and without the benefit of a signal-phrase like that about looking through rents in a fog. When Marlow and Fyne rejoin Mrs Fyne after their fruitless search for the missing girl at night, Marlow suddenly realises that he has misjudged the Fynes, and, indeed, that a mere trick of the light may make the difference between a right and a wrong judgment:

1. Preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, Collected Edition, Dent, 1974, p. xxiii.

when Fyne and I got back into the room, then in the searching, domestic, glare of the lamp, inimical to the play of fancy, I saw these two stripped of every vesture it had amused me to put on them for fun. Queer enough they were, Is there a human being that isn't that - more or less secretly? But whatever their secret, it was manifest to me that it was neither subtle nor profound. They were a good, stupid, earnest couple ... There was nothing in them that the lamplight might not touch without the slightest risk of indiscretion.¹

On another occasion Marlow implies that the problem of shifting circumstances is compounded by the fact that people themselves change, or at least are capable of being transformed by temporary states of illumination, as de Barral was at the end of his trial. After the verdict, when everyone had turned his attention away from the criminal, and the newspaperman found nothing of significance in the criminal's gesture of the fist shaken at the assembled court, Marlow is struck by it:

the disclosure which so often rewards the moment of detachment from mere visual impressions gave me a thrill very much approaching a shudder. I seemed to understand that ... his imagination had been at last roused into activity.²

(Marlow means that de Barral, who is normally prodigiously conceited and self-absorbed - hence his flat voice and mechanical movements - has been roused momentarily to a higher vision of those who judged him as essentially engaged in playing the same game as he: a vision of the topsy-turvy justice of society.)

1. *Ibid.* p. 56-7. The notion expressed here is in fact developed through the two preceding paragraphs beginning 'coming up to the cottage ...' p. 56.

2. *Ibid.* p. 87.

Apart from the glimpse of the momentarily transformed character, Marlow also has the experience of being baffled by what he sees of a character. The passage about Flora on the pavement which was quoted earlier¹ is the clearest case in point. Marlow is at pains in these passages to convey a sense that the formulation of human character is problematic because it is at times opaque to observation or unstable. It is an interesting view, yet it seems characteristic of the last phase of Conrad's art. Marlow's vision as it is presented in this novel does not escape the suspicion of imperfect coherence. A comparison with *Lord Jim* is illuminating. There, too, Marlow was driven to exclaim on the difficulty of making out his protégé sitting opposite him on the gallery of the Malabar Hotel. But there the factor of uncertainty was better controlled. Marlow's (and the reader's) judgment oscillated between approving Jim's innocence and good intentions and suspecting that Jim whitewashed his motives even as he reported them (see the Chapter on *Lord Jim*, p. 46), whereas in *Chance* the uncertainty does not constitute a distinct factor in the total meaning of the novel, but is ascribed loosely and without special significance to a number of characters.

The novelist's conception of his two main characters remains to be considered. Douglas Hewitt in his study of Conrad's development² argues that the protagonists of the early major works reflect Conrad's sense of the moral complexity of human nature in their embodiment of both good and evil traits. Kurtz is able at the last to recognize and pronounce upon his own moral depravity; Charles Gould's good

1. See above, p.219; other expressions by Marlow of the difficulty of interpreting character occur *ibid.* pp. 208, 223.

2. Douglas Hewitt, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

intentions in resisting a corrupt tyranny are balanced by a personal failure of which his failed marriage is the index, and so forth. Hewitt shows convincingly that while the two protagonists of *Chance* again have an equivocal aspect, Conrad evidently found these aspects too problematic to work out, and simply abandoned them. Hewitt might have availed himself more fully of the evidence that lies to hand. Flora is believed by the Fynes to take advantage of Captain Anthony's passion for her, and even Marlow at one moment, as noted above, suspects her of making a bargain with the Captain rather than marrying him for love. But as she is doing so for the benefit of her father, there is hardly room for any suspicion of moral iniquity. When at the end of the novel she looks back and considers Mrs Fyne's allegation that she was a heartless adventuress, she exclaims, 'Adventuress! ... So be it! I have had a fine adventure.'¹ The fact that Flora's 'guilt' was wholly unconnected with her history of anguish shows that Conrad is no longer investigating the possibility of a moral flaw and the darker side of human nature, as he was still doing as late as in *Razumov*.

Captain Anthony's magnanimity towards Flora is at one point presented as an immense vanity,² as a 'refined delicacy of tenderness',³ and as a parallel to his father's 'famous sonnets singing of the most highly civilized, chivalrous love';⁴ and Marlow speaks of 'the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem

1. *Ibid.* p. 444.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 332.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 332.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 332.

of conduct on this earth.'¹ But these hints of criticism remain undeveloped, and tend to be replaced by an idealized and romantic view of him which stresses 'his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day.'² His painful predicament with Flora is seen in at least one context to be due to the purely external influence of Fyne's accusation that he is taking advantage of the girl, and it is a purely temporary situation. Between him and the opponent who tries to poison him in the dénouement there is no connection, no 'unforeseen partnership', and his end is arbitrary in the sense that it bears no relation to any possible flaw of character. Yet despite the correctness of Hewitt's observations, the two protagonists remain credible characters, whose mutual misunderstanding lends a poignant and convincing drama to an otherwise flawed novel.

The rôle of imagery in the novel has diminished. Images which by their sensuous concreteness throw a strong light on the situation of a character do still occur. This is how the vehicle, in which her uncle is taking Flora back after her temporary escape from his odious family, is described:

A four-wheeler stood before the gate under the weeping sky. The driver in his conical cape and tarpaulin hat streamed with water. The drooping horse looked as though it had been fished out, half unconscious, from a pond.³

And, more directly:

The girl was like a creature struggling under a net.⁴

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1. *Ibid.* p. 325.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 333.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 168.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 140.

There is still the telling personal detail: when Marlow in his conversation with her on the pavement asks her a crucial question, the parasol which she has been swinging nervously to and fro stops swinging as she grapples with the question.¹ But the proportion of images has become smaller than it was in the major novels, and some are of an inward, non-sensuous kind, having a literary or even flippant effect:

Powell wandered up and down there (in the St Katherine's Dock House) like an early Christian refugee in the catacombs; but what little faith he had in the success of his enterprise was oozing out at his fingertips.²

my memory (says Marlow) is merely a mausoleum of proper names ... he had to throw off a monstrous heap of grisly bones before he stood before me at the call of the wizard Fyne.³

It is instructive to note how imagery and symbolism are used in the approach to the final crisis. When Powell commences his first voyage on the *Ferndale* in Chapter II.2, the beginnings of a slowly mounting tension are accompanied by suggestive imagery. Powell notes the mood of placidity of the scene of the *Ferndale* leaving the dock: the other ships are still 'asleep', the tugs approach without a ripple, the Captain is 'still-eyed' on the bridge, and his wife 'mustn't be disturbed'.⁴ Two hours later this mood becomes a moment of 'entranced vision' when the *Ferndale* arrives in the Thames estuary under a mounting sun and catches its light, 'her tall spars

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1. *Ibid.* p. 233.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 10.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 69.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 275-6.

and rigging steeped in a bath of red-gold, from the water-line full of glitter to the trucks slight and gleaming against the delicate expanse of blue.¹ The moment is reminiscent of that in *The Secret Agent* when Mr Verloc, setting out on his journey to the embassy, sees the city streets for a moment steeped in a glorious light, whereafter his course is plunged into the murk of criminality. Breakfast on the *Ferndale* now has to be expedited so that the fire in the galley may be extinguished and a cargo of explosives taken on board.² Over breakfast Franklin intimates to Powell that there is a strange alteration in the Captain. Beyond this point the imagery is not sustained, while the symbolic significance of the cargo emerges only later as the tension is slowly built up through the next chapter (II.3), *viz* through the descriptions of de Barral's unwilling arrival on board, the Captain's strange state of distraction,³ his unexpected laughter,⁴ Flora's signs of anguish and 'resigned recklessness'.⁵ The effect of the imagery and the cargo-symbol in the preceding chapter is partly dissipated in this widely-spaced unfolding of the drama, and there is only one other symbol in the whole of Part II: the episode of the near-collision of the *Ferndale* with another ship,⁶ which neatly implies the psychological state of affairs on board ship.⁷

1. *Ibid.* p. 277.

2. *Ibid.* p. 277.

3. *Ibid.* pp. 302, 313.

4. *Ibid.* p. 323.

5. *Ibid.* p. 312.

6. *Ibid.* p. 316.

7. Perhaps the accidental fall of gear out of the rigging, narrowly missing Captain Anthony's head, and necessitating the repair of the saloon skylight, should also be regarded as a symbol of mischance narrowly escaped. *Ibid.* p. 402.

The only instance of a recurrent image in the novel is that of the starry heavens. When first encountered, it seems to have distinct philosophic ramifications, though it is rather overwritten:

It was one of those dewy, clear, starry nights, oppressing our spirits, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of the awful loneliness, of the hopeless obscure insignificance of our globe lost in the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe.¹

The image recurs sporadically,² but the suggestion of a soulless universe fails to find any objective pattern in the novel to attach itself to. It provides the setting of the final dénouement ('It was a moonless night, thick with stars above, very dark on the water'³), and is referred to in the heading of the final chapter. The reader is not sure if it should be connected with Flora's anguish, or perhaps with Marlow's tragi-comic vision, and, as Hewitt points out,⁴ it fails to agree with Marlow's vision of universal peace at the end of the book. Touched by the beneficence of the fine afternoon as he approaches Mrs Anthony's cottage, he concludes,

Breathing the dreamless peace around the picturesque cottage I was approaching, it seemed to me that it must reign everywhere, over all the globe of water and land and in the hearts of all the dwellers on this earth.⁵

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1. *Ibid.* p. 50.
 2. *Ibid.* pp. 61, 64, 148, 287, 300, 406, 409.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 406.
 4. D. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 100.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 442.

It is interesting and probably significant that the image which Conrad has so frequently used with a moral connotation, the image of light, is little used in this novel. It is in fact used twice. When Flora disappears from the Fynes' cottage,¹ and there is a good deal of searching for her at night, there is some play on the contrast of the dark night and the brightly lit window of the Fynes' cottage, visible for miles,² and the lamp in Marlow's parlour which later burns itself out.³ The effect is ominous⁴ in a general way but unclear, and when it is later articulated in retrospect, it is still lacking in any clear moral connotation:

outside (were) the dark fields, the shadowy contours of the land on the starry background of the universe, with the crude light of the open window like a beacon for the truant who would never come back now ... This affair of the purloined brother, as I had named it to myself, had a very puzzling physiognomy. The girl must have been desperate, I thought ...⁵

By the time Flora's moral plight becomes clearer, the reader will hardly recall the image. The only other instance is much more effective. It is the incident of the lighting of the flare which averts a collision at sea. It is highly dramatic in presentation, and symbolizes the seeming play of chance in human affairs and the destructive forces present on board ship, which will presently lead to a human collision. In the dénouement which follows there will be a collision, an escape, and an illumination.

1. *Ibid.* p. 49.

2. *Ibid.* pp. 55, 56.

3. *Ibid.* p. 55.

4. Apart from the effect of the 'crude light' here shed on Mrs Fyne, which was discussed above, p. 227

5. *Ibid.* p. 148.

The more sparing use of imagery is an indication of the lower intensity of the novelist's imaginative engagement. There is a loosening in the structure and the characterization. The complex narrative scheme, which is the novel's claim to innovation, seems at times to be itself a symptom of the general loosening and relaxation of engagement. It does provide, at the cost of some considerable strain to the reader, a sense of a secondary drama, the drama of reconstruction; but beyond this it does not succeed; the multiplication of observers does not produce unique insights, nor does the resulting supplementation of Marlow's vision produce anything significantly different from what an omniscient novelist's account would have provided.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VICTORY

Victory deserves to be included in this study not only because of its merits, though these are of a lesser order than those of *Nostramo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, but because the approach that has been followed in this study suggests conclusions which differ from the views of some recent critics of this novel. While F.R. Leavis accorded it in 1948¹ a place among Conrad's major novels, largely on the grounds of the significance of the character of Heyst, Douglas Hewitt takes a different view. Hewitt, writing in 1952, averred that Conrad's later work 'is ruined by his attempt to shed the burden of his pessimism';² that while this novel purports to present a hero who suffers from a mistrust of life, the novelist has evaded the task of realising this weakness, giving us instead 'a romantically conceived figure of more than normal distinction and delicacy of feeling, suffering from a flaw in which we find it hard to believe.'³ Hewitt adds that the evil of which the novelist has failed to convince the reader in Heyst is heaped in such measure on the villains of the novel that they give it a strong element of melodrama.⁴ Several critics have followed Hewitt's lead. Albert Guerard says that 'the romantic pose of world-weary detachment, the simple yet vague erotic fantasy of the island shared with a graceful uneducated girl ... are naturally pleasing materials to the adolescent mind.'⁵

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1. Leavis, *op. cit.* p. 209.
 2. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. xv. The Third Edition of 1975 is quoted here and throughout this study; the First Edition appeared in 1952.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 106.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 107 ff.
 5. Guerard, *op. cit.*, 1958, p. 272.

C.B. Cox sees in the novel an unresolved conflict between Heyst's and Lena's points of view, and he speaks of 'the crude melodrama of the stage villains Jones, Ricardo and Pedro,' of 'the mushy sentimentality which surrounds Lena', and of 'the mixture of melodrama, sentimentality and acute psychological observation in the last chapters.'¹

Hewitt's strictures, which are the most fully reasoned and incisive of the group, can be conceded only in part. It is true that the insistent and rather mechanical use of formulae in the portrayal of Mr Jones, Ricardo and Pedro as 'a spectre, a cat, an ape,² diminishes their sinister aspect. Their grotesqueness falls somewhat short of the imaginative power³ of the anarchists of *The Secret Agent*, or of

1. C. B. Cox, *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 126-7.
2. *Victory*, Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, Dent, 1970, p. 148.
3. The following quotation shows how the animal formula is strained. Ricardo during his conversation with Schomberg on the subjects of serving a gentleman, gambling, and alcohol evinces various cat-like reactions; Schomberg is serving him a beverage:

He came back carrying a pink and glistening tumbler. Mr Ricardo had followed his movements with oblique, coyly expectant yellow eyes, like a cat watching the preparation of a saucer of milk; and the satisfied sound after he had drunk might have been a slightly modified form of purring, very soft and deep in his throat ... Ricardo blinked slowly for a time, then closed his eyes altogether, with the placidity of the domestic cat dozing on the hearth-rug. In another moment he opened them very wide, and seemed surprised to see Schomberg there. *Ibid.* pp. 147 - 8.

The point is that none of these cat-like reactions has any particular appropriateness to the views that Ricardo expresses.

Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S - in *Under Western Eyes*. But Hewitt's view of Heyst as 'a romantic figure - something, indeed, of a stock character',¹ which forms the gravamen of his attack, is not convincing. Hewitt thinks that 'all sense of there being a flaw in nature disappears because it is so generally and vaguely expressed, and because it is swamped by the response of admiration which he receives as a man who is in touch with the beauty and tranquillity of the islands.'²

Hewitt does not do justice to Conrad's portrayal of Heyst. It is true that the consequences of Heyst's detachment from his fellows are not as severe and therefore not rendered as graphically as are those of Razumov's or even Captain Anthony's. It is after all natural for a writer to give a theme he has already treated from several angles a more summary treatment in a later work; but it is not true that the theme in question is inadequately embodied in Heyst. There is nothing of the romantic figure or the stock character in the Heyst who in spite of himself is drawn into assisting first Captain Morrison and then the persecuted girl in the travelling orchestra. The difficulty he has in reconciling his revulsion from action and his generous impulses is not 'swamped'; it is frequently alluded to and illustrated, and it is given dramatic treatment in III.4. Here Heyst is confronted by the consequences of his rescue of Captain Morrison in the form of the calumny Lena tells him she has heard at the hotel. Thus by means of a skilful telescoping of two episodes Heyst is made to see her as representing in a new

1. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 105.
2. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 106

form the trap whereby life tempts man into disastrous action. The theme of Heyst's mistrust of life is again dramatized at the beginning of the final episode when he finds himself at bay because he feels himself responsible for Lena's safety but cannot even contemplate committing an act of violence in self-defence.¹ Heyst's aversion to involvement in the lives of others is partly a matter of temperament, giving him an impaired sense of reality, which leads to his making such remarks as this to Ricardo: 'You people ... are divorced from all reality in my eyes.'² Indeed, his sense of unreality is sufficiently substantiated in the novel to spill over into its imagery, so that the imagery represents in large measure an extension of Heyst's consciousness. Hewitt's view of him as 'a man who is in touch with the beauty and tranquillity of the islands' is a misreading both of Heyst and of the island imagery.

Nor can Hewitt's case against Lena be conceded. He describes her as the flawless heroine of popular literature, and adds,

It is essential for the effect of the book that we should see Lena as coming from a background of lodgings off the Kingsland Road, as having the naiveté of the uneducated waif, and yet as bringing love and faith to the intellectual and highly educated Heyst. But she is palpably a creation of the writer for his scheme and a projection from his romantic conception of woman.³

This view does not do justice to the vitality with which she is conceived, of which her interaction with Heyst gives evidence. Where he inclines to

1. See II.8 and 9, and particularly p. 361.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 364.
 3. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 110.

self-reliance, she asserts that it is he who gives her a sense of her own reality; where he is sceptical, she has faith in the greater possibilities of life; where he is bound by his sense of honour, she is willing to practise deception to attain a moral end. If her portrayal is 'romantic' in the sense that it reflects a certain radiance of authorial approval, it is nowise unsubtle or unreal; her gratitude to Heyst, her simpler speech idiom, her puzzlement over his coldly detached sentiments, and her quick grasp of the fact that her sharing of his bed gives her no certain access to his heart - these make her entirely convincing. Her dream-like exaltation as the final crisis approaches, when she acts under the influence of a vision of her spiritual resources unglimped by her partner, should be acceptable in an age familiar with depth psychology and the psychology of C.G. Jung.¹ The naivety which the above critics see in Conrad's rendering of her victory does not do justice to the text. Even Leavis's statement that it is an 'unequivocal' triumph, that 'the "victory" is a victory over scepticism, a victory of life'² is true but is an oversimplification. She wins a moral victory in that her intervention disarms Ricardo and causes a rift among the antagonists, and in that she wins from Heyst in her last moments words and a gesture of commitment³ which are later attested to in his admission:

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1. C.B. Cox completely misinterprets her when he concludes, 'Lena's attitude is distinctly odd ... She wants Heyst defenceless, and likes him to be completely in her power.' *Op. cit.* p. 135.
 2. F.R. Leavis, *op.cit.* p. 232.
 3. 'Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck'. *Victory*, p. 407; and 'No one in the world ...' *ibid.* p. 406.

Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart
has not learnt while young to hope, to
love - and to put his trust in life.

But Conrad maintains in the final scene an ironic balance. While Lena is allowed her dream of faith, she is shown to be unaware of some material aspects of her situation. When the shot is fired, she is so overjoyed at having gained possession of Ricardo's knife that she is unaware that Ricardo runs off 'to provide himself with a firearm from the armoury in the trunks.'² Indeed she is unaware that she has been shot and is dying, for she asks Heyst what the matter is with her. Hewitt's view that the final scene 'tries to lull us into uncritical acceptance' is erroneous; Lena's victory is both demonstrated and circumscribed.

There is however one respect in which Hewitt's criticism of an abstract pattern not given embodiment in the novel is justified. The imputed parallel between the protagonists on the one hand and the evil trio on the other (with Wang completing a neatly ranged double trio) is strongly implied in the later part of the book. Heyst and Mr Jones have much in common. Their aristocracy is stressed, as is their separation from their social milieu - voluntary in the one case and forced in the other. They share also a temperamental preference for isolation which at times verges on mental aberration, so that Heyst is described as 'bemused' or 'enchanted,' while Mr Jones is subject to 'moods'. Their gentility is marked also by an articulateness, by a tendency to epigrammatic and ironic statement. They both have a

1. *Ibid.* p. 410.

2. *Ibid.* p. 402.

companion from a lower social milieu whom they have rescued from servitude, and a servant.¹ The power of this rather unwieldy pattern depends, as it did in the case of Jim and Gentleman Brown, and of the Captain and Leggatt in *The Secret Sharer*, on whether the protagonist is aware of and affected by a sense of community of guilt with his counterpart. In *Victory* there is little room for such a sense on the protagonists' part; the grounds for a case against Heyst are hardly stronger than those against Flora de Barral when she accepts Captain Anthony's offer of marriage in *Chance*. Heyst is wholly guiltless towards Morrison. As for his 'stealing' Lena from her employer (there might have been a contract between them), the only indication that Heyst might be feeling guilty about it may be his yielding without protest to the arrangement that Pedro cook for him, that Ricardo share his table, and that he surrender his store-room key to Pedro. But Heyst's silent yielding is quite as likely to be prompted by a protectiveness towards Lena. The only guilt that can be fairly imputed to Heyst, guilt over the pain he causes Lena by his mistrustful attitude, is not acknowledged by him until the very end, and it is too inward a thing to relate in any way to his opponents' view of him as a swindler. As for Lena, there is her 'guilt' of disregarding Heyst's arrangements for her safety and of dealing secretly with Ricardo, which clearly trouble her not at all; and there is her whole 'unlawful' life with Heyst on the island after she 'throws' herself at him, about which she admits at one point a feeling of guilt.² The

1. It may be added that both their lives end in suicide: one by fire and the other by water.

2. *Ibid.* p. 354.

Chapters III.8 and 9 exemplify Conrad's characteristic procedure of prefacing action with a pause in which the predominant mood is established and the outcome of the action to come is indicated. The action which follows, constituting the contents of Book IV, is full of suspense. This is evoked by the frequent movements of the characters, mostly between the two bungalows. Heyst calls on Mr Jones,¹ allowing Ricardo to spy on Heyst's bungalow and attack Lena (the description of their struggle, which is terminated with implausible suddenness, is admittedly awkward). When Wang leaves Heyst's service, Heyst visits the trio again, to warn them against a possible attack from him.² The interview decides Heyst to visit Wang's hut with Lena to make an appeal to Wang,³ but before he returns empty-handed from this visit, another scene is interpolated in which Pedro, astounded to see Heyst accompanied by a woman, rushes to tell his masters of his discovery, and is ordered straight back by Ricardo. (The interpolation is a little pointless, since the misogynic Mr Jones's ignorance of Lena's presence on the island is already sufficiently clear. Also rather pointless is the latter part of the conversation between Mr Jones and Ricardo in IV.6, in which Mr Jones proposes that his ultimatum to Heyst take the symbolic form of a game of cards. The proposal, though in character, is pointless because the ensuing interview does not in fact take this form, revealing instead an almost

1. *Ibid.* p. 285.

2. *Ibid.* IV.4.

3. *Ibid.* IV. 6,8.

desperately nervous Mr Jones.¹ The two scenes do, however, strengthen the impression of frenetic movement.) Then there is a narrative pause, at the end of IV.8, where Heyst faces the failure of his mission to Wang to secure protection for Lena, and the possibility of imminent death: the moment marks the total defeat of Heyst's philosophy of detachment;² it is the moment of inward crisis whose outward dénouement now follows. The novelist's attempt to lend this moment a metaphysical dimension by means of the protagonists' speculations about sin, an angry heaven, and redemption is not very effective since there is little in the rest of the novel to give these speculations substance. The moment is given more weight by the imagery of growing darkness and a sunset crimson 'like an open wound'.

The dénouement is handled with competence. The rapid to-and-fro movements cease. The action becomes deliberate, in key with the mood of sombre fatality. The climactic interview between Heyst and Mr Jones³ is wholly convincing, well paced and dramatic, their dialogue proceeding by natural stages to the point where Heyst reveals that Lena was the reason why Schomberg directed Mr Jones and his fellows to the island. Mr Jones, grasping the meaning of Ricardo's elation, resolves inevitably on the

1. The earlier part of their conversation is more to the point in that it reveals Ricardo's feelings of elation towards Lena, which complicate his relationship with Mr Jones, and is psychologically convincing, so that it offers no confirmation of the view which sees him as a puppet in a melodrama, and which implies a parallel with Lena's state of dream-like exaltation.

2. *Ibid.* p. 350.

3. IV.11.

shooting which marks the moment of outward crisis. The whole scene bears the Conradian stamp of an impressive combination of vivid action and exalted theme. Mr Jones's attributes of 'deathlike composure',¹ and 'spectral intensity',² during the interview lend him a dimension of supernatural evil which is convincingly complemented by the more human features of nervousness and a strain³ which increase as the scene proceeds. His remarks earlier in the scene, 'I am he that is',⁴ and 'I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit',⁵ carry metaphysical and Satanic overtones which reverberate because they have been prepared earlier in the novel.

The action of the final crisis is heightened further by the imagery. The starkly lit view of Lena seated with Ricardo at her feet, which greets Heyst and Mr Jones, strikes Heyst with 'an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes',⁶ and its hallucinatory effect is enhanced by the continuous play of lightning which causes the whole world to shudder:

Everything - the bungalow, the forest, the open ground - trembled incessantly; the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle flames.

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1. *Ibid.* p. 377.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 385.
 3. *Ibid.* pp. 379, 383.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 376.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 379.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 392.
 7. *Ibid.* p. 392.

The effect is similar to that of the tableau-like moment which enriches the final crisis of *Under Western Eyes*.

Some broader aspects of the final crisis call for consideration. The fact that Lena is shot in error, in place of Ricardo, may be questioned by the reader who, heeding Aristotle's requirement that there be a link between flaw and fate in a tragic character, looks for a precise dramatic justice. But, her own notion of guilt notwithstanding,¹ she remains a figure of innocence whose death occurs in consequence of the presence of evil on the island, and in the manner of the death of Desdemona. Furthermore, despite the title of the novel, she is arguably subordinate to Heyst, who is the true protagonist. An aspect which is, however, open to critical exception is the fact that Schomberg, who has engineered the tragic dénouement from a distance, escapes the destruction which engulfs all the other main characters except Wang.

It has been argued above that Lena's part in the dénouement is not an exercise in melodrama, that her victory is somewhat equivocal and circumscribed. It consists in her eyes in the capture of the knife, whereby, she thinks, she succeeds at last in evoking from Heyst a few words and a gesture of total commitment.² But this aspect of her victory may have been prompted as much by Heyst's anguish at her dying as by gratitude over the disarming of a murderer. The capture of the knife is in fact

1. *Ibid.* p. 354.

2. *Ibid.* pp. 406-7.

rendered meaningless when Ricardo rushes off to obtain 'a firearm from the armoury in the trunks'.¹ The 'capture' of the knife, which is in fact a voluntary surrender, has of course a deeper significance; it means that she has succeeded in creating a rift among the antagonists. In this sense her victory is a real one, though it is won at the cost of the lives of all the main characters.

The construction and the narrative management of the novel are resourceful and competent, avoiding with only a few exceptions the looseness which is to be found in the construction of *Chance*. The view of the ending as facile, melodramatic and indicative of a decline is not borne out by a careful reading of the novel.

An examination of the non-narrative elements of imagery, symbol and repetitive devices in the novel prompts the same conclusion. After the sparseness of imagery which marks *Chance*, *Victory* returns to a more liberal use of it characteristic of the early novels.

Instead of the opening *in medias res* which is often used in Conrad, *Victory* begins with a deceptively straightforward description of the island setting which is full of images with suggestive overtones; the impression Hewitt forms of it as a place of 'beauty and tranquillity' represents a misreading

1. *Ibid.* p. 402: these words are from the last sentence of a chapter, which usually carries extra weight in Conrad's novels.

of it. Heyst is surrounded on his island by a 'tepid, shallow' sea, the shadows of clouds, 'the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics,' and, most significant of all, a volcano playfully described as 'indolent' because it smokes only faintly by day and is almost out of sight, having only its head above the horizon.¹ Its behaviour at night is made to seem trivial by a comparison of its red glow with that of the cigar Heyst often smokes of an evening; yet its attribute of 'a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically' is subtly disquieting. The island setting is marked also by windlessness² and silence.³ That a connection is intended between the island imagery and Heyst's state of mind is suggested by such references to him as 'Enchanted Heyst', and to the island as the centre of a 'magic circle'.⁴

After the first few pages the island imagery is left in abeyance until the first crisis, when it is made to reflect the change that occurs in Heyst as he intervenes in the girl's life. Accustomed to the somnolent silence of his island, Heyst is so appalled by the uproar of Zangiaco's orchestra that its music seems to him like an act of violence:

(It was an) instrumental uproar, screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some kind of lively air...⁵

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1. *Ibid.* p. 4.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 4.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 5.
 4. *Ibid.* p. 7.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 68

The Zangiacomo band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy ... Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle ...¹

Moonlight imagery figures briefly in Heyst's memory of his father's deathbed. He recalls their last discussion thus:

They had been talking a long time. 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 the unvisited, unhonoured cemetery of hopes.²

And as the father counsels his son to detach himself from all human hopes and affairs, 'the moon swam in a cloudless sky over the begrimed shadows of the town'.³ In view of the use made of moonlight imagery in *Lord Jim*, and regarded in the context of the other imagery, the moonlight imagery is evidently intended to convey the sense of unreality which the elder Heyst's influence casts over his son's world.

The various groups of images tend to link up to form an almost continuous fabric of suggestion which is counterpointed with the action in a manner first achieved in *Heart of Darkness*. The keynote of the island imagery, silence, is repeated a number of times in the description of the couple's homecoming to the island, where it is rare for 'any sound

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1. *Ibid.* pp. 68 - 69; the same point is made on pp. 81 - 82.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 174.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 174.

louder than the buzzing of insects' to trouble the profound silence, and where silence is 'the genius of the locality'.¹ The suggestion of somnolence, of enchantment, of strangeness, is intended to relate to the moonlight imagery to suggest an effect of unreality, as is the description of Lena's arrival, given not in terms of how Heyst sees her, but how a total stranger first hears her voice:

Then Wang heard, much more faint, a voice he had never heard before - a novel impression which he acknowledged by cocking his head slightly to one side ... The new voice sounded remote and uncertain ...²

An impression of unreality is also intended in the portrayal of Wang, who makes a minimal use of speech, and whose coming and going is so unobtrusive and soundless that it is presented as a matter of materializing and vanishing - something in the nature of 'a conjuring trick'.³ He is described as a 'ghost' and as someone 'who has mastered the art of vanishing'.⁴ The suggestiveness of the volcano has already been noted. As the references to the volcano are deployed through the novel, it comes to have a clear symbolic import, threatening the somnolence of the island and making it seem unreal by its subterranean menace.⁵

1. *Ibid.* p. 180.

2. *Ibid.* p. 184.

3. *Ibid.* p. 189.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 181; 247.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 4, 168, 192, 226, 355, 356.

One of these is, appropriately in its context, overtly threatening: the reference made by Schomberg when he uses the volcano to guide the infamous trio to the island: 'There's a volcano in full blast near that island ... what more do you want? An active volcano to steer by!' *ibid.* p.168.

An impression of unreality, a sense of the fragility of reality, is most strongly conveyed in the consciousness of the two protagonists. Early in their relationship Heyst encounters Lena in terms of his sense of reality:

It was a shock to him, on coming out of his brown study, to find the girl so near him, as if one waking suddenly should see the figure of his dream turned into flesh and blood. She did not raise her shapely head, but her glance was no dream thing. It was real, the most real impression of his detached existence - so far.¹

Lena has the same experience:

Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!²

And she adds presently,

I can only be what you think I am.³

This idea that one's reality as a person, one's identity, springs from relationship is implied also in Heyst's renaming of the girl, which is frequently alluded to.⁴

1. *Ibid.* pp. 92 -3.

2. *Ibid.* p. 187.

3. *Ibid.* p. 187.

4. *Ibid.* pp. 88, 92, 186, 209, 366, 367. Her old and new names are significant: 'Alma' is an Egyptian dancing girl, from the Arabic words meaning 'instructed in music and dancing', while 'Lena', from Magdalen, is of course the prostitute who finds a faith.

The phantasmagoric quality of the whole final scene is merely an intenser form of the sense of strangeness, of the frailty and the lack of credibility of the physical world which the imagery creates sporadically throughout the novel. It should be seen as an extension of Heyst's consciousness, in which a sense of social responsibility, apart from certain impulsive acts of pity, has been abandoned. When he returns to his bungalow after meeting the infamous trio for the first time, he reflects: 'now that I don't see them, I can hardly believe that those fellows exist!'¹ Their arrival is nevertheless sufficiently disturbing to affect his awareness of Lena in a similar manner:

... for a whole minute, perhaps, with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person, he had lost the sense of her existence.²

The impression of the tenuousness of reality is supported in this scene by several instances of images of unusual light. For instance:

The lantern at their feet threw the shadows of her face upwards. Her eyes glistened, as if frightened and attentive, above the lighted chin and a very white throat.³

Since the final crisis occurs within a single night, there is no need to dramatize its progress by a time scheme such as Conrad sometimes uses in his

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1. *Ibid.* p. 247.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 248.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 247.

crises, but he makes full use of a dramatic weather situation. The return of the couple after their futile visit to Wang's hut is marked by a sunset which ominously heralds the coming thunderstorm:

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom.¹

The thunderstorm which now sets in is depicted as 'waves of cold fire' alternating with the darkness in rapid succession, the effect of which is to suggest that the physical world is unstable and people are elusive and unreal. Heyst hopes to make Lena vanish by letting her dress in black and wear a veil,² and when Ricardo leaves Heyst with Mr Jones in the visitors' bungalow, there is the same effect:

At a given moment, between two flickers of lightning, he melted out of his frame (*i.e.* the door-frame) into the outer air.³

The succeeding events are accompanied by sporadic references to the flickering lightning and thunder, the most impressive of which has already been quoted:

Everything - the bungalow, the forest, the open ground - trembled incessantly; the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle-flames.⁴

1. *Ibid.* p. 355.

2. *Ibid.* p. 371.

3. *Ibid.* p. 376; a play on the notion of his 'mortal frame' is probably intended.

4. *Ibid.* p. 392.

It is noteworthy that while the action leaves Lena's victory in a measure of doubt, the imagery here singles it out for confirmation.

There is one image whose meaning is simply not communicated: that of the candles to be lighted by Heyst as a signal to Lena if he survives the confrontation. Its meaningless elaborateness suggests that on this occasion the novelist nodded:

Wait in the forest till ... you see three
candles out of four blown out and one
relighted - or should the lights be put out
here while you watch them, wait till three
candles are lighted and then two put out
...¹

The arrangement is the more meaningless in that it is not carried out.

It is, of course, the overall management of the imagery that matters, and this has two qualities which give *Victory* a distinction that does not tally with the notion of a steady decline after *Chance*. The first is that after using the imagery of light and darkness so many times in earlier novels, the novelist is able in the last scene of *Victory* to lend it a fresh variation of meaning - the fragility of the physical world. The second is that he is able to weave all the various image groups and motifs - images of light and darkness, the silence of the island, the music of the orchestra, the two protagonists' sense of reality and identity, the sky and the weather, Wang's movements - into a continuous fabric which acts as an extension of Heyst's

1. *Ibid.* p. 372.

mental disposition. The management of the imagery suggests that the novelist's creative vitality is whole and intact.

The novel is not free from weaknesses. Apart from the meaningless image noted above, there is the too-insistent use of the animal formula for the infamous trio; a few developments are of doubtful relevance to the plot; there is a moral parallel between the protagonists and the antagonists that has little structural value. But these are peripheral weaknesses which do not condemn the novel. The tragic conception of Heyst, on which the whole novel rests, is valid and convincing, significant both in itself and in the light it casts backwards upon the treatment of the theme of isolation in earlier novels. While Hewitt is right in his criticism of Captain Anthony in *Chance* as a character whose complexity is unsustainable, giving way to a romantic simplification, such a criticism cannot be extended to Heyst. When we have seen the satisfying structural clarity of the novel - the conflict between Heyst's social withdrawal and his sympathetic impulses, the complicating effect of this conflict upon his relationship with Lena, and the interaction between the couple and the rapacious trio - and when we have seen how effectively the narrative and non-narrative elements complement one another, we realize that it was conceived in no facile romantic spirit, and that it merits Leavis's assessment as attaining to the classic status of Conrad's major novels.

APPENDIX

RÉSUMÉS OF SOME OF THE NOVELS EXAMINED

1. LORD JIM

Jim is introduced; he obtains an officer's berth on the *Patna* (Chs 1,2)

The *Patna* collides with a floating derelict (Ch. 3)

The inquiry (Ch. 4)

(Marlow takes up the narrative:) The skipper of the *Patna* absconds, the Second Engineer is put in hospital with d.t.'s (Ch. 5)

(Forward time-shift:) Brierly's suicide (Ch. 6)

The inquiry is resumed, interspersed with conversations between Jim and Marlow at the Malabar Hotel (Chs 7-12)

(Forward time-shift:) Marlow's conversation with the French naval officer about the *Patna* incident. Little Bob Stanton's death by drowning (Chs 12, 13)

The court's verdict. Chester's view of Jim; his proposal (Ch,14)

Marlow takes Jim to his hotel room; Jim's inner crisis (Chs 15-17)

Jim's short-lived engagements as water clerk (Chs 18, 19)

Marlow's consultation with Stein (Chs 20, 21)

Patusan introduced (Ch. 22)

Jim's departure for Patusan (Ch. 23)

Marlow's impressions of Patusan upon his visit nearly two years later (Ch. 24)

Jim's story of his arrival in Patusan; his escape from the Rajah's stockade to Doramin's camp (Ch. 25)

Jim makes peace in Patusan by defeating Sharif Ali: the 'battle of the summit'. (Chs 26, 27)

Jewel introduced (Chs 28, 29)

The attempt on Jim's life (Chs 30-32)

Jewel's questioning of Marlow about Jim (Chs 32-34)

Marlow's departure: the end of his direct contact with Jim (Ch 35)

(Marlow reports from a distance:) The 'privileged listener' receives Marlow's account of Jim's last episode (Ch. 36)

Marlow tells of his meeting Brown in Bangkok, and Jewel and Tamb' Itam in Stein's house: their final impressions of Jim (Ch. 37)

Brown's story to Marlow: his arrival in Patusan, his precarious entrenchment at the creek (Ch. 38)

Brown's negotiations with Kassim through Cornelius (Chs 39, 40)

The confrontation of Jim and Brown across the creek: Brown persuades Jim to agree to his plan of retreat (Chs 41, 42)

Brown's retreat and treacherous attack on Dain Waris's camp (Chs 43, 44)

Doramin's mourning; Jim's abandonment of Jewel and his death (Ch. 45)

2. NOSTROMOPART I

- Ch.1. A description of Sulaco and its environment (*Ibid.* p. 3)
- Ch.2. Captain Mitchell recalls a memorable day when Nostromo rescued Señor Ribiera, the president-dictator of Costaguana, from the Sulaco mob (p. 9)
- Ch.3. Giorgio Viola and his wife and daughters on the same day await an attack on their barricaded house by the mob (p. 16)
- Ch.4. More about the Violas; Giorgio's service under Garibaldi; his republicanism (p. 22)
- Ch.5. The official dinner party eighteen months before, to celebrate the turning up of the first sod of the new railway. A few days earlier the chairman of the railway visits a surveying camp in the mountains (p. 34)
- Ch.6. Background information about Nostromo, Dr Monygham, Don José Avellanos; the past history of the San Tomé mine, its revival under Gould's father; Gould's earlier history; his marriage to Emilia; his winning of Holroyd's financial backing (p. 44)
- Ch.7. The further history of the mine: how Gould obtained labour for it and bribed officials to establish it (p. 86)
- Ch.8. The further history of the mine: the first silver ingot; the first escort to the harbour; its ever-growing success leading the reader back to the dinner party (p. 95)

PART TWO

- Ch.1. Don José Avellanos labours for the establishment of the Ribierist regime (p. 135)
- Ch.2. The regime is embroiled in a civil war against the militarist and anti-foreign faction of the Montero brothers (p. 144)
- Ch.3. Martin Decoud: his background; his editorship of a Ribierist newspaper (p. 151)
- Ch.4. The embarkation of the Sulaco garrison; the background of its commander, General Barrios (p. 160)
- Ch.5. Decoud's conversation with Antonia Avellanos in the Casa Gould about the political situation. A portrait of Father Corbelan. Señor Hirsch's

unsuccessful appeal to Gould for assistance for his hide exporting business (p. 173)

- Ch.6. Later that night Decoud tells Mrs Gould of a rumour of a Ribierist defeat in the South (p. 207)
- Ch.7. Decoud's letter, written two days later, describing the two days of rioting, how Nostromo rescued Ribiera from the mob; how the mob failed to seize the latest silver consignment; Nostromo has left the Albergo d'Italia Una to fetch the doctor for the dying Teresa; Nostromo and Decoud are to take the silver out to sea while two forces are converging on Sulaco; Pedro Montero's by land and Sotillo's by sea. Out on the gulf, Nostromo and Decoud discover Hirsch hidden on the lighter (p. 223)
- Ch.8. Sotillo's troopship accidentally collides with the lighter, carrying off Hirsch on its anchor. Decoud and Nostromo bury the silver on the Great Isabel, where Decoud remains while Nostromo swims back to Sulaco (p. 271)

PART THREE

- Ch.1. In Sulaco the truce arranged by the engineer-in-chief of the railway holds while the arrival of Pedro Montero is expected within hours. The first digression about Dr Monygham's earlier years in Costaguana (p. 307)
- Ch.2. Sotillo's arrival. Mitchell after interrogation by Sotillo in the Custom House is locked up and joined by Dr Monygham, also arrested. Captain Mitchell learns from him of Teresa's death and of the sinking of the lighter and the drowning of Nostromo and Decoud (reported by Hirsch to Sotillo) (p. 323)
- Ch.3. Dr Monygham pretends to help Sotillo learn the whereabouts of the silver consignment; the engineer-in-chief frightens Sotillo with a report of Pedro Montero's approach into withdrawing from Sulaco, so that refugees, including a dying Don José, are able to be evacuated to Hernandez's forest sanctuary (p. 343)
- Ch.4. Dr Monygham goes to consult the Goulds. The second digression about his torture and confessions under Guzman Bento. He tells the Goulds the news of the loss of the silver and drowning of Nostromo and Decoud. Gould realises Nostromo cannot now be sent to summon Barrios (the lowest point of the Sulaco crisis). The uproar of the bells all over Sulaco (p. 363)

- Ch.5. The triumphal entry of Pedro Montero into Sulaco. His speech and that of Gamacho in the plaza (p. 384)
- Ch.6. Don P  p   at the mine is ready to blow it up, or if necessary to lead a force of miners to save Sulaco (p. 394)
- Ch.7. Gould warns Pedro Montero that the mine will be blown up if it is interfered with. Dr Monygham continues his pretence of negotiations with Sotillo to keep him away from Sulaco and from Pedro Montero (p. 402)
- Ch.8. Nostromo meets Dr Monygham in the deserted Custom House; they find Hirsch's strappadoed body; Nostromo learns that he is generally believed to be drowned and the silver sunk; that Teresa has died (p. 413)
- Ch.9. A flashback to the torture episode explains why Hirsch has been strappadoed. Dr Monygham tries to persuade Nostromo to undertake the mission of summoning Barrios (p. 440)
- Ch.10. A shift to a later time, peace and prosperity restored, Captain Mitchell gives an account of the Sulaco crisis to distinguished visitors: Nostromo's famous ride leading to Barrios's defeat of Pedro Montero's force; the miners attack when Gould was about to be shot. A flashback reveals Decoud's suicide on the Great Isabel. Nostromo decides to keep the secret of the silver to himself and enrich himself by it (p. 473)
- Ch.11. Further local news is given in a conversation between Dr Monygham and Mrs Gould; in particular that Nostromo is mysteriously visiting the Great Isabel at night and causing both the Viola girls to be 'under a spell'. The scene conveys Mrs Gould's loneliness and the emptiness of her marriage (p. 504)
- Ch.11. A backward shift explains Nostromo's strange behaviour. To secure his access to the silver, he decides to marry one of the Viola girls; he discovers that he loves Giselle, but he agrees to marry Linda to avoid offending Viola (p. 523)
- Ch.13. Viola shoots Nostromo one night when he comes to fetch more silver, mistaking him for Ramirez, another suitor who has been forbidden the island (p. 546)
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3. THE SECRET AGENT

The Verloc household (Ch. 1)

Mr Verloc's visit to the embassy where Mr Vladimir demands that he carry out a bomb attack on Greenwich Observatory (Ch. 2, p. 11)

A meeting of revolutionaries in Mr Verloc's parlour: Michaelis, Yundt, Ossipon express their political views (Ch. 3, p. 41)

The discussion between Ossipon and the Professor in the Silenus Restaurant about the latter's work with explosives and about the news of an explosion in Greenwich Park (Ch. 4, p. 61)

That evening Chief Inspector Heat meets the Professor in an alley and warns him. At headquarters Heat tells the Assistant Commissioner what he has learnt of the case (Ch. 5, p. 80)

Their discussion is continued after a digression explaining why the Assistant Commissioner does not want Michaelis involved in the case. The Assistant Commissioner, learning about the recovered name-tag and about Heat's private connection with Verloc, decides to do some investigating himself (Ch. 6, p. 104)

He calls on the Secretary of State, indicates the widening scope of the case, and obtains permission to take the case out of Heat's hands. He proceeds to Mr Verloc's shop (Ch. 7, p. 135)

A backward time shift describes the cab ride which takes Winnie Verloc's mother, accompanied by Winnie and Stevie, to her new home in the almshouse. (Ten days elapse before the next chapter) (Ch. 8, p. 152)

On the day of the bomb outrage Mr Verloc returns to the shop looking exhausted. The Assistant Commissioner calls at the shop and the two go out together. Heat calls a little later, and when Verloc returns to the shop, learns the essentials of the bomb outrage from him. Winnie, eavesdropping, learns these too (Ch. 9, p. 182)

The Assistant Commissioner, having learned from Mr Verloc the connection of the case with Mr Vladimir, meets the latter later that evening at the home of the lady patroness; the Assistant Commissioner warns Mr Vladimir by way of intimating that the police know of his complicity (Ch. 10, p. 214)

The situation at the shop after Heat's departure:
Mrs Verloc's grief and Mr Verloc's unavailing
protestations. She murders him (Ch. 11, p. 229)

She flees from the shop and, meeting Ossipon in
Brett Street, clings to him. They arrange to escape
together by the boat train to the continent. Ossipon,
having learnt of the murder becomes terrified of
her and abandons her at the moment the train moves
off (Ch. 12, p. 266)

Winnie Verloc, discovering her abandonment, throws
herself into the Channel (Ch. 13, p. 302)

4. CHANCEPART I

At a dinner at the Riverside Inn Powell tells Marlow and the overall narrator how when young he gained a berth as second mate on the *Ferndale*. (Ch. 1)

Marlow tells the narrator 'in stages' of his acquaintance with the Fynes and of their part in the story of Flora: her suicide attempt at the quarry, her disappearance with Captain Anthony (Ch. 2);

(a backward time shift:) her father's rise and fall as financier (first crisis of novel) (Ch. 3); her humiliation and abandonment by the governess and Charley after the crash (Ch. 4).

Flora is further demoralized while staying with the family of her uncle, with a wealthy old lady, and then with a Hamburg family, and returns to the 'present' of her disappearance). The Fynes are surprisingly agitated by her disappearance with Captain Anthony. (Ch. 6)

Fyne, accompanied by Marlow, travels to London to warn Captain Anthony against the proposed marriage; Flora, meeting Marlow outside Captain Anthony's hotel, tells him how she came to decide to accept the Captain's offer. (Ch. 7)

PART II

Finding Powell's boat in the Thames marshes, Marlow has him continue his tale begun in I.1 of his first voyage on the *Ferndale*. (Ch.1)

Powell describes the strained atmosphere on the ship between Flora, Captain Anthony and de Barral, and the resentment this arouses in the loyal mate and steward towards the two 'passengers'; there is a near-collision with another ship (main crisis of novel). (Chs. 2, 3)

Marlow interprets the strained situation: (backward time shift:) explains the harm Fyne does in accusing Captain Anthony of taking advantage of Flora's helplessness: this arouses in Captain Anthony a resolve not to presume on Flora's dependence, which in turn produces in her a conviction that he does not love her.

Captain Anthony shows Flora over the ship; they are married in a registry office (Ch. 4); upon de Barral's release from prison Flora brings him on board 'under protest'; de Barral's dissatisfaction and jealousy. At the end of the voyage Captain Anthony gallantly accommodates the father and daughter in a country cottage until the next voyage. (The narrative returns to the commencement of Powell's first voyage and his surprise at the tension on board) (Ch. 5)

Powell sees de Barral poisoning the Captain's drink (final crisis and dénouement as observed by Powell). Captain Anthony, informed of this, decides to release Flora. She refuses the offer, she and the Captain embrace and find one another. De Barral feeling deserted by his daughter, drinks the poisoned brandy and dies. The happiness of the couple endures until Captain Anthony goes down with his ship in a collision at sea. Six years later Marlow, visiting Mrs Anthony in her cottage on the estuary, reads signs that she and Powell have an interest in each other, and sets about promoting their marriage.

5. VICTORY

Heyst lives alone on Samburan after the failure of the Tropical Belt Coal Co. (I.1)

(Backward shift:) He became its manager in the East after rescuing Morrison from his trouble with the Portuguese authorities (I.2). Morrison later died, the Company failed, and Heyst remained on the island.

Captain Davidson takes Heyst to Sourabaya to do some business, and during a later visit learns that Heyst has upset the hotel-keeper Schomberg by disappearing from his hotel with a girl (I.4-7): minor crisis.

The story of Heyst's fateful visit to the hotel is retold from Heyst's point of view: his meeting with the girl of the orchestra, his promise to 'steal' her. Schomberg, infatuated with the girl, is outraged when he discovers their disappearance (II.1-3)

The evil trio arrive at the hotel, turn the music room into a gambling den. (II.4-5)

Ricardo tells Schomberg of his past association with Mr Jones and their criminal exploits. Schomberg proposes that the trio go to Samburan to despoil the supposedly wealthy Heyst. (II.6-8)

(Backward shift:) The couple's homecoming to Samburan: when Lena tells him of the calumny about Morrison that she heard at the hotel, he feels she represents the same snare Morrison represented repeated in a different form. She realises that he has a difficulty of commitment to others. (III.1-5)

The arrival of the trio in a boat suffering from exposure. Heyst helps them, allows them a bungalow (III.6-8). He misses his revolver. (III.9)

Ricardo invades Heyst's bungalow, attacks Lena. She throws him off, pretends to consider his plea that she joins the trio, helps him evade Heyst who returns suddenly (IV.1-3). Wang leaves Heyst's service (IV.4). Heyst tells Lena of their worsening position: he had gone to warn Mr Jones against a possible desperate act by Wang. They compelled him to take Pedro as his new servant and let Ricardo share their table. Heyst decides to go to speak to Wang and takes Lena along (IV.5). Wang refuses to shelter Lena. The defeat of Heyst's efforts and philosophy marks the inward crisis of the novel. (IV.8)

Ricardo arrives, persuades Heyst to see Mr Jones. Heyst agrees to go. A thunderstorm comes up. Mr Jones, covering Heyst with a revolver, demands his hoarded wealth. Heyst points out what Schomberg's motive must have been for concocting the story about his supposed hoard. Mr Jones, hearing about the girl, suddenly understands Ricardo's change of mood. Outward crisis of the novel: he is revolted by Ricardo's disloyalty, divines that he must now be with the girl, and resolves to shoot him.(IV.9-11)

At Heyst's bungalow they see Ricardo sitting at Lena's feet, pleading his love. He has threatened to kill both Heyst and Mr Jones, and has given up his knife to her. Mr Jones fires a shot at Ricardo which hits Lena. Ricardo flees. Mr Jones disappears. Lena joyfully shows Heyst the knife whose capture proves her love and her victory over evil. Davidson arrives and witnesses her end.(IV.13)

Davidson's report to a government official indicates the final developments: Ricardo was shot by Mr Jones; Heyst has killed himself by burning his bungalow; Wang has shot Pedro; Mr Jones is found drowned.(IV.14)

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