"POSITIVE" AND "NEGATIVE" CHARACTERS

IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S FICTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

What is said here will be directed toward an attempt to understand Joseph Conrad's own concept of the "moral law"; what is meant by the terms "positive" and negative," often used to describe the forces so obviously influencing his characters; and the characters, the action, and the endings as proofs of Conrad's belief in such a law and such forces.

There cannot be, of course, any one exclusive approach to such a task. Yet, so far as possible, Conrad's preoccupations with style and artistic motif must be ignored in the search for a clear understanding of both conscious and unconscious influences of his personal philosophy upon his writings. Also, though the plot of some of the accounts must be examined for evidence of his moral insight, a large part of the action may safely be omitted from consideration in the search for the psychological motives which guided Conrad himself, and--through him--the characters. Such a limited approach is necessary when a study is more occupied, as this is, in clarifying the basic moral philosophy of the man than in explaining his artistic credo. The real problem, here, is to separate one from the other as completely as possible. One
cannot be separated from the other absolutely, because the moral philosophy is dependent upon the artistic approach for its final proof. Still, the very admission of a possible separation is reason enough to carry on such a study, because even if Conrad's practice of denying the reader one interpretation of an action to force upon him as many as four or five re-interpretations\(^1\) proves somewhat confusing in terms of artistic endeavor, it goes far in showing the consistency in point of view on a moral level. The very fact that all the characters re-interpret the same basic action is proof of this consistency. Therefore, the extent of separation will be entirely dependent upon the need for clarity, for as Bancroft points out:

> 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.\(^2\)

If Bancroft is right, then the need for distinction is great. The awareness of J. Donald Adams to this need is no less marked when he states:

> At bottom, for all his power as a descriptive artist, for all the exotic wrappings of his tales, he was interested chiefly in the souls of men.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Joseph Warren Beach, *Twentieth Century Novel*, p. 358.


Indeed, the problem itself lies in connecting Conrad the man to his "moral law" by describing his characters' actions as influenced and finally determined and consummated by their obedience to or their disobedience of that law. If this connection is to be properly made, some mention of Conrad's relation to established religion must be examined and his background—his early years in Poland, his hatred of and yet strange similarity to the Russian novelists of the period—must be taken into consideration.

Method of Presentation

This study, then, is basically a search for consistency in Conrad's belief about morals. Proof of this moral interpretation will be produced by character analysis, wherein it will be pointed out how the course of action which the character follows and the ending which results from that following define Conrad's belief in some fundamentals of morality and describe the method by which he employs such principles.

The second chapter will make a preliminary explanation of Conrad's interpretation of certain well-known ideals of human conduct. A part of this chapter also examines definitions which noteworthy critics have made of Conrad's credo. Such a preliminary discussion as this is necessary in view of the fact that Conrad never gave a full account of his beliefs, but through occasional phrases did hint at an outline of a mature philosophy.
The third chapter is the first of three chapters devoted almost entirely to an analysis of characters who, in their individual ways, offer proof of Conrad's moral belief. Specifically, the characters in this chapter are linked together by the fact that they evolve under the same environmental difficulties. They are all isolated from other men of their race and their creed by physical obstacles. More important, these men are isolated from the rest of mankind because of false notions which they have of their moral affiliations with the rest of mankind. Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands are the novels examined in this chapter; and "The Heart of Darkness," "An Outpost of Progress," and "The Planter of Malata" constitute the shorter tales. The reason for such a division as this is that it is necessary to find out whether Conrad placed any emphasis upon environmental factors as the cause of moral variations.

Chapter IV deals with stories of the sea--The Shadow Line, Typhoon, and Youth--because these three stories have the same "pressing sense of the unstable and inexplicable just beneath the surface."4 As in Chapter III, these sea stories are separated for the purpose of examining whether Conrad placed any special emphasis on this specific phase or way of life as a moral determinant.

Chapter V is an analysis of the major characters from "Karain," "The Lagoon," "Falk," "Because of the Dollars," "The

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Return," "Il Conde," "Tomorrow," and Chance to show that even when characters are in completely different environments they may have similar moral significances. This chapter denies that Conrad believed one mode of life to have any more implicit moral significance than another. It excludes the possibility of the environment's being more than of mere surface importance where Conrad's credo is involved.

Chapter VI contains the conclusions and summarizes what Conrad's philosophy of life--his moral consciousness--was, and in what way certain of his characters have portrayed this philosophy.
CHAPTER II

FUNDAMENTALS OF MORALITY

Conduct of Life

The peculiar circumstances of Conrad's life-experience must always be taken into consideration as conditioning the subject-matter, if not the fundamental character of his books.¹

Such a statement as this may or may not mean a great deal to this study. It may mean merely that Wagenknecht believes all writers to be influenced by personal experience, or it may mean that he considered Conrad to be excessively influenced by personal experience. In the first instance, it can mean nothing where this study is concerned; but in the second instance, it can mean all. The important thing, however, is that it does show, in either of the two cases, that Wagenknecht is aware, like many critics, of the possibility of Conrad's moral and personal implication in his fiction. The degree of implication becomes secondary—at least temporarily—to this awareness. That is, it admits the plausibility of Conrad's early life in Poland—those years of anxiety in the exile of his parents from their beloved country—and his twenty years of lonely and introspective life at sea, having something, at least, to do with both his creative and stylistic endeavors.

¹Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel, p. 432.
There seems to be a great deal of evidence to support the theme that "perfection of individual conduct"\textsuperscript{2} in Conrad's characters is almost entirely dependent upon Conrad's personal conflicts. At least, if one critic is to be believed, Conrad's years in Poland were the years of greatest importance because of the psychopathic sense of frustration Conrad may have had from having given up his fight for Polish freedom.\textsuperscript{3} Something of the same sort may also be seen in even another critic's conclusions: H. L. Mencken implies that Conrad's very birthplace is indicative of a "slavic mind"\textsuperscript{4} and that he is therefore "more given than we are to revealing the qualities that are in all of us."\textsuperscript{5} Wagenknecht, in his own right, says that Conrad is what he is because he is first of all a "passionate puritan,"\textsuperscript{6} and that it was this puritanism which gave him his fundamental theme. He also says that Conrad was "nominally, at least, a Roman Catholic,"\textsuperscript{7} only to alter this statement in the next paragraph by saying:

Personally I can find little specifically Catholic doctrine in him, though it is only fair to add that Patrick Braybrooke thinks he finds a good deal.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{2Ibid.}, p. 433.
\textsuperscript{3}Morton Dauwen Zabel, \textit{The Portable Conrad}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{4}Mencken, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 14. \textsuperscript{5Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{6}Wagenknecht, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 430.
\textsuperscript{7Ibid.}, pp. 430-431. \textsuperscript{8Ibid.}, p. 431.
It seems unfortunate in the light of all this speculation that Conrad did not write down, in so many words, exactly what he felt influenced him the most. But here, again, is seen the separation of the man and the artist—perhaps even more of a breach than Conrad would have liked to admit.

Something, at least, gave Conrad the writer an extraordinary insight into life. It is doubtful that he would be the center of so much research if this insight had been less than it is. From it, all of Conrad's characters may be explained. It is, after all, not as important to point out where Conrad's moral implications were derived as it is to point out what they are. There is some need, however, to point out some of the possible means whereby Conrad could have induced the cardinal principles of human conduct from his own life-experience. Also, it is quite safe to assume that every writer is to some degree autobiographical, Conrad no less than other writers. In fact, the exact point of this study is to prove that Conrad was really more involved in his characters' moral condition than has heretofore been recognized. Conrad himself refuted the claim of contemporary critics that he was a mere teller of exotic sea and adventure stories:

Every subject in the region of intellect and emotion must have a morality of its own if it is treated at all sincerely; and even the most artful writer will give himself (and his morality) away in about every third sentence. 9

What is the key to this "morality" in Conrad himself?

He had nothing but scorn for overt didacticism in fiction, yet he... saw the world as resting squarely on a few ancient fundamentals, the most important of which was fidelity.\textsuperscript{10}

This seems to be the essential Conrad—the seeker of group solidarity. Wagenknecht chooses to call this same fundamental principle "fidelity," and, as this study will show, others choose to call it by other names. Whatever this fundamental around which Conrad builds his stories is called, it is first and foremost a species of morality. Since moral implication presupposes introspection and reflection, all of Conrad's characters are victims—intended victims—of the fundamental "moral law." That is, Conrad seems to have deliberately set up certain characters by creating in them certain innate weaknesses for the sole purpose of allowing the "moral law" to operate on those characters. If they were strong enough, they could withstand the force of moral stress to which they were subjected, but if they had certain innate weaknesses from the first, they were allowed to fulfill their created end—their end of becoming so immersed in their struggle that they lost their battle with life. A few of the characters escape the title of "victim" and become, instead, spiritually affiliated with the "moral law" by their acceptance of and confession to the positivity of the law. The others remain

\textsuperscript{10}Wagenknecht, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 430.
victims, always disobeying the warnings which negativity gives them by the very process of drawing them further and further away from solidarity. Confession, which is in itself a necessary and traditional method of bringing about individual unification with the law, is the point of fusion at which the specific positive forces and the "moral law" itself become one. All of the characters in Conrad's fiction furnish consummate evidence of this fusion between action and principle. Briefly, he believed in the need of confession, because it was only through confession that negativity ceased to be the strongest force in man. After confession, characters lead a happier existence, because they are no longer "victims" of the "moral law" but a part of it—an unexplainable fused part of it—from which no warnings issue because there is no conflict to warrant such warnings. They are "harmoniously contrived" by Conrad, and they represent the essence of morality.

That such was Conrad's view is hinted at in a statement of Mencken:

In all his stories you will find this same concern with the inextricable movement of phenomena and noumena between event and event, this same curiosity as to first causes and ultimate effects.\footnote{Mencken, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47.}

It is doubtful if Mencken himself believed that such curiosity was possible only to a man of deep moral convictions.
Whether he did or not, his words are fitting tribute to Conrad as a seeker of answers outside the realm of the purely physical life.

With more sympathetic insight, Zabel indicates the fundamental doctrine of Conrad:

... love, or the sense of honor, or the obligation of duty, or even the social instinct itself, enters the novels as a means whereby the individual is forced out of his isolation and morbid surrender. ... It is finally the world that saves us—the world of human necessities and duty.\textsuperscript{12}

If Conrad had been as optimistic as Zabel would have us think, the chances are that he would have been known as a romantic writer, whose stories, in spite of their implications, always ended with the hero living happily ever after. So few of Conrad's characters ever are saved by the "world of human necessities and duty," that the reader is likely to believe Guerard when he says:

My own feeling is that Conrad is far more skeptical than Zabel takes him to be, that recovery in the sense of a return to equanimity or to the group almost never occurs, and that spiritual isolation is indeed presented as the inescapable destiny of modern man.\textsuperscript{13}

A few characters—a very few, it is true—escape doom. It is these few of whom Symons is speaking when he says:

Most of his art is the unclothing of the soul, and when at last it is naked and alone, in that thrilling region where the souls of other men have at times

\textsuperscript{12}Zabel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{13}Albert Guerard, Jr., \textit{Joseph Conrad}, p. 16.
penetrated, only to shudder back with terror from that brink of eternal loneliness, then only is the soul exultant with the supreme happiness.\footnote{Arthur Symons, Notes on Joseph Conrad, pp. 27-28.}

Symons implies here that Conrad had a diabolical reason for allowing his characters to witness from the very brink the darkness of complete negativity. The moralist is, rather, inclined to read into Conrad something of the "passionate puritan" in view of the supreme happiness which the soul must feel after such an experience. The gist of the matter is that Conrad was not enough of a humanitarian to save all of his characters, but he was enough of a moralist to create a few who could escape—as examples of the ultimate end of a man who heeded the warning of the "moral law." Conrad's practicality led him to believe that the innate weakness of most men overbalanced the scale and sent them, by their own blindness, and their own actions, into the final state of negativity. A few of the characters seem to have been able to keep the scale from overbalancing at the last moment, and even a smaller number were able to overload the scale with positivity so that it spilled in the opposite direction. Certainly none of Conrad's characters can be fully understood until they are thoroughly defined in terms of their relations to the "moral law" from beginning to end.

Elusiveness of Method

Conrad's method, briefly, is to observe from as many points in space and time as possible the working
out in action of fairly simple human traits. Sometimes he analyzes his characters in lucid expository paragraphs, or employs an observer with Marlow's speculative mind. But more often he endows his characters, together with highly individual mannerisms, with a more than lifelike simplicity of motive and with abnormally coherent impulses.\textsuperscript{15}

As far as the general outline of Conrad's fiction is concerned, such a critical judgment as the one given above finds almost wholesale agreement among readers and critics alike. Proof that this is Conrad's method may be found by examining any or all of his works. Such a cursory judgment is of little value, however, unless one is made aware that below this "simplicity of motive" Conrad had a reason for impressing upon the reader the simplicity of basic human characteristics. Conrad stripped away the countless irrelevant traits and tendencies and bared the few really essential, provocative forces which are basic in every individual. Also, he devised a method of using more than one point of observation of a given incident by going backward or forward and picking up interpretations of that incident from many angles in time. These seemingly unimportant expository or descriptive dialogues may last for a page or for several pages according to the amount of emphasis Conrad wishes to place upon that incident. Obviously, however, Conrad did not wish to confuse the reader but rather to show the difference between life and a straight narrative.

\textsuperscript{15} Guerard, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 59.
He preferred to present his characters in a more lifelike setting than most writers feel is necessary.

Beneath the surface of every conversation and every descriptive phrase there lurks the significance of the need of positivity. There is an urgency in the speech of each observer, and there is a feeling of silent affirmation in the scenes, a voiceless anxiety pointing out the need to recognize the positive path and to humble oneself before the indifference of the "moral law." Such art as this allowed Conrad at times to take the reader to the "fifth level"\(^{16}\) of point of view and always—even when the story is being told by the first narrator who is interpreting from the second who, in turn, received it from the third and so on until the fifth level is reached—the feeling of anxiety exists in exactly the same degree.

Sometimes, too, Conrad presents his story "entirely with direct, objective narrative"\(^{17}\) and the urgency fails to vary in the slightest. Such a method could be made necessary only if the author felt the need of exemplifying a complexity of moral significances, and even though some critics call this practice eccentric,\(^{18}\) others think that Conrad gave his "characters less violence dragging them out into the open, when some third person intervened between himself and them."\(^{19}\)

\(^{16}\)Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 436.  \(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 435.  \(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 436.  \(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 437.
This seems to be Conrad's natural method, and, as Wagenknecht points out, it is possible proof of Conrad's temperament:

...Conrad was one of the most profoundly intuitive of all writers. He created his characters without knowing what they were going to do; he thrust them into a situation without the remotest idea of how he was going to get them out again. With such a writer, theories and principles, however sincerely held, are mere rationalizations imposed upon the deep urges of his fundamental temperament. 20

At any rate, Conrad's method is one which sooner or later involves even the reader. That is, so complex is the perspective that the reader begins to find his own state of morality reflected in the characters. The effect is much like that of the realism of Dostoevsky. That Conrad detested Dostoevsky is common knowledge, but that he had basically the same attitude toward life seems even more evident. There are differences, of course, of much greater importance than a mere personal dislike on the part of Conrad. For one thing, Conrad seems to be more removed from his characters than Dostoevsky. Yet, at the same time, Dostoevsky doubtlessly knew what his characters were going to do when he created them. Also, Dostoevsky seems to have set out not only to prove the existence of the "moral law" but to allow his characters the alternative of conforming or being doomed. Conrad, on the other hand, implies a similar moral code but could never quite bring himself to a state of complete cognizance. He is not at all as sure as Dostoevsky that such a force actually exists,

20 Ibid.
and although his characters go far in proving him wrong, he never openly admits his error. That is, even though Dostoevsky probably never personally lived closer to this awareness of moral issues than Conrad, he seemed to be more confident that it actually did exist. Perhaps the best example of Conrad's final hesitation comes from E. M. Forster, who says:

What is so elusive about him is that he is always promising to make some general philosophic statement about the universe, and then refraining... 21

In so far as this goes, it seems correct. Forster, however, goes on to say that because of this hesitation Conrad cannot be "written down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions..." 22 In light of what is now known about Conrad, such a deduction seems hasty. That he actually "loves to trace the slimy involution of morbid psychology" 23 and "when it comes to his heroes, he loves to envelop them in a cloud of slavic mysticism" 24 may or may not be true. Either way, he could still be the fundamental moralist which his characters prove him to be. It is true that he hesitates to carry the reader past the veil of positivity, an indication of his indecisiveness. Spasmodically, he is even able to conquer his indecisiveness, as one or two of his books prove.

22 Ibid.
23 Beach, op. cit., p. 339.
24 Ibid.
Still, he makes as much of an impression and implicates himself just as thoroughly when he more or less consistently deals with characters who have over-balanced negative traits. "His hell could not be so low, had he no heaven." The final fate of any of Conrad's negative characters is the same as the destiny of Dostoevsky's. As Beach summarizes:

Conrad resented Mencken's stress upon his Slavic strain; he never tired of expressing his dislike for the Russians, and especially for Dostoevski. But where do we come so near as in Dostoevski and the Russians to the psychology of a Lord Jim, a Baron Heyst: and where but in Dostoevski did Conrad get the plot, the psychology, the very technique of "Under Western Eyes?" 25

Beach could have gone further than this. He could have said that to a remarkable degree, all of Conrad's books--but especially his negative characters--reflect Dostoevsky's moral doctrine exactly. Still, Conrad did deny any affiliation with Dostoevsky, and he had reason to, but on decidedly different grounds from the attitude toward the "moral law." Beach states:

Of course Conrad hated the Russians on patriotic, on political grounds, and he was a decidedly political minded man... again he may have disliked in Dostoevski the specifically religious cast of his 'mysticism.' He certainly shared with Dostoevski a profound feeling of the mysteriousness, the almost transcendental character of human motives. This psychological cast is something as exotic as his subject matter, and is another reason why he found so arduous the novelist's task of making his reader see. 26

It seems logical to believe that in spite of Conrad's protest, his connection with the eastern European gave him

something which he was not aware of himself. He was a writer of great analytical ability in a country which during his career had few authors with aptitude for analysis. 27 He seems to have very little in common with other English writers of the period—one of the main reasons being his temperament, which places him closer to writers outside the country he had picked for his new homeland than to those of that country. Indeed, he wrote in a vein which seemed to thrive in England in spite of the prevailing fashions of thought rather than because of them.

When all the doubts about where Conrad got his morality—if there really is any—or how he got it, subsides, the fact still remains that if morality is present—and, again, his characters offer the only working proof of it—it is a morality of which much may be said. His method itself is either proof of the morality or else an individual and unusual dream of a form of art new to the era. Zabel says:

Once the rationale of his method is seized and its relevance to his personal history is reasonably allowed, the famous technical devices in his books take on a fresh importance, as do also his defects and mannerisms. We see how the time-shift, the use of narrators, the repeated motif or incident, the exhaustive analysis of events, become in his hands instruments of consciousness, a mode of sympathy and instinct . . . . The fact has gained a wider periphery of relevance. What seems to be a tied plot, gyrating aimlessly around a static point of obsession, is actually growing in meaning and moral import, taking on a wider increment of value. 28

Thus, Conrad's method fits well with a moral purpose. Characters such as he produced respond to his method alone. Significantly, very few of them would have any importance whatsoever unless they were finally dependent upon their own meaning. His method has not been shown to be artistically valid in any other relation. Therefore, Conrad's characters must be the symbols and symptoms of a vast moral intensity. Their destinies must also imply the affirmations of their creator. He creates them to show that man is governed by basic laws--fidelity being among the most important--and allows his method and his characters to seek their own natural course. The "moral law" moves onward, with or without the aid of the characters. It is indifferent to the negative state of man--indeed, it cannot know that negativity exists, so positive is it in nature. Therefore, it is not the "moral law" which responds and governs; the characters, themselves, must seek the law. Most of them never become aware of its importance. It is the characters whose actions we must examine to prove and clarify the operation of these principles.
CHAPTER III

ISOLATION OF CHARACTERS

Importance of Environment

The characters who are to be discussed in this chapter live in such pronounced simplicity that they are allowed a vast amount of time for self-analysis and retrospective reflection. They are fortunate in this, because they are spared some of perplexity of a more complex society than that of their environment—the jungles of Africa or the outlying and isolated islands of the far east. And, even if Conrad seemed to think that "loneliness... surrounds, envelops, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave,"[1] his readers cannot but think that a man who is left alone as much as any of these characters would have the time to argue out his fate more adequately than his fellow-sufferers in higher social planes. Such isolation, however, possibly tends to make a man feel that he is outside the jurisdiction of laws—both of physical and spiritual quality—that control other mortals. The tendency to think in terms other than those which bind them to the same level of culture as creatures ordinarily felt to be in the same group as themselves—to think that they are not governed by the same recognition of duty, fidelity, or

sense of honor—causes them frequently to obscure the real context of the moral truth by causing them to place more importance upon their own concepts than upon the more important force—the "moral law." When the self becomes so important that it obscures or relegates to a secondary place the infinite forces of life, the characters have displaced the real meaning of life. They think that what they derive from the self is the law, when actually anything which is derived from the ego is finite and therefore false because it obscures the infinite meaning of life.

All of these characters also have the Conradian touch of being almost wholly negative when they are discovered to the reader. This might seem to imply that Conrad believed that negativity is a natural outcome of discovering weaknesses within oneself, but more likely it is indicative of what Bancroft says:

Conrad treats the matter negatively, and indicates how the moral significance is made real to the individual through violence to its principles, and through which its 'authority' is defined as absolute.2

In fact, to Conrad, negativity is one of the ways whereby man may discover himself, because each one of these characters could have changed—had ample opportunity to change—even after he had progressed to the state of misconceiving life as dependent upon his own feeling of adequacy rather than upon an obedience to a force greater than himself. By the very process

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2Bancroft, op. cit., p. 5.
that Conrad followed of allowing each of his figures a sense of being wrong—and he does this throughout all of his books when conflict or suffering causes the characters to become reflective and thoughtful—he is allowing them the opportunity to re-establish themselves, to understand that the "moral law is the value-aspect of the Cosmos" and that "the Cosmos, as the real, is a kind of neutral stuff out of which man molds the issue, conditions—all that makes up his own peculiar environment" and that this opportunity is offered to them for that purpose. It is only when the final warning comes—a moment when each of them finally realizes the futility of his life more strongly than he ever felt it before—and passes without his taking advantage of it, is it possible to say that Conrad has at last condemned a character to complete negativity. Until the final warning passes, the character still is adjustable to his surrounding. When he refuses the last one, however, he simply fails to discover his true self and must necessarily perish for his foolhardiness.

... But he never ceased to believe, too, that the secret impulses of the mind, even when they betrayed one into a deed of evil, might reveal the genius of man's soul and suggest the operation within it of an unfathomable and beneficent providence.  

Negativity, then, to Conrad must have simply meant another method of proving the existence of a "moral law," and for that

\[3\text{Ibid.}\] \[4\text{Ibid., p. 4.}\] 

\[5\text{Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad, p. 106.}\]
reason his characters are frequently outside the realm of positivity when the story opens.

Selection of Characters

The characters to be discussed here are taken from Almayer's Folly, Conrad's first published novel; An Outcast of the Islands, his second "in conception, second in execution, second as it were in its essence"; and the three shorter works, "Heart of Darkness," An Outpost of Progress," and "The Planter of Malata." As has been noted before, these are grouped in this category because they offer evidence of the degeneration of the isolated white man. They are not grouped in this fashion because of their chronological order of appearance, but more because they offer prime evidence of how action is speeded up or retarded by environmental influences.

To a marked degree, Conrad's first two novels express the fate of characters who are "victims" of the "moral law." That is, the principal characters--Tom Lingard, Almayer, and Williams--may be called "victims," although some of the minor characters may escape that label. Of these minor characters, very little need be noted except how they remained in harmony with their group and the environment. They evolve around the major characters and are frequently lost from sight or obscured by the more important action of the major figures. Conrad created

them to exist in a shroud of semi-darkness, bursting forth every now and then into the full light of life for the sole purpose of giving the reader a reinterpretation of the actions of the major characters. When they have been allowed to make their point, they elapse once more into the exotic surroundings. Because of this Conradian trait, the minor characters are difficult to trace and will therefore be ignored for the more important task of proving morality as the cause of any characters' being created at all—that task of tracing a few important characters by their errors and linking those errors by the stress which they bring about in accordance with the "moral law."

Much the same procedure will be followed for the shorter works; that is, minor characters will be passed over because they have interpretive rather than intrinsic importance. In "The Heart of Darkness," Kurtz is the main focus of moral implication, and in "An Outpost of Progress" Kayerts and Carlier are the most important figures. Renouard's actions in "The Planter of Malata" are almost wholly distinct from the actions of other characters found in that story. The characters whose names have appeared here will be discussed in that order.

Falseness of Dreams

In spite of the differences between the three main characters in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, they have one fault in common. This moral flaw might well be called
"adhesion to false ideas." That is, in spite of the fact that all three of these men sought different goals, not one of the three actually sought anything which might be considered to be important to anyone except himself. Therefore, they all followed dreams which were selfish in context and which led them further and further away from the path of positivity. They believed, wholeheartedly, that what they sought was the most important thing in life. At the time their declines reached the point where they were often forced to reflect before they made a decision, they were more influenced by selfish motives than anything else. They could not yield, even in the face of doom, their beliefs that their way was firm and therefore good. They took the second of the two choices which Bancroft points out:

Man can do one of two things--meet the problems of life, for the most part, presented for solution under the moral stress, or refuse to yield the self to the larger significance. The second results in moral degradation; the first, contentment and happiness.  

Simply, this means that these three men refused to take advantage of the opportunity, which presented itself time after time, to get in harmony with the "moral law"--of sacrificing the self finally to a more important evaluative force. The firmness of these three men's purpose did not excuse them in their disobedience of the law, because "the moral law

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7Bancroft, op. cit., p. 52.
8Ibid., p. 7.
operates whether man obeys it or not."\textsuperscript{9} Almayer's belief in the power of material wealth and in firmness with the natives is his false concept of life. Willems' belief that his particular type of dishonesty was not dishonesty at all and that he could function outside the moral force because he was a superior being is a falseness which he never lost. Tom Lingard's obvious belief in himself, in his ability to return to a state of power by his firmness of purpose, is no less a falseness than that of Almayer and Willems. So enthralled are all three of these men in their false dreams that they neither realize that they are doomed nor that they are even in opposition to the law until it is too late to change except by a complete reversal of their way of doing things. At this point, they are unable to change because of habit, if for no other reason. They have gone so far away from the center of the "gravitational power which Conrad was to name 'solidarity'"\textsuperscript{10} that the return is more difficult to make than to "fall back into the darkness, because death is better than strife."\textsuperscript{11} The entire action of these three fictions serves to show that Conrad has this moral intent.

\textbf{Almayer's Folly} is the story of a man who is isolated from other white men a great part of the time by natural environmental obstacles. Almayer's isolation, however, is not

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 89. \textsuperscript{10} Wright, op. cit., p. 127. \textsuperscript{11} Conrad, \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, Vol. X, p. 81.
of force but rather by choice, brought about by his greed. Almayer was always a weak man, a believer in the power of money, and it is this belief that had early in life caused him to marry the adopted daughter, a native Malayan, of a rich seaman, Tom Lingard. It is also this belief that has brought him to Sambir, a trading post which is situated in the interior of one of the Far-Eastern islands. Tom Lingard had discovered the river leading to Sambir, and it was unknown to anyone else but himself for many years. He had brought Almayer here, had set him up in business, in what would have been a lucrative trade except through an unfortunate happening—the secret was revealed to others by Willems, the major character in *An Outcast of the Islands*. At the time the story takes place, Almayer has been at Sambir some twenty years, slowly losing hope that he will make a fortune so that he can take himself and his half-caste daughter to Europe. He still has the hope that Tom Lingard will give him wealth, but it becomes progressively obvious to him that Lingard is always seeking a greater fortune and in so doing will lose all that he has. Finally, in desperation, Almayer turns to a scheme of running gunpowder into the interior to native tribes. He takes a Malayan pirate, Dain, into partnership on this venture, only to have it fall through when the authorities seize Dain's ship. As a final blow, Almayer's daughter runs away with Dain, leaving Almayer full of remorse over his
entire life and lost forever from his only love, outside of himself and money, his daughter, because he is unable to forgive her when she prefers Dain to his dream of European splendor.

An Outcast of the Islands is the story of Sambir some twenty years prior to the time of Almayer's Folly. Willems is also one of Tom Lingard's protégés, and like Almayer, Willems had earlier married a native woman—the daughter of the leading merchant of a thriving port city of the Far East. Willems stole money from his employer and was found out. In desperation he turned to Lingard, who brought him to Sambir to stay until things quieted. Once at the post with Almayer, Willems becomes lonely and restless. On one of his daily walks, he meets a native girl and is soon enthralled by her. Out of his passion for the native girl, he leads some Arabian traders to the post and thus reveals the secret entrance to the river. Afterwards, Willems grows to hate the girl and himself. Still, he is unable to break away from his belief that he can escape—that somehow he is not controlled by the laws, that he is superior. When his lawful wife appears on the scene, he attempts to leave the native girl and escape with the wife. In a struggle over his revolver—which is symbolic of his belief in material power above everything else—he is killed. Even in death he could not believe that his concept was wrong.
What possessed these three men to act as they did? One has but to read and observe to feel and to see the futility of their existence.

There seems to be some disagreement as to whether Tom Lingard is really a negative character. Bancroft implies that he is not, because Lingard is one "whose accomplishment was the result of self-attainment, free of external support, unspoiled in his greatness."\(^{12}\) Guerard, on the other hand, says that he is "a lifelong failure."\(^{13}\) The weight of evidence favors Guerard's judgment. As Guerard says:

Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands seem determined to prove that even the strongest natural endowment and the best intentions are doomed. They argue that to follow an ideal is the noblest of human aims, but that the ideal, having originated in the ego, carries its own destruction within it.\(^{14}\)

Of course, Guerard was referring primarily to his theory that Conrad was a skeptic \(^{15}\) and that his morality was negative only. "The orthodox critic who recently out of his liking for Conrad's books, tried to assimilate him into traditional Christianity might have served his purpose better had he referred to Conrad's explicit belief in original sin."\(^{16}\)

Yet, in spite of this, it is Conrad's own type of moral insight coming out. At least it seems illogical to believe that Lingard could escape the same fate meted out to others

\(^{12}\)Bancroft, op. cit., p. 83.
\(^{13}\)Guerard, op. cit., p. 80.
\(^{14}\)Ibid.
\(^{15}\)Ibid.
\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 36.
who failed to relate their actions to a source higher than themselves. Almayer was just as firm in his belief, and the only difference between the two men's beliefs is the fact that Almayer was not adventurous enough nor brave enough to seek the wealth he desired on his own. Lingard's personal bravery could not in any way change the falseness of his concept. He differed only in that he seized his chances in life; unfortunately, these chances were always toward the furthering of a false goal. Lingard always sought a tangible goal--wealth--and he was always nearly in reach of a "fabulous fortune."\(^{17}\) Further, as Bancroft says:

Triumphant life is not to be judged by the possession of tangibles, nor by those achievements usually deemed by the world as indicative of success. Success or victory is defined by Conrad in terms of character, or self-realization, all that re-united man with his kind and fulfills thereby the purpose of the moral law.\(^{18}\)

At any rate Lingard's fate is never completely settled. He is lost in the darkness, near the opening pages\(^{19}\) of Almayer's Folly, still seeking, still expending his fortune for greater and yet greater wealth. This is an unusual ending for a strong character in one of Conrad's books, for he usually traces his figures until he has settled with them. Therefore, the darkness to which he dooms Lingard is symbolic of his end. Morally speaking, Lingard is lost.

\(^{18}\)Bancroft, op. cit., p. 88.  
Even if Lingard's fate be questionable, there can be no doubt whatsoever as to the fate of Almayer or Willems. Both of these characters are prime examples of the degeneration which comes about when there is no relation between the man and the Absolute. Almayer's life is a slow degeneration, stretching over a period which encompasses both An Outcast of the Islands and Almayer's Folly. Willems' doom is settled more rapidly than this, for he dies while still a relatively young man. The difference in speed means nothing.

Almayer was the type of man who liked to watch the sunset on the river:

... perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the water of the Pantai, and Almayer's thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured—dishonestly, of course—or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions.²⁰

He was a firm man, also, in his dealings with the natives, and outside of his early marriage to a native woman, he did not allow himself to degenerate to the native culture. He remained firm in his affiliations—his obligations—to his race. This was his only conspicuous virtue. Otherwise, he violated all the laws of what is deemed to be positive in the nature of man. From the first he was one "who in every instance yields to the external forces which confront him."²¹ He was innately weak, and even after twenty years of futile search,

²⁰Ibid., p. 3.  
²¹Wright, op. cit., p. 126.
he could not give up his dream of "European splendor," although it should have been obvious to him that time was passing rapidly. Almayer was "moreover, sensitive and thoughtful," yet he could not understand wherein he had failed. He kept dreaming until the final warning, even, passed him by. When the futility of his life finally dawned on him—and it did when he lost the only other living creature that he loved—it found him helpless and afraid. Yet, he died still trying to be firm in his false resolutions.

The first sign of Almayer’s greed and of his weakness comes when he consents to the marriage between himself and the "Malay foundling and the adoptive daughter of his patron Lingard." This was his first step in the direction of negativity. His life after that event was one long report of weakness. Yet, for all his negativity he had only to renounce his dream to re-establish himself with his environment. He felt the desire, at various times in his life, to renounce himself. If he had, his story would have ended far differently than it did.

For instance, Almayer felt the need of relief from his way of life when his last opportunity to make a fortune ended in the catastrophe that it did. He wept for the loss of his

22Guerard, op. cit., p. 82.
23Wright, op. cit., p. 126.
pirate friend, Dain, whom he believed dead. Unfortunately, he really did not weep for Dain nor to a force greater than himself, an act which would have been a type of confession. Instead, as Bancroft says:

When Almayer felt the force of disastrous defeat, he wept over the body of the supposed Dain, wept for his own degradation, yet refusing to detach himself from those interests that caused it. 26

And, again, he felt an almost irrepressible desire to forgive Nina, his daughter, and perhaps even to accompany her and her lover away from Sambir.

Great things could be done! What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and—follow her! What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves that would guard her from any mischance! His heart yearned for her. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than. . . . 'I will never forgive you, Nina!' he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream. 27

This was Almayer's last warning—his last opportunity to re-establish himself with the "moral law." Had he taken it, he would have been saved from the darkness in which he was falling more rapidly with every passing incident. According to Bancroft:

Had he made that sweeping confession, revealing the deceit that had been in his heart, Almayer would have been at once ennobled in her eyes—but the moment passed, and the escape was gone forever. 28

26 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 66.
28 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 66.
Yet Almayer, in this moment, illustrates the basis of Conrad's philosophy, for he discovered "one great and bitter truth which he persisted in trying to deny--the meaningless of life as an assertion of one's ego."\(^{29}\)

The last of the three major characters, taken from Conrad's second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, is in many ways the most interesting. Morally, Willems goes further even than Almayer in proving the existence of Conrad's belief in a "moral law" and in the need for personal harmony with that law. Willems reminds one of Raskolnikov, for Willems, like Raskolnikov, felt superior to the law. He thought that "his reason and will would remain unimpaired at the time of carrying out his design"\(^{30}\) and would carry him on afterwards--in the same way that it had carried him before. Like Raskolnikov, too, Willems found that such an assumption was untrue; but, unlike Raskolnikov, he found it out too late. The difference typifies Dostoevsky's tendency toward positive endings and Conrad's toward negative endings.

Wright adequately summarizes the theme of *An Outcast of the Islands* when he says:

> The theme of the novel is expressed in Willems' attempt to deny his identity and the inevitability of his being forced toward admitting it.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\)Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 128.


\(^{31}\)Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
He also gives the clue to Willems, himself, when he states:

He [Willems] believes that he has principles... but he assumes that he can turn away from virtue and back to it as he chooses. He is magnanimous, yet egocentric in his generosity... The conflicts are strong, and Willems becomes poignantly conscious of what he has lost. He is forced ultimately to the admission that, instead of being the conqueror of circumstances, one may be helpless and alone.32

Like Almayer, Willems married a native woman because he thought that by doing so he would some day inherit a fortune. This, however, was not his important step toward negativity. Indeed, his step came when he stole money from his employer. It was not a matter of money with Willems, however, but a matter of principle. In the opening page of Conrad's tale, he says of Willems:

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect... He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed... and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things...33

He was wrong in this assumption because he was caught in the process of returning the stolen money, and this, in itself, should have pointed out the weakness of his philosophy.

32Tbid., p. 150.
33Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, X, p. 3.
Unfortunately, he did not change, even after he was taken to Sambir by Lingard. He continued to "feel that he carried the universe within himself"\textsuperscript{34} and could do what he wished as long as he returned to his original state.

At Sambir, Willems failed to utilize the opportunities made available to him. That is, he persisted in his belief that he was outside the law of other men. When he entered into illicit relationship with the native girl, Aissa, he proved that he had learned nothing from his initial dishonesty. Had he been strong enough to resist this temptation—indeed, could he have but recognized that everyone is controlled by the law, for he was strong enough—he would have ended differently. As it happened, however, he continued on his road until he suddenly became aware that he was alone. It was at this point that a part of the truth took hold of him:

He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself—and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity—of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed to see what went on within him and was horrified at the strange sight. He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage, and... he tried to tell himself that the thing was of no consequence. It was a vain effort. The novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before in the slightest

\textsuperscript{34}Wright, op. cit., p. 130.
degree, yet had despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilized man, destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat--lost his footing--fell back into the darkness. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up: because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far--because death is better than strife. 35

From this moment on Willems' decline was a more rapid process. It was more rapid because in this instance Willems made known the "acknowledgment of his guilt, and at the same time the revelation of his lack of heroism to face self-knowledge." 36 He gave up his moral battle of life and decided, once again, that the fight was not worth the reward.

... instead of confessing to himself the cause of it, he rebuked the cruelty of Providence to which he ascribed his downfall. 37

The fact that Willems blamed circumstances or Providence for his downfall did not change the fact that the truth was slowly catching up with him. Later on in the novel, the reader sees him trying to rid himself of this term of moral truth:

There was a long interval of silence. She stroked his head with gentle touches, and he lay dreamily, perfectly happy but for the annoyance of an indistinct vision of a well-known figure;

36Bancroft, op. cit., p. 66.
37Ibid.
a man going away from him and diminishing in a long perspective of fantastic trees, whose every leaf was an eye looking after that man, who walked away growing smaller, but never getting out of sight for all his steady progress. He felt a desire to see him vanish, a hurried impatience of his disappearance, and he watched for it with a careful and irksome effort. There was something familiar about that figure. Why! Himself! 38

This was the figure from which Willems could never escape—himself. Had he operated outside the laws of the universe, he would have been able to destroy this seed of truth. As it was, the seed grew and grew until it destroyed him. Willems came to hate himself—that part of himself that recognized the moral implication of life, but he also grew to a full acknowledgment that in the end it was this portion of his self that was the important part. Yet, even as he grew toward this belief, he continued to deny it. He could not bring himself to the point of confession and, as Bancroft says:

Confession is heroism of mind and will. The same power that brought the moral defeat is that which alone can achieve victory. There is no deception but self-deception, and confession is free of deceit. Confession restores the balance, it re-directs the forces within along channels that make for the benefit of all concerned. 39

In bringing to a close this discussion of the three outstanding figures in Conrad's first two novels, and especially in view of the moral implications which seem to be the main basis of Conrad's writing them in the first place, perhaps it

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would be a good idea to point out the difference between the moralist's and the psychologist's concept of life. That Conrad was the first is no more obvious than that he was not the second. As Guerard has so adequately phrased it:

The moralist's simplifications must frequently seem, to the academic psychologist, irrelevant or naive. Not a few of Conrad's characters are victims of Dickensian monomania rather than Freudian complexity. When the disillusioned Almayer determines to erase his unfaithful daughter from his memory he goes so far as to smooth away the footprints she had left in the sand; such behavior is symbolically effective but psychologically most improbable. 40

Standards of Weakness

In his preface to the Tales of Unrest, Conrad has this to say:

"An Outpost of Progress" is the lightest part of the loot I carried off from Central Africa, the main portion being of course "The Heart of Darkness." 41

In many ways Conrad's tale of Kayerts and Carlier is a continuation of the theme of the degeneration which some white men give way to when isolated from their group. Like Almayer and Willems, both of the main figures in "An Outpost of Progress" are victims of the moral law. They are too weak to mold the issue to their advantage. Unlike Almayer and Willems, however, Kayerts and Carlier are symbolic of a much larger falsity in idea, for they show evidence that Conrad might have

40 Guerard, op. cit., p. 45.
believed that entire societies, as well as individuals, could have a false notion of standards of conduct. This study does not intend to deal with Conrad's political attitude; but not to acknowledge that some of his stories are aimed at pointing out the misconceptions which society can put on certain matters of conduct would be dodging a truth that is almost as strong in Conrad as his moral implication. Indeed, the two attitudes are so intertwined that it would be impossible to think of Conrad without some mention of both entering into the discussion. Kayerts, Carlier, and Kurtz, as well, are embodiments of false conduct which a society can sometimes be responsible for when the exterior definitions are cleared away. As Beach writes:

Kurtz is a personal embodiment, a dramatization of all that Conrad felt of futility, degradation, and horror in what Europeans in the Congo called "progress" which meant the exploitation of the natives by every variety of cruelty and treachery known to greedy man. 42

To read "An Outpost of Progress" or "The Heart of Darkness" is to understand the meaning of life when an individual is cast into the situation without the very dangerous and disarming realization that his society has taught him to live with as little thought about the inner self as possible. Such a social notion as living outside of oneself drops from the individual like the flimsy apparel which he wears when it is subjected to the mildew of the humid climate. The stress and the tension of life in its uncultured state brings the

42Beach, op. cit., p. 343.
character to the abrupt realization that

Life is an individual affair. It is a case of being instrumental merely, or a conscious agent in the exercise of cosmic forces, that is, to employ the Conradian expression—whether one believes simply in the safety of his surroundings, or whether one trusts in life. The first is acquiescence, like Kayerts and Carlier who were rendered inefficient by their belief in the protesting influences of society. . . 43

Bancroft could just as well have said this of Kurtz as he did of Kayerts or Carlier. That is, he could have said it except that Kurtz realized the truth of the matter in the end. Quite adequately, too, Kurtz confessed to the belief—a strange sort of confession, because it was too late for him, but nevertheless, a confession of fitting tribute of the condition to which society had made him respond. Kurtz summed it up when he cried in a low, weak voice: "The horror! The horror!" 44

"An Outpost of Progress" is the tale of two men who are given a trading post in the interior of Africa. There, with little to do except talk to each other and carry on a very scanty ivory business with native tribes of the district, these two men—Kayerts and Carlier—sit and wait for the return of the riverboat which will take them away. At first the two men get along very well, for they are still enough under the influence of the society so recently left behind

43 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 83.

that they react to it automatically. Later, they are indi-rectly involved in a trade with some visiting natives in which they receive a large amount of ivory and do not have to give anything in return. The morning after this trade, however, they find that a number of their native workers have dis-appeared during the night. Then, to their horror, they real-ize that what they had considered to be nothing as their part of the bargain had turned out to be these native workers. It is at this point that Kayerts and Carlier begin to sense the lack of social bonds to guide them. However, they would still have been able to weather their environment, had they not slowly come about to the belief that no one would know about the trade except themselves, and they would never tell. In other words, they placed greed above their more important needs in life. The outcome, of course, is obvious. They be-gin to distrust each other, and their distrust finally de-velops into an open quarrel in which Kayerts kills Carlier. Then, as he tries to tell himself that no one will know why or how Carlier died, he hears the whistle of the returning riverboat. He is reminded of his social obligations, and fear that he will be discovered in his crime drives all other thoughts away. He hangs himself to escape from his punish-ment--because the realization that he is forever segregated from his group and from all mankind makes him aware of the futility of continued existence. His is the real tragedy of separation, because he never realizes that his real obligation
is moral. He mistakes his return to civilization for the real wrong. He might have been able to return to society and bear his burden in secret—thus escaping physical punishment—but he could never escape from himself. He was outside of his group morally, not on some other plane.

By taking two men such as Kayerts and Carlier—"Two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds"—Conrad has, in many ways, shown how environment can speed up or retard the moral function. As Wright says, "the two principals in the story are not originally bad men; Conrad represents them as about average in moral fortitude." Again, it is doubtful that he can be interpreted as thinking that the individual is any more of a morally-controlled instrument when subjected to one type of environment than another. Even in their own society, and here is where Conrad portrays tendencies of a political nature, Kayerts and Carlier were just as susceptible to fate. This would imply that Conrad believed the majority of men to harbor in their nature certain negative traits which—when allowed a free hand—would lead them to ruin. Kayerts and Carlier offer evidence that such a thesis is not without some foundation. Their tale is, truly, the reduction of life "to


46Wright, op. cit., p. 132.
its primary moral and emotional denominator. At best, Conrad depicts men who must remember that there are times when the crowd is gone—when they must face the issue alone—and they must face up to it with some sort of a moral philosophy based on a deep understanding of the self. Otherwise, they are doomed. Proof of this comes from Conrad, himself, when in "An Outpost of Progress" he states:

Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotion and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd; to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion. But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive men, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart.  

It makes little difference which of these two characters is discussed at length. They are identical. Their backgrounds for the sort of life they were subjected to here are basically the same. Neither has any training for it, because they are both mass-thinkers, not individual thinkers. Carlier could just as easily have killed Kayerts as the other way round. The outcome would have been the same. The one that was left had finally to think in terms of the truth. Kayerts


did this as he was sitting near the body of Carlier, "thinking; thinking very actively, thinking very new thoughts." 49

Unfortunately, Kayerts does not get an opportunity to organize these thoughts. It is doubtful, however, if it would have done him any good anyway. Kayerts was a doomed man, and he thought of returning to what had been his sanctity for so many years in a rather strange and truthful manner. When the riverboat announced its arrival with its whistle, Kayerts understood that:

**Progress was calling... Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done.** 50

There is little to be wondered at, then, when Wright says of Kayerts' reaction to the whistle:

Yet in hanging himself, Kayerts, it is implied, is not so much cowardly as wise. The squalor and decay of his existence have eliminated all hope and pleasure and have left him the capacity to contemplate life on its most elementary terms as mere consciousness... 51

Morally, there was nothing left for Kayerts to do. He could not return, nor could he remain. As for Willems and Almayer, the truth came too late.

"The Heart of Darkness" is the first of Conrad's tales in which Marlow, an interested onlooker and narrator, appears.

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He appears in the same category here as he does in some of the other tales of Conrad—a sort of sympathetic skeptic who has a knack for getting to the core of the matter. In "The Heart of Darkness," however, Marlow is more subdued to his story than he is in later tales. Obviously, his reflections are the reflections of the novelist, but he adds more impression of varied, consistent opinion by his being involved. All in all, though, "The Heart of Darkness" is not Marlow's story—it is the story of Kurtz, a man who when "initiated into the monstrous and unnameable rites of savages, loses all his bearings in space and time, and slips back into a twilight of chaos like that before mind dawned on the body's bestiality."54

In many ways Kurtz is the most simple and yet the most difficult of Conrad's characters to define. He is simple because he represents the epitome of man's doom when he allows himself to escape from the folds of his group. He is the most difficult in that the reader really never gets to know Kurtz except by rumor until he has reached the stage of complete incoherency. This, however, is obviously what Conrad was aiming at when he produced Marlow to tell Kurtz's story. It would not do to know this character or to have him tell the story. Such a life as he led could be understood only from the objective point of view, and that is exactly why Marlow

53 Ibid.
54 Follet, op. cit., p. 56.
was made to tell his story. Kurtz could not tell it because he did not know himself what had happened. His story would have been even shorter had he taken the time to reflect, as he would have had to do to tell his tale.

Briefly, "The Heart of Darkness" is the tale of a man who is stationed on a trading post in Central Africa at the very last outpost of the white man. Although the main character is not discovered by the reader until a few days before his death, Kurtz's reputation begins to make itself known to Marlow on the very same day he docks in Africa. "Kurtz, from all reports, was superior to the little men; he was something of a genius; and, above all, he was articulate—an eloquent voice." Yet, when Marlow finally meets Kurtz, Kurtz is in a state of complete negativity. That is, he is a madman, a primitive beast. Just before he dies, Kurtz realizes his condition—realizes that his has been an existence of horror and of futility. Thus, even in the clutches of death, he, at least, proves his greatness in that he accepts the truth. He is a sort of hero by this acceptance, because he recognizes the futility of man's fighting the "moral law."

It is something 'to have at least a choice of nightmares;' and the nightmare of Kurtz's end was paradoxically lightened by his final awareness of its horror.56


56 Ibid., p. 102.
It is difficult to say just when and where Kurtz lost his harmony with the "moral law." In fact, it seems that Conrad has here given us a story of a man who--from the outside, at least--never really was in harmony with the law. He seems to have been in a state of negativity from his very beginning. Still, he had many favorable traits and should have possessed mind enough to have delved more deeply into the meaning of life than he did. Marlow says:

... but the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. 57

The thing which happened to Kurtz was that he had realized his weaknesses, but instead of trying to remedy them had gone the other way. Feeling that he was isolated from life, he had decided to plunge himself into the final depths of negativity. Marlow thinks:

... but his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and by Heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. ... I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggled blindly with itself. 58

There can be very little conclusive evidence with which to locate Kurtz's stepping off the path of truth, but the meaningless of his life and his final acknowledgment of the horror


58Ibid., p. 145.
of his earlier conclusions show that Conrad had a moral pur-
pose. In spite of the opinion expressed by Leavis that "'The
Heart of Darkness' is, by common consent, one of Conrad's best
things," he complained that the tale was "marred." There can be only one answer to this, as far as the moralist
is concerned, and that is that Conrad or any other writer "did
not expect to approach the secret of the Universe through
reason" alone. Kurtz was the possessor of a reasonable mind--
a mind which made him reason that life was meaningless in any
respect--but as he lay dying, the truth--and the fear--touched
him and made him whisper of the horror.

Strength of Pride

The story of "The Planter of Malata" gives in many re-
spects a sense of relief from the more weighty matters dis-
cussed above. Yet it deals with a man--a strong white man--
who was isolated from his group. Renouard, like Kurtz, was
somewhat of a success in building a reputation. He had every
reason in the world to be a positive figure, because he was
truthful and self-analytical. Unlike Kurtz or the others,
however, his downfall came about because he was temporarily
blinded to his own self by his selfish love for a woman.

His story is relatively unimportant except that it shows
how even the strongest can step off the path of duty and never

59 Leavis, op. cit., p. 174.  60 Ibid.
61 Wright, op. cit., p. 55.
return. A successful and potentially wealthy planter, Renouard is the prime example of a man who allowed his one weak point--egotism--to overcome his judgment. He is in possession of a secret--the disappearance of a man--and he refuses to reveal this secret, because the person who is looking for the man is a woman, and Renouard has fallen in love with the woman. The man for whom the woman is searching is really dead, but Renouard refuses to disclose this to her for fear she will leave. He thinks that if he keeps her around him long enough, she will fall in love with him. Finally, he does reveal his secret, and instead of falling in love with him, the woman loses her respect for him--thinking that he is the cause of her lover's death. She leaves Renouard, and he drowns himself.

Renouard's path of negativity is obvious. Up until the time when he makes his decision not to tell his secret, he is honest and truthful. Then, under the delusion that his love is greater than the truth--that he could use this secret to his advantage in much the same way that Willems used the money which he stole from his employer, that he could return to his original state after he had made the secret serve his purpose--he weakened himself. The longer he put off what he knew he would have to do sooner or later, the further away he got from his "gravitational center." When at last he did reveal his secret, he was so negative that he could not return to his original concept. Like Willems, again, he felt that the "moral law" did not pertain to him. He lost everything that he had
made significant by following a "false idea." In spite of his knowledge that his was a wrong concept, he insisted—even as the girl was leaving—that he was not really guilty of having abandoned the truth.62 His death is his defiance against the "moral law," against Providence, and is a depiction of his arrogance in the face of that law.

For to whom could it have occurred that a man would set out calmly to swim beyond the confines of life—with a steady stroke—his eyes fixed on a star?63

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63 Ibid., p. 85.
CHAPTER IV

POSITIVITY THROUGH ACHIEVEMENT

Sea of Life

That Conrad wrote of the sea and the remote corners of the earth was the accident of his life before he became a writer.¹

It is not infrequently that a reader categorizes Conrad as a teller of sea stories. There are various reasons for such a title being given to him, for his stories of the sea are nearly always found to be among his most impressive. The real reason, however, is that it is not difficult for the reader to see the analogy between a ship on the ocean and man on the sea of life. Actually, Conrad—as a moralist—wrote nothing of a different sort in his sea stories than can be found in any of his other tales. But everyone likes to read something of himself into all adventures of life, and everyone finds the analogy between the various hardships which a ship encounters on the ocean to his own eventful, sometimes unsurmountable, trials and tribulations too much of a gratification to resist. His readers remember Conrad for this analogy, and they are likely to recall it more quickly than any other.

¹Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, preface by J. Donald Adams, p. vii.
In contrast to the preceding chapter, this chapter deals with men who were not isolated from their group by environment but were rather brought into very close contact with the other members of their group by the small space of a ship's deck. It is doubtful that Conrad intended to imply, however, that such close contact allowed the individual a better opportunity to harmonize his relations with the "moral law." His stories of the sea generally, like all other of his stories, deal with men who fail to establish themselves with the law. And, as in other types of stories, some of his characters of the sea—a rather meager number in comparison to the total—may be counted as positive enough in nature to wrest from the sea and the Cosmos some sort of harmonious existence. The few characters to be analyzed herein are of the positive sort, not to prove that Conrad's sea stories usually dealt with such men, but rather to prove only that Conrad actually did have such characters in his stories—no matter what their environment or their occupation in life might have been. To paraphrase what Adams says, it is indeed an accident that Conrad happened to place such characters in a setting pertaining to the sea.\(^2\) He could just as easily have placed them in the middle of the Congo or the center of Europe, because it is not the environment or the occupation but the significance with which these men hold to a force outside of

\(^2\)Ibid.
themselves for the final proof of life that is important. Quite aptly, too, the characters to be discussed here are of the type who might more easily believe in an exterior—even idealistic or conscious—force outside of themselves—two very young and inexperienced men and an older man who is so unimaginative as never to seek beyond his one positive way, whether it be right or wrong.

Confidence in Ability

In the tales Typhoon, The Shadow Line, and Youth are drawn characters who offer evidence of the existence of an aspect of Conrad not yet discussed in this study. These characters are examples of the positivity which accompanies a life which holds to narrow and unbending rules of action and which seemingly does not know that codes other than that of loyalty and faithfulness to duty actually exist.

The Shadow Line and Youth express the restlessness of youth—the restlessness to prove the ability to stand up under the burdens of manhood. Conrad has depicted here a seemingly insatiable desire on the part of his two young heroes to prove to the world that they are ready to shoulder their portion of the burden of mankind. He has expressed the judgment that both of these young men are as yet untried and that their eagerness to bestow upon themselves the responsible position of manhood must first be preceded by a period of moral stress—a period when they must prove to themselves, even before they
can offer their services to the world or to their group, that they are capable of passing through the veil which separates youthful dreams of adventure from responsible manhood. Conrad defines this period as "the Shadow Line" in the tale of that name, but it is just as applicable to Youth as to the other. Both young characters pass through the veil and both emerge unscathed by the passage—a condition somewhat unusual when one pauses to reflect upon the many who failed to make this crossing in other—perhaps better and certainly better known—tales by Conrad.

Typhoon, on the other hand, deals with a type of person who seemingly never had to go through such an initial pledge-ship to prove himself. There was never any negativity in this man, because he simply never paused to consider the possibility of there being more than one approach to life—the right way, the "fair thing"\textsuperscript{3} to others. That is, this man was old before the possibility of failure was made clear to him and he, too, had to fight a moral battle. The possibility of actually losing a ship caused him "vexation"\textsuperscript{4} and opened up new channels of thought where his own life was concerned. He had to conquer these new realizations—the negative part of him coming to the surface—in a manner similar to that which the young heroes followed to prove their positivity.

\textsuperscript{3}Conrad, Typhoon and Other Stories, Vol. XXI, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 94.
Symbolically, it seems that all three of these characters had to face moral stress before they were finally and ultimately accepted as positive in nature. Any one of them could have fallen by the wayside; none of them did because they had faith in a force outside of themselves—a force greater than man—and they had faith in their own abilities as well. The young characters were fresh and untried, but it was their freshness which saved them—at least temporarily—from falling by the wayside. The hero of Typhoon was neither young nor fresh, but he was untried because of his lifelong blindness to the possibilities of other paths. His stubbornness and his belief in "men and the ships they have built" saved him.

Certain implications of moral rectitude may be found which link these characters to Conrad on a personal basis. According to Wright, Conrad called his sea stories "spiritual autobiography," which, if true, would make Wright's supposition seem correct:

Both the outward events and the conflicts in the hero's mind may be assumed to have been in accord with those in Conrad's own life. More important, if one accepts Conrad's convictions, they are true of almost any life.  

H. L. Mencken also credits Conrad with autobiographical tendencies where his sea stories are concerned. However, it

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5Wright, op. cit., p. 45.  6Ibid., p. 46.  
7Ibid.  8Mencken, op. cit., p. 41.
is doubtful that Mencken believed as Wright did about Conrad's convictions. Indeed, Mencken believed that

The sea to him is a living thing, an omnipotent and unfathomable thing, almost a god. He sees it as the Eternal Enemy, deceitful in its caresses, sudden in its rages, relentless in its enmities, and forever a mystery.\(^9\)

Such a statement as this may not seem to refute Wright, and yet it does, because Mencken implies that Conrad was really more interested in the sea than he was in the seamen. To hold such an idea would be to disagree with the fundamental concept which Conrad possessed, for like the unnamed seamen in The Mirror of the Sea who observed that "ships are all right; it's the men in 'em,"\(^{10}\) the moralist would prefer to believe that whatever the sea may be, it is still the men upon it that are the most important. To hold convictions to the contrary is to reverse the obvious procedure which Conrad followed—to contradict the belief that man in "moral stress does not imply tragedy."\(^{11}\) It also goes rashly against what Conrad, himself, said in his often quoted preface:

... I have tried with an almost filial regard to render the vibration of life in the great world of waters, in the hearts of the simple men who have for ages traversed its solitudes, and also that something sentient which seems to dwell in ships—the creatures of their hands and the objects of their care.\(^{12}\)

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\(^9\)Ibid., pp. 50-51.

\(^{10}\)Conrad, Mirror of the Sea, Vol. VI, p. 129.

\(^{11}\)Bancroft, op. cit., p. 42.

Virtue of Youth

Youth is the account of a voyage from London to the Far East, told by the scintillating Marlow several years afterwards. It is told after years of experience have taught Marlow that there is a period earlier in life when preparation for the more mature years must be undergone. Marlow depicts himself—rather impersonally—as an untried youth whose utmost virtue is his vitality of purpose. The voyage is an ill-fated one from the beginning. The ship has to return to harbor twice, after that many battles lost against the sea, and on the third try the ship is abandoned, with a fire in her hold which will ultimately sink her. Several hundred miles of the voyage are made in small boats, and it is at this point that young Marlow is finally capable of proving himself master of his own and his group's destinies, for he refuses to remain with the other boats but strikes out on his own—simply to prove to himself that he can shoulder the responsibilities of his second mate's rating. Only youth, with its lack of caution, would have attempted such a foolhardy venture—but only youth with the desire to prove maturity of concept would have had the energy to carry it through to a successful conclusion.

The Shadow Line is the tale of a young first mate who quits his ship in an Eastern port with the idea that he will return to England as a passenger on the next ship to that country. Actually, this young sailor is trying to argue with his destiny in terms that he has the right to do whatever he wishes to do. An elderly captain, who understands this,
persuades the young man to accept a captain's command on a ship which needs to be taken from one port to another—a simple trip for a distance of only a few hundred miles. In the process of commanding this voyage, the young captain takes on such tremendous responsibilities that he learns to be a mature person—one who will not attempt to run at cross-purposes with his duty or destiny.

Weygandt has this to say of the first of these two stories:

After Youth there was no question that a new writer of the first moment had arrived. This account of a voyage from London to the East, with its tempests and fire in cargo and final disaster, shows the triumph of youth over all difficulties and misfortunes.13

What Weygandt really means is that only youthful persistency could have weathered all of the catastrophes of this voyage and come out feeling that life was less than a bitter and profitless mockery. Conrad was a new writer of the first moment, because he presented a new faith in life, based upon a creed of "tradition, duty, order, seemliness, courage, faith, responsibility."14 Literary history tends to show that most writers of Conrad's England were not of the same stuff that he was. Such is the positivity of the youthful Marlow that nothing can touch it nor change it from its course. Actually,


14ibid., p. 378.
nothing really can harm this positivity, for Marlow is capable
of withstanding any moral stress which the sea—or more
broadly, the Cosmos—puts in his path. His energy, his be-
ief in himself, but—most of all—his belief in life is of
the sort that is unconquerable. It is the record of a "past
that was beautiful,"15 but also one that "is vanished."16
That is, youth has such persistency, but with age comes
fatigue which makes the struggle of life somewhat harder to
bear. That is why the elderly Marlow and the men listening
to the tale have

... faces marked by toil, by deceptions,
by success, by love; out weary eyes looking still,
looking always, looking anxiously for something
out of life, that while it is expected is already
gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—
together with the youth, with the strength, with
the romance of illusions.17

Yet by their confession to the need of such an attitude they,
too, portray certain evidence of the positivity of life. Men
who accept these convictions are the proof which Conrad offers
for his credo; or, as Follet states:

And it is in the last sentence of all, where
Marlow's story and the inherent 'fellowship of the
craft' strikes the same response from the hearts
of each, that Youth consummates its effect; that
silent response of their aligning into a single
undeviating mood every detail and circumstance of
the narrative...18

15Follet, op. cit., p. 66. 16Ibid.


18Follet, op. cit., p. 67.
It is difficult for the present age to accept such standards as Conrad sets forth in Youth. This may be the reason why Conrad has relatively little importance for the materialistic and scientific mind of today, or, as Adams states:

... but I imagine that the chief cause of his partial eclipse has nothing whatever to do with his powers as a writer. Life held meaning for him only in terms of honor, loyalty, and courage, ideals whose light is nowadays somewhat more dimly perceived. When the present wave of negation has subsided, and there is again general acceptance of the fact that life is fruitless without them, Conrad will need no champion.19

Youth, then, may be considered something of an argument against such a condition, for as Conrad has the older Marlow ask of his younger self and of his fellow seamen on board the ill-fated Judea:

What made them do it—what made them obey me when I, thinking consciously how fine it was, made them drop the bunt of the foresail twice to try and do it better? What? They had no professional duty; they all knew well enough how to shirk, and laze, and dodge—when they had a mind to it—and mostly they had. Was it the two pounds ten a month that sent them there? They didn't think their pay half good enough. No, it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting.20

Bancroft answers this question by saying that "man innately recognizes that 'overwhelming destiny.'"21 That is, man is aware that the response to times of stress must be of a positive nature—an obedience to the "moral law," if success

19Adams, op. cit., p. vii.
20Conrad, Youth, XXV, p. 28.
21Bancroft, op. cit., p. 42.
is to be attained. Follet also implies that Conrad's moral credo was dependent upon more than reason alone when he says that "the preeminent distinction of Youth is that it moves men together,"\textsuperscript{22} for young Marlow and the other men are unified in fighting against insurmountable odds, acts in which there is a certain futility, which the present age emphasizes, but also a certain honor in the battle itself, which we have lost.

At any rate young Marlow is morally capable of meeting life's greatest obstacles, and his outcome—a self-satisfied state of confident knowledge that he has proved himself a responsible and mature member of his group—is a lesson in the desirability of such a concept. It may be an illusion; for, as Weygandt remarks, "in certain moods Conrad has a sense that all life is an illusion,"\textsuperscript{23} but, if so, it is the type of illusion which all men have need of to face the many trials of life. It is suspiciously nostalgic of an even greater doctrine—the Christian.

The Shadow Line is, as Conrad observed, "a fairly complex piece of work."\textsuperscript{24} Basically, it has the same purpose of Youth—the purpose of showing how the young can conquer in the face of tremendous odds. There are, however, other things

\textsuperscript{22}Follet, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{23}Weygandt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 378.

in The Shadow Line as well. There are, for instance, certain mystical allusions which the reader is likely to accept as supernatural in origin. At least Conrad was criticized on such a basis, as his note preceding this story makes a point of noticing. But, as Conrad goes on to say:

I believe that if I attempted to put the strain of the supernatural on it it would fail deplorably and exhibit an unlovely gap. But I could never have attempted such a thing, because all my moral and intellectual being is penetrated by an invincible conviction that whatever falls under the dominion of our senses must be in nature and, however exceptional, cannot differ in its essence from all the other effects of the visible and tangible world of which we are a self-conscious part.

There are also certain characteristics in The Shadow Line which tend to make the reader feel that the work is autobiographical, as much as, if not more than, Youth depicts. Conrad acknowledges such possibilities when he states in his notes:

Primarily the aim of this piece of writing was the presentation of certain facts which certainly were associated with the change from youth, carefree and fervent, to the more self-conscious and more poignant period of mature life. Nobody can doubt that before the supreme trial of a whole generation I had an acute consciousness of the minute and insignificant character of my own obscure experience. There could be no question here of any parallelism. That notion never entered my head. But there was a feeling of identity, though with an enormous difference of scale—as of one single drop measured against the bitter and stormy intensity of an ocean. And this was very natural too. For when we begin to meditate on the meaning of our own past it seems to fill all the world in its profundity and its magnitude.
Beyond everything else, however, The Shadow Line is the symbolic story of man's clash with the "moral law." That is, it is a word-portrait of that period of life when neutrality is left behind, and the character of the mature man must either be in obedience with the Cosmos or begin its journey of rebellious negativity outside that force. Fortunately for the major character in this tale, he chose the path of positivity. "Only the young have such moments"\(^{23}\) of neutrality, and it is in this period that they must prove themselves to be capable of crossing the "shadow line" and emerge morally positive.

When the young hero of The Shadow Line left his comfortable berth on board a very good ship for no apparent reason, he was yet too young to make any decisions, moral or otherwise, for himself. He was simply doing what his neutral state allowed him to do—"The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off."\(^{29}\) He reasoned as the young often reason:

Man's responsibility is first to himself... and he has a right to be free; and so he starts to hurl himself eccentrically from the force that has kept him on a humdrum concentric path... he recognizes no obligation... His life is in no serious danger of becoming tragic because his departure is not in feeling, but in intellectual decision.\(^{30}\)

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 3.


\(^{30}\)Wright, op. cit., p. 46.
Had he been a mature person, his pattern would either have been tragic or else he would not have done what he did. Maturity would have brought with it certain obligations which could have caused self-defeat and disobedience to his code.

As he has not violated his instinctive nature, he can be restored. What he needs, however, is a severe and sustained test.\footnote{Ibid.}

Had this young seaman been allowed to go back to his England, had he been actually permitted such an easy path, he would have been cultivating a feeling of disobedience which could have made his end different than it was. As it was, he was given the severe test, mostly through the gentle insistence of an understanding and elderly Captain Giles who pointed out to him the need for looking into the matter concerning the captaincy of the uncommanded ship.\footnote{Conrad, The Shadow Line, XI, p. 27.} This was the beginning of the test—a severe test in which the youth is actually given the command and allowed to take the ship to sea, with most of his men dying from fever, weather ranging from one extreme to another, and—above all—a first mate who believed that the spirit of the late captain was drawing supernatural wrath upon the ship and the voyage. The young captain proves himself master of the situation, however, and brings the ship through—thus symbolically leaving youth behind and accepting the responsibilities of mature life. Morally, too, this young captain realized that life must be
fought out on a basis of duty and fidelity and cannot be merely a matter of intellectual decisions. Again Conrad reveals his belief that life goes beyond the realm of pure reason. As far as the supernatural element is concerned, morally speaking it is not different from nor "more tangible than the forms against which one always contends—the forms of fear, of jealousy, indignation, ambition." 33

Audacity of Stupidity

Typhoon differs from Youth and The Shadow Line in many exterior ways. It also differs from them in that it presents a study of a man who has a peculiar type of solidarity—a sort of self-assured, and perhaps one might call stupid, persistency of purpose. It must be remembered that Youth and The Shadow Line depicted characters who distinctly lack either positive or negative morality when the action begins. Typhoon is an antithesis in that it deals with a man who has such positive virtues that he finds it difficult to get along even in his group. The reader is more likely than not to admire persistency of the type depicted here, especially after the end of the story is reached and one finds that the character is—in spite of the stupidity—a man who could do no wrong except show a lack of intelligence when faced with a decision of either meeting a storm or changing the course to veer around

33 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 15.
it. In fact, one is likely to admire the sheer audacity of such a decision even when reason tells him that it is intellectually wrong. Symbolically, the storm was just another obstacle in the onward path of this character, and he never lost courage in the face of such obstacles—even when they were outside the realm of normal human endeavor.

*Typhoon* is in every respect the story of Captain MacWhirr, because none of it could have happened had it not been for the susceptibility of this man. On the surface, however, it is the tale of a voyage of the ship *Nan-Shan* with two hundred Chinese in her hold, which runs into a storm of such tremendous proportions that seemingly nothing could survive. Yet, bearing directly through the center of this hurricane, the *Nan-Shan* does live and, although some of her superstructure is torn away, manages to make her port of call on schedule. Beneath the surface, however, lurks the fact that had Captain MacWhirr changed his course he could have missed the storm completely. It is in his decision to the contrary that the real story lies. This is true because it is after the storm has reached its halfway mark that the unimaginative MacWhirr "now realizes what before he could but theoretically admit, that his ship, too, can sink."34 This realization automatically categorizes MacWhirr to the moralist as another of Conrad's characters who must face a period of moral questioning.

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34Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
and either answer by obeying his positive nature or sink into a state of negativity. MacWhirr wavered just enough to realize that there must be more to life than the physical forces which surround him. In admitting this to himself, he confessed to the existence of the "moral law," for he suddenly realized that there is need for a guiding force. Like the young captain in *The Shadow Line*, MacWhirr needed the test. He received it, mainly out of his own stupidity, and it gave him an opportunity to concede to the one force greater than his belief in himself—the "moral law."

Bancroft, who usually leans to a moral understanding of Conrad, advances a rather puzzling interpretation of MacWhirr when he says:

In *Typhoon*, the Captain is separated from his fellows, not because of misdeeds, but by an intangible medium of personality. Stubborn, over-confident in himself, unimaginative, and seemingly unsympathetic, this temperamental man cut himself off from his fellows, and from lack of understanding was, in that degree, an outcast. This is instanced in that incident of the Siamese flag and the coming of the typhoon. When the storm broke, he dealt with the Chinamen in a manner peculiar to his temperament. That temperament prevented him from understanding his men and he was too unimaginative to appreciate his loss.35

Up to the point including MacWhirr's stupidity in believing himself capable of coming through the typhoon unharmed, which is really the reason he decided to keep to his course, such an interpretation as Bancroft's is agreeable. There can be

little doubt that MacWhirr believed first in himself and therefore needed to be made aware of the existence of something greater even than himself. Perhaps, too, his dealing with the Chinamen depicted something of the self-assuredness which kept the man from actually entering into group activity, yet it seems more fitting to attach MacWhirr's actions to the traditions which every captain must feel, "the tradition that binds even the dead to the living," which is as much a solidarity as it would have been had he asked the crew to assist him in doing the "fair thing" where the Chinamen were concerned. Wright says that MacWhirr's solidarity of tradition is what "gives order and identity to his life." The peculiarity of his temperament is that "there is no sentimental humanitarianism about MacWhirr." But then, there does not seem to be any of that in nature, either. He does the traditionally fair thing because it is the best he can do.

By Conrad's own admission also, MacWhirr was a good captain:

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, overbearing, and difficult to please; but every ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace.

36 Wright, op. cit., p. 45.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Conrad, Typhoon and Other Stories, XXI, p. 4.
There is little more which may be said of solidarity than that peace and harmony prevail or that in time of stress men respond together against a common foe. It was MacWhirr, too, who during the lull in the center of the storm gave Jukes, the first mate, a feeling of confidence and "made him feel equal to every demand." It was this type of confidence which brought the Nan-Shan through the storm. It is also the kind which every man must find in time of moral stress if he is to survive.

All in all, though, as Weygandt says:

Typhoon related the triumph of the faithfulness and courage of a stupid man over wild tempest. MacWhirr had the faith and the courage, but he needed to experience the inhuman quality of the typhoon before he could admit to a force greater than himself. For this reason, if for no other, it seems that the moral implication is great:

The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path, and doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: 'I wouldn't like to lose her.'

He was spared that annoyance.

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40 Ibid., p. 89.
41 Weygandt, op. cit., p. 372.
42 Conrad, Typhoon and Other Stories, XXI, p. 90.
CHAPTER V

DEGREE OF MORAL CORRECTION

Variation of Internal Stress

It is to be observed in passing that the Moral Law is a correcting force, and that moral stress is necessitated by the degree of that which requires correction. Tragedies are not difficulties, for these are never motiveless, but in that refusal to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the larger. If man would only recognize in the 'oppositions' and conflicts of life a call to larger significance, a call to come up higher, he would catch more clearly the meaning of living.¹

The past chapters of this study have dealt with characters who have been more or less categorized by the mere fact that they lived in either one of two environments—the environment which has isolated them from other white members of their group by natural geographical obstacles or has thrown them into very close contact with the other members of their group by the concentrated space of a ship's deck. In so dealing with two such distinctly opposite situations, the study has sought to show that a character may suffer moral isolation under any conditions.

This chapter, however, does not intend to segregate characters in such a distinct categorical pattern. Instead, all discussion pertaining to environment will be left out in an

¹Bancroft, op. cit., p. 77.
effort to show that the setting of Conrad's stories was unimportant and that the important part of Conrad's fiction was that which dealt in matters of morality. To persist in categorizing Conrad's characters in accordance with their specific group is likely to degenerate into an insistence that "group solidarity" or fidelity to the group is the most important part of Conrad's credo. There can be but little doubt that "group solidarity" occupied an important place in Conrad's stories, but it seems also to be true that he felt that a character must finally settle an account with a force even greater than that of group responsibility before that character's life could be called infinitely victorious. If Conrad were less concerned with the morality of a specific character in relation with a specific group, then his moral philosophy is of very little importance to anyone outside of that group. On the other hand, if it links one group to another in such a way that they all finally seek positivity with the same moral force, then his philosophy has vast moral implications where all of mankind is concerned and must be investigated accordingly.

It may be noted further that the preceding chapters have had very little to say about the variation of degree of moral stress to which characters have been subjected. Thus far, there has been little need for depicting variation, for the study has been more preoccupied with moral stress only as a means of showing that characters are either in opposition to
the "moral law," which brings about the stress, or else are unconscious of the existence of the law and are being reminded of it through the necessary means. Now, however, there is some need for showing how the intensity of moral stress varies with the character, for variation offers the only proof that there actually is a belief on the part of Conrad that such a law exists. That is, if the degree of stress varies in characters, some idea of Conrad's belief in a conscious moral force may be implied. Therefore, it will ultimately settle not only the question of whether Conrad had a belief in a moral law but also the question of whether he considered that law to be unconscious or conscious as well. That tragedies struck most all of Conrad's characters is irrefutable, but as to whether the degree of tragedy, which may be proved to vary only by comparison of characters, differs because of the consciousness of the "moral law" according to the character's needs is yet undecided. Groupings of a different sort than those pertaining to environment will be needed to make such a comparison.

Bancroft, who believes that moral stress varies according to the need, makes such an adequate grouping when he states:

Many of the characters in Conrad's novels lose the significance of meaningful life through wilful resistance, a few, on the other hand, because of an apparent immunity relative to the resistive forces of life, and one or two tales
reflect a tragic result due to unconscious substitution of an externality for the Moral Law.²

One of the outstanding features of Conrad is the fact that he actually drew characters of such assorted types as Bancroft mentions—characters who are openly antagonistic toward the "moral law," others who are ignorant of the law because of dullness or lack of experience, and some who either consciously or unconsciously substitute a false concept for the real truth—without once saying that he believed that such groups actually did exist. The moralist generally accepts this condition as an acknowledgment from Conrad that even in so presenting characters he felt the need for curtailing his personal philosophy for fear that it would prove detrimental to his method or form of art. Again it is possible to see the segregation of Conrad as a man and Conrad as an artist. It may also show the effect one had upon the other. At any rate some justification for examining a cross-section of his artistic endeavors—wherein at least one character from all three of the types which Bancroft labeled—may then be admitted. This chapter will be an examination of such characters.

The selection of stories from which characters are to be taken and analyzed here is necessarily more dependent upon the moral problems which those characters pose than upon the importance the stories hold in relation to public acceptance.

²Ibid., p. 84.
That is, as this study is really more interested in following moral thought than it is in finding out which of Conrad's stories met with public success, some of the more obscure writings of Conrad have been included. This, too, may be a point in the moralist's favor in that Conrad even at his most complicated point—as in his novel Chance—and at his most uncomplicated point—as in some of his less-known stories—remains consistent in his search for the significance of life, no matter upon what basis it is lived.

Perhaps it is perception of this constant search which caused Symons to say:

Therefore, Conrad's prose has in it something fantastically inhuman, like fiery ice; and it is for this reason that it remains a thing uncatchable, a thing whose secret he himself could never reveal... When a soul plays dice with the devil there is only a second in which to win or lose; but the second may be worth an Eternity.\(^3\)

Actually, it matters but little whether one analyzes a character from one of those stories by Conrad which met with popular acclaim or a character from a less-known work. The fact still remains that

Conrad, master equally of a method the most direct and the most oblique, is everywhere the conscious, deliberate artist.\(^4\)

Conrad was just as much the artist in his lesser works as he was in his better known attempts. Trivial as it may seem to

\(^3\)Symons, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 12.

\(^4\)Cutler, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
quibble over such a point, it still remains important to try
to establish Conrad as deliberate as a moralist as he was as
a conscious and meditative artist.

Even though some of the works discussed here may be con-
sidered minor from a popular standpoint, it is necessary to
investigate them in the same manner and degree as Conrad's
more noteworthy attempts to fully understand the moral impli-
cation involved in creating them. Such an investigation will
prove that environment and background material is just as
superficial in the minor works as it is in the major works.
When this material has been stripped away, the important part
that remains is, as Bancroft states:

The history of the individual... that of
his own moral experiences in which the mind and
will are either victorious or vanquished... .
The world of the individual is not necessarily
the real world, nor always the best possible
world, for always there is that correcting and
modifying force 'the Moral Law within.'

This cannot apply to Conrad the artist, because as Zabel
says, "this is not to say that his achievement is consis-
tent." But it may apply to Conrad's morality, for as Zabel
points out:

There the essential Conrad is found--one
who knew the humiliations of the spirit at their
cruelst and who spared neither himself nor his
heroes the humility of standing alone with fate,
in mortal enmity and embrace the Self that com-
mits us to the one destiny that is inescapable.

5Bancroft, op. cit., p. 23.
6Zabel, op. cit., p. 41. 7Ibid.
For the purpose of clarifying the consistency of moral implication, then, if for no other reason, the varied backgrounds of the major characters from Conrad's novel, Chance, and his short stories, "Karain," "The Lagoon," "Falk," "Because of the Dollars," "Tomorrow," "The Return," and "Il Conde," in that order, will be examined.

The major character in Chance is a woman by the name of Flora de Barral. Her background may be known only after the difficult and complicated style in which this story is written is cleared away. She is at times subjected to as many as four levels of interpretation of what she herself has said of her earlier life. Fortunately, all of these re-interpretations are so consistent in what is seen that the reader is able to glean from them a fairly good account of the girl's character.

Briefly, Flora spent the first few years of her life in wealthy isolation from all people except her financier-father and a governess. Then, rather abruptly, she is deserted by her governess, because her father has been found out to be "nothing but a thief." At this point Flora's background becomes confused in a maze of various environments to which she is subjected as a penniless girl who is the daughter of a notorious convict. She lives with some rather offensive relatives for a while, then with the Fynes—two of the

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major characters of the novel—who treat her with a great deal of kindness and finally with her husband, Captain Anthony, aboard his ship. The really important thing about her background is, of course, the fact that her father is a thief and a swindler. This fact goes far in making her into the character of importance, because her entire outlook on life for years afterwards hinges on this one fact—the feeling that her father has been falsely accused.

Of the listed short tales, "Karain" and "The Lagoon" are very similar in that they deal with two men who have one common background—that of having betrayed another member of their group. Karian's betrayal is to a friend with whom he has pledged to aid in killing the friend's sister. In "The Lagoon," Arsat betrayed his brother to save the life of his beloved. In both cases the betrayal was a direct outcome of love for a woman which led both of these men to betray the trust of a greater obligation.

"Falk" is the tale of a man who had earlier eaten of human flesh. This action obscured—even eradicated—any other background which the man might have known. Falk's sense of honor was that of his group—European. His will to live surpassed the code of ethics of his group, and he was unable to correlate one with the other for many years.

"Because of the Dollars" is the story of a seaman, Davidson, who had by accident brought about the death of a woman. Actually, Davidson had nothing to do with the woman's
death except that out of kindness for her he visited her and her husband while his ship had as cargo a very large sum of money. The woman's husband had entered into a plot with some other men to steal the money from Davidson and because the woman informed Davidson, she was killed. Always a kind and trustful man, Davidson feels that fate has been wrong in bringing about the woman's death. It is this feeling against fate that isolates him from other men, for he does not realize the significance of the "moral law" above the finite self. From Davidson's background it is possible to trace a direct belief of Conrad's—the belief that man must not question the working of the "moral law."

"Tomorrow" is in many ways the most tragic of all of Conrad's stories, for it is the tale of a person who has lived always in a state of pure negativity, not out of conscious disobedience, but because of ignorance. The major character, Bessie, has done nothing to invoke the wrath of the "moral law." Unfortunately, she has never attempted to prove her positivity either. Conrad has given the reader an insight here into the futility of existing, without taking advantage of opportunity. Bessie's background and her very existence are a prime example of Conrad's belief that man must wrest a victory from the Cosmos by subjecting the Self to moral stress, if that stress does not come of its own accord.
"The Return" is the depiction of a man who realizes rather abruptly that his background of luxury and social life is a false concept of life. Alvan Hervey is, in many of the same respects as Kayerts and Carlier in "An Outpost of Progress," a victim of the society in which he has been reared. The moral stress to which he is subjected brings about the realization that he and his group have taken a false symbol as the truth of life. With the realization comes revulsion, and Alvan becomes something of a hero when he responds to the stress in a positive manner.

"Il Conde," on the other hand, is the depiction of a man who tries to flee from the realization that he has held a false concept for the great number of his years. Il Conde, like Alvan Hervey, is a wealthy aristocrat who has been false in his applications of the values of life. Unlike Alvan, he prefers death rather than give up his concept of life.

In living up to his principles that the personal life and the artistic life must be separated as much as possible, Conrad has caused a great many things to be said about himself that could have been eliminated had he been less strict in those principles. This is no less true of a moral classification of his characters than it is of any other thing. There can be no way of knowing whether Conrad categorized his characters in the same way that Bancroft did or not. Conrad simply failed to make such a simplification. Perhaps it is false to so categorize Conrad's characters in any one specific
fashion, for it is easy to see that some of the characters actually belong to all three of the groups and even, at times, fall into other groups as well. However, from a strict moralist point of view, it is much less difficult to deal with characters who have been classified according to some general attitude. Bancroft obviously was aware of the inconsistency of characters at times. This study is also aware of it, but since certain characters usually portray tendencies which place them in a broad grouping, Bancroft's classification has been adapted to prove Conrad's moral implication through character action. Perhaps it is an over-simplification of attitudes, but it is also the only logical method with which to deal with characters of the sort that Conrad created.

Separation through Conscious Disobedience

There is a moment in the lives of both Karain, in the story named for him, and Arsat, of "The Lagoon," when they offer wilful and conscious resistance to the "moral law." Strangely, this moment comes about as a direct effect of passion overcoming an even greater trust. At first glance it would seem that so abrupt and violent is the moment of decision that to say that the men's reaction is conscious is unfair. Conrad employed background for the purpose of showing that the reaction was neither automatic nor unconscious. That is, he created these two characters as living in a society which had taught them never to betray a trust, especially
for fulfillment of a passionate, physical desire. By depicting honor as the most important of all virtues for a Malayan to seek, Conrad eliminated the possibility of these two men's reactions being unconscious. Both men were aware of the need to keep their trust before they committed acts against that trust. Therefore, because they both knew what could be the result of a betrayal, they were conscious of their betrayal, and they were both morally weakened when they committed an act which placed selfish desire before the more important responsibility in life—that responsibility of recognizing their affiliation with the group and with the Universe.

Several critics have arrived at the same conclusion. For instance, Guerard states:

Conrad is indeed much more interested in the isolation caused by moral or temperamental failings than in the solitude enforced by circumstances.9

Somewhat more pointedly, Bancroft says:

It matters not whether the Malay clothes the force of the principle in superstitious colors, it is the same principle. At sea, on land, a heathen, a student—the same forever holds—betrayal leaves the viper in the soul.10

"The Lagoon" is, according to Conrad, "the first short story I ever wrote."11 It is, among other things, one of the better known of his works as well. It is the tale of two

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9Guerard, op. cit., p. 76.
10Bancroft, op. cit., p. 35.
11Conrad, Tales of Unrest, XIX, p. vii.
brothers, one of whom—Arsat—falls in love with a woman who has been promised by the ruler of the two brothers' country to another more favored member of the Malayan group. The two brothers enter into a plan to escape from their country, taking the girl with them. They manage the escape successfully, but when they are closely pursued, Arsat's brother falls behind to delay the pursuers. It is at this moment that Arsat betrays his brother's trust, for he and the girl are to go ahead and prepare a boat which will make victory of the escape final. Arsat becomes fearful at the very last moment that the pursuers are going to arrive at the same moment as his brother; so, for the selfish purpose of saving himself and his woman, he shoves the boat off—leaving his brother to be killed by the pursuers.

'... I heard him cry my name twice; and I heard voices shouting. 'Kill! Strike!' I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice—and I never turned my head. My own name! ... My brother! Three times he called—but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten—where death is unknown!'

From this account it is perhaps possible to see the innate moral weakness in Arsat's character—the belief that he can escape from himself and from the "moral law." In this conscious belief that he is beyond the reach of any force,

Arsat has committed the same error that Willems, in An Outcast of the Islands, had committed. Neither of the men could subject the self to the more important infinite force. Both felt that they could return to the original state after committing their sins. In this Arsat and Willems were both completely wrong. That Conrad was aware of the likenesses to be found between these two stories may be found in his "Author's Note" preceding Tales of Unrest when he states:

Conceived in the same mood which produced 'Almayer's Folly' and 'An Outcast of the Islands,' it is told in the same breath (with what was left of it, that is, after the end of 'An Outcast'), seen with the same vision, rendered in the same method—if such a thing as method did exist then in my conscious relation to this new adventure of writing for print. 13

Like Willems', too, Arsat's downfall came about as the outcome of his "love of woman." 14 It is doubtful that one could say that Conrad felt that love for women was in itself a negative factor. Indeed, love for women, like anything else, could be good, providing it did not cause the character to overlook a greater obligation or in some way involve the character in a conflict of selfish desires over fidelity. Any other selfish desire would serve just as well, because thought, which has its beginning in the ego of the character and which subjugates the "moral law" to a secondary place, is a sin against that law.

14 Wright, op. cit., p. 94.
To continue with the story of "The Lagoon," Arsat and the girl escape only to live rather uneasily together until finally the girl dies. It is at this point that the futility of Arsat's existence becomes plain even to himself. His only hope of wresting any sort of a moral victory from what is left of his life is for him to return to his land for the purpose of avenging his brother. However, as Wright points out:

Even vengeance is unlikely ever to erase from his mind the memory of his letting passion cheat him of heroism. 15

Arsat is doomed, because even his selfish happiness is gone with the death of the girl. There is nothing left for him but the darkness which comes to all of Conrad's characters who disobey the "moral law," because

No one can escape himself. That within him seems to flow out into the stillness and awaken there a voice—is it our own, or but the utterance of that to which our deeds has given language? That voice may be as charmed as the brilliancy of the sun that smiles into the beauty of noonday, or it may seem sinister, like the black and august night against which the threatening lightning plays. 16

The story of Karain is in many ways the same as that of "The Lagoon." It seems, however, that Conrad has here carried his idea a step further, or, as Conrad states:

I admit that I was absorbed by the distant view, so absorbed that I didn't notice then that the motif

15Ibid., p. 25.
16Bancroft, op. cit., p. 36.
of the story is almost identical with the motif of "The Lagoon." However, the idea at the back is very different. 

It has been said that Arsat had nothing to look forward to except a darkness with some grim satisfaction gleaned from avenging his brother's death. Karain, on the other hand, escapes from his state of darkness, "an escape furnished by a trinket given him by his white friends with the assurance that it is an infallible charm." This is perhaps the difference of which Conrad speaks—the escape by a belief in an illusion. Perhaps, too, it is only a temporary escape, but at least it quiets Karain's fears for what the reader may assume to be the remaining years of his life. Wright says that such is the escape because

For Conrad an illusion expressed the genius of artistic paradox. Common sense could deny it a factual basis. . . . Yet, it was itself the imaginative creation which gave facts meaning.

The moralist, however, would hesitate to accept such a view, because Conrad seems less of a humanitarian than this theory would imply. It would seem more to the point to believe that Conrad was indulging in an ironic depiction of the values of a false illusion when all hope of restoration on a positive scale is gone. However, it is of little consequence to delve into such matters, for "Karain," like "The Lagoon," is more

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17 Conrad, Tales of Unrest, XIX, pp. ix-x.
19 Ibid., p. 27.
interested in showing the results of conscious disobedience than it is in offering evidence of ways to regain moral positivity.

"Karain" is the tale of a man who in the twilight years of his life has attained great prestige as a wise leader of a Malayan tribe. His decisions are considered the law, and he stands in great favor among his followers. Strangely, though, Karain is never alone, for wherever he goes another old man follows at his heels. This old man is Karain's protection against the spirit of his friend whom he has killed while he is still a youth. When the old man dies, Karain is left alone and becomes afraid. It is at this point that some seamen--gunrunners--hear the tale which Karain has to tell. He tells them that he long ago had made a blood trust with a friend to restore the honor of that friend's family. The cause of the dishonor was that the friend's sister had run away with a white man. The friend had sworn vengeance upon the white man and his sister in the form of death. Karain, as is the custom among the Malayan tribesmen, entered into the trust to assist the friend. Then, in the period between the time the trust was made and the girl was found, Karain fell in love with her. When the moment arrived to wipe out the dishonor, Karain turned upon his friend and killed him instead of the girl. This conscious breaking of his trust--even though it did save the life of two relatively innocent people--isolated Karain from his group and caused him to live
always in fear. This is the reason he has taken the old man with him wherever he has gone, and it is also the reason he tells the white men his tale—in hopes that they will offer him some sort of a charm to drive away the fear. The white men give him a coin to wear around his neck. Karain, who, as Wright says, "under the power of the charm..., conquers memory and achieves a new and satisfying illusion," goes back to his followers full of new hope.

Actually, there can be little added to an analysis of Karairn's character which has not been said before about Arsat. In every respect the two are the same. Both learned that violation of group obligations must sooner or later bring about

...a realization of how treacherous are human impulses and of how they can revolutionize a life so that it is no longer free, but must follow a new direction to which the impulsive act has constrained it.21

Karain, like Arsat and Willems, found that life becomes intolerable when one mistakenly believes that the original state of the soul may be reverted to at will—without some repercussion from actions which have drawn the character away from his particular path of honesty. Karain is partially restored in his belief by the charm which the white men gave him. Unfortunately, he can never be more than partially restored; this restoration, as has been implied in the preceding

21Ibid., pp. 92-93.
chapters, is as much a doomed state as complete negativity. The white men were aware of this, for

The great thing was to impress him powerfully; to suggest absolute safety—the end of all trouble. 22

Karân was impressed—strongly impressed—for the spirit of his friend "has departed again." 23 One pauses to wonder, though, why Conrad had one of his characters in this story ask "what the reader thinks?" 24 The psychologist might think that Karain's problems were done with, but the moralist would continue to doubt.

Substitution of False Concepts

Man must think aright, for thoughts are the substance of true reality. They are forces through which the Moral Law operates. Disappointment and defeat are episodes in the drama of human experiences, never motiveless, always purposeful, the conditions by means of which the mind and will are swung out of the orbit of the small into the great sweep of action, significant, social, and therefore—divine. 25

The second classification which has been made in this study on the basis of Conrad's moral implications deals with those characters who fail to think in terms of the real truth—who substitute a false ideal for the true. There is much which can be said of this grouping, for it is the category into which more of Conrad's characters fit than either of the other two. In fact, it may be that this group so overlaps the other two—those who are consciously disobedient to the

"moral law" and those who are dull or ignorant—to such a
degree that these latter classifications are unnecessary.
Morally speaking, though, Conrad made some fine points of
difference where those who set up a false concept are con-
cerned, and for that reason they have been divided here.
This fine point of difference is that in spite of the fact
that this group is made up of men who are above average gen-
erally in their ability to think—a fact which would in it-
self divide them from the ignorant group—they are yet men
who do not realize that they have actually set up a false
concept which differentiates them from the group that is
consciously disobedient, until that realization is brought
upon them by varying degrees of moral stress.

Another interesting fact about such a grouping as the one
given here is that it seems that more of Conrad's characters
so categorized find meaning in life, after they are once sub-
jected to moral stress. This may be, of course, because of
the very fact that the greater number of Conrad's characters
do fall into this group, and therefore the number of positive
characters would naturally be numerically greater. It may be
also because these men live in an environment which offers
more opportunity for escape than other characters, or because
of the larger intellectual capacity of the individual char-
acters which gives them a greater insight. There are counter
considerations, however. This is especially true of those
characters who are bound to their social group by material
ties which make it impossible for them to escape, even if they become aware of the falsity of interpretation. It also seems logical to think that a man who has a higher intellectual capacity would have followed his path of falseness to the point of being too sure of himself to recognize wrong—even under the most violent of moral stresses. The real fact of the matter is that from a moral viewpoint these characters are capable of exactly the same thing that any individual in the other two categories is capable of—that of confessing the falsity and adhering to the newly-recognized impulses of the "moral law." If they do this, they are morally better off than they were before. If they fail to do this, like two of the four to be discussed here, they are forever doomed.

Among those numerous tales of Conrad's which fall most naturally into the "substitution of false concepts" category may be included "The Return," "Il Conde," "Because of the Dollars," and "Falk." It may be further noted that of these tales, two deal with men of high social rank, and two deal with men who are attached to the sea. These were purposely selected so that Conrad's degree of moral implication may be seen to run in a consistent manner through two—if not more—of his general settings. They were also selected as further evidence of the variation of degree of moral stress, according to the need for each individual.

"The Return" is the story of a man who has spent his life in high society and who has always believed that his group
and its culture are beyond reproach. He has earlier married a girl of his own social level because "it is the thing to do." He has nothing other than deep respect for her, this respect being based entirely upon the fact that her attitude toward life is the same as his. They both respond to life as their social group teaches them to respond—by never becoming upset about anything which the "mass" might do or in any way showing other than a mild enthusiasm for anything. This is the life which Alvan Hervey lived until he came home one night and found a note from his wife saying that she had eloped with a member of what Alvan considered to be a lower caste—a "literary man." 26 Alvan was stunned by this event, not in terms of personal loss, but in terms of his social position. For some time after he discovers his wife's infidelity—a matter of hours—he does not think of her departure except in terms of what it will do to him socially. It is only after his wife returns, too morally weak to carry through her attempt to escape from her old way of life, that the full knowledge of how false that way of life is dawns upon Alvan. Then, after a conflict between accepting this falsity or giving it up, Alvan proves himself a hero morally by leaving himself.

"The Return" is one of the best examples of what a character must do when he is subjected to the necessary degree of

moral correction. It is simple in its motive—having only the task of depicting a man suffering from a false concept and of the escape from that condition. Alvan Hervey lost the meaning of life "through greed for position." 27 He regained it by confessing to his falsity and then doing something about it.

Briefly, Hervey was "a gentleman of refinement and ordered living. . . ." 28 Morally, however, he and his wife were

. . . both unable to look at a fact, a sentiment, a principle, or a belief otherwise than in the light of their own dignity, of their own glorification, of their own advantage. 29

It was for this reason that his wife's note affected Hervey as it did, for it was made up of words

. . . . charged with the shadowy might of a meaning, that seemed to possess the tremendous power to call fate down upon the earth, like those strange and appalling words that sometimes are heard in sleep. 30

Hervey was still in a state of negativity when he read the note. He remained in this same state for the few hours that his wife was gone. Even after she returned it took him several hours to discard the belief that they could still work together to better themselves socially. Slowly, however, his social preoccupation turned inward, and it was at this moment

27 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 45. 28 Ibid., p. 61.
30 Ibid., p. 127.
that he realized that what he really wanted from life was "Faith!—Love—the undoubting, clear faith in the truth of a soul." This, of course, was the one thing that his wife could not give him, because he had given her nothing for so long. From this point he toiled slowly to the acknowledgment that he did not really know her. She, like himself, "had not love and no faith for any one." This thought, in turn, made him realize that

... morality is not a method of happiness. The revelation was terrible. He saw at once that nothing of what he knew mattered in the least. The acts of men and women, success, humiliation, dignity, failure—nothing mattered. It was not a question of more or less pain, of this joy, of that sorrow. It was a question of truth or falsehood—it was a question of life or death.

Then, as Bancroft says:

When he realized the true significance of existence, those things that he had held essential became empty and void—and in the moment of that self-realization 'he felt his fellowship with every man.'

Once Hervey accepted the truth, his path was relatively clear. He had to leave because if he stayed he would have to compromise that truth; this was no better than his original state. He saved himself, morally, when he went away. The reader must assume that what he found wherever he went must have been better because "he never returned."

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31 Ibid., p. 178. 32 Ibid., p. 183.
33 Ibid. 34 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 77.
"Il Conde" is the tale of "a perfectly unaffected gentleman." Like Alvan Hervey, Il Conde moved in a high social plane, and he felt that his life was above reproach. His tastes were simple, and he persisted in leaving everyone else to his own opinion. The teller of the story met Il Conde in Naples—a resort which Il Conde visited each year because of his "dangerous rheumatic affection." Other climates, if frequented for too long a period, would have soon killed Il Conde. Here, however, he could look forward to a relatively long and healthy existence. His tale is simple, for it is the story of a man who put too much faith in his false interpretation of life.

Il Conde was kind and humane, but these qualities emerged from his feeling of his right to be so.

Il Conde continued in his fallacy until one night he ran into a man who robbed him. This in itself was a shocking episode, for Il Conde thought all men to be basically of the same philosophy as he was. He gave the robber all of the money he had on his person except a gold piece which he forgot in his haste to be rid of the man. Later, while Il Conde was eating in a restaurant, the man who had robbed him appeared and watched him use the gold piece to pay his bill. He approached Il Conde and threatened him by saying "you are

36 Conrad, "Il Conde," A Set of Six, XVI, p. 269.
37 Ibid., p. 271.
38 Bancroft, op. cit., p. 38.
Il Conde discovered from a waiter that the young robber was a member of a very powerful political group which controlled Naples, and the threat left him so unnerved when he added to it the new information that he decided to leave Naples—even though it meant almost certain death from his rheumatic affection.

From a moral standpoint this tale may seem to have very little value; but if the reader pauses long enough to understand that Il Conde attached a moral significance to his actions, himself, perhaps the deeper context becomes more clarifying. Il Conde was "not afraid of what could be done to him. His delicate conception of his dignity was defiled by a degrading experience." In so placing so much emphasis upon his delicate conception, Il Conde has admitted that even in the face of death he intends to abide by what he thinks is the most important thing in life. He has no conception whatsoever of the more important things in life. Indeed, he is completely immersed in his own vanity. It is not in fleeing that Il Conde does wrong but in believing—in the first place—in the need for such fidelity to a false notion. As Bancroft states:

Conrad exhibits in this tale how the threads of connection between self and the world of Human Solidarity are composed of the stuff of ideas, and if

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40 Ibid.
these are woven out of the transmutation of selfish interest, the connection is brittle.\textsuperscript{41}

Much of the same idea may also be noted in Wright's statement:

\ldots When, at the end of the tale, the count is enroute back across the mountains, his retreat typifies the helplessness of spirit before a force wilfully committed to its degradation.\textsuperscript{42}

Il Conde's vanity, like all false concepts, carries its own doom with it, for it takes the character further and further away from the "gravitational center" of positivity. Il Conde could not stay and fight the forces of evil around him, because his fortitude was dependent upon a relatively insecure idea--a weak belief in life springing entirely from the self. Such a belief had no foundation for Conrad.

In what might be considered almost a direct contrast in terms of extremes of following false concepts, "Falk" is the story of a man whose will to live drove him even more violently than Il Conde's will to die, if necessary, for his false dream. These two stories differ in many ways--for where "Il Conde" is the story of a man who lived entirely by his culture, "Falk" is the tale of a man who held no cultural attitudes whatsoever--but behind this difference may be found the same intensity of purpose, a purpose which in both cases is directly from the self and one which dooms the first and would have doomed the second, had it not been for his

\textsuperscript{41}Bancroft, op. cit., p. 38.

\textsuperscript{42}Wright, op. cit., pp. 167-168.
confession before the end to the real truth of life. Like Alvan Hervey in "The Return," Falk did not fight the truth when it finally dawned on him. Unlike Hervey, however, whose necessary degree of moral stress came abruptly and violently, Falk's stress grew over a period of years—a subtle and ever-increasing insistent force which spasmodically requested recognition from Falk but was easily shrugged off by him in the form of a gesture of drawing his hands down over his face. Finally, however, the force became so increasingly insistent that Falk realized that an answer must be made to it. He gave it, in the form of a confession of his original sin of having eaten human flesh to remain alive, but only after a greater desire than his will to live put upon him a greater moral stress than he could bear and which he could not shrug off by his well-known gesture—that desire of love for another being, greater by far than his love of life.

Falk is a silent man who is well known in the German village where he docks his river tugboat because of his unfriendly attitude and his unusual habit. This habit is the gesture which he has—the drawing of his hands down across his face, accompanied by a shudder as if of something distasteful which has just entered his mind—and the fact that he never eats flesh. He is a vegetarian and flies into a rage when anyone places meat before him. When the story opens, Falk and the interpreter meet while both are visiting a German captain who has had his ship docked at the village for some
time, awaiting spring so that Falk can tow him down the river
to the sea. The German captain has a niece—a beautiful girl—
with whom Falk is slowly falling more and more in love. At
first Falk thinks that the interpreter is also a suitor of
the girl, but as the story progresses it becomes increasingly
evident that the girl is as fond of Falk as he is of her.
However, the strange thing about the relation is that Falk
never talks to the girl—or to anyone else for that matter—
but just sits silently and ever so often goes through his
strange gesture with his hands. Finally the matter is brought
to a head by the fact that the German captain is soon to leave
the port, taking the girl with him. Falk confesses the reason
for his strange gesture to the interpreter and tells him the
story of having once been aboard a ship at sea which had lost
her steering apparatus and had drifted far off the ship lanes.
Food ran out aboard the ship, and Falk would have died from
starvation except that he killed and ate several other mem-
bers of the tragic crew. It is this remembrance of having
lived off human flesh that causes Falk to shudder and go
through his strange gestures. It is also this experience
which keeps him silent where the girl is concerned. The in-
terpreter advises Falk to confess his story to the girl and
to the German captain. Falk does this, and, even though they
are somewhat upset at first, they accept Falk in the end.
Thus, Falk wins the hand of the girl and learns a very im-
portant moral lesson—the effect of being restored by confession.
Guerard does much to enlighten the reader on the point of the extent to which moral stress is brought to bear upon Conrad's characters when he says:

It is, more than anything else in Conrad, the dramatization of an idea: the idea that hunger, love, and sexual desire have a common origin in the will to live. Falk desired Hermann's niece, that superb and buxom blond animal, with the same unreflective craving which had once led him to forestall starvation by eating human flesh.43

The moralist's definition of Falk's love for Hermann's niece would imply that it was even stronger than the other two impulses of man and that Conrad was actually showing how the force of the "moral law"—by subjecting the character to such a high degree of moral stress—had the sole purpose of bringing Falk back into the folds of positivity. After all, what Falk needed most was to rid himself of his falseness. By confessing to people he was able to show that he was capable of accepting the real truth. Morally speaking, this is all that anyone must do. Proof in this implication lies in Falk's confession to the interpreter of his love for the girl by saying that his earlier experience was "a great, terrible, and cruel misfortune,"44 but that his present feeling for the girl is "a worse pain! This is more terrible."45

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43 Guerard, op. cit., p. 49.
Conrad says of "Falk" that

Falk obeys the law of self-preservation without the slightest misgivings as to his right, but at a crucial turn of that ruthlessly preserved life he will not condescend to dodge the truth. 46

To the moralist, again, this could mean only that Falk was false in his belief that it was important that he live. However, because he did have such a false concept, the moral stress was brought to bear on him with such force that he had to admit that there are even greater forces in life than mere living. Love, or the feeling which Falk had for Hermann's niece, became more important than even his life. He realized this, and in so realizing it he bowed to a force greater than himself. This realization came to Falk as it does to all individuals—in a manner peculiar to that individual's condition. It is merely a matter of relating the interpretation to the cause behind the forceful stress.

"Because of the Dollars" is less impressive than many of Conrad's stories, because it has such subtlety in meaning. The reader has to think long upon Davidson before he can understand wherein Davidson failed to fulfill the moral obligations which life has asked of him. It is only in his condition at the end of the tale that surface acknowledgment of his state of negativity is given. 47 Otherwise, about the only

46 Conrad, Typhoon and Other Stories, XXI, p. x.

47 Conrad, "Because of the Dollars," Within the Tides, XXIV, p. 211.
thing which need be said of Davidson is that he goes down into the darkness unhappy, because he never realizes that life does not necessarily imply happiness. Like Willems', Davidson's negativity springs from his belief that fate is cruel, that it has been unfair.

Davidson got into his rather peculiar state by accident rather than by deliberation. He is the captain of a small ship in the Far East, having the task of moving cargo from one port of call to another. He befriended a woman—a one-time prostitute—and her husband, because it is just his nature to be kind and gentle to everyone. Because these people lived on an inland river which most sea traffic passed by, Davidson frequently looked in upon them for the sole purpose of providing them with provisions and medicine. On one trip in which he has a cargo of money which a local government is shipping from one main port to another, Davidson decides that in spite of such an important cargo he will stop by "Laughing Anne's" to see whether she and her husband are in need of anything. However, prior to his visit, some rather unsavory characters have involved "Laughing Anne's" husband in a plot to rob Davidson of his important cargo. When Davidson arrives, "Laughing Anne" informs him of the plot, and in the battle which follows, the robbers kill "Laughing Anne" because she is an informer. Davidson escapes from the conflict with his cargo intact, but he remains forever unhappy, because he thinks that he is the cause of "Laughing
Anne's death. He can never reconcile the working of fate in this matter, for he feels that fate has been cruel to "Laughing Anne." Actually, what Davidson does is to persist in his belief that life is a matter of happiness. He continues to believe in this false concept of the importance of selfish happiness until the story ends. Morally, he never recognizes that life is a matter of greater things than the happiness or unhappiness of the individuals placed here. Because of this belief, he is doomed. He places too much emphasis upon the finite self.

Wright defines the moral implication to be found in "Because of the Dollars" in its entirety when he states that

... the progress of 'Laughing Anne' is toward triumph. ... She sacrificed her life in a spirit of devotion. The account of Davidson, on the other hand, is of no such vindication. One would have to resort to quibbling to discover a flaw in Davidson's character. He is kind, loyal, patient, and practical; yet he feels responsible for Anne's death, since he helped indirectly to bring about the circumstances that occasioned it, and he is saddened by the indifference of fate, which has submitted her to brutality and murder. True, he has taken care of Anne's son, but he has achieved no peace. Still kind and gentle, he is too noble to turn to cynicism, but his resignation is without certainties. 48

Lack of Immunity through Ignorance

In order to understand how even those who are ignorant of the existence of the "moral law" must go through a period of moral stress and emerge either in obedience or disobedience of

48Wright, op. cit., p. 162.
the law is to classify a very small number of Conrad's characters who fail to fall into either of the other two classes mentioned prior to this. It is not to be implied here that a character must have a low intellectual capacity to fall into this category. Indeed, it is more a matter of having been innately endowed with either stubbornness and lack of foresight or of humility to the point of timidity rather than being possessed of low or high intellectual capacities. For example, Captain MacWhirr of Typhoon would more logically fall into a classification such as this than numerous other characters in Conrad's fiction, because of his consistent habit of doing right without once acknowledging that there is any other way of doing things. His lack of acknowledgment made his positive state incomplete. He needed to be made aware of a choice, because it is only through conscious obedience to the law—rather than unconscious obedience—that man is saved. Any character who feels that there is but one path open to him before he has had opportunity to choose either the right or wrong path has not morally proved himself and is therefore doomed to the same darkness as those who choose wrongly.

The two characters who are to be discussed under this classification are quite different from each other except that both are timid to the state of not seizing their chances—presented to them in the usual Conradian procedure of varying degrees of moral stress being inflicted upon them—and proving themselves to be consciously related to the "moral law."
One of the two, Flora de Barral, finally escapes the fate of the other, Bessie Carvil, by recognizing her obligation to life and seizing—almost too late—the opportunity offered to her. On the other hand Bessie Carvil recognizes her condition but does nothing at all about it. Bessie is doomed to a state of unhappiness for the remainder of her life, but, more important, she admits to a state of negativity without feeling a need to reject her present way. Conrad has given us in Bessie one of those characters who cannot under any circumstances find the courage to break the bonds which hold her from what Bancroft terms "a call to come up higher." Bancroft also rates this as

Perhaps the most tragic of all tales—tragic, because there was no appreciable moral stress, therefore no triumph—just a drab, uninteresting existence. The tragedy of life is not in the struggles and sacrifices, 'terrific' as they may be, but in what may be lost through self-defeat, resulting either from the recoil of outraged nature, or through ignorance and stifled existence. 49

It is rather interesting to point out that the major characters from what is generally conceded as one of the most subtle of all Conrad's tales, "Tomorrow," and from what this study has earlier described as one of his most complex novels, Chance, have here fallen into the same category as far as moral significance is concerned. This may seem strange, but, as far as the actual character of Flora de Barral is concerned, she is no more complex than Bessie Carvil. In Flora

49Bancroft, op. cit., p. 46.
there are frequent implications of the same self-defeat that one finds in Bessie. In fact she differs from Bessie only in that her moral stress is so much stronger than Bessie's that she is finally forced into a decision. Both lose the immunity which ignorance to the law sometimes falsely implies through the means which the law has of showing itself in every life—moral stress—Flora at a relatively early age and Bessie somewhat later. Both find that life cannot be lived on a basis of being always humble.

Chance is, among a great many other things, the story of Flora de Barral's life. Flora spends her first few years of life so completely segregated from other people that she never has an opportunity to find that there is more than one path in life. Her father, a wealthy financier, has kept her secluded and under the care of a governess who teaches her nothing. Then when her father is sent to prison for being a thief, Flora is thrown upon the mercy of the world. In this new life, so completely different from anything which she had before imagined possible, she suffers such deep self-defeat for a while that she almost commits suicide. Finally, she comes to live with a couple by the name of Fyne who treat her less harshly than others have; so, she regains some of her composure. Then when a sea captain named Anthony comes to visit the Fynes, he falls in love with Flora and carries her off to sea with him. Even then Flora is still unable to seize her chance of happiness, for she is suffering under the
illusion that her father—like herself—is a martyr in this world. It is only after her father is released from prison and brought to live with Flora and her husband that the real moral stress of life is brought full force upon Flora. Her father attempts to poison Anthony, and the sudden realization that she loves Anthony far more than she does either herself or her father—whom she sees through the same selfish way that she sees herself—is what brings happiness. She becomes morally positive, because she thinks in terms of something greater than herself and which in itself does not evolve from her ego.

"Tomorrow" is the tale of a woman who has all of her life taken care of her father. She is isolated from the rest of the world by the fact that her father is blind, and she has to stay close to him. Her next door neighbor, Captain Hagberd, often talks to Bessie of his son—a boy who ran off to sea at an early age. Captain Hagberd keeps telling Bessie that his son is coming home "tomorrow." Yet, each day ends without the appearance of the son. Bessie tolerates the old man's derangement in much the same way that she tolerates her father—without knowledge that either of them really understands life. Actually, it is Bessie who does not have any identity, for she is ignorant of any but the one path which she follows. Then one day the son does appear, only to have the old man reject him as an impostor. The son remains for a few hours talking to Bessie and then goes off
again. As the son leaves, Bessie becomes conscious of her condition in life, for she sees that she has never really ever lived. This knowledge opens up for her the real significance of life, but because she is weak, she cannot break away from her obligations. She identifies herself with life in the brief moment that she talks to the son, and the recognition brings her unhappiness for the rest of her life. It is then, too, that Captain Hagberd's futility of looking always to the tomorrow, without facing the reality of today, makes itself clear to her. She, too, has always been looking for tomorrow. As Wright says:

The one word 'tomorrow' symbolizes the gamut of her course. At first it stood for toleration of an illusion, then suddenly for the beginning of romance. Finally she discovers that it means only one day more of enslavement to circumstances.50

Flora, rather than return to "that moral loneliness, which made all her life intolerable,"51 given a choice of choosing between her selfish and introspective love for her father and herself or that for a husband, was able to say "but I don't want to be let off"52 in answer to Anthony's agreement to free her from the marriage. Bessie, on the other hand, found no such answer for herself when Captain Hagberd's son was leaving, for the only evidence of the stress was subtle.

50Wright, op. cit., pp. 166-167.
52Ibid., p. 430.
... she could not tell whether it was the beat of the swell or his fateful tread that seemed to fall cruelly upon her heart. Presently every sound grew fainter, as though she were slowly turning into stone. A fear of this awful silence came to her—worse than the fear of death. 53

This was all that Bessie knew—the fear. Then as she returned once more to her old way of life, the reader is shown again the subtlety of the moral stress. Going back to her father and to the cottage, she found that

It had no lofty portal, no terrific inscription of forfeited hopes—she did not understand wherein she had sinned. 54

The fact still remains, however, that had Bessie taken advantage of her chance—even though it was so much slighter than that of Flora, she, too, could have proved her positiveness with the "moral law." In her own way Bessie refused to see; this refusal constitutes a state of unhappiness—final darkness—for her. The wayward son left after telling Bessie that "you can't buy yourself out." 55 What he really meant was that Bessie must do what he had earlier done, if she is to escape from her state of unhappiness—find strength somewhere to change.

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 275.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Positivity through Action

One of Conrad's characters—a German philosopher by the name of Stein—while speaking of such moral matters as "how to be\(^1\)

The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertion of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.\(^2\)

This, in so many words, is also the philosophy of Joseph Conrad. The rather original structural way of saying it in many ways reflects the method with which he presented that philosophy to the reader as well.

Symbolically speaking, this study has changed a number of Stein's words. The words, however, are the only things that have been changed, because the moral implication behind them remains the same. For instance, Stein's rather broad term "destructive element" has been re-named "moral stress" herein. Also, "exertions" as far as characters are concerned have been called "positive" and "negative" struggles which characters have put forth in their desire to escape the "destructive element." The exertions are positive if

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the characters emerge from the "deep, deep sea"—often referred to as "life" here—better men for their experiences. On the other hand those characters who refuse to accept life because they have what they consider a better definition of it than it can offer them or who cease to exert any movement whatsoever because of the paralysis of self-defeat are among the negative strugglers. Swimming may be accomplished only when one coordinates his muscles in exertions which keep him above the water. Life, also, is a far-fetched analogy of the same thing—the character's actions must be of the sort that allows submission to moral stress without his becoming so overcome with fear or anger that he sinks below the surface of it.

To break away from symbolic meanings for a moment, Conrad's moral credo is difficult to relate to any one specific attitude for the reason which Ford Madox Ford, a man closely related to Conrad for many years, gives.

... it was the very basis of all Conrad's work that the fable must not have the moral tacked on to its end. If the fable has not driven its message home the fable has failed, must be scrapped and must give place to another one.3

Through such characters as Stein, speaking in a highly involved and analogous manner, Conrad has attempted to tell all that is necessary to tell—physically, descriptively, morally—without himself explaining the "how" or the "why"

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of it. He obviously felt that if the story did not take care of all these points, then it did not fulfill its purpose. This trait has earned him many different titles—some apt and some inept—and it has also made him the possessor of one of the most complicated and individualistic styles of any author, either before or since his time. Yet, when all of the complexity of style is shown, Conrad attains simplicity of motive. His world, seemingly, did "rest on a few simple ideas." What this study has attempted to do is to depict these simple ideas.

The question which must ultimately rise in the mind of the reader is just where the simple ideas which Conrad had came from. The answer to such a question as this must necessarily lie in Conrad's life before he became a writer. For one thing, the stabilizing effect of years and of experience—vast experience—had had time to work their charms upon Conrad before he applied pen to paper in his new career. He had become consistent in point of view—so consistent that what he had to say necessarily proved itself repetitious. He could not consciously say more or less than what his experience had taught him to say. It seems that he quite frequently attempted to say it all in his writings and that in the telling he had to invent new symbols and new settings to fulfill that purpose. Otherwise he would have been merely repeating the same rudimentary belief.
To label Conrad as a moralist is really not so radical as it may at first appear. Critics tracing Conrad's life have come upon a great amount of evidence which points to such a conclusion. His estrangement with Eastern Europe was in itself more of a moral issue than anything else. It cultivated a need in Conrad for some stable relationship with life, as well as made such a desire other than arbitrary. His later life as a sailor—with the lonely hours of watches and of viewing the universe in isolation—could have influenced even the most unimaginative into some thought of man's relationship with the universe. Conrad, who was far from unimaginative, must have felt the weight of the mystery of the sea and of life. These and other influences go to shape Conrad the writer, and, in spite of his insistence upon dividing the artist and the man, it is to be doubted on the face of it that a division so complete as he implied is possible.

This study has attempted, however, neither to psychoanalyze Conrad on the basis of his past life nor to imply that he was influenced exclusively by any one specific force during that life. Indeed, it has sought instead to prove only that analysis of many of Conrad's characters proves enlightening from a moral standpoint. It would be difficult to understand some of Conrad's characters on any other basis. It is, for instance, impossible to understand how Lingard, who always followed life, or Bessie Carvil, who was meek to the
state of being sinless, failed in their way of life, unless the moral basis of their failure be taken into account. Also, it seems entirely impossible to see how confession aided Falk or Alvan Hervey except from a moral standpoint. Wilems argued to the last moment that he had a better definition of life than life had of him. Almayer also failed to adjust to the infinite—the divine—in life. All of these characters, by their actions and by the ultimate ends of their actions, proved that Conrad believed in something other than reason as a controlling factor with which every individual must sooner or later contend. This study has spoken frequently of the "moral law," but the law itself is merely what may be induced from the actions of the characters, that which sooner or later goes beyond the realm of reason. There can be little doubt that "these characters and scenes were evoked by an imagination darkened with apprehensions and fears."\(^5\) Too many characters are caught in a web of highly unusual circumstances for such a statement to be refuted. Yet, what more perfect examples of "the impulse to moralise"\(^6\) than such characters? It may be true, as Ford says, that Conrad "let, otherwise, his light so shine before men that few would be inclined to claim him among the preachers."\(^7\) Still, Ford himself admits to the possibility of certain moralistic tendencies on the

\(^{5}\) Wilbur L. Cross, *Four Contemporary Novelists*, p. 43.

\(^{6}\) Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

\(^{7}\) Ibid.
part of Conrad. Perhaps it was, as Wagenknecht says, that it is a world in which any character may "win a spiritual victory." Even more logically, the cause is that in Conrad's fiction "everywhere the theme is mass or individual psychology," and that

The complete mind Conrad aimed to portray so far as he could understand it. In the endeavor he made no use of the mechanism of current psychology. He laid no claim to the discovery of 'complexes,' leaving it to the reader to unearth, if he liked, a perfect example of the inferiority complex in Lord Jim. Nor did he distinguish sharply between the conscious and the unconscious activities of the mind, though he recognized both aspects of human behavior. Such generalizations as he arrived at were the old ones, which it was his business to interpret anew.

Review of Characters

Character after character—those discussed in this study and those who have not been discussed—may pass before the reader and yet not one escape examination in terms of the old general and fundamental concepts of life. They all react according to their individual natures, yet they all react. This, according to Guerard, is possible because

Perhaps the greatest of Conrad's virtues is his simultaneous achievement of intimacy and detachment, his power to sympathize with his victims without losing clear sight of their deficiencies.

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8Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 431.
9Gross, op. cit., p. 37.
10Ibid.
11Guerard, op. cit., p. 83.
The fact that Conrad could be intimate and yet detached may also cast some light on his personal lack of any specific religious base. When all else is said, Conrad's characters were either able to prove themselves capable of the task before them, or else they lost the most important of all fights in life—that which must be reckoned on a moral basis. Reason, no matter how sensitive it was, could not alone save a character—witness Willems who was far above the average—because sooner or later he had to admit to a force greater than himself. Conrad's general conception of such a force was that it lay outside time and space, estranged from man because man lacked the necessary perception. Yet, the impulses of such a force could be felt by every man, and unless the man adhered to the unconscious or conscious calling of that force he was lost. Wright says:

As we have seen, Conrad believed that whenever a man becomes conscious of himself apart from the natural world he is subject to tragedy.  

How true this seems to be of all of Conrad's characters! Of the characters who have been discussed in this study, all fall on one or the other side of obedience or disobedience. Almayer, Willems, Lingard, Kayerts, Carlier, Renouard, Karain, Arsat, Il Conde, Davidson, and Bessie Carvil have proved themselves incapable of obedience. Kurtz, in his own way, Marlow, MacWhirr, Hervey, Falk, and Flora have finally submitted to

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12Wright, op. cit., p. 201.
the greater force. The outcome of each of these characters' lives is final and irrefutable proof of Conrad's belief in a "moral law." Approached on the same basis as Conrad must have approached them himself, they are the ultimate expression of the truth which lies in "duty," in "fidelity," but above all else, in "exertion."
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