

JOSEPH CONRAD'S A SET OF SIX: A STUDY

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By

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ABSTRACT

Although much has been written on Joseph Conrad's major novels, novellas and short stories, very little has been done on his collection of tales and novellas entitled A Set of Six. This study attempts to elucidate the significance of these tales in the light of recent yet limited criticism on them. Avrom Fleishman, Addison C. Bross, and Daniel R. Schwarz have written short studies of the collection as a whole, and this thesis endeavours to extend and expand upon the works of these critics.

The approach taken is to provide a moral and political context for the interpretation of the work as a whole by summarizing Conrad's political thought and convictions as found in his writings generally. To this end, I rely upon Fleishman's excellent study, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad. From there I establish a fundamental "conflict" between Conrad's commitment to the values of the organic or traditional community as the repository of the moral grounds for human action, and the attempts in modern society to establish utopian or radical solutions to problems of a political nature. Indeed, the thesis is an attempt to show that for Conrad the grounds of all moral action and human goodness are threatened by these various modern "experiments" because they imply the creation of new and artificial grounds for human morality, grounds which ultimately are based upon the worst sort of material selfishness.

Furthermore, because the deepest moral values inhere in the

organic community, the destruction of the values it represents by the forces of history necessarily results in the moral isolation and tragic alienation of the Conradian hero. Only the spiritual reaffirmation of those fundamental communal values--fidelity, trust, loyalty--can lead to spiritual victory and new life for the alienated hero. The tales and novellas of A Set of Six all treat this theme of tragic alienation and the possibility of a victorious return to life. As such, they treat in a lesser yet equally significant key the central themes of Conrad's greatest works. Any study of these stories, therefore, helps to illuminate our understanding not only of Conrad's greatest novels but of his work as a whole.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

All references to Conrad's works and writings are from the Collected Works (London: Dent, 1954). Page references to Conrad are given in parentheses in the body of the text, and any mention of specific titles from the Collected Works is given in full in the text. All information on secondary works and works of criticism is given in the endnotes.

L'uomo, monotono universo,
Crede allargarsi i beni
E dalle sue mani febbrili
Non escono senza fine che limiti.

Attaccato sul vuoto
Al suo filo di ragno,
Non teme e non seduce
Se non il proprio grido.

Ripara il logorio alzando tombe,
E per pensarti, Eterno,
Non ha che le bestemmie.

(Giuseppe Ungaretti, "La Pietà", 1928)¹

On the tenth day, after a night spent without even dozing off once (it had occurred to him that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself), the solitude appeared like a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands, without fear, without surprise, without any sort of emotion whatever. Only towards the evening, in the comparative relief of coolness, he began to wish that this cord would snap. He imagined it snapping with a report as of a pistol--a sharp, full crack. And that would be the end of him. He contemplated that eventuality with pleasure, because he dreaded the sleepless nights in which the silence, remaining unbroken in the shape of a cord to which he hung with both hands, vibrated with senseless phrases, always the same but utterly incomprehensible, about Nostromo, Antonia, Barrios, and proclamations mingled into an ironical and senseless buzzing. In the daytime he could look at the silence like a still cord stretched to breaking-point, with his life, his vain life, suspended to it like a weight.

"I wonder whether I would hear it snap before I fell," he asked himself.

(Joseph Conrad, Nostromo)

INTRODUCTION

The passages cited above from Ungaretti and Nostramo bear a striking thematic and symbolic resemblance. Yet if Ungaratti in "La Pietà" emphasizes the relationship between man and eternity, Conrad emphasizes that between the individual and the community. For Ungaretti, man finds himself alone in an empty universe, and civilization ("le tombe") is man's feeble attempt to withstand the wear ("logorio") of time; the recognition of an indifferent universe is the basis of man's despair. The passage from Nostramo suggests that the individual falls into despair when he is alienated from the community, the nation, which gives him his identity: "It had occurred to him [Decoud] that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself". The traditional community is for Conrad the crucible in which the self is forged, and Decoud's love for Antonia is deeply significant for it alone promises the reaffirmation of the self which is his legacy. Only the mistaken belief that he has lost Antonia's love convinces him of the illegitimacy of his own existence. Thus when the reality of the organic self is threatened or shattered, the individual collapses into despair.

Both Ungaretti and Conrad represent the tenuousness of man's hold on life through the symbol of the cord or spider's web. Each suggests the fragility of man's faith in the validity of his own existence. Indeed, Ungaretti's "logorio" of time becomes for Conrad the disintegrating forces of history. Central to the action of Nostramo as

to the tales of A Set of Six, therefore, is the drama of the individual's fight to maintain intact the links to the source of his self while battling the forces of radical historical and social change. Gaspar Ruiz, Erminia, Paul the Anarchist, Sevrin, the Young Lady Anarchist, and Il Conde all suffer from despair and a loss of faith in life brought about by their alienation in history from the only genuine basis for the self: the organic community. Conrad thus portrays in these tales the psychological and spiritual consequences suffered by the individual who has lost this sustaining source of the self and of life.

The first chapter of this thesis thus considers the philosophical and moral grounds of Conrad's thought and art as it derives from his Polish heritage and from his adherence to the English organicist tradition in thought and letters. The synthesis of these influences provides the groundwork for establishing a conception of the organic community as the real basis of the self and the source of the life of the individual.

The chapter divisions used in the reading of the tales of A Set of Six are based upon several factors. One of these is Conrad's "scale of vision." The vast historical canvasses of the novellas, "Gaspar Ruiz" and "The Duel", distinguish them from the short stories. Their exotic historical and geographic settings suggest that they are more specifically about history and the effects of its flux and movement on the life of the individual and the collectivity. History is indeed an important protagonist in these tales, presented as an irrepressible force at work in human affairs conflicting with the desires, beliefs, concerns and sensibilities both of the private citizen and the organic community. Operating beyond the control of human individuals, it

possesses a material dynamism all its own which may or may not harmonize with the wishes of the heroes and heroines of the tales. History is thus distinguished from politics, which, for our purposes, has to do with the more specific problems of modern capitalism and political ideology.

The short stories deal specifically with contemporary political and social problems, and as a group are thus set off from the novellas for thematic reasons as much as for reasons of scale. "The Brute", the weakest story in the set, is placed at the start of the third chapter because its thematic emphasis falls almost exclusively upon the failure of modern utopias and the hypocrisy of their material selfishness, without developing in any way the destruction of a specific individual. It thus sets the way for the more complex analysis of the effects upon the individual of the modern utopia, both economic and political, that we see in "An Anarchist".

Finally, "The Informer" and "Il Conde" are placed together in the final chapter mainly because they are the best tales in the set, having garnered the most critical attention. They are the most complex and the most effective in their treatment of the effects of modernism on the individual psyche, and in the loss of selfhood in the modern world. Their thematic centre is the portrayal of characters who have in some way betrayed an ideal of community, either actively like the Young Lady Anarchist in "The Informer", or through passive withdrawal like the Count in "Il Conde". These tales, finally, are the only ones which take place exclusively in contemporary Europe, thus providing the most careful analysis of its culture and society, a factor which alone would justify their being considered together.

THE ORGANIC COMMUNITY: THE BASIS OF SELF IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S ART

The criticism that has grown up around Conrad's book of short stories A Set of Six is fairly divided on the value and merit of these tales. Critics such as Thomas Moser,¹ Leo Gurko,² John V. Hapopian,³ and Lawrence Graver⁴ take a negative view of these stories. Thomas Moser calls them "frankly potboilers,"⁵ while Graver writes:

On the surface, A Set of Six does not seem very different from Conrad's other work. The stories all deal with the familiar themes of heroism, betrayal, guilt, and illusion;...But on closer examination, the stories can be seen to have many more features in common with conventional magazine fiction than with Conrad's serious work.⁶

On the other hand, critics such as Richard Curle,⁷ Edward W. Said,⁸ Avrom Fleishman,⁹ and Addison C. Bross¹⁰ are generally more-or-less favourably disposed to the stories. Frederick Karl¹¹ finds that only two of the tales, "Il Conde" and "An Anarchist", are worthy of consideration, while other critics have written favourably on individual tales.¹² However, only two critics, Fleishman and Bross, actually attempt any sort of unified study that sees the stories as a whole, linked by common themes.¹³ These critics take different yet related

lines of interpretation in their approval of the stories, lines which can be reconciled to form the basis of a more extended general study of the collection.

Addison C. Bross opens his article on A Set of Six thus:

In Conrad's fiction men create the conditions of their corporate and individual lives and determine the qualities of their existence through a process known as belief. Their own beliefs or those of their respective societies decide men's actions and define their destinies by imposing meaning upon the motives and consequences of their deeds. It may be claimed that Conrad's single great theme is this act of belief in its fullest variety, with its crucial propensity to control men's perceptions of the exterior world as meaningful symbol or meaningless void, to determine a man's evaluation of himself and his fellows, to establish the conventional notions of a society, which often frustrate an individual in his search for identity.¹⁴

Bross indicates here all the elements central to Conrad's thought and art with such terms and concepts as "belief," "meaning," "destiny," "society," "search for identity," and accurately suggests the dynamics of the interaction of these elements in Conrad's fiction. He thereby indicates the direction which any serious and detailed account of A Set of Six must take. Avrom Fleishman, who is very favourably disposed to five of the six tales in A Set of Six, despite the fact that he disregards completely "The Brute",¹⁵ provides a very useful and detailed study of Conrad's politics which can help us to understand and explicate more fully the thesis that Bross is able only to indicate.

In Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad, Fleishman argues correctly that Conrad follows the tradition of political thought that can be called "organicism." The "organicist" tradition was at odds with the material effects and ideology of the dominant culture of nineteenth-century England, grounded, Fleishman tells us, in "'Utilitarianism' in ethics, 'Liberalism' in economics, 'Radicalism' in politics, 'Individualism' in private life and business practice."¹⁶ The significant point about the organicist political tradition is its commitment to the integrity of the community and to historical continuity. Fleishman writes that in contrast to capitalist theory,

...there had survived from the world picture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance a set of ideas about the way the world is organized which can be called "organicism" in its Romantic and Victorian form. In place of the nominalist or atomist metaphysics implied by individualist theory, the varying forms of belief in a chain of being had emphasized the interconnection and unified direction of the myriad members of the universe. In the social sphere, the Medieval-Renaissance doctrine of the place of the state in a system of divine governance, and the related notion of the mutual responsibility of all members of the body politic, had survived in an altered form in the eighteenth-century version of the Great Chain of Being, and particularly in the ethics of sympathy.¹⁷

Fleishman traces the presence of this ethos in Conrad's political thought back to two fundamental sources of his Polish

background. One is Conrad's view of nationalism, which seems a far cry from the sort of nationalism which had grown up in the nineteenth-century rush for economic supremacy by the industrialized European states. His view was based upon "the doctrine that the real political entity is not the artificially constructed state (which may be arbitrarily imposed on a nation by an occupying power) but the historical community of the people, whose culture survives the vicissitudes of political power."¹⁸

The other source to which Fleishman draws attention is the Polish Romantic tradition that Conrad inherited. Zdzislaw Najder, in Conrad's Polish Background, tells us that, upon leaving Poland, Conrad "was undoubtedly well acquainted with a rich and lively literary tradition, to a marked extent unified by distinctive characteristics in its moral and political attitudes."¹⁹ Romanticism, Najder reminds us, had survived in Poland up to the 1860s and 1870s and Conrad was profoundly influenced by such nationalist-Romantic writers as Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Zygmunt Krasinski (1812-1859) who, in his The Un-Divine Comedy (1835), "prophesied the destruction of the beauties of the old world and the coming of the kingdom of 'material interests' (to use Conrad's expression)."²⁰ Conrad was, moreover, profoundly influenced by the "ideas of moral and national responsibility" that "pervaded this literature." Najder goes on to write that for Polish Romantic literature

...the moral problems of the individual were posed in terms of the social results of his actions; and ethical principles were based on the idea that an individual, however exceptional he might be, is always a member of a group, responsible for its

welfare. A poet was a typical example of such an exceptional individual, burdened with special duties to his nation.²¹

Najder also makes clear another element of Conrad's Polish heritage that seems to have had an influence on his thought and art: his days spent under the guardianship of his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, and their subsequent correspondence. Najder points to Bobrowski's letter of 9 November 1891 as "the fullest exposition of Bobrowski's view of life." In this letter Bobrowski exhorts Conrad to "take reality as it is, without complaining too much and without wanting to change it radically.... In a word, Bobrowski contrasts his 'realism' with Conrad's 'romanticism'."²² Fleishman too writes that "Conrad's subsequent political principles and aversion to radical violence were shaped by his uncle's mentorship, not by his father's example."²³ Bobrowski's letter is worth quoting in some detail:

My dear lad, whatever you were to say about a good or bad balance of the forces of nature, about good or bad social relationships, about right or wrong social systems, about the boundless stupidity of crowds fighting for a crust of bread--and ending up in nothingness--none of this will be new!! You will never control the forces of nature, for whether blind or governed by Providence, in each case they have their own pre-ordained paths; and you will also never change the roads along which humanity goes, for there exists in social development an historical evolutionary compulsion which is slow but sure, and which is governed by the laws of cause and effect derived from the past and affecting the future....if both individuals and Nations were to make "duty" their aim,

instead of the ideal of greatness, the world would certainly be a better place than it is! And those crowds "aiming instinctively at securing only bread," so detestable to all visionaries, have their *raison d'être*: to fulfill the material needs of life; and they no longer seem detestable when, as often happens, a more thorough evaluation reveals that they embellish their existence, their work, and often even their shortcomings, by some higher moral idea of a duty accomplished, of a love for their family or country to whom they leave the fruit of their endeavours and labours in the form of sacrifices and bequests.²⁴

For Najder, such exhortations by Conrad's uncle "originated what was to become the curse of Conrad's inner life and the bitter inspiration of his art: his deep scepticism, frequently tinged with pessimism.

Believing in the necessity for 'dreams' and ideals, and knowing them to be illusions, Conrad seems to have listened both to Mickiewicz and to Bobrowski."²⁵ Thus, Conrad derives from his Polish background his strong sense of social responsibility, and the idea that all moral values inhere in the community. The individual, moreover, derives his identity from the community, and no possibility of moral action exists outside of it. For Conrad too this idea of community extends to the nation, which is conceived as a living, historically determined organic entity.

As a further major influence on Conrad's thought and art, Fleishman places, alongside his Polish heritage, the "organicist" political and artistic tradition of Romantic and Victorian English literature. This tradition, running from Edmund Burke (who "conceived

society not as a business like contract but as a spiritual and a cultural union"²⁶) and Coleridge, to George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, has to do with the preservation of "the living traditions of the past."²⁷ Fleishman continues:

The prevailing approach to Conrad, emphasizing his interest in the isolated individual and the crucial need for social roots, can now be placed on a philosophical basis: the primacy of the community, which gives individual life its possibility and its value. It is his awareness of the priority of the social unit to the individual self which places Conrad squarely within the organicist tradition.²⁸

Thus, "the sense of the polis as the ultimate reality and the primary condition of being a man...places Conrad, with the organicists, squarely within a tradition deriving from Aristotle and the Greek tragedians. It is this classical element in the Western imagination that accounts for the tragic power of Conrad's tales of lonely individuals separated from the human community."²⁹ Conrad's primary political as well as ethical concern, therefore, is to combat the forces of individualism by revealing its fundamentally destructive ethos. The integrity of the community is of primary importance, for it is the repository of life's most fundamental moral truths.

In the modern world, threats to the integrity of the organic community and the moral values it sustains come from two sources, both of which play a highly important role in Conrad's fiction. The first is the radical politics of modern European culture. It is in his "A Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record that Conrad gives, in the name of a few simple yet deeply moral ideas, his famous declaration against the modern revolutionary spirit:

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity. At a time when nothing which is not revolutionary in some way or other can expect to attract much attention I have not been revolutionary in my writings. The revolutionary spirit is mighty convenient in this, that it frees one from all scruples as regards ideas. Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains (xix-xx).

The second threat comes from capitalism and the forms of egoism to which its blatant materialism gives rise. Significantly, this ethos has led to the creation of a new idea of the nation as the means through which to exercise the worst sort of collective selfishness. Conrad's essay "Autocracy and War" in Notes on Life and Letters is perhaps one of the most insightful and prophetic writings on the destruction that capitalism, with its liberal-individualist ideology, would bring to the body and soul of modern Europe, and to the "simple ideas" cited above. The analysis of certain passages of this essay, therefore, provides great insight into Conrad's thought and art. Of the Congress of Vienna, which wiped Poland off the face of the map of Europe, Conrad writes:

The idea of a Europe united in the solidarity of her dynasties...has been extinguished by the larger glamour of the restraining ideals. Instead of the doctrines of solidarity it was the doctrine of nationalities much more favourable to spoliations that came to the front, and since its greatest triumphs at Sadowa and Sedan there is no Europe (103).

Thus, for Conrad, what is wanting among European nations is "a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action tending towards the restraint of particular ambitions" ('Autocracy and War' 111). It can be argued that for Conrad the ideal of solidarity is precisely this common conservative principle. Conrad's thought, therefore, contains a fundamental "catholicity" that is primarily, if not exclusively, political in nature. Having denied his Catholic-Christian religious heritage,³⁰ Conrad nevertheless clings to a catholic political heritage grounded in an ideal of the solidarity of all European nations. Given such a conception of the role of the nation in a politically catholic Europe, Conrad must necessarily defend the historically grounded traditions of all European nations--in other words, he must protect the idea of nation as community.

This ideal of solidarity³¹ is for Conrad grounded in a particular "metaphysical" conception of the nature of the nation, a conception that may indeed be considered fundamental to all aspects of Conrad's work. From this particular conception, I feel, we can derive much about the meaning and significance of Conrad's fiction. In "Autocracy and War" he writes:

The intellectual stage of mankind being as yet in its infancy, and States, like most individuals, having but a feeble and imperfect consciousness of the worth and force of inner life, the need of making their existence manifest to themselves is determined in the direction of physical activity. The idea of ceasing to grow in territory, in strength, in wealth, in influence--in anything but wisdom and self-knowledge is odious

to them as the omen of the end. Action which is to be found the illusion of a mastered destiny, can alone satisfy our uneasy vanity and lay to rest the haunting fear of the future--a sentiment concealed, indeed, but proving its existence by the force it has, when invoked, to stir the passions of a nation....the only action open to a state can be of no other than an aggressive nature (108).

Conrad here is distinguishing between two principles at work in the life of the nation, one outward, the other inward. These principles, moreover, are presented as existing in a state of war with one another. The outward principle manifests itself in action that is directed to superficial material self-aggrandizement. The inward principle seeks self-knowledge both for the nation and the individual who participates in all aspects of its life. This dichotomy, it must be emphasized, is not merely conceptual; it is indeed effectual, for each principle operates like a force at work in the life of the nation. Each, moreover, possesses a "spirit" or idea that gives it life and animation. The principle of "interiority" manifests itself in the idea of the nation as community, in the sincere work of its people,³² in its moral and blood ties, through mutual fidelity and love. All of these are given the deepest expression through genuine and sincere artistic and cultural endeavour. The outward principle leads to the false, the artificial, the contrived, the superficial, and, above all, to destructive, useless mass technology; its most obvious manifestation is the modern capitalist state. One stark and violent image of this principle and its effects comes from "Autocracy and War"; it is the prophetic image of "the virtuous, industrious democratic States of tomorrow...reduced to

fighting for a crust of dry bread, with all the hate, ferocity, and fury that must attach to the vital importance of such an issue" (106).

Another image in the form of a characterization, comic and absurd, typical of the sorts of images one is used to seeing in A Set of Six, comes from "Poland Revisited". It is the image of the German father taking his two boys home for the holidays from school in England:

He trod the deck of that decadent British ship with a scornful foot while his breast (and to a large extent his stomach, too) appeared expanded by the consciousness of a superior destiny. Later I could observe the same truculent bearing, touched with the racial grotesqueness, in the men of the Landwehr corps, that passed through Cracow to reinforce the Austrian army in Eastern Galicia. Indeed, the haughty passenger might very well have been, most probably was, an officer of the Landwehr; and perhaps those two fine active boys are orphans by now. Thus things acquire significance by the lapse of time. A citizen, a father, a warrior, a mote in the dust cloud of six million fighting particles, an unconsidered trifle for the jaws of war, his humanity was not consciously pressed on my mind at the time. Mainly, for me, he was a sharp tapping of heels round the corner of the deck-house, a white yachting cap and a green overcoat getting periodically between my eyes and the shifting cloud-horizon of the ash-grey North Sea (157).

Such a passage prepresents perfectly the fundamental conflict between the two principles: the humanity of the father, grounded in his natural obligations to his sons, contrasts dramatically with the impending war fought on a principle of national hatred; it is a principle that kills his humanity and reduces him to a mote for the "jaws of war."

Examples such as these make evident the degree to which Conrad is a political writer without being a political theorist. The political implications of his fiction and his thought are evident at every turn. Conrad is not concerned with elucidating a theory of the state, but rather with revealing the terrible implications of the artificial nature of the ideas and spirit driving the modern state. Such ideas threaten the ideal of the nation as community and hence the possibility of any moral context for sincere thought, feeling or action. Although, for example, Conrad appears to favour the old monarchies of pre-Napoleonic Europe as a means or mechanism to withstand or stave off the forces of modern capitalism as well as radical socialism,³³ he is not interested in theoretically establishing the legal grounds for such mechanisms. Rather, he is interested in portraying through his art the struggle or conflict at work in the modern world between the threatening contemporary concepts of state and traditional notions of the community/nation; the place of the individual in this struggle; and the manifestation in the individual of the conflict between the "simple ideas" and the larger political/social tendencies of his time, if not of all time. For Conrad, the fundamental moral problems are necessarily political in scope, and the battle ground is as much the individual soul as the life of the community or nation.

Much Conrad criticism has seen his thought and fiction in terms of certain fundamental oppositions or conflicts. Critics such as Garver and Moser indeed develop a line of thought consistent with what I have thus far argued. In his Conrad's Short Fiction, Lawrence Graver devotes a chapter to the development of the thematic opposition between egoism and altruism. He quotes at length a letter Conrad had written to the New

York Times, August 24, 1901, in response to statements made in a review of The Inheritors, Conrad's collaboration with Ford Madox Ford. I quote only the relevant passages of that letter:

Egoism, which is the moving force of the world, and altruism, which is its morality, these two contradictory instincts of which one is so plain and the other so mysterious cannot serve us unless in the incomprehensible alliance of their irreconcilable antagonism.³⁴

With this dichotomy in hand, Graver is able to divide Conrad's major characters into two camps. Figures such as Captain Mitchell, Charles Gould and Martin Decoud in Nostramo, Almayer of Almayer's Folly, Razumov of Under Western Eyes and Axel Heyst of Victory are egotistical figures, while Mrs. Gould of Nostramo is an altruistic one. Meanwhile, Thomas Moser in his Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline sees egoism as the cause of failure of many Conradian heroes:

If loneliness is the condition of most of Conrad's characters, it is a condition largely self-imposed. Whether simple or complex, his vulnerable heroes are all egoists. Their deepest impulses and longings are directed not toward a dutiful place in the ranks but toward self-aggrandizement. They are alone chiefly because they have thoughts for no one but themselves. This is one of the central convictions of Conrad the psychologist, that egoism is the motive force of most men's actions.³⁵

In opposition to this egoism Moser points to the community as the goal of the altruistic. He writes:

It is Conrad the moralist, with his simple idea of fidelity,

who chooses the central situation of the early stories: the test. Conrad wishes to explore the most important moment in an individual's life, the moment which reveals whether or not he is faithful to the community.³⁶

Moser's conception of the Conradian "test," in which the selfish individual is at odds with the well-being of the community, is consistent with both the view that Graver cites in Conrad's New York Times letter and with the dichotomy that I have been working toward in this chapter.

Thus far I have been developing a line of thought built upon the presence of a series of oppositions in Conrad, particularly between the "inner life" of the spirit, both individual and collective, and the "outer life" of egoistic material interests; between "simple ideas" and the "revolutionary" ideas that threaten their integrity. The "revolutionary ideas" can be seen to stand together with the "material interests" on the side of history, that vast canvas of collective human events and endeavours. Over against this canvas stand the "simple ideas" together with the "inner life" of the spirit. This side of the opposition can also be considered the side of the individual, of the conscious ego, and of the collective inner spirit of the nation as community and cultural entity. What interests us here is to establish our position with respect to Conrad's view of the role and function of the ego and, hence, of the inner life and the spirit vis-à-vis the vast canvas of human history, material interests and revolutionary ideas. We thus wish to establish the fundamental optimism and hopefulness of Conrad's vision, despite the views of many critics to the contrary.

In an article entitled "Conrad Between Sartre and Socrates",

Eloise Knapp Hay argues for the integrity of Conrad's moral commitment, as well as his fundamental optimism, defending him against charges of nihilism. Reacting against three studies of Conrad from the early 1970s,³⁷ Hay defends Conrad's conception of the ego in terms that will become critical to our thesis. She writes that for Conrad:

...the ego acts as a force, conserving what is valuable, and can restrain passions which destroy "hollow men" who seem to be egoless, like Kurtz relying on ready-made ideologies, unforged and uninternalized by the ego.³⁸

Hay sees here a crucial conflict in Conrad between the artificial and the uninternalized on the one hand, and the integrity of the ego on the other. The repository of all moral action and intelligence, the ego is not, according to this conception, fundamentally isolated. It has a history that is radically tied to the history of a community which gives it its configuration, its shape, and its identity. Indeed, for the Conradian hero "education" involves the breaking through of false or illusory ideologies to the truth of the real moral basis for all human action or endeavour. Only if conceived in this way can the ego act as a conserving force, choosing the "simple ideas" of fidelity and love over the false, uninternalized and destructive ideologies; only in this way can the integrity of the inner spirit, the basis of national and community identity, and of sincere culture, withstand the forces of history and material interests.

Conrad's aesthetic thought too is directed towards the artistic revelation of the sincerest moral truths. In his "Preface" to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" he writes:

...art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to

render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal.

In the lines immediately following this passage, Conrad makes clear that he has little interest in the truth of the scientist or the philosopher. Philosophy discovers truth according to deductive logical methodologies, while science follows an empirical methodology grounded in the rules of rational observation. These disciplines, moreover, make their "appeal", i.e. convey to others the truth of their discoveries--whether in moral philosophy, metaphysics, sociology, history, physics, biology, chemistry--through a process of rational explication. As an artist Conrad is not concerned with truth that is discovered in such ways, nor with the kind of "appeal" that it makes. Rather, as the passage cited here suggests, the kind of truth with which Conrad is concerned has to do with the drama of lived human experience. In other words, Conrad is concerned with the truth that reveals itself to the individual psyche in and through experience and which drives it towards some sort of self-realization or final, absolute value. Lived experience is thus the highest concern of the artist, and for Conrad the art of fiction must be concerned with its outward representation in order to arrive at the inner truth it contains:

To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes and in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth--disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment.

The "rescued fragments" of lived human experience, i.e. the events of human life itself, are therefore Conrad's deepest artistic and moral concern. The "stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment" is the "test" of which Moser speaks and which I call the "drama of lived experience." It is here, furthermore, that the oppositions and conflicts which I have been discussing come to a head, and the importance of the "simple" moral truths reveals itself to the human psyche. Thus, through the fictional representation of the outward forms of human events, through their vibrating form and colour, we are able to "see" the deepest moral truths which emerge from the conflicts fundamental to human existence:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see.

The sympathy and compassion which are evoked through the art of fiction, finally, imply a leap of identification on the part of the reader with the protagonists of the events recounted. What the reader is above all asked to "see" is the identification of the events of his own

life with those of the tale: the truth of the tale is the truth of our own lives, of our own existence. The artist is thus able to create through his fiction conditions allowing the reader to participate in the truths which his vision uncovers; and the reader, through identification with the "rescued fragments" which the imagination of the artist brings forth, is able to experience the moral force of the artistic revelation.

I conclude this chapter by summarizing its salient points. I have argued that a consideration of Conrad's political thought, as found primarily in his non-fictional writings, is crucial to an understanding of his art, for his political thought makes evident the degree to which he is committed to a positive view of community. Moreover, the idea of community is fundamental to his fiction, for it is the repository of all sincere moral values, and gives shape and consistency to the ego. Community contrasts with decadent contemporary philosophies and ideologies, primarily political but also cultural, and it is here that Conrad is a "modern" writer, prophesying what modern ideology would bring. His interest, therefore, is to represent this conflict, specifically through the "outward representation" in fictional terms of the particular events in and through which it manifests itself. This intention is not, as some have suggested, Pyrrhonic in nature,³⁹ but rather deeply moral and hopeful. Finally, by awakening our sympathy, Conrad believes that he can re-establish the correct grounds for moral action. We may now consider, through a discussion of the short fictions in A Set of Six, the form and shape these notions take in Conrad's artistic practice.

II

THE NOVELLAS: "GASPAR RUIZ AND "THE DUEL"

"Gaspar Ruiz": The Organic Community Threatened

Critical discussion of "Gaspar Ruiz" is rather sparse, and the very terse consideration it receives in the major studies is not all favourable. Thomas Moser, writing that the decline of Conrad's later period is due to his inability to write about love, calls the story a disaster.¹ Lawrence Graver follows up this line of attack. He argues that Conrad had a light opinion of the subject of love, seeing it as a topic worthy only of popular fiction. Graver writes that in A Set of Six "a new emphasis is placed on love and humour, two elements that Conrad seemed to think were indispensable in popular fiction," while the "conflict between varieties of egoism and altruism, central to his finest stories...becomes peripheral or almost non-existent."² Frederick R. Karl also dismisses the tale, calling it "a hasty magazine piece of minor Conrad,"³ while Wilfred S. Dowden writes in Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style that "of the six, only 'Il Conde' and perhaps 'The Informer' deserve serious consideration."⁴

Other critics more sympathetic to "Gaspar Ruiz" attempt to elucidate its significance. Walter F. Wright provides a brief yet hopeful rendering of the tale in Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad. He concludes his account by stating that "out of revenge and cunning and bloodshed have come love, simplicity, peace."⁵ Paul Wiley in Conrad's

Measure of Man says that in "Gaspar Ruiz" the Andes Mountains "stand apart from a world where bonds between men have fallen apart and where forces potentially good are wasted."⁶ Osborn Andreas in Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-conformity sees Gaspar Ruiz as "an outcast attempting to effect re-entry into the society which has thrust him into outer darkness."⁷ Meanwhile, W.R. Martin, in a short article entitled "Gaspar Ruiz: A Conradian Hero", writes:

["Gaspar Ruiz"] dramatizes a conflict between what Wordsworth in his preface calls "the essential passions of the heart"--that is, filial and local piety, the love of man for a woman and his child, his sense of common humanity--and the "sanguinary imbecilities" of political hatred in war.⁸

Despite the negative attacks on "Gaspar Ruiz" and A Set of Six, I would argue with W.R. Martin "that the story, simple as it is, does not seem to have been understood, and is more interesting than has been supposed."⁹ However, I would take Martin's argument one step further. Rather than being exclusively about love, the story treats the breakdown of the "organic" ties of community in the face of attempts in the modern world to idealize class tension and conflict into an ideology that proves false and destructive. As W.R. Martin points out:

On the one hand we have Ruiz's peasant instincts and strong natural devotions, and his innocence of all feeling for abstract or theoretical ideas and causes, and on the other the insensate inhumanity of idea-ridden Republicans and the pathological hatred of a Royalist, Erminia. To Ruiz the only really compelling loyalties and motives in life derive from what one might call the immediate and fundamental affections

which are essential to life itself, and which must--one need hardly add--be given an inviolable place in the good life that politicians and armies strive to establish.¹⁰

For Gaspar Ruiz, the practice of such strong natural devotions is not possible apart from the community. Thus, if a conflict exists between Ruiz and "idea-ridden" Republicans and Royalists, there exists also a conflict between the forces of history and the community. In "Gaspar Ruiz" it is this conflict above all that leads to the alienation of the individual from the community. The story thus presents on the one hand a very specific image of history, an image in which nations are founded upon necessarily self-contradictory ideals, and on the other an image of the organic community. Conrad's concern, therefore, is to reveal the workings of history, and to show the force of its effects on the individual as well as the community.

From the very first page of the story, Conrad's unknown narrator, a guest at General Santierra's house (69),¹¹ stresses the significance of history in the events recounted. He states that the Chilean revolutionary war, "waged for independence on one side and for dominion on the other, developed in the course of years and the vicissitudes of changing fortune the fierceness and inhumanity of a struggle for life" (3). Moreover, "All feelings of pity and compassion disappeared in the growth of political hatred" (3). The people, meanwhile, are caught between these two warring factions:

And, as is usual in war, the mass of the people, who had the least to gain by the issue, suffered most in their obscure persons and their humble fortunes. (3)

The opening page of the story thus summarizes Conrad's view of history

as a realm of pure struggle for self-assertion in which the obscure, humble people, holding in their hearts the spirit of true community, are caught between two warring world visions.¹²

The figure of General Santierra represents not only the embodiment of the Republican ideal, but also suggests the contradictory nature of modern political ideology. The General's narration of the tale's events betrays his fighting not so much for an ideal of brotherhood as for personal self-assertion, despite his claims to the contrary (26). Avrom Fleishman indeed argues that Conrad "shows both Royalists and Republicans to be dominated by personal motives and prejudices that mar the principles for which they stand."¹³ The General's description of the humble final abode of Erminia's once rich and powerful Royalist family proves highly instructive in this regard:

"I, of course, disregarded the noise of that [Royalist] madman with that feeling of superiority the success of our cause inspired in us Americans. I suppose I really despised him because he was an old Castilian, a Spaniard born, and a Royalist. Those were certainly no reasons to scorn a man; but for centuries Spaniards born had shown their contempt of us Americans, men as well descended as themselves, simply because we were what they called colonists. We had been kept in abasement and made to feel our inferiority in social intercourse. And now it was our turn. It was safe for us patriots to display the same sentiments; and I being a young patriot, son of a patriot, despised that old Spaniard, and despising him I naturally disregarded his abuse, though it was annoying to my feelings. Others perhaps would not have been so forbearing." (23-24)

Immersed for many years in conflicting material and social realities, both Royalists and Republicans seek to justify their differences by idealizing their self-interest into a political cause. General Santierra has thus idealized his lesser social status and his rancor against the Spanish Royalists into a positive and absolute political goal of justice and fraternity. The General's personality, moreover, absorbs this fundamentally self-interested political ideal, thus forgetting the simpler moral guides of honour and humanity, delicacy and fear. Addison C. Bross indeed argues:

The validity of all idealism is called in question when Santierra reluctantly but repeatedly acknowledges that his ideal of human liberty has been betrayed by the passionate vindictiveness of those who fought for it, and even by his own deep feelings.¹⁴

And Santierra himself tells us:

"At such times the heat of passionate convictions passing into hatred, removes the restraints of honour and humanity from many men and of delicacy and fear from some women." (24)

Such an admission reveals that the General's proud republican ideal is at odds with his deeply humane sensibility, and is in large part the cause of Erminia's loss of delicacy and fear as well as his own honour and humanity.

The use of double narrators helps to emphasize this contrast between flawed ideal and native sensibility, and is a key indicator of Conrad's vision. A useful example is the comparison between the unknown narrator's description of young Santierra's reaction to the mistreatment of the thirsty prisoners, and the retired General's reminiscences fifty years later. The unknown narrator states:

Lieutenant Santierra glared with indignation, but hesitated. His handsome oval face, as smooth as a girl's, flushed with the shame of his perplexity. Its nature humiliated his spirit. His hairless upper lip trembled; he seemed on the point of either bursting into a fit of rage or into tears of dismay.

(10)

Working through outward physical description alone, the unknown narrator cannot describe the state of young Santierra's spirit. This is left, rather, to the old General, who, significantly, still vividly recalls the moment:

"I don't remember having been so miserable in my life before or since. The torment of my sensibility was so great that I wished the sergeant to fall dead at my feet, and the stupid soldiers who stared at me to turn into corpses; and even those wretches for whom my entreaties had procured a reprieve I wished dead also, because I could not face them without shame. A mephitic heat like a whiff of air from hell came out of that dark place in which they were confined. Those at the window who had heard what was going on jeered at me in very desperation: one of these fellows, gone mad no doubt, kept on urging me volubly to order the soldiers to fire through the window. His insane loquacity made my heart turn faint. And my feet were like lead. There was no higher officer to whom I could appeal. I had not even the firmness of spirit to simply go away." (11-12)

General Santierra's description betrays his paralysis in the face of the exigencies of his republican ideal. His sensibility and his humanity, in

conflict with his political goals, are the cause of this paralysis, itself a lesson that fifty years of life and experience cannot diminish. The old General has clung to his ideal, but not without reservations, for experience has taught him to be wary of the the potential evil inherent in it. This evil most effectively manifests itself in the image of bondage, despair, and anonymous suffering of the Royalist prisoners of war:

At the crossings of rare streams they were permitted to quench their thirst by lapping hurriedly like dogs. (5)

This image of bondage complements the more comic scene of senseless violence in which Gaspar is conscripted into the Republican army:

There was no reason why Gaspar Ruiz should wish to uphold in his own person the rule of the King of Spain. Neither had he been anxious to exert himself for its subversion. He had joined the side of Independence in an extremely reasonable and natural manner. A band of patriots appeared one morning early, surrounding his father's ranche, spearing the watch-dogs and hamstringing a fat cow all in the twinkling of an eye, to the cries of "Viva la Libertad!" Their officer discoursed of Liberty with enthusiasm and eloquence after a long and refreshing sleep. When they left in the evening, taking with them some of Ruiz, the father's, best horses to replace their own lamed animals, Gaspar Ruiz went away with them, having been invited pressingly to do so by the eloquent officer. (6)

If Santierra embodies the contradictions that stir in the heart of the individual whose personality is determined by an idealized political

cause, then the "eloquent officer" shows us the material consequences of putting that cause into practice. The liberty he promises is nothing more than mere rhetoric serving the self-interest of one political class over another, while the destruction of the economic livelihood of Ruiz's family points to the more significant conflict between a political ideology that promises utopian solutions, and the real needs of the organic community. The slaughter of Ruiz's animals and the destruction of his ranch, therefore, is the ruin of the organic community's economic foundation at the hands of modern utopian political ideologies. What Conrad perhaps wishes to express more than anything else here is the indifference of modern political ideology, and indeed of history, to the real needs of the community and of the individual. This is his point in the scene describing the execution of the prisoners, a scene in which the indifference of political ideology and history is transformed symbolically into an indifference of cosmic proportions:

A red and unclouded sun setting into a purple ocean looked with a fiery stare upon the enormous wall of the Cordilleras, worthy witnesses of [Gaspar's] glorious extinction. But it is inconceivable that it should have seen the ant-like men busy with their absurd and insignificant trials of killing and dying for reasons that, apart from being generally childish, were also imperfectly understood. (19)

The act of humanity performed by Gaspar in the prison--bending the bars of the window in order to get water to the men--represents a truer spirit of liberty and justice than that promised by Republican ideology. Gaspar's act of strength and courage, having neither a political objective nor indeed any real material consequence since it

will not save the men's lives, stands nevertheless on the side of humanity, on the side of real ties of brotherhood and solidarity that have nothing to do with political advantage. Yet the tragic irony lies in the fact that Gaspar's act can never be anything more than the outward expression of an innate goodness, whereas the false ideology of the Republicans will have real material consequences. It will result in political change and transformation, for a new nation will be built upon its foundation. To put it ironically, civilization will benefit from Republican violence. Nations and civilizations, therefore, are created and built in this realm of history, this outward realm of false ideologies. It is a realm as indifferent to the needs of the organic community as it is blindly in conflict with the individual's natural devotions, symbolically expressed through Gaspar's "miracle of strength" in the prison. Indeed, General Santierra's description of this event many years later suggests the tone of a Christian miracle:

"With his feet against the thickness of the wall, and his hairy hands grasping the iron bar, Gaspar sat still. It was an attitude. Nothing happened for a time. And suddenly it dawned upon us that he was straightening his bowed back and contracting his arms. His lips were twisted into a snarl. Next thing we perceived was that the bar of forged iron was being bent slowly by the mightiness of his pull. The sun was beating full upon his cramped, unquivering figure. A shower of sweat-drops burst out of his forehead. Watching the bar grow crooked, I saw a little blood ooze from under his finger-nails. Then he let go. For a moment he remained all huddled up, with a hanging head, looking drowsily into the

upturned palms of his mighty hands. Indeed he seemed to have dozed off. Suddenly he flung himself backwards on the sill, and setting the soles of his bare feet against the other middle bar, he bent that one, too, but in the opposite direction from the first." (15-16)

The meeting of Gaspar and Erminia shifts the focus of the tale's attention from the collective consequences of political ideology to a representation of the individual isolated and alienated from the community. Surviving both the firing squad and a final slash to the neck by Estaban, a sergeant in the Republican army (20), Gaspar finds himself wounded and barely alive at the foot of the door of a Royalist house. It is here that he first encounters Erminia:

Her face was pale and her eyes were very dark; her hair hung down black as ebony against her white cheeks; her lips were full and red. (22)

Both Erminia and Gaspar suffer from the vast upheavals which have befallen Chile. Yet each responds differently to these historical events, and this difference has deep symbolic implications. The above description of Erminia, for example, foreshadows her terrible hunger for revenge, suggesting the "death and devastation" she will bring on behalf of the Royalist cause. This desire for revenge contrasts with Gaspar's simple, almost comical, need for redemption: "I shall show Estaban some day that I am alive yet" (28). Erminia, however, can find no redemption in such a simple view of the world:

"Ah! The sergeant," she muttered, disdainfully.

"Why! He has wounded me with his sword," he protested, bewildered by the contempt that seemed to shine livid on her pale face.

She crushed him with her glance. The power of her will to be understood was so strong that it kindled in him the intelligence of unexpressed things.

"What else did you expect me to do?" he cried, as if suddenly driven to despair. "Have I the power to do more? Am I a general with an army at my back?--miserable sinner that I am to be despised by you at last." (31)

Indeed, General San Martin's later description of Erminia as an "unobtrusive companion" (43) to Gaspar suggests a "secret sharer" motif. Each comes to represent, as a result of the changes that history has brought, opposing psychological and moral states with respect to the community. If Gaspar is that side of the self which requires and seeks harmony with the community in order to act morally, then Erminia represents that part of the self at war with the community.

Like Santierra, Erminia derives her identity from class, social status, wealth, family tradition. The only justification for political action, Erminia believes, is the continued well-being of the organic family, its traditions, its name, and its property (the economic means of its continued prosperity). Yet the revolutionary war removes the possibility of such action, and the earthquake (36) which kills her parents alienates her from all community. The moment of amnesia she suffers following the earthquake (38) symbolizes this final moment of moral disorientation, for her parents' death takes away all hope of a return to society. Thus Erminia's refusal to leave their destroyed home, last tie to the community and indeed to life, comes as no surprise:

"Let us go," he [Gaspar] whispered.

"Never--never from here," she cried out, flinging her arms above her head. (39)

Having lost her place in society, Erminia has lost her moral bearings, and, hence, her self. The real basis of her desire for vengeance, then, is despair, which she expresses through her need to annihilate the community. Thus she wrongly identifies it as the cause of her loss of self and not the forces of history. Her vengeance, therefore, is the antithesis of Gaspar's simple instinctive belief in the redemptive power of love, allied to a simple religious faith:

He pressed her close to him. His face was grave and his footsteps steady. The conflagrations bursting out in the ruins of destroyed villages dotted the plain with red fires; and the sounds of distant lamentations, the cries of Misericordia! Misericordia! made a desolate murmur in his ears. He walked on, solemn and collected, as if carrying something holy, fragile, and precious. (39)

I have already pointed out Osborn Andreas' view that Gaspar is "the outcast attempting to effect re-entry in to the society which has thrust him into outer darkness,"¹⁵ and the letter sent to General Robles following the earthquake presents just such an attempt. In that letter Gaspar asks for the opportunity to retrieve his character (42). Yet Santierra sees the letter as the work of Erminia, whom he describes as a soul that Gaspar has snatched for himself "out of a cataclysm" (42). The letter, therefore, ironically contains a double significance. For Gaspar, it expresses the profoundest truth of his simple soul: the desire for redemption and re-entry into society. For Erminia, however, the letter is the most terrible of lies, hiding nothing less than the desire for the total destruction of the community. Gaspar's sincere desire to be allowed to return from the "outer darkness," his only means

of moral redemption, disguises the most alienating and immoral of acts, and it is here that history and morality clash. History as protagonist, as a force that carries perpetual change continually affecting the political community, has swept away the possibility of all morally good action for Erminia. She is a pathetic character as much for what she has lost, namely her family, as for what she refuses to accept: the simple redemption which Gaspar seeks.

Gaspar's encounter with General San Martin, commander-in-chief of the Republican forces, is also significant for the development of the "secret sharer" theme. In the face of the General's great humanity, Gaspar is unable to answer the young Santierra's friendly enquiries regarding Erminia, for he knows that he is motivated by her vicious "reverse" ideal of vengeance:

"At this friendly question his aspect changed. He looked at me from under his eyebrows with the heavy, dull glance of a guasso--of a peasant. 'Señor teniente,' he said thickly, and as if much cast down, 'do not ask me about the senorita, for I prefer not to think about her at all when I am amongst you.'"

(46)

Gaspar recognizes that his love for Erminia is a contradictory one. It is a vicious attachment which takes him beyond the humane laws of community that General San Martin represents, and threatens the possibility of virtuous action and brotherhood in the world of men. The conflict between Gaspar's love for Erminia on one hand, and his desire for simple virtue on the other, finally comes to a head in the horrific crime committed against the Civil Governor (47). Avrom Fleishman's view that this act of violence points to Gaspar's alienation from the

Republican cause because he has "been denied...the opportunity to identify his egoism with the social community,"¹⁶ fails to point out the extent to which Erminia's hopeless desire for vengeance has corrupted Gaspar's fundamental humanity. She has transferred her own violent desires to his soul, as indeed General Santierra observes: "she poured half of her vengeful soul into the strong clay of that man, as you may pour intoxication, madness, poison into an empty cup" (52). Thus Erminia's violence, much like Feraud's in "The Duel", symbolically represents a moral condition of antagonism toward the community which contrasts with Gaspar's need for redemption.

Carreras' betrayal of Erminia to the Republican forces (54) proves to be the final test of the rupture between Gaspar and society, while the moral complications of his alienation, as well as the intensity of his destructive love for Erminia, increase greatly with the birth of a daughter:

"...'The Pequeña fort; a fort of Palisades! Nothing. I would get her back if she were hidden in the very heart of the mountain.' [Gaspar] amazed me [Santierra] by adding, with an effort: 'I carried her off in my two arms while the earth trembled. And the child at least is mine!'

"Those were bizarre words; but I had no time for wonder." (55)

Gaspar's instinctive love for his child is the basis of true community, and, hence, of moral action. Yet his isolation from society renders his love morally ineffectual, and gives his wild attempt to break down the walls of the Pequeña fort the same symbolic value as his miracle of strength in the prison. Osborn Andreas writes:

The manner of [Gaspar's] death very fittingly symbolizes the entire struggle of his life, which had been one long attempt to relieve his isolation by battering his way in to the company of people from whom he had been excluded.¹⁷

I would add that the siege of the fort more accurately depicts a most profound human contradiction: the desire to rebel against the community while at the same time attempting to seize that which can be had only with the community's sanction.

This contradiction is effectively brought home in the story's closing scenes. Prior to Gaspar's death, the two lovers remain immobile and silent, listening to the sweet prattle of the child:

"...while that child-talk, incomprehensible and sweet to the ear, lasted, those two, the dying man and the kneeling woman, remained silent, looking into each other's eyes, listening to the frail sound. Then the prattle stopped. The child laid its head against the mother's breast and was still." (66)

The child is their greatest responsibility, as well as the source of life's greatest sweetness. Its prattle is both admonition for their destructive strength and defiant will, and reminder of their hopeless alienation. Viewed in this light, Erminia's final pledge of love takes on conflicting meanings:

"She bent down, dry-eyed and in a steady voice: 'On all the earth I have loved nothing but you, Gaspar,' she said.

"His head made a movement. His eyes revived. 'At last!' he sighed out. Then, anxiously, 'But is this true...is this true?'

"'As true as that there is no mercy and justice in this world,' she answered him, passionately. (66)

Addison C. Bross states that Erminia's "speech affirms the validity of her private emotion in the very moment it denies the validity of the human community's standard of justice."¹⁸ This is true, yet we must not underestimate the sincerity of her love for Gaspar, and, hence, the value of her declaration of love as a conscious yet despairing affirmation of the fundamental human need for moral certainty. Her love also reinforces, significantly, her instinctive understanding that such certainty is grounded in the life of the community and in natural ties of devotion and love. Her speech is thus a just condemnation of the political ideology of her time and not merely the denial of the community's standard of justice; her suicide, meanwhile, expresses the despair of never again being able to participate in the life of the community.

It is necessary, before concluding, to comment upon Santierra's reaction to Erminia's suicide. Addison C. Bross argues that what appalls Santierra about the suicide is Erminia's "rejection of the community's moral standard, her complete moral autonomy, which shocks his own need for a communally shared ideal verified and supported by something more than one's own lonely belief. She arouses his fear of ideological emptiness."¹⁹ Moreover, Bross continues, the story "exposes Santierra's pathetic fidelity to a sullied cause and his reluctance to accept in real life the logical consequences of the egalitarian ideal he espouses."²⁰ Yet we must also understand the extent to which Santierra's "sudden and abject fear", his "dread of the abyss" (68), implies a capacity to identify with Erminia's extreme despair. Indeed, immediately following her capture, he is overcome by a feeling of genuine pity:

"She gave me a look at the word 'republicans' which I imagined full of undying hate. But an hour or so afterwards, as we drew up to let the baggage mule go first along a narrow path skirting a precipice, she looked at me with such a white, troubled face that I felt a great pity for her." (67)

Finally, the General understands that the child delivered into his hands is the living symbol of the fundamental value of life's natural ties of love, of the simple ideas of faith, trust, and courage. Even as a grown woman, the child signifies old Santierra's nostalgia for values which history has taken away not only from Erminia and Gaspar but, one suspects with good reason, from the General as well:

"Somehow, señores, though the flame of love has been kindled early in my breast, I have never married. And because of that perhaps the sparks of the sacred fire are not yet extinct here." He struck his broad chest. "Still alive, still alive," he said, with serio-comic emphasis. "But I shall not marry now. She [Gaspar's daughter] is General Santierra's adopted daughter and heiress." (69)

One may doubt the extent to which the General understands that he has been history's instrument in taking away the life of both Erminia and Gaspar. Yet there can be no doubt as to the value of his commitment to their now middle-aged daughter, a commitment symbolizing Conrad's own belief in the need for moral certainty, found not in any transcendent political truth, but in the very life of the community and the moral ties to which it necessarily gives birth.

"The Duel": Community Regained²¹

The longest story in the volume, "The Duel" has received even scantier attention than "Gaspar Ruiz." Leo Gurko calls it "a small anecdote extended to inordinate length,"²² while Frederick Karl calls it "a slight piece of fiction in which Conrad found it possible to reduce excessive honor and faith to ridiculous terms."²³ However, writing in 1914, Richard Curle observes that "as a sustained effort in Conrad's sardonic later style, 'The Duel' is unmatched."²⁴ Paul Kirschner calls it "a superbly controlled tale" that treats the theme of "reconciliation between opposing selves."²⁵ Osborn Andreas intelligently writes that D'Hubert "affirms the positive values of social cohesion, the centripetal as opposed to the centrifugal,"²⁶ while Paul Wiley points out that "the value of loyalty to a bond of feeling as an element of man's essential humanity is set forth positively in... 'The Duel'... where the conflict lies between sentiment and honor and the powers of irrationality and self-regard."²⁷

Richard Curle's observation is highly useful in explicating the significance of "The Duel", especially in light of the later criticism, for it suggests an ironic treatment of character and of situation which nevertheless points to a highly serious moral problem: the role of self-doubt as the necessary means to moral certainty. An analysis of Conrad's brilliantly comic development of the events leading up to the first duel bears out this highly significant marriage between sardonic tone and serious meaning.

The absurd humour and irony of the duel's pretext is readily apparent. Madame de Lionne, Conrad tells us, "was the wife of a high official who had a well-known salon and some pretensions to sensibility

and elegance" (169). Lieutenant D'Hubert, a tall, blond, rational northerner of good family, not having had the opportunity to make her acquaintance, is shocked to find that a man such as Feraud—short, dark, irrational, southern, and from no family at all--has already gained admittance to the house:

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed D'Hubert, ironically. His opinion of Madame de Lionne went down several degrees. Lieut. Feraud did not seem to him specially worthy of attention on the part of a woman with a reputation for sensibility and elegance. (170)

In the early pages of the tale, therefore, Conrad is careful to build up D'Hubert's false prejudice against Feraud, while suggesting the fundamental incongruity of Feraud's presence in any good society. D'Hubert is thus effectively drawn as an appropriate object of Feraud's hatred, while Feraud is presented as a lower-class military man seeking acceptance into the best social circles. It is not unusual, moreover, that D'Hubert is first sent to arrest Feraud for his part in a duel with a Strasbourg native belonging to an influential family (174), not unlike D'Hubert himself. The absence of all remorse for his part in this duel, meanwhile, betrays Feraud's unconscious hatred of the very society he seeks to enter. Despite his obvious wish to improve his social rank, therefore, he nonetheless hates all those who are socially superior to himself. Feraud thus reveals his deep sense of insecurity with respect to his own real social condition. Indeed, his anger is sparked only after D'Hubert sarcastically suggests that the General would be very upset to find him "making eyes at the goddess of the temple" (175), Madame de Lionne. The obvious social slight intended by this statement, if not the real underlying cause for the duel, is certainly the catalyst

which sets it off. Yet it is highly significant that Feraud's anger at this point in the tale is no less absurd than D'Hubert's false sense of superiority, itself a sign of his own insecurity manifesting itself through his reaction to the news of Feraud's acceptance to Madame de Lionne's salon.

The fact that the first duel is fought at Strasbourg, in a private garden no less, points to just such a mockery of class conflict and social tension. The duel is fought here because each combatant is uncertain of his social standing; each is laden with self-doubt because of the apparently unattainable standards set for social acceptance. Indeed, after Feraud has fallen with a blow to the arm, D'Hubert's reflections take on a decidedly "worldly" tone and colour:

Ridicule would be added to the scandal of the story. He imagined the adorned tale making its way through the garrison of the town, through the whole army on the frontier, with every possible distortion of motive and sentiment and circumstance, spreading a doubt upon the sanity of his conduct and the distinction of his taste even to the very ears of his honourable family. It was all very well for that fellow Feraud, who had no connections, no family to speak of, and no quality but courage, which, anyhow, was a matter of course, and possessed by every single trooper in the whole mass of French cavalry. (182)

Avrom Fleishman supports this view of the series of duels, arguing that it "slowly reveals the motivations behind their apparently irrational hostility: competition for promotion, differences of manners, discrimination in their assignments, and, ultimately, the quality of

their loyalty to the egalitarian ideals of the Revolution, as symbolized by Napoleon."²⁸ Yet the initial social and political cause of the duel is transformed into something more than the expression simply of class conflict: it becomes the symbolic means through which the individual is able to transcend falsely egoistic worldly concerns in order to gain a higher moral and spiritual maturity, one in which society is no longer seen as existing so that personal ambition and self-interest can be satisfied, but so that the deepest moral ties can be established and reaffirmed.

To begin, D'Hubert's meeting with his Regimental Colonel following the second duel points to his fear of having gone beyond all law and reason in pursuing the quarrel. The duel's significance is already beginning to acquire a value beyond that of mere conflicting desires for social self-affirmation. This concern has significant bearing on the story's "secret sharer" theme. Paul Wiley, who compares "The Duel" to "The Secret Sharer", writes:

The related themes of chance, law, and initiation make "The Duel" resemble Conrad's more difficult tale, "The Secret Sharer".²⁹

The Colonel, like General San Martin in "Gaspar Ruiz", is the symbol of authority; he alone has complete command over all things pertaining to the regiment. Rather than cede to his authority, however, D'Hubert feels compelled to continue the quarrel. The Colonel, perplexed by the duel and unable to discover its cause, accepts D'Hubert's need to continue it. The Duel, therefore, brings D'Hubert outside the security of the military family (196), outside its law. For D'Hubert the duel will prove to be a necessary means of exorcising self-doubt, of bringing on a more

conscious maturity. Indeed, the tears he sheds while refusing the assistance of the Colonel suggests the fear and terror of coming face to face with an absurdity beyond the rational laws of the community:

But the morbid obstinacy of an invalid possessed him, and at the same time he felt with dismay his eyes filling with water. This trouble seemed too big to handle. A tear fell down the thin, pale cheek of Lieut. D'Hubert. (201)

In the retreat from Moscow, both D'Hubert and Feraud come face to face with history and the truth it brings: the fundamental instability of all things human and worldly. The description of D'Hubert's dress is the concrete image of this truth. It is the sardonic contrast to his "worldly thoughts" following the first duel with Feraud:

His regularly handsome features, now reduced to mere bony lines and fleshless hollows, looked out of a woman's black velvet hood, over which was rammed forcibly a cocked hat picked up under the wheels of an empty army fourgon, which must have contained at one time some general officer's luggage. The sheepskin coat being short for a man of his inches ended very high up, and the skin of his legs, blue with the cold, showed through the tatters of his nether garments. This under the circumstances produced neither jeers nor pity. No one cared how the next man felt or looked. (214)

The experience of the retreat renders all social distinction, all social ambition, senseless. The original ostensible cause for the duel is nullified, and a newer, more truthful cause reveals itself. The hidden motive of self-doubt merges into the new motive of metaphysical doubt in the face of a social and cosmic order which proves to be as faithless and unstable as it now appears vapid and lifeless.

D'Hubert's letter from Pomerania to his sister Léonie is the reasoned, thoughtful response to the horrible experience of the Russian campaign:

...Colonel D'Hubert's letter contained also some philosophical generalities upon the uncertainty of all personal hopes, when bound up entirely with the prestigious fortune of one incomparably great it is true, yet still remaining but a man in his greatness. (216)

D'Hubert senses the impossibility of man's withstanding cosmic instability through attachment to some romantic political ideal or to some great heroic leader. The only valid human means of control over such instability is to be found in the tangible natural ties of family and community. Feraud, meanwhile, "who wrote no letters to anybody, whose father had been in life an illiterate blacksmith, who had no sister or brother, and whom no one desired ardently to pair off for a life of peace with a charming young girl" (216), responds differently. The sterile emptiness of his existence after the war, his profound alienation from all community, contrasts with D'Hubert's sense that only dutiful immersion in all aspects of social life can come closest to staving off misfortune. Feraud, therefore, responds with an irrational and indignant anger against all men while clinging to an irrational faith in Napoleon:

The early buoyancy of [D'Hubert's] belief in the future was destroyed. If the road of glory led through such unforeseen passages, he asked himself--for he was reflective--whether the guide was altogether trustworthy. It was a patriotic sadness, not unmingled with some personal concern, and quite unlike the

unreasoning indignation against men and things nursed by
Colonel Feraud. (215)

In his unreason, Feraud undergoes feelings of terrible self-doubt which bring him close to suicide. His world is shattered; there are no more wars to fight on behalf of the emperor. He is subject to a feeling of cosmic betrayal which foreshadows D'Hubert's sleepless night before the last duel in the forest. Conrad's portrayal of Feraud's inner state suggests the presence of a universal psychological realm of violent emptiness and dull rage against a meaningless universe that is the result of alienation from all community. Conrad makes Feraud's soul into the symbol of this abyss:

[Feraud]...imagined his soul to be crushed by grief. He suffered from quickly succeeding impulses to weep, to howl, to bite his fists till blood came, to spend days on his bed with his head thrust under the pillow; but these arose from sheer ennui, from the anguish of an immense, indescribable, inconceivable boredom. His mental inability to grasp the hopeless nature of his case as a whole saved him from suicide. He never even thought of it once. He thought of nothing. But his appetite abandoned him, and the difficulty he experienced to express the overwhelming nature of his feelings (the most furious swearing could do no justice to it) induced gradually a habit of silence--a sort of death to a southern temperament. (231)

The secret sharer motif is more fully crystallized when D'Hubert meets the Duke of Otranto. If Feraud is alienated from and hostile to all community, while his absurd faith in the emperor betrays the abyss

that is his existence, then D'Hubert's encounter with the Duke shakes his faith in all order, let alone the new Royalist order that follows upon Napoleon's decline. His reaction to the Duke—a figure that recalls Archbold, master of the Sephora, from "The Secret Sharer"—is one of nausea (229). D'Hubert thus remains as isolated as Feraud. The two combatants, opposites in so many ways, share much between them.

D'Hubert's betrothed, Adèle, is decent, upstanding, moral, and of good family; she is quiet, serious. These qualities not only suit D'Hubert's sensibility, they also offer him the opportunity to recover his belief in society, in the possibility of community. Adèle is no abyss of irrational passion, as is Feraud. She is not the sign of imminent death, of instability, of mortal danger. She is, rather, the sunlight of true community, of parents, of sister, of childhood memories regained, of continuity: she is the justification for all the days that D'Hubert has lived, all the days that he remembers. History has in the meantime brought war, death, destruction; it has taught D'Hubert the tenuousness of all life, the vanity of all ambition. The duel has taken him beyond the stabilizing laws of the military community. Adèle is the return out of this abyss back to life, to stability, to peace. This is the point of the opening paragraph of the tale's last part:

No man succeeds in everything he undertakes. In that sense we are all failures. The great point is not to fail in ordering and sustaining the effort of our life. In this matter vanity is what leads us astray. It hurries us into situations from which we must come out damaged; whereas pride is our safeguard, by the reserve it imposes on the choice of our endeavour as much as by the virtue of its sustaining power.

(233-234)

And later in the same part:

General D'Hubert was not the man to be satisfied merely with the woman and the fortune--when it came to the point. His pride (and pride aims always at true success) would be satisfied with nothing short of love. But as true pride excludes vanity, he could not imagine any reason why this mysterious creature with deep and brilliant eyes of a violet colour should have any feeling for him warmer than indifference. (234-235)

Vanity, a form of egoism, is the original cause of the duel; it lies below, together with instability, danger, violence, ambition, loss. It is everything that the duel represents. Pride, representing immersion in an honourable tradition, stands above as a moral guide promising continuity and stability. D'Hubert must move upward, away from the one and toward the other. Feraud is to D'Hubert what the experience of the inferno is to Dante. Without the experience of Feraud's irrational vanity, there is for D'Hubert no possibility of any real knowledge or consciousness of good and evil, and hence of moral certainty.

The seconds sent by Feraud to meet D'Hubert before the final duel, therefore, are infernal figures; they have come up from the abyss of Feraud's ferocious hostility to society, his violent alienation and emptiness. One is missing part of his nose, the other an eye:

...they stood before [D'Hubert] lank and straight, as though they had been shot up with a snap through a trap door in the ground. Only four-and-twenty months ago the masters of Europe, they had already the air of antique ghosts, they seemed less substantial in their faded coats than their narrow shadows

falling so black across the white road: the military and grotesque shadows of twenty years of war and conquests. They had an outlandish appearance of two imperturbable bonzes of the religion of the sword. And General D'Hubert, also one of the ex-masters of Europe, laughed at these serious phantoms standing in his way. (238-239)

The seconds represent the possibility of spiritual death, the loss of all community, and arouse in General D'Hubert the deepest, most consciously felt self-doubt that he has as yet suffered:

That night, General D'Hubert stretched out on his back with his hands over his eyes, or lying on his breast with his face buried in a cushion, made the full pilgrimage of emotions. Nauseating disgust at the absurdity of the situation, doubt of his own fitness to conduct his existence, and mistrust of his best sentiments.... (247)

D'Hubert's victory over Feraud the next day marks the final expulsion of self-doubt from his soul, and affirms the value of his best sentiments. It is the victory, finally, of maturity over despair, of life over death:

General D'Hubert had the second of leisure necessary to remember that he had dreaded death not as a man, but as a lover; not as a danger, but as a rival; not as a foe to life, but as an obstacle to marriage. And behold! there was the rival defeated!--utterly defeated, crushed, done for! (256-7)

Love and marriage stand not on the side of life as mere physical existence, but on the side of life as an inner condition in which the erotic impulse is psychologically, as well as spiritually, affirmed by

the individual, and morally condoned by the community. Mere physical existence can no longer have any value for D'Hubert, for he learns that love and marriage, signs of his immersion in the life of the community, have the power to transcend time and thus defeat death.³⁰

Of all the tales in A Set of Six only "The Duel" has the structure of comedy, ending with a happy marriage and the birth of a child--Charles Henri Armand (265). Indeed, not even the quarrel between D'Hubert and Feraud ends in death. The message, therefore, is not one of tragic finality; the tale is not about the irreconcilable antagonism between two conflicting forces. Yet the story's being played out as a comedy does not deny the seriousness of its message: maturity involves the spiritual victory over the abyss of death and instability which vanity and an improper conception of the human community bring. Maturity thus leads both to a new sense of duty toward, and hence harmony with, the community, as well as to a new spiritual state in which fear of death is defeated and consciousness of time transcended. And the duel plays a crucial role in this, for without it D'Hubert could not achieve the state of maturity and moral certainty he does: hearing about the duel from her uncle, Le Chevalier de Valmassigue, Adèle, fearing for D'Hubert's life, comes running two miles to the house of Léonie. Her concern for his life is the confirmation of the love that D'Hubert had sought to win:

"My dear, I had the right to blow his brains out; but as I didn't, we can't let him starve. He has lost his pension and he is utterly incapable of doing anything in the world for himself. We must take care of him, secretly, to the end of his days. Don't I owe him the most ecstatic moment of my life?..."

Ha! ha! ha! Over the fields, two miles, running all the way! I couldn't believe my ears!...But for his stupid ferocity, it would have taken me two years to find you out. It's extraordinary how in one way or another this man has managed to fasten himself on my deeper feelings." (266)

The certainty of Adèle's love carries with it the certainty of a necessary moral law, and the conflict between the duellists confirms the need for moral certainty over the terror of a life void of such certainty. And although Conrad's message may not appear political, it is in reality profoundly so. For if his intention is to convey the symbolic representation of the individual human soul and its moral and psychological requirements, he does so highly conscious of the individual's need to participate in the life of the community. Finally, as we saw in "Gaspar Ruiz", not only is the individual soul unable to live without moral certainty, but such certainty itself is to be found only in the ties of community, in the ties and obligations each of us has to one another.

III

"THE BRUTE" AND "AN ANARCHIST": THE FAILURE OF UTOPIA

"The Brute": Symbol of the Modern Utopia Failed

The terror of instability and self-doubt which victimized D'Hubert and Feraud in "The Duel" is symbolized by the ship the Apse Family in "The Brute". This ship was to be "like the others, only she was to be still stronger, still safer, still more roomy and comfortable" (110). The Apse Family, built by a shipbuilding family named Apse and meant to withstand instability and chance at sea, comes to represent the human desire for order. Ned, a former sailor aboard the Apse Family, recounts the ship's adventures. He describes her in this way:

She was unaccountable. If she wasn't mad, then she was the most evil-minded, underhand, savage brute that ever went afloat" (112).

The ship thus acquires a conscious malevolence, becoming the symbol of a force in the universe which is out to destroy order in the human world, as well as man's hopes of a future happiness within that order, and to bring death.

Osborn Andreas observes that in this tale "everything external to the person, not only society but even brute matter itself, the material of which all physical objects are composed, is felt to be evil, hostile, and malevolent."¹ Andreas goes on to argue that "by extension, the enmity between the person and society is conceived to

subsist between the person and the material constitution of the earth, inanimate nature itself."² Addison C. Bross, moreover, argues that the story "bears witness to the truth that the phenomenal world is elusive."³ Both these readings, however, fail to take into account the fact that this tale is more about the kind of human attempt made to control the phenomenal world, than about that phenomenal world itself. Leo Gurko, in Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile, follows a more useful line of reasoning in which he sees the Apse Family as ironic symbol. In a chapter entitled "The Conradian Centaur", Gurko points out that the significance of "The Brute" is to underline in reverse Conrad's vision of the ship as a man-boat, the Conradian version of the Centaur myth. Gurko writes that in Conrad's great sea stories "the ship is at once the shield and the vessel by which its cargo of humanity survives in and even occasionally triumphs over a hostile and dangerous world."⁴ In "The Brute", Gurko argues, Conrad reverses this view of the ship, presenting it rather as a malevolent force. Yet if we take the ship to represent human society and civilization, then the evil it stands for is to be found as much in that society as in the phenomenal world: the Apse Family symbolizes not so much the evil of instability in the phenomenal world as it does the failed attempt by modern society to control that fundamental instability through its excessive concern for material well-being. The Apse Family, therefore, reflects not only man's failure to control nature, protect himself against chance, plan for the future, and defeat death, but also the end of the organic community in the modern world.

The love between the narrator's elder brother, Charley, and the niece of the ship's captain, Maggie Colchester, represents the ties of

community, and the hope for a stable future. Ned indeed remembers his brother Charley "as the finest fellow in the world....No better officer ever walked the deck of a merchant ship....He was a fine, strong, upstanding, sun-tanned, young fellow, with his brown hair curling a little, and an eye like a hawk" (118). He describes Maggie as "a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the best sort," with "a beautiful colour, and a deuce of a lot of fair hair" (119). They are figures from comedy; both are in harmony with the community, and their love promises its renewal. Yet the contrast between that promise and the menace which the ship conceals is suggested by Ned himself when he describes Maggie, the ship's most significant victim, as "hopping all over that ship in her yachting skirt and a red tam o' shanter like a bright bird on a dead black tree" (121). At the moment of Charley's greatest confidence that the ship has not taken any life at least for one voyage, and when everyone least expects it--in the Thames River itself--the ship takes an unlikely victim, Maggie:

"I heard a horrid, scraping sound, and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to clasp her close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by heavy ringing blows that shook the ship from stem to stern--because the ring stopper held!" (124)

Unlike "The Duel", then, where the terror of self-doubt, instability and death lead to the affirmation of Adele's love for D'Hubert, and hence to moral certainty, here love itself is the ship's victim. And whereas D'Hubert finds community, Charley finds only near madness and

alienation, never returning to England and ending his days in the command of "a smart steamer on the China coast" (126).

Yet if the ship destroys that love which promises the renewal of the community, so illicit love, ironically, is responsible for the ship's destruction. Following the death of Maggie, Old Colchester her uncle gives up command of the ship. In order to prevent scandal, the Apse family immediately selects a new captain who brings with him a second mate named Wilmot:

"A harum-scarum fellow, and pretending to a great scorn for all the girls. The fact is he was really timid. But let only one of them do as much as lift a finger in encouragement, and there was nothing that could hold the beggar. As apprentice, once, he deserted abroad after a petticoat, and would have gone to the dogs then, if his skipper hadn't taken the trouble to find him and lug him by the ears out of some house of perdition or other." (127)

On board is a green-eyed governess or nurse (127) who, unable to sleep one night off the Cape of South Africa, lures Wilmot into the chart room while he is on watch:

"I suppose when she whispered to Wilmot it was as if somebody had struck a match in the fellow's brain. I don't know how it was they had got so very thick. I fancy he had met her ashore a few times before." (129)

The result is the destruction of the Apse Family:

"Her time had come--the hour, the man, the black night, the treacherous gust of wind--the right woman to put an end to her. The brute deserved nothing better. Strange are the instruments of Providence. There's a sort of poetical

justice---." (130)

This illicit love does not, as the criticism would have it, represent simply the evil, destructive force against which all human attempts to create stability and order fail. The point Conrad wishes to make, rather, is a more hopeful one: this unstabilizing force will wreak its havoc if human society behaves irresponsibly and allows it to do so. The causes and consequences of this irresponsibility are conveyed subtly by Conrad through his characterization of two figures: Mrs. Colchester, the captain's wife, and old Stonor, the senior pilot.

Addison C. Bross writes that Mrs. Colchester alone likes the Apse Family "because it affords her a luxurious home...She herself attains something of the ship's obscurely malevolent nature, for she continually defends its reputation under a guise of scoffing at superstition, all the while, perhaps, secretly condoning the murders she knows of for the sake of her comfort. She is also linked to the ship in appearance: she struts about the deck with a heavy gold cord flopping about her bosom as a ship's cable hangs from its prow."⁵ Direct quotation supports Bross's description of Mrs. Colchester as a "pretentious" woman,⁶ selfish and insensitive to the dangers that the ship poses for others:

You should have heard her snapping out: 'Rubbish!' or 'Stuff and nonsense!' I dare say she knew when she was well off. They had no children, and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap hotel or boarding-house. I daresay she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew very well she couldn't gain by any change. And, moreover, Colchester, though a

first-rate man, was not what you may call in his first youth, and, perhaps, she may have thought that he wouldn't be able to get hold of another (as she used to say) so easily. Anyhow, for one reason or another, it was 'Rubbish' and 'Stuff and nonsense' for the good lady. I overheard once young Mr. Apse himself say to her confidentially: 'I assure you, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself.' 'Oh,' says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, 'if one took notice of all the silly talk,' and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. 'It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you,' says she." (108)

Symbolically, the ship represents the modern desire for a perfection of utopian dimensions which can never be met: "She was to be 2,000 tons register, or a little over; no less on any account. But see what happens. When they came to measure her she turned out 1,999 tons and a fraction" (111). The ship thus stands for the necessary failure inherent in any attempt to find utopian or ideal solutions to the problems of instability and chance. Mrs. Colchester's use of the ship to support her egotistical self-interest, moreover, animates its potential evil. Her irresponsible egoism is the real cause for the ship's murderous activity, and the evil which exists in the universe manifests itself above all through this egoism. Evil, then, does not reside in the chance circumstances of the phenomenal world, as Bross might have it, but in human moral irresponsibility. The ship is therefore the symbol of human civilization obsessed with a material utopia that is no more than material selfishness--a selfishness, by the way, which recalls the

forces of history at work in "Gaspar Ruiz" to destroy the basis of the organic community. By failing to foster an ethic of selfless duty to others, and by favouring an excessive concern for material well-being rather than the life of the inner spirit, Mrs. Colchester and the Apses allow the ship to become the agent through which the possibility of true community is destroyed.⁷

The figure of Mr. Stonor represents a truer stability founded upon inner moral strength, as well as selfless nobility of soul, and not concern for selfish material well-being. Consider the narrator's description of him upon their meeting at the Three Crows:

I did not nod to him. He was too big to be nodded to in that parlour. He was a senior Trinity pilot and condescended to take his turn in the cutter only during the summer months. He had been many times in charge of Royal yachts in and out of Port Victoria. Besides, it's no use nodding to a monument. And he was like one. He didn't speak, he didn't budge. He just sat there, holding his handsome old head up, immovable, and almost bigger than life. It was extremely fine. (106)

The pilot Stonor's control of the ship represents the domination of the body and the material appetites by human reason. He thus possesses the kind of moral restraint necessary to deal with the fundamental instability of the phenomenal world. Yet it is significant that he leaves the tavern prior to Ned's recounting the terrible destructive malevolence of the Apse Family: his absence is therefore a symbolic cause of the ship's being out of human control. Importantly, the description of his departure recalls the great men of the past who, like Singleton in The Nigger of the "Narcissus", are in harmony with the cosmos and in control of their simple yet honest destinies:

At once the senior pilot arose in his mighty bulk and began to struggle into his coat, with awe-inspiring upheavals. The stranger [Ned] and I hurried impulsively to his assistance, and directly we laid our hands on him he became perfectly quiescent. We had to raise our arms very high, and to make efforts. It was like caparisoning a docile elephant. With a "Thanks, Gentlemen," he dived under and squeezed himself through the door in a great hurry. (109)

Stonor belongs with Singleton to that family of absent men who "appeared bigger, colossal, very old; old as Father Time himself," yet who are only the children of time, the lonely relics of "a devoured and forgotten generation" (The Nigger of the "Narcissus", 24). Jermyn,⁸ the "mere North Sea pilot" (109) who stays behind to hear Ned's tale, belongs rather to the family of its successors, "the grown-up children of a discontented earth" (The Nigger of the "Narcissus", 25). The story's unknown narrator, perhaps inadvertently, observes this radical difference: "Mr. Stonor's presence reduced poor old Jermyn to a mere shabby wisp of a man, and made the talkative stranger in tweeds on the hearthrug look absurdly boyish" (106). If Stonor suggests the selfless heroism of Singleton, then the wispy Jermyn perhaps represents the potential victim or dupe of Mrs. Colchester, symbolic leader of a destructive material self-interest at odds with Stonor's selfless ideal. The symbolic absence of Stonor, therefore, is as much linked to the brute's malevolence as is Mrs. Colchester's selfishness.

The illicit love of Wilmot and the governess therefore is not so much the expression of a malevolent force in the universe as it is the product of the absence of an ideal of duty forming the basis of a true

community, one which the love of Maggie and Charley represents. Thus, rather than demonstrating the impossibility of man's controlling his destiny in the face of an elusive phenomenal world, the tale suggests the exact opposite: that man creates his own tragedy through his own blind and selfish actions. "The Brute", then, is not about human despair over not being able to control an elusive phenomenal world, but about the need for human responsibility in the face of that fundamental elusiveness.

"An Anarchist": The Destruction of the Organic Self

This tale has garnered somewhat greater attention than the previous stories considered. Although critics such as Frederick Karl⁹ and Lawrence Graver¹⁰ provide negative judgments of "An Anarchist", others point out the tale's significance. Osborn Andreas observes that Paul the anarchist "is willing to accept solitude in order to secure the freedom necessary to happiness," and that he had "learned the rock-bottom secret to happiness, but in so doing he had had to sacrifice forever all association with humankind."¹¹ Paul Kirschner, meanwhile, points out the parallel between Anatole France's tale "Cranquebille" and Conrad's short story: "'An Anarchist' has been compared to Cranquebille, because, like Anatole France's street vendor, Conrad's young workman is ironically destroyed by society."¹² Avrom Fleishman, moreover, argues that the moral viciousness of bourgeois society is the subject of "An Anarchist",¹³ while Addison C. Bross calls Harry Gee, manager with B.O.S. Ltd., the "epitome of a hypocritical society."¹⁴ These readings are useful in helping to point the way to an accurate interpretation of the tale, for they comment upon the significant fracture between Paul

and society. Yet none does justice to the underlying social and political problem which the tale seeks to reveal as the true cause of that fracture. They fail to point out the specific characteristic of modern society which Conrad sees as the effective cause of Paul's demise: the extent to which the modern world is inundated with and driven by the artificial in all its aspects, and specifically in its attempts to create a false moral and aesthetic sensibility couched in utopian or ideal terms.

Although conceding that "in moral terms...[B.O.S. Ltd.] stands behind the brutal manager who keeps Paul in virtual slavery and who justifies his actions by his regard for his employer's profits," Avrom Fleishman argues that there is no justification in the plot for the tale's satiric introduction.¹⁵ Doubtless, he is correct in stressing the moral implications of the company's presence in the tale, yet the full explication of the significance of its role goes much further than this. The company is indeed a central unifying symbol of the tale, for it represents above all the artificial nature of modern economic endeavour:

B.O.S. Bos. You have seen the three magic letters on the advertisement pages of magazines and newspapers, in the windows of provision merchants, and on calendars for next year you receive by post in the month of November. They scatter pamphlets also, written in a sickly enthusiastic style and in several languages, giving statistics of slaughter and bloodshed enough to make a Turk faint. The "art" illustrating that "literature" represents in vivid and shining colours a large and enraged black bull stamping upon a yellow snake

writhing in emerald-green grass, with a cobalt-blue sky for background. It is atrocious and it is an allegory. The snake symbolizes disease, weakness--perhaps mere hunger, which last is the chronic disease of the majority of mankind. Of course everybody knows the B.O.S. Ltd., with its unrivalled products: Vinobos, Jellybos, and the latest unequalled perfection, Tribos, whose nourishment is offered to you not only highly concentrated, but already half digested. Such apparently is the love that Limited Company bears to its fellowmen--even as the love of the father and mother penguin for their hungry fledglings. (135)

This is the opening satiric monologue of the story's lepidopterist/narrator. It is a sharp attack upon the close link between a facile, artificially created moral law and the "aesthetic" which is the external projection and material justification of that law. Both of these aspects of the modern endeavour must be discussed here, for they have great bearing on the tale's significance.

The "art" and "literature" of advertising is the means through which modern commercial culture conveys its aesthetic. The story's narrator is sensitive and intelligent enough to see that such commercial "art" and "literature" is directed toward the creation of an artificial "aesthetic of violence." Indeed, he points out, it seeks to create an ideal image of an ideal violence: the enraged bull stamping upon the yellow snake before a cobalt-blue sky stands as the perfect image of a morally justified anger and violence. Commercial advertising, the narrator subtly points out, understands clearly that the outward expression of violence is one of the most powerful means of moral

justification. The idea of a just rage against a blatant enemy is one of the most powerful tools at B.O.S. Ltd.'s disposal as vindication for its activities. As we shall see, violence becomes a central concern of "An Anarchist", for its hero Paul must resort to it in order to gain a freedom which ironically mocks that offered by B.O.S. Ltd.

The attack against the false moral concepts which lie behind such an absurd yet powerfully effective aesthetic is rather more subtle. Most obviously, there exists here a facile dichotomy of good versus evil in which B.O.S. Ltd. is the agent of good doing battle against that evil "chronic disease of the majority of mankind", hunger. Yet such a simplistic moral notion contains a highly significant corollary which the narrator implicitly satirizes: that the solution to problems of a fundamentally moral and political nature is to be found in the mass production of artificial products. This capitalist notion, moreover, suggests that the manufacture of such products will liberate mankind from the need to think and behave morally with respect to such serious questions as hunger, scarcity, injustice, political tyranny. Indeed, the narrator's satire ironically implies not only that modern technological innovation will render serious moral questions superfluous, but life in all its aspects will become simpler--even the digestion of food. Neither does such satire fail to point out the more serious moral claim made by modern capitalism: if it is able to defeat the evil of hunger, then it is everyone's moral duty to be committed to its success. For Conrad, such an absurd claim to duty is nothing more than the attempt to create a false morality, one which threatens the more significant ties of brotherhood, family, community, and solidarity--values which the father and mother penguin uphold! Hence, B.O.S. Ltd. in reality does nothing

more than exploit the worst of mankind's evils in order to justify an activity that is not only oppressive and violent, but also likely to exacerbate the very "disease" it claims to eliminate. "An Anarchist" thus attacks the artificially created sense of duty that compels the fundamentally false moral attachment of Harry Gee to B.O.S. Ltd: not only is the company in business to produce artificial consumer goods for mass distribution, it is also in business to produce an artificial moral sensibility which finds a ready-made, facile means of justification and rationalization in the highly simplistic law of monetary profit at all costs.

B.O.S. Ltd. is thus the modern bourgeois symbol of an ideal economic and social organization, one which manufactures its own false morality alongside its products. The kind of morality that it promotes is one which does not pay heed to organic ties of community, brotherhood and friendship, a morality in which obligation to an impersonal economic entity replaces the implicit moral principles that natural ties bring--fidelity, trust, love. Economic well-being too comes to depend almost exclusively upon allegiance to an impersonal, absent corporation. Organic ties to the community can never again provide the basis for economic order and prosperity. Indeed, there is no indication that Harry Gee, foreman of the Marañon cattle estate of the B.O.S. Ltd. (136) and living embodiment of the new moral sensibility, has any family of his own, or ties of any sort to a community providing the basis for a way of life. He is as alone and isolated as Paul the anarchist, and equally as dispossessed. The consequences of such political, economic and social conditions has far-reaching consequences for the individual moral psyche, which we must now consider.

If "Gaspar Ruiz" is about the shattering of the organic community by the forces of modern political ideology and the impossibility of moral certainty as a result of its demise, then "An Anarchist" is about the shattering of the individual "organic" personality by the same forces. Personality or self is determined fundamentally by two things: culture, which includes family, community, native tradition; and natural sensibility. In "Gaspar Ruiz" the cultural dimension of personality is destroyed: the organic community. In "An Anarchist" natural sensibility is under attack by the artificial moral obligations which modern society seeks to impose upon the individual. The conflict between the narrator and Harry Gee represents precisely this tension between natural sensibility, crucial to the inner life of the spirit, and the domination of self in modern society by the material interests that Harry Gee and B.O.S. Ltd. represent:

"Ha, ha, ha,!--a desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, Ha, ha!"

This was the tone in which Mr. Harry Gee, the manager of the cattle station, alluded to my pursuits. He seemed to consider me the greatest absurdity in the world. On the other hand, the B.O.S. Co., Ltd., represented to him the acme of the nineteenth century's achievement. (137)

The narrator's interest in butterflies, reminding us by the way of Stein's interest in entomology in Lord Jim, shows his respect and concern for nature, which goes hand-in-hand with his interest in Paul: not only is he concerned with the nature of living things, he also understands the nature of the human soul. He possesses, moreover, an implicit understanding of the value of the organic self and the life of the inner spirit in the creation of true and sincere moral attachments.

This contrasts with the stake that B.O.S. Ltd. has in subjecting nature to artificial processes of transformation and change for profit. Indeed Paul himself, when first introduced, is described as a victim of this obsession with transforming the stuff of nature to artificial ends:

The man's head and shoulders emerged above the deck, over which were scattered various tools of his trade and a few pieces of machinery. He was doing some repairs to the engines. At the sound of our footsteps he raised anxiously a grimy face with a pointed chin and a tiny fair moustache. What could be seen of his delicate features under the black smudges appeared to me wasted and livid in the greenish shade of the enormous tree spreading its foliage over the launch moored close to the bank. (138)

...

His eyes had a liquid softness and his teeth flashed dazzlingly white between his thin, drooping lips. (139)

Paul's delicate features and soft eyes represent his sincere, retiring nature, his warm-hearted and weak-headed (161) sensibility, now soiled and dirty, transformed into something not in keeping with his nature. He wears the mask of modern economic and industrial exploitation, as well as the mask of false personality forced upon him by modern political and economic ideology in the form of label. Paul's real, organic personality has been broken and subsumed under the artificial personalities that the modern world creates and seeks to impose upon the individual, reducing him to the level of the subhuman --"I call him Crocodile because he lives half in, half out of the creek. Amphibious--see? There's nothing else amphibious living on the island

except crocodiles; so he must belong to the species--eh?" says Harry Gee (139). The artificial duty Harry owes B.O.S. Ltd., moreover, is the basis of Paul's imprisonment on the cattle estate. Using the label "anarchist" to keep him prisoner on the island, Harry Gee argues: "I gave him the name because it suited me to label him in that way. It's good for the company" (139-140). The freedom from the "disease" of hunger promised by the new capitalist utopia thus leads to the economic enslavement of the weak, the simple, the dispossessed.

The false political utopia promised by the anarchists parallels the false economic one advertised by the capitalists. Indeed, their political ideology damages Paul in much the same way as does the false morality of the business corporation: a utopian ideology committed to a grand revolution promising a great society of brotherhood and freedom succeeds only in bringing about the moral, psychological and spiritual enslavement of Paul. While celebrating his twenty-fifth birthday, he is tricked by his anarchist friends into shouting political slogans while drunk. He soon finds himself in jail. Unable to find work after his release from prison because of his now sullied reputation (148), he is forced into a life of crime by the anarchists. Caught between them and the police--"It was an impossible existence! Watched by the police, watched by the comrades, I did not belong to myself any more!" (149)--Paul feels that he has lost his self. His thoughts thus turn to violence as the only means of escape. Forced on one occasion to participate in a bank robbery by the anarchists, much in the same manner as he is forced to work for B.O.S. Ltd., he considers throwing himself into the Seine:

"After the meeting at which the affair was arranged a trusty

comrade did not leave me an inch. I had not dared to protest; I was afraid of being done away with quietly in that room; only, as we were walking together I wondered whether it would not be better for me to throw myself suddenly into the Seine. But while I was turning it over in my mind we had crossed the bridge, and afterwards I had not the opportunity." (150)

This scene is highly significant because it describes accurately Paul's psychological state, as well as the extent to which his moral psyche, like Erminia's, has become distorted. He comes to see violence as the only means to freedom from the false selves which the labels of others have imposed upon him.

The violent solution Paul wishes to apply to his own situation during the Paris bank-robbery--suicide--is interestingly transferred to the wife of the head warder during the prisoner's mutiny on St. Joseph's Island. Having been sent there for his part in the attempted robbery in Paris, Paul refuses to participate in the mutiny: "I knew what was going to be done, of course. But why should I kill these warders? I had nothing against them. But I was afraid of the others. Whatever happened, I could not escape from them. I sat alone on the stump of a tree with my head in my hands, sick at heart at the thought of a freedom that could be nothing but a mockery to me" (152). When Paul comes across the head warder's wife as she is ringing the bell to alert the troops stationed on the nearby Ile Royale that a mutiny is taking place, his thoughts turn to death as the only means of escape for both of them:

"She was a comely woman of thirty--no more. I thought to myself, 'All that's no good on a night like this.' And I made up my mind that if a body of my fellow-convicts came down the

pier--which was sure to happen soon--I would shoot her through the head before I shot myself. I knew the 'comrades' well."

(153-154)

Paul's resorting to violence as the means of escape from his material condition of enslavement reflects the extreme distortion of his moral, psychological and spiritual condition, which reaches its climax with the murder of the two anarchists, Mafie and Simon, while on the boat escaping from the French penal colony. The exhilaration Paul feels knowing he has them at his mercy because he is carrying a gun possesses a powerfully eerie feeling of perversity (156). The need for freedom from the artificial oppression under which he has suffered erupts in a scene of terrible violence which is indeed a stark mockery of the freedom that modern capitalism and political ideology promise. And any sense of victory and justice which the reader senses in Paul's killing the "Ruffian Mafie" (159) is quickly cancelled by his murder of Simon:

"[Simon] slipped off the thwart on to his knees and raised his clasped hands before his face in an attitude of supplication. 'Mercy,' he whispered, faintly. 'Mercy for me!--comrade.'

"'Ah, comrade,' I said, in a low tone. 'Yes, comrade, of course. Well, then, shout Vive l'anarchie.'

"He flung up his arms, his face up to the sky and his mouth wide open in a great yell of despair. 'Vive l'anarchie!
Vive----'

"He collapsed all in a heap, with a bullet through his head." (159)

If violence has become for Paul the only valid means of expunging evil

and regaining freedom, then the point here is to suggest the extreme degree of moral debasement in his feeling of liberation, and to remind us, ironically, of the ideal violence of B.O.S. Ltd. as well as that of the anarchists: the violence used to oppress and imprison Paul becomes the means through which he gains a corrupt freedom from such oppression, a freedom not without its terrible price of guilt and psychological pain. This is Conrad's point in calling "An Anarchist" a desperate tale:

He paced to and fro rapidly, till at last he broke into a run; his arms went like a windmill and his ejaculations became very much like raving. The burden of them was that he "denied nothing, nothing!" I could only let him go on, and sat out of his way, repeating, "Calmez vous, Calmez vous," at intervals, till his agitation exhausted itself.

I must confess, too, that I remained there long after he had crawled under his mosquito-net. He had entreated me not to leave him; so, as one sits up with a nervous child, I sat up with him--in the name of humanity--till he fell asleep. (160)

The perverse nature of the freedom Paul wins is reinforced at the very end of the tale, for he never regains the self that modern society has taken away from him, nor the simple life he would have lived had he been left alone:

...I tried to induce him to leave the launch moored where she was and follow me to Europe there and then. It would have been delightful to think of the excellent manager's surprise and disgust at the poor fellow's escape. But he refused with unconquerable obstinacy!

"Surely you don't mean to live always here!" I cried. He shook his head.

"I shall die here," he said. Then added moodily, "Away from them."

Sometimes I think of him lying open-eyed on his horseman's gear in the low shed full of tools and scraps of iron--the anarchist slave of the Marañon estate, waiting with resignation for that sleep which "fled" from him, as he used to say, in such an unaccountable manner. (161)

Like Erminia and Gaspar, then, Paul has lost his life because he has lost a part of his natural, organic self; he has lost the future of work and marriage which that self promised. The narrator's claim that Paul "was much more of an anarchist than he confessed to me or himself" (160) is not intended to make Paul the object of the tale's satire. It is directed rather at "them," namely those who sought to make him into that which he would never become. The forces at work in the modern world, the business corporation and its natural antagonist the anarchist movement, present moral visions far beyond the "measure of man," to use Paul Wiley's phrase. Because these forces command moral obligations which the individual is unable to keep, those moral principles which exist on a human scale are rendered psychologically impracticable and inoperable. It would not be too far fetched, therefore, to conclude by saying that the desperate state of alienation in which Paul in the end finds himself, and which prevents him from returning to Europe, is the result of his having lost the capacity to exercise a most precious moral sentiment existing within man's natural measure: mercy.

IV

"THE INFORMER" AND "IL CONDE": THE COMMUNITY BETRAYED

"The Informer": The Betrayal of Life

This tale and "Il Conde" are the best in A Set of Six. These stories more than the others suggest the degree to which in Conrad the political and the moral, the aesthetic and the psychological, merge and cannot be separated. All these elements combine here to confirm Conrad's deep commitment to the human community, a commitment in which the moral dimension is never divorced from the political, and duty to the community is reaffirmed as the very basis of all morality. Yet the means Conrad employs in this tale to convey his vision are perhaps the most complex of all. As in "Gaspar Ruiz" and "The Brute", the interesting play of ironies between the principal tale and the one contained within it has great significance. Here the tale-within-a-tale is recounted by Mr. X, a propagandist member of the anarchist underground, while dining in London with the story's principal narrator, a collector of Chinese bronzes. Indeed much of the critical debate on the tale has centered on the ironic effect of Mr. X's anarchist thriller--his "little joke"--on the narrator, and it would be useful here to summarize the salient points of this debate.

James Walton, in an article entitled "Mr. X's 'Little Joke': The Design of Conrad's 'The Informer'", places much emphasis on the tale's significance as a joke played by Mr. X not only against the narrator but

also against the decadent bourgeoisie which he represents. Walton writes that Mr. X's "pleasure is in manipulating the emotions of others, of the middle-classes with his writings, of the narrator with a revelation of his 'underground side,' of the anarchists with his bogus police raid, of the heroine with his 'small malice' of sending her Sevrin's diary."¹ The story is thus "primarily a study of artificial sensibility...in relation to extreme politics," and of the "forms of dissimulation that are indigenous to modern culture--from fraudulent advertising and sensational journalism to the self-dramatizations of individuals like Sevrin who identify morality with morose intensity of conviction."²

Diana Culbertson pursues Walton's discussion of the tale, arguing that in "The Informer" Conrad is "performing a sly parody of himself," mocking the middle-class readers of Harper's, where the story first appeared, and "perhaps enjoying the gesture immensely."³ She attacks, however, those critics who read a "serious intent" into the tale: "The suggestion that Conrad is playing a joke on his readers by deliberately creating a laughable story with all the appearances of earnestness does not seem to have occurred to most critics."⁴ She cites both Walton and Osborn Andreas as putting "a bit too much weight on what is primarily a satirical thrust at 'amateurs' of literature."⁵ For Culbertson, "Mr. X is...the voice of Conrad telling a story that the narrator wants to hear, and that the narrator is Conrad's magazine-reading public."⁶

The tale's many ironies suggest however that it is much more than merely a satirical attack on the amateurs of literature. Rather, its exploration of what Walton calls those "forms of dissimulation... indigenous to modern culture"⁷ has meaningful consequences which none

of the criticism has fully articulated. For the fact that Mr. X sees his tale as a mere joke suggests both the frivolousness of modern cultural endeavour and the complete inability of modern society to accept or even see deep feeling or conviction beneath mere appearances. "The Informer" is thus mainly about the seriousness of the connection between art and life. It treats in ironic yet earnest terms the theme of the absence in modern life of a genuine art which permits the sincere expression of the deepest and most significant human feelings, drawing important conclusions about the moral and political consequences that a such a condition implies.

It is significant, therefore, that we meet only in these last two tales the proponents of an overly sophisticated and decadent English and Continental upper class, the arbiters and critics of a society which is theirs ultimately to shape and manipulate, or be manipulated. Conrad thus fills "The Informer" with references above all to a culture which in no way reaffirms the values of duty and responsibility. The famous Chinese bronzes belonging to the tale's narrator, taken out of their true historical, political, and geographic context in order to be "disposed in three large rooms without carpets and curtains" and where "[t]here is no other furniture than the *étagères* and the glass cases whose contents shall be worth a fortune to [his] heirs" (74), suggest the hollowness of the cultural endeavours of a society possessing no serious moral or spiritual commitments. The bronzes themselves have become no more than mere functionless objects to be gazed at by connoisseurs who fail to see in them any significance beyond their monetary value. It is the worst form of voyeurism: the highest art of an alien and exploited nation has been put on display in order to arouse

the fancy of the European art-dealer. It is indeed a form of tourism-at-home, and the fact that genuine artistic production counts less than the ability to purchase foreign objets d'art is a sign of the worst sort of intellectual and spiritual decadence.

This decadence reflects moreover the irresponsible moral detachment of the story's narrator, who with unconscious irony links the bronzes' precious fragility to Mr. X:

"I am a quiet and peaceable product of civilization, and know no passion other than the passion for collecting things which are rare, and must remain exquisite even if approaching to the monstrous. Some Chinese bronzes are monstrously precious. And here (out of my friend's collection), here I had before me a kind of rare monster [Mr. X]. It is true that this monster was polished and in a sense even exquisite. His beautiful unruffled manner was that. But then he was not of bronze. He was not even Chinese, which would have enabled one to contemplate him calmly across the gulf of racial difference. He was alive and European; he had the manner of good society, wore a coat and hat like mine, and had pretty near the same taste in cooking. It was too frightful to think of." (76)

Both the preciousness of the bronzes and the exquisite refinement of Mr. X are "monstrous." However, the narrator is willing to deal in rare oriental art while refusing to contemplate Mr. X because no similar "gulf of racial difference" exists between them. The passage thus suggests his tacit fear of any self-scrutiny which the contemplation of Mr. X might imply: it is his moral detachment which parallels the monstrous activities of the highly refined anarchist propagandist, not

the bronzes. Rather, the bronzes share in the monstrousness of the Europeans only insofar as they are made into an instrument of moral evasion: becoming mere objects of contemplation for men who fear commitment, they are made to prevent the serious self-investigation which is the true starting point of any real cultural labour.

Yet the "monstrous" preciousness of the bronzes also ironically recalls the violence which Mr. X and the narrator foster and permit. The narrator, a man "whose whole scheme of life had been based upon a suave and delicate discrimination of social and artistic values," and to whom "all sorts and forms of violence appeared as unreal as the giants, ogres, and seven-headed hydras whose activities affect, fantastically, the course of legends and fairy-tales," is suddenly appalled to hear "the festive bustle and clatter" of the London restaurant crowd turn into the "mutter of a hungry and seditious multitude" (77). Mr. X, on the contrary, believes that "there's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence" (77). He very shrewdly sees these as underlying realities in human nature to be manipulated both for material political ends and for the creation of a false propagandistic culture which titillates an overfed and bored audience. Rather than suppressing those tendencies which threaten civilized culture, he exploits them:

"What I have acquired has come to me through my writings; not from the millions of pamphlets distributed gratis to the hungry and the oppressed, but from the hundreds of thousands of copies sold to well-fed bourgeois. You know that my writings were at one time the rage, the fashion--the thing to read with wonder and horror, to turn your eyes up at my pathos...or else, to laugh in ecstasies at my wit." (77-78)

If Mr. X is guilty of participating actively in the creation of a false literary culture which disguises a very real potential for violence, then the narrator's moral detachment and blindness to violence renders him powerless to resist it. Each character is in his own way a producer of culture, yet each fails to meet the serious responsibility which the care of the bronzes requires. The false nature of their interest in the bronzes thus reveals an inaccurate interpretation of the significance of culture, one which allows violence to exist as a real possibility. This potential violence, significantly, foreshadows the real violence done to Sevrin the informer. Moreover, neither Mr. X nor the narrator benefits positively from his interest in the bronzes, for neither is moved to a state of moral urgency by the seriousness which they represent. The failure of the bronzes to effect such a transformation further predicts the real transformation which takes place in the Young Lady Anarchist after the violent tragedy of Sevrin's death. Mr. X's attacks against the amateurism of modern bourgeois culture are therefore highly ironic:

"Amateurism in this, that, and the other thing is a delightfully easy way of killing time, and feeding one's own vanity--the silly vanity of being abreast with the ideas of the day after to-morrow. Just as good and otherwise harmless people will join you in ecstasies over your collection without having the slightest notion in what its marvellousness really consists."

I hung my head. It was a crushing illustration of the sad truth he advanced. The world is full of such people. And that instance of the French Aristocracy before the Revolution was extremely telling, too. (78)

This passage is significant for it leads directly to, and is indeed the impetus for, Mr. X's tale-within-a-tale. The narrator, impressed by Mr. X's trite and hollow observations on the amateurism of modern bourgeois culture and the marvellousness of the bronzes (79), sees the story as an attempt to prove the point. Yet the propagandistic nature of Mr. X's work, together with his corrupt cynicism, seriously undermine the value of his judgment. The story indeed escapes his control and proves instead the marvellousness and the power of Sevrin's love for the Lady Anarchist, while pointing out not the falseness of the bronzes themselves but his own and the narrator's inability to judge accurately the value of anything at all. Mr. X is thus both the means and the victim of Conrad's satirical attacks on modern society.

Understood in this way, the link between the principal tale and the tale-within-a-tale becomes clearer. The false cultural labour of the narrator and Mr. X reflects in the anarchist tale the political posturing which leads to the destruction of all sincere action and to spiritual as well as physical death. Addison C. Bross argues that Conrad's point here is to show that "human beings are quite incapable of being influenced by the ideals they profess--that though a few retreat into an inhuman skepticism, most people live by means of gestures with no genuine belief in the meaningfulness of their actions."⁸ If the narrator is secretly entertained by the suppressed eroticism of the underworld love affair between Sevrin and the girl, as well as by the violence that the tale promises, then Mr. X's obsession with gestures betrays a skepticism that is the same as the abyss that Santierra faces in "Gaspar Ruiz" after the suicide of Erminia. For beneath the posturing and the gestures, the commitment to false ideals, and the political

ideologies masquerading as serious moral visions, is the very real love of Sevrin for the young lady anarchist, and the serious problem of the significance of her withdrawal from life to a convent. The point would be that artificial modern culture annihilates the fundamental value of all natural ties of love and community. The young lady's retreat to a convent thus signifies much more than the mere gestures of her class, as Mr. X would have us believe. Yet it is neither solution nor sincere and genuine choice: it is merely a consequence, an effect, of the impossibility of finding true community and real harmony with the external world. For if she learns nothing else, it is that her beliefs and actions had indeed been no more than mere gestures threatening all truly sincere life-reaffirming values.

"The Informer" thus teaches that the highest cultural labour must necessarily treat the theme of individual moral responsibility, and the love affair between Sevrin and the Lady Anarchist ironically offers a serious discussion on the nature of such responsibility. For if the girl is only playing at love, Sevrin, who has "something of the air of a taciturn actor or of a fanatical priest" (85), is deadly serious. Fooled into revealing his true identity of police informer, he is described by Mr. X as possessing the "sombre aspect of a fanatical monk in a meditative attitude, but with something, too, in his face of an actor intent upon the terrible exigencies of his part" (96). This description possesses a powerful double irony. Conrad is both attacking those who are skeptical of the fundamental importance of absolute cultural values such as love and community while reaffirming the deep convictions of Sevrin which are informed by such values. His passionate convictions and his sincere love for the Young Lady Anarchist indeed possess a genuine

religious fervour cynically attacked by Mr. X. Yet the only real fanatic here is Mr. X himself: unable to distinguish between the actor and the priest, between the outward manifestation and the inner conviction, he attaches himself to an absurd political vision which is unable to comprehend the value of any moral commitment because it is founded upon a fundamentally skeptical and nihilistic view of life and human society. Sevrin is a victim precisely because of his deep commitment to life and to the values of community, a commitment which is ridiculed and misunderstood by a society which has given itself up to a political and cultural endeavour which is empty.

As already hinted at above, there is a sense in which the tale is less about Sevrin and more about the "young Lady Amateur of anarchism" (84) and the impossibility of escaping personal responsibility for the lives of others. Her act of snatching away her skirt from Sevrin's "polluting contact" and averting "her head with an upward tilt" (98) indicates an attempt to maintain a personal integrity which is egotistical and thus tending to isolate morally those who uphold it. Significantly, this fundamentally selfish and irresponsible act has its basis in the false rhetoric of Mr. X's political propaganda: the young lady has learned well the amateurish behaviour which he hypocritically both propounds and attacks in the same instant. Her act is thus the projection of a false and destructive cultural ideal having deep moral and political repercussions: any ideal which teaches the kind of moral repudiation and vain detachment suggested by the young lady's act threatens the stability of the human community. Adhering to a cultural standard advocating selfishness, she is thus an instrument of betrayal and disintegration rather than of salvation and political cohesion.

Mr. X, characteristically, satirizes the Young Lady Anarchist's decision to retire to a convent after Sevrin's death (101). Learning the sincerity of Sevrin's love from the diary sent her by Mr. X (his "little malice" (101)), she recognizes both her responsibility for his death and her guilt in transgressing life's most fundamental principle: the impulse of love. Furthermore, she learns that the betrayal of Sevrin's love implies the betrayal of life itself. And if love is the very principle which forms the basis of the human community, then life is to be found precisely in those ties which animate the community. Life thus takes on the character of a moral principle, one which has value only insofar as it compels the individual to uphold those natural ties which are the basis of all community. The false cultural standard which the Young Lady Anarchist's act of repudiation projects is thus shattered by the tragedy of Sevrin's death, and a higher standard grounded in a principle of selflessness reveals itself.⁹ Ironically too Sevrin's diary succeeds where his rhetoric tragically had failed: "'I have felt in me the power to make you share this conviction,' he protested, ardently" (97). His death proves the superficiality of all political rhetoric, as ineffective as the anarchists' propaganda is hollow. The diary thus succeeds in effecting a transformation in the Young Lady Anarchist which the bronzes fail to effect in either the narrator or Mr. X.

Osborn Andreas, correctly pointing out the fundamentally flawed and artificial nature of the Lady Anarchist's political activities,¹⁰ errs in arguing that Sevrin was a "liar" whose "original error had been a belief that he could split his honor into two parts, that in the interests of a supposedly higher honor he could dishonorably

misrepresent himself to the anarchists with whom he foregathered;" moreover, in "dishonorably gulling and betraying" the anarchists, Sevrin "had inflicted an irreparable injury upon his own moral nature."¹¹ The point rather is that Sevrin represents the moral exile deeply committed to a higher loyalty, one which his society belittles. His betrayal is thus inevitable: the clash between the artificial values of modern culture and Sevrin's more sincere convictions leads invariably to his death. As Eloise Knapp Hay points out in her study The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad, an important subordinate theme in the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz's narrative poem Konrad Wallenrod is the "hero's brooding sense of remorse at having to play the part of conspirator, liar, and traitor—even though he must play it in service to a higher loyalty."¹² The poem's hero, brought up in Medieval Europe as an orphan among the German Knights of the Teutonic Order, must hide his real loyalty to their enemy, his native Lithuania. His deception is so effective that he is able to become Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, thus putting himself in a better position to save his country and destroy the order. This sounds very much like the condition in which Sevrin finds himself, coming very close thematically to "The Informer".¹³ Eloise Knapp Hay, furthermore, makes much of the "Polish stress on fidelity," arguing that Conrad's variations on the theme of fidelity

might easily be connected with a yearning toward personal and political integration and a yearning to end deceptions suffered too long, a desire for peace and stability like the longing that is one force driving Jim away from the West. Deceit and the breaking of promises are, of course, primary causes of political disruption and unrest.¹⁴

The yearning toward personal and political integration, the desire to end all deceptions, implies that all moral action and all human ties possess fundamentally a political dimension. A moral sensibility which sees duty and fidelity as the basis of life must, for Conrad, form the foundation of the political order, while the culture which such a sensibility fosters must be the intellectual and creative projection of those principles. "The Informer" thus shows above all that a serious cultural endeavour which reaffirms such principles is of the utmost importance for any sincere political order. Such an endeavour, moreover, implies the perpetual and continuous attempt to sustain a belief and a faith in the value of all life: only this can be the highest political objective, the most significant work of a true culture, and thus the duty of a good man.

In "The Informer" as in "Il Conde", finally, we see the human psyche, and by extension European culture and society, in a constant psychological battle between life and death. Consciousness of death awakens the need for a moral principle committed to the absolute value of life, a principle in which life acquires a sacred dimension, in which it is granted absolute importance and deep seriousness. This is ultimately the significance of Sevrin's "convictions" and of the Lady Anarchist's retreat to a convent. Yet for Conrad such a fight for life against the forces of despair is not merely an isolated psychological battle that takes place in the individual; the fight is not purely an inner one belonging exclusively to the spirit or psyche: it is also radically political and cultural, involving more than anything else a duty and a commitment to the moral and spiritual well-being of the community, a desire for that community to perpetuate, through its

cultural labour above all, a belief in the value of all life. This is the point, ultimately, of "The Informer", this and nothing else, however much the satirical or literary dynamics of this tale may interest us.

"Il Conde": The Community Makes its Claim¹⁵

The theme of the psychological and spiritual battle between life and death which closed the discussion of "The Informer" is also the thematic centre of "Il Conde". The hero of the tale, an old Bohemian aristocrat who spends most of the year in Naples for reasons of health,¹⁶ shares much with both Mr. X and the narrator of "The Informer". Like them, the old Count is a moral failure because he is unable to resist spiritually the forces of evil, death, and disintegration. And like Mrs. Colchester in "The Brute", whose selfish egoism brings destruction to the organic community, the Count withdraws into a self-indulgent isolation in which his desire to live free from the threat of physical pain symbolizes his wish to avoid moral responsibility. The Count's life in Naples thus represents an integrity that is fragile because it is purely formal. It is the integrity of an isolated aesthetic sensibility, one which parallels the vacuous and empty refinement of Mr. X and the narrator of "The Informer". Such refinement is valueless if it is merely the projection of an imagined ideal existence which leads to moral isolation, rather than the projection of the supreme and absolute value of all natural human ties. The Count's retirement at Naples is thus an aesthetically ideal life void of the realities of moral commitment and duty to others. As "Il Conde" shows, such an ideal life, grounded in an aesthetic and not a moral principle, is not only egotistic but by nature unattainable. In

other words, Conrad suggests here the impossibility of establishing any sort of private aesthetic utopia as a response to the claims of the real human community.¹⁷

Much of the criticism on "Il Conde" treats precisely this theme of the Count's egotistical withdrawal from society and life. In an article entitled "Adam, Axel, and 'Il Conde'", John Howard Mills, who considers "Il Conde" one of Conrad's best short stories, argues that it contains two allegories, the Fall or Expulsion from Eden allegory, and the fin de siècle Ivory Tower allegory. In the first of these Mills sees the young Camorrista who robs the Count as revealing "the several evils of the world." Making much of the aural symbolism in the tale,¹⁸ Mills points out that the Count sees in the Camorrista "his own degradation and death,"¹⁹ and it is he also who "opens the paradisaical gates and thrusts the Count into the wilderness beyond."²⁰ In the Ivory Tower allegory, the Count, like the ancient upper-class Romans who built their seaside villas in Campagna to avoid painful rheumatic afflictions (A Set of Six, 271), comes to Naples to escape physical pain and thus his own mortality.²¹ Yet the wilderness of death which reveals itself to the Count through the young Camorrista cannot be avoided, and he is exiled beyond the Alps.

Two other critics, Paul Dolan and Daniel R. Schwarz, follow this line of argument. Dolan, in an article entitled "Il Conde: Conrad's Little Miss Muffet", likens "Il Conde" to the nursery rhyme of "Little Miss Muffet", arguing that both stories are about the "smashing of an idyll."²² Meanwhile, in an article called "The Self-Deceiving Narrator of Conrad's 'Il Conde'", Schwarz makes a significant comparison between this tale and "The Informer", pointing out that they both "examine the

implications of an overdelicate aristocracy who protect themselves from involvement in meaningful public or private relationships by withdrawing into an ivory tower to meditate upon the beauty of objets d'art."23 A third critic, Ernest Carter, analyses Conrad's use of classical symbolism in "Classical Allusion as the Clue to Meaning in Conrad's 'Il Conde'" to support the argument that the tale "presents with great economy of effect and characteristic irony the themes of the isolated man and the confrontation of a life-illusion by the shock of reality."24

Although these several readings of the tale are highly useful, and indeed fundamentally correct, they fail to emphasize certain key details which are crucial to a full understanding of the significance of the Count's isolated withdrawal from life, as well as his shattered idyll or reverie. They fail, furthermore, to clarify in correct terms the significance of "Il Conde" as "A Pathetic Tale". In this analysis of the tale, therefore, I will seek to develop certain images and details which the criticism has either overlooked or not fully considered, most notably the references to the Count's past life and the significance of his family rings.

Very little has been made of the Count's own personal family ties and his life beyond the Alps. The tale's narrator, an English-speaking expatriate in Naples who shares the same hotel as the Count, tells us that he is a widower who in the months of July and August crossed the Alps for six weeks on a visit to his married daughter, whose name was that of a very aristocratic family:

She had a castle--in Bohemia, I think. This is as near as I ever came to ascertaining his nationality. His own name,

strangely enough, he never mentioned. Perhaps he thought I had seen it on the published list. Truth to say, I never looked.

(272)

This passage suggests that the Count's ties to his family and his nation have been obscured; they are indeed very tenuous. By focusing on his overly delicate nature--too "kindly" for the strife of money making (272)--the narrator misses the more significant point that the Count has all but abandoned his estates and, hence, his wealth and social position:

In the course of conversation he mentioned his estate quite by the way, in reference to that painful and alarming rheumatic affection. One year, staying incautiously beyond the Alps as late as the middle of September, he had been laid up for three months in that lonely country house with no one but his valet and the caretaking couple to attend to him. Because, as he expressed it, he "kept no establishment there." He had only gone for a couple of days to confer with his land agent. He promised himself never to be so imprudent in the future. The first weeks of September would find him on the shores of his beloved gulf. (272)

The near-abandoned estate together with the forgotten name--itself as important to a man of aristocratic heritage as his property--suggest that the Count is an exile who has cut himself off from all natural ties and responsibilities. There is a subtle yet clear indication that the Count, perhaps unconsciously, suffers from a deep sense of loss. The narrator, indeed as self-deceiving as Daniel R. Schwarz suggests in his article,²⁵ focuses only on the superficial aspects of the Count's life

and character--his incapacity for making money, his rheumatic condition, and the pleasant days spent in Naples. He thus fails to see the true political, social, and moral implications of the Count's isolated existence in a foreign land. And whereas the narrator finds the Count's Neapolitan reverie charming, the subsequent events of the tale suggest the dangerous and fragile emptiness of this ostensibly harmonious life:

He had a piano, a few books: picked up transient acquaintances of a day, week, or month in the stream of travellers from all Europe. One can imagine him going out for his walks in the streets and lanes, becoming known to beggars, shopkeepers, children, country people; talking amiably over the walls to the contadini--and coming back to his rooms or his villa to sit before the piano, with his white hair brushed up and his thick orderly moustache, "to make a little music for myself." And, of course, for a change there was Naples near by--life, movement, animation, opera. A little amusement, as he said, is necessary for health. Mimes and flute-players, in fact. Only unlike the magnates of ancient Rome, he had no affairs of the city to call him away from these moderate delights. He had no affairs at all. Probably he had never had any grave affairs to attend to in his life. It was a kindly existence, with its joys and sorrows regulated by the course of Nature--marriages, births, deaths--ruled by the prescribed usages of good society and protected by the State. (271-272)

Social usage and the modern State (the latter of which Conrad disliked so much) will not protect the Count. Rather, he is subject to the evil forces of chance and instability because he has been cut off from the

natural ties of family, community, and nation. This condition of alienation from such fundamental natural ties renders him susceptible above all to spiritual and moral disintegration in the face of any irrational, haphazard threat to his honour.

The Count's implicit awareness of the moral and spiritual significance of the robbery is especially important. Ernest Carter, in "Classical Allusion as the Clue to Meaning in Conrad's 'Il Conde'", argues that "Conrad intended his emphasis to fall on the discovery of self rather than 'other'," and that "'Il Conde' is about self-judgment and self-punishment. The Count condemns himself to death--his single authentic act."²⁶ Yet the conclusions Carter makes about the quality and nature of the Count's discovery of guilt do not adequately address the political and social questions which the story's details and structure raise. Carter, for example, emphasizes the first meeting between the Count and the narrator before the statue of the Resting Hermes: "He adressed me first, over the celebrated Resting Hermes which we had been looking at side by side" (269). Carter argues that the Count, unable to say anything profound about the statue, therefore "understands nothing of the powerful forces of fertility and death that the statue symbolized for the classical world; for him it represents simply the 'delicate perfection' of art, it has nothing to do with life." Linking the statue of Hermes to the young Camorrista who robs the Count in the Villa Nazionale, Carter points out (1) that the Hermes is the patron of all thievery and duplicity, and (2) that Hermes psychopompos was a chthonic god, "the death-bringer who leads souls to the infernal regions." It is thus fitting that Hermes "presides throughout this story of a man who awakes to discover his invalid

existence."²⁷ And if the Count leaves on the longest journey of all--death--he "goes of his own free will and because his confrontation with the reality of his inner emptiness has robbed his life of its illusory value. The circulating crowd in the park represents the world of social ties and responsibilities to which he is a stranger."²⁸ Carter concludes by emphasizing the regenerative and cyclical aspect of Conrad's life-concept:

With the force of a divine judgment Vesuvius overwhelmed Pompeii and its epicurean inhabitants (like the Count, leisured and devoted to "art"), and that eruption is a metaphorical equivalent for the bursting forth of the repressed forces of life in the Count.²⁹

The story is indeed about death and the terror of death coming in to break up the Count's reverie. Yet its significance goes beyond the mere revelation of the repressed forces of life. For if maturity involves the acceptance of the presence of these forces in the universe, it involves too the recognition that they form the very ground upon which the human community stands. The same forces which threaten order also create the natural ties which are the basis of life's most significant moral principles: loyalty, faith, trust. Thus, as in "The Brute", where the real concern is human responsibility in the face of such potentially unstabilizing forces, the life-concept which interests Conrad is not simply the pagan regenerative or cyclical one. His life-concept involves rather the fulfillment of the natural obligations which each individual owes to one another, as well as the active and responsible participation in the life of the community. "Il Conde" is not therefore simply about a pagan split between chthonic life forces

and a sort of Apollonian detachment, the former represented by the young Camorrista and the latter by the refined tastes of the old Count. On the contrary, the story presents the conflict between a spiritual and psychological state of moral commitment on the one hand and the desire to avoid natural responsibilities on the other.

Any analysis of Conrad's use of classical allusion must therefore consider more fully the significance of the Roman busts and the Count's strong dislike of them, as well as the "self-deceiving" narrator's references to the act of Hara-Kiri:

"I dropped my hands," [the Count] said, "but I never put them in my pockets. I felt a pressure there----"

He put the tip of his finger on a spot close under his breastbone, the very spot of the human body where a Japanese gentleman begins the operations of the Hara-kiri, which is a form of suicide following upon dishonour, upon an intolerable outrage to the delicacy of one's feelings. (279-280)

...

It was not timidity, though [the Count] did say to me once: "You do not know what a Camorra is, my dear sir. I am a marked man." He was not afraid of what could be done to him. His delicate conception of his dignity was defiled by a degrading experience. He couldn't stand that. No Japanese gentleman, outraged in his exaggerated sense of honour, could have gone about his preparations for Hara-kiri with greater resolution. To go home really amounted to suicide for the poor Count.

(288)

The authenticity of Hara-kiri as a sincere cultural act is not possible

for the Count. No such heroic act of suicide is sincerely possible for one living an existence of isolated aesthetic withdrawal. Honour involves commitment to community above all; for the Japanese as for the ancient Romans, suicide is fundamentally a public and not a private act. The Japanese tradition of honourable suicide is the sign of a commitment to a transcendent ideal--honour--which is grounded in a concept of loyalty to community and nation. One does not commit Hara-kiri because a private idyll has been shattered. The Count meanwhile loves the private lives of the Romans and is fearful of their public lives. His suicide is thus satirized because it is ultimately irrelevant: the Count's honour is insignificant precisely because it is not offered up in duty to a greater good. The comic tone of the narrator's description of his departure on the train de luxe is perfectly clear:

Vedi Napoli e poi mori. It is a saying of excessive vanity, and everything excessive was abhorrent to the nice moderation of the poor Count. Yet, as I was seeing him off at the railway station, I thought he was behaving with singular fidelity to its conceited spirit. Vedi Napoli!... He had seen it! He had seen it with startling thoroughness--and now he was going to his grave. He was going to it by the train de luxe of the International Sleeping Car Company, via Trieste and Vienna. As the four long, sombre coaches pulled out of the station I raised my hat with the solemn feeling of paying the last tribute of respect to a funeral cortège. Il Conde's profile, much aged already, glided away from me in stony immobility, behind the lighted pane of glass--Vedi Napoli e poi mori!

The Count makes no sacrifice on behalf of a principle which transcends his own selfish aestheticism. An adequate treatment of Conrad's use of classical allusion would therefore point to the Count's contradictory and false understanding of the significance of the Roman aristocracy. Admiring the ancient Romans for constructing their villas in Campagna, he fails to see in the awful faces of the marble busts the real force that lies behind their power to build such villas: "he had expressed his dislike of the busts and statues of the Roman Emperors in the gallery of marbles: their faces were too vigorous, too pronounced for him" (270). The Roman empire was indeed corrupt, but it was the republican values of duty and obligation that had made it great. The Roman Emperors do not thus represent simply some brutal life force, but rather those "material interests" that so dominate the life and action of Nostramo. They represent indeed the ties of duty and commitment that have become corrupted and soiled, much like the Count's: he is much closer than he thinks to that which he dislikes so much.

Like the Count, the young Camorrista himself belongs to an aristocratic tradition. Pasquale, the pedlar of the Galleria Umberto, informs the Count that the young "signore" is a "Cavaliere of a very good family from Bari" who studies at the University of Naples and heads an association "of young men--of very nice young men" (287). Although the value of this bit of information is undercut by the narrator's claim that Pasquale is "an accomplished liar" (287), it does not discount the clear parallels between the Camorrista and the Count: for Pasquale, at any rate, the Count and the young Camorrista share a similar decadent tradition. Indeed, Mills argues that in his encounter with the Camorrista the Count meets "the reality of himself,"³⁰ while Schwarz

points to "some slight resemblance" between the Count and the young Camorra.³¹ I would argue that this resemblance is more than slight: the Count's association of the Roman busts with the young Camorrista's "peculiar expression of cruel discontent" (286) is heavily ironic, reflecting his own moral decadence. Further, the deferential service which the Count receives at his hotel--"I judged he was an old and valued client. The bow of the hotel keeper was cordial in its deference, and [the Count] acknowledged it with familiar courtesy. For the servants he was Il Conde" (269)-- ironically foreshadows the quick service that the Camorrista will receive at the Café Umberto:

At the call, not only his own waiter, but two other idle waiters belonging to a quite different row of tables, rushed towards him with obsequious alacrity, which is not the general characteristic of the waiters in the Café Umberto. The young man muttered something and one of the waiters walking rapidly to the nearest door called out to the Galleria: "Pasquale! O! Pasquale!" (286)

The young man wishes to buy a cigar from Pasquale, ironically recalling the cigar which the Count is smoking during his first dinner with the narrator: "The faint scent of some very good perfume, and of good cigars (that last an odour quite remarkable to come upon in Italy) reached me across the table" (270). If the Count's world is that of the tourist, then the Camorrista's is that of the criminal underworld. They are both in their own way outside the accepted law of the community. The attack thus reminds the Count of his lost tradition and his lost duty.

Yet having said this, we ought not to forget that "Il Conde" is a "pathetic" tale. If there is satire directed at the Count it is

undercut by certain other elements in the tale that work effectively to make him a truly pathetic figure, worthy not so much of our scorn as of our compassion. For the corrupt material interests which both the rude Roman busts and the Camorrista represent are a real threat to the historical community that the Count has lost. This a real and tragic fact of the Count's life, something which the narrator is too blind to see. Hence a conflict exists between the horrible busts and the Camorra on the one hand and the needs of the organic community on the other. Significantly, this conflict is symbolized by the Count's gesture of clapping his hands together in defiance of the Camorrista when asked to give up his rings.

Ernest Carter claims that the Count "has nothing but a tradition of breeding and good manners, and his instinctive and adamant refusal to give up his rings only underlies the fact that all he has is not in any authentic sense 'his' at all."³² This is a crucial error of interpretation, for the rings represent the most precious thing of all: the ties of community and the participation in a native tradition. Indeed, it could be argued that the significance of the rings goes much beyond the private loneliness of the Count to encompass the whole of modern Europe, the English-speaking narrator included. The Count dies, or is already dead, precisely because he is exiled from the tradition which the rings represent. A central role, therefore, must be given to the robbery scene and in particular to the significance of the Count's refusal to give up his rings:

"Vostri anelli."

"One of the rings," went on the Count, "was given me many years ago by my wife; the other is the signet ring of my father. I said, 'No. That you shall not have!'"

Here the Count reproduced the gesture corresponding to that declaration by clapping one hand upon the other, and pressing both against his chest. It was touching in its resignation. "That you shall not have," he repeated, firmly, and closed his eyes, fully expecting--I don't know whether I am right in recording that such an unpleasant word had passed his lips--fully expecting to feel himself being--I really hesitate to say--being disembowelled by the push of the long, sharp blade resting murderously against the pit of his stomach--the very seat, in all human beings, of anguished sensations. (283)

Conrad takes great care to ensure that the only valuables the Count has in his possession during the robbery are his rings. Significantly, the Camorrista too shows a rather strange respect, almost delicacy, toward his victim, letting him alone rather than forcing him to give up his most precious possessions. Moreover, the filtering of the narrative through the Count works effectively to produce a double image of his gesture of clapping together his hands: the miming of the gesture by the Count as he retells it to the narrator is superimposed upon the actual act made during the robbery. Thus restaurant and public garden, actual and recalled event, effectively interpenetrate to produce a focused image of that one act of "resignation."

This gesture is not presented as an act of heroism in the face of physical danger but rather as an act of pathetic desperation: the rings are at that moment more important than his own life because their loss would mean the death of the self. They represent not just the Count's personal honour but also that of his family, his nation, his

tradition--those things which make up the very fabric of his identity. The deep sense of self-disgust which he feels after the robbery is psychologically linked to the family rings.³³ The reminder of his past life awakens a sense of self-loathing because it recalls those things which have shaped him and from which he is now alienated:

The Count sat up straight and tried to think calmly of what had happened to him. The vileness of it took his breath away again. As far as I can make it out he was disgusted with himself. I do not mean to say with his behaviour. Indeed, if his pantomimic rendering of it for my information was to be trusted, it was simply perfect. No, it was not that. He was not ashamed. He was shocked at being the selected victim, not of robbery so much as of contempt. His tranquillity had been wantonly desecrated. His lifelong, kindly nicety of outlook had been defaced. (284)

The Count's being the selected victim of contempt is the logical result of his having lost all contact with the real basis of his self. His self-disgust thus follows the recognition of his state of moral isolation, and, as the expression both of his weakness and his alienation, leads to a different sort of vice in which carnality replaces the still tranquility of the detached aesthetic idyll: "As his agitation calmed down somewhat, he became aware that he was frightfully hungry. Yes, hungry. The sheer emotion had made him simply ravenous" (284). The Count's voracious hunger following the robbery represents a moral condition of disintegration paralleling his reverie. Both states signal a condition of alienation from the law of the community. Yet if as we have seen the community is fundamental to the makeup of the self,

then the self possesses an innate moral dimension in which dutiful behaviour toward the community is fundamental to its integrity. Any attempt to evade the exigencies of the community in order to seek an existence of idyllic transcendence must necessarily fail; either way, vice threatens the self not rooted in community. The only real moral and psychological protection which the self has from vicious disintegration is the law of community.

On the verge of death, the Count has been reminded of where his real allegiances lie. He is reminded of his lost tradition, his lost duty and responsibility to the community, and his lost participation in the continuity of its traditions. The real pathos of the tale lies in that final gesture of honour which recalls the grand past of a once heroic, powerful and effective nobility. Yet this gesture is also the Count's attempt to maintain the integrity of his self, the last hope of psychological and spiritual health which he possesses. The obvious satiric tone of his departure on the train de luxe, then, must be read with that hand-clapping gesture in mind: we are indeed meant to feel the pathetic, not just the comic, state of the Count's fragile moral, social, and political condition. As the one thing not taken away from him, the rings signal with tragic irony the loss of the one thing ultimately capable of protecting him from the evil which the young Camorrista represents: the tradition of the organic community.

EPILOGUE

The dominant theme of the tales of A Set of Six is the radical importance of the community in forging the self and the individual personality. The tales treat the various forms in which the self thus forged and constructed is either destroyed or betrayed, and they give particular attention to those forces, both external to the self and internal to the individual and his spiritual or aesthetic needs, which threaten its decline. The tragic quality peculiar to these tales, therefore, derives from the loss and destruction of this fundamental aspect of the self, the loss of which threatens the very legitimacy of any faith in life itself. Erminia, like Decoud hanging from his cord, dies finally because she has lost the very grounds of her existence, while the Young Lady Anarchist and Il Conde refuse life after recognizing that they have, each in his own way, betrayed an ideal of community and the necessary commitment and sacrifice it requires.

Because the community, as the forger of the self and the personality, gives significance and value to the life of the individual, it necessarily makes its moral claim upon him too. Yet its claim extends beyond merely the single human being: it encompasses the whole of history, the whole of man's political endeavour. Although most of the tales emphasize the importance of the protagonist's moral responsibility in the face of the community and its needs, the implications for mankind generally are more striking: through the analysis of the personal

tragedies of his heroes and heroines, Conrad succeeds in drawing the most serious political and social consequences of the loss of the organic community as the basis of self and as the only legitimate context for life. Thus in "An Anarchist" as in "The Informer" we have a satiric picture of the stark failure of modern utopian formulas, both economic and political. The dire consequences of their failure for the individual psyche is reflected in "Gaspar Ruiz", where the effects upon the organic community of the noble civilizing ideal of General Santierra's republicanism are anything but positive.

The drama of these tales is woven out of the conflict between the needs of history and civilization on the one hand, and those of the individual personality and the health of the source of its very life, the traditional or organic community, on the other. If these tales emphasize the personal tragedy of uprooted individuals, they do so only to implicate us all in the deep moral and political claims they make, and to indicate the way to a deeper personal as well as political awareness. Finally, the best example from the stories of the need for such awareness comes from the image of two highly refined and civilized Europeans, Mr. X and the collector of Chinese bronzes, discussing in ironic terms the hollowness and illegitimacy of human love while planning the next acquisition or the next act of political violence.

ENDNOTES

1. These lines quoted from Ungaretti's "La pietà" are from his Vita d'un uomo (Milan: Mondadori, 1966, p. 126). The translation which follows is by Patrick Creagh (Giuseppe Ungaretti: Selected Poems, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 82):

Man, monotonous universe,
Thinks he is piling up his goods
And from his feverish hands
Only endings endlessly emerge.

Strung over the void
On his spider's thread
He fears nothing and attracts
Nothing but his own cry.

He makes good the waste by raising tombs,
And to speak of you, Eternal One,
Has to use swearwords.

Chapter I

1. Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline.
2. Leo Gurko, Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile.
3. John V. Hagopian, "The Pathos of 'Il Conde'".
4. Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction.
5. Moser, 50.
6. Graver, 124.
7. Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad: A Study.
8. Edward W. Said, Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography.
9. Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad.
10. Addison C. Bross, "A Set of Six: Variations on a Theme".
11. Frederick Karl, A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad.

12. John Howard Mills, "Adam, Axel, and 'I1 Conde'"; Daniel R. Schwarz, "The Self-Deceiving Narrator of Conrad's 'I1 Conde'"; Paul J. Dolan, "'I1 Conde': Conrad's Little Miss Muffett"; Ernest Carter, "Classical Allusion as the Clue to Meaning in Conrad's 'I1 Conde'"; Paul Kirschner, "Conrad's Strong Man"; W.R. Martin, "Gaspar Ruiz: A Conradian Hero"; James Walton, "Mr. X's 'Little Joke': The Design of Conrad's 'The Informer'".
13. In Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes, Daniel R. Schwarz devotes a chapter to A Set of Six. While recognizing that the tales "address the subject matter of the three major political novels: revolution, class struggle, the cost of political activity, and how individuals may become caught in the web of history" (177), Schwarz's emphasis falls upon the shortcomings of Conrad's fictional narrators. In this regard, his chapter is very useful and has indeed influenced my reading of the tales. My indebtedness to him is especially clear in my readings of "The Informer" and "I1 Conde".
14. Bross, 27.
15. Fleishman, 142.
16. Ibid., 51.
17. Ibid., 53.
18. Ibid., 54.
19. Zdzislaw Najder, Conrad's Polish Background, 19.
20. Ibid., 16.
21. Ibid., 15.
22. Ibid., 19.
23. Fleishman, 8.
24. Najder, 153-154; quoted in Fleishman, 9.
25. Najder, 19.
26. Fleishman, 57.
27. Ibid., 56.
28. Ibid., 56-57.
29. Ibid., 77.
30. Fleishman, 26-27; cf. letters to Marguerite Poradowska (15 September 1891) and to Edward Garnett (28 August 1908) in Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, eds., The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad.

However in a recent article entitled "Conrad's Catholicism", C.F. Burgess writes: "It is clear that Conrad was and remained a Roman Catholic, by birth, by heritage, and, most probably, by sentimental attachment to the 'faith of his fathers.' It is also clear, however, that he was a non-practicing Catholic throughout most of his life or, to use the old fashioned term, 'a fallen-away Catholic.' Apparently from sincere conviction, he rejected much of the Church's dogma and all of its ritual and sacraments. At the same time, the fact must be faced that Conrad's disassociation from the practices of the Roman Church might have been a factor in his quest to be assimilated fully into the mainstream of British life" (123).

31. William Bancroft in Joseph Conrad: His Philosophy of Life argues that the notion of human solidarity is crucial to Conrad's philosophy of life. Bancroft makes a very useful distinction between this ideal and artificial human institutions, which are the material expression of the ideal: "Human Solidarity is represented...through those particulars that may be described as 'artificial institutions.' This latter term serves to differentiate between 'society' as the divine universal and the more concrete form as represented in temporary institutions. Artificial institutions represent codes, morals, customs, or levels of interpretation of Human Solidarity" (75). Bancroft also argues that "man's relation to...Reality is defined as one to a world of selves, which may be construed in terms of an Infinite Individual. This latter term is but the personification of Human Solidarity as opposed to the 'finite self' or individual life. It is this Infinite Individual, past, present, and potential, that creates the connection-content, to borrow a term from Bosanquet, in which the 'finite individual' discovers the significance of his existence and the value of his manifold relations" (74). Furthermore, "separation from Human Solidarity is to be rendered an outcast regardless of the integrity of one's relation to his immediate social environment" for it is "that which warns and from which there is no escape; it is the Absolute Law from which codes receive their temporal significance, and human institutions, their meaning" (74-75). Ultimately, the drama inherent in the tales of A Set of Six derives from the conflict between the will of finite individuals and the exigencies of the "Absolute Law" of Human Solidarity. Tragedy results when the conditions permitting the exercise of this law are shattered by various forms of selfish wilfulness.
32. Cf. Conrad's essay "Tradition" in Notes on Life and Letters.
33. Cf. "Autocracy and War", 96-97; 105.
34. Graver, 44.
35. Moser, 31.
36. Ibid., 14.
37. Bruce Johnson, Conrad's Models of Mind, 1971; Royal Rousset, The Metaphysics of Darkness: A Study in the Unity and Development of

Conrad's Fiction, 1971; Leon F. Seltzer, The Vision of Melville and Conrad: A Comparative Study, 1970.

38. Eloise Knapp Hay, "Conrad Between Sartre and Socrates," 91.
39. Kingsley Widmer, "Conrad's Pyrrhonic Conservatism: Ideological Melodrama Around 'Simple Ideas'".

Chapter II

1. Moser, 99.
2. Graver, 124.
3. Karl, 229.
4. Wilfred S. Dowden, Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style, 105.
5. Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad, 92.
6. Paul Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man, 87.
7. Osborn Andreas, Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-conformity, 113.
8. Martin, 46.
9. Ibid., 46.
10. Ibid., 46.
11. All subsequent page references to A Set of Six are given in parentheses in the body of the text.
12. Morton Zabel quotes more or less the same lines that I do in his introduction to Tales of Heroes and History (xxxii). In more general terms, his observations on Conrad's view of history are highly relevant to our theme: "...though history, unlike the universe, is a creation of man, it sets into motion laws or forces that get beyond his control or outstrip his mastery and comprehension. Originating in the great ideals, ambitions, or passions of humanity, it becomes possessed by strange and irrational energies; by forces of ambition, greed, reckless or unconscious instinct; by an impersonal or abstract justice which corrupts the ideals or aspirations that animate it and so sets up a fatal enmity between human honor and brutal or inhuman circumstance. ...[H]istory is a long tale of high ideas brought to degradation, of heroic purpose brought to defeat or humiliation, and of human pride subjected to doubt, grief, and mortification. Nations that begin in some kind of honorable dedication to the human or communal good, some desire for noble achievement or liberty, are either preyed upon by selfish greeds and aggressions, or are betrayed by treacherous or irrational impulses, or yield to such forces and become tyrannies or despotisms.

Civilization, inspired by lofty principle and reason falls victim to the dark workings of violence or anarchy and thus exists precariously, always likely to confound itself and bring its achievements to defeat.... The fate of humanity exists in a continuous condition of risk, peril, and betrayal. History, viewed in the large, embodies either a gross impersonal justice that becomes reckless of the life caught in its workings, or a justice so far removed from man's intelligence and responsibility that he can only submit to it as to a fate he can never hope to understand or master. In the face of its enormous doubt, its inhuman logic, the only salvation or sanity lies in a 'reasonable faith' maintained in balance with a 'necessary skepticism'; a confidence in man's 'capacity for good' that does not submit to his 'propensity to greed and evil.' It lies finally in maintaining, in whatever treachery, derangement, or betrayal the human spirit may be subjected to, the 'point of honor'" (xxviii-xxix).

13. Fleishman, 136.
14. Bross, 30.
15. Andreas, 113.
16. Fleishman, 137.
17. Andreas, 116.
18. Bross, 31.
19. Ibid., 31.
20. Ibid., 31-32.
21. J. DeLancey Ferguson, who considers "The Duel" a brilliantly ironic tale (385), points out that its origin derives from a story much longer than the ten-line paragraph from a small provincial paper published in the South of France mentioned by Conrad in his preface to A Set of Six. The tale indeed derives from a four-page story published in Harper's Magazine for September 1858. Ferguson argues that Conrad had probably read the Harper's story as a young apprentice aboard French vessels between 1874 and 1878, and then had forgotten it. The short paragraph from the provincial paper simply triggered his unconscious memory of the Harper's story, thus inspiring him to write "The Duel". Ferguson quotes the whole of the text of the Harper's story in his article.
22. Gurko, 165.
23. Karl, 210.
24. Curle, 61.
25. Paul Kirschner, 172.
26. Andreas, 107.

27. Wiley, 92.
28. Fleishman, 141.
29. Wiley, 94.
30. In Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives Frederick Karl reads the final defeat of Feraud negatively: "Both Napoleon and their own compulsive sense of honor give their lives 'magic,' and this magic--whether induced from dueling, from charging a fixed battery, or (for Conrad) from coming through a storm--is necessary to keep one alive. Its disappearance or transformation into the comforts of bourgeois life is an indication of man's decline. When the duels end, and D'Hubert finally holds the upper hand, he is struck by his sense of loss, not gain..." (628). I interpret the end of the duels as the necessary passage toward maturity.

Chapter III

1. Andreas, 121.
2. Ibid., 121.
3. Bross, 28.
4. Gurko, 68.
5. Bross, 28.
6. Ibid., 28.
7. William Bysshe Stein in an article entitled "The Eastern Matrix of Conrad's Art" points out Conrad's dislike of modernism in terms highly relevant to the argument here that the Brute is an ironic symbol of what modern ideas such as perfection, efficiency, and progress have brought forth. Commenting on the closing passages of "Karain: A Memory" from Tales of Unrest, Stein writes: "...Conrad shows what man had made of history and what history has made of man.... He had created a massive apparatus of impersonal efficiency (from wheeling omnibuses and hansom to the mechanically gesturing policeman) at the expence of his own selfhood. Uprooted from his own being by his obsession with external perfection, he now faces an unpredictable future. He can never foresee the demands the machine is going to make on his energies, his talents, and his will" (7).
8. Jermyn also appears in "Youth" where Marlow's description of him is not very flattering: "We worked out of the Thames under canvas, with a North Sea pilot on board. His name was Jermyn, and he dodged all day long about the galley drying his handkerchief before the stove. Apparently he never slept. He was a dismal man, with a perpetual tear sparkling at the end of his nose, who either had been in trouble, or was in trouble, or expected to be in trouble--couldn't

be happy unless something went wrong. He mistrusted my youth, my common-sense, and my seamanship, and made a point of showing it in a hundred little ways. I dare say he was right. It seems to me I knew very little then, and I know not much more now; but I cherish a hate for that Jermyn to this day" (6).

9. Karl, 209.
10. Graver attacks the thinness of "An Anarchist": "The story is purely circumstantial; no coherent view of conspiracy and sedition can be sifted from its pages; the anarchists themselves hardly appear, and their victim is merely a lonely man with rotten luck and no particular self-awareness" (134).
11. Andreas, 126.
12. Kirschner, 237.
13. Fleishman, 138.
14. Bross, 34.
15. Fleishman, 138.

Chapter IV

1. Walton, 333.
2. Ibid., 333.
3. Diana Culbertson, "'The Informer' as Conrad's Little Joke," 431.
4. Ibid., 432.
5. Ibid., 432.
6. Ibid., 432.
7. Walton, 333.
8. Bross, 35.
9. Bancroft uses the term "negativity" to describe those opportunities in human experience which permit one to wrestle from "the indifferent Cosmos the reward of triumphant life;" this reward, moreover, is "possible only through moral stress" (41). Moral Stress in turn provides the catalyst for the action of "The Informer" and applies specifically to the case of the Young Lady Anarchist. Bancroft writes that "when man has launched upon a false career, the ideas associated therewith crystallize into settled convictions. These form the shell composed of restricted notions that hide from the individual the real values of life, and which must be broken through before re-contact with 'real life' is again possible" (49).

The Young Lady Anarchist's retreat to a convent expresses symbolically this recognition that the "real values of life" have broken through those "restricted notions" which are the false gestures of bourgeois life.

10. Andreas, 100.
11. Ibid., 100.
12. Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad, 73.
13. There exists an obvious affinity too between Sevrin and Razumov. The criticism, however, interprets Sevrin in a negative light. Zabel, for example, argues that Sevrin is "an amateur or dilettante dabbler in revolutionary ideas" (xxxix). D.R. Schwarz, meanwhile, says that "the similarity between ideologically opposite fanaticisms suggests the moral equivalence of terrorist and police agent" (187). My view is that Sevrin is a tragic victim of historical and political circumstances, like Gaspar Ruiz, Paul the anarchist, and Konrad Wallenrod.
14. Hay, 74.
15. John V. Hagopian points out that the title is an error, il being Italian and Conde Spanish. He cites this fact as an example of "how hastily and carelessly Conrad worked" on this tale (31). Yet in a 1983 article entitled "Sulle rive del golfo amato: 'Il Conde' di Conrad," Gaetano D'Elia points out that the title is half Spanish half Neapolitan dialect: "Il titolo del racconto conradiano è in italiano (come era avvenuto per il famoso precedente di Nostramo), ma si tratta di una grafia scorretta, mezzo spagnoleggiante e mezzo dialettale ('conde' al posto di 'conte'); dello sbaglio di ortografia (che si ripete anche nel testo assieme ad altri errori nell'uso dell'italiano), Conrad rende avvertito il lettore nella 'Nota dell'Autore' premessa all'edizione del 1920 di A Set of Six, senza darne ulteriore spiegazione (396)." Perhaps Conrad sought unconsciously to render the Neapolitan dialect rather than the Italian, as he had done with the phrase Vedi Napoli e poi mori (D'Elia also points out that "mori" is dialect (400)). At any rate, despite his admission in the preface to A Set of Six that he had misspelled the title (along with other Italian words--portofolio for portafooglio and cinquanti for cinquanta (287)), Conrad was content to leave it as he had originally rendered it. D'Elia, making much of the arguments put forth by Steinman and Hughes that the Count is a homosexual whose "abominable adventure" is really a sexual misadventure, argues that the error in the title suggests the name of the Bourbon prince of Condé, a noted homosexual, and, by extension, the whole homosexual underworld of fin de siècle Naples and environs, Tchaikovsky included (396-397). Despite such excessive claims, among which he also interprets "The Duel" as a tale of suppressed homoeroticism (409 ff.), D'Elia makes an effective point about the decadence of early twentieth-century Europe and the decline of the old traditional aristocracies (398 ff.).

16. This story is based upon an episode from the life of a Polish nobleman, Count Zygmunt Szembek, whom Conrad had met on the island of Capri. Cf. Baines (341); Karl (The Three Lives, 612).
17. Several critics point out the affinities between this tale and Thomas Mann's Death in Venice: Dowden (109); Schwarz (Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes, 190); D'Elia (399). Fleishman sees a link with Mann's "Mario and the Magician" (142).
18. Mills, 22.
19. Ibid., 22.
20. Ibid., 22.
21. Ibid., 25.
22. Dolan, 110.
23. Schwarz, 192.
24. Carter, 55.
25. Schwarz, 188.
26. Carter, 58.
27. Ibid., 59.
28. Ibid., 60.
29. Ibid., 60.
30. Mills, 25.
31. Schwarz, 191.
32. Carter, 60.
33. In Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style, Dowden argues that the rings are "symbols of 'pure' emotions as contrasted with the 'vileness'" of the robbery (111).

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