SYMBOLISM IN SIX WORKS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The symbolic device is as old as literature itself and is the most effective tool of the literary artist who desires to tell a story, but cannot separate his story from the thing it means. The studies made of Joseph Conrad and his works indicate that he made extensive use of symbolism, expressing the invisible by means of the visible and employing artistic imitation and invention, not as an end in itself, but as a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial or ideal truth.

This study examines evidence as to Conrad's principles provided by the symbolism in five novels and one novelette. All available criticism which may throw some light on Conrad's purpose and method is surveyed. As a final step, the symbolic elements in these works are interpreted. Our particular interest will subordinate the narrative element of Conrad's works to the symbolic element; that is, our interest in his story-telling is coincident with our interest in what his stories signify. Bancroft says:

1
The physical events portrayed in the novels of Joseph Conrad are but the drapery behind which the intangible forces of the Cosmos meet in conflict with the will and mind of man. . . . His stories cannot be separated from his philosophy of life. . . . His material is like the canvass upon which the picture is painted—it is the necessary support for the symbolization of the artist's dream.1

The student who reads Conrad's writings for the first time may find a number of elements which he can associate with his own particular literary background. Sometimes Conrad uses a background quite as romantic as any found in Cooper or Stevenson; in some works, notably Under Western Eyes, there are indications of a psychology not unlike that of Dostoevsky, whom Conrad professed to dislike. Closer scrutiny reveals some philosophical principles reminiscent of the German idealists. Any author who was exposed to such diverse literary influences and who may have been affected, even unwittingly, by them is difficult to classify.

Provocative questions also arise when Conrad's national literary tradition is considered. Although born and reared in Poland and ignorant of the English language until his late teens, Conrad preferred it to his native tongue as a literary language. In addition he professed a great respect for the French tradition. An even greater handicap to satisfactory classification is the fact that Conrad refused to discuss the

personal and philosophical elements in his writings. As a result of these difficulties, Conrad has been classified as a romantic, a realist, a romantic-realist, and an impressionist by the modern literary critics who feel it their duty to catalogue every author as a member of some general literary school.

Yet this much is certain: the novelist must express himself through the medium of language, through the delineation of characters, the development and dénouement of situations; but Conrad strove to use those tools for the creation, more than the re-creation, of ideas and emotions. He used such devices as kaleidoscopic sequences, juxtaposition of time, and an interposed narrator in order to create a total effect which would interpret reality as well as record it. Critics have agreed on one point, that Conrad was often highly subjective and independent in his literary and artistic intentions.

On the basis of these facts, Conrad might logically fall into still another classification. If we can, by definition, assume that a certain amount of distortion of fact on the part of an artist in order to intensify emotion is a form of expressionism, and that expressionism is subjective, and that symbolism adapts itself to the purpose of expressionism better than any other device does, then it follows that Conrad
might be, to a certain degree, an expressionist. But even
this category does not satisfactorily and fully describe
Conrad; perhaps he will remain, for some time at least, what
Albert Guerard calls "a great novelist unclassified."  

Method

The Nigger of the Narcissus, Lord Jim, Nostromo, Under
Western Eyes, "The Secret Sharer," and Victory are the indi-
vidual works with which this study is concerned. Each will
be discussed in separate chapters, chronologically arranged.
Available critical analyses will be utilized to guide and
supplement original interpretation of the symbolism. The
amount of useful criticism is, however, small in quantity,
particularly in view of Conrad's literary stature; much more
study has been devoted to novelists of lesser import. This
dearth of interpretative criticism may arise from the critics'
inability to see through the veil of Conrad's abstract com-
position.

Under these circumstances, it is obvious that a great
deal more study and research is necessary before anything
like a comprehensive understanding of Conrad's works can be
attained. The limits of this thesis permit only a partial
and tentative effort to discover and interpret his symbolism.

2 Albert Guerard Jr., Joseph Conrad, p. 5.
CHAPTER II

THE NIGGER OF THE NARCISSUS

Narcissism

The sea, the ship, the sailors, the vacillations of nature, and other prosaic features have such a commonplace connotation that the average reader is usually blinded by the glare of familiar things to the symbolic import of The Nigger of the Narcissus. When this novel was published, literary critics promptly branded it a novel of the sea, static at times, but adequate enough to sustain interest; furthermore, it added to the general belief that Conrad was a sort of latter day avatar of the English romantic tradition, a competent raconteur.¹ Yet this novel is a conspicuous example of the symbolic element found nearly everywhere in Conrad's works.

The title, The Nigger of the Narcissus, is symbolic. Narcissus was a very beautiful young man who fell in love with his own image reflected from the water of a spring; on the spot where he pined away from unrequited love, a flower sprang up that bears his name. Consequently, the flower

"Narcissus" is symbolic of self-love. Freudian psychologists adopted the term "Narcissism" to denote a morbid condition of abnormal interest in one's own body. In naming the ship "Narcissus," Conrad connoted both of these interpretations; the men of the crew were introspective, and their reactions to each other were aggravated.

Introspection was a natural attitude for seamen during the days of the sailing vessel; the voyages took months and sometimes years to complete, and these long periods of isolation gave rise to the expression "as lonely as a sailor's life." During long periods of inactivity, when the ship lay becalmed, the venomous philosophies of the donkins and waits would spread through the forecastle, causing malingering, sullenness, and mutiny. With nothing to occupy their thoughts and time, the men would curse their fate, torment themselves with self analysis, mull over real or imaginary abuses which the officers heaped upon them, and reach a pitch of discontent that was the bane of every sea captain.

... isolated groups of simple men... are likely to be swept from time to time by such exaggerated sentiments of sympathy or dislike.² Webster compares the crew's emotional reactions to those of children, except that the isolated seaman has "nothing to interrupt the riding of the hobby horse"³ and present new

²Ibid., p. 127. ³Ibid., p. 127.
interest. The story of the voyage of the Narcissus is brought into proper focus only when the introspection and exaggerated emotional reactions of its characters are considered.

The Symbol of the Sea

"The unconcerned immensity of the sea" is the territory over which the Narcissus must travel; to Conrad, it is symbolic of the "unconcerned immensity" of the Universe itself, of the unseen force of the Cosmos. They are both "indifferent, neutral, potential--out of which man moulds the issues of his individual life." Like the Cosmos, the sea is a vast stage upon which man acts out his role of life, remaining indifferent to his drama. When the sea rises up in violence, it has no motive except to express its own nature: "True, the experience provides a test for the men; but that is their concern, not the intent of the typhoon." The Nigger of the Narcissus portrays the notion of the Cosmos and its relation to active life, a relation defined in terms of an immutable law--an actual life of which the perceptual is but the garment

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5 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 12.
6 Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad, p. 64.
and expression of its 'ghostly reality.'\textsuperscript{7} This metaphorical interpretation of the meaning of the sea has almost conclusive corroboration at the end of The Nigger of the Narcissus, "Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning for our sinful lives?"\textsuperscript{8}

In Conrad, when the term ship is not used with specific reference, it presents a mental image of precarious security in all-surrounding danger, of progress between two points, with the near, if dormant, connotation of safe imprisonment in the hold, as in the womb, and the men aboard "feel themselves equal before the unconcerned immensity of the sea."\textsuperscript{9} The security of the Narcissus, in contrast to the unknown and dangerous voids of the open sea, prompted a code of the "solidarity of the craft," a set of rules in which all relationships were fixed. Without this code, security could not be maintained; the Narcissus could safely complete her voyage only if the crew cooperated in performing the necessary tasks. Even the commonplace activities of the forecastle served to foster this feeling of mutual dependency and cooperation for a common goal:

\textsuperscript{7}Bancroft, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{8}Joseph Conrad, \textit{The Nigger of the Narcissus}, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., p. 16.
There is a camaraderie in the work, too, from the fact that few things done by forecastle men are performed by one alone.\(^{10}\)

Any departure from this accepted code of the sea would result in isolation or catastrophe for all; the necessity of obedience overpowers the desire to avenge injustices, real or imaginary. When Donkin speaks out against Captain Allistoun, the skipper of the *Narcissus*, and even hurls a belaying pin at him he returns the pin to its proper place at Allistoun's command; the crew expect him to obey the captain, because "Donkin's insolence and Allistoun's command startled them into realization that mutiny is anarchy, and that anarchy would leave them helplessly isolated. They have for a moment lost their true identity, and the quiet firmness of their captain's voice restores it to them."\(^{11}\) Bancroft says:

> The *Narcissus* upon the lonely sea . . . represents the tangible expression of the crew's need for fellowship. Mutiny would be disastrous to that fellowship.\(^{12}\)

There is a "force which they do not understand, and they feel themselves knitted together with a fear akin to awe;\(^{13}\) it is the force that causes Singleton to return to sea during his

\(^{10}\) Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 41.
\(^{12}\) Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
\(^{13}\) Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
last years; it is the force which strips the men of their "reason for existence" when the Narcissus has docked in England. This force is security, the solidarity of the craft, which holds the secret of man's survival in the universe.

A Glimpse of Truth

In the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus is to be found a statement of Conrad's artistic purpose:

...my task which I am trying to achieve is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel— it is— before all, to make you see. That— and no more, and it is everything.  

In a literal sense seeing is accomplished with any basic formulation of sense perception, but to see from an artistic point of view is to make abstract conceptions out of literal knowledge.

Literally, Conrad wrote a story about the voyage of a ship named the Narcissus, a sailing vessel not unlike the many that were the product of England's shipwrights. The Narcissus was preparing to make her voyage home from Bombay. Captain Allistoun had been master aboard the Narcissus since she was built, and he had a secret ambition "to make her

14 Ibid., p. 8.

accomplish some day a brilliantly quick passage that would be mentioned in nautical papers.\textsuperscript{16} So it was to be expected that he would push the ship and men, trying to satiate his privy aspiration. The crew was short; so it became necessary to secure some hands from the men that were available in the port of Bombay; therefore a Negro was shipped aboard, not a usual, but a sometimes necessary practice. The composite picture of the crew was not unlike that of any other group picked at random for such a purpose. They were of varying natures and temperaments, and ran the gamut of human attributes and depredations.

After the \textit{Narcissus} had put out to sea it became evident that something was wrong with the Negro, James Wait. He was either malingering or ill. Concessions were made for his comfort, such as are made for the sick among the so-called civilized nations.

The voyage was not extraordinary. The \textit{Narcissus} encountered a severe storm while rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and perhaps had more than her share of calms and fickle winds. The crew was unquiet and restless during periods of inactivity, but such a thing might be expected. The Negro was not just malingering; he proved to be mortally ill, for he

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 31.
died a few days from port, and was buried at sea. The
Narcissus docked and lay at anchor, no different from the
other ships about her. The crew was paid, and each man went
his separate way. In condensed form this is the prosaic voy-
age of the Narcissus. What of the artistic purpose of the
author?

Conrad stated that his purpose was "to make you see,"
but there must be a thing to see, apart from what appeals to
basic perception; the artist appeals to the higher order of
abstract perception.

... the artist appeals to that part of our being
which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which
is a gift and not an acquisition—and therefore, more
permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for de-
light and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding
our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain;
to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—
and to the subtile but invincible conviction of soli-
darity that knits together (the loneliness of innumerable
hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow,
in aspiration, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which
binds men to each other, which binds together all human-
ity—the dead to the living and the living to the un-
born.17

Therein is given the thing that is to be seen, "the subtile
but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together
the loneliness of innumerable hearts."

Half a hundred impulses are at work to make the
forecastle rend asunder and send its inhabitants into
the limbo of space; but the feeling that, whether it

17Ibid., p. xii.
be from love of a common task or awe of death, man is indissolubly linked with his fellows, keeps the universe of the forecastle and the novelist's own universe concentric.\(^{18}\)

Such a vast symbol cannot be analyzed by deduction, nor can it be analyzed by an artist, but the artist can touch a part of it here and there in symbolic synthesis.

Among primitive people the death symbol held a central place in religious practices, nor has modern man, with his scientific discoveries, been able to cope with the mystery of death, nor has he found a wholly suitable analogy to explain death. Modern psychologists are greatly concerned with the terrifying effect which death has on certain people, and this fear has been dealt with through the ages because there seems to be an element of fear in all mankind of "that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns."\(^{19}\)

Conrad attacked this problem squarely in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* when he "grappled with the supreme expression of fate, the inevitability of death."\(^{20}\) When James Waite declared he was going to die, life aboard the *Narcissus* took on a completely new aspect. The "idea of a stalking death"\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

\(^{19}\) Hamlet, Ill. i, 11. 79-80.

\(^{20}\) Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

brought to the mind of everyone that he was carrying the seeds of mortality within his own breast, and this universal mortality made them equal before the "unconcerned immensity of the sea"; thus they were bound irrevocably together by the spectre of man's final fate.

The one fact that matters is that he is dying. . . . they only recognize their common humanity and their common fate. The very effort to rationalize with Jimmy that death will not strike because they do not want it to links them together.\textsuperscript{23}

This inevitability of all mortals evoked "that feeling of unavoidable solidarity."

Jimmy—he was called Jimmy "to conceal [the] hate for his accomplice"—was waited on hand and foot, for "he had found the secret of keeping on the run the fundamental imbecility of mankind."\textsuperscript{24} He was a subject of interest to other members of the crew because:

Men are of interest so long as they remain . . . on the brink of an obscurity which may menace . . . an entire group.\textsuperscript{25}

His submissive weapon was death, and the fear of death made slaves of the crew of the \textit{Narcissus}.

A work of art will give a "glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask."\textsuperscript{26} This truth which Conrad refers

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 16. \textsuperscript{23}Wright, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{24}Conrad, \textit{The Nigger of the Narcissus}, VII, 37.

\textsuperscript{25}Guerard, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{26}Conrad, \textit{The Nigger of the Narcissus}, VII, p. xiv.
to is man's failure to recognize that each day of living is a day of partial dying; and Jameswait is symbolic of a humanity that will be defeated by death, and he is, in retrospect, all people who will never reconcile themselves to death.27 The crew thinks wait is just malingering; they do not want to believe he is dying, because if he dies, so must they all. wait fights against the knowledge that his illness is real and mortal; he held steadfast "to his untruthful attitude in the face of inevitable truth."28 His death came as a surprise to the crew.

We did not know till then how much faith we had put in his delusions, we had taken his chances of life so much at his own evaluation, that his death, like the death of an old belief, shook the foundations of our society. A common bond was gone; the strong effective bond of a sentimental lie.29 Therefore one of the cohesive elements of society is a sentimental lie which man carries within his own soul—the lie of human immortality.

There is a close affinity between a malingering wait and a shirking Donkin. Donkin was an advocate of an easy, shirking life, and "there is [not] a spot on earth where such man is unknown, an ominous survival testifying to the eternal fitness of lies and impudence."30 Wait liked Donkin, although

27Webster, op. cit., p. 128.
29Ibid., p. 155. 30Ibid., p. 10.
Donkin heaped insults on him. While Wait represented a humanity that would be defeated by death, Donkin represented the advocate of capitulation without honor, a "man who can't do most things and won't do the rest." Even such a character as Donkin is not completely outside of the pale of the solidarity of mankind; he showed a "human kinship through the black fantasy of his rage," and when Donkin presented himself to the crew they gave him clothes and necessary gear, and "the gust of their benevolence sent a wave of sentiment through their doubting hearts" in the realization that they were extending the hand of fellowship to Donkin and thereby strengthening their own claim to receive it. Donkin symbolizes one who comes to terms with reality.

In contrast to Wait and Donkin, old Singleton, the veteran of the forecastle, has successfully established his identity as a member of the solidarity of man because "he has never given a thought to his mortal self." Singleton, who had spent his whole adult life at sea, decided to return to the merchant service again after the voyage of the Narcissus was completed; his world was the "solidarity of the craft"; there he belonged and there he returned. In so doing,

31Webster, op. cit., p. 128.
he illustrated the "perfect love of work." Walter Wright says:

The perfect love of work, for example, makes Jukes and Singleton at home in the order of the universe. When the old helmsman of the Narcissus is wandering aimlessly in London, he senses what is his proper destiny. The thirty-hour watch during the gale has reaffirmed what he assumed before.36

Through the moral stress of combatting the fury of nature, men are forced to reevaluate their lives; Singleton chose to return to sea and spend the remainder of his life snug in the solidarity of man at sea.

The Dark Weight

Mr. Baker, the mate of the Narcissus, could not distinguish the last name on his roll as he mustered the ship's company for the first time; but, as he dismissed the men, he heard a deep, ringing voice cry, "Wait!" and the Negro moved into the light of the quarterdeck.

"My name is Wait, James Wait."37 Whether or not Conrad intended to pun, the Negro is symbolic of a dark, mysterious, malingering weight which entered the lives of the crew when he boarded the Narcissus. In all phases of human activity one finds those who shirk their share of the burden, weights to their fellowmen. In this sense the malingering James Wait

36 Wright, op. cit., p. 37.

burdened the lives of those about him, symbolic of the parasites that inhabit the earth.

Wait would not "get on with his dying," and thereby caused delay in the lives of those about him. His procrastination depicts no more than the universal tendency to delay an unpleasant task. The lives of the crew, from the cook to the captain, were inconvenienced by Wait's delay. When the effect of Wait's life upon his fellow crew members is considered, the intent of Conrad's pun is evident; the malingering parasite is always a dark weight to those who seek to do their part in the joint human community.

Symbolic Fibers

The Nigger of the Narcissus is, like a tapestry, so interwoven with recurring symbols that the final meaning is gleaned only through a perception of the whole. The symbol of Narcissus, the sea, the solidarity of the ship, James Wait, Donkin, and Singleton are woven together to present Conrad's Weltanschauung. The name Narcissus connotes introspection and exaggerated emotional reactions. The sea is representative of indifferent nature, or the Cosmos. The ship symbolizes a point of security through life's perilous passages, a community in which man may share and thus preserve himself.

38 Ibid., p. 42.
wait and Donkin are weights of sorts in the soul of each man, even old Singleton, who has found his ideal task. Through skillful artistic craftsmanship, Conrad has blended these symbols into an untranslatable and catholic truth.
CHAPTER III

LORD JIM

The Large Symbol:

Man's Quest for Solidarity

Man's primary function in life is to recognize his own nature, to establish his own mortal identity in an immortal universe.¹

Joseph Conrad himself could have used Walter Wright's statement as the basis for his largest symbol in Lord Jim. His hero, like all men, sought peace,² and Marlowe, the narrator, explained where to find it:

... in our hearts we trust for our salvation in men that surround us.³

Bancroft says, "The bonds of society are so interwoven that no one can escape his part in the pattern of the whole";⁴ he calls this phenomenon "human solidarity," a theory which Conrad seems to have accepted:

The term solidarity itself, not to mention expressions that are its equivalent, appears so frequently in Conrad's pages that, without question, it describes for him a primary belief about human destiny.⁵

Man's peace can come only through solidarity with his fellows; and when that peace is achieved, it will be characterized, like Nature itself, by harmony. As Stein says of the beautiful butterfly:

This is Nature—the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so—and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces—this. 6

Conrad held that man, too, must bring the factors of his own nature into harmony before solidarity could be attained. In every man, by Conrad's view, there was some quality which drew him toward the universal current of human life. There was also in human nature a contrary temptation to pull away from that current. 7

That the positive quality might triumph was the basis of those "eternal longings" 8 depicted in Lord Jim; for the peace of man's soul, it must be. Solidarity is necessary for man's salvation.

This solidarity has a rational basis, as symbolized by the French officer, who seemed to Marlowe a sort of mouthpiece for abstract wisdom. 9 Wright compares the Frenchman's philosophy to that of Conrad himself and finds them very similar. 10 For the Frenchman, like his literary creator, might easily have been taken for a pessimist when he recognized

10 Wright, op. cit., p. 52.
that all men are cowards, that "Given a certain circumstance, fear is sure to come."

Ah! The young . . . And after all, one does not die of it—of being afraid. One is always afraid. One may talk, but . . . The fear, the fear—look, you—-it is always there . . . One talks; this is all very fine; but at the end of the reckoning one is no cleverer than the next man—and no more brave . . . Each of them, I say each of them, if he were an honest man—would confess that there is a point—for the best of us—there is a point where you let go of everything. And you have to live with the truth—do you see? And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same—fear of themselves.\(^{12}\)

There are two rational reasons why the man who is a coward fulfills his destiny and remains true to his fellow men:

"the example of others who are no better than yourself, and yet make good countenance,"\(^{13}\) and the necessity to prove oneself to his fellow men. This necessity is the Frenchman's honor.

But the honour—the honour, monsieur! . . . The honour—that is real—that is! And what life may be worth when . . . the honour is gone—I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion—because, monsieur, I know nothing of it.\(^{14}\)

Wright calls this "an insubstantial ideal, an airy symbol around which he builds a world of his own" and concludes: "what is honor, after all, but a kind of dream of in-herent solidarity?"\(^{15}\)

\(^{11}\)Conrad, Lord Jim, V, 146-7. \(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 147.

\(^{13}\)Ibid. \(^{14}\)Ibid. \(^{15}\)Wright, op. cit., p. 52.
Therefore, the Frenchman is an expression of Conrad's own understanding of man and his actions; he is symbolic of the rational basis of solidarity.

Although Conrad resented being called a writer of the sea, he symbolized human solidarity through the solidarity of the men of the sea; in his books "Each ship is a world in itself." When Jim deserts his ship, Marlow speaks of it as a violation of "the solidarity of the craft." Conrad's symbol is applicable, for at sea survival is almost entirely dependent upon cooperation; in the larger sense, all man must band together for protection and the happiness that comes through the achievement of peace.

"One of Us"

Sixteen years after the publication of Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad assured his readers that Jim was not a product of coldly perverted thinking; he was instead "one of us." Jim is similar to many of us and acceptable to all of us; he is so credible that "with Jim we identify ourselves completely." Jim always appeared symbolic to Marlowe, because Marlowe

16Ibid., p. 43.  
17Ibid., p. 51.  
18Conrad, Lord Jim, V, ix.  
19Guerard, op. cit., p. 46.  
20Wright, op. cit., p. 107.
could see in Jim a partial embodiment of his own soul; Jim was a sort of mirror, and the image reflected was not unlike Marlow's own image. There was something elusive and intangible in Jim's character which Marlowe found in himself. "I knew his appearance . . . he was one of us." Marlowe could have lost himself; the self-association was so strong that had Jim escaped, Marlowe would never again have known peace.

It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, weaving and misty are the beings that share with us the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, inconsolable, and elusive spirit that no eye can follow, that no hand can grasp. It was the fear of losing him that made me keep silent, for it was borne upon me suddenly and with unaccountable forces that should I let him slip away into the darkness, I would never forgive myself.

There is a moral crisis in the life of all men, a path to choose, a way to go, a belief to hold to; each man must have a reckoning with himself; he must balance his own account. Marlowe did not dare lose Jim, because his own accounting must be delayed until after Jim's account had been rendered. Jim and Marlowe were identical in that they were "one of us," and we must render up our own account.

I was about to go home for a time; and it may be that I desired more than I was aware of myself, to

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dispose of him, to dispose of him, do you understand, before I left . . . it seems to me that for each of us, going home must be like going to render an account. . . . You must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp. 23

Had Marlowe deserted Jim to his fate, he would have been betraying his own belief in the solidarity of men. Having once erred, Jim might have completely separated himself from the human community. Marlowe was also bound to Jim by a universal relationship not unlike that of a child turning to a man for surcease, "believing that age and wisdom can find a remedy for the pain of truth." 24

Brierly, who knew nothing of indecision, committed suicide soon after Jim's inquiry. In all his life, Brierly had never committed an act that would reflect any discrepancy in his character. He had been a perfect example of a man who had never gone against "the solidarity of the craft." In the face of danger Brierly had conducted himself in a truly heroic manner; his attitude toward other men had been one of tolerance and aloofness; yet he killed himself. As Brierly's character is drawn, his suicide is completely inconsistent with his past behavior. What actually happened was that Brierly saw a weakness in Jim which he associated with himself; the thing that made Jim "jump" was a universal weakness;

23 Ibid., p. 221.  
24 Ibid., p. 224.
Brierly had never known before that he himself possessed a weakness. When he became aware of a discrepancy in himself, he committed suicide. He illustrates an allegorical simplicity of character, and the price simplicity must pay when its moral standards are upset.  

Brierly is symbolic of those men who think they are exactly what they should be, but who finally, in the end, realize that they are not perfect specimens of man.

Brierly and Marlowe were not the only men who were deeply affected by the story of Jim's cowardly act. The inquiry made concerning Jim's desertion of the Patna was well attended; the thing that attracted so many people was "purely psychological—the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror of human emotions."  

It was fundamentally the same interest that packs a courtroom at a sensational murder or rape trial; the newspapers call it "human interest." The emotions exposed are universal, because there is self-association involved. The interest manifested at Jim's trial is symbolic of the universal interest in anything that touches the nature, the soul of man.

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25 Guerard, op. cit., p. 58.

26 Conrad, Lord Jim, V, 56.
And, as often occurs at such events, there was some "essential disclosure"; those who heard Jim's trial did not soon forget Jim and his act; for it was a fundamental weakness which they recognized in themselves. Each man is but a reflection of other men, and evil and weakness are embedded in the soul of all men, as well as goodness and strength.

The Universal Romantic

When Marlowe related Jim's story to Stein, the teacher of "How to be" offered such a simple diagnosis of Jim's case that it startled Marlowe. Stein said, "I understand very well. He is romantic." 27 Aboard the training ship, Jim would often look down from his station in the fore-top with contempt for those below him. He was a man destined to be a hero in the midst of dangers, his whole "life was a quest for an ideal." 28 He would imagine himself aboard sinking ships, in hurricanes, on desert islands, among savages, performing all sorts of daring deeds in the face of untold hardships. But at the training school, his future conduct was "foreshadowed by a moment's cowardice." 29 There was an accident during a gale, and a boat was lowered to give assistance. Jim was rendered immobile in the face of this crisis; he

27 Ibid., p. 212. 28 Wright, op. cit., p. 206.

29 Guerard, op. cit., p. 51.
could do nothing. After a rescue of two men had been executed, Jim no longer feared the gale, or anything else; he felt capable of greater things.

When all men flinched--then--he felt sure--he alone would know how to deal with the spurious madman of wind and seas.30

After this occurrence, Jim was sorry he had by-passed an opportunity to display his innate heroism, but that was his only reaction.

It is not with guilt for having done harm, but with the remorse associated with failure to achieve heroism that Jim is tortured. Conrad emphasizes the fact that Jim regards the incident as a chance missed. If we forget this, and many seem to, we make Jim a potential victim of disintegration. On the contrary he is a hero of romance. There can be no repetition of his failure to act in a crisis involving physical courage, for if there were he would be beyond redemption. We know that there will not be. . . . Experience . . . dogged determination will see him through. In fact, Jim, we perceive, is committed now to accepting physical danger.31

But physical bravery was not enough when Jim's test came. The Patna hit a floating obstacle, and it seemed inevitable that she would sink. Jim, commanded to examine the bulkheads, did so in spite of the physical danger; he did not make the same mistake twice, for experience had taught him to be competent. But, having vanquished physical cowardice, Jim displays weakness in another form. The other officers deserted ship and reviled Jim for being so stupid as not to join them

31 Wright, op. cit., p. 108.
in the lifeboat. In this moment of crisis, Jim imagines himself facing the eight hundred pilgrims of the ship alone; he is lost because "the traditional patterns do not apply," the "solidarity of the craft" has been destroyed, and he alone has all the responsibility. He jumped ship and left the human cargo to its own destiny. It was only after he was safe and away from the ship that he had courage; he felt a strong desire to jump out of the life boat and swim back to the place where he thought the ship had gone down. As Marlowe speculates, it "perhaps was not his fear of death that made him jump, but it was his imagination, an imagination that evoked "all the horrors of the panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped—all the appalling incidents of a disaster at sea he had ever heard of." Marlowe, in trying to explain Jim's inability to act in the face of danger, touches a fundamental truth the military leaders are aware of when they send the young, who still have hope, into the battle and leave the old behind:

A certain readiness to perish is not so very rare, but it is seldom you meet men whose souls, steeled in the impenetrable armour of resolution, are ready to fight a losing battle to the last, the desire of peace waxes stronger as hope declines, till at last it conquers the very desire of life. Which of us has not observed this, or maybe experienced something of that feeling in his own person?

Stein, whose purpose in the story is to explain "how to be," says:

A butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He wants to be so... he wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil—and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow—so fine he can never be. ... in a dream. ... 35

If it were in some way possible, it would be interesting to know how many dreams occupy the mind of man in a single day. Man has an idea about himself; he thinks he is this way and that way, when actually he is a different way entirely. He thinks himself to be brave and fine, then suddenly he meets a Jim and gets a glimpse of himself as he actually is, and his dream bursts. This thing that he thought he was turns out to be just a figment of his imagination. Marlowe thought that Jim had cheated him of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of his being. Someone comes along and robs the common life of man of some of its glamour, and the illusion is gone. Jim is symbolic of that which takes away the fantasy of life, but the fantasy comes back, because Jim, "to be," follows the dream again. Jim found that he couldn't keep his eyes shut, and therefore he really could never actually make his dreams come true. "A man that is

34 Ibid., p. 88. 35 Ibid., p. 216.
born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb into the air as inexperienced people endeavor to do, he drowns." Stein explains the way to be is "to follow the dream, and again to follow the dream." And Jim did as all men do; he followed the dream.

Crime

After Jim had jumped ship, he wanted to stand trial. Although the court was only concerned with the circumstances of his crime, not its motives, Jim sought to understand the cause of his weakness. He looked to Marlowe "as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. There is some "infernal alloy" in the "metal" of all men; no man is perfect. As Wright says, Jim has our sympathies during the entire episode aboard the Patna. "We do not chide a man for not asking for a responsibility." Jim jumped, and "we cannot with a grain of honesty separate our own identity from Jim's." The innate weakness in every man is not always exposed, but every man is not subject to the testing circumstances Jim was exposed to.

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38 Ibid., p. 45.  39 Wright, op. cit., p. 110.
40 Ibid.  41 Guerard, op. cit., p. 53.
When Jim leaped from the deck of the latana to the lifeboat, he not only manifested a deficiency in his character, he broke a link in the chain that bound him to other men.

The real significance of a crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind.\(^{42}\) Or, as Bancroft would say, when man breaks the moral law that governs solidarity, he can no longer hope for the happiness which comes only from obeying the Law; he "suffers from the recoil and is rendered an outcast"\(^{43}\) as Jim was.

It is ironic that Jim returns to stand trial for only one reason: he hopes to explain his behavior to his fellow men, to get his judges to believe his story in order that he may establish a "kinship with his race."\(^{44}\) Isolated by his crime, Jim did not realize that he was still "one of us."

Bancroft says that man, with his infernal weakness, has only two choices: he can meet the problems of life which usually present themselves under moral stress, or he can refuse to "yield the self to the larger significance."\(^{45}\) Jim attempted to meet his problems, or at least to understand them so he would not make the same mistake again. That choice results in contentment and happiness eventually. The failure

\(^{42}\) Conrad, Lord Jim, V, 157.
\(^{43}\) Bancroft, op. cit., pp. 16-17.
\(^{44}\) Wright, op. cit., p. 111.
\(^{45}\) Bancroft, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
to meet problems brings only "moral degradation," but that is the path chosen by some men.

Among those who fail to meet their problems is the fat German skipper of the Patna, a confederate in Jim's crime. He always remained in Jim's memory as an incarnation of everything vile and evil that exists in the world; his nature was incapable of any selfless act in the union of solidarity. He lounged through existence, exerting as little energy as possible, maintaining his position among the natives only because he was white. With his philosophy of taking all and giving nothing, the skipper was one of those men who hang on the outer fringes of society and, like a parasite, grow fat at the expense of others. He is symbolic of the man who refuses to recognize solidarity and becomes engulfed in his own moral degradation.

Chester, the Australian, would not face the reality of solidarity, either; he thought Jim a fool for taking his "jump" to heart. Nothing ever touched Chester; he never took anything to heart; he thought he saw things exactly as they were, and therein lay his fallacy. For he saw nothing as it really was. He was always seeking something that did not exist; the Guano Island of his dreams is comparable to the

\[46\] Ibid., p. 7.
pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Chester's entire point of view is symbolic of the man who always comes to terms with himself, who compromises with reality because he is too weak to recognize it.

Punishment

Jim was punished for his crime, as the skipper and Chester were punished for theirs, through separation from the solidarity of man, the isolation of an outcast. Jim's struggle to find himself again is tragic, universal, and our own, but his tragedy is a direct result of "his introspection which has made him aware of his isolation." He fights against the destiny of Chester and the skipper, for he does not want to be one of those scarecrows "whose meetings are more trying to a man who believes in the solidarity of our lives than the sight of an impenitent deathbed to a priest." In this struggle, there is no escape from punishment; Jim cannot escape his guilt, for there is literally "no place to hide."

As Guerard points out, "a transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth,"

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47 Guerard, op. cit., p. 83.
48 Wright, op. cit., pp. 28-29.
49 Conrad, Lord Jim, V, 224. 50 Guerard, op. cit., p. 62.
consumes it like a fever." 51 As his punishment, Jim was overcome by the negativity of his own secret fears. He "separated himself, unconsciously, by a kind of subtle fear that stood between him and his ambitions." 52 Because secret fears are a powerful factor of negativity, 52 they must be overcome before man can attain his salvation in solidarity. Jim's punishment for his crime against the community of his fellow men was an isolation in which these fears were many; he was forced to explore the "blackness" of his own soul.

Secret fears construed out of the blackness of the night must be eradicated, removing the uncertainty from within, so man may strike out boldly for a new destiny. 54

The Place of Redemption

Wright speaks of "The Triumph of Lord Jim," because, like Hamlet, he is a hero who emerges victorious from his internal struggles. "Through anguish and introspection, Lord Jim becomes able to act according to his ideal." 55 If Lord Jim is a symbolic novel concerning a man's search for self identification, then its protagonist does so. 56 It is significant that the first step in Jim's redemption was his honest confession to Marlowe and the expressed desire to atone for his mistake. According to Bancroft, confession is

51 Ibid., p. 60.  
52 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 39.  
53 Ibid., p. 54.  
54 Ibid., pp. 58-59.  
56 Ibid., p. 122.
one way for a person outside the solidarity of man to re-instate himself:

Confession restores the balance, it redirects the forces within along channels that make for the benefit of the personality of all concerned. It re-baptizes the soul into a new life—free from self-interest, free from fear, free from falsehood.  

Thus, by his confession, Jim overcame his secret fears and attained the balance which characterizes identity in the Cosmos. The specific result of this confession was that Marlowe secured a post for Jim at Patusan.

It is interesting to note the similarity of the names "Patna" and "Patusan." Whether or not Conrad deliberately made them similar is a matter of speculation. There is also an abstract similarity between Patna and Patusan, in that both places were definite turning points in Jim's life. The conditions of danger, fear, and the unknown prevail in both places. Jim was able to redeem himself under conditions similar to the circumstances under which he lost himself; a redemption is impossible in any other way.

Patusan has the same symbolic implication as does Dante's Purgatory; they were both places to bury transgressions. Marlowe suspects Stein of having undergone some sort

57 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 66.
of spiritual transformation at Fatusan. Jim went to Fatusan in a last desperate attempt to save himself; it was a place that represented hope, a place of rebirth. Jim's quick decision to go to Fatusan was characteristic of him, for it was really another jump into the unknown. At Fatusan, Jim forced his ideas of unity and peace upon the natives, and finally overcame his fear and selfishness and felt again that he was needed and respected by his fellow men. The experience at Fatusan is symbolic of the process all sinners must undergo, unless they, like Brierly go "twenty feet under."  

With the coming of "Gentleman Brown" to Fatusan, Jim's downfall was fast. (Jim did not take any action against Brown, thereby indirectly causing the death of his best friend, who was the tribal chief's son.) Guerard believes that Brown reminded Jim of the desertion of the Fatna and thereby left him powerless. Bancroft believes that Jim had learned to trust in life, thus achieving the "final triumph." Wright also takes this attitude:

Out of his own suffering has come a belief in human decency of even the most degraded.

At any rate, Jim did not act against Brown, and, although Brown caused his downfall, Jim met his death at the hands

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60 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 83.  61 Wright, op. cit., p. 113.
of another. His final act was to present himself at the native council, squarely facing the chief, who promptly shot him. Again the critics differ in their interpretation. The critics are agreed that this final act was highly romantic and in keeping with Jim's character, but Wright and Bancroft believe romanticism and imagination brought Jim a "final triumph,"62 "beatitude out of his shame,"63 while Guerard maintains that Jim remained a prisoner to his romantic ego, that his death is a claim to honor rather than any final victory.64 In a sense, Jim was a "prisoner" to his romantic dreams, but it does not mean that he did not or could not, regain solidarity. In the discussion of the Frenchman's philosophy and his symbolism of the rational basis of solidarity, Wright's belief is cited, wherein he says that honor is essentially a concept of solidarity; therefore, a claim to honor could be a claim to solidarity. Taken in this interpretation, Jim's final act can be triumphant.

Speaking of his death itself, Wright points out that it is a payment for Jim's mistake in trusting Brown.65 This false judgment of another's character was an act of conscious will, and conscious will had always failed Jim. The fact

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62Bancroft, op. cit., p. 90.
63Wright, op. cit., p. 115.
64Guerard, op. cit., p. 75. 65Wright, op. cit., p. 49.
that he made another mistake is further evidence that Jim is "one of us," for who is an infallible judge of character?66

When Jim died a heroic death, he reinstated himself as the man whom the natives called "Lord Jim" and regained solidarity. Only in dying could he do so; thus, his death symbolizes the passage of Puccini's opera, Madame Butterfly:

"If you can no longer live with honor, die with honor."

With his crime against society, his punishment, his secret fears, his confession, and final redemption, Jim runs the full gamut of violating and reasserting the Moral Law. Through the symbols of the solidarity of the craft and the rational basis of solidarity, Conrad has strengthened his symbolistic panorama which preaches one principle: the solidarity of man.

66 Ibid., p. 115.
CHAPTER IV

HOSTROMO

Material Interest

In Hostromo, Conrad has used silver as a symbolic manifestation of the power which complete materialism wields over man and man’s organized society. According to Guerard, the general influence of this form of material wealth isolates some characters and brings others into fatal conjunction;¹ but the selfish idolatry of silver always has the same result, isolation from the solidarity of man.

Back of all the examples noted of separation from Human Solidarity is one central theme concerning the cause, namely, the obscuration of the real self by the emphasis one places upon the finite self. That emphasis emanates from selfish interest.²

Conrad ostensibly calls silver "an incorruptible metal that can be trusted to keep its value forever."³ But at the very beginning of the book, a legend is repeated about "Americanos, perhaps, but gringos of some sort,"⁴ who set out to obtain forbidden treasures. They never returned from this quest, and the superstitious natives of Sulaco believe that,

¹Guerard, op. cit., p. 61.
²Bancroft, op. cit., p. 39.
³Conrad, Hostromo, VIII, 300. ⁴Ibid., p. 4.
after having discovered the treasure, they died of hunger and thirst. Now, "their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure."^5 This legend foretells Conrad's treatment of materialism by illustrating the tenacity of man's selfishness fighting against his true interest, which lies in the solidarity of all men.

Conrad has used a mythical South American republic as the stage upon which he develops this symbol of materialism. Costaguana, or coast of guano (manure) is the scene for his "most elaborate historical and political canvas,"^6 his reasoned interpretation of imperialism. Sulaco, the Occidental Province, has been only slightly affected by the political throes of Costaguana, since it is protected and isolated by natural boundaries. Modern enterprise has been repelled "by the precipices of its mountain range, by its shallow harbour opening into the everlasting calms of a gulf full of clouds."^7 But an isolated part of the world will not long remain in solitude when the missionaries of "the religion of silver and iron"^8 become interested in its welfare, especially if it has such potentialities as the

^5Ibid., p. 5.


^7Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 37.  

^8Ibid., p. 71.
San Tome mine to add fuel to this religion's fantastic zeal. Thus the Holroyd interests, a vast and mighty empire, focused its attention on Costaguana. The attitude of Holroyd, chief disciple, is symbolic of the attitude of imperialism:

Now, what is Costaguana? It is the bottomless pit of 10 per cent loans and other fool investments. European capital has been flung into it with both hands for years. Not ours, though. We in this country know just about enough to stay indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, someday we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And we shall have the leisure to take in hand the out laying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it—and neither can we, I guess.9

Thus, the true imperialist, through his selfishness, is ignorant of the full import of the moral law and works against his own fundamental social interests. This failure to recognize that man's real salvation is dependent upon membership in a healthy society is one of the forces of Negativity, which opposes the workings of the moral law.10

The San Tome mine, symbolic of all "material interest,"11 was not resurrected "for money alone,"12 but for a "serious

9 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
10 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 59.
11 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 5.
12 Ibid., p. 74.
and moral success." Charles Gould, the owner of the mine, kept "the ideas of wealth well to the fore; but he brought it forward as a means, not as an end." When the first silver ingot from the mine was moulded, Mrs. Gould "endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and im-palpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle." Holroyd, the great financier, whose financial backing made possible the reopening of the mine, used his great wealth to advance "purer forms of Christi-anity." Through these ideas, Conrad has illustrated the rationalizing process employed by the followers of material-ism to justify their "religion of silver and iron."

That this selfish materialism is actually contrary to real interests is proved by the effects of the reopening of the San Tome mine. As silver started pouring from the mine, "civilization" began to impose its stamp on the country, and "the future [meant] change--an utter change" in the physical aspects of the country as well as in the lives of the people. A scheme was proposed to build a railroad linking Sulaco with the rest of Costaguana. The area surrounding the

13 Ibid., p. 66.  
14 Ibid., p. 75.  
15 Ibid., p. 107.  
16 Ibid., p. 80.  
17 Ibid., p. 71.  
18 Ibid., p. 120.
San Tome mine preserved its original wild beauty only in a picture painted by Mrs. Gould, for the refuse from the mine soon contaminated the whole area. The social life of the natives did not escape the march of "progress."

All this piece of land now belongs to the railroad company. There will be no more popular feasts held here.19

For the first time in the history of the country, Sulaco is invaded by revolutionary forces, the attraction being the wealth of the silver mine. Through it all, the Europeans in Sulaco "rallied around Charles Gould as if the silver of the mine had been the emblem of a common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests."20 By these events, the devotion to material wealth had destroyed Sulaco's solitude, natural beauty, recreation, and brought to it the violence of war: this is what comes, according to Conrad, from neglecting man's true interests. In a speech by Dr. Monygham to Mrs. Gould, there is sounded a note that perhaps summarizes Conrad's view of the problem:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their laws, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without recititude, without continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back.21

19 Ibid., p. 123.  
20 Ibid., p. 260.  
21 Ibid., p. 511.
The general effects of materialism, in creating imperialistic ambitions, in encouraging misinterpretation of true motives, and in destroying the peaceful life of Costaguana, are only a part of Conrad's symbolic view in Nostromo. A large part of the novel is devoted to the influence which silver exerts over individual lives, particularly those of two men who became slaves of the silver from the mine—Charles Gould, owner, and Nostromo, Capataz de Cargadores.22

Charles Gould

Symbolically, Charles Gould might be one of Conrad's more universal characters, in that his moral disintegration is the result of long, gradual corrosion by material interests, focused in the silver from the San Toma mine. The action is so imperceptible to Gould himself that when he finds his life empty, he "is unaware of what he has excluded that might have been a part of his experience."23 As a young man, he was determined that the working of the mine "must be made a serious and moral success"24 because it "had been the cause of an absurd moral distress."25 The mine had caused his father so much misery that Gould felt "he simply could not

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22 Wright, op. cit., p. 137.  
23 Ibid., p. 139.  
24 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 66.  
25 Ibid.
have touched it for money alone."  

Yet his life turned out to be a complete failure "because he had no illusions . . . He felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success. There was no going back."  

The silver usurped his whole being, and he had nothing but "his mine in his head."  

His "idealization of greed" made him an easy tool for Holroyd, the imperialist, and his "imagination had been permanently affected by the great fact of the silver mine."  

that he did not object to a planned economic conquest of the world. Dencud recognized the extent of Gould's idealization of material interests, and that prompted him to say to Mrs. Gould:

"Are you aware to what point he has idealized the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? . . . as some men hold to the idea of love or revenge . . . A passion has crept into his cold and idealistic life. A passion which I can only comprehend intellectually. A passion that is not like the passions we know, we men of flesh and blood. But it is as dangerous as any of ours."

Reasonable facsimiles of Gould, or Gold, if Conrad intended to pun, have been in evidence since man first experienced ownership and possession. Undoubtedly it was Conrad's

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26 Ibid., p. 74.  
27 Ibid., p. 85.  
28 Ibid., p. 239.  
29 Guerard, op. cit., p. 54.  
30 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 77.  
31 Ibid.
intention that Charles Gould be an allegorical characterization, for an analysis of his character, as portrayed in Nostromo, leads inevitably to the conclusion that he is a concentrated embodiment of the materialistic nature of man. Like many another, Gould's idolatry of wealth grew gradually, beginning with a desire to avoid his father's misfortunes and ending with a desire to own the world. Because he did not know what he had missed in life, Gould illustrates the negativity of ignorance. Like Hervey in The Return, "His materialism grew out of the effort to entrench himself more securely in the protecting interests of artificial institution," nurtured by an "unconscious emphasis upon self-interest."32 Gould's life was a failure because he envisioned success only in materialistic terms, excluding the Moral Law.

Our Man

Gian Battista Fidanza, Capataz de Caragadores, was given the name Nostromo, "our man," by the people whom he served. He was an individual "for whom the value of life seems to consist in personal prestige."33 Indeed, Nostromo's one concern in life was to win the admiration and confidence of his superiors and the adulation of the common people; he symbolizes

32 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 77.

33 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 248.
that part of human nature that lends itself to the pursuit of personal glory:

Nostromo was efficient, trustworthy, and intelligent—but these fine qualities became a form of conceit. And conceit is one of those forces of negativity which bring about man's destruction and misery.

The political schemes that embroiled Costaguana and the silver mine had significance to Nostromo only because they were a vehicle by which to enhance the idea that he was "a man absolutely above reproach." Through personal power, Nostromo sought to achieve an exalted state of reflected glory. Whenever a task had to be done that entailed integrity and superior personal prowess, the exalted Capataz de Caragadores was the man to be called on, because he was "made incorruptible by his enormous vanity." It is ironic that he made himself indispensable to the "material interests," and yet he received no monetary reward above his salary from the steamship company. "He takes his risks, draws his pay, and distributes largesse to his admirers."

Because of his apparent indifference to material gain, Nostromo remained outside the tentacles of the silver mine

34 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 61.  
37 Ibid., p. 300.  
38 Wright, op. cit., p. 140.
until a lighter of silver had to be saved from capture, and then he, too, was ensnared, because he was "the only man for their purpose."39 This task exposed a weakness in the incorruptible capataz. "He resented having been given a task in which there were so many chances of failure."40 In order to save the silver, Nostromo refused to bring a priest to the side of Teresa, his benefactress, and she caused him to see himself in his true light.

Get riches for once, you indispensable, admired Gian Battista, to whom the peace of a dying woman is less than the praise of people who have given you a silly name—and nothing besides—in exchange for your very soul.41

According to Bancroft, Teresa's words are a warning of the Moral Law, always delivered to one who has chosen the wrong path. And in this case, that warning "rebuked his concealed selfishness."42

Nostromo, along with Decoud, manages to escape to sea with the silver. Their lighter is almost sunk by an invading ship, but they finally manage to land on the great Isabel, an island, where they bury the silver. Nostromo returns to the mainland, leaving Decoud to guard the silver, but Decoud cannot endure the loneliness and, with four bars of silver to

39 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 256.
40 Ibid., p. 275. 41 Ibid., p. 236.
42 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 30.
weight himself down in the sea, commits suicide. When
Nostromo revisits the island and finds part of the treasure
gone, he is completely defeated, because "even in his suc-
cesses and despite his apparent indifference to praise, [he]
has never thought of a dangerous job for its own sake, but
rather Nostromo in the triumph of its accomplishment." 43 To
retain his reputation, he had to adhere to the lie that the
silver had sunk in the gulf, and that lie became "the only
secret spot of his life, that life whose very essence, value,
reality, consisted in its reflection from the admiring eyes
of men." 44 He "retained the silver in order to preserve his
reputation, and in his fear of losing that reputation, he
failed to retain it." 45

This one blemish on the life of "our man" was responsi-
ble for his death, and poetic justice has seldom been better
served. 46 Nostromo began removing the silver from its hiding
place a little at a time and "growing rich very slowly." 47
A lighthouse was built close to the silver's hiding place,
and old Giorgio and his two daughters, Linda and Giselle, who
were Nostromo's "sacred and profane loves," 48 come to tend it.

43 Wright, op. cit., p. 141. 44 Conrad, Nostromo, VIII, 525.
45 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 40.
46 Guerard, op. cit., p. 61.
One night Nostromo attempts to remove some of the silver from its hiding place and is shot by the old man, who mistakes Nostromo for Ramirez, a discarded lover of Giselle. "It is a final irony that the Capataz should be shot for another man's sins." 49

It is necessary for man to bask in some reflected glory, but when that passion grips the whole of his existence, he is lost because there is no other meaning in his life for him to turn to when his personal bubble bursts in the eyes of his fellows. Nostromo's personal vanity was so great that it was more than a conceit, "It was his form of settled convictions," 50 and a powerful negative factor in his life. Nostromo was isolated from his fellow men, because his conceit created "a separation between the individual and his potential triumph." 51 Despite the warnings of the Moral Law, "our man" continued his self-worship and finally knew "the tragedy of separation." 52 His mistakes symbolize the inevitable experience of a man whose only recourse to glory is in his personal prestige.

49 Ibid.
50 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 61.
51 Ibid., p. 59.
52 Ibid., p. 89.
The character of Martin Decoud, "the dilettante of life," is a symbolic depiction of skepticism. He was "a sort of Frenchman—godless—a materialist... Neither the son of his own country nor of any other." He was "in reality a mere indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority." In this characterization Conrad again manifests his interest in isolation, and this is an isolation brought about by a refusal to recognize any virtue other than intelligence. Decoud, educated in Paris, had been "an idle boulevardier... welcomed in the pleasure haunts of press-men." And of his own native country he was fond of saying:

Imagine an atmosphere of opera-bouffe in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe. Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind... No man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of une farce macabre.

Although Decoud believed "neither in sticks nor stones," he was drawn into the political intrigue of Costaguana because he had fallen in love with Antonia, the

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55 Ibid., p. 152. 56 Ibid., p. 498.
57 Ibid., p. 152. 58 Ibid. 59 Ibid., p. 197.
daughter of Don Jose Avellanos, the representative of the aristocratic Spanish party. He became so embroiled in the revolution that it became expedient for him to leave with Nostromo and the silver when it seemed inevitable that Sulaco would fall into the opposition. When the lighter put to sea with the silver aboard, Decoud had the sensation of being launched into space. He was actually launched into space as far as he personally was concerned, because he had lost contact with the social fabric he professed to despise, although this social fabric was the very ground of his skepticism. Feeling alone for the first time in his life and being "intellectually self-confident, he suffered from being deprived of the only weapon he could use with effect." Decoud's skepticism was powerless against the complete solitude that engulfed him when he was left alone with the silver; he "was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed." Alone, Decoud began to entertain doubts as to his own individuality; he lost all belief in the reality of his past actions and action to come. The silence increased his skepticism, and in the end "he believed in nothing."

60 Ibid., p. 261. 61 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 18.
64 Ibid. 65 Ibid., p. 500.
He rowed to sea, put a pistol to his breast, pulled the trigger, rolled overboard, and sank to the bottom, weighted down by the silver he had placed in his pockets.

A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity, the brilliant Don Martin Becoud, weighted by the bars of the San Tome silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things.66

Thus Becoud's death would be symbolic even without the bars of silver.67 While the social fabric was the basis and target of his intellectual skepticism, Becoud did not realize that he must obey the Moral Law and seek Human Solidarity; "indifference" will not "suffice."68 It left him isolated, defeated, and destroyed.

In _Nostromo_, Conrad uses general and classical symbolism more deliberately than he does in his other long novels,69 and his "canvas" is so great that it is impossible to treat fully all characters of a metaphysical nature. There is Mr. Monygham, whose soul is "withered and shrunk by the shame of a moral disgrace."70 Under torture, he betrayed his comrades and thought that the weakness manifest in his own

character was an inherent weakness in the character of all men. Because of his inability to escape self and inevitable punishment of those who violate the moral law, Monyghan knew the personal meaning of isolation; he erred when he opposed "the cosmic push toward the good." 71 Giorgio Viola, the old Garibaldino, is blindly devoted to the memory of Garibaldi; with this false adhesion of ideas, he is the slave to a concept of perfect liberty that is no longer possible, and therefore loses the "name of action." Mrs. Gould, for whom the mine was only a tool to relieve suffering humanity, cannot understand the influence which silver exerts over her husband, whom she loves; she is symbolic of the unhappiness wrought in woman's life by material forces over which she exerts no control.

Conrad undoubtedly was being ironic when he described silver as being an "incorruptible metal." As the plot of *Nostromo* unfolds, the silver of the San Tome mine penetrates, corrupts, and destroys all that comes under its influence; there is no deviation in this novel of that pattern. Conrad probably knew that silver is not literally incorruptible—it will deteriorate rapidly under certain chemical conditions—so is heightened the ironic note. *Nostromo* is unusual in the amount of emphasis placed on imperialism, but there is no

lessening of the expected emphasis that is placed on certain aspects of human nature; indeed, the inter-relation of the two brings out more forcefully the corruption that can be wrought by the "incorruptible metal."
CHAPTER V

UNDER WESTERN EYES

The Symbol

The narrator of Under Western Eyes indicates the symbolic nature of this novel when he says: "A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or love."¹ So again Conrad's concern is with the thesis of human solidarity.

For the background of this story, Conrad chose a period of history when people of an entire nation disregarded man's interdependency. Before the days of Lenin and Trotsky, Russia was a fermenting caldron of nihilism, where autocrats fought revolutionists. To Conrad, the meaning of nihilism was not restricted to revolt through violence; he gave the term a wider context and interpreted it as the situation wherein each man works out his own destiny without regard for anyone else.²

In early twentieth century Russia, autocrats of a failing imperialistic system sought to maintain the absolute

¹Conrad, Under Western Eyes, XXII, 14.
²Wright, op. cit., p. 97.
power which had brought them wealth and prestige. General T. . . . was the personification of this ambition.

. . . the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible. He embodied the whole power of autocracy because he was its guardian. He was the incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social regime on its defense. He loathed rebellion by instinct. And Razumov reflected that the man was simply unable to understand a reasonable adherence to the doctrine of absolutism.3

At the other extreme were the revolutionists, who dismissed the idea of reforming this system and sought to overthrow it entirely. Young Victor Haldin, a student at the University, was such a radical revolutionist that he imagined himself appointed by the deities to assassinate a certain high government official. He "resigned" himself to the task, oblivious of its repercussions.4 Because he ordinarily "wouldn't hurt a fly,"5 the very violence of his act was testimony to its necessity.

The woman revolutionist, Sophia Antonovna, represents the more rational elements of the anarchists, yet she believes that revolt is a matter of faith, not asking questions.

"You've got to trample down every particle of your own feelings;

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3 Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, XXII, 84.
4 Ibid., p. 23.
5 Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
for stop you cannot, you must not,"6 until a better day is at hand.

But not only Sophias make up the camp of the revolutionists: Peter Ivanovitch, the refugee from Siberia, represents the more radical elements.

"Do you know what I want, Natalia Victorovna?" he uttered solemnly. "I want you to be a fanatic."
"A fanatic?"
"Yes. Faith alone won't do."7

Later, in a conversation with Razumov, the hero, Peter Ivanovitch again reveals the attitude which made him the leader of Russian revolutionists taking refuge in Switzerland.

"The subservient, submissive life. Life? No! Vegetation on the filthy heap of iniquity which the world is. Life, Razumov, not to be vile must be a revolt—a pitiless protest—all the time."8

Therefore, Under Western Eyes depicts a whole nation, a whole race of people, disregarding their interdependency and plotting each other's destruction. The autocrats "seek peace" through the elimination of all revolutionary elements in their system of absolute domination. The revolutionists strive to overthrow that system through violence, violence without rhyme or reason.

6Conrad, Under Western Eyes, XXII, 245.
7Ibid., p. 129. 8Ibid., p. 260.
Kazumov and the Symbol of Solidarity

Kazumov is a young Russian university student who is ambitious, intelligent, and—most significant of all—a complete outsider from the society of mankind. The bastard and unrecognized son of a nobleman, he has no family, no friends, and has "never known love before." Kazumov's ambition is to become a respected member of Russian society. His immediate goal is to win the University's essay prize, because he feels it is symbolic of the recognition he longs for. In his desperate need to "belong," Kazumov fears anything or anybody that might prevent his membership in the social family. For this reason he fears and hates the revolutionists, because while he tries to be accepted by the present regime, they plot to overthrow it. Yet at the same time, the young revolutionists constitute a large part of the student body at the University, so that Kazumov cannot afford to be openly antagonistic toward them. His primary interest being with the present regime, he cannot be associated or involved with the revolutionary faction at the University because that would make him a criminal in the eyes of the Russian government. In such a situation, Kazumov strives to remain neutral, superior to both the revolutionists and the autocrats through exercise of his intelligence.\(^9\)

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 360.  \(^10\)Wright, op. cit., p. 98.
Razumov admits, and, indeed, can claim no antecedent except the whole panorama of Russian tradition and history, being without any sort of family background. As Russia's own son, he secretly dreams of a better day for his nation. His own opinion, the result of an intellectual rather than emotional assessment of the revolutionists' methods, is that a "better day" must come through reform, not revolt. Once he is accepted by his fellow men, Razumov hopes to instigate a few reforms of his own.\textsuperscript{11}

Razumov is therefore a complete outcast from the solidarity of mankind and seeks membership. Since his only ties are with his nation, he seeks respect and recognition as a Russian citizen, the stepping stone to a reformist career. However, his Russia is an armed camp of autocrat and revolutionists. His intelligence makes him scorn the revolutionists' methods, and his fear of isolation makes him favor the autocrats because they are "in." With this situation as a basis, Conrad weaves the history of Razumov.

\textit{Razumov's Crime}

Victor Haldin, one of Razumov's fellow students, erroneously supposed Razumov to be a sympathetic revolutionary and

\textsuperscript{11} Conrad, \textit{Under Western Eyes}, XXII, 301-302.
came to the latter for protection after assassinating a high government official. When Haldin entered his apartment, Kazumov's bubble of neutrality burst. He could have easily explained his attitude toward the revolutionists and sent Haldin on his way, but fear of losing his personal dignity prevented this.  

Instead, Kazumov sought to regain his neutrality by quickly and secretly aiding Haldin to flee from the police. To make arrangements for Haldin's escape, Kazumov had to visit a certain horse-dealer, Ziemianitch. Finding him dead drunk, Kazumov gave way to anger and frustration by giving him a brutal beating. With all hope of regaining his neutrality lost and defeated in his attempt to be rid of Haldin, Kazumov went to the police and betrayed him. Wright says that "Impulse, fear for his own security, and conviction all demand that Kazumov yield Haldin up to the police for execution."  

This betrayal was a means to gain social approval, but the method Kazumov employed doomed him to further and increased isolation. After visiting the police, Kazumov returned home and stayed with Haldin for some time before the latter went into the street and was captured by the waiting police. During all this time—interminable to Kazumov—the

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12 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 56. 13 Wright, op. cit., p. 98.
betrayer remained silent before the man he had condemned to death. It was this silence which constituted Razumov's crime, his violation of the moral law which enforces the solidarity of man.

His silence violated the Principles of the Moral Law. . . . He broke the bonds of that solidarity by his selfish act.\textsuperscript{14}

Razumov's Punishment

At a later date, Razumov realized that "In giving Victor Haldin up, it was my self, after all, that I have betrayed most basely."\textsuperscript{15} After the betrayal of Haldin, Razumov sounded the depths of isolation. The police half suspected that he had not told the whole truth about the Haldin affair. As a matter of fact, he was afraid to admit to them that his first thought had been to help Haldin escape and had tried to help in that scheme. Forced into employment as a government spy, he reported the activities of revolutionists in Switzerland. That group erroneously believed him to have been Haldin's confederate in the assassination; therefore, he was trusted and admired by those who should have hated him. Unable to confide in either the police or the revolutionists, Razumov lived in the "bitterness of solitude."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}Bancroft, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{15}Conrad, \textit{Under Western Eyes}, XXII, 361. \textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 292.
Rest, work, solitude, and the frankness of intercourse with his kind were alike forbidden to him. Everything was gone. His existence was a great cold blank, something like the enormous plains of the whole of Russia leveled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists.\(^{17}\)

Razumov's greatest tribulation comes from his association with Haladin's sister Natalie, a Swiss resident. Constantly tortured by her trust in him, when Razumov realizes that Natalie loves him, his tragedy reaches its climax. Crying out a confused confession which is ambiguous to his audience, Razumov senses that he has been defeated by his own selfishness and asks, "I wonder who is the greatest victim in that tale?"\(^{18}\) His punishment is summarized in the halting statement, "Do you conceive the desolation of the thought --no one--to--go--to?"\(^{19}\)

Confession

In this predicament, there were but two paths open to Razumov. He could remain silent and face the continued punishment of isolation for having broken the Moral Law, or he could face his crime and be free of deception. A certain revolutionist student at the University had sent word to Switzerland that Ziemianitch, the keeper of the horses, had

\(^{17}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 303.}\)

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 292.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 303.}\)
betrayed Haldin; therefore in the eyes of the revolutionists, Razumov is completely free of guilt. Yet it is on that day that his relationship with Natalie Haldin reaches its climax. So Razumov goes before the revolutionists and confesses his crime. Actually, this choice saves him, for "Confession is heroism of mind and will . . . restores the balance, it redirects the forces along channels that make for the benefit of the personality of all concerned. It re-baptizes the soul into a new life . . . free from self-interest, free from fear, free from falsehood. Through confession the moral law achieves the triumph of principles." Razumov himself recognizes this phenomenon and breathes his first breath of moral freedom, saying, "I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse— independent of every single human being on this earth."

The End of Isolation

The rewards of crime are punishment, and the rewards of confession are redemption. Although Razumov's eardrums are burst by one of the more violent revolutionists and he is crippled in a street accident, the hero is reinstated with the revolutionists and finds peace at last. Returning to

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20 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 66.

21 Conrad, Under Western Eyes, XXII, 368.
Russia, he lives in a small cottage where revolutionists often visit in order to hear Razumov's profound political comments. The man who deafened him has been exposed as an arch police spy, adding to Razumov's martyrdom. Sophia Antonovna speaks for the revolutionists when she praises the new Razumov:

... And please mark this--he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe and more--infinitely more--when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignoring of the existence before him. There's character in such a discovery.22

Thus Razumov nullified his violation of the Moral Law, and by the single act of heroic confession, linked himself "Once more to the society that he had injured," and brought himself "into the circle of universal sympathy and understanding."23

Other Symbols

The personal history of Razumov with all his ambitions and fears, his crime, punishment, confession and redemption are the theme of Under Western Eyes, cast against a background of revolution and revolt. However, there are other

22Ibid., p. 380.

23Bancroft, op. cit., p. 71.
symbols in this novel. Mrs. Haldin believed her whole life and happiness depended on her son, so she allowed his death to destroy her sanity. At first, she was overcome by a guilt complex, blaming herself because she thought Victor had committed suicide after the assassination. Later, when she found that was untrue, she refused to believe him dead at all. Seated in her high-backed chair in the darkened front room, she could not face the fact of his death and seemed to be always waiting his return.

There was in the immobility of that bloodless face the dreadful aloofness of suffering without remedy.\(^{24}\)

Therefore she is symbolic of the fate awaiting those who suffer, as Bancroft says, from the false adhesion of ideas.\(^{25}\)

Often the truth of the Moral Law is proved by action of negative forces. In the case of Natalie Haldin, Victor Haldin's sister, innocence did not prevent entanglement in moral difficulties. Speaking to her about her brother, Razumov defines this vulnerability:

Of you he said that you had trustful eyes. And why I have not been able to forget that phrase I don't know. It meant that in you there is no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion--nothing in your heart that could give you a conception of a living, acting,

\(^{24}\)Conrad, Under Western Eyes, XXII, 339.

\(^{25}\)Bancroft, op. cit., p. 339.
speaking lie, if ever it came your way. That you are a
predestined victim—ha! what a devilish suggestion!26

And indeed, fate had made Natalie Haldin a victim, al-
though she was guilty of no crime, of no violation of the
Moral Law. By falling in love with Razumov, she unwittingly
united herself with her brother's betrayer. After the moral
shock of Razumov's half hysterical confession, she moans,
"It is impossible to be more unhappy—It is impossible—I
feel my heart becoming like ice."27

From this tribulation emerged a more mature nature. Like
Razumov, she redeemed herself through her inherent merit.
When her friend the professor (the narrator of Under Western
Eyes) meets her several days after Razumov confesses, he is
amazed at Natalie's new maturity.

She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled
at that something grave and measured in her voice, in
her movements, in her manner. It was the perfection of
collected independence. The strength of her nature had
come to the surface because the obscure depths had been
stirred.28

The professor is "lost in wonder at her force and her
tranquillity. There was no longer any Natalie Haldin, be-
cause she had completely ceased to think of herself."29

26 Conrad, Under Western Eyes, XXII, 349.
27 Ibid., p. 356.  
28 Ibid., p. 373.  
29 Ibid., p. 375.
Again in Natalie's case, as in Razumov's, unselfishness proves the key to greater maturity of character and security in the solidarity of man.
CHAPTER VI

"THE SECRET SHARER"

The Symbol

The symbol of the solidarity of man continuously lurks behind the scenes of "The Secret Sharer," for the captain's goal is acceptance by society. Wright says that this story "presents the achievement of solidarity by persons who at first distinctly lack it."¹

The captain of the ship has just assumed command two weeks before the story opens. Because he is a young man, because he has never before had complete command of a ship, and because he is a stranger to the crew, he is isolated from the society of the ship. Before him lies the necessary task of proving himself to his men, a task he views with some misapprehensions.

The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out, faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.²

¹Wright, op. cit., p. 46.
The captain imagines that the men are already aware of all his shortcomings and are whispering about him behind his back, for during his first two weeks on board, he has not yet proved himself. As an outcast from the society of his own ship, the captain is isolated from the solidarity of mankind. Acceptance by and membership in that group is his secret ambition.

False Security

It is precisely because the captain doubts himself and his ability to adjust to society that he has chosen a career at sea. In the protection of the deserted ocean, he experiences a false sense of security—false, because even here he cannot escape the solidarity of man which, at sea, takes the form of the crew.

Only as I passed the door of the forecastle I heard a deep, quiet, trustful sigh of some sleeper inside. And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straight-forwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose. 3

But even a false sense of security is soon dispelled by the events which befall the captain. He secretly befriends and shelters a fugitive whom he comes to identify as his

alter ego, undergoes a process of self-discovery, accomplishes a moral necessity, and finally achieves his place in the solidarity of man.

Desiring to be alone with himself and his still alien ship one evening, the young captain impulsively sends his tired crew to bed and takes the watch by himself. This procedure is entirely contrary to the traditional code of behavior aboard ship. While walking along the deck, the captain notices that the rope side-ladder has not been hauled aboard as it should have been. Actually, in disturbing the routine of the watch, the captain had not given his men a chance to haul the ladder in. In trying to haul in the ladder himself, the captain discovers a naked man down in the water, holding to the ladder. This naked swimmer is the man who is to change the captain's destiny, and their first contact was caused by his "neglect of rational sea tradition."4 Undeniably, it was "through his negligence in setting the watch that the 'sharer' comes aboard."5 The captain's own weakness has made him vulnerable; he himself is directly responsible for the events that follow.

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4 Guerard, op. cit., p. 41.

5 Wright, op. cit., p. 48.
The Alter Ego

When the captain discovers this man, he feels instantaneously and inexplicably attracted to him.

A mysterious communication was established already between us two—in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea.6

This man has murdered one of his fellow crew members of the Sephona and is trying to flee his punishment. As far as the captain is concerned, Leggatt becomes "a symbol for the subconscious—those dark potentialities."7 From the very beginning, the captain identifies himself with Leggatt, first because of their physical relationship.

The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly gray of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror.8

But the identification does not stop there; the captain feels an emotional kinship with the refugee.

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes.9

And finally the identification focuses itself upon one particular part of the two men's personalities; their failure to adjust to the solidarity of man.

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7Guerard, op. cit., p. 47.
9Ibid., p. 102.
The captain reads his own weakness into this man who has killed a rebellious sailor... he is correct. The mate had erred through lack of mastery of his responsibility. 10

This same lack in the captain had already caused him trouble aboard his own ship and, indeed, was directly responsible for Leggatt's presence there in the first place. Thus Leggatt emerges as the captain's alter ego, his "secret sharer."

According to Sancroft, the function of this alter ego is to elevate man, for it is "our real being that urges us against self-interest and to which we offer excuses for acts of self-love." 11 The captain, through Leggatt, elevates himself, discovers himself, proves himself, and places himself in his correct relationship to the solidarity of man.

The Process of Self-Discovery

The ensuing days held many tribulations for the captain. At times, the strain of living with his other self is almost too great. His burdensome secret is driving him near the brink of insanity.

... all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed,

10 Wright, op. cit., p. 48.
11 Sancroft, op. cit., p. 52.
behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of that table. It was much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it.\textsuperscript{12}

On that first night when the captain befriended Leggatt and relinquished his bed to him, the captain impulsively thought he should pin together the curtains of his for greater protection.

I thought for a moment of pinning them together for greater safety, but I sat down on the couch and once there I felt unwilling to rise and hunt for a pin. I would do it in a moment. I was extremely tired, in a peculiarly intimate way . . . \textsuperscript{13}

But pinning together the curtains would serve not only to protect Leggatt, but separate him from the captain; therefore, the captain does not "hunt for the pin." Guerard interprets this incident as symbolic of the captain's inability to separate himself from Leggatt until he has discovered himself.

He does not pin the curtain, of course; he will not be able to divide himself from the other self until he has discovered its exact nature; until he has fully recognized his own capacity to commit such a crime.\textsuperscript{14}

For in order to attain "the simplicity of mature self-command," the captain must first "travel through his own complexity, through the dark potentialities of his own nature."\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12}Conrad, "The Secret Sharer," Twixt Land and Sea, \textit{Ax}, 113-114.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 111. \textsuperscript{14}Guerard, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 37.
At the same time the captain seeks to find himself through study of his "secret sharer," for his relationship with the crew is becoming increasingly strained. "His own blunders are fast making his position intolerable," and those blunders arise from his confused and frustrated attempts to keep Leggatt's presence a secret. Thus he finds himself caught in a vicious circle. He cannot join the "solidarity" of the crew until he has experienced self-discovery, yet during that process—which Leggatt expedites—his relationship with the crew suffers.

But what causes the struggle here is that the very bond which should tie him to his fellowmen—the secret of man's emotional and impulsive nature, of his fear and irresolution, of his unpredictability of himself—this bond in pulling him further away from the kinship which he must achieve with humanity as the master of a crew and a ship. He seems caught in one universe, which keeps him from finding a place in the other.17

The Moral Necessity

The captain of the Sephona had come aboard seeking Leggatt, and the protagonist had protected his "secret sharer"; the crew members were aghast with horror when they heard the story of Leggatt's deed and wished nothing more than to see him dead, but the captain sheltered his other self from their eyes. Because the captain had completely identified himself with Leggatt, his alter ego, he had to defend him.

17Ibid., p. 49.
... he cannot condemn to punishment a man who is his alter ego without feeling that he has been a traitor to his own soul and has forever separated himself from the standard of decency which makes society tenable.18

Because Leggatt is an expert swimmer, he hopes to escape by swimming ashore when they approach an isolated island. The captain, of course, cooperates. But he is not content to bring his ship near to this island and let Leggatt swim the rest of the way; no, he must take the ship "as close as possible to the unknown and reefed shore of Koh-ring; he must go to the very brink of disaster to which self-knowledge may lead."19 This invitation to danger for himself, his crew, and his ship is not precipitated by any physical necessity, for Leggatt is perfectly capable of swimming at least two miles; rather, "the necessity is clearly a moral one."20

Solidarity achieved

Indeed, as the captain does draw so near to Koh-ring that all the crew stand in fear of their lives, convinced that they cannot avoid the reefs, as the captain was helping Leggatt to escape, he gave the "secret sharer" his hat, suddenly realizing that the man would be doomed to perpetual wandering in the blistering tropical sun.

After coming so close to Koh-ring, the captain must

18 Ibid. 19 Guerard, op. cit., p. 42.
20 Ibid., p. 40.
turn his skill and attention to maneuvering a ship which is still a stranger to him and prove his ability to an openly belligerent crew. Trying to avoid crashing into the reefs of Koh-ring, the captain desperately needs a marker in the water to help him gauge the direction the ship is taking. Looking down, he sees floating on the waves the hat he gave Leggatt. Using it as a mark, he saves the ship in a display of skill and gains thereby the respect of the crew.

Already the ship was drawing ahead. and I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.21

He had proved himself at last, but he saved himself only by being kind to Leggatt, his alter ego. His gift of the hat represented a final gesture of understanding and tenderness which opened the door to complete self-realization. Although the captain had been insecure, afraid, and isolated with a false sense of security, he endured the hard process of self-discovery, faced his moral necessity, and finally united himself to the solidarity of man.

CHAPTER VII

VICTORY

The Symbol

In Victory, Conrad again symbolizes the solidarity of man, which is developed through the factor of negativity—adverse circumstances which may arise purely by chance or may be the product of man's own behavior. At any rate, negative factors drive man to the fold of solidarity. Bancroft stresses the universal singificance of negativity in the development of the protagonist, because "negativity refers to the moral stress to which every rational individual is subjected."¹ Conrad himself said that Victory "is a book in which I have tried to grasp at more 'life stuff' than perhaps in my other works."² Guerard has called it a "study in skepticism in isolation"³ and of the "vicious circle wherein skepticism breeds isolation and isolation breeds further skepticism."⁴

¹Bancroft, op. cit., p. 7.
³Guerard, op. cit., p. 34.
⁴Ibid., p. 77.
In short, *Victory* is a chronicle of what befalls a man who violates the tenet of solidarity and isolates himself. While solidarity is one of Conrad's favorite subjects for symbolic representation, it is amplified in *Victory* more faithfully than in any other of his novels analyzed in this paper.

In his impressionable and formative adolescence, Axel Heyst was admonished by his philosopher father to "Look on life--make no sound." So adhering to this philosophy, Heyst "could not take my soul down the street to fight there. I started off to wander about, an independent spectator" in the islands of the South Pacific. Through intellectual isolation Heyst hoped to protect himself from "the enslavement that besets mankind." He characterized himself as "I, a man of universal scorn and unbelief," cutting himself off from the solidarity of mankind through control of his mind. He felt he had found, in this way, the panacea of happiness in a troubled world.

It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without

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5 Conrad, *Victory*, XXIII, 175. 6 Ibid., p. 196.
suffering and almost without a single care in the world—invulnerable because elusive.\textsuperscript{9}

Actually, he had merely forgone the great emotional experiences of human existence. "To slay, to love—the greatest experience of life upon a man! And I have had no experience of either."\textsuperscript{10} Bancroft substantiates this self-appraisal of Heyst's.

Heyst was separated by his stifled emotions and pessimistic outlook... He had suppressed his emotions in order to escape their effects... but in so doing had not escaped the effects of separation.\textsuperscript{11}

However, Heyst's isolation was not complete. The history recorded in \textit{Victory} is made possible by the fact that he had his Achilles' heel, a hole in his otherwise impene-trable armor of detachment. Heyst's father had once said, "You still believe in something, then?... You believe in flesh and blood perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained it, I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity."\textsuperscript{12} And cultivate it he did. Heyst seemed to feel that he was safe so long as he confined his relations with other people to the realm of imagination and sympathized with their trials and tribulations. He did not realize that

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., p. 90. \textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 212.

in retaining even one bond with his fellow men, he could be drawn into the world he sought to escape.

Pity was the one strand that united Heyse with his kind and finally brought him to his realization.\(^{13}\)

**Heyst's Development**

Heyst’s development has been called "a progressive self-discovery through relations with others.\(^{14}\) His pity for mankind brought him into contact with guilt, loneliness, love, and danger. At first he sought to escape to an isolated tropical island because "This seemed to be an inexpurgable refuge," but he came to learn that "it's perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other."\(^{15}\) Certainly the factors of negativity brought Heyst his share of trouble, and it was true that in his besieged state, he did "get to know" people and his rightful relationship with them.

The first step in this process came when Heyst offered financial aid to Morrison, an island trader who was in danger of losing his boat. Because Morrison was unable to repay Heyst and felt indebted, he persuaded the recluse to be his partner in a mining venture. While away in England to complete the arrangement for the South Pacific mine, Morrison

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\(^{13}\) Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 78.


\(^{15}\) Conrad, *Victory*, XXIII, 352.
died of pneumonia. To Schomberg, the local inn-keeper, Heyst had indirectly murdered Morrison. Although there was absolutely no basis for this accusation, Heyst himself felt guilty.

His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and, in addition, he also suffered from plain, down-right remorse. He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death. 16

Wright says that "Morrison's death in Europe while promoting it [the mine] is for Heyst symbolic of the nemesis that pursues contamination with man's affairs." 17 Surely, the ramifications of this innocent impulsive act of pity—the frustration and feeling of guilt—sent Heyst back to his island hermitage with increased determination to avoid entanglements of society.

Impulse has trapped him once, but he will not again be drawn into the maelstrom, conscious awareness of the form in which the temptation once overtook him will insure the skeptic's son from another lapse. 18

Heyst has learned his lesson and will not make the same mistake again. He has renounced all ties with other of his fellow men, saying "I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul." 19

16Ibid., p. 65. 17Wright, op. cit., p. 102.
18Ibid. 19Conrad, Victory, XXIII, 280.
The man who once confined himself to "looking on" has now abandoned even that.

I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not; but now I have done with observation, too.\textsuperscript{20}

In thus renouncing all ties, action, and even observation, Heyst has isolated himself completely and achieved "the lowest spirituality to which trust in mere intellect can bring him."\textsuperscript{21}

In this state of mind, Heyst remains for some time on his remote island, site of the ill-fated mine which went bankrupt after Morrison's death. Once a month a trader steamed close enough to the island to see any distress signal that Heyst might send, but Heyst actually speaks to no one except his Chinese servant, Wang. Although this isolation was what Heyst had wanted, loneliness was what he experienced, for he could not escape the effect of separation.\textsuperscript{22}

He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 54.

\textsuperscript{21}Wright, op. cit., p. 102.

\textsuperscript{22}Sancroft, op. cit., p. 39.
them ever. Where could he go to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on this earth. Of this fact—not such a remote one after all—he had only lately become aware . . . and though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him.23

This arrangement could not remain permanent, because Heyse had only suppressed his impulses, not annihilated them.24 Venturing out into society again, he visited the hotel on the mainland and met a young girl who played in a travelling orchestra stopping there. She was ill-suited to her sordid environment and suffered from the continued attentions of the innkeeper Schomberg. Again moved to action by an impulse based on pity and sympathy, Heyst came to her aid.

It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Lelli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognize it. He was not thinking of Morrison then.25

As the only possible solution, Heyst carried the young girl with him when he returned to his island hermitage. This time he involved himself irrevocably with his fellow men.

23Conrad, Victory, XXIII, 66-67.

24Wright, op. cit., p. 102.

25Conrad, Victory, XXIII, 71-72.
He was caught up in the process of action and reaction. The girl Lena altered his entire life, and his influence on her was equally far-reaching.

The young girl loved Heyst, but he was unable to accept or return that love fully. Although loneliness had precipitated his need for love and companionship, the habits of a lifetime were too strong. Lena, "for whom he feels the half-hearted reluctant love of a man whose temperament and opinions deeply cut him off from other people,"26 is frustrated by Heyst's attitude.

Conrad has subtly traced the development of their relationship—Heyst's attempts to free his emotions, Lena's need to be wanted, and her desire to prove herself worthy of Heyst's love. At times Heyst comes near to self-revelation, but occasionally he reverts to his habitual isolation. At these moments, he actually resents the girl, because she symbolizes further entanglement, "ties," and the inevitable grief which must follow.

All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment... He jumped up and began to walk to and fro. Presently his hidden fury fell into dust about him, like a crazy structure, leaving behind emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself—that commonest

26 Webster, op. cit., p. 131.
of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolled by the lucidity of his mind. 27

For Heyst, danger comes to his island retreat in the person of three thieves whom the jealous, vengeful Schomberg has persuaded to rob him, "Plain Mr. Jones," his secretary Ricardo, and their servant Pedro. Perhaps it was Conrad's intent that these three disreputable characters should personify some aspect of evil.

There was a similarity of mind between those two—one the outcast of his vices [Ricardo], the other [Mr. Jones] inspired by a spirit of scornful defiance, the aggressiveness of a beast of prey looking upon all the tame creatures of the earth as its natural victims. 28

Mr. Jones himself gives the most significant clue to his function in Heyst's life:

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am—yes, I am the world itself come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast—almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate—the retribution that waits its time. 29

Symbolically interpreted, "Plain Mr. Jones" and his two assistants represent danger, the menace of threatening death and destruction. They are a part of the negativity which drives men to the solidarity of his fellow men to gain security. Perhaps they are the punishment for uncommitted sins.

28 Ibid., p. 269.
29 Ibid., p. 379.
He who is "afraid of wickedness"\(^{30}\) finds himself pitted against it. The Chinese servant Wang has stolen Heyst's revolver and left him physically unarmed against those three men who covet the mythical wealth which Schomberg has told them is hidden on the island. Heyst is not only without physical weapons; he has become defenseless emotionally. His frustrating reaction is a feeling of "complete uselessness"\(^{31}\) and disgust. He sensed that "when the issue was joined, it would find him disarmed and shrinking from the ugliness and degradation of it."\(^{32}\) This disgust was a direct result of Heyst's years of escapism and isolation, for it was the only emotion he had left.

They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time—anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense—it extends even to myself.\(^{33}\)

While "Plain Mr. Jones" and his confederates were "divorced from all reality"\(^{34}\) in Heyst's mind, they presented Lena with her first real opportunity to be of use to the man she loved. She schemes to steal a knife from Ricardo and is

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 207.  \(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 350.  
\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 357.  \(^{33}\)Ibid., pp. 329-330.  
\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 364.
carried away in the ecstasy of martyrdom, of self-sacrifice for her lover. At last her life has found its purpose.

... whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason for her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blending hot glow of passionate purpose. 25

Danger has come to the isolated intellectual and his lover. Although Lena is not isolated from the solidarity of man to the extent that Heyst is, she is insecure emotionally. The challenge of this threatening destruction reduced Heyst to a helpless pessimism overcome by disgust; for Lena it presented an opportunity to gain the security she sought.

Victory

The girl was diabolically successful in her attempt to obtain the knife: she obtained a fatal bullet wound as well.

Her death, however, is not allowed to lessen the greatness of her "victory." Indeed, "The spirit of the girl which was passing away from under them clung to her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death." 36 She was victorious, because "She dies believing that for the first time in her life she is truly loved." 37 Having found her purpose, her fulfillment in life, she cannot be conquered, even by

25 Ibid., p. 367.
37 Wright, op. cit., p. 105.
death itself. She passes away "profoundly at peace... . The flush of rapture flooding her whole being."\(^{38}\)

As for Heyst, "He knew not his love for her until in death she revealed the depth of her."\(^{39}\) With the realization that he loved Lena, Heyst's isolation is ended; he is completely awakened and joined to the solidarity of man and has learned to say "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love... and to put trust in life."\(^{40}\)

But regardless of Heyst's self-discovery, Lena is dead and he cannot live on without her. The danger of the thieves is gone. Pedro drowns, and Mr. Jones murders Ricardo in dispute over Lena; then he himself drowns trying to escape the island. Along on the island of tragedy, Heyst sets fire to his house and dies there, joining Lena in death. Leavis maintains that this act was not evidence of Heyst's cowardice, but that "Having achieved reality, he refuses to exist without it."\(^{41}\)

Interpreted in this manner, Heyst's suicide was the logical end to that "progressive self-discovery through relations with others"\(^{42}\) which had brought him guilt, loneliness, love, love.

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\(^{38}\) Conrad, *Victory*, XXIII, 407.

\(^{39}\) Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 45.


\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 202
danger, and, finally, the acceptance of his true nature and needs. His relationship with society had not only brought him self-discovery; he had brought happiness to the girl who loved him. Lena was victorious over insecurity and even over death. Heyst, too, had his victory, a victory over himself.

However, this is not the only interpretation of Heyst's suicide. To Guerard, it is symbolic of the hero's punishment for having abandoned his father's philosophy of skepticism.

He pays for his truancy to his father's ideal of inaction by his death, the only remedy for a breach of faith.43

Considered in this light, Victory becomes symbolic not of victory at all, but of defeat that follows desertion of principles. This interpretation fails to take into account the most significant facts: the principles of Heyst's former life are contradictory to the thesis of solidarity, and when he deserted them he was not defeated; he found himself at last. Heyst's suicide may be an artistic necessity because of his unfaithfulness to his father's ideals, but symbolically it cannot discount the importance of his victory over pessimism. Leavis's version of the suicide seems more in keeping with Conrad's intention and with Conrad's practice in other novels.

43 Guerard, op. cit., p. 34.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Negativity

Conrad once wrote that a "work of art is not limited to any one meaning"; like Keats, he held that the mark of genius "lay in part in the selection of the particular perspective which would suggest the most profound meaning." In the works examined in this study, there is considerable evidence that through the medium of symbolism, Conrad expresses his most profound philosophical principles. There is considerable evidence that the major premise of his abstract thought was that men are bound together by similar needs, desires, hopes, and abilities into a community or state of solidarity. The works examined in this study uphold this state as not only being desirable, but as being ideal. All men do not maintain or achieve this ideal state because of forces of negativity. Lord Jim secretly feared that he could not attain the heroism that his romantic super-ego demanded; the captain in the "Secret Sharer" chose a "secret sharer" to hide his secret fear that he was not capable of assuming responsibility;

\[^{1}wright, \textit{op. cit.}, \textit{p. 205.}\]
Razumov was afraid of any alliance because he feared it might be the wrong one. The ideals of all these men were high, but because of secret fears, they were frustrated in their efforts to attain their ideals; secret fears are a force of negativity.

Another force that prevents man from reaching the ideal state is adherence to false ideals. Because Victor Haldin's mother had made her whole life and happiness dependent upon her son, his death destroyed her sanity. A similar condition prevented Charles Gould from conceiving of success and happiness except in terms of material wealth. So long as a man clings to a false ideal, he is hampered in his attempts to attain any degree of real happiness.

Conceit and ignorance, acting as a negative force, caused the crew of the Narcissus, including James Wait, to think they could postpone or escape the reality of death. Decoud's conceit expressed itself in an intellectual isolation which sterilized his chances for a happy life. Mostromo's desire to live only for reflected glory brought about his destruction. The conviction that life held nothing was passed on to Heyst by his philosophical father; therefore stifled emotions and a completely detached, unparticipating attitude acted as forces of negativity in Heyst's life.
Crime and Punishment

In Conrad's order of human solidarity, an act that was a rejection or disobedience of the Moral Laws which regulate the human community would isolate a man and deny him membership in the "solidarity of the craft." Jim's cowardice, Razumov's betrayal of a confidant and Nostromo's theft of gold were all condemned by Conrad because of their effect on the solidarity that bound men together. Jim disappointed his fellow seamen by running away at a critical moment when his service was needed by others; Razumov's betrayal sent a friend to death; Nostromo's theft broke faith with the people who admired and praised him. Therefore, the failure to assume man's inherent responsibilities of acting according to the welfare of all is damaging to the welfare of all, and really constitutes a crime. Heyst, in his isolation, deprived his fellowmen and the girl who loved him of his potential contributions to the solidarity of all. The captain in the "Secret Sharer" deprived his crew of the benefits of his knowledge by failing to execute all the duties that were his, as captain of the ship. Any act that was not in accord with the rules that govern the solidarity of man is, then, a crime.

As a logical outgrowth of this philosophical idea, punishment comes in the form of isolation from the community a
man has betrayed. The protagonists examined in this study always stand alone on the brink of "the solidarity of the craft." They suffer from their loss of fellowship with their kind, and redemption comes in proving one's desire to be reinstated into this fellowship. To be reinstated, a man must assume and execute the inherent responsibilities that are the cohesive elements of "the solidarity of man."
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